



TITANIC QUARTER REGENERATING BELFAST



- A new urban quarter and era for the city
- Europe's biggest waterfront regeneration project
- Sustainability in action

Belfast

BUILDING ON ITS MARITIME HERITAGE TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE



TITANIC QUARTER
REGENERATING BELFAST

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Printed by: Trade Winds

Images: Robinson McIlwaine Architects, Titanic Quarter, Todd Architects, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum

Published by:

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CONTENTS

05 HISTORY

Nearly 100 years ago, Queen's Island, soon to be transformed into Titanic Quarter, was the birthplace of the world's most famous ship – the Titanic

10 INTRODUCTION

The huge Titanic Quarter development, one of the largest in Europe, will both boost the city's fortunes and reconnect it to its maritime heritage

18 MAPPING THE QUARTER

It's a complex project. We show you what's going where

21 PHASE ONE

Work is already on site, bringing residents, workers and students into the area by the middle of next year

28 PROFILE

Key to the success of the scheme is the visionary masterplan by Eric Kuhne. But what makes him tick? And why did he choose Belfast for his next project?

32 WATERSIDE REGENERATION

Cities around the world are re-embracing their waterfronts, not least Belfast. How will Titanic Quarter make the most of its mile-long river frontage?

37 SUSTAINABILITY

Such a vital site at the heart of the city has to be developed with both the environmental and long-term economic impact in mind

40 INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION

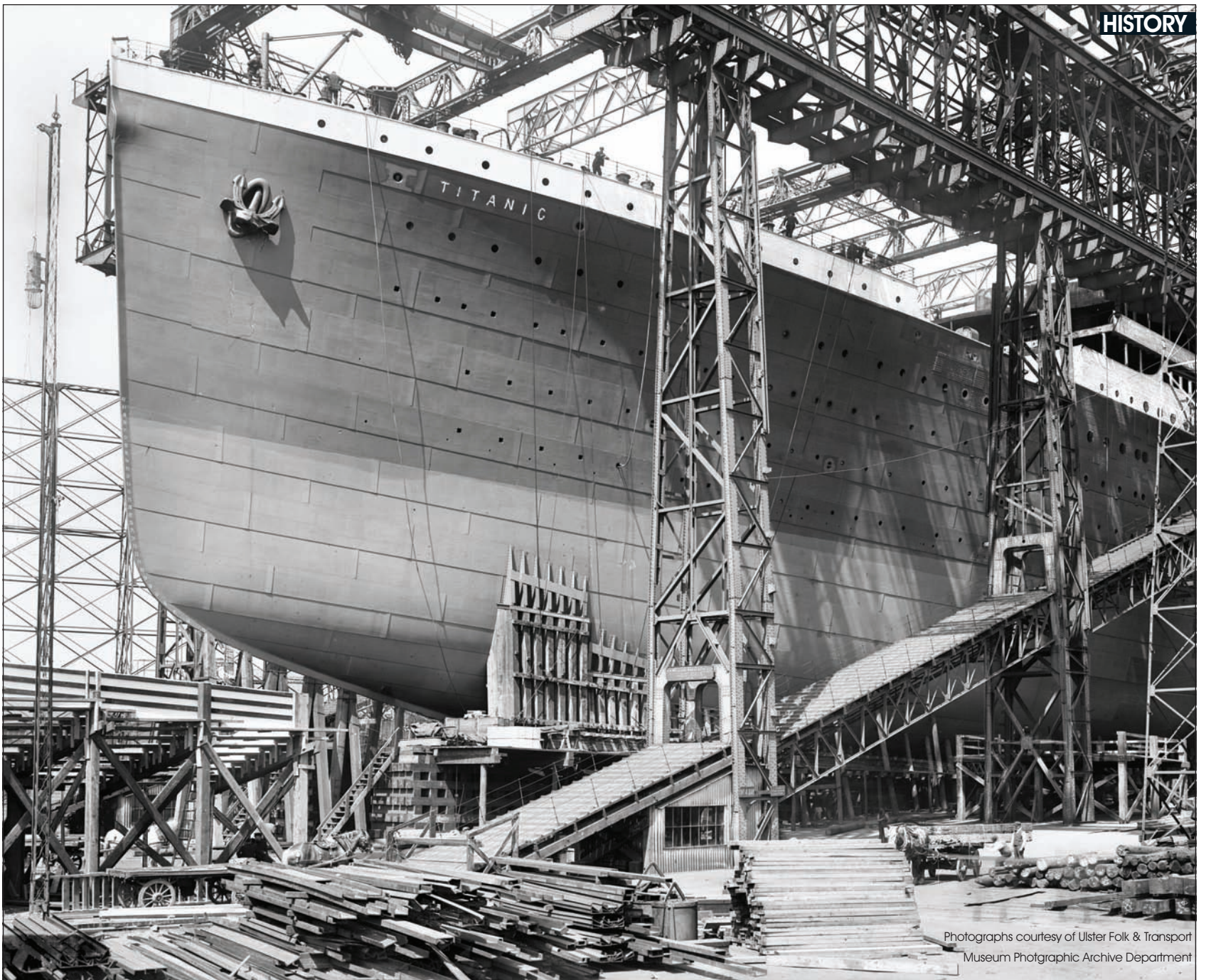
Academic and commercial success are vital to both the success of Titanic Quarter and the wider city

44 BIGGER BELFAST

Transformation isn't confined to the docklands. Numerous schemes in the city centre are testament to Belfast's new era of prosperity

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Photographs courtesy of Ulster Folk & Transport Museum Photographic Archive Department

Berth of a new legacy

ON THE BELFAST DOCKLAND WHICH ONCE GAVE US SOME OF THE FINEST SHIPS EVER SEEN, TITANIC QUARTER WILL BUILD ON THE PAST TO CREATE A NEW ERA FOR THE CITY

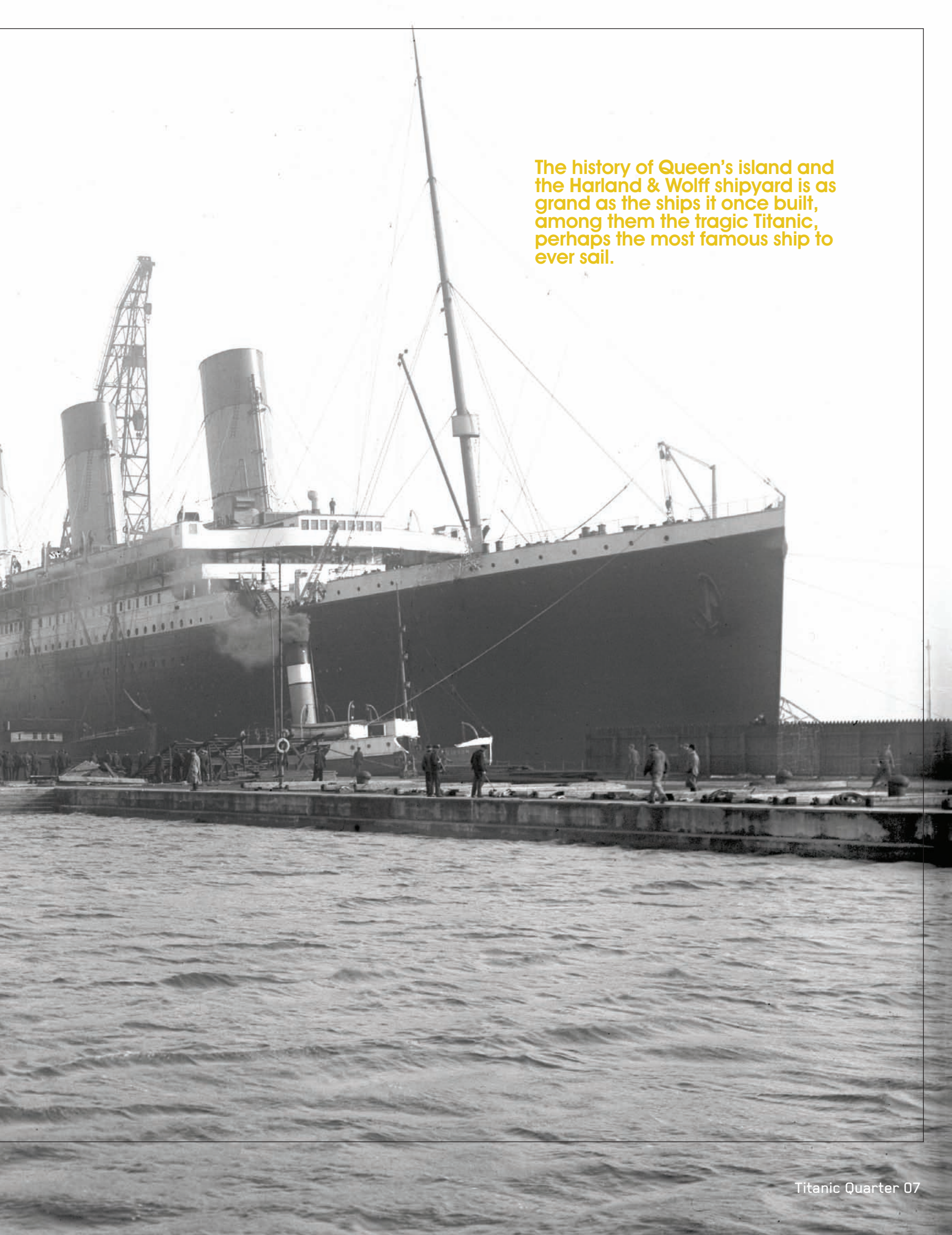


PREVIOUS PAGE

Titanic under construction on the slipways

THIS PAGE The Titanic (right) and her sister ship the Olympic in Thompson Dock

The history of Queen's island and the Harland & Wolff shipyard is as grand as the ships it once built, among them the tragic Titanic, perhaps the most famous ship to ever sail.

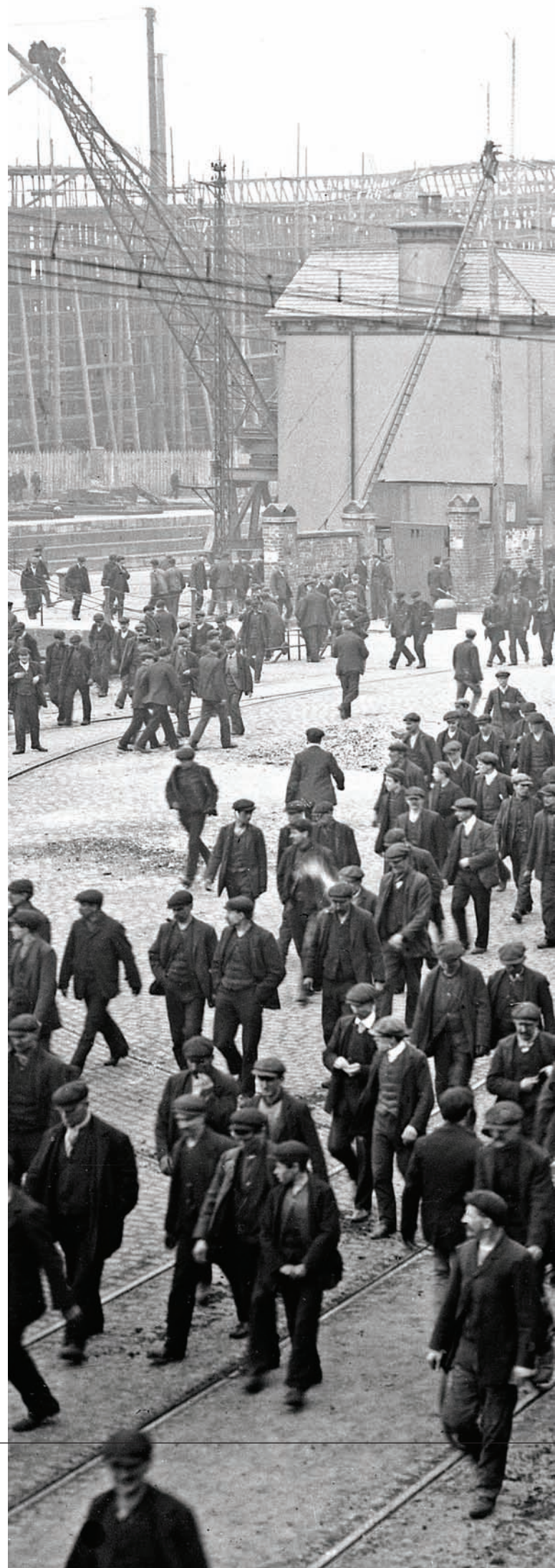




It is fitting that the huge dockland area where Titanic was built should be home to one of Europe's most spectacular waterfront developments, the £1 billion, 75ha Titanic Quarter.

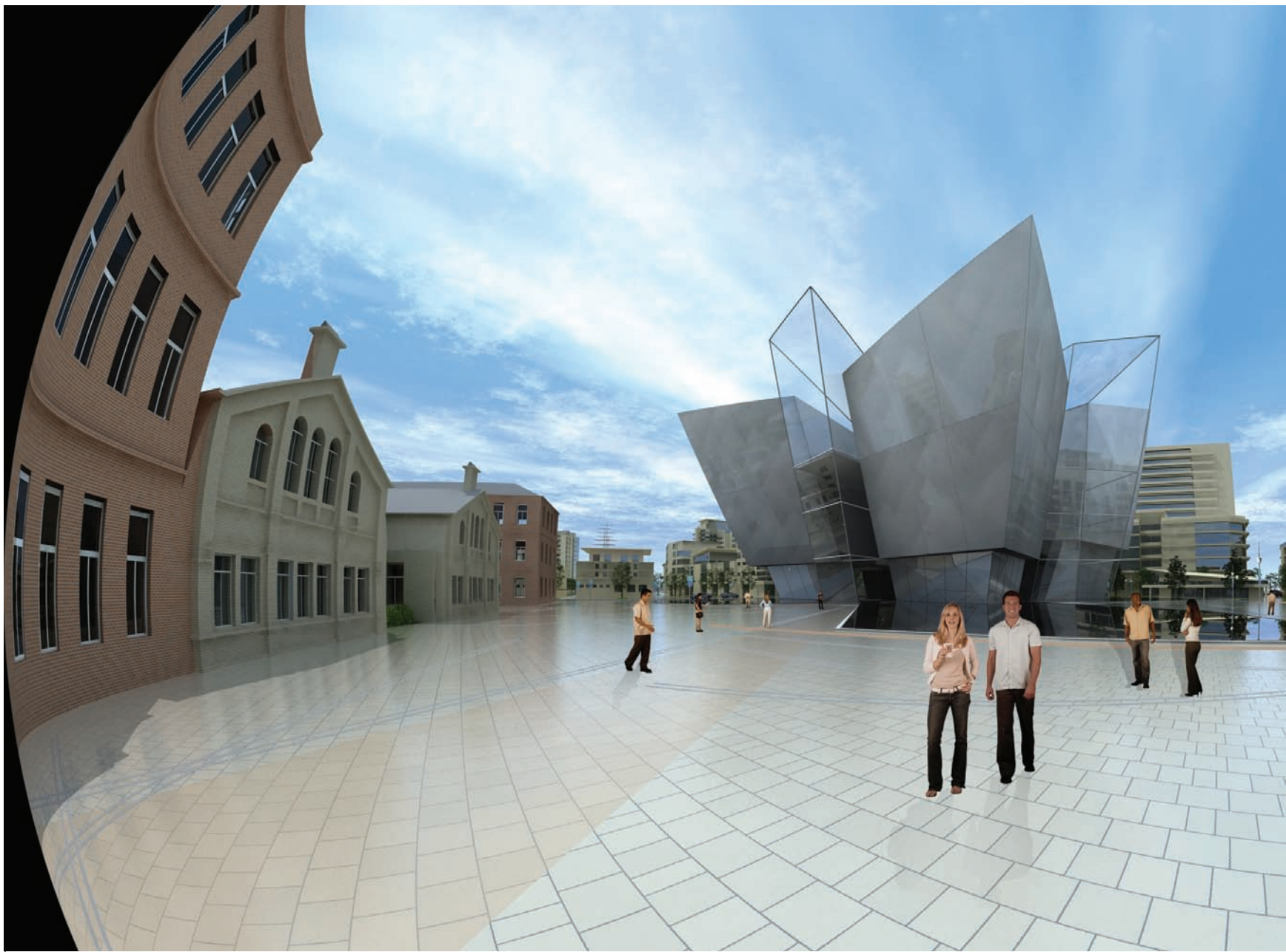
The history of Queen's Island and the Harland & Wolff shipyard is as grand as the ships it once built – among them the tragic Titanic, perhaps the most famous ship to ever sail. A remarkable feat of engineering, she was the largest and most luxuriously appointed ship of her generation and, despite her tragic sinking five days after setting sail, remains a source of enduring pride in the city where she was built – Belfast.

The huge dockland area on the River Lagan is inextricably linked with the history of Belfast itself, and its rise to prominence as one of the great shipbuilding cities. It is now fitting that it should be home to one of Europe's most spectacular waterfront developments, the £1 billion, 75ha Titanic Quarter.



FAR LEFT The giant gantry cranes
used to build the ships
THIS PAGE Shipyard workers
leaving Queen's Island.





QUAY TO THE CITY

REDEVELOPING QUEEN'S ISLAND, HOME OF BELFAST'S SHIP-BUILDING HERITAGE, INTO THE 75HA MIXED-USE TITANIC QUARTER WILL BOTH BOOST THE CITY'S FORTUNES AND RECONNECT IT TO ITS MARITIME HERITAGE, SOURCE OF PRIDE AND PROSPERITY



The signature project
at the heart of Titanic
Quarter will celebrate
the Titanic and the
area's maritime
heritage

**THE POLITICAL, COMMERCIAL, EDUCATIONAL
AND ADMINISTRATIVE HUB OF NORTHERN
IRELAND IS ON THE UP. BELFAST HAS BEEN
GOING THROUGH EXPONENTIAL CHANGE**

"Belfast is an industrial city, the product of hard work, industry and good honest graft." So says Peter McNaney, chief executive of Belfast City Council. Once the world's busiest port, the city's wealth came from its position as a pivotal point of the British Empire, as well as its innovations in engineering, position in the linen industry and, most importantly, its vast shipyards. The city hit its zenith at the beginning of the 20th century, when it was building the world's great cruise liners, most famously the Titanic.

Like many similar industrial cities, the 1970s and 1980s decline in manufacturing industry hit it hard. And, of course, its difficulties were exacerbated by the political troubles, which saw neighbourhoods divided down sectarian lines and the population decline by 10,000 a year in the 1970s as people sought peace and prosperity in the suburbs, or further afield.

But the political, commercial, educational and administrative hub of Northern Ireland is on the up. Home to 47.3% of all jobs in the province and 38% of its population, Belfast has been going through a period of exponential change, especially since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Unemployment fell from over 14% to

4.6% this year, much lower than the UK average. A 2004 report by Michael Parkinson, an expert on urban regeneration, showed that Belfast had performed well over the previous seven years, with GVA up 47.3% between 1995 and 2001, well ahead of both regional and national levels. More than 300,000 are employed in Belfast, which increases in working population by a third each day as commuters flood in from outlying areas. And it has higher productivity than all English core cities – Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.

BOOM TOWN

A massive improvement in investment and job opportunities and infrastructure has seen it become a modern, vibrant 21st century city. People even want to come and visit. Before 1994 400,000 people came to visit. Last year it was 6.4 million. And recently the Lonely Planet travel guide put Belfast in the top ten places to visit in the world.

Symbolising, and building on, the upturn in the city's fortunes will be the redevelopment of Queen's Island – the docklands area once home to Harland & Wolff, builder of the Titanic and the Olympic – into Titanic →



The Harland & Wolff drawing office, where the Titanic and her sister ships were designed, to be refurbished as part of Titanic Quarter's plans

→ Quarter. It will be the latest chapter in the rebirth of the city's waterfront. For much of the 20th century, the city had turned its back on the River Lagan which, as the site for its industries and dockyards, had been the source of its power and riches. Until, that is, the Laganside Corporation, set up by the government with a £1 billion investment programme, began to regenerate 75 hectares of river-side inner-city land, the city's richest asset. The cornerstone to the regeneration scheme was the Waterfront Hall conference and concert venue, which has brought in £400 million over 10 years and was voted second best conference venue in the world. It has acted as catalyst for other developments, such as the BT Tower, the Hilton hotel, and, across the river, the Odyssey arena and congress centre, the largest building in Ireland.

The success of the Laganside developments proved to the city that ambitious development works, that good design and infrastructure matter, and that city centre living can be a solution to outward migration. It also

**TITANIC QUARTER IS TRULY MASSIVE,
ONE OF THE LARGEST DEVELOPMENT SITES IN
EUROPE, YET WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE
OF THE CITY CENTRE**

showed that a partnership between public and private sector really can work. Titanic Quarter, the next phase of waterside redevelopment for the city, is an even bigger opportunity for the city. It is truly massive, one of the largest development sites in Europe, yet within walking distance of the city centre. And at the helm of its redevelopment is Mike Smith, ex-chief executive of Laganside Corporation. "Now the city's seen that something on that scale can be done," says Smith, →

RIGHT The area of Queen's Island to be developed into Titanic Quarter

Titanic Quarter land use

39% residential:

waterfront apartments and family townhouses

53% employment:

industrial, high-tech office/administrative and ancillary services

4% cultural:

major attraction on the Titanic slipway, refurbishment of Harland & Wolff HQ, museum, event space

4% mixed use:

leisure and tourism facilities, cruise liner berth, hotels, public spaces, quay walls and boulevards



→ “there is more of a sense of confidence about TQ actually happening.” The development is expected to create at least 20,000 new jobs over the next 15 years, and bring in £1.5 billion of investment.

The opportunity to redevelop TQ came when Harland and Wolff shrank greatly in size – employing a mere 300 people, compared to the 40,000 at its height – abandoning most of the docks, and leaving one mile of valuable waterfront development land. Once more, the area will be the engine room for the city’s growth and economic prosperity, while building on and celebrating the maritime history of the area. Many listed and historic structures will be preserved. The Abercorn Basin will be brought back to life with new quay walls, while the slipways on which RMS Titanic and Olympic were built will become the focus of a new visitor attraction, currently known as the ‘signature project’, and the two huge Harland and Wolff cranes – Samson and Goliath – will continue to dominate the skyline as they have done for years. The old H&W drawing offices, where Titanic and her sister ships were conjured up, will become both the offices for Titanic Quarter and a cultural centre. Materials and artefacts including cast iron stanchions, roof trusses and derricks from the site’s former use have been retained for erection in public spaces throughout Titanic Quarter.

HISTORY LESSONS

Titanic Quarter, the company, is sister company to Harcourt Developments, a Dublin-based property developer. Conal Harvey, director of operations at Harcourt Developments, puts it: “Titanic Quarter will have a strong sense of place. Although we’re making something completely new, it doesn’t forget its identity. The heritage projects anchor it to the past.”

Harcourt’s marketing director, John Doherty, adds: “The whole area has a strong sense of industry and

‘TQ WILL BE NO DORMITORY DEVELOPMENT.

IT WILL BE DESIGNED TO BUILD A COMMUNITY

CENTRED ON GENUINE SOCIAL INTERACTION

AND SHARED VALUES’

ERIC KUHNE Masterplanner, TQ

maritime identity. But it’s not constrained by the past. It will be a vibrant new urban centre, where people of all ages will want to be.” Smith agrees: “It’s Belfast’s version of Canary Wharf, but on the scale of the city centre, not a suburban outpost.”

While Turley Associates had already planned phase one of the development, when Harcourt entered the game by buying Titanic Quarter in 2005, the team welcomed Eric Kuhne on board as masterplanner for the second phase. Kuhne, architect of Bluewater shopping centre in the UK, and the enormous Darling Harbour in Sydney, Australia, was chosen for his visionary outlook and ideas about the importance of community in urban design. “TQ will be no dormitory development,” he says. “The pattern of parks, streets and gardens and the localised retail, healthcare and educational facilities will be designed to build a community centred on genuine social interaction and shared values. It will be a new focal point for Belfast.”

The first phase is already on site and will be finished in the next two-and-a-half years. It comprises:

- 475 apartments, by Robinson McIlwaine Architects, based around the Abercorn Basin. They’re already over-subscribed by a factor of 10, creating quite a waiting list! The basin itself will house a marina, for which there is strong demand throughout Northern Ireland. “Boats are a wonderful way to animate a space,” says Smith.
- The Gateway Office building – comprising two six- →



→ storey and one five-storey buildings – with 30,000sq ft (2,900sq m) retail space, by Todd Architects

- Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, a public/private partnership project providing 1,400 full-time, 14,000 part-time students, who will bring life and vibrancy to the area.
- A 140-bed hotel.

(For more on phase one, see p21)

This phase is bookended by two existing sets of buildings: at the city end, the Odyssey complex; and at the other the Innovation Centre, part of the Northern Ireland Science Park which, funded by both the universities and central government, concentrates on R&D. Its two latest tenants are Microsoft and Citigroup, which has relocated 120 people to the White Star building from the city centre.

URBAN VILLAGE

The enormous phase two, currently awaiting planning approval, will encompass phase one, and existing buildings. Fitting in with Turley Associates’ development framework, the masterplan is a high-density, mixed-use development led by residential use, creating an urban village, with dwellings arranged into three distinct neighbourhoods, each centred on an urban square.

The village aims to be self-sufficient to an extent – providing the workplaces, culture and leisure, local amenities and convenience retail for both residents and visitors, with everything needed for daily life within 250 metres, or comfortable five-minute walk. To reduce car use, non-residential uses and infrastructure are spread throughout the village, which is a 30-minute waterfront walk to Belfast City Centre via the Lagan Weir footbridge.

To the north of Abercorn Basin, at the heart of the village, running the full east-west depth of the site, is a trio of heritage, leisure and culture buildings forming a world-class destination for visitors: the refurbished Harland & Wolff administration and drawing block, the

Queen’s Island Wharf complex, and the Titanic Experience (also known as the signature project). This crystalline building, with its plan in the shape of a white star (after the shipping company), will house a flying IMAX theatre, where viewers are suspended in the air for maximum sensation, a 50m scale model of the Titanic, a maritime museum and events facilities. It will face the dramatic 80 x 300m slipways of Titanic and Olympic, highlighting the vast form and scale of the ship. The slipways together are intended to create a city-scaled, public open space, which also acts as a place of remembrance. They will run to the northern boundary of the site. If the project wins lottery funding, it will be the biggest leisure attraction in the island of Ireland.

A corridor of open space runs the entire length of the island, enabling vistas to visually link the main heritage assets – the drawing office, the slipways and the two giant Harland & Wolff cranes, Samson and Goliath.

The street grid surrounding the heart responds to both the historic fabric and the adjacent Abercorn Arc project being built in phase one, which will be extended in phase two on to reclaimed land to form an arc on the north shore of Abercorn Basin. New quay walls will trace this arc from the basin to the southwest point of the Island. From here springs a new Waterfront Promenade along

Harcourt Developments

Sister company of Titanic Quarter, Harcourt Developments is a 35-year-old Dublin-based construction and management company. Other projects include Park West business park in West Dublin, at 93ha the largest in Ireland. Says director of operations Conal Harvey: “Titanic Quarter is one of the most significant projects Harcourt Developments has ever set up.”

LEFT View of Kuhne's river-side vision, from Belfast Lough

RIGHT Abercorn Basin will form the heart of phase one's residential development

Port of Belfast

Titanic Quarter is being jointly promoted between the Port of Belfast and Titanic Quarter Limited. The Port of Belfast's Harbour Estate comprises approximately 800 hectares of land. The lands are divided into those used for port and non-port activities.



the entire River Lagan frontage, punctuated by leisure uses at three points, with residential blocks in between.

The residential neighbourhood streets are sized and spaced according to the urban block types. Each block contains shared private courtyard gardens above concealed basement parking garages, designed to give the streets back to pedestrians. The resulting 'urban grain' of the concept masterplan will closely resemble the city centre of Belfast, but with a greater amount of green space, both private in the form of gardens, and public in the form of parks for the workers in the area.

CITY QUARTER

Even together, at 75 hectares, phases one and two only cover a quarter of the vast area of Queen's Island, which itself covers a quarter of the area of Belfast. Totally transforming it will be a 20-year project, with Harcourt extending Kuhne's masterplan across the whole area, which could ultimately bring in £2 billion of investment and create 30,000 jobs.

Peter McNaney believes the development fits the council agenda of how the city needs to grow, bringing in investment, and substantially adding to the city's wealth base, drawing in residents, workers and those coming for recreation. "It ticks all the right boxes: introducing new industries and increasing the skills base to help diversify the city's employment base into the knowledge economy, with its innovation centre and Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education." BIFHE, 100 years old this year, was first built at the request of the industries to provide the skills needed in the growing economy. "It's like we've come full circle," says McNaney.

It cannot be avoided: Belfast is a divided city. The city is to all intents and purposes segregated, with 80% of the population living in sectarian neighbourhoods. TQ, like Lagan side before it, offers politically neutral neighbourhoods, with integrated living space open to everybody. The mixture of housing, from very exclusive

'TITANIC QUARTER TICKS ALL THE RIGHT BOXES: INTRODUCING NEW INDUSTRIES AND INCREASING THE SKILLS BASE TO HELP DIVERSIFY THE CITY'S EMPLOYMENT BASE'

PETER MCNANEY chief executive, Belfast City Council

to affordable, will celebrate the cultural mix.

As Harvey says: "Belfast is a special place. A successful development here could have a disproportionate effect. Titanic Quarter will be the biggest thing to hit Northern Ireland for a generation. Northern Ireland's future must be driven economically. Everything hangs on people having the lifestyle opportunities, and reasons to put their history of conflict behind them. TQ is symbolic of the new Northern Ireland. We see it as an exceptional opportunity to create something very significant, that other stakeholders – the council, the public and the harbour – can be proud of."

Harbour Commissioners

The Harbour Commissioners form the board of Belfast Harbour and have responsibility for improving, maintaining and managing the port. The chairman of Belfast Harbour Commissioners Len O'Hagan said: "Belfast Harbour Estate is already home to some of Northern Ireland's key economic and urban redevelopment schemes, such as the Odyssey and Sydenham Business Park. Titanic Quarter will complement these, and establish Queen's Island at the centre of Northern Ireland's 21st century economy."

What's going where

BUILDING TITANIC QUARTER WILL BE A HUGE UNDERTAKING, OVER A NUMBER OF YEARS. HERE IS WHERE THE PROJECTS WILL BE BUILT, AND HOW SOME OF THE SITE WILL LOOK

Key to the quarter

EXISTING

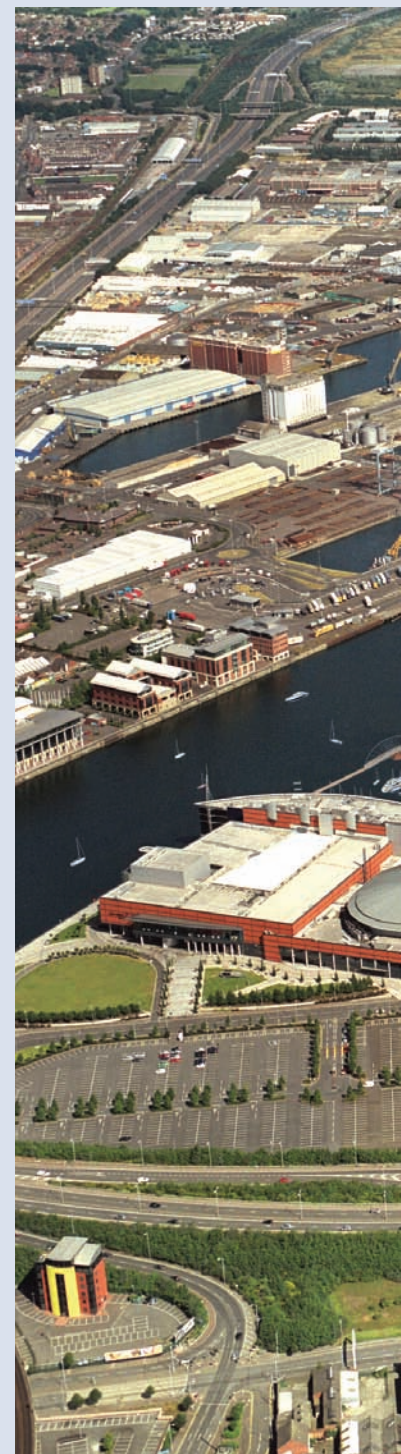
- 1 Odyssey arena and entertainment complex
- 2 Northern Ireland Science Park business accommodation, including incubator premises for start-up companies
- 3 Harland & Wolff drawing offices, to become TQ's headquarters and cultural space

PHASE ONE

- 4 Abercorn Quay. Rebuilt quayside, with waterside living space, designed by Robinson McIlwaine Architects, and 100-bed hotel. Completion 2008
- 5 Abercorn Basin, to house a marina, fronted by restaurants and cafés
- 6 Gateway area high-quality office accommodation, anchored by Todd Architects' Gateway Building, completion 2008
- 7 Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education's new state-of-the-art campus

PHASE TWO

- 8 Signature project, and Titanic slipways
- 9 River-based residential development
- 10 Light industrial park, an extension to the existing Channel Commercial Park



ere?



A new lease of life for Abercorn Basin, with its apartments and public spaces



WHAT'S NEW

PHASE ONE OF TITANIC QUARTER'S MULTI-MILLION-POUND REDEVELOPMENT IS ALREADY ON SITE, TO KICK-START THE HUGE AREA'S NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Titanic Quarter's long-term regeneration, which will see the transformation of 75 hectares of Queen's Island over the next 15 years, is beginning as we speak – in early 2007 – with completion of the first phase set for mid-2009.

This first stage comprises:

- 475 apartments, by Robinson McIlwaine Architects, based around the Abercorn Basin
- The Gateway Office building by Todd Architects
- A new campus for the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education
- A 140-bed hotel

TQ's chief executive Mike Smith claims: "Phase one is very important. We want to make sure we get it right

from day one. We want people to see the quality of the infrastructure, the materials used and public realms, and to feel comfortable and secure in this new urban sector. This is not a suburban site. It is a rich mix of land use, of a similar density to the city centre."

At the heart of phase one are plans to develop Abercorn Basin, unveiled at MIPIM in 2005. The basin will be converted into a busy marina providing the main focus for the mixed-use space, to include apartments, bars, restaurants, offices, hotel and a college campus.

At the northern end of Titanic Quarter is the Northern Ireland Science Park, established in 1999 in partnership with Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster. It has proved to be a popular venue for conferences and exhibitions, as well as with tenants, which include Citigroup and Microsoft. There are →



→ plans to expand the park in conjunction with the TQ development.

At the other end of the site, towards the city centre, the Odyssey arena, next to Abercorn Basin, is Ireland's biggest indoor stadium seating 10,000 people. Since opening its doors in 2000 it has hosted the World Amateur Boxing Championship and President Clinton's keynote speech during his last presidential visit to Ireland. Home to the Belfast Giants ice hockey team the venue is also used for concerts and sports events. Popular with Belfast residents the entertainment venue offers an ice-rink, multiplex cinema, IMAX cinema, a science exhibition and numerous restaurants, bars and nightclubs.

The waterfront is vital to the whole project, including phase one. Rebuilding the quay wall and bringing the basin to life as a working marina will attract visitors and provide an animated backdrop for residents. Smith believes there is great scope for this aspect of the project: "There are marinas in Carrickfergus and Bangor, but no inner city marina. This development will bring boats directly to the heart of Belfast."

A large, £4 million stretch of public space will run between the waterfront and phase one's Abercorn Apartments. The landscaped 'urban park' will be dotted with trees, water features, and public seating, creating a relationship between the buildings and the quayside. The



ABOVE Apartments around Abercorn Basin are designed to be larger than the market average, to enhance quality of life

intention is for the 'urban park' to provide a destination, not just a place to pass through. An event space featuring a series of water jets will sit at the heart of the space, and at the south of the basin a viewing platform will project past the quay wall affording views across Hamilton dry dock. Accent lighting will animate the night-time environment; parallel lines of lighting will pick out where the old railway line ran along the quayside providing a conceptual link to the area's history.

Although it is within walking distance of the city centre, good transport links to Titanic Quarter are essential, so the existing road network connecting the site to the M3 was upgraded before construction work

Timeline for first phase projects

ARC Apartments: Due for completion by the end of 2008

Hotel: Due for completion between summer and end of 2008

Gateway Offices: Due for completion by the end of 2008

Belfast Institute campus: Due for completion September 2009

began. Initially public transport will be in the form of buses, but medium-term aspirations are for a tram system. Smith comments: "It is important for us to ensure Titanic Quarter is connected to the city via good pedestrian routes, public transport and roads."

And within the development, transport is just as important. Smith adds: "A system of walkways and boulevards running along the river's edge will provide accessibility to the waterfront – Abercorn Basin is a very attractive area of open space."

ARC APARTMENTS

Titanic Quarter's residential zone will be dominated by six towers offering 475 one-, two- and three-bedroom properties plus six penthouse apartments. The buildings will range from six to 12 storeys as they curve round the basin in two concentric arcs rising from one side.

John Fitzgerald of Robinson McIlwaine architects explains: "The different heights create architectural geometry and add to the dynamism of the building, as the towers appear to be growing out of the corner." On a practical level this ensures the apartments receive optimum daylight and also provides some degree of privacy as the end apartments are not directly opposite each other. All apartments have a glazed external wall in the living room with doors out to a balcony; properties at the front of the development will benefit from views across Belfast towards the Black Mountain, while those at the rear will enjoy vistas of the Craig Antlet hills.

In a bid to encourage owner-occupiers rather than investors, to promote a lively and dynamic environment, the apartments are particularly spacious with ceiling heights of 2.55m. According to Fitzgerald the properties are 15-20% bigger than other apartments being built in Belfast. He says: "We're hoping to create a real community for people who want to be part of the new living sector at Titanic Quarter. The sophisticated bars and restaurants on the ground floor of the apartments are within easy reach and will provide a contrast to those available at the Odyssey." →

**'IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO
ENSURE TITANIC QUARTER IS CONNECTED
TO THE CITY VIA GOOD PEDESTRIAN ROUTES
PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND ROADS'**

MIKE SMITH Titanic Quarter

→ Thomas O'Doherty of Eric Cairns Partnership, the selling agent for the apartments, says: "Demand has been phenomenal, thanks to both the high specification and spacious layouts of the apartments and the buoyant city centre residential market."

HOTEL

As TQ went to press a decision had yet to be made on the type of hotel to be developed. Designed by Robinson McIlwaine, the building will appear as an extension to the apartments, curving to match the streetscape with views across the river. "The architecture reflects the area's maritime association," remarks Fitzgerald. "The design is evocative of the Art Deco era, harking back to the golden age of travel when hotels were fabulous."

GATEWAY OFFICES

The aptly named offices will form the entrance to Titanic Quarter. Andrew Murray of Todd Architects says: "The design was influenced by the building's location and relationship to the masterplan. At the main access point it is a strategic component of the development."

The design concept was for three 'linked yet defined' elements, with a total 13,000sq m of office space, linked at their apex by an atrium, with glazed gable ends to each of the three main blocks for a "bright, welcoming work environment". The penthouse-style offices in the upper levels will have mostly glazed walls and direct access to the surrounding roof terraces. A central courtyard with decorative stone surfaces, feature water areas and artwork provides an additional 'break-out' space for office workers and acts as a linking device.

"The visual and physical link between the atria, the adjacent courtyard and streetscape is strengthened by the use of a continuous flooring material," Murray continues. "Car access has been consciously played down, with the vehicular entrance located on the least



BELOW Gateway office development by Todd Architects





A GREEN TRAVEL POLICY IS BEING ENCOURAGED, WITH EMPHASIS PLACED ON THE EASE OF ACCESS TO TQ BY FOOT, BICYCLE OR BUS

→ prominent elevation of the building.” More than 100 parking spaces will be incorporated beneath the building in a semi-basement area.

BIFHE CAMPUS

The new campus for Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) will establish a lively student village at the heart of Titanic Quarter.

The philosophy behind Todd’s design brief was for a new type of establishment, forging closer ties with surrounding communities and the business and commercial world in particular. As one of TQ’s early occupants, BIFHE is viewed as a trailblazer, setting the precedent for other institutions. Kevin Chambers, head of capital projects at BIFHE, comments: “The new state-of-the-art campus will be in what we believe will become one

of the most exciting and vibrant areas in Belfast.”

BIFHE has a historic link with Queen’s Island, training many of the engineers who worked in the shipyard during its heyday. Today it is the largest provider of further and higher education in Belfast. The new campus will offer 2,500 students a wide range of courses on subjects from business or health studies to languages and computing. There is scope for a sports centre on the site at a later date.

The four-storey building, rising to five storeys at the front, will offer 21,000sq m of space centred round a large courtyard. For an arresting first impression, the building’s entrance is shaped like a ship’s prow. “It is inevitable that the design will pay homage to the maritime heritage,” acknowledges Emma Logan of Todd Architects. “It is an iconic image for Belfast Institute as the prow will be evident from across the basin, something which was taken into account at the design stage.

“The site’s major advantage is that it has plenty of space, allowing for a user-friendly low-rise building. The canteen will spill out onto the central courtyard, which is not just for getting from one place to the next but offers an attractive recreation space where students can meet and sit; it could also be used for student events.”

A green travel policy is being encouraged, with emphasis placed on the ease of access to Titanic Quarter by foot, bicycle or bus. However, a semi-basement car park will offer 300 spaces.

ABOVE The BIFHE campus will bring youth and vibrancy to Titanic Quarter

RIGHT Eric Kuhne, masterplanner of Titanic Quarter, believes architecture is always about the 'quality of the experience'



Space man

ERIC KUHNE, MASTERPLANNER OF TITANIC QUARTER, HAS WON HIS REPUTATION BY DESIGNING FOR THE NEEDS OF THE CITIZENS OF A CITY, RATHER THAN ARCHITECTURE CRITICS

Eric Kuhne is an architect who admits that he sends architectural critics running for the exits. Not that this big, affable American, famous for designing Bluewater shopping centre in Kent, seems to mind. “We’re in a very lonely place,” he says. “And yet, we have work on four continents – in Australia, Malaysia, Dubai and Europe.”

Nor is Kuhne remotely interested in being lauded for some trophy building. Instead, he genuinely seems to care about how his architecture can help restore civic pride. Significantly his architectural practice is part of a larger group called Civic Arts, incorporating Kuhne’s research, publishing and masterplanning interests.

“It’s about restoring the pageantry of city life and cities. The 20th century replaced civic with public and

ground out all the spectacle and splendour from the city... We believe there’s an absolute integration between art, architecture, gardens and the ethos of a culture,” he says, adding that modernism has done a “pretty good job” of destroying the link between these elements. “Our business is all about the restoration of that capacity to tell stories through architecture.”

Now he has a chance to prove this in Belfast, where he is the architectural mastermind behind the Titanic Quarter masterplan.

Born in Texas in 1952, Kuhne was brought up by a mother who was a teacher, and a father who was trained by the US Air Force to drop bombs. His father wanted his children to do something that protected rather than destroyed life, and taught him perspective drawing when he was just seven, thus setting him on the road to becoming an architect. He trained at Rice University, →

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RIGHT Kuhne is passionate about the public realm. His plans for TQ include a commemorative plaza and park, three times the size of Trafalgar Square, for both visitors and residents

→ Houston, setting up in practice while doing his masters at Princeton, New Jersey in 1983.

“I love my art,” he says. “I chose architecture as a way to express my voice. It’s never about the building – it’s always about the quality of the experience.”

Kuhne has lived in Clerkenwell, London, for the past 12 years, time which has been a “true gift” in his life, he says. Before the UK, he spent four years in Australia building the huge Darling Park scheme in Sydney which completed in 1991.

Some might find his assertions of the power of narrative architecture to create quality environments a bit much to take. Bluewater, for example, received a critical mauling when it opened. Yet it has been a huge commercial and popular success – 31 million shoppers each year enjoy its pleasant and user-friendly facilities and there’s no doubt it works brilliantly as a shopping experience.

And when talking to him, it’s hard not to be won over by the sheer passion and earnestness of his views, however schmaltzy they may be (this is a man who refers to skyscrapers as star-catchers). Kuhne really seems to care and strive to use his architecture to help create a better quality of life. He is under no illusions about his architectural standing – often he is the third practice that a client turns to when the first and second choices have failed to deliver. But neither is he in any doubt of the great benefits his schemes can bring.

PEOPLE POWER

His philosophy is that the ground plan of a project belongs to the citizens of the city. This needs to be brought to life by retail and restaurants to restore a mixed use and café society feel, but in such a way that it tells stories to connect with both the memory and dreams of the people and the area. For Kuhne, gardens and landscapes are important integral parts of a scheme, and not just shunted into residual pieces. Drawing on philosopher Raymond Williams, he advocates treating people as “guests rather than consumers” so that “you dignify the heroic routine of everyday life”.

The contribution his work makes to improving the quality of the everyday environment is important to him – he talks about his schemes being based on “molecules” of family and community spirit. His research division has been contributing to the NHS’s Healthy Cities Agenda and he is passionate about the need to be able to walk to local shops for fruit and vegetables or a pint of milk.

“If people have to walk more than five minutes they’ll get in their cars and if they drive, the health of their community goes down the toilet,” he says.

He is also adamant about the need to incorporate healthcare and education facilities into the heart of the community rather than the periphery. A good example, he says is at Greenwich in south east London where he

used to live, which has changed from being just a tourist trap to a thriving student area with the establishment of a University of Greenwich campus there.

Ask him to pick out the most significant of his projects over the years, and he goes for a relatively modest one – Headwaters Park in Fort Wayne, Indiana, completed in 1994 on a former flood plain. This, he says proudly, has genuinely changed the community for the better, and has become the centrepiece for the city, hosting 30 festivals a year. “I never dreamed that a place could have such an impact on the city. We’re going to do the same for Belfast, creating a meeting place that restores Queen’s Island as a place where people bond together,” he says.

His practice’s approach is to really understand the nature of the end user so that the resulting architecture can speak both to their hopes and needs.

COMEBACK KING

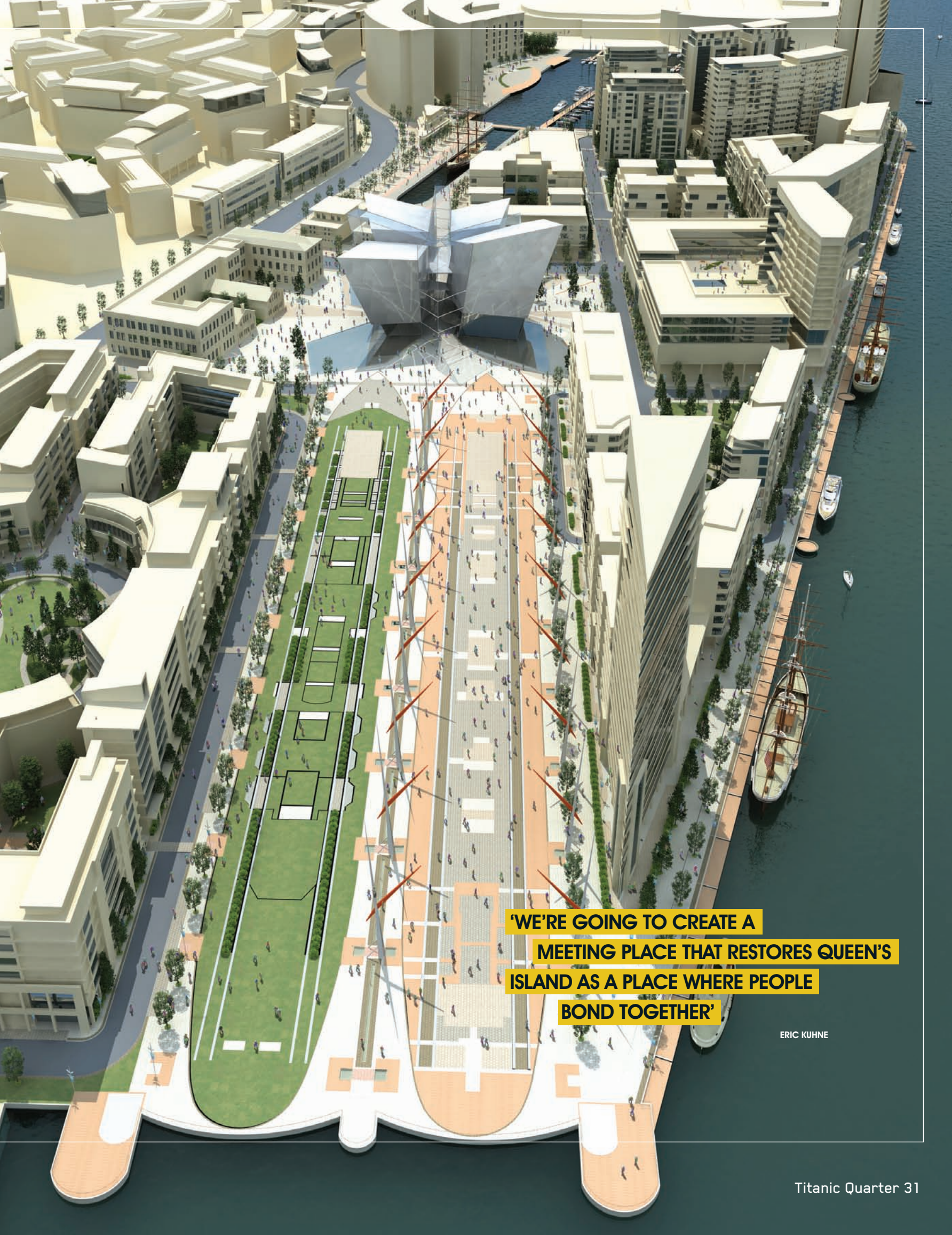
Detailed analysis for the Titanic Quarter involved investigating why a staggering 25% of Belfast’s citizens had left the city in the past 20 years, and finding out what might draw them back from the nearby towns and villages, if only for a visit. “The story isn’t just about the Titanic but about Queen’s Island being a centre of excellence for nearly 100 years,” he says. “Where once they grew ships, we’re now going to grow a community – one of the finest residential, working, educational and office communities.”

In Titanic Quarter, the ‘stories’ of the thousands of men and women such as naval engineers and fitters who worked on the docks or were involved in Trans Oceanic trade will be remembered in the architecture. Kuhne is hoping to literally include their names in the pavement of the signature project visitor attraction.

“We’re going to build a museum that talks about not just the Titanic story but the 50,000 people that worked on Queen’s Island that represented the finest congregation of talent in the country.” The form of the museum will, says Kuhne, represent five ships’ prows to create a dynamic form. This use of rather literal imagery is to Kuhne truthful and respectful of the context. But to others, it may seem trite, just like the topping off of Bluewater with oast house references.

Even the considerable scope of the Titanic Quarter pales when compared with another of Kuhne’s current projects – a proposed scheme for Kuwait not far from the Iraq border. Madinat Al Hareer, or ‘City of Silk’, will house 700,000 people and include a 234-storey tower some 1,001 metres high called the Tower of 1001 Arabian Nights which, if it goes ahead, will house 7,000 people and be by far the world’s tallest building.

Ever one to relish a challenge, Kuhne is gung-ho about the project, as he is about all his schemes. Whatever the critics might say, he’s an enthusiast who certainly loves his work: “My favourite project is always my next one!”



'WE'RE GOING TO CREATE A MEETING PLACE THAT RESTORES QUEEN'S ISLAND AS A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE BOND TOGETHER'

ERIC KUHNE

RIGHT Residential development will focus on the refurbished Abercorn Basin, which will also house a marina

WATER WORLD

THE DOCKS AND RIVER FRONTAGE THAT FUELLED THE CITY'S GROWTH IN THE PAST ARE NOW PLAYING AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ITS ECONOMIC REBIRTH, WITH TITANIC QUARTER MAKING THE MOST OF QUEEN'S ISLAND'S LINEAR MILE OF WATER FRONTAGE

It was on the banks of the River Lagan where the wealth was generated that fuelled Belfast's extraordinary expansion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Industries like lace-making and ship-building proliferated along the river, transforming the capital of Northern Ireland into one of the world's major centres of maritime trade and ship-building.

And Queen's Island, on the east bank, was at the heart of the action. It was here that the mighty Harland & Wolff shipyard, birthplace of the Titanic, had its home. In its heyday the shipyard was Belfast's major employer, employing 35,000, but as long ago as the 1950s it started its decline. These days, Harland has a maximum of employees on a dramatically

contracted site, engaged in work on renewable energy projects and ship repairs.

It took some time to decide how to deal with the resultant massive brownfield site of Queen's Island, according to Diana Fitzsimons, partner at the Belfast office of planning consultancy Turley Associates, which put together the original framework for the area. She says: "It took a while for Harland & Wolff to contract. After that, the Belfast Harbour Commissioners had to be careful about what it did with the site."

Now, with its future as Titanic Quarter, the waterfront that fuelled the city's growth is playing an important role in its 21st century economic rebirth. Roy Adair, chief executive officer of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, says: "Much of Belfast's historical prosperity was built upon its maritime





RIGHT The new apartments will join the Odyssey complex looking out over the lough



→ heritage. Today, projects such as Titanic Quarter and the signature project are helping the city recapture and build upon that legacy to help create Belfast's future."

Titanic Quarter is seeking to capitalise on the site's dramatic waterfront location. The development framework for the site earmarks 39% of the 75ha area for residential uses. Much of the residential accommodation consists of apartments facing on to the water, with dramatic views across the Belfast Lough.

Down at ground-floor level, the plan identifies 'great potential' along the site's waterfront for river-based leisure facilities and café/bars. The quarter's backers are also planning to build a cruise ship terminal, which will provide liners with an opportunity to stop off at Belfast, providing the city as a whole with an opportunity to tap into what is becoming a growing and increasingly lucrative market. A network of footpaths and bridges across the site's basins and docks will make it easier to get around the waterfront.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

In this respect, the Titanic Quarter development is helping to break new ground in Belfast, reversing the city's traditional neglect of its waterfront. Until recently, the river was seen primarily as a place for industry. Fitzsimons says: "People didn't know the waterfront was there – the city had completely turned its back on it. Laganside showed what could be done."

She is referring to the work of the Laganside Development Corporation, the agency set up by the

MUCH OF THE ACCOMMODATION CONSISTS OF APARTMENTS FACING ON TO THE WATER, WITH DRAMATIC VIEWS ACROSS THE LOUGH

Northern Ireland Office to regenerate the 1.5km-long stretch of run-down waterfront between the city centre and the Harland yard. The corporation has transformed perceptions of the city's riverside since it was set up in 1989. Since then, extension along the waterfront towards the docks area has become the most significant trend in the city's development.

"Regeneration is moving out along the river," says Brian Lavery, a director in the Belfast office of property agents CB Richard Ellis.

The corporation's showpiece project is the Waterfront Hall, which has become a conference centre of national significance as well as Belfast's premier entertainment venue. The other key project is the Odyssey Centre, on the other side of the river at the gateway to the Titanic Quarter. This £120 million millennium project has disproved the many sceptics who believed it would be a white elephant by becoming a big hit with the Belfast public, attracting more than three million visits in 2002 alone. The corporation has exceeded expectations. When it →

'WE ARE CREATING A PLACE THAT IS UNIQUE TO THE AREA WE ARE TRYING TO DEVELOP. THERE ARE LOTS OF ASSETS ON THE SITE THAT WE WANT TO CONSERVE.'

MARK EVANS associate at Eric Kuhne's practice, Civic Arts

→ was launched in 1989, it predicted that the project would generate £225 million worth of investment. The actual figure looks set to top £1 billion next year.

Part of that success story is down to the wider transformation in Northern Ireland's political scene in recent years. But far-sighted planning has helped the process along.

GO WITH THE FLOW

The construction of a weir on the Lagan has helped to regulate the river's flow, meaning that its muddy seaweed-strewn banks are no longer exposed at low tide. In addition, the water itself has been cleaned up to the extent that it has become a habitat for wildlife.

On the waterfronts

Recent years has seen an explosion in waterfront development across the UK, as a result of a number of converging factors.

Many of the factories lining the country's canals and rivers have become redundant in recent decades. And while traditionally it used to make sense to locate next to canals, the shift to road transport meant that waterside locations are no longer relevant for industry.

Birmingham has led the regeneration way, with its comprehensive redevelopment of the derelict land around the canals to the west of its city centre, creating a new conference centre and indoor arena, which in turn sparked developer Argent's showpiece regeneration of adjacent Brindleyplace. The estimated £400 million-worth of private and public investment in the area has generated 2,800 new jobs and attracted five million visitors a year, according to a study for British Waterways.

Figures like these mean that waterfront

locations are increasingly viewed as attractive development opportunities.

Roger Hanbury, chief executive of the Waterways Trust, says: "There's been a realisation that waterfronts are a great place to live and work. Developers have woken up to the potential of water. People are seeing the added value of water and being able to justify its creation for regeneration purposes." He reckons developers are willing to pay a premium for building next to water, which can add 15-20% to the value of a residential project.

And we like working next to water too, according to recently published research. One in three employees who work near water say that it has a positive impact on their productivity, according to a poll carried out by YouGov for Glasgow's waterside International Financial Services District. The same poll shows that one in five workers say their productivity would improve if they could look out over a river or a canal.

"A lot of what is happening there now is down to Laganside," says Lavery. With projects like the Waterfront Hall and the Odyssey demonstrating the potential for waterfront developments in Belfast, the hard work by Laganside Development Corporation has created an environment in which the Titanic Quarter can flourish. When TQ plans were first being thought up, Lavery says much of the site was envisaged for relatively low-grade industrial and warehouse uses. Now, as well as workspace, the framework also provides for high-quality offices, aimed at multi-national occupiers like Pricewaterhouse Coopers which has recently located nearby in waterfront space.

In addition, the framework envisages that the site will feature a clutch of landmark buildings. A key difference between the two developments is that while the Laganside Corporation got a lot of European funding, Titanic Quarter will be a largely private-funded development.

Mark Evans, an associate at Kuhne's office, says that key to the long term success of Titanic Quarter is that it should not become an 'anywheresville'. "We are creating a place that is unique to the area that we are trying to develop, we don't want Belfast to look like Barcelona. There are a lot of assets on that site that we want to conserve."

MARITIME HERITAGE

The development framework exploits the quarter's rich maritime heritage, which features the marketing opportunity from heaven in the shape of the Titanic. The site's listed buildings and scheduled structures are all being preserved. "These include the giant slipways on which the Titanic, and its equally ill-fated sister ship the Olympia, were launched. These will become the focus of a new visitor attraction, which Evans believes will become a 'must see' attraction, on a par for visitors to Northern Ireland with the Giant's Causeway. Harland & Wolff's headquarters, which includes the Titanic's drawing offices, will be opened up to members of the public.

The historic Abercorn Basin's quay walls are being rebuilt. And Harland and Wolff's famous cranes, Samson and Goliath, which dominate views of this part of the city, are protected by statute.

Fitzsimons says: "This is the best urban regeneration opportunity in the whole of Europe. How often do you get a flattened site with a waterfront so close to the city centre. It's one and a half kilometres from City Hall, and where else do you have a waterfront site with such fantastic heritage?"



Playing for keeps

WHILE OTHER CITIES ACROSS THE UK ARE TALKING THE TALK ABOUT SUSTAINABLE REGENERATION, BELFAST IS WALKING THE WALK, IN BOTH ITS ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC SENSES.

"Titanic Quarter is a huge, huge opportunity for the city," says Belfast City Council events manager Gerry Copeland. "That area of the city has obviously declined since its industrial use. But now we have almost a blank canvas and an opportunity to create a new future and to shift the whole city, east of the river."

The 75ha scheme is a sustainable reuse of brownfield land that will provide some 20,000 jobs in a thriving, new mixed-use quarter which aims to blend heritage with new facilities to provide a working community as well as one which will pull in the tourists. →



→ “The thinking is to regenerate the area and bring it back into use via the public and private sector, but for it to be in keeping with the heritage of the site,” says senior scientist at RPS Kirk McClure Morton, Kellie McNamara.

But before the onset of the developers and architect Eric Kuhne, says McNamara, the site was good for nothing, mostly due to its history of heavy industry. “We’ve been left with a legacy of various nasties in the ground that will have to be dealt with,” he says. The Titanic Quarter itself is an area of reclaimed land from the dredging of the River Lagan, and a contamination study signalled remediation was necessary to rid the site of lead and arsenic from its shipbuilding history. RPS proposed soil stabilisation as the remedial technique, ‘locking in’ some of the lead and arsenic by creating a cement-like mixture to keep it in the soil, and prevent it leaching out in the water. The soil itself can then be used as backfill to reduce cost to the plant. The quay wall, for example, is being extended out by around 14m, so some of the material that has been remediated will be used as infill material.

Not only does this make sound economic sense, it makes environmental sense too. “The plant can reduce their costs and the amount of clean aggregate that they are going to have to import,” says McNamara. “We’re reducing the cost for the developer.”

The phase two site, which will accommodate mixed-use accommodation as well as the Titanic signature project, incorporates the historic slipways for the Titanic and Olympic, which at the moment are backfilled with

It’s going to be absolutely fantastic. A new urban quarter with its own character. There will be everything you need for living

DIANA FITZSIMONS Turley Associates

materials believed to include asbestos.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

For Diana Fitzsimons, office director at planning and urban design consultancy Turley Associates, the Titanic Quarter project represents a rare opportunity that will act as a driver for high-quality investment in the city. “It’s the largest brownfield site, we reckon, in Europe, and is a unique opportunity because it’s so close to the city centre. There are lots of waterfront regeneration sites but this is the most central – it’s the same distance from the city centre as Queen’s University.”

Turley Associates was appointed in 2002, before Harcourt came on board, and initially drew up a development framework, evolving it over time and working with Civic Arts, Eric Kuhne’s practice, to produce a planning application. “We see it as having a quantum of residential development sufficient to make it a self-sustaining residential neighbourhood within the overall city, so a new city quarter,” says Fitzsimons. The mixed-use development will provide 20,000 projected jobs, mostly in ‘modern’ areas such as office and light industrial but also in tourism and leisure, taking the place of the 35,000 or so



who worked at the shipyard in its heyday.

“It’s going to be absolutely fantastic,” says Fitzsimons, “a new urban quarter with its own character.” Streets will be laid out to reflect those of the city centre, but also taking account of the historic elements in the Queen’s Island section of Belfast Harbour, with its slipways, scheduled monuments and docks. “It has been designed to make sure you can see all these things”, says Fitzsimons, “but also the views out of the site, the hills outside Belfast.”

Titanic Quarter is true sustainable development. “There will be jobs, and the day-to-day services that you need for living, like small scale shops and services. But it will also be a fantastic place for tourists to come to because you will have a major iconic building – the signature project.”

In planning the site, the backers of Titanic Quarter looked at other international examples of waterfront development, including those in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Helsinki and others. “What we’ve learnt is that you need to have very high-quality public realm, mixed-use and active ground floors,” says Fitzsimons. Sustainable public transport systems are also on the agenda, based around walking and cycling, with ‘restrained’ parking levels and a commitment to a dedicated bus service for the Titanic Quarter from the city centre. Eventually, a rapid transport system is planned.

The signature project, the main tourist draw, will feature interactive exhibits and a ‘flying cinema’ based on the shipbuilding heritage of the area and Titanic’s design

and construction. In front of the building, the Olympic and Titanic slipways – an area around three times the size of Trafalgar Square – will be retained as hard and soft open space, but will also be used for concerts as well as recreation, part of the tourism offer. The buildings on either side will reflect the scale of the dominating gantry structures either side. The 1867 dry Hamilton Dock from where ships went out to the Abercorn basin will also be retained, along with the listed former Harland and Wolff drawing office. One of the ideas is that the Nomadic, a ship brought back to Belfast from France that took passengers out to the Titanic, might be put on show in the Hamilton Dock, if it can be restored. The Thompson and Alexandra Graving Docks, and Thompson pump house complete the local historic picture, creating a European waterfront development that is firmly rooted in the history and character of Belfast. “The idea is to link up these features so you have a tourist trail going through Titanic Quarter.”

Copeland agrees. “It is the opportunity to develop an iconic world-class visitor attraction around the theme of the Titanic and is something the council is extremely passionate about,” he says. When it is all completed Titanic Quarter also represents some £15 billion of investment of the area, over the course of 20 years.

“It will take time to develop but certainly the masterplan provides a wonderful opportunity for the city to look forward and turn a vacant site into something that will be a multifunctional location that both the city and business will be attracted to.”

Both **LEFT** residential and **ABOVE** industrial elements of Titanic Quarter will ensure it is a truly sustainable new quarter of the city

Brain wave

BRAND NEW FACILITIES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED COMPANIES LOOK SET TO BOOST THE ECONOMY OF BOTH TQ AND THE WIDER CITY

A major new regeneration project in the centre of Belfast is a positive step forward for a city that has had to overcome many difficulties over the past few decades, yet is home to the largest port in Ireland, an expanding international airport, an advanced ICT infrastructure and two world-class universities. Unemployment is low and both prosperity and optimism are high.

The Titanic Quarter development, the most significant development opportunity in Northern Ireland for a generation, will provide a boost for education in the city, as the Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) has committed to the construction of a new single campus centre within its borders. This commitment, when allied to the ongoing construction of new elements to the Northern Ireland Science Park (NISP), means that Titanic Quarter can provide the kind of centralised educational facilities that can help to energise Northern Ireland's knowledge economy, as well as provide significant opportunities for investment and employment.

The move to locate the BIFHE city centre campus in TQ has been welcomed by Pat Doherty, chairman of Harcourt Developments, overall developer of Titanic Quarter, who says: "This decision will provide the institute and Belfast with a state-of-the-art, purpose-built campus fit for 21st century education and learning." Co-promoter of the TQ development, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, is also pleased by the institute's decision. BHC financial director Maurice Bullick says: "BIFHE's



decision to locate its city centre campus on Belfast's key brownfield regeneration site, a site that also contains the Northern Ireland Science Park, and Queen's University Institute of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology will send all the right messages to foreign investors and local companies alike that Belfast has a world-class research centre bringing together higher education, colleges and specialists in the key areas of an advanced knowledge economy."

Dr Norman Apsley, chief executive of NISP, is delighted by the news that the institute will be adding its considerable presence to TQ. "This decision will further cement Titanic Quarter's status as a hub for knowledge and knowledge-based industry and help the science park deliver our mission of providing a direct link between the two. We look forward to working with Titanic Quarter and the Belfast Institute in promoting the importance of



LEFT White Star House, completed last year on the NISP campus, TQ

LEFT BELOW Citigroup, a new tenant of NISP

RIGHT Dr Norman Apsley, chief executive of NISP

→ university spin-outs, successful indigenous firms and blue chip inward investors such as Microsoft and Citigroup.” The real value of NISP, however, can’t be fully understood through its various buildings. Its unique benefits lie in its ability to develop a community that encourages the free exchange of knowledge and expertise.

The relationship between technology and education can help NISP become a key influence in the rapidly expanding knowledge economy, where the capacity to exploit science or technology through knowledge can be a catalyst for change. Maurice Bullick confirms: “The successful development of a community within the Titanic Quarter that encourages the free exchange of knowledge and expertise is important to the future economy, the city and to Northern Ireland as a whole.”

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Titanic Quarter has predicted that its new development could provide up to 20,000 new jobs – a welcome employment boost for the city. The area will be a hotbed of employment opportunities, particularly in industries such as health and environmental technology, information and communication technology and the growing business, services, hospitality and tourism sectors. The creation of new jobs plays a vital role in regeneration. Employment is, in many ways, the lifeblood of a community and the prospect of new jobs will ensure that the people of Belfast are fully supportive of the development of this historic area.

Other projects under way help add to the sense of a city that is regenerating: the £14 million facelift planned for the area around Belfast City Hall, the transformation of the historic Cathedral Quarter area, designed to give Belfast a cultural heartland, and the £300 million Victoria Square retail development, due to open in 2007 (for more on city-wide developments, see p44). Belfast was indeed the venue for a recent conference of global experts in land regeneration to see at first hand one of Europe’s ‘most outstanding recent examples of urban transformation’.

There are some interesting parallels between what is currently taking place in Belfast and what has already been achieved in other cities, both in the UK and around the world. According to recent research by the Work Foundation consultancy, London and Edinburgh are the UK cities which have adapted most rapidly to the demands of the knowledge economy, with Manchester, Bristol, Glasgow and Newcastle close behind.

The Work Foundation also found that the keys to adapting to the knowledge economy were “economic success, a diverse industry base, a university that has a mutually beneficial relationship with the city, a strong communications infrastructure and good transport

WHITE STAR HOUSE



Employment is, in many ways, the lifeblood of a community. The prospect of new jobs will ensure the people of Belfast fully support the TQ development

links”. Belfast may have some way to go to match the achievements of the big UK cities but the Titanic Quarter regeneration, with its emphasis on education, is definitely a step in the right direction. Belfast already has an excellent education system, a first class telecommunications infrastructure and good transportation links, both locally and internationally. This kind of infrastructure bodes well for Belfast’s future.

In terms of the global knowledge economy the examples of Korea and Finland demonstrate the link between knowledge and economic growth. In the aftermath of its financial crisis in 1998, Korea officially launched a national campaign to make the transition to an advanced knowledge-based economy where innovation could thrive, enhancing overall productivity and sustaining economic growth.

Finland has successfully transformed itself into a knowledge economy in a relatively short time. The Finnish experience of the 1990s represents an example of how knowledge can become the driving force of economic growth and transformation. During that

decade, Finland became the most ICT-specialised economy in the world, completing its move from resource-driven to knowledge- and innovation-driven development. The advent of the knowledge economy has had significant ramifications for governments and policy makers over recent years as the role that education and knowledge play in economic prosperity has started to be properly understood.

BELFAST MEANS BUSINESS

The Titanic Quarter project will provide a boost for Belfast and Northern Ireland over the coming years in education, regeneration and employment. The developer has taken steps to ensure that Belfast is a city that is at the forefront of urban development and in a position to be a catalyst for a new era of economic regeneration. The moves to combine redevelopment with education and knowledge should mean that TQ provides both physical and social regeneration, a combination crucial to the success of any regeneration initiative.

The government is clearly confident that TQ is going to be the success it deserves to be. Northern Ireland Minister Peter Hain has stated that: “Our shared vision is that the whole Titanic Quarter development will make a unique contribution to regenerate and revitalise this site and contribute to a more prosperous future for Northern Ireland.” This is probably one of the only times that a British government minister has said something that all the people of Belfast can agree with.

CITY-WIDE STORY

BELFAST'S PAST PROBLEMS COULD NOW PROVE TO BE ITS SALVATION. YEARS OF UNDER-DEVELOPMENT NOW MEAN THAT THERE'S A LOT OF CATCHING UP TO DO, AND A LOT OF POTENTIAL TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE FINE CITY CENTRE AND ITS ECONOMIC UPTURN.



Belfast is unique among Western European cities in that more than half of its city centre has yet to be redeveloped, creating a pleasingly blank canvas for regeneration. True, the circumstances that led to this are unfortunate. The violence that plagued the province for 32 years, until peace was declared by the IRA, meant that Belfast was completely underdeveloped and under-regenerated compared to English cities of the same size.

But over the past 10 years that has all changed. With prosperity now flooding back to Ulster, Belfast is at the eye of several major regeneration schemes, only one of which is Titanic Quarter (TQ). Belfast's regeneration was kickstarted by the redevelopment of the River Lagan waterfront, which brings in more than £1.5 million a year in business rates from its plush leisure complexes, offices and up-market homes. Now, several new projects are carrying on from where Laganside left off: Victoria

SHOPPING HEAVEN Multi Developments' 90,000sq m Victoria Square development, due to open in spring 2008

Square, the North East Quarter, now known as the Royal Exchange, the Cathedral Quarter, and the proposed extension to the Castle Court shopping centre on the retail stretch of Royal Avenue.

As for TQ, Joanne Jennings, chief executive of Belfast City Centre Management Company and Chamber of Trade and Commerce, believes it is a significant piece of the jigsaw in Belfast's regeneration. "The whole regeneration of the Titanic Quarter represents something hugely exciting for Belfast. Its strategy for investment in housing gives a new impetus to city centre living, which is a great strategy for the city as a whole by encouraging life back into the city centre."

She points out that the entire development is bringing major brownfield sites back into use. "It represents a significant opportunity, in that there's a major visitor attraction with the Titanic connection as well as providing employment with the science parks. It, along with the other city centre schemes, is heralding a new era for Belfast."

Mike Smith, chief executive of TQ, says all the new projects in the city are achieving a "renaissance for Belfast". He says: "Initiatives such as Victoria Square, Cathedral Square and Royal Exchange will all add to the offer that Belfast has as a city. If I think back 10 years ago to the dark days a lot has been done to regenerate Belfast. The likes of Laganside started the work, which is being completed by the rest of the developments.

"All the developments [now going on] have also given people the confidence in developing areas of Belfast and they will make a huge difference to how Belfast is perceived."

VICTORIA SQUARE

Victoria Square is Multi Developments' 1 million sq ft (90,000sq m) shopping complex in Belfast city centre due to open in spring 2008. The project



'ALL THE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE GIVEN PEOPLE THE CONFIDENCE IN DEVELOPING AREAS OF BELFAST AND WILL MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE TO HOW IT IS PERCEIVED'

MIKE SMITH Titanic Quarter



→ provides a natural link from the city centre through to the Laganside development, essentially regenerating the entire south-east quarter of Belfast's centre. When finished it will provide a new shopping area, restaurants, apartments, and 1,000 car parking spaces. House of Fraser has signed as anchor tenant, taking a 200,000sq ft (18,000sq m) unit, while H&M will take 24,000sq ft (2,000sq m) of space.

ROYAL EXCHANGE (NORTH EAST QUARTER)

With Victoria Square regenerating the south east of Belfast, the city took a long hard look at the north east quarter. In March 2006 plans were put forward for a major revamp that will turn the run-down area in to a high-quality open-air shopping district, known as the Royal Exchange. William Ewart properties, the preferred developer in the £300 million project, is planning 800,000sq ft (72,000sq m) of mixed-use property, including a 100,000sq ft (9,000sq m) department store, two 40,000sq ft (3,600sq m) shops and 65 smaller shops. Royal Exchange will also include 200 apartments and 100,000sq ft (9,000sq m) of office space above the retail.

CATHEDRAL QUARTER

Being developed as Belfast's newest leisure spot, Cathedral Quarter is a niche area appealing to what has been described as 'fashionable crowds'. St Anne's Square is its £50 million showpiece. Work has begun on the development, which will include apartments, shops, arts centre and a 155-bed hotel, opening in 2008.

CITY HALL

The city's iconic City Hall is set to play a major role in its regeneration over the next three years. Plans announced in August by the Department for Social Development have outlined a £14 million project to upgrade the area around the 100-year-old building, which has a prominent place in the heart of Belfast. Tentative plans include extending its grounds out to the surrounding streets, and upgrading the adjacent streets and squares, with the aim of making the city centre more environmentally friendly and inviting. Architect/masterplanner EDAW has been appointed to carry out the work.

CASTLE COURT EXTENSION

Extending Castle Court shopping centre, presently Belfast's largest shopping centre on Royal Avenue in the north eastern quarter of Belfast, has been long mooted. The plans by owner Westfield lost out against Victoria Square, and then more recently against Royal Exchange. But Westfield remains undeterred. Plans for an extension may have been put on hold, but have certainly not been shelved. "We'd still like the extension and we are still very keen, it's just an issue of approvals," says a Westfield spokesman.

HOW IT COULD

LOOK...

TOP Garfield Street, behind Castle Court, looking to the North Street arcade

CENTRE Central Square

BOTTOM Writers Square in the Cathedral Quarter