



Subject:	Consultation on a Historic Environment Policy for Northern Ireland
Date:	15 September 2026
Reporting Officer:	Dermot O'Kane – Acting Development Planning & Policy Manager
Contact Officer:	Robert Kennedy, Senior Planning Officer

Is this report restricted?	Yes	☐	No	☒
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes	☒	No	☐

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek the Planning Committee's approval of Belfast City Council's response to the Department for Communities' consultation on the Draft Historic Environment Policy 2027-2037.
1.2	The consultation proposes a strategic policy framework intended to guide the identification, protection, management and promotion of Northern Ireland's historic environment over this period.
2.0	Recommendations
	The Planning Committee is requested to: • Note the contents of the Department's consultation document; • Agree the proposed Council response as outlined within this report; and • Authorise officers to submit the response to the Department for Communities.
3.0	Background
3.1	The Department for Communities has published a Consultation on a Historic Environment Policy for Northern Ireland Department for Communities . The document forms part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme and sets out a series of high-level policy aims relating to the conservation, protection, management and promotion of Northern Ireland's historic environment. The Department has also published its Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Equality Impact Screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment documents as part of this consultation.
3.2	The consultation document identifies 17 draft policy aims and establishes a strategic direction for future heritage policy. However, it contains limited detail regarding implementation mechanisms, governance arrangements, funding structures and the relationship with existing planning policy and guidance.
3.3	Given the Council's statutory planning responsibilities, including preparation of the Local Development Plan (LDP) and the assessment of planning applications affecting the

	historic environment, clarification is required regarding the practical implications of the proposed policy framework.
4.0	Main Issues
4.1	The consultation document is largely strategic and aspirational in nature and does not clearly explain how the proposed policy aims will be delivered, monitored or resourced. Clarification is sought regarding the status of the document and its relationship with future policies, guidance, action plans and implementation frameworks.
4.2	Particular concerns relate to the interaction between the proposed policy and the existing planning system. It is unclear how the policy will relate to Local Development Plans, Community Planning, existing departmental planning guidance, and current heritage designation processes. Further clarity is requested regarding the implications for local authorities, including any new responsibilities arising from the policy.
4.3	The response also highlights uncertainty regarding funding arrangements and delivery mechanisms. While the document refers to future investment in heritage-led regeneration, housing delivery, town centre renewal and heritage assets at risk, no detail is provided on funding criteria, governance arrangements, prioritisation processes, or resource commitments.
4.4	Concerns are raised regarding several draft policy aims which identify desired outcomes but do not explain the practical actions, programmes or interventions that would be required to achieve them. This includes objectives relating to place-making, education, accessibility, technology and community engagement.
4.5	The response notes that references to international heritage conventions and guidance require further explanation, particularly in relation to how these principles will be interpreted and applied alongside existing planning and heritage policy frameworks.
4.6	The consultation document's ambitions to improve access to heritage information and promote wider participation are supported. However, greater detail is sought regarding the proposed use of technology, digitisation, online access to heritage records, and other measures intended to improve accessibility and public engagement.
4.7	Overall, it is considered that the document would benefit from additional detail on implementation arrangements, governance structures, funding mechanisms, monitoring and performance measures, and its relationship with existing planning policy. It is also suggested that a more open-ended consultation format would have enabled more comprehensive consideration of these issues by stakeholders.
	<u>Finance and Resource Implications</u> There are no resource implications associated with this report. <u>Asset and Other Implications</u> None noted. <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no relevant equality or good relations implications attached to this report.
5.0	Appendices

	Appendix 1 – Historic Environment for Northern Ireland - Background to Public Consultation Appendix 2 – Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Report for Historic Environment Policy for Northern Ireland Appendix 3 – Draft Council Response
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