

**Department for Regional Development - TransportNI**

**YORK STREET INTERCHANGE**

**Public Inquiry**

**November 2015**

**Proof of Evidence:**

**Landscape & Visual**

**by**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1.1 My name is Paul Tully and I am a Technical Director with URS, the consultants appointed to assist TransportNI Eastern Division's Strategic Road Improvement Team to deliver the York Street Interchange ('the Proposed Scheme'). I am a Landscape Architect on the Proposed Scheme.

1.1.1.2 I hold a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree in Environmental Science, and a Masters degree in Landscape Architecture. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute, and I am current Chairman of the Landscape Institute Northern Ireland Branch. For 3 years, I was NI Branch Representative on the Landscape Institute Council.

1.1.1.3 I have over twenty four years' experience working as a Landscape Architect in Private Practice in Northern Ireland.

1.1.1.4 I have experience of managing a variety of projects from inception through to completion and have as extensive experience of new road and existing road improvement schemes throughout Northern Ireland. This includes Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment from feasibility and Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stages 1 to 3 Scheme Assessment for route options, through to detail design proposals and full implementation of roadside landscape works.

1.1.1.5 I have acted as the Principal in Charge for the DMRB Stage 1, 2 and 3 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for the Proposed Scheme and its urban design proposals.

1.1.1.6 URS was acquired by AECOM in October 2014. Together, AECOM and URS are one of the world's premier, fully integrated infrastructure and support services firms. For the purpose of this Proof of Evidence, any reference to URS may include reference to its former legacy companies, including Scott Wilson.

### **1.2 Scope of Evidence**

1.2.1.1 The following Proof of Evidence summarises the key issues associated with the Landscape & Visual Effects chapter (Chapter 11) contained within the Environmental Statement (ES), January 2015 (DRD-YSI-4-04).

1.2.1.2 For the purposes of identification, the road links within the footprint of the Proposed Scheme and its environs have been given a unique reference number, as shown on Figure 4.1 in

Volume 3 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04D). These reference numbers have been used in the description of the key elements of the Proposed Scheme in this Proof of Evidence.

## 2. LANDSCAPE & VISUAL EFFECTS

### 2.1 Methodology

2.1.1.1 The landscape and visual assessment is based upon guidance contained within the Highways Agency Interim Advice Note (IAN) 135/10 *'Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment'*, (DRD-YSI-6-08) published in November 2010. This IAN provides instructions on the assessment of landscape and visual effects of highway projects and replaces guidance set out in DMRB 11.3.5 (Landscape Effects) (DRD-YSI-6-05). The assessment has also been supported by using guidance from the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment *'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Second Edition'* (2002) (DRD-YSI-6-22). Site visits were undertaken between late 2013 and 2014 to assess key features of the landscape and critical view points. The significance of the interchange and visual dominance within the landscape/cityscape were recorded. In addition, an assessment of the existing landscape character was undertaken. The terminology and criteria used in the assessment of the quality of the landscape character are defined in Table 11.1 in Volume 1 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04B).

2.1.1.2 Desktop research was undertaken to establish any landscape designations present on or in close proximity to the Proposed Scheme. This process was in accordance with the staged process for undertaking a landscape effects assessment (as outlined within Annex 1 of IAN 135/10 (DRD-YSI-6-08)), which also included:

- define the study area;
- collect and collate information on the landscape;
- assess the character and value of the landscape through consultation and desk study;
- carry out site survey to assess landscape character and condition and augment the desk study;
- assess the magnitude of impact, or degree of change, caused by the project;
- assess the sensitivity of the landscape to accommodate change arising from the project;
- identify and develop mitigation measures as a component of the iterative design process, to avoid, reduce and where possible remedy adverse effects; and
- assess the significance of the residual landscape effects.

2.1.1.3 In terms of assessing visual effects, again the staged process for undertaking such an assessment (as outlined within Annex 1 of IAN 135/10 (DRD-YSI-6-08)) was followed, and included:

- determine the extent of visibility of the Proposed Scheme;
- collect and collate information on the visual context of the Proposed Scheme;
- identify receptors and evaluate their sensitivity;
- describe the degree of visual change caused by the Proposed Scheme;
- identify and develop mitigation measures as a component of the iterative design; process, to avoid, reduce and where possible remedy adverse effects; and
- assess the significance of the resultant visual effects.



2.1.1.4 A statement on the potential visual effects of the Proposed Scheme was prepared, along with a set of maps illustrating the private, commercial and educational properties within the visual envelope. The Visual Receptor Location Maps are illustrated in Figure 11.2 (Sheets 1 to 11) and the Photomontages are illustrated in Figure 11.6 (Sheets 1 to 6), within Volume 3 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04D).

## 2.2 Findings

2.2.1.1 The starting point for the Landscape Assessment was a review of baseline conditions, taking into account the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and statutory designations. The study area is located in Belfast and lies within the Belfast/Lisburn LCA (No. 97). There are no significant landscape designations such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the vicinity of the Proposed Scheme.

### 2.2.2 Landscape Effects

2.2.2.1 The potential landscape effects of the Proposed Scheme would result from the combination of new elements, alterations to site boundaries, and removal of vegetation and existing elements. The Proposed Scheme would add roadway structures, supports for roadway decks, retaining walls, flood walls, parapets, safety barriers and auxiliary elements such as lighting columns and signage gantries. These combined elements would create visual clutter, potentially further fragmenting this node, and would limit access options through the site. The enclosed setting of the Proposed Scheme would generally screen it from wider cityscape views.

2.2.2.2 The physical impacts of the Proposed Scheme are contained within the vesting line and would permanently alter the site. The landscape impacts would range from minor road layout changes to cuttings which would permanently impact the landform.

2.2.2.3 Due to the urban location of the Proposed Scheme, the receiving 'landscape' is defined as 'cityscape' and following the character areas are defined into 'cityscapes'. The description of the landscape impacts has been divided into these six Cityscape Character Areas, defined for the purposes of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04), namely:

- Transport Infrastructure Node (Cityscape Character Area 1);
- Northern Residential (Cityscape Character Area 2);
- Cityside Retail Park and Environs (Cityscape Character Area 3);
- Harbour Estate and Industrial Area (Cityscape Character Area 4);

- Clarendon Dock Environs and Titanic Quarter (Cityscape Character Area 5); and
- Northern City Centre (Cityscape Character Area 6).

#### **Transport Infrastructure Node (Cityscape Character Area 1)**

The Proposed Scheme is predominantly located within this cityscape area. The main cityscape impacts in this area would be:

- removal of existing vegetation;
- demolition of the 'Jack Kirk Automobile Engineer' property, on Shipbuoy Street;
- loss of four surface level car parks, located on York Street and Shipbuoy Street;
- widening of the bridge structure over North Queen Street and associated works;
- removal of the McGurk's memorial under North Queen Street overbridge;
- construction of Link Nos. 2, 3 and 4, and the introduction of associated underpasses, cuttings and floodwalls;
- creation of York Street overbridge (Link No. 11). A short portion of Link No. 11 would be elevated approximately 5m above its existing level, between Great Georges Street and Henry Street;
- removal of a section of Nelson Street, replaced by Link No. 6;
- widening of Whitla Street subway. This would slightly increase the length of this pedestrian route;
- removal of the path linking Corporation Street and Nelson Street, which passes under the Dargan and Lagan bridges;
- improvements to brownfield sites and boundary treatments; and
- creation of potential future development areas.

The overall magnitude of impact for this cityscape character area is Moderate Adverse.

**Northern Residential (Cityscape Character Area 2)**

The main cityscape impacts on this area would be:

- removal of existing vegetation along the Westlink, adjacent to Little Georges Street to accommodate the development;
- alterations to the Westlink (North Queen Street) overbridge;
- alterations to the pedestrian access between Henry Street and York Street, including the removal of existing vegetation; and
- proposed acoustic barrier located along the boundary of the Westlink, in the vicinity of North Queen Street overbridge.

The overall magnitude of impact for this cityscape character area is Minor Adverse.

**Cityside Retail Park and Environs (Cityscape Character Area 3)**

The main cityscape impacts on this area would be:

- removal of existing vegetation to the south of Galway House; and
- Link Nos. 11, 15, 16 and 27 would be constructed /amended in this area.

The overall magnitude of impact for this cityscape character area is Negligible Adverse.

**Harbour Estate and Industrial Area (Cityscape Character Area 4)**

The main cityscape impacts to this area would be:

- removal of vegetation;
- Link No. 2 elevated section at the proposed new Dock Street overbridge from the M2 motorway;
- Link No. 29; and
- addition of Link No. 31.

The overall magnitude of impact for this cityscape character area is Negligible Adverse.

**Clarendon Dock Environs and Titanic Quarter (Cityscape Character Area 5)**

The main cityscape impacts to the setting of this area would be:

- construction of the Link No. 2 overbridge (at Dock Street), elevated road and underpass;
- amendments to Corporation Street (Link No. 43);
- creation of potential future development area; and
- demolition of boundary fence and properties; TransportNI section office, office building and depot on Corporation Street and property no. 130-132 Corporation Street.

The overall magnitude of impact for this cityscape character area is Moderate Adverse.

**Northern City Centre (Cityscape Character Area 6)**

The main cityscape impacts in this area would be:

- removal of existing vegetation along the Westlink (Great Georges Street side) to accommodate the development;
- demolition of property nos. 141-149 and 151-153 York Street;
- York Street overbridge (Link No. 11);
- Link No. 7 amendments to the Westlink/Nelson Street;
- creation of new entrance to Lancaster Street Car Park;
- addition of M3 to the Westlink (Link No. 4) elevated road between beneath Lagan Bridge and Dargan Bridge; and
- proposed acoustic barrier located along the boundary of the Westlink in the vicinity of North Queen Street overbridge.

The overall magnitude of impact for this cityscape character area is Minor Adverse.

### 2.2.3 Road Lighting

2.2.3.1 The Proposed Scheme would increase the number of road light fixtures, including their operational light. There would be an increase in transient light from vehicle traffic as a result of alterations to the number and elevation of road links. In relation to the new elevated links and elevated portion of Link No. 11, the lighting columns and their associated light emission would be at a higher elevation than existing and this would increase their visual effect and impact at Little Georges Street, Molyneaux Street and Thomas Street. In the short term, some nearby residential receptors may experience additional light spill from the Proposed Scheme, until proposed planting establishes. Due to the urban nature of the site, this is generally considered a limited change from baseline conditions.

2.2.3.2 The road lighting for the Proposed Scheme is therefore deemed to have a Minor Adverse impact on the character of the cityscape and a Slight to Moderate Adverse visual effect.

### 2.2.4 Visual Impact

2.2.4.1 The description of visual impacts has been divided into thirteen main areas in the visual envelope. These areas extend beyond the ground level Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) to include nearby tall buildings which may experience elevated views. The visual impacts have been assessed prior to any mitigating measures, and are given for Year 1 (the 'assumed' year of opening), Winter scenario. The existing receptors include residential, commercial and educational properties and receptors comprise a single property or a group of several properties.

2.2.4.2 Committed developments are potential future visual receptors, additional to the existing receptors. These developments may be constructed before completion of the Proposed Scheme, and as a result would alter the baseline conditions. Committed developments have been divided into two groups; those in the 'Primary Zone' are within the ground level ZVI, and those in the 'Secondary Zone' are immediately outwith this. The Visual Receptor Locations drawings (Figure 11.2 (Sheets 1 to 11) in Volume 3 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04D)) indicate the position of the 'Primary Zone' committed development visual receptors and the ZVI drawing (Figure 11.1 in Volume 3 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04D)) illustrates the position of the "Secondary Zone" committed development visual receptors. The committed developments are described in the Committed Developments Visual Effects Schedule included as Annex D of Appendix 11 in Volume 2 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04C).

2.2.4.3 Full details and explanatory notes of the significance of visual effects for each receptor are given in Annex C of Appendix 11 in Volume 2 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04C), and full details and

explanatory notes of the significance of visual effects for each committed development receptor are given in Annex D of Appendix 11 in Volume 2 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04C).

- 2.2.4.4 A significant portion of the existing receptors (approximately 41%) would experience a neutral visual effect and another large portion of the receptors (approximately 44%) would experience a Slight Adverse visual effect as a result of the Proposed Scheme, in Year 1. A small portion of receptors (approximately 7.5%) would experience a Moderate Adverse visual effect, a very small portion (approximately 2%) would experience a Large Adverse visual effect and the remaining receptors (approximately 5%) would experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect. No receptors would experience a Beneficial visual effect.
- 2.2.4.5 Of 47 committed developments within the Primary Zone, there is one (a residential development, off Corporation Street) which would potentially experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect and there are sixteen committed developments which would experience a Large Adverse visual effect in Year 1. Approximately 30% of the committed developments would experience a Moderate visual effect, 45% would experience a Slight Adverse visual effect and 6% would experience a Neutral visual effect. None of the committed developments would experience a beneficial visual effect. None of the secondary zone committed developments would experience a Very Large or Large Adverse Visual effect.
- 2.2.5 **Very Large Adverse Visual Effect**
- 2.2.5.1 There are thirty six existing receptors in total which would experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect.
- 2.2.5.2 There are thirty one existing receptors (1, 3, 5, 7, 9 Molyneaux Street, 1-47 (uneven numbers) Little Georges Street and 97 and 99 North Queen Street) in Zone G which would experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect. These residential receptors are rated as high sensitivity and share a boundary or are located very close to the Proposed Scheme. The Proposed Scheme would dominate their view in Year 1.
- 2.2.5.3 There is one existing receptor (Stella Maris Hostel, 28-34 Garmoyle Street) in Zone M which would experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect. This would be due to the shared boundary with the Proposed Scheme, Link No. 2 elements would break the skyline, the demolition of adjacent buildings and the removal of existing vegetation.
- 2.2.5.4 There are four existing receptors (17, 19, 21 and 23 Garmoyle Street) in Zone N, which would experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect. These residential receptors are rated as high

sensitivity, are located very close to the Proposed Scheme and also face towards it. Therefore the Proposed Scheme would dominate their view in Year 1.

#### 2.2.6 **Large Adverse Visual Effect**

2.2.6.1 Three of the existing receptors (Eithne House and Meave House, in Duncairn Parade and Cuchulainn House) in Zone B would experience a Large Adverse visual effect. The adverse visual effect is due to the close proximity of the Proposed Scheme, the elevated views and the removal of existing vegetation.

2.2.6.2 There are eight existing receptors (2 and 4 Thomas Street, 1 and 2 Portland Place, 2 McGurk's Way, 122, 124-126 (uneven numbers) Great Georges Street and 95 North Queen Street) in Zone F, which would experience a Large Adverse visual effect. These residential receptors are rated as high sensitivity, are located adjacent to the Proposed Scheme and it would constitute a major discordant element in their view in Year 1.

2.2.6.3 There are five existing receptors (Harbourview Apartments, 18 Pilot Street, the two receptors in the James Clow Building, in Pilot Street, 1-30 Clarendon Road and 31-60 Clarendon Road) in Zone N, which would experience a Large Adverse visual effect. The Adverse Visual effect is due to the close proximity of the Proposed Scheme, the elevated views, demolition of existing nearby buildings and the removal of existing vegetation.

#### 2.2.7 **Landscape Effects**

2.2.7.1 Post mitigation, the potential landscape effects of the Proposed Scheme are described per cityscape character areas.

##### **Transport Infrastructure Node (Cityscape Character Area 1)**

The additional elevated roads and the underpasses would increase the mass of transport infrastructure. An existing path and existing vegetation would be removed. However the proposed mitigation could improve the appearance of site boundaries and replace some areas of removed vegetation.

In local landscape character terms, the removal of McGurk's memorial would cause the loss of this locally characteristic feature, which is directly associated with this location.

Note that a replacement memorial (if progressed separately to the Proposed Scheme) would reduce the effect of removing the memorial to facilitate construction.

**Northern Residential (Cityscape Character Area 2)**

The removal of vegetation on the edge of this character type would alter the character at localised positions. The southern edge of this area would be influenced by elements of the Proposed Scheme, particularly the acoustic barriers at Link Nos. 1, 2, 5 and 11.

**Cityside Retail Park and Environs (Cityscape Character Area 3)**

In the long-term, the Proposed Scheme would blend in with the existing transport infrastructure located adjacent to this character area, as proposed planting would act to replace removed vegetation.

**Harbour Estate and Industrial Area (Cityscape Character Area 4)**

The development would not significantly impact the existing industrial character of this cityscape. Proposed planting would act to replace removed vegetation.

**Clarendon Dock Environs and Titanic Quarter (Cityscape Character Area 5)**

The development would alter the appearance of the area immediately west of Corporation Street and Garmoyle Street, which would impact on these streetscapes, located on the boundary of this area. The appearance of Corporation Street would be softened by proposed tree planting.

**Northern City Centre (Cityscape Character Area 6)**

The elevated portion of Link No. 11 would be at variance with the cityscape and detract from the sense of place at the edge of this area. The narrowing of Link No. 7 would improve the appearance of Great Georges Street, at the edge of this area. The two York Street corner properties proposed for demolition do not contribute positively to the streetscape, but the site would require a good quality treatment.

Clifton House and Grounds (LLPA and Historic Park, Garden and Demesne) is enclosed, but some of the elevated elements such as road lights and signs may add further uncharacteristic elements to its wider setting.



**2.2.8 Visual Effects Year 15**

2.2.8.1 For the purposes of the assessment, it was assumed that any 'Adverse' visual effect assessed as 'Very Large' or 'Large' should be regarded as significant. Adverse visual effect of 'Moderate' significance may also be significant, but this may vary according to circumstances of the individual visual effect.

2.2.8.2 The proposed mitigation planting will act to partially screen the Proposed Scheme, when established and therefore some of the existing receptors would experience a reduced level of visual effect in comparison to the Year 1 scenario. In particular, the receptors which would experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect in Year 1, only one receptor (Stella Maris Hostel, 28-34 Garmoyle Street) would still experience a Very Large Adverse visual effect in Year 15 (the "design year", 15 years after opening).

2.2.8.3 The committed development which would experience a Very Large visual effect in Year 1 would still experience the same level of effect, due to its proximity to the Proposed Scheme. The committed developments which would experience a Large visual effect would experience lesser visual effects in Year 15.

**2.2.9 Construction Effects**

2.2.9.1 Many of the effects specifically related to construction are expected to be temporary. Short-term visual effects associated with the construction phase can take several forms and there is little that can be done to reduce or mitigate them. Such effects can result from:

- the movement of construction vehicles and machinery;
- general site clearance and topsoil strip of the site;
- siting of the Contractor's main offices and works compound areas;
- fencing and signage;
- security lighting at night;
- temporary access roads;
- transfer and storage (stockpiles) of cut and fill material; and
- storage of construction equipment and materials

- 2.2.9.2 Site clearance and earthworks are among the more visible operations and will have a significant effect on the local landscape during construction. There will also be a general increase in activity on the site and movement of vehicles as viewed by receptors living close to the works.

**3. MITIGATION**

3.1.1.1 In addition to the screen planting that is proposed around the interchange, the effect of which has been illustrated by several photomontages (Figure 11.6 in Volume 3 of the ES (DRD-YSI-4-04D)) other measures are proposed, including:

**3.1.2 Avoidance Measures**

3.1.2.1 Where possible, measures have been incorporated into the design to avoid detrimental visual effects on the surrounding area. However, as the design is developed further, proposed avoidance measures should consider the following:

- avoid the use of dominant infrastructure elements on the skyline wherever possible. This is particularly important on elevated links;
- signage should be located sensitively during detailed design so that it does not increase the visual effect, particularly to residential dwellings;
- road lighting should be kept to essential locations only, and designed to reduce unnecessary light spill to minimise the visual effect of the various road links at night; and
- retention of existing vegetation wherever possible, particularly where it provides natural screening to visual receptors.

**3.1.3 Reduction Measures**

3.1.3.1 Where visual effects cannot be avoided, measures can be put in place to reduce the degree of visual effect. The key remediation measures to reduce visual effect are proposed planting, and the creation of potential future development sites. The remediation measures include:

- proposed acoustic barriers along the Westlink, in the vicinity of North Queen Street Bridge, should be sensitively located (where feasible) at detailed design stage where feasible to limit any potential visual and landscape impact;
- appropriate hedge planting to be provided to soften and reduce visual effect of embankments and acoustic barriers along the Westlink behind the back gardens of North Queen Street and Little Georges Street properties. Replacement planting should be of an appropriate scale to reduce the potential for overshadowing;
- all planting on the embankments and road edges that would be removed due to construction of the Proposed Scheme should be re-planted with appropriate planting

wherever possible; existing vegetation lost at the small pocket of open space at Molyneaux Street should be re-planted with semi mature trees to provide immediate visual effect;

- the Proposed Scheme would create several new blocks of mixed tree and shrub planting to create zones of urban forest. This planting would act to partially screen the development, assist wildlife habitat creation, and the soft landscape would offer an informal drainage sink. It is recognised that the potential extent of planting may be constrained in specific locations by underground services;
- the design and finish of boundary treatments for the Proposed Scheme should be sensitive to the character and sensitivity of the location. Appropriate planting should be provided in conjunction with boundary treatments to reduce the visual effect;
- the detailed design of the public realm at underbridges should be attractive to non-motorised users to encourage greater usage. This should consider lighting enhancement to improve safety of these sites at night. Consideration could be given to the use of public art to enhance these areas;
- Corporation Street and Garmoyle Street would be planted with street trees with a grass verge to the west of the existing pedestrian path to create a tree-lined edge to the street. This would improve the appearance of these streets in advance of any future development; and
- Great Georges Street (eastern portion) would be potentially planted with street trees on both sides. The development would narrow the road and widen the southern path to facilitate improved public realm.

### 3.1.4 **Construction Measures**

- 3.1.4.1 Construction compounds and stockpile locations should be sensitively located in relation to adjacent and nearby properties to reduce the extent of adverse visual effects.
- 3.1.4.2 Construction compounds should be fully reinstated and landscaped following completion of the works.

**4. CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1.1 No Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Areas of High Scenic Quality would be affected by the Proposed Scheme. Clifton House and lands are designated as a Local Landscape Policy Area LLPA (CC 030) are also designated as a Historic Park, Garden and Demesne (HPGD) (CC 027) and are the closest landscape designated area to the proposed interchange. There are no significantly sensitive features within the lands required for the Proposed Scheme.
- 4.1.1.2 The study area has been degraded by previous development and has few positive elements. The effect on the cityscape around the periphery of the site would be limited, due to the relatively enclosed nature of the site setting. Therefore, on a Belfast City scale, the development would be generally blended into the site with appropriate mitigation. The proposed mitigation measures would reduce the long term visual effect of the proposals significantly. The proposed planting would provide some visual screening of the proposed infrastructure and associated lighting.
- 4.1.1.3 Views from dwellings in proximity to the interchange would change. Mitigation of these visual effects has been considered through the arrangement of the infrastructure and planting to address residual visual effects. The construction of the elevated links, in particular York Street (Link No. 11) associated lighting and signage, would be the most visually significant features of the Proposed Scheme, slightly increasing the visibility of it, in comparison to the existing infrastructure.
- 4.1.1.4 In general, the landscape and visual effects of the scheme will be most significant in the year following construction. However, with the maturing of new vegetation, the significance of the residual effects will be reduced as the proposed planting establishes.