

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**

17th June, 2025

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

As previously notified to you, I enclose a copies of the reports for the following items to be considered at the meeting to be held at 9.30 am on Friday, 20th June, 2025.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

2. Restricted Items

- (f) Community Support Plan (Pages 1 - 92)
- (g) Leisure Transformation Programme - Update and proposed next steps (Pages 93 - 98)
- (i) Update on Fleadh Cheoil (Pages 99 - 104)

4. Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

- (b) Belfast Stories Update (Pages 105 - 222)

5. Physical Programme and Asset Management

- (a) Physical Programme (Pages 223 - 230)

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Belfast Stories Update
Date:	20 June 2025
Reporting Officer:	Wendy Langham, Programme Director, Belfast Stories
Contact Officer:	Eimear Henry, Creative and Strategic Lead, Belfast Stories

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>Purpose of the report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To update Members on the Belfast Stories programme as part of the Belfast Region City Deal including findings of the public consultation as part of RIBA stage 2 Concept Design development. - To outline activity to support the next phase of development with regards to story gathering, engagement and communications.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To update on the development of a draft ethical framework and the process for developing the story gathering programme including curatorial guidelines. - To update on key findings from consumer testing.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the contents of this report and update on progress against the delivery of the Belfast Stories programme. - Note the findings of the consultation exercise and the equality impact assessment and the rural needs screening as summarised in the report and detailed in Appendix 1 and 2. - Note the consumer testing findings. - Agree the actions set out in the work plan detailed in Appendix 3. - Note the <i>draft</i> ethical framework detailed at Appendix 4 and agree to receive a detailed report in September 2025.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Members will be aware that Belfast Stories is the Council's flagship project under the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) and is due to open in 2030. Positioned as a tourism anchor, Belfast Stories is set to deliver significant economic and social impact for Belfast and beyond helping to regenerate the city centre and connect the tourism offer to the neighbourhoods.
3.2	In August 2024, Members of Committee received an update on plans for a public consultation to take place in late 2024 / early 2025.
3.3	<p><u>Belfast Stories Programme</u></p> <p>All programme activities have been underpinned by a programme of ongoing engagement that recognises that the success of Belfast Stories hinges on the active participation and input of those who know the city best—its residents, local communities, cultural groups, business owners and visitors. Engaging with these diverse stakeholders through a structured consultation process is crucial to ensuring that the project reflects the collective vision and meets the needs and aspirations of all who will use and enjoy Belfast Stories.</p>
3.4	<p>A first public consultation on Belfast Stories was delivered from August to November 2022 running for 14 weeks. The consultation focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raising awareness of Belfast Stories so that people are excited and want to continue to be engaged in its development - Making sure that Belfast Stories can be a positive experience for everyone, including consultation on the EQIA, RNIA and Story Collection Framework - Asking people how they would like to continue to be involved in the ongoing engagement.
3.5	The reach of this consultation included 2,755 visits to the online consultation hub, 149 responses to online survey and polls, 65 consultation workshops and 1,148 direct participants.
3.6	Whilst the feedback received during this consultation was overwhelmingly supportive of Belfast Stories, there were several areas that were noted as requiring careful ongoing consideration throughout the development of the project. In particular, responses indicated that the main barriers that would stop people enjoying Belfast Stories included concerns over the experience not being considered inclusive, potential to be politically partisan or lack of trust in how the stories would be represented.
3.7	<p><u>Second Public Consultation, Nov 2024 – Mar 2025</u></p> <p>From an early stage and in line with Council's consultation and engagement framework, the project has made a commitment to consult with the public, communities and key stakeholders at key points in the design process to allow feedback to be meaningfully taken on board.</p>

	<p>RIBA stage 2 represents an important milestone and as such a second public consultation was undertaken. This second public consultation took place over a 16-week period from November 2024 – March 2025. Documents and information are available here.</p>
3.8	<p>Feedback from this second consultation has already informed the next steps of the emerging concept designs from the design teams. Throughout the public consultation period updates were provided on a fortnightly basis to the design teams to ensure feedback was taken on board as the designs developed through RIBA stage 2. Key members of the design team also attended and co-facilitated several consultation events in Belfast.</p>
3.9	<p><u>What we consulted on</u></p> <p>The information presented during this consultation was commensurate with the current design phase. As such it did not present detailed designs, however, it offered a genuine and inclusive opportunity to engage on two primary areas of interest, the design of the building and the envisioned visitor experience. Through the public consultation, Belfast Stories and the design teams received both quantitative and qualitative responses to inform the next stage of project development up to the end of RIBA stage 2 and beyond. By undertaking consultation events, workshops and targeted activity, Belfast Stories continues to ensure the potential of the project to deliver on inclusive growth through focusing on positive economic, social and environmental impacts. The full report including findings and recommendations is available at Appendix 1 and summarised in Appendix 2.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Design Concept</u></p> <p>Emerging proposals seek to bring the former Bank of Ireland back into the life of the city respecting the importance of Royal Avenue whilst developing the full site, ensuring that the design orientates towards and embraces local communities. In designing a home for stories, the design teams have aimed to place significant emphasis on inclusivity and generosity, making spaces for stories and for a multiplicity of uses. Proposals focus on making spaces for both visitors and local people. The purpose of the consultation was to test whether the proposed approach to date, was successful in delivering on the ambition.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Facilities Mix</u></p> <p>The proposed facilities mix at Belfast Stories is based on the site bringing together three threads as one:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A creative hub where writers, musicians, artists and film makers can meet to create, collaborate and develop art and stories to sustain us. Proposals include education and learning facilities together with development and showcasing spaces for industry and a new home for archive. 2. A visitor attraction that visitors can engage with which clearly communicates the spirit of the city – its past, its present and its future. Proposals include a ticketed experience that can support a 90-minute core visitor journey aimed at local and international visitors as well as free to access areas including orientation and a springboard to neighbourhood tourism. 3. A public space – a place for everyone to gather, helping us to express our unique identities and share them with others. Proposals include generous outdoor space comprising of a programmable central courtyard for activities and events and an extensive roofscape offering panoramic views of the city.
3.12	<p>Defining the proposed facilities mix further will continue to be an iterative process as we progress through the business case and design development processes. However, the consultation provided an important opportunity to test the balance of proposed facilities and uses.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Story Gathering</u></p> <p>The emerging masterplan for the visitor experience challenges a conventional thematic approach to storytelling and replaces it with a narrative framework comprising of the two main proposed routes of time and space, supported by a series of crossroads that will support large scale interventions and creative installations. This approach also emphasises the importance of the city's authentic voice focusing on engagement with the people of Belfast</p>

	<p>through an extensive programme of ongoing story gathering as well as establishing a creative commissioning model for local artists. Given the level of feedback on the proposed themes during the first public consultation in 2022, this second consultation provided an important opportunity to test how the emerging concept had responded to previous concerns.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Purpose of the consultation</u></p> <p>The specific objectives of this consultation were to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote the project, raise awareness and gain buy-in - Ensure that Belfast Stories is for everyone including undertaking an equality impact assessment and rural needs impact assessment - Gain feedback on current plans and thinking - Inform next phase of project development and design.
3.15	<p>Activities and opportunities for feedback during the public consultation focused on the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emerging design concept to reflect the current stage of the project, RIBA Design stage 2 of an industry standard eight-stage RIBA process - Proposed facilities mix including public space, visitor attraction and creative hub - Visitor experience as informed by the <i>draft</i> Interpretive Masterplan, and specifically focusing on primary audiences (visitor journeys) for all elements of the Belfast Stories site.
3.16	<p>Consultation activities were structured around five key themes, aligned to the overarching aspirations of Belfast Stories and mapped against the physical form that the building could potentially take. These themes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regenerating the city centre - Providing outdoor space for all - Providing indoor space for all - Trusted storytelling - Engendering pride.
3.17	<p>A summary of consultation activities and reach is included below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consultation hub welcomed over 4,900 - 514 responses to the online survey - 97 responses to questions on the draft equality impact assessment - Information was available in a range of formats: Easy Read, British sign language BSL, Irish sign language ISL, HTML online, easy read, Irish language - The online consultation documents were downloaded by 272 users - Over 2,500 hard copy consultation documents were distributed across the city - 102 in person consultation sessions - 1014 in person participants across a range of stakeholder groups - Reaching an audience of over 4000 people during all activities in person - Media coverage across 38 media outlets - Social posts reaching audience of over 5000 people throughout public consultation.
3.18	<p><u>Conclusions and Recommendations</u></p> <p>As well as a detailed report (Appendix 1), a consultation summary report including next steps is included at Appendix 2 and will be circulated publicly to all who took part during the consultation and available on the Belfast Stories YourSay hub page. Key areas of feedback and analysis arising from the consultation responses and EQIA is summarised below. This is not an exhaustive representation of consultation feedback. The Belfast Stories Programme Management Office and design teams have reviewed and are continuing to consider the detailed information presented in the full report.</p>
3.19	<p><u>Support for the Belfast Stories concept</u></p> <p>During the public consultation, feedback was gathered across a range of groups, and there was broad support for its concept and potential impact. Responding to the overarching concept of Belfast Stories, when asked if they were likely to visit it, 84% of survey respondents agreed that they would visit, including 57% who would “definitely” visit and 27%</p>

	<p>who would “probably” visit. 82% of survey respondents were likely to recommend Belfast Stories to a friend visiting Belfast. Support was even stronger at face-to-face engagements such as workshops and focus groups. Survey results indicate people from some Section 75 categories may have concerns that should continue to be monitored going forward.</p>
3.20	<p><u>Architectural concept</u></p> <p>Across both RIBA stage 1 and 2 public consultations, consultees generously shared their lived experience and advice to help make Belfast Stories inclusive and welcoming. Some of this feedback has already been used to inform the initial architectural concept, including multiple, broad entrances; a wide, open courtyard; and accessible public space.</p>
3.21	<p>The design team will now further consider new evidence and review architectural plans to maximise the sense of welcome and inclusion, particularly in relation to access and thresholds, signage, public space and accessibility.</p>
3.22	<p><u>Curatorial/Ethical framework</u></p> <p>Compared to the first public consultation, when stories were to be curated by theme, the time and space curatorial framework has been well received, and there appears to be fewer concerns that it will present a partisan, binary or narrow perspective of Belfast.</p>
3.23	<p>Nevertheless, residual concerns are likely to be a barrier to equitable story gathering and curation. It is proposed that these concerns should be addressed through long-term, ongoing, and targeted engagement and mitigation, such as targeted outreach, embedded in story gathering processes.</p>
3.24	<p>A <i>draft</i> Ethical Framework has been developed in response to this feedback and is included in Appendix 4. It is proposed that further engagement on this takes place with an updated version alongside details of the story gathering programme presented to Committee in September 2025.</p>
3.25	<p><u>Story Gathering</u></p> <p>It is recommended that Council should prioritise testing story gathering processes and tools with groups that are less likely to share stories, in particular older people and the very elderly whose stories are otherwise at risk of being lost. The potential for this activity to be delivered via partnerships should be considered.</p>
3.26	<p><u>Language strategy</u></p> <p>Belfast Stories is an opportunity to promote access to and awareness and inclusion of Irish, Ulster Scots, BSL and ISL. This may in turn enhance good relations by affording respect and recognition to native minority language in keeping with local and international policy and best practice.</p>
3.27	<p>Belfast Stories will continue to consult closely the city’s language communities, including in relation to the development of the building, story gathering, exhibition and overall experience. Resulting language policy or practice should support the council’s Language Strategy and draft Irish Language Strategy and be subject to an equality screening. Language should be a key area included in initial story gathering activities. Further recommendations will be presented as part of the report to Committee in September 2025.</p>
3.28	<p><u>Travel and transport</u></p> <p>Consultees have identified that travel and transport may be a major barrier for some Section 75 groups including disabled people, older people, younger people, carers and parents. Ongoing engagement is required with city stakeholders in relation to accessible parking, sustainable transport, drop-off and streetscaping.</p>
3.29	<p><u>Safety</u></p> <p>Another major barrier identified across consultees and that may affect some Section 75 groups in particular is perceptions of safety in the immediate vicinity of Belfast Stories and the city centre in general. Ongoing engagement is required with public and private sectors</p>

	including Belfast City Council departments, government, other developers and stakeholders to maximise regeneration and reduce concerns around blight, safety and anti-social behaviour.
3.30	<p><u>Ongoing engagement</u></p> <p>Survey responses may point to underlying systemic issues of trust and representation which reinforce Belfast Stories' intent to continue to target engagement at people and groups most likely to feel excluded. The next stage of engagement is an opportunity to continue to build on messages of welcome and inclusion while gathering evidence as to how this can be achieved, practically and ideologically, from those key equality groups. This is particularly important as concepts and ideas become plans for structures and layouts during RIBA stage 3.</p>
3.31	<p>Consequently, Belfast Stories engagement plan and stakeholder mapping will be reviewed and revised in light of lessons learned and additional evidence uncovered during this public consultation. Ongoing engagement will prioritise those stakeholders and groups that may be most at risk of missing out but also have most to offer in terms of how inclusion can be designed in. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - young people - older people - people from minoritized ethnic communities - disabled people - parents - carers - people from the LGBTQ+ community - people from neither a Protestant nor Catholic community background - different language communities including Irish, Ulster Scots and sign language.
3.32	An updated engagement plan with proposed actions will be presented to Committee in September 2025.
3.33	<p><u>Operational model</u></p> <p>There were high levels of interest among stakeholders as to how Belfast Stories will be run after its opens in 2030. This included the need for further detail on the operating model, staffing, pricing policy, opening hours and marketing and communications.</p>
3.34	At a meeting of SP&R Committee in April a report was presented on the Outline Business Case for Belfast Stories including initial consideration of operator models. It was agreed that further work be undertaken to develop options and that this would include ongoing engagement with Members in advance of any decision point, which is currently anticipated as end of 2026. Details of this proposed programme of work will be included in September update to Committee.
3.35	<p><u>Equality consultative forum</u></p> <p>The equality consultative forum proved a valuable tool for engagement throughout second the consultation. Many of its participants had been involved in the first public consultation and now couple lived experience with expertise in the development of Belfast Stories. Actions and next steps include a recommendation that a standing equality consultative forum be established to provide continuity and advice between and throughout public consultation.</p>
3.36	<p><u>Consumer Testing</u></p> <p>Between December 2024 and April 2025, market testing was conducted via focus groups, engagement with tour operators and online surveys covering international and domestic consumers in Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Ireland, USA, France and Germany.</p>
3.37	Overall, the Belfast Stories experience was received very positively by the travel trade representatives interviewed, with each suggesting that they would include it in travel itineraries.

3.38	Almost three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents overall would consider visiting the Belfast Stories experience with around four in five (83%) survey respondents overall felt that the Belfast Stories experience was exciting, whilst 63% felt that it was unique. Of the three key elements of the Belfast Stories experience, the public spaces were most likely to have been ranked first in terms of appeal, followed by the main, paid exhibition, then the creative hub.
3.39	The potential sustainability of Belfast Stories is supported by these initial results. In particular there is a strong level of interest in the breadth of the offer and from across several markets both domestic and international including daytrippers (e.g., ROI 64% would consider daytrip) and overnight stays. Similarly, almost 80% of respondents to the survey indicated that Belfast Stories could be either the main reason for visiting Northern Ireland or a factor in decision-making, supporting the ambition to increase dwell time as well as overall visitor numbers.
3.40	<p><u>Next steps</u></p> <p>A summary of recommendations is included in Appendix 2 Public Consultation Summary with an initial workplan including engagement, communications and stories gathering set out in Appendix 3.</p>
3.41	<p>It is proposed that detailed programmes are developed and presented to SP&R in September 2025 to cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final RIBA stage 2 Concept Designs highlighting how feedback has been incorporated - Final Ethical Framework - Story Gathering Programme including criteria for partnerships - Operator Model programme, actions and engagement.
3.42	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no new financial implications to this report.</p>
3.43	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>An Equality Impact Assessment and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment were undertaken during the second public consultation and the equality decision report is available here. These will be reassessed and updated in line with emerging designs and as part of the next public consultation.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1: Belfast Stories Public Consultation Full Report</p> <p>Appendix 2: Belfast Stories Public Consultation Summary</p> <p>Appendix 3: Belfast Stories workplan including engagement, communications and stories gathering</p> <p>Appendix 4: <i>Draft</i> Ethical Framework (RAA)</p>

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BELFAST STORIES

Public Consultation

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Public consultation report

19 November 2024 to 9 March 2025

JUNE 2025

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
WHAT WE DID	7
WHO WE ASKED	8
WHAT WE HEARD	15
The overarching concept	15
Attitudes to visiting Belfast Stories	15
Attitudes to the concept and impact	17
Demographic variations	18
Something new (<i>would you visit?</i>)	22
The facilities mix	23
Arrival	23
Exploring	28
Public space	33
Creative hub	34
Food stories	36
Retail stories	37
Sustainability	37
Operation	38
The visitor experience	40
Time–space interpretative framework	41
What stories they would like to experience	41
How stories could be told	43
Authenticity	45
Story collection	46
Regenerating the city centre	49
The surrounding area	49
Supporting local tourism	50
Travel and transport	52
CONCLUSION	52
RECOMMENDATIONS	55
Equality recommendations	55
Concept design recommendations	56
further recommendations	56
APPENDIX 1: RIBA STAGE 2 ENGAGEMENT	57

INTRODUCTION

Funded by the Belfast Region City Deal and Belfast City Council, Belfast Stories will open at the former Bank of Ireland building (where North Street and Royal Avenue meet) by 2030. It aims to attract both tourists and locals while helping to regenerate the city and surrounding areas.

In December 2021 the Belfast Region City Deal was signed, providing £1 billion to Belfast City Council and its 11 partners, including potential investment in Belfast Stories subject to approval of the business case.

Early consultation

Engagement around the concept of a Belfast Stories has been ongoing since 2014 when the need for a second major visitor attraction in the city was identified. Belfast Stories has subsequently been formally consulted on during a range of public consultations.

In 2017 a conceptual framework was developed, including plans for co-locating a film centre, a landmark tourism attraction, digital skills programming, a cultural centre and leisure and public realm facilities.

In 2021, in preparation for the Belfast Region City Deal bid, Belfast Stories engaged over 50 stakeholder organisations at over 160 meetings and presentations.

RIBA stage 1 public consultation

Between August and November 2022, a 14-week public consultation was carried out on the outline concept of Belfast Stories and its draft EQIA. This public consultation focused on gathering ideas and evidence to help shape the design brief to make sure that the building is welcoming and accessible, and everyone can see themselves reflected in its stories.

To do this, feedback was sought in relation to:

- a. the outline Belfast Stories concept
- b. story collection principles and themes
- c. the draft engagement plan
- d. the draft EQIA

Over 4,000 people engaged in the consultation. Its findings were used to shape the initial architectural and curatorial concepts for RIBA stage 2 and informed the RIBA stage 2 draft EQIA.

RIBA stage 2 public consultation

Between 19 November 2024 and 9 March 2025, Belfast City Council carried out a 16-week public consultation on Belfast Stories and its accompanying equality impact assessment (EQIA). The draft Equality Impact Assessment decision report is available here [Belfast Stories draft equality impact assessment: RIBA Stage 2 Final Decision Report - Executive summary](#)

At this stage of the development of Belfast Stories, known as RIBA stage 2, initial architectural and curatorial concepts have been developed. These were presented during the public consultation, and consultees were invited to comment.

Findings from the RIBA 2 consultation will then be reviewed and used to inform more detailed plans, which will be further consulted on as part of the process for securing planning permission.

Initial architectural concept

Designing Belfast Stories is an intricate and multi-layered process combining the design of both the structure (the architectural concept) and the exhibition experience (the curatorial concept). The concepts are intricately linked and as stated in the RIBA2 public consultation documents, “wedded also to ongoing feedback we receive from the public” during the public consultations.

The initial architectural concept aims to present a building that is welcoming and accessible with four entrances that can be approached from different sides of the building. The former Bank of Ireland art deco building will be a focal point, and the total building will cover over 5,000m².

In the middle, there is a public space. Visitors can then follow a gentle sloping path to a rooftop where people can walk, relax, play and interact. These spaces will be free to enter.

Initial curatorial concept

The exhibition

There will be an exhibition of stories about Belfast that visitors will have to pay to experience. Stories will be arranged by “two simple, universal frames that lets people draw their own conclusions about the city”:

1. time – for example, stories about people getting up, going to work or going out
2. space – for example, stories about Royal Avenue, the Belfast Hills, peace walls, pubs or kitchen tables

The stories will be told in many different ways, such as in print, audio, video, music and more.

At the time of the first public consultation, it was proposed that stories would be collected and exhibited around seven broad themes (such as Home, Resilient, Innovative and Place). However, consultees did not want their stories constrained by themes and were concerned about binary or partisan narratives or that their stories could be misinterpreted. Taking onboard this feedback, it is now proposed that stories will be arranged by “two simple, universal frames lets people draw their own conclusions about the city”:

1. time – for example, stories about people getting up, going to work or going out
2. Space – for example, stories about Royal Avenue, the Belfast Hills, peace walls, pubs or kitchen tables

According to the interpretative masterplan, a document that details the thinking behind the concept, this

“avoids pre-defining Belfast in terms of values or themes [and] Instead it creates shared space for debate, dialogue, and difference [so that] Difference and diversity are never pre-packaged or essentialised. They just exist, like people on a busy street.”

Visitors can then choose how they make their way around the exhibition.

There will also be an ongoing programme of story-themed events and activities in public parts of the building.

Story gathering

There will be an ongoing programme of story-gathering activities. This will take place both inside Belfast Stories and off site, helping to ensure that both stories and process are relevant and accessible to a wide range of people.

Stories will be collected in many different ways, such as in writing, film, verse, recording, song and more, allowing storytellers a choice of medium to suit their tastes, comfort and access requirements.

Experts-by-experience equality consultative forum

Building on an equity steering group that was established during the first public consultation, an equality consultative forum was set up in September 2024 and met four times during the public consultation.

It comprised 16 experts by experience who understand how it feels to experience additional barriers to consultation and to developments like Belfast Stories. It included people of different religion and political opinion; of different genders; older and younger people; people from minoritized ethnic community backgrounds; people from the LGBTQ+

community; D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people; and people with caring responsibilities.

As well as engaging in depth with the consultation questions and the Belfast Stories design teams, the group helped facilitate consultation with groups and networks they are involved in.

Reporting

Findings from all consultation activities were recorded and shared with the architectural and curatorial design teams at fortnightly meetings.

Belfast City Council policies and strategies

Council policies and strategies that are relevant to Belfast Stories are:

- Belfast Agenda [Belfast Agenda](#)
- Corporate Plan [Corporate plan and improvement plan | Belfast City Council](#)
- City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy [Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy](#)
- A City Imagining (culture strategy) [A City Imagining | Belfast City Council](#)
- Make Yourself at Home (tourism strategy) [Make Yourself at Home - Planning for the Future of Tourism](#)
- Equality Scheme [Equality scheme and equality action plans | Belfast City Council](#)
- Good Relations Strategy [Good relations | Belfast City Council](#)
- Language Strategy [Our Language Strategy | Belfast City Council](#)
- Draft Irish Language Strategy [Draft Irish Language Policy | Your say Belfast](#)
- Draft Changing Places Policy [Changing Places Toilets draft policy](#)
- Consultation and Engagement Framework [Consultations and engagements by Belfast City Council](#)

Equality impact assessment

Belfast City Council recognises Belfast Stories as a major development which will impact on staff, residents and other ratepayers. As a result, it could also impact on people and groups associated with the nine Section 75 equality categories.

An initial equality screening was carried out in December 2021. It recommended that an equality impact assessment (EQIA) be carried out on Belfast Stories, potentially at different stages in the project, such as concept and design stages.

Between 19 November 2024 and 9 March 2025, a 16-week public consultation was carried out on the initial architectural and curatorial design concepts and the accompanying draft.

Belfast City Council plans to continue engagement with different people and organisations throughout its development. This includes a further planned public consultation as part of the process for obtaining planning permission.

WHAT WE DID

A second public consultation on Belfast Stories took place between 19 November 2024 and 9 March 2025.

The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Continue to promote the project, raise awareness and gain buy-in
- Make sure that Belfast Stories is for everyone including equality impact assessment and rural needs impact assessment
- Gain feedback on current design thinking and plans for the next phase of the project
- Use the findings to inform the next phase of the project

The consultation presented and tested:

- The overarching concept
- The facilities mix
- The visitor experience

An online consultation hub was created on Belfast City Council's Your Say platform. It included copies of the consultation document in a range of formats including HTML, Easy Read, British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL), and 514 responses were received to the online survey including 97 responses to questions on the draft EQIA.

The council's Equality Scheme consultees were notified of the public consultation and draft EQIA and invited to comment. The Belfast Stories equality consultative forum, comprising 16 experts by experience (including people of different religion and political opinion; of different genders; older and younger people; people from minoritized ethnic community backgrounds; people from the LGBTQ+ community; D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people; and people with caring responsibilities) met four times. Over 2,500 consultation documents were distributed across the city, and 103 consultation sessions engaged over 1000 participants across a range of stakeholder groups.

What we asked

Consultation was themed around five project ambitions:

1. Be somewhere that Belfast people are proud of (something new)
2. Regenerate our city centre and support our city's development
3. Provide open outdoor space, accessible to all (courtyard/roof)
4. Provide facilities, activities, events, programming (creative hub)
5. Be a trusted storyteller – gathering and presenting stories

How we asked

A series of questions were developed across the ambitions.

These were included in the consultation survey, which was available on Belfast City Council's online YourSay survey platform. The questions were also embedded in the public consultation easy read document and were available in different formats, including plain text, easy read, Irish, British sign language (BSL) and Irish sign language (ISL).

These project ambitions formed the discussion points and questions used at all in person consultation activities. The questions were designed to be flexible so they could also be adapted and used in different settings depending on what ambitions different audiences were most interested in. This included in:

- briefings and presentations
- focus groups
- site visits
- walking tours
- art workshops
- photography workshops
- pop-up engagements at venues and events
- semi-structured interviews
- sectoral sessions and workshops
- 1 to 1 meetings
- Partnership events

Consultees were also asked to share the consultation through their contacts and networks. For example, information was circulated to U3A's 1,100 Belfast members via its mailing list and newsletter.

This led to enquiries and interest amongst groups who wanted to hear more about Belfast Stories and sessions were arranged where possible.

The following report presents the feedback¹, recommendations and actions in a format that is considered most useful to the collaborative teams involved in shaping the next stage of the project.

WHO WE ASKED

YourSay online consultation hub

Overall, the online consultation hub welcomed over 4,900 visits and 3,794 unique visitors. 44 per cent of visits accessed the hub direct, and 21 per cent used a search engine. 30 per cent were referred from social media. 33 per cent were from other websites, of which 10

¹ Analysis of feedback has been supported by AI.

per cent came from a .gov site (presumed to be www.belfastcity.gov.uk). Other main website referrals included NI Screen, Belfast Telegraph, Community Arts Partnership and Belfast Live.

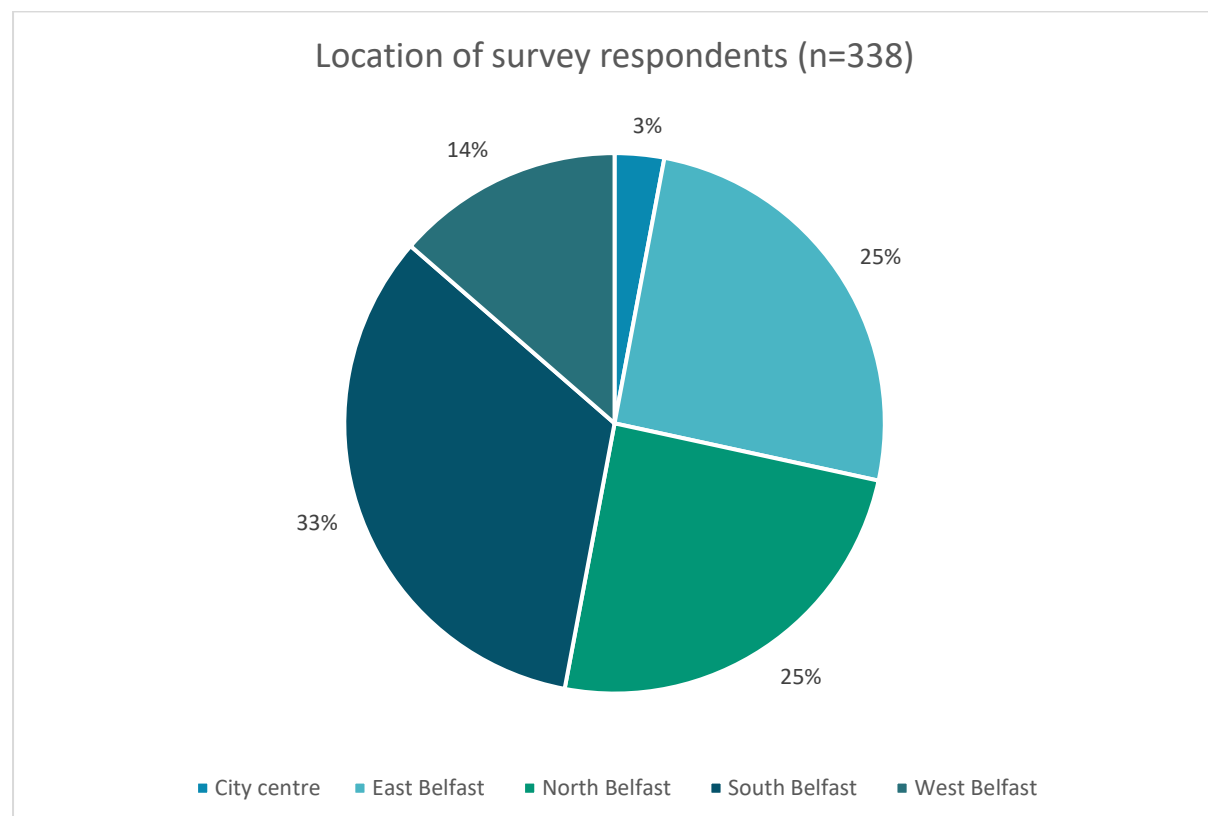
Consultation documents

The online consultation documents (including the easy read, Irish, BSL and ISL versions) were downloaded by 272 users, and 2,530 hardcopy documents were distributed.

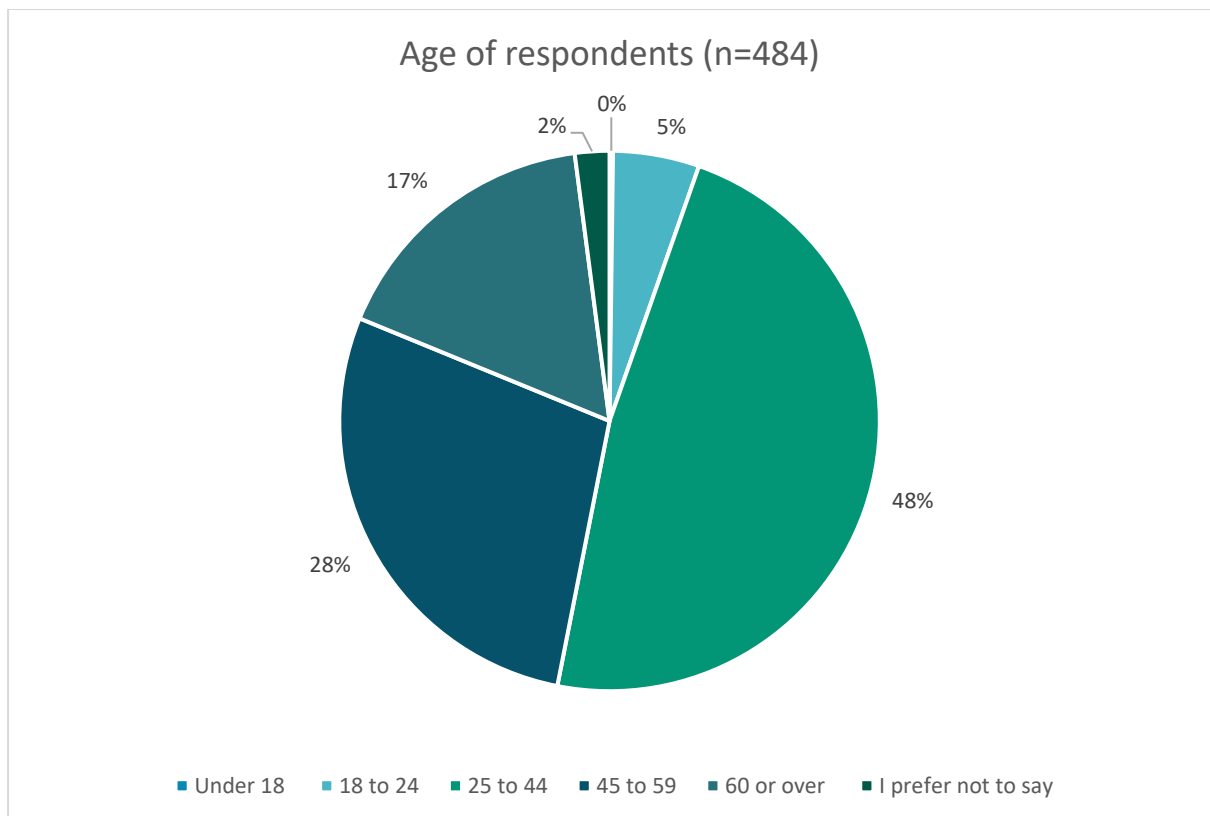
Survey

There were 514 responses to the online survey.

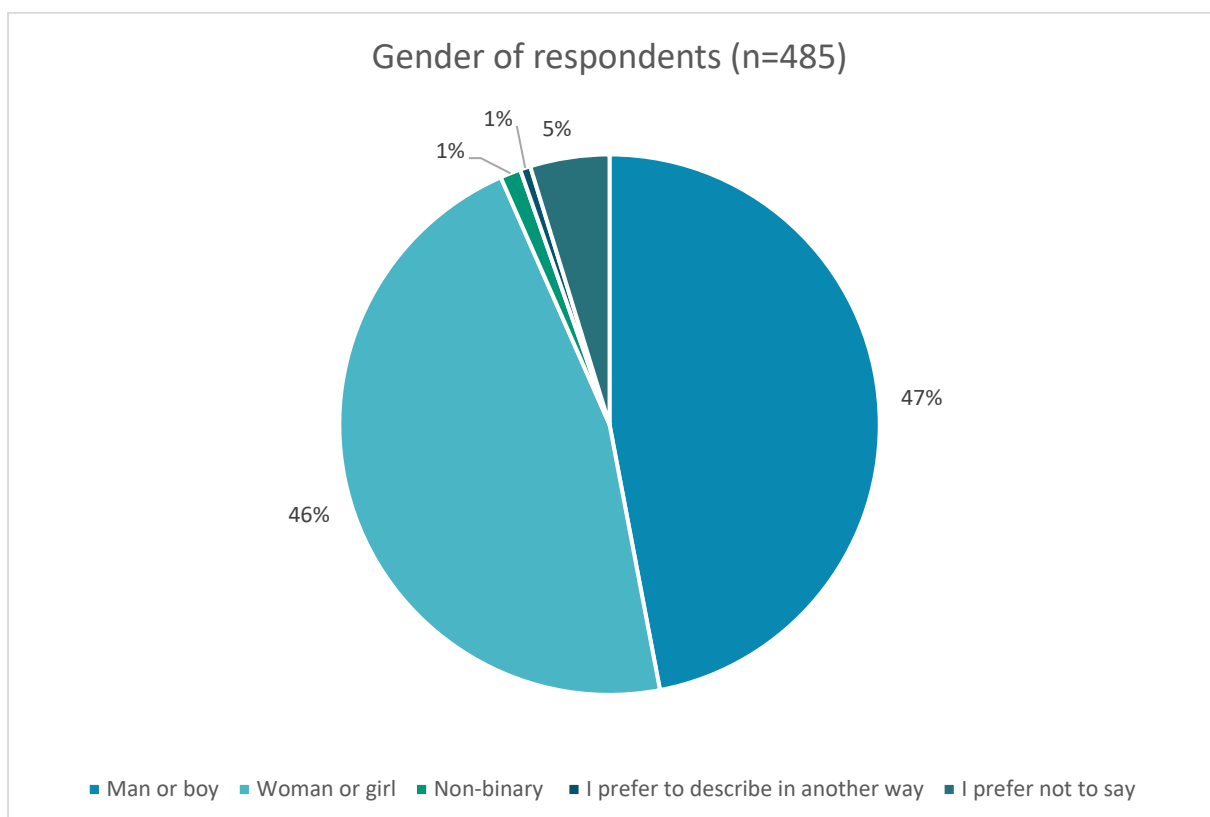
Among those respondents resident in Belfast, a third live in South Belfast, a quarter in East, a quarter in North and 14 per cent in West Belfast.



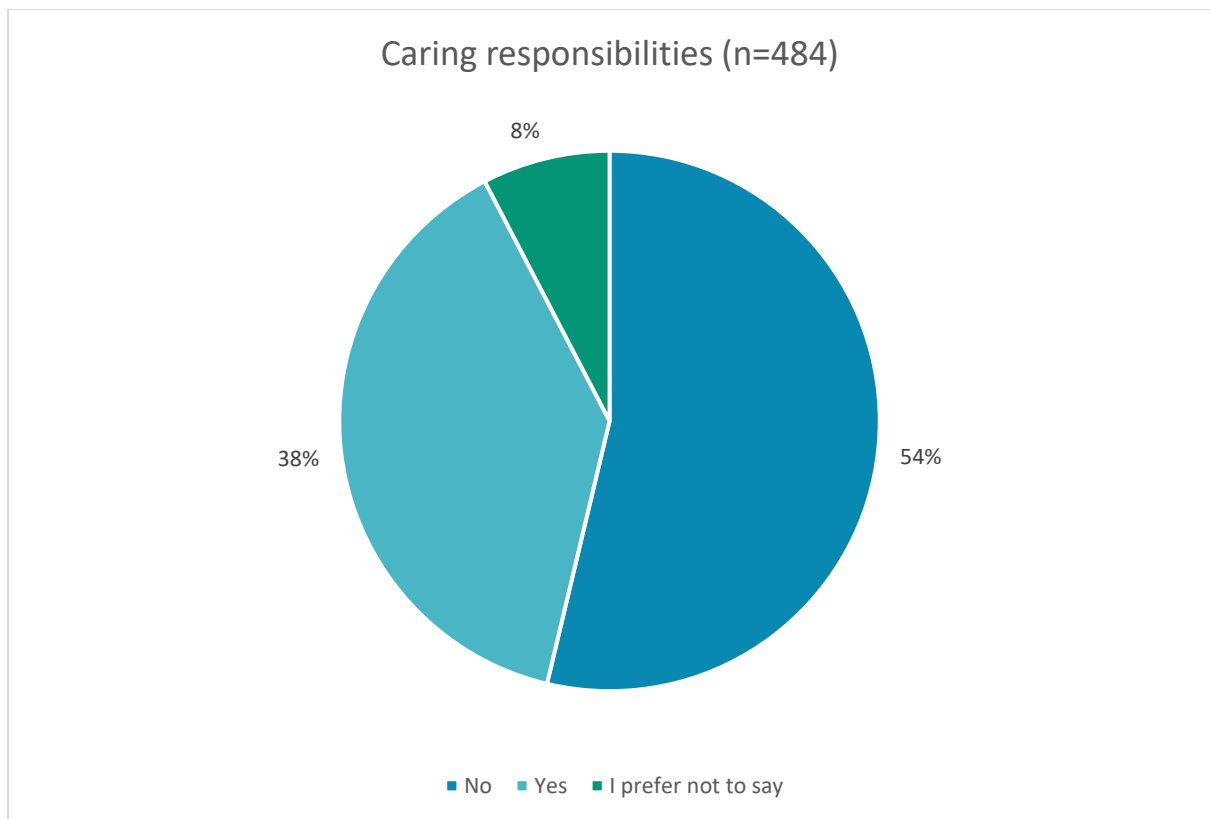
The survey was particularly effective at engaging 25- to 44-year-olds, who made up nearly half of the responses.



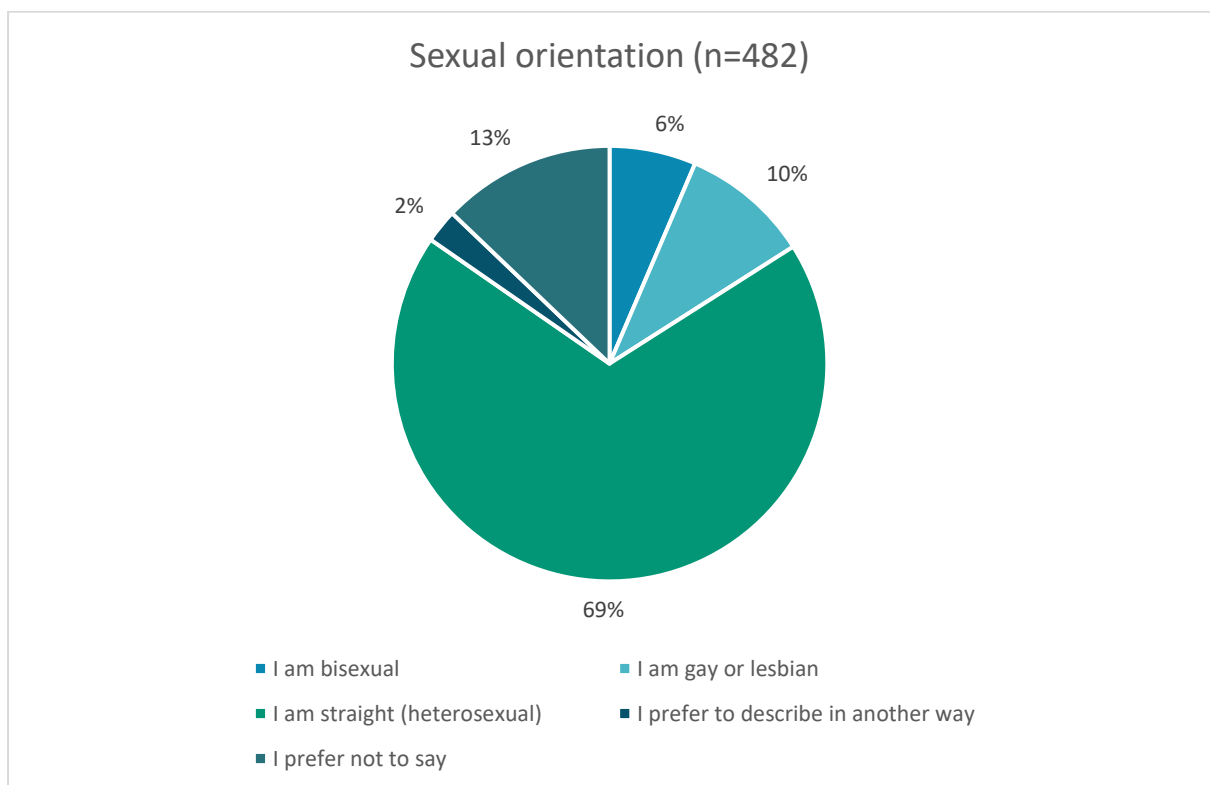
Approximately half the respondents were female and half, male.



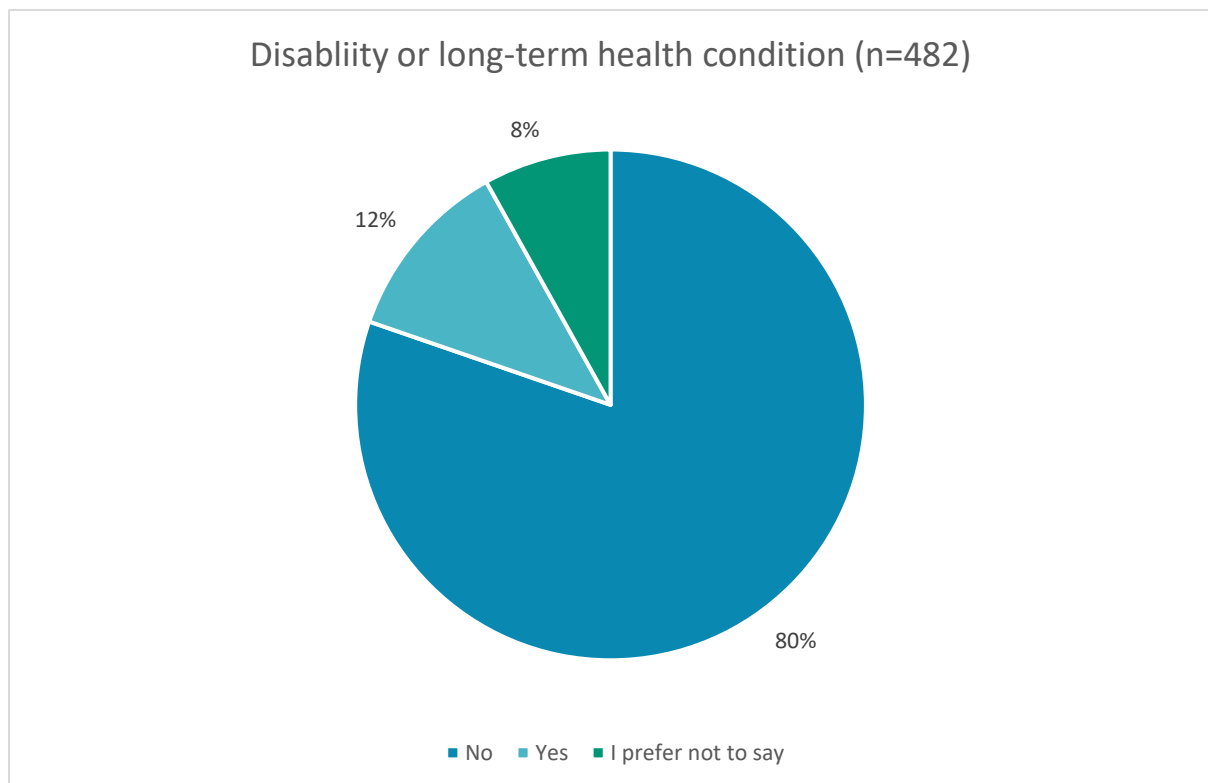
Nearly 4 in 10 respondents have caring responsibilities.



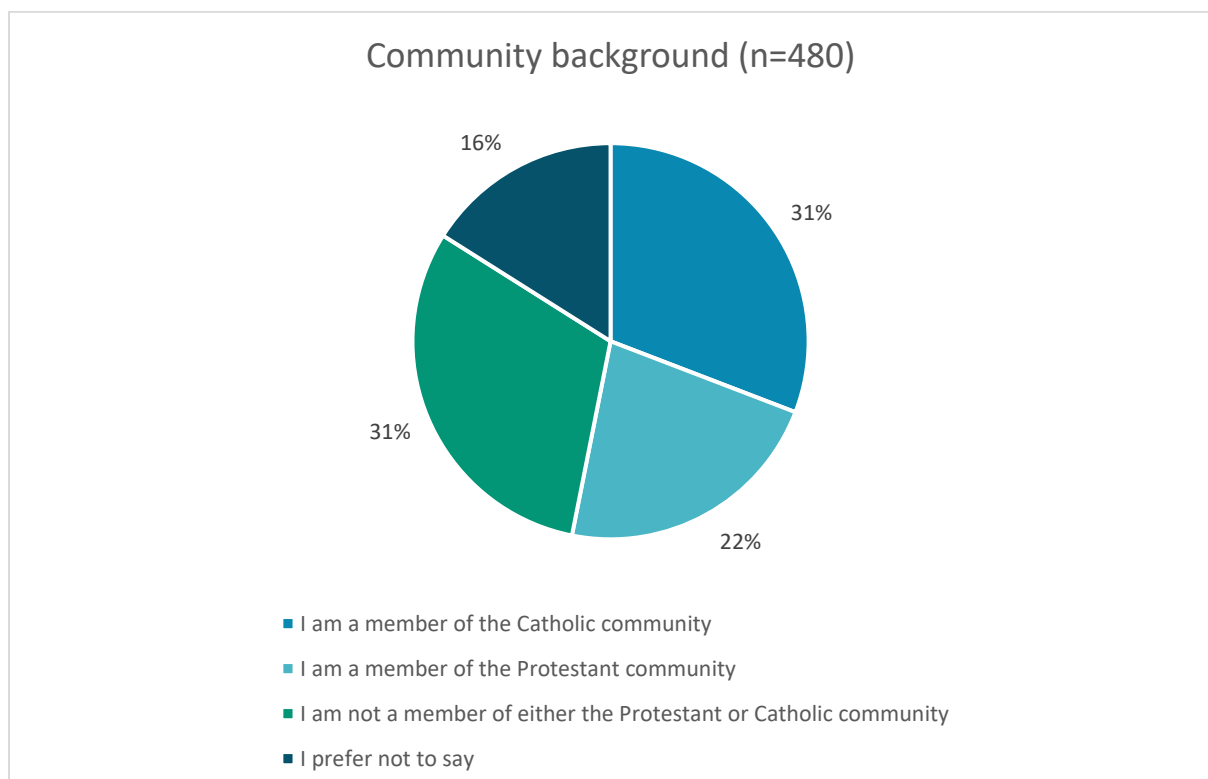
At 16 per cent of respondents, the survey was particularly effective at engaging people from LGBTQ+ communities.



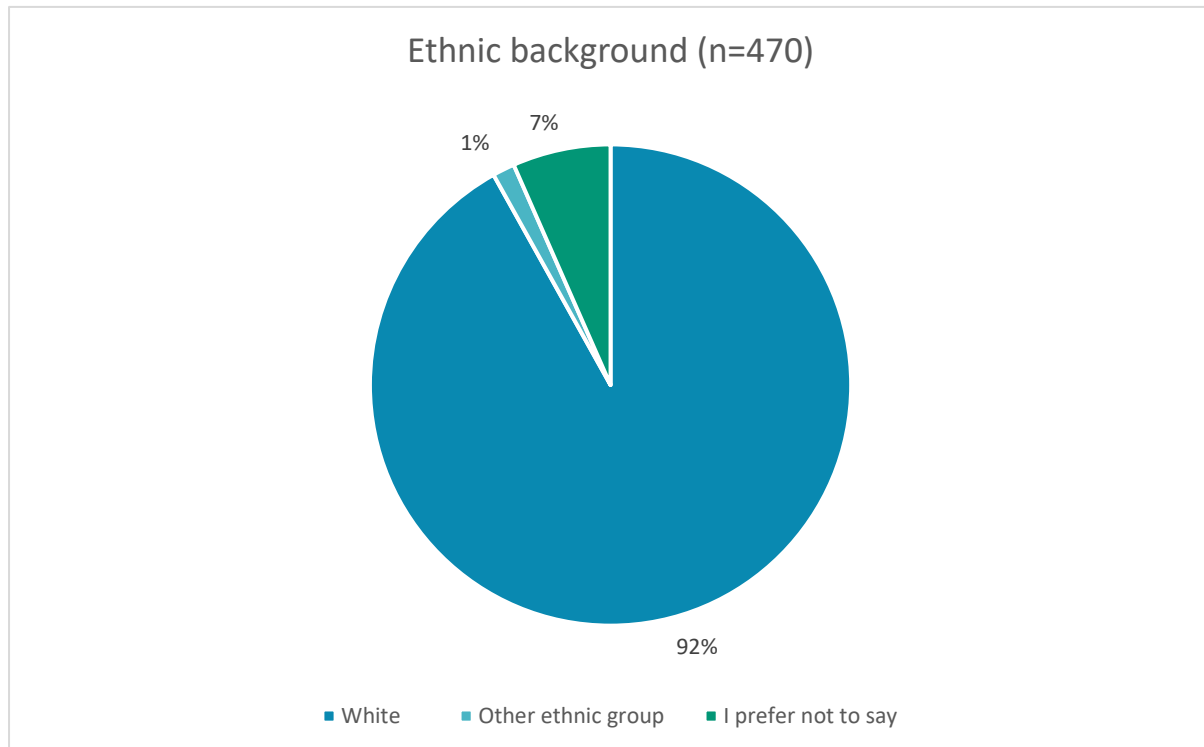
12 per cent of respondents indicated that they have a long-term health condition or disability that limits their day-to-day activity.



The survey was particularly good at engaging people from outside the two main religions (31 per cent). 31 per cent also identified as belonging to the Catholic community. 22 per cent identified as from the Protestant community.



98 per cent of respondents identified as white, and 2 per cent identified as being from another ethnic group including Chinese, Irish Traveller and mixed.



Equality consultative forum

An equality consultative forum was set up in September 2024 and met four times during the public consultation.² It comprised 16 experts by experience who understand how it feels to experience additional barriers to consultation and to developments like Belfast Stories. It included people from Asian, Middle Eastern, inner city, working class and LGBTQ+ backgrounds; migrant workers; older and younger people; D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people; and people with caring responsibilities.

The meetings were focused as follows –

- **November 2024 Meeting 1** – overview of the current project status and plans, including the 5 discussion points.
- **December 2024 Meeting 2** – architectural designs and site visit with the architectural design team.
- **January 2025 Meeting 3** – experience concept design with the experience design team – time and space
- **February 2025 Meeting 4** – story collection

As well as engaging in depth with the consultation questions and the Belfast Stories design teams, the group helped facilitate consultation with groups and networks they are involved in.

² A fifth meeting, to review these findings, will take place in April.

Other engagement sessions

102 sessions engaged 1014 people from a wide range of stakeholder groups including:

- Political representatives
- Belfast City Council staff
- The general public
- Other tourism attractions
- Other cultural venues
- Artists and arts organisations
- Heritage organisations
- Music sector
- Visual arts sector
- LGBTQ+ community
- Children
- Young people
- Schools
- Parents
- Carers
- Disabled people
- BSL and ISL users
- Irish language speakers
- Older people
- Women
- People from Muslim, Chinese, Polish and Roma community backgrounds
- Migrant workers
- Young people from a School of Sanctuary
- Geographic communities including Shankill, South Belfast, East Belfast, North Belfast, inner city and neighbouring communities
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Food and drink organisations
- Local businesses
- Architects
- Students
- Libraries
- The general public

Written responses from organisations

Written responses were received from the Belfast Agenda VCSE³ Sectoral Advisory Panel, Belfast Buildings Trust and Belfast Civic Trust.⁴

The following organisations also gave their permission to be named having responded via the survey:

- Beyond Binary
- Rovar.com
- Belfast Chamber Of Commerce
- Ulster against Ulster Scots
- Tools for Solidarity
- Carnegie Oldpark Library
- Linen Quarter BID
- Craft NI
- Maritime Belfast Trust
- Young at Art/Belfast Children's Festival
- Circusful

³ Voluntary, community and social enterprise

⁴ Written responses were also received from four individuals.

WHAT WE HEARD

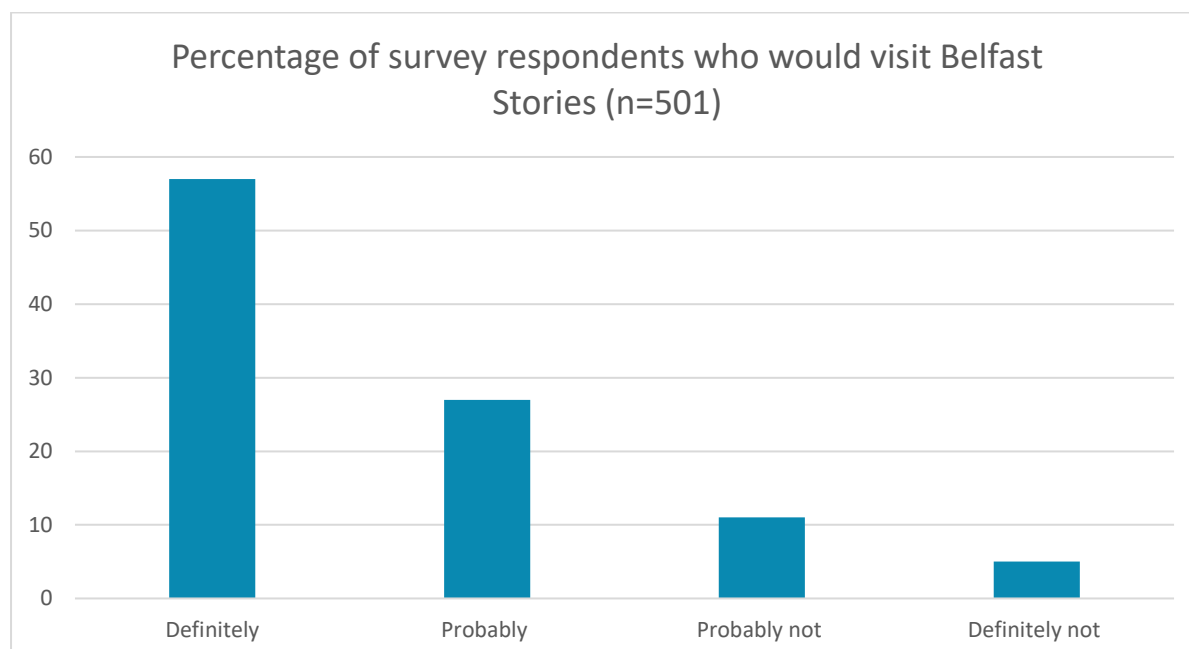
In total, 514 responses were received to the online survey which, in addition to the questions specific to the draft EQIA, asked questions including:

- What might put you off visiting Belfast Stories?
- Would you feel welcome exploring the space?
- What would make you feel more likely to spend time there?
- What would make you less likely to spend time here?
- Would you feel comfortable sharing a story?
- What would encourage you to share a story?
- What would stop you sharing a story?
- How can we make sure anyone who wants to can visit Belfast Stories?

THE OVERARCHING CONCEPT

ATTITUDES TO VISITING BELFAST STORIES

One indicator of whether people are supportive of the overarching concept is whether they think they would visit Belfast Stories. According to the survey, 84 per cent agreed that they would visit, including 57 per cent who would “definitely” visit and 27 per cent who would “probably” visit.



Stronger levels of support were found during face-to-face engagements where the vast majority were keen or even very keen to visit. The remainder were largely unsure, wanting to know or understand more about Belfast Stories before they made up their mind or

because its opening was too far in the future to think about. Some were disappointed that the opening is so far away.

Reasons people gave for wanting to visit Belfast Stories include:

- Interest in Belfast's history and culture, in particular different stories or stories that go beyond expected narratives such as the Troubles and the Titanic
- Interest in storytelling, which people consider a core part of Belfast's identity with the capacity to highlight the city's rich tradition of oral history, literature and film while bridging communities and capturing diverse voices and personal narratives
- Interest in arts and creativity including live performances, storytelling nights, spoken word events, film screenings and more
- Pride in Belfast – people felt motivated to support the project out of civic pride and a desire to showcase their city
- Regeneration – people will visit because it has made the area more attractive
- Public space – being able to use free public space in the city centre
- Tourist attraction – it will be a useful place for local people to introduce visitors to the city
- Curiosity – people want to visit to find out more about it

"I think it's going to be amazing. Belfast really needs something like this to showcase its stories properly."

"I can't wait to see how it turns out. The city has so much history and creativity—this is exactly what we need!"

The main reason people gave for not wanting to visit Belfast Stories was lack of clarity. These consultees felt that it is described in a vague or abstract way that does not clearly explain what visitors will experience. This makes people feel hesitant about visiting and also fosters scepticism about its uniqueness, relevance and value.

"the core concept remains contested: what is 'Stories' – a museum, a gallery, a library, an exhibition, a jumble of self-referential dross?"

Other reasons given for not wanting to visit included:

- Object to the use of public money
- Object to the architectural concept design
- Existing historical attractions and storytelling experiences (such as Titanic Belfast, Ulster Museum and black taxi tours) means there is no need
- Perceived prioritisation of tourists over local people

- Perceived political or cultural bias that means stories told will be one-sided or overly focused on certain narratives

ATTITUDES TO THE CONCEPT AND IMPACT

The survey also asked, “On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very positive and 5 is very negative,⁵ how do you feel about the development of Belfast Stories and the impact it will have on the area?”

The average score, based on 127 responses, was 2.5.

Among those who considered Belfast Stories to be a positive development or to have a potentially positive impact, the main reasons included:

- Architecture. Respondents found the design attractive, impressive and bold and liked how it integrated with the surrounding character and style.
- Regeneration. Respondents were excited about the regeneration of Belfast, seeing Belfast Stories as potentially transformative for this part of the city, particularly if linked with other physical developments.
- Facilities mix. There was strong support for plans for public, green and creative spaces, particularly space that is accessible, inclusive and in the city centre.

"Excited by this project. We need a place in Belfast to celebrate all things Belfast! Looks creative, innovative, a bit different."

"Post-GFA Belfast hasn't been promoted as aggressively as it should have been. The city needs something with the 'Wow' factor to it... Belfast Stories will do that."

Some positive perceptions were qualified with constructive feedback and other concerns including:

- A desire for the architecture to be bolder still or have more “‘WAOH!’ factor”
- Need for more greenery, green space and sustainability
- Tensions between meeting the needs and aspirations of different audiences including tourists, local people and creative industries
- Accessibility must go beyond minimum legal requirements and consider the full experience for disabled people from public areas to backstage.
- Some concerns about the financial viability of the plans
- Queries about the long-term operating model and affordability of tickets, programmes and rents (of meeting, studio, events space, etc.)

⁵ There is some mismatch between comments and scores indicating that some people interpreted 1 to be negative and 5 to be positive.

- Queries about how the use of public space will be managed including for performances, artistic interventions and protests

Among those who rated Belfast Stories as negative or having a potential negative impact, there was still wide support for investment in the area and for the concept of community and cultural space in principle. Nevertheless, the main concerns raised in survey responses were:

- Public expenditure. Respondents noted that there is an economic crisis and considered that the investment could be better spent on social issues such as child poverty.
- Local character. Those who disliked the design of the building would generally prefer a more “Belfast” or historically influenced style. There were also concerns about risk to Belfast’s historic building stock, style and character generally, including local culture and street art.
- Tourism. There were concerns that Belfast Stories would not be attractive to tourists.
- Community benefit. While this was, in principle, supported, there were concerns that in practice, tourists would be prioritised over residents. There was also a perception that it is “half for locals, half for visitors”.
- Environmental. This included concerns about sustainability, maintenance (particularly the roof garden) and light pollution.
- Trust in decision-making. Some respondents expressed a general lack of trust in those overseeing the development and in the public consultation process.

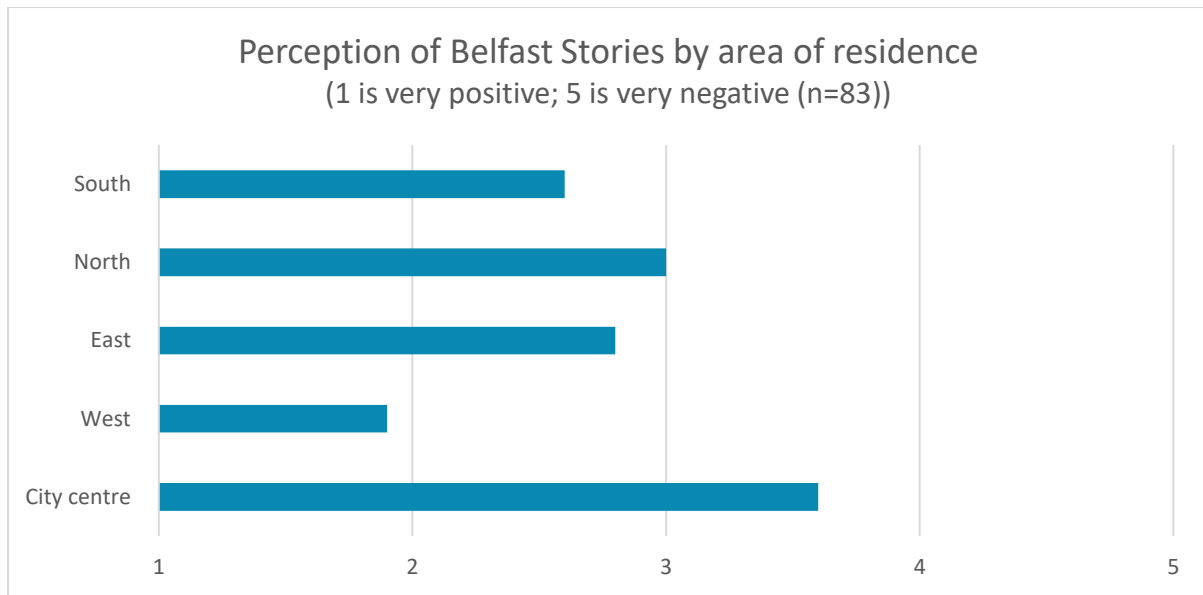
“Do not spend tax on this during a time of poverty, the public will not thank you for this”

“Saving Belfasts historic buildings means more than saving two walls. I imagine the brown envelopes have already gone out, so this ‘carbuncle’ will go ahead wether the people want it or not!”

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS

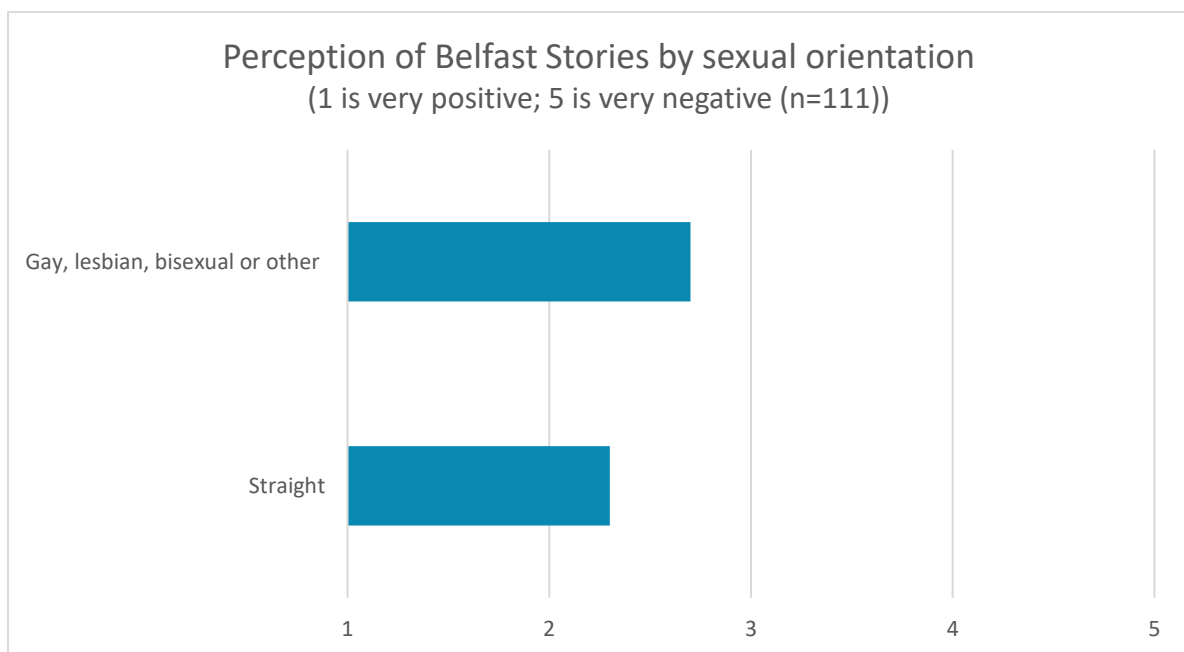
Geography

According to the survey, people in West Belfast may be more likely to feel positive, and people in the city centre may be least likely to feel positive, although the number of responses was small at 24 and 6 respectively.



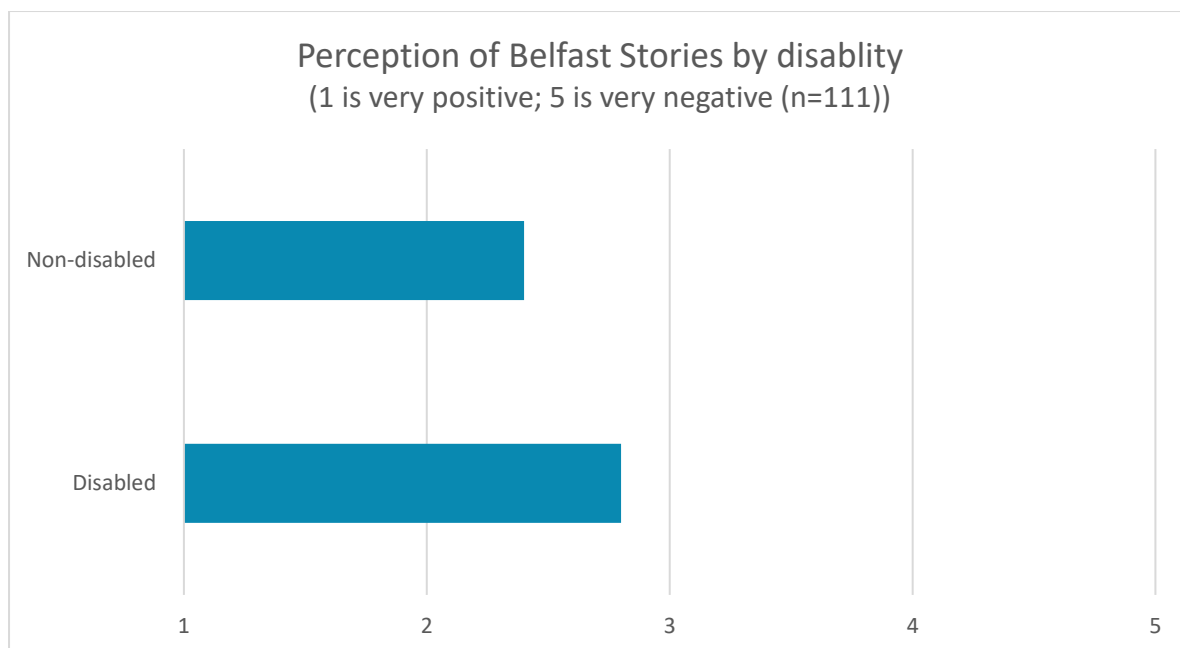
Sexual orientation

According to the survey results, people who identify as straight may be slightly more favourable than people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or in another way.



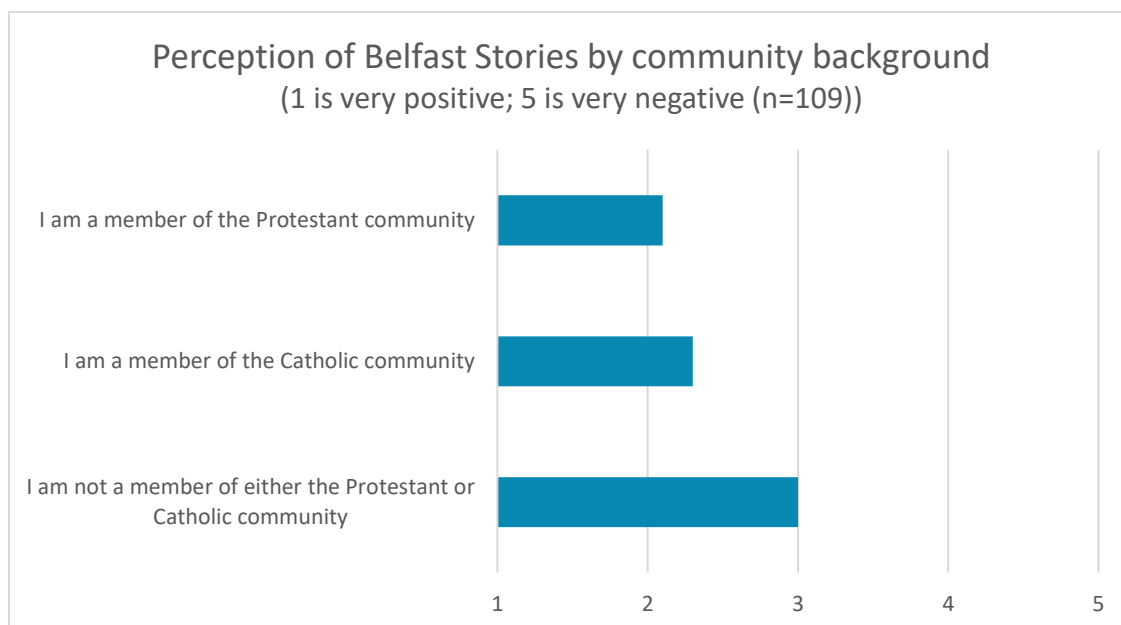
Disability

According to the survey, non-disabled people may be slightly more favourable than disabled people.



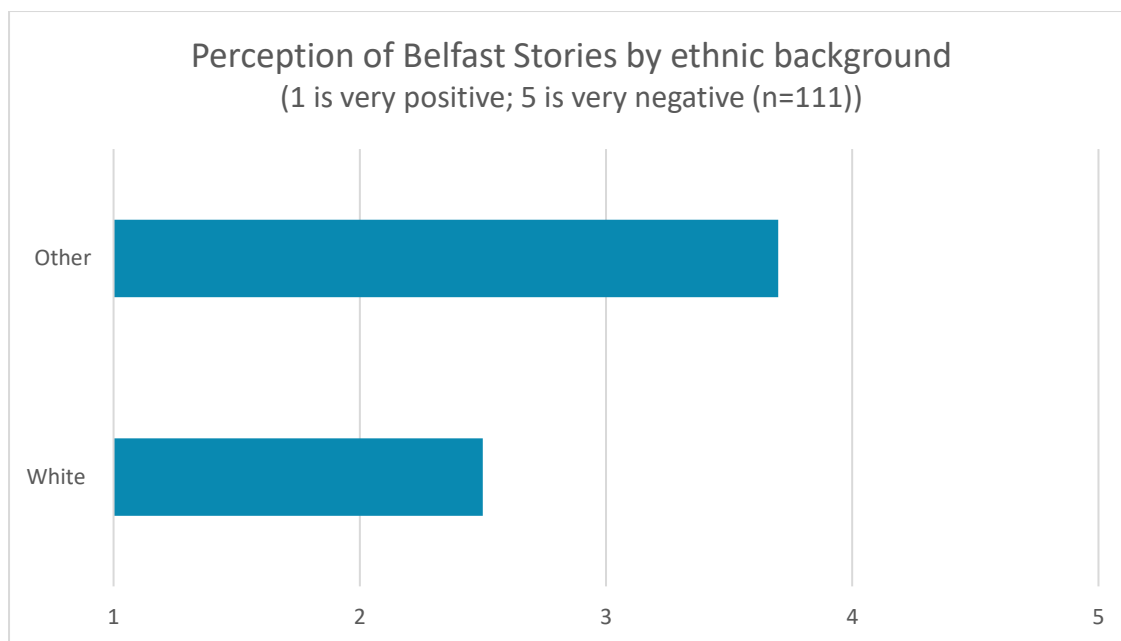
Community background

According to the survey, people from either Protestant or Catholic community backgrounds may feel more positive than people from neither of the two main communities.



Ethnic background

According to the survey, people from a white community background may be more positive than people from other ethnic community backgrounds, although only three responses were received from people from other ethnic community backgrounds.



Age

People aged 18 to 24 may feel least positive about Belfast Stories, although only four responses were received from this age group.



Gender

There was no significant difference depending on people's gender.

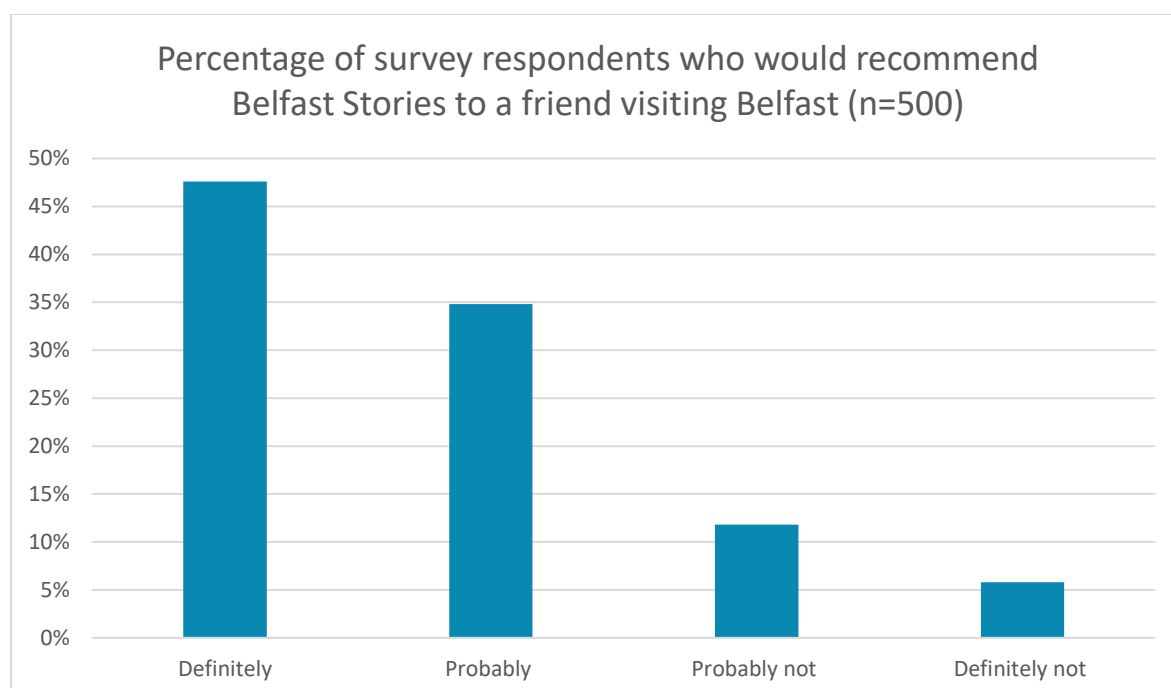
Caring responsibilities

There was no significant difference depending on whether people have caring responsibilities.

SOMETHING NEW (*WOULD YOU VISIT?*)

One of the ambitions for Belfast Stories is that it will be somewhere people are proud of. One indicator of pride is whether it will be somewhere that local people want to take visitors to the city.

82 per cent of survey respondents would recommend Belfast Stories to a friend visiting Belfast including nearly half (48 per cent) who would definitely recommend it.



People shared a deep personal connection to Belfast and a desire to share its stories with visitors. They stated they would feel proud to have an authentic representation of the city's stories, history, resilience, culture and potential that is positive and forward looking while being respectful of the past.

Some of the people engaged through the consultation expressed a strong interest in volunteering at Belfast Stories.

People also stated that there is current no or very limited child-friendly space, public space and green space in Belfast city centre. Some noted that these are rare commodities in any city centre. The roof garden in particular was considered something people would feel more likely to find in other European cities or in New York.

"This project will bring people together and make us proud of where we come from."

"It's about time we had something like this. I'm really looking forward to visiting!"

Reasons people gave as to whether or not they would recommend Belfast Stories to a visiting friend are similar to reasons why people [would or would not visit](#) themselves.

THE FACILITIES MIX

Consultees broadly welcomed the facilities mix with particularly strong support for the roof garden and courtyard.

Consultees suggested additional provision including a sensory garden, play facilities for children, use of the Irish language, a range of food offerings to suit people with dietary restrictions or to celebrate the diversity of Belfast's communities, and inclusive cafes.

ARRIVAL

"Welcoming places show that they expected you"

A key aspiration of Belfast Stories is that it is welcoming and accessible to all.

Each visit to Belfast Stories starts, of course, well before its concourse. [Marketing](#) and [getting there](#) are to be considered by the teams developing Belfast Stories.

Consultees identified key aspects of the building design that would make them feel welcome. This included the open, permeable architectural design; wide, step-free entrances; and access to free, high-quality public space.

Aspects of the building that people felt might present barrier included the building's façade and frontage, which some felt was unwelcoming.

Consultees would further welcome:

- Signage at entrances and regularly throughout the building
- Consideration of how nuisance and anti-social behaviour will be managed
- Consideration of acoustics
- Consideration of interior design
- Consideration of the location of key facilities
- Quiet spaces

Most people felt that the building should be neutral with no flags or emblems displayed.

"Great scheme – looks like a building I visited in Lisbon, and I was very impressed with that."

There was very strong, virtually universal support for preserving the former Bank of Ireland building, which is much loved and considered iconic.

Consultees felt strongly that the open design of the building helped make it appear welcoming and accessible. People particularly liked that they would be able to see into and through the building so that they would know what to expect inside. This appears to be particularly appreciated by people who might have additional reasons to feel unwelcome or unsafe including young people, people from minoritized ethnic groups and women.

While the mixed opinion on the architecture is also considered in the [Overarching concept](#) section of this report, some negative feedback is also relevant to access and inclusion. This includes people feeling that the building felt modern, cold, sterile or industrial. Some likened it to a government building, warehouse or even a fortress or police station – places where the public is generally not welcome and may have cause to feel apprehensive walking in.

Others felt that there was a mismatch between the outside and the inside, so it was not clear what to expect from a visit.

It was also described as looking “expensive” – somewhere they might not be able to afford to go in – and as “clipboard formality”, a “precious” space where you would be expected to behave formally, and children may not be allowed to run about and play.

Some of this could be mitigated with good [signage](#).

Survey respondents were generally more likely to feel that the building felt closed or uninviting. This may be because consultees at face-to-face sessions were able to gain a better understanding of the open design, for example, by being given additional information, shown additional images or three-dimensional models or taking part in a site visit.

While few people objected to the openness of the building in principle, in practice there were concerns about potential anti-social behaviour and perceptions of safety. This was common among consultees in general but may be particularly important for older people, carers, women, parents, young people and people from the LGBTQ+ community. For example, one person explained, a “welcoming and inclusive space” can also mean a “free-for-all” for some.

Acoustics need to work for different types of use, different types of music and different types of user including people with hearing loss and sensory sensitivities, neurodivergent and Autistic people and people with vision impairment who can aid navigation using echolocation.

Glass can help create open and bright spaces but can be problematic for regulating heat, neurodivergent and Autistic people, people with dementia guide dog users, visually impaired people and people with depth perception challenges.

Visitor experience

Consultees were generally enthusiastic about the visitor experience provided it is engaging and well balanced with a wide range of stories.

Minority and minoritized communities in particular tended to like the idea that they and their stories would not be labelled or added to the edges.

There were some isolated, though not insignificant concerns raised about the time–space curatorial framework, including that:

- It may cause confusion including for some people with learning disabilities.
- Stories should be searchable, so there is a practical need for labelling or tagging.

Entrances

There was strong support for the four entrances so that people would feel invited from all directions. This could also increase its usage by increasing the likelihood that people would “stumble across” its thresholds. A small number of people expected an entrance on Royal Avenue.

Gates and doors, even unlocked, even transparent, can be a barrier.

“What would make you feel welcome to go in?”

“Barrier free entrance. No doors. To an outsider Belfast is synonymous with barriers and closed doors. Opposite would be 24hr access.”

Consultees also liked that the entrances were wide and step-free.

Some people, such as carers, older people, people with learning disabilities and Autistic people, might expect a main entrance. This would avoid confusion and social anxiety. For people with limited mobility and physical access needs, main entrances are understood to be nearest to disabled parking, drop-off points, reception, toilets and other key facilities.

People might also be confused that the front door of the Bank of Ireland is not an entrance.

Reception should be friendly but efficient. Queues are off putting.

There should be generously proportioned toilets, Changing Places, baby changing and comfortable seating at the entrance (and frequently throughout the building, “for old bones”), not behind a pay wall.

There should also be a cloakroom.

The entrance should be light and bright. This creates a sense of welcome generally and is also important to sign language users and people with vision impairment.

Complex patterns and designs should be avoided as they can confuse and distract. While people generally favoured a simple, modern interior, some cautioned that this could feel cold or sterile and that reverberations and reflections of hard and shiny surfaces could be difficult for older people, people with hearing loss, guide dogs and people with vision impairment who can aid navigation using echolocation.

Signage

Confusion around multiple entrances could be mitigated by good signage, which was also generally identified as creating a sense of welcome.

This is particularly important given the size of the site, which most consultees were (pleasantly) surprised to understand is significantly larger than the Bank of Ireland building.

According to consultees, signage should include:

- Signage outside the building showing
 - The main entrance
 - Other entrances
 - What's on that day and that month or season
 - That it is (or what elements are) free to access
 - That everyone is welcome
- Signage at the entrances detailing
 - What's on that day
 - How to get there
 - Where the toilets are, Changing Places, cloakrooms, help points, lifts, escalators, emergency exits, quiet spaces, seating and other key facilities
 - Any potential hazards, such as opaque surfaces, heights and edges
 - How to get out
 - What to do in an emergency
- Signage throughout the building, particularly at every level change, showing where people are, how to access key facilities and the way out

Signage should be in different languages (including Ulster Scots and Irish), different formats including sign language and Braille, at an appropriate height and in an appropriate design (for example, black font on a yellow background).

Consideration should be given to using colour as well as numbers to indicate levels, floors or zones.

While more consultees felt that the building should be “neutral – no flags, no propaganda”, one group of young people suggested an integrated approach with the tricolour, Union flag and possibly other world flags displayed at the main entrance.

Signage should be supported by, not instead of adequate levels of helpful [staff](#).

Frontage

The greening of the streetscape was strongly welcomed. Greenery and nature can make people feel more relaxed and space look more appealing.

People also felt that they would be encouraged by seeing other people meeting, gathering and enjoying themselves.

However, it was suggested that the building is “somewhat monolithic” with no active frontage:

“The site takes in a whole City Centre urban block, yet there appears to be next to no active frontage at street level. Active frontage includes retail, restaurants, and other uses that the public can access. “somewhat monolithic”

Some people, particularly parents of young children and those responsible for bringing community groups on visits were concerned about the proximity of the road. Several consultees would welcome further greening and pedestrianisation of the area.

“Open spaces full of people are fearful for parents”

Courtyard

Similar to the frontage, seeing into the courtyard and seeing people having fun there will feel welcoming.

People would also like the courtyard to be greened and perhaps have a water feature, blending the indoors and outdoors to create a welcoming sense of urban tranquillity.

It was also suggested there could be a children’s play area.

As with the roof garden, there were some concerns about shelter from wind and rain.

Staff

“People make you welcome or not welcome”

“Have kind people running it”

Staff were considered to be the main source of welcome (or otherwise). They should be friendly and well trained including in supporting children and adults with additional requirements. This should include having a sign language interpreter during every shift, and sign language interpretation for guided tours, events and exhibitions should preferably be provided by local interpreters in “our local language”.

They should accompany people to where they want to get to, “not just point”.

Given the openness of the building, both physically and across 24 hours, consultees frequently stated that there needs to be visible security at all times to help them feel safe. This was particularly a requirement for older people, women and parents.

However, security staff can also make people feel judged. Generally, young people would also feel safer with visible security, but this can also feel “oppressive”, and some have experienced being turned away just because they are young people. And at a session with people from the Roma community, they reflected:

“If a number of Roma arrive at once you do not want to be looked at with ‘that look’ and you know they do not want to work on you or help you”.

Neurodivergent and Autistic people and people with learning disabilities feel reassured when they are served by people like them.

Consultees felt strongly that staff, particularly tour guides, should be local people.

Stories

Having the stories of the people of Belfast rendered throughout the building, including through murals, sculptures and other artwork, was considered to be welcoming.

EXPLORING

What would encourage people to explore the facilities

Once in the building, many of the characteristics that made people feel welcome on arrival would also encourage them to explore further. This includes well-designed, obvious signage; the open, bright and airy design; consideration of hard and soft surfaces; no queuing; use of greenery and nature to create tranquillity; and friendly, helpful staff.

Key facilities should be available frequently throughout the building including toilets, Changing Places, quiet spaces and staffed information points, including on the roof.

Seating should be generously dispersed throughout the building and comfortable.

Walkways should be even but not slippery, wide enough to accommodate pushchairs and wheelchairs of different sizes and so that sign language users can chat (facing each other). Wide paths also mean that the building can be evacuated easily and can assure people who may feel more vulnerable.

Digital technology could be harnessed to aid wayfinding and provide other information, as well as, not instead of staff or physical signage. It can be disrupting, rather than enhancing to have to look at a phone or a handheld device at the same time as moving about or

enjoying an exhibition, particularly for people with different first languages including sign languages.

People also enjoy exploring in different ways, and the opportunity to choose was appealing. Some associated the open design with “free flowing” movement, allowing them to curate their own experience in their own way, at their own pace. Others would expect to be guided on a more structured journey through the building. This may be particularly important for Autistic people, people with learning difficulties and people in charge of community group visits. Group leaders would welcome advance visits to plan and risk assess. This is particularly important if there is sensitive material in the exhibition.⁶

Disabled people and young people emphasised the need to support both independent and facilitated visits (for example, with a carer, buddy or group).

People would also be encouraged by:

- Activities they could make, do or take part in
- Performances and events
- Spaces to spend time alone
- Places to meet and spend time with friends and family

Further consideration of what would encourage people to explore the [visitor experience](#) is included in the next section.

Overall, feeling welcome to explore Belfast Stories was underpinned by a sense of being able to identify with the space including that:

- it is not primarily a tourist attraction
- that it is a neutral space
- that it is a shared space
- that it is inclusive of all cultures (“these spaces are created by and for a certain class of people”)
- that it is inclusive of the Irish language
- that it is accessible and inclusive for disabled and D/deaf people

Accessibility

Consultees emphasised that best practice or universal access should be designed in to the built fabric of Belfast Stories at this stage, rather than added after. This should include consideration of:

- Physical accessibility including ramps, lifts, step-free access, doorways, routes, restrooms, Changing Places and surfaces
- Evacuation planning including visual alarms and lifts that work in fires

⁶ One community group leader, for example, shared concerns that their participants experiencing or sharing political- or Troubles-related stories would jeopardise their funding, which requires them to remain neutral.

- Sensory requirements including acoustics, noise levels, quiet spaces, lighting, light, reflections and sensory-friendly and multi-sense exhibitions
- Assistive technology including audio guides, large print materials, subtitling, closed captions, real-time captioning, Braille, hearing loops, high-contrast signage, NaviLens, picture boards and other augmentative and alternative communication
- Sign language interpretation
- Transport and parking including good transport links, accessible parking and drop-off points
- Age-friendly including comfortable seating, clear signage and easily navigable spaces
- Dementia-friendly including easily navigable spaces, sensory-friendly displays and clear signage
- Neurodivergence, creating structured environments with clear signage and quiet areas
- Key facilities including restrooms, Changing Places, quiet areas and help points frequently throughout the building
- Diverse storytelling representation different disabled people and linguistic communities

Consultees also emphasised that access should be embedded in Belfast Stories' [operation](#), including the provision of equipment to support people with limited mobility, sensory sensitivities and anxiety (for example, loanable mobility scooters and wheelchairs, fidget toys and ear defenders). Knowledge and skills of [staff](#) will be critical.

A number of groups offered to test or snag Belfast Stories prior to its opening. Others may be willing to continue to be involved in a steering, governance or critical friend role.

In the spirit of universal design, accessibility is embedded and further expanded upon throughout this report.

[What they would do there](#)

The following word cloud summaries survey respondents' responses to the question, "What would you do [in Belfast Stories]?"

Arts and cultural activity

Consultees envisaged a wide range of arts and cultural activity in Belfast Stories as an enjoyable way to share and experience authentic Belfast stories. This included:

- Live music including classical, experimental, trad and contemporary, from intimate gigs to large-scale concerts
- Theatre, including one-man shows and immersive performances
- Spoken word events including storytelling, comedy and poetry
- Screenings of local and independent films
- Special events including themed events, seasonal activities, outdoor screenings, festivals and pop-ups
- Outreach activities and events including story gathering and citywide festivals
- Collaborative festivals, events and activities partnering with existing providers
- Culturally diverse activity including food and language
- Educational activity such as talks, lectures and discussions on social and historical topics
- Practical workshops where people could express their own stories, for example, through craft, creative writing, painting, animation or coding
- Intergenerational activity
- Cross-community activity
- Family-friendly and child-focused activities, for example, “Something like W5 but focused on creativity and storytelling” or a dedicated kid zone with storytelling, interactive exhibits and workshops

Who they would go with

A significant number of consultees felt they would go by themselves. They may go at other times with friends or family, but solo visits were often motivated by wanting to learn, research particular aspects of Belfast, particular stories or genealogy (for adults) or study (young people).

Some consultees, particularly older people and group leaders would also go by themselves initially to find out more about the experience and familiarise themselves with the building before bringing others.

Community groups would like discounted tickets, familiarisation visits, go-sees or VIP tours, so then individual members would have the confidence and appetite to return alone or in friendship groups.

Some people would bring their children to learn about Belfast. However, others queried whether it would be of interest to their very young children. It was suggested that there could be:

- a play area in the courtyard

- craft stations throughout the building
- a soft play area at the end of the exhibition to tire or reward (or bribe) young visitors
- free fruit for children to enjoy and keep them quiet
- a creche facility

It could also be a space where schools bring pupils for “hands-on” learning.

Consultees, particularly younger people, parents and women, looked forward to an opportunity to socialise in the evening outside pubs and clubs. It was noted that most Belfast cafes shut by 4pm, when people are starting to leave work and might welcome a space to go, without alcohol, alone or with colleagues, before heading home.

Having a choice of times is particularly important to carers who, like visitors, might appreciate fun or relaxation on a Monday.

Residents would bring visitors from outside NI, in particular family visiting from the US. Most did not appear particularly motivated by showing them their personal story if it was included in the building.

It was also considered a good spot to meet people before going on to other places (“I’ll meet you by Belfast Stories”).

PUBLIC SPACE

The provision of free, quality, city centre public space appears to be the key attractor for residents.

The open-air courtyard and the roof-top garden were almost universally, very strongly welcomed. Consultees liked that these spaces would connect people to nature through planting and views of the hills and create a place of tranquillity or sanctuary in the city centre.

Most people encouraged the use of local planting telling Belfast’s nature story while supporting biodiversity and bioactivity. There was strong support for community gardening whereby the green areas would be looked after by volunteers and visitors and local restaurants could use produce, similar to the meanwhile use gardens currently on site.

People would use the public spaces to meet friends, be by themselves, relax, drink coffee, read books, study, work, listen to music, enjoy the peace and quiet. While many consultees requested free WiFi, others would like a mobile-free zone.

The roof garden and its views would be great for photographs. It was also suggested there could be a telescope, and the idea that it would be open throughout the night inspired ideas including community karaoke, paranormal investigations, star gazing, sunset meditation and dawn yoga.

Some people would like more greenery outside and throughout the building as well as on the roof. Water features were also suggested – for ambiance and also to recreate habitat and streams found in the Belfast Hills.

There could also be a sensory garden.

Well-behaved dogs should be welcome, although consideration should also be given to dog-free zones for those who may be anxious or phobic.

Artists in particular were keen that creativity is incorporated throughout the building and that this should be authentically “Belfast”.

“Make it truly feel like a Belfast space – full of local creativity, not just another polished visitor attraction.”

“Street art and public murals should be part of it – keeping Belfast’s raw, authentic creativity visible.”

The main concerns about the public spaces were

- Weather, particularly usability in the wind, rain and cold. People requested at least some sheltered and heated areas.
- Detering anti-social behaviour and use by people experiencing homelessness. One person describe it as “a magnet for winos”. Parents were particularly concerned about this issue during the day, and women and older people in the evening and at night. Others felt that good design and use would naturally deter people.

“Internal courtyard must be open, airy and visible from the outside, with good activation and lighting at night otherwise it won’t be used and will feel like an intimidating underpass.”

There were also some concerns about maintenance; vandalism; littering; aesthetics throughout the seasons; nuisance birds; health and safety at height; overcrowding in good weather; and signage or support for people who have a fear of heights or impaired vision or depth perception.

“build the best, most inspiring space and even the most difficult teenagers will respect it”

CREATIVE HUB

The creative hub was welcomed as a much-needed space that could be used by artists, creatives, freelancers, students, start-ups, small businesses, community organisations and arts organisations.

It could include:

- Free WiFi
- Computers
- A creative tech lab supporting, for example, editing, podcasting, coding, animation and VR
- Charging points
- A library including local publications and art books
- A materials, resource or equipment library
- A reading room
- Quiet zones
- Good lighting
- Comfortable seating
- Meeting space including small meeting rooms
- Drop-in and bookable workspace
- Short-, medium- and long-term rental artist studios
- Artists-in-residence including residencies for new and early career artists
- Workshop space
- Specialist spaces such as visual arts classrooms and photography studios bookable for community groups
- Rehearsal space
- Performance space
- Exhibition space
- Gallery space
- Flexible space for large and small events and exhibitions

There also needs to be consideration of backroom and behind-the-scenes provision such as loading and storage.

Arts and community organisations were particularly concerned that they would be excluded on cost and stressed that use needed to be free or affordable for artists from different backgrounds and organisations of different sizes.

“It needs to be a welcoming place for all artists, not just those who fit into a commercial mould.”

“Make sure artists from all backgrounds have a voice – this should be for everyone, not just well-connected people.”

It should facilitate collaboration and networking. This could include communal areas, brainstorming spaces and talks and lectures.

Talks, lectures, workshops and masterclasses could also provide professional development.

And, of course, it should be inspiring with people working surrounded by Belfast’s stories, art and creativity.

“Imagine having a library section with books on Belfast’s history, storytelling, and art while having desks for people to work.”

“A hybrid between a library, a gallery, and a café would make it a really engaging space.”

FOOD STORIES

People were generally excited by the potential food offer and engaged by the idea of food stories. Food and drink was considered a strong attractor, and good cafes and restaurants would help create a social ambiance.

With the exception of some young people, all agreed that they would prefer to support local producers and local brands over multinationals.

Some people challenged the practicality of Belfast food stories. For example, most local produce is produced outside Belfast. Variety may be limited so that visitors would “get tired of eating it”. Visitors and people with a restrictive diet (for example, some young children, people with dementia or Autistic people) will expect some everyday brands and produce (nuggets, ketchup, coke, Guinness, etc.).

One person cautioned that smaller local businesses might not have the staffing capacity of larger chains to be able to keep restaurants and cafes open for extended hours.

Others took a more purist approach (“Sourdough is not a Belfast bread.”).

There was discussion about what is a Belfast food. For example, one person felt that there should be no Chinese restaurants as they are not “Belfast”. Others felt that Chinese restaurants and food are an integral part of Belfast’s history and culture. Overall, most people wanted Belfast food stories to be inclusive of world cuisines. Young people in particular were excited about the possibility of showing and trying diverse foods.

A variety of food offers would also support families, which also need to cater to different tastes. And many different people said it needed to be affordable. Being able to bring your own food makes a visit more affordable still, and it is also more practical for people or dependants with restrictive diets.

Some consultees encouraged sustainable and ethical food practices including a range of vegan and vegetarian options, healthy options and the use of locally grown, seasonal food including from the rooftop garden.

The rooftop restaurant was considered to be a particularly desirable destination, possibly more for a special occasion. It should be positioned to maximise the views of the Belfast Hills.

There should also be:

- Vegan food
- Picnic areas

- Casual dining options
- Pop-ups
- Incubators for innovation and start-up (food and drink specifically)
- Small kitchens for small producers

As always, staff should be friendly and professional. Neurodivergent and Autistic people and people with learning disabilities feel reassured when they are served by people like them.

It was also suggested that there could be inclusive cafes where Autistic people and people with learning difficulties could learn about money, social interaction and so on in a safe, supportive space.

RETAIL STORIES

Similar to food stories, people were encouraged by supporting small local retailers and producers. Many, usually older consultees referred back to when the area around Belfast Stories was a thriving shopping district.

Current local businesses stressed the need to keep them up to date about development, construction and disruption to business.

Pedestrianising the surrounding streets could also boost existing local business by integrating them into the wider site.

People would also like:

- Open-air markets
- Pop-up shops
- Local products made on site
- Bookshops
- People's library or book swap
- Other swap shops (for example, seeds, plants or fashion)

SUSTAINABILITY

While not explicitly consulted on, young people were particularly interested in Belfast Stories' sustainability goals.

Across consultees, it was suggested that

- There should be good recycling facilities.
- Planting should support biodiversity and bioactivity.
- Gardening should be organic.
- There should be a community garden.
- There should be water stations.
- Reclaimed bricks could be used in the building

While the solar panels on the roof were appreciated, there were some concerns that these took up too much space, had prime position relative to the Belfast Hills or would obstruct views from the rooftop.

OPERATION

Consultees were interested in how Belfast Stories will be run after it opens. Many felt that this should be on a not-for-profit basis in keeping with an ethos of generous partnership and giving back to people and communities.

Other suggestions included:

- using social clauses to create jobs (“beyond construction”) and measurable return on investment in the local area
- partnering with local employment academies and training programmes
- targeted apprenticeships and job opportunities for young people, disadvantaged groups and those seeking to upskill
- having a school-leavers pipeline programme
- using local businesses, social enterprises and the voluntary and community sector in the supply chain
- having a charity partner
- having local community partnerships
- having community voices, including Belfast Stories users, workers and young people, represented in the governance structure

Staff

Staff, including front of house, tour guides and security, should be friendly, well trained and local.

More feedback on [staff](#) is contained in the section on Facilities mix.

Opening hours

Consultees said there was a particular need for Belfast Stories to be open:

- On Sunday mornings (2 Royal Avenue users particularly appreciate it opens from 10am on a Sunday)
- Sundays in general
- Mondays (particularly for carers and visitors)
- After work
- Evenings and late nights

Extended and flexible visiting hours would also support people with sensory sensitivities or anxiety, and there should be quiet hours at different times of the day.

Pricing

Consultees emphasised that Belfast Stories should be affordable for all users including residents, artists and creatives, community groups and event organisers. Most people felt it was reasonable to charge visitors a competitive price.

Particular consideration should be given to:

- Pensioners
- People receiving benefits
- Working-class artists
- New and early career artists
- Students

As residents will often bring visitors, providing them with free or discounted tickets was considered good for return on investment.

Some consultees felt strongly that Belfast Stories should be free for residents, or at least free on designated days, “symbolically” or as “a point of principle” – stories having been freely given by the people of Belfast or residents perceived to be already paying for it through rates. Otherwise, price promotions or concessions for residents were generally welcomed.

Reasonable ticket costs for residents ranged from £2 to £10. Some noted that people will budget what they spend across the whole experience, so what is spent on tickets will mean less money spent on shops or cafes (“doubling down on your pocket”).

A few people cautioned that ticketing could be overly complicated, especially for visitors. One group of young people from minoritized ethnic community backgrounds who were born outside the UK and ROI felt that everyone should pay the same, so no one feels different.

Marketing

Most people consulted had heard of Belfast Stories, although most understood it only to be the Bank of Ireland building. The scale seemed to be of particular interest.

Those who had not already heard of Belfast Stories tended to be more sceptical and queried why they had not heard about it.

Others struggled to conceptualise it (“If not a museum, what is it?”) and what they would do there.

Other feedback relevant to marketing includes:

- There is already a lot happening in the city, so it is difficult to keep informed about everything.
- It is generally difficult to find out what’s on.

- People were particularly interested in how they would find out what was on in Belfast Stories over a whole month, season or year.
- Having to search for information is off-putting.
- There should be an accessibility section on the website, access guides and social narratives detailing facilities available for disabled visitors.
- Social media and the internet is not universally accessed.
- Radio is very important for some older people.
- Some found the language of the consultation document confusing or ambiguous.

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Consultees were generally enthusiastic about the visitor experience provided it is engaging and well balanced with a wide range of stories. People felt that they would both enjoy and learn from the experience and that visitors would feel similar.

One consultee, reflecting on the storytelling that currently takes place throughout the city, loved that it would be a “permanent home for true stories”. Another felt that there was stronger need to support decentralised activity.

“Belfast’s stories should be told by its people through creative, inspiring, and enterprising experiences in every one of the city’s neighbourhoods.

“Instead, the ‘Belfast Stories’ project is diverting creative energies and vast sums of investment into a single project driven by the priorities of and curated and delivered by the City Council. It fails to acknowledge the diverse, creative energy already shaping Belfast’s cultural landscape [...]

The real story engine of Belfast is its people and their creative potential. [...] Across the arts, heritage, community, and business sectors, people and organisations are already delivering an ever-developing programme of story-telling activities, despite long-term underinvestment [...] It is indicative that the ‘Belfast Stories’ project and City Council are instead seeking to lay claim to ownership of how people in the city use Belfast’s stories and the very nature of creative delivery in the city, rather than recognising, supporting, and strategically investing in the work already happening across the city.”

Others encouraged connections to existing assets, including museums, archives and visitor attractions.

TIME–SPACE INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK

“Great idea to have stories from the living – we’ve enough history here already!”

The time–space interpretative framework was very strongly received among the great majority of consultees. However, some consultees continued to refer to third-person narratives and history beyond living memory indicating difficulty with the concept.

Minority and minoritized communities in particular tended to like the idea that they and their stories would not be labelled, put in to boxes or added to the edges. Rather, their stories would be integrated with others as a core part of the narrative, past, present and future.

There were some isolated, though not insignificant concerns raised.

- During consultation with people with learning disabilities, there was discussion as to whether the concepts of measured and lived time could cause confusion. For example, some people might think “Closing time” meant it was time to leave the building.
- At another session, the “clock thing” was felt to be inauthentic because people have different breakfast times, working hours and so on. People in at least two other sessions commented that sunset and sunrise change significantly in Belfast.
- People want to be able to search for stories that are of interest, so there is a practical need for labelling or tagging to support search functions. It was suggested storytellers could provide their own tags.
- There might also be a need for more context. For example, it would be useful for visitors to know whether a story took place at 8am in 2025 or 8am in 1925. Geographic context may also aid understanding and [support local tourism](#).
- A few consultees would prefer more traditional, linear interpretation. One consultee, for example, considered a historical timeline “more objective”.
- Some older people in particular were interested in the “cut-off point” for living memory and if older stories “drop off” to make room for newer ones.

WHAT STORIES THEY WOULD LIKE TO EXPERIENCE

A different approach to curating the Troubles was generally appreciated. Survey respondents in particular were more likely not to want the Troubles retold. In practice, most people considered it a backdrop to their lives.

“We need to stop defining ourselves by our worst years.”

“Have we honestly nothing to offer people other than The Troubles and Titanic? We have a whole history of good too—highlight it!”

"Younger people are enjoying a new Belfast and not having The Troubles constantly thrown in our faces."

Survey respondents in particular were more likely not to want the Troubles retold. During an engagement session in an inner-city, participants felt very strongly that all mention of the Troubles should be barred. This was in part because "There's lots of places already do that – people should go there", but also:

"Tourists can go do that somewhere else and get one sided stories [...] a lot of terrible lies are told on tours and in museums."

A few would welcome "a troubles museum" that would "tell the facts".

In practice, most people know the Troubles cannot be ignored. Rather, it is the stage on which their lives have played out and which makes everyday stories remarkable.

"No one [in my storytelling group] mentions 'the UDA or the IRA' in their stories. The Troubles are in a backdrop."

"no skipping over the hard stuff either – it's Belfast, after all, so the stories should carry the weight of the Troubles, the resilience of the people, and the craic that somehow survives through it all."

Indeed, there was a general preference to experience the stories and lives of ordinary people, the "unsung heroes" and "everyday workers and families who built this city" rather than well-known celebrities, politicians or industrialists, although there was concern to preserve lesser-known figures (particularly from the fields of music, sport, comedy, showbusiness and industry). Where there was interest in famous people, it was usually in previously untold aspects of their personal, rather than public lives.

"It needs to tell 'the unsung history of Belfast – the I was there' in own voices. Not the usual saying the usual."

"There were two classes of people: the 'money class' and the 'no money class'."

"there's no us and them – there's only us in all of our complexity"

Other stories people would like to experience at Belfast Stories include:

- History that educates young people and visitors, particularly locating Belfast in global narratives (for example, the slave trade, migration, world war)
- Architecture, historic buildings and streets including the Bank of Ireland building and its surrounding streets

- Industrial and economic history including shipbuilding, linen, lesser-known industries and Belfast's role in global trade and innovation
- Travel and transport across eras
- Clothes and fashion across eras
- Family and intergenerational stories
- Contemporary stories including reflections on modern Belfast, its regeneration and how young people are shaping its future ("It shouldn't just be a museum—it should connect Belfast's past to where we are today.")
- Humour, including light-hearted stories and black humour, often found in the juxtaposition between everyday lives and the backdrop of the Troubles or hardship, told in Belfast slang, dialect and colloquialisms, capturing the unique character of the city and its people
- Diversity and representation: stories from communities including working-class histories, geographic communities, minority and minoritized voices, the D/deaf community, LGBTQ+ experiences, stories of migration (from rural areas of NI and from outside NI) and more. These may be of particular interest to younger people and people from such communities.

"stories that aren't represented by statues outside City Hall"

"How [the Deaf community] were language deprived. How we are more independent now. It will educate the locals and surprise visitors."

- Stories offering hope and inspiration, particularly of those who have endured or thrived against the odds
- Music, arts and creativity, both historical and contemporary including space to showcase creative work
- Protestant cultures and traditions including Orange and Ulster Scots
- Irish language, culture and tradition
- Major events, such as Bill Clinton's visit to Belfast, particularly "small stories" and ordinary people's experiences on that day

"All the past stories, not just the dark times, but the big times, the positive things"

HOW STORIES COULD BE TOLD

"Little details would make all the difference – the smell of the shipyards, the sound of the rain on cobblestones, the feeling of a hand-me-down school blazer that was always just a bit too big."

Consultees expected stories to be told in a wide variety of ways appreciating that these would appeal to a wide audience's communication preferences and requirements. [Authenticity](#) was felt to be essential to both enjoyment of the experience and trust in the story collection process.

Suggestions for ways to tell stories included:

- First-person audio recordings and video interviews
- Interactive and immersive exhibits including audio-visual stories, hands-on displays, demonstrations (for example, of baking, sport or street games), AR and VR
- Playful and gamified elements (for example, escape room-style historical stories, quizzes, scavenger hunts) particularly, but not exclusively for children and young people
- Multi-sensory experiences including sight, sounds, smell and touch
- Live storytelling, reenactments and performances
- Large-scale visuals and photographs
- Archive photographs, film and recordings
- Murals and street art
- A graffiti wall (to tell stories and stop vandalism)
- Sculpture and three-dimensional installations
- Creative writing, poetry and drama
- Multi-language and inclusive formats including Irish and Ulster Scots,⁷ sign languages, other world languages, Braille and other tactile communication
- Talks, lectures, panel discussions and debates
- Reflection and quiet spaces
- Memorial benches telling the stories of deceased people
- Community conversations including with locals and volunteer storytellers
- Community spaces where communities and groups could exhibit their stories, archives or creativity
- Gallery and exhibition space for artists and makers to showcase contemporary stories and work
- Bespoke guided "with locals" tours
- Self-curated tours
- A searchable archive of all stories that can be accessed for free, digital and analogue, on site and remotely

Changing at least some of the exhibition frequently would encourage people to visit again. It was suggested this could happen with the seasons or to mark significant events, occasions, celebrations or festivities.

⁷ Some disabled consultees also requested that information not provided in English, Irish, Ulster Scots and other visitors' languages as this can be confusing.

Some people felt it could also date very quickly. It could therefore be updated annually with, for example, reflections on big sporting or cultural events that took place the previous year.

Others felt that at least some things should stay the same to “anchor” your visit. This was particularly important for Autistic people, parents and community groups who might feel assured by knowing what to expect from their experience.

AUTHENTICITY

“To make the stories of Belfast feel real and authentic, they’d have to be told in the voices of the people who lived them – proper, unscripted, full of warmth, wit, and maybe the odd swear word. None of this polished, overly formal nonsense; it should sound like someone chatting to you in the pub or over a cuppa, with all the quirks and rhythms of Belfast speech. [...] A mix of voices – young, old, from different parts of the city – would make it feel layered and honest, and maybe they’d even tie them to objects, like a photo or a love letter, so you could feel the connection. Most importantly, it should feel personal, like someone pulling you into their world for a moment and saying, ‘Here’s what it was like for me.’ Real stories, real people, with all the humour and heartbreak that makes Belfast, Belfast.”

There was a strong sense that the more Belfast Stories could bring together stories and storytellers, the more authentic the experience would feel. Ideally, this would be by having stories told in person by real local people (not actors) throughout the experience – from front of house to tour guides to installations (for example, a people’s corner; live storytelling; reenactments or craft and cookery demonstrations; human/living libraries; volunteers wearing “chat to me” armbands; “benches where you sit down and the little old lady sat there starts to tell you some of her stories”).

Having a story told in a local accent or seeing a person’s face was also considered to be important for authenticity. Where there were concerns about privacy, this could be an actor.

“Belfast stories often appear so incredible as to be incredulous. The telling of them is what helps people suspend disbelief. “

Stories should not be sanitised, and humour, often black, was considered a hallmark of Belfast authenticity. Consultees prioritised “unfiltered, sometimes challenging perspectives” over “polished narratives”. Consultees stressed that stories should not be sanitised, prioritising “unfiltered, sometimes challenging perspectives” over “polished narratives”. Generally, it was felt that language should be retained as told (including, for example, in sign or Irish).

Often this extended to stories of ordinary people over celebrities, politicians or other well-known figures. Generally, it was felt that language should be retained as told (including, for example, in sign or Irish), including pronunciation, spelling, colloquialisms, malapropisms, slang and swearing, although typos that could cause embarrassment could be silently corrected, and people widely understood the need to interpret and gloss for visitors.

Some consultees cautioned against “overly” curating stories, which risks making the overall experience either “too politically neutral” or “propaganda”.

"Things in Northern Ireland always have a slant."

"I would hate to see it become some sort of sanitised 'good vibes only' Belfast showcase rather than telling the truth."

"If the project becomes a cathedral of wokeness, resplendent with trans-rainbow flags and other present-day political symbolism, then I'm out."

"We don't want the council to rewrite history or push an agenda that only suits one side of the community."

Some suggested there should be advisory notices to help community groups and parents navigate sensitive topics and language.

Interactive and multi-sensory elements, including video, audio, multimedia, AR, VR, taste and smell, could help bring stories to life.

Artefacts such as handwritten letters, other personal objects and archive photographs and footage could also deepen the emotional connection.

At least one consultee raised the potential of fraud or identify theft.

A minority questioned the authenticity of the concept itself.

"the 'Belfast Stories' project seeks to commercialise people's stories as a tourism product in one experience under one roof. It is based on an inauthentic proposal made a decade ago by a consultant with no connection to the city. As a top-down proposal, true civic ownership is absent."

STORY COLLECTION

Nearly 3 out of 5 (59 per cent) of survey respondents⁸ would share their stories. In face-to-face engagements, this was substantially more, and the question was often greeted with “Try and stop me” or “The problem will be getting me to shut up”.

⁸ n=484

Generally, people expect story gathering to be:

- Clear. This includes easy-to-understand guidance on the process and how their stories would (or would not) be used including editing, interpretation and presentation. This also makes people feel comfortable as they know their story will be safeguarded and respected.
- Comfortable. People expected to feel or be put at ease. As a minimum, this should be a warm, friendly, comfortable environment and a cup of tea. Rather than restrictive themes, people felt prompts to start the conversation would work well. Similar to the time–space interpretative framework, the prompts should be familiar, reassuring or universal (for example, food, family), like natural casual conversation. They should not feel judged. For some people, this means talking to peers, while others would prefer to talk to strangers or professionals. Some people may need extra support if there is potential for re-traumatisation. There should also be options to preserve privacy and anonymity including of the story owner and anyone mentioned in their story.
- Reciprocal. People expected to get something in return. For most, this was simply meaning: that their story would be part of a greater purpose, greater good or posterity. Many people simply get enjoyment from talking to others or sharing their stories. People would also feel proud to take part and, even more so, to have their story used in a significant or creative way. A few people mentioned payment. Again, hospitality is always welcome. Other suggestions included free tickets or vouchers for Belfast Stories or other attractions.

People may also be encouraged by:

- Seeing examples of stories
- Diverse ways to share such as individuals and groups:
 - Structured interviews
 - Online forms
 - Other options for independent recording and submission (for example, voice notes, leaving an answer machine message in a phone booth)
 - Oral storytelling workshops
 - Creative-writing workshops
 - Reminiscence workshops
 - Being filmed
 - Being recorded
 - Drawing, animation, graphic art and other visual art
- Convenience. This includes being able to share their story at Belfast Stories, quickly or remotely (for example, by text message).
- Outreach, particularly to those who face additional social or physical barriers to getting to Belfast Stories ("it needs to include all perspectives, not just the ones that make the most noise.")

- Engagement through schools and reaching out to parents
- Collaboration with organisations that are trusted by their communities including to engage geographic communities, the LGBTQ+ community and people from minoritized ethnic communities
- Encouragement or invitation. Some people are more reticent because they do not feel they have anything to contribute or are not natural storytellers.

People may be more hesitant to tell their story because of:

- Concerns about judgment or ridicule, privacy and anonymity or incrimination. This mostly related to sensitive stories. People who felt less confident were also likely to be concerned about judgement or ridicule. It was also noted that what is considered sensitive or taboo changes over time (for example, health, disability, sexuality), which might particularly concern older people. Others may only feel ready or safe to share towards the end of their lives.
- Concerns about misinterpretation. At one engagement session, a woman told how she had previously shared her story and thought it spoke of strength and resilience. But afterwards, the audience looked sad, and she realised they had labelled her as a victim.
- Concerns about safety. It was noted that Belfast is a small place. While steps could be taken to protect anonymity, this is not always possible.
- Lack of trust. This includes in the motivations behind Belfast Stories and the purpose of story collection.
- Lack of trust in the process including how stories would be collected, edited or displayed, and concerns about stories being misrepresented, sensationalised, used for political purposes or as part of divisive narratives.
- Commercialisation. A few consultees were wary that their personal stories might be monetised without benefiting those who shared them.
- Lack of confidence or not feeling that a story is interesting or worth telling or that a person has a story at all. This may be more likely to affect younger people, women and people, particularly women, from minoritised ethnic communities.
- Feeling that their story was not relevant. This includes people not born in Belfast, whether they have newly arrived or have spent decades in the city (for example, one Black woman who was born outside the UK and ROI but lived in Belfast for 40 years enthusiastically explained that her white, Belfast-born husband would have lots of great Belfast stories to tell. Only after several prompts did she realise that she also had Belfast Stories.)
- Feelings of exclusion: that their story would not be welcomed, valued or used as it does not align with received narratives. “Protestant” communities were also described (at an engagement session in a predominantly Protestant area) as “more sceptical”. It was also considered that Belfast Stories could redress a perceived bias that Protestant communities have fewer stories.

At least one person made a distinction between being unwilling to tell *my story* but willing to tell *a story*.

Some queried whether they would be able to add to or revise their story in the future.

Consultees conveyed a strong sense of urgency not to delay gathering the rich and varied stories of older people.

“My Nana is 93, I would love to capture some of her stories before they are lost forever. She's lived through world wars, the Troubles... her stories are amazing.”

REGENERATING THE CITY CENTRE

“A big white beacon attracting people back to that end of Royal Avenue”

In general, respondents were pleased about investment in this part of Belfast and were supportive of regenerating the city centre in principle, which many regarded Belfast Stories as potentially transformative. However, concerns remain about the extent to which this can be achieved.

THE SURROUNDING AREA

“We want all of Royal Avenue to be beautiful from the lovely City Hall ground to the University.”

The main barrier to people enjoying Belfast Stories is actually outside its walls. The northern end of Royal Avenue is generally considered to be rundown and unattractive. Few people visit the area at the moment as there are few motivations to do so. Many people also felt it was unsafe to do so, particularly at night.

Some people remembered when this area was a thriving shopping district and transport hub and were hopeful that it could be revitalised.

Some people felt that the Ulster University and student accommodation were already helping with regeneration.

Some felt confident that Belfast Stories in itself would catalyse regeneration, bringing its own investment and footfall and attracting other businesses and investors. While frequently raised with scepticism, it was noted that this could be strengthened further by integration with other plans and developments.

Some people felt that good design (including the building, lighting and thoroughfares) and increased footfall in itself would deter public nuisance and anti-social behaviour and assure of safety.

Many consultees felt that the city centre is generally unwelcoming and sometimes unsafe, particularly Royal Avenue. They generally feel less motivated to come in to the town and to spend time there, typically going just to visit a particular shop or shopping centre.

Many consultees felt that these issues would persist – at best, needing careful management; at worst, remaining a barrier to people’s experience of Belfast Stories.

Suggested solutions or mitigation included:

- Street cleaning
- Addressing uneven paving (particularly for wheelchair and mobility aid users, older people and people with visual impairments)
- Creating a pedestrian plaza around the building
- Pedestrianising Royal Avenue
- Renewing the arterial routes leading to Belfast Stories including from York Street Station, to the North and West and along Royal Avenue
- Addressing the prevalence of social issues such as homelessness and drug and alcohol use
- Working with local pubs and clubs

A small number of strong voices feel that Belfast Stories will not aid regeneration and may, rather, be detrimental to civic development.

“In short, it is a ‘build it and they will come’ approach rather than a meaningful response to the city’s real needs. It is also a clear sign of desperation for a ‘silver bullet’ to deliver much-needed city centre regeneration [...] true regeneration will not be achieved by claiming ownership of this energy as the basis for one building, but by facilitating and investing in partnership as the basis of the whole city’s transformation.”

There were also concerns that Belfast Stories might lead to the closure of the city centre community and cultural hub, 2 Royal Avenue.

Consultees were also keen that Belfast Stories supports Belfast Central Library through programmatic and perhaps even physical connection.

SUPPORTING LOCAL TOURISM

Support for Belfast Stories among tourism stakeholders was generally positive provided that it complements and amplifies the existing tourism offer and community-led initiatives across the city. However, there remains strong concern that it may instead act as competition.

“If visitors visit ‘Belfast Stories’ they’ll get short snippets and won’t see the value in travelling out to communities for genuine engagement and

therefore contribute to local economies. It will be a ‘gravitational pull’ on the city at the expense of smaller tourist attractions. Between Belfast Stories and Titanic Belfast there will be a monopoly.”

Consultees noted that Belfast Stories will be in an “arty” area, providing a strong opportunity to build on, without duplicating or sanitising existing strengths including street art and festivals.

It was also suggested that good story gathering and telling could help communities “move away from” perceived or binary narratives.

Suggestions to help share the benefit included:

- Having local, knowledgeable staff actively encouraging visitors to go further afield
- Sharing stories that would be strengthened by the context of visiting where they took place
- Identifying landmarks from the rooftop
- Stickers and signage on displays, “If you liked this story, now go to [...]
- Discount vouchers to other attractions, cafes and restaurants
- A “city pass” so that entrance to Belfast Stories also gets free or discounted entrance to other experiences
- Partnerships with local hotels
- Photographs of local areas and buildings that are good for photo opportunities
- Information on free activities that visitors can do as an alternative to Belfast Stories visitor experience
- Stories from diverse communities including different parts of the city
- Clear information on transport and travel to other areas and attractions
- Walking and other tours starting from Belfast Stories
- Integration with Visit Belfast Welcome Centre
- Ongoing engagement to connect with and avoid duplicating existing story assets, including museums, archives and visitor attractions
- Ongoing engagement with local community stakeholders

“The building in the city centre should act as a starting point not a finishing line for visitors. It should encourage people to seek out stories anchored in places beyond Royal Avenue. This could be done by making the project’s organizing principles [...] do work in different parts of the city – for example [...] How is local time different from central time? I.e. opening times [...] closing of gates, working hours relative to specific locally dominant industries”

TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT

Another major barrier cited frequently by consultees was getting to Belfast Stories. Issues and concerns included:

- **Parking.** Most consultees understood encouraging active and public transport is a greater good and accepted that there will be no car park at Belfast Stories. In practice, it seems many still anticipate travelling by car. For disabled visitors, there must be adequately size and sufficient disabled parking bays, and consideration must be given to the path users will then take to get easily and safely in to the building.
- **Drop-off point or points.** This was particularly important, perhaps more important than parking, for carers, disabled people and families. Ideally, it should be supported by nearby parking.
- **Congestion.** Increased traffic and parking should not cause nuisance to neighbouring businesses, residents and communities.
- **Public transport.** There should be direct links from all parts of the city. The area could be used as a transport hub, increasing the number and frequency of buses. A Glider stop would be useful. Public transport is particularly important for older people and younger people who may not have access to a car.
- **Park and ride.** It was suggested there could be a park and ride scheme between key car parks and Belfast Stories.
- **Minibus.** It was suggested that there should be a minibus that could take people to and from Belfast Stories and key city centre locations (for example, City Hall or the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre). This would be particularly valued by people with limited mobility and carers.
- **Costs.** It was noted that “Nothing is free to get in to when you have to pay to park” and that for some people, the cost of public transport will be a barrier.
- **Pathways.** The way to Belfast Stories should be well signposted and well lit. Pavements need to be even, and there should be step-free access along main routes with drop kerbs at crossings and disabled parking bays.
- **Cycle paths.** A few people requested cycle lanes and bike parking, although it is perhaps most notable by how infrequently it was mentioned.

CONCLUSION

This information has been brought together in order to ensure that Belfast City Council is in a position to take account of all issues when making a decision in relation to Belfast Stories.

The analysis of the key points arising from the consultation responses and EQIA are provided to assist the council, but it is not exhaustive and is not meant to be a substitute for the detailed information presented in this report.

Support for the Belfast Stories concept

During the public consultation, Belfast City Council gathered feedback across a range of groups, and there was broad support for its concept and potential impact.

Support was generally strongest at face-to-face engagements such as workshops and focus groups. However, survey results indicate people from some Section 75 categories may be less supportive. This may include young people; people from minoritized ethnic communities; disabled people; people from the LGBTQ+ community; and people from neither a Protestant nor Catholic community background.

Architectural concept

Across both RIBA stage 1 and 2 public consultations, consultees generously shared their lived experience and advice to help make Belfast Stories inclusive and welcoming. Some of this feedback has already been used to inform the initial architectural concept, including multiple, broad entrances; a wide, open courtyard; and accessible public space.

The design team should now further consider new evidence and review architectural plans to maximise the sense of welcome and inclusion, particularly in relation to egress, signage, public space and accessibility.

Curatorial framework

Compared to the RIBA stage 1 public consultation, when stories were to be curated by theme, the time and space curatorial framework has been well received, and there appears to be fewer concerns that it will present a partisan, binary or narrow perspective of Belfast.

Nevertheless, residual concerns are likely to be a barrier to equitable story collection and curation. Such concerns may reduce further over time with ongoing, targeted engagement and mitigation, such as targeted outreach, embedded in story collection processes.

Language strategy

Belfast Stories is an opportunity to promote access to and awareness and inclusion of Irish, Ulster Scots, BSL and ISL. This may in turn enhance good relations by affording respect and recognition to native minority language in keeping with local and international policy and best practice.

Belfast City Council should continue to consult closely the city's language communities, including in relation to the development of the building, story collection, exhibition and overall experience. Resulting language policy or practice should support the council's Language Strategy and draft Irish Language Strategy and be subject to an equality screening.

Travel and transport

Consultees have identified that travel and transport may be a major barrier for some Section 75 groups including disabled people, older people, younger people, carers and

parents. There should be ongoing collaboration with Translink and city planners in relation to accessible parking, public transport, drop-off and streetscaping.

Safety

Another major barrier identified across the population and that may affect some Section 75 groups in particular is perceptions of safety in the immediate vicinity of Belfast Stories and the city centre in general.

There should be ongoing collaboration with city planners, other developers and stakeholders to maximise regeneration and reduce concerns around blight, safety and anti-social behaviour.

Ongoing engagement

Survey responses may point to underlying systemic issues of trust and representation which reinforce Belfast Stories' intent to continue to target engagement at people and groups most likely to feel excluded.

The next stage of engagement is an opportunity to continue to build on messages of welcome and inclusion while gathering evidence as to how this can be achieved, practically and ideologically, from those key equality groups. This is particularly important as concepts and ideas become plans for structures and layouts during RIBA stage 3.

At this stage, Belfast Stories engagement plan and stakeholder mapping should be reviewed and revised in light of lessons learned and additional evidence uncovered during this public consultation. Ongoing engagement should prioritise those stakeholders and groups that may be most at risk of missing out but also have most to offer in terms of how inclusion can be designed in. This includes:

- young people
- older people
- people from minoritized ethnic communities
- disabled people
- parents
- carers
- people from the LGBTQ+ community
- people from neither a Protestant nor Catholic community background
- different language communities including Irish, Ulster Scots and sign language

Operational model

There were high levels of interest among stakeholders as to how Belfast Stories will be run after its opens in 2030. This included in relation to its operating model, staff, pricing policy, opening hours and marketing and communications.

Belfast Stories should give consideration to further engagement to ensure that it creates a welcoming and inclusive operating environment in the long term.

Equality consultative forum

The equality consultative forum proved a valuable tool for engagement throughout the RIBA 2 public consultation. Many of its participants had been involved in the RIBA 1 public consultation and now couple lived experience with expertise in the development of Belfast Stories.

Belfast Stories should consider having a standing equality consultative forum to provide continuity and advice between and throughout public consultation.

Story collection

Belfast City Council should prioritise testing story collection processes and tools with groups that are less likely to share stories, in particular older people and the very elderly whose stories are otherwise at risk of being lost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

"[Belfast Stories] has been thoroughly covered with consultation – you can't represent or tell every individual story, but equality of opportunity is important."

Both the concept and engagement process have been generally well received through the second Belfast Stories public consultation. There are now opportunities to build on these strengths.

EQUALITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review of architectural plans to maximise the sense of welcome and inclusion, particularly in relation to
 - The four entrances
 - Signage and way finding
 - Public space
 - Accessibility
- Ongoing collaboration with Translink and city planners to design transport and travel including accessible parking and public transport
- Ongoing collaboration with city planners, other developers and stakeholders to maximise regeneration and reduce concerns around blight, safety and anti-social behaviour

- Review of marketing and communications to agree and promote key messages going forward including in plain, accessible and augmented formats
- Further development of Equality Consultative Forum during further RIBA stages
- Focus on engagement with other S75 groups during future RIBA stages
- Consideration to the feeling of ‘exclusion’ from the protestant, unionist communities
- Further equality screening in 2026 as part of planning consultation

CONCEPT DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Bank of Ireland building to be integrated into the visitor experience. Rather than preserving it as a relic, the design strategy should make it active and accessible
- Consultation feedback highlighted a tension between the desire for a bold architectural statement and the need for the building to feel approachable and in context for the area
- Further consideration of the courtyard – use, weather protection, informal zones that feel safe and sociable
- Further consideration of the rooftop terrace/garden in relation to accessibility, public views, green space and gathering areas that are free to use
- Acceleration of the ethical framework and story collection as a priority for further engagement in particular among older people
- Further considerations for an experience that is intuitive, layered, and multisensory, with moments of intensity and moments of calm
- The consultation findings showed there was a need for further consideration of co-authorship, diverse representation, ongoing gathering of lived stories.
- Further consideration regarding the creative hub and the uses for creation and not just consumption. Requirement for flexible and hands on workshop spaces.
- Consideration of how stories can be rendered throughout the building
- Considerations on testing story gathering processes and tools with people who are less likely to come forward

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consideration of what, how and when to consult in relation to operational model
- A structured long-term programme of engagement up to 2030
- Development of Belfast Stories champions or ambassadors
- Ongoing collaboration with key stakeholder groups (for example, tourism, local business, local communities, communities interest and identity) with the aim of creating good neighbours, good stories and good will. This should include:
 - Ongoing engagement with key groups who have expressed a strong interest in continuing to support the development
 - Ongoing engagement with key groups who may be less supportive of the concept or who may face additional barriers to its benefits

- Ongoing engagement with a refreshed equality consultative forum
- Development of how to communicate details and deal with issues perceived. E.g. perceived prioritisation of tourists over locals, political or cultural bias etc.
- Consideration for training and volunteering programmes
- Engagement plan and stakeholder mapping reviewed in advance of RIBA Stage 3
- Focused engagement regarding operating model
- Consult further closely with the language community

APPENDIX 1: RIBA STAGE 2 ENGAGEMENT

Engagement sessions

Between 19 November 2024 to 9 March 2025, there were 102 consultation sessions engaged 1014 people from a wide range of stakeholder groups including:

- Political representatives
- Belfast City Council staff
- Other tourism attractions
- Other cultural venues
- Artists and arts organisations
- Heritage organisations
- Music sector
- Visual arts sector
- LGBTQ+ community
- Children
- Young people
- Schools
- Parents
- Carers
- Disabled people
- BSL and ISL users
- Irish language speakers
- Older people
- Women
- People from Muslim, Chinese, Polish and Roma community backgrounds
- Migrant workers
- Young people from a School of Sanctuary
- Geographic communities including Shankill, South Belfast, East Belfast, North Belfast, inner city and neighbouring communities
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Food and drink organisations
- Local businesses
- Architects
- Students
- Libraries
- The general public

Written responses from organisations

Written responses were received from the Belfast Agenda VCSE⁹ Sectoral Advisory Panel, Belfast Buildings Trust, Belfast Civic Trust and North Belfast Heritage Cluster.¹⁰

The following organisations also gave their permission to be named having responded via the survey:

- Beyond Binary
- Rovar.com
- Belfast Chamber of Commerce
- Tools for Solidarity
- Carnegie Oldpark Library
- Linen Quarter BID
- Craft NI
- Maritime Belfast Trust
- Young at Art/Belfast Children's Festival
- Circusful

⁹ Voluntary, community and social enterprise

¹⁰ Written responses were also received from four individuals.



Public
Consultation
2024–25

What you told us

Between November 2024 and March 2025, we opened the doors to conversation and asked you to help shape Belfast Stories. Thousands of you shared your thoughts, hopes, and ideas—and here's what you told us.

What is Belfast Stories?

Belfast Stories is a landmark development for the city situated on the 5,000 square metre site where North Street and Royal Avenue meet.

It incorporates and preserves the iconic Art Deco building that was formerly the Bank of Ireland.



1. It will be a beautiful new **public space** for the people of Belfast to explore their heritage, enjoy their shared sense of community and gather for special events, meetings, walks, food and drinks in a uniquely inspiring environment.
2. It will be a new **visitor attraction** that clearly communicates the spirit of the city – its past, its present and its future, enhancing the city's reputation nationally and internationally and growing our tourism industry.
3. It will be a **creative hub** where writers, musicians, artists and film makers can meet, learn and collaborate, enabling people of all ages and from diverse backgrounds to become involved in one of the fastest developing sectors of the economy.

Who's behind it?



Belfast Stories was announced in December 2021 and is the flagship project in the tourism and regeneration strand of the Belfast Region City Deal programme of investment.

Delivered by Belfast City Council with support from partners, Belfast Stories aims to attract both tourists and locals while helping to regenerate the city and surrounding areas.



How has it evolved?

Engagement around the concept of Belfast Stories has been ongoing since 2015 when a strategy for the future of the city centre was published.

- In 2017 plans emerged to co-locate a film centre, a major tourism attraction, digital skills hub and a cultural centre.
- Plans for Belfast Stories were included and consulted on as part of A City Imagining, Belfast's 10-year Cultural Strategy and Make Yourself at Home, A Vision for the Future of Tourism.
- In preparation for the Belfast Region City Deal bid, Belfast Stories engaged over 50 stakeholder organisations at over 160 meetings and presentations.
- Between August and November 2022, a 14-week public consultation was carried out on the outline plans for Belfast Stories and its first Equality Impact Assessment. This public consultation focused on gathering ideas and evidence to help shape the project brief that set out its ambition to be welcoming, accessible and reflective of the diversity of the city's stories.
- Between 19 November 2024 and 9 March 2025, Belfast City Council carried out a second consultation on Belfast Stories and its accompanying equality impact assessment (EQIA).



What we did

The second public consultation on Belfast Stories ran for 16 weeks between 19 November 2024 and 9 March 2025.

The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Continue to promote the project, raise awareness and gain buy-in
- Make sure that Belfast Stories is for everyone including equality impact assessment and rural needs impact assessment
- Gain feedback on current design thinking and plans for the next phase of the project
- Use the findings to inform the next phase of the project

The consultation presented and tested:

- The overarching concept
- The facilities mix
- The visitor experience

Consultation was themed around five project ambitions:

1. Be somewhere that Belfast people are proud of (something new)
2. Regenerate our city centre and support our city's development
3. Provide open outdoor space, accessible to all (courtyard/roof)
4. Provide facilities, activities, events, programming (creative hub)
5. Be a trusted storyteller – gathering and presenting stories

Key actions included:

- An online consultation hub was created on Belfast City Council's Your Say platform.
- The council's Equality Scheme people were notified of the public consultation and draft EQIA and invited to comment.
- The Belfast Stories equality consultative forum was established, comprising 16 experts by experience met.
- A programme of in person events and activities was delivered.



Consultation methodology

The project ambitions formed the discussion points and questions used at all in person consultation activities.

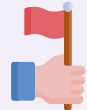
The questions were designed to be flexible so they could also be adapted and used in different settings depending on what ambitions different audiences were most interested in.

This included in:

Briefings



Walking tours



Focus groups



Art workshops



Site visits



Photography workshops



Event pop-ups



Interviews



Sectoral workshops



1 to 1 meetings

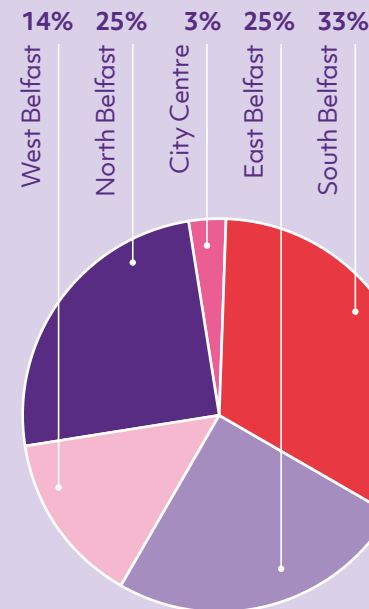


Partnership events



Who we asked

By location:



Stakeholder groups:

Geographic communities including Shankill, South Belfast, East Belfast, West Belfast, North Belfast, city centre and neighbouring communities

Political representatives

Belfast City Council staff

General public

Culture and heritage stakeholders

Artists, arts organisations and people working or interested in the arts

Section 75 groups (including LGBTQIA+, Young people, older people, people with a disability)

Stakeholders in the tourism, food and beverage and local businesses

Language organisations and representatives

Parents and carers

People from Muslim, Chinese, Polish and Roma community backgrounds and migrant workers

Voluntary and community organisations

Information was available in a range of formats:

Easy Read
British Sign Language
Irish Sign Language
HTML online
Irish language



4,900

Welcomed to Consultation Hub



514

Responses to the online survey



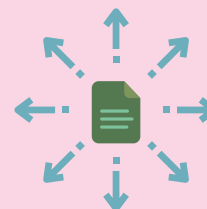
97

Responses to Draft Equality Impact Assessment



272

Downloaded consultation documents



2,500+

Documents distributed city-wide



102

In-person consultation sessions



1,014

In-person participants across stakeholder groups



4,000+

In-person participants reached



38

Media outlets used



5,000+

People reached through social posts

Would you visit Belfast Stories?



84%
of people agreed
that they would visit
Belfast Stories.

57%
said they would
'definitely' visit.

27%
said they would
'probably' visit.

Stronger levels of support were found during face-to-face engagements where the vast majority were keen or very keen to visit. The remainder were largely unsure, wanting to understand more about Belfast Stories or because it was too far in the future to think about.

You said...

Reasons to visit:

- **History & culture**
Great to see and hear stories that go beyond expected narratives of Belfast such as the Troubles and the Titanic.
- **Storytelling**
A core part of Belfast's identity and a rich tradition of oral history, literature and film that can bridge communities and capture diverse voices and narratives.
- **Arts & creativity**
Live performances, storytelling nights, spoken word events, film screenings and more.
- **Pride in Belfast**
People felt motivated to support the project out of civic pride and a desire to showcase their city.
- **Free & easy**
Great to be able to use free public space in the city centre for tourists and locals alike.

Reasons not to visit:

- **Not sure what it is**
Some people required further detail on the project to understand its relevance and value and know if it was something for them.
- **Just for tourists**
Some thought it would be focused on tourists alone.
- **Could be biased**
Some worried about potential political or cultural bias.



Would you recommend Belfast Stories to others?

82%

of people asked were likely to recommend Belfast Stories to a friend visiting Belfast.

Page 178



“I would actually love to volunteer.”

Proud of Belfast

One of the ambitions for Belfast Stories is that it will be somewhere of which people are proud. People communicated a deep personal connection to Belfast and a desire to share its stories with visitors.

These feelings of pride were qualified with a desire that any representation of the city's stories, history and culture is positive and forward looking while being respectful of the past but most importantly, it needs to be authentic.

“This project will bring people together and make us proud of where we come from.”

Family friendly

Another ambition for Belfast Stories is that it is somewhere people can go for a family stroll in the outdoors.

People felt that there is currently very limited child-friendly, public or green space in Belfast city centre. Belfast Stories was seen a welcome addition to city centre facilities.

The roof garden in particular was welcomed and considered unique for Belfast and the region, and something people were more likely to find in other European cities.

Facilities mix

People broadly welcomed the facilities mix with particularly strong support for the roof garden and courtyard.

“It’s about time we had something like this. I’m really looking forward to visiting!”



Building design

Architecture

There was virtually universal support for preserving the former Bank of Ireland building, which is an iconic and much-loved part of the city's heritage.

There were many comments about the building not appearing too cold or clinical and needing to be warm and welcoming. It was also noted that the building should be excellent in terms of its design.

People felt strongly that the open design of the building made it welcoming and accessible. They particularly liked that they could see into and through the building so that they would know what to expect inside.

This was particularly appreciated by people who might have additional reasons to feel unwelcome or unsafe such as young people, people from minoritized ethnic groups and women.

Some responses cautioned against a design that would feel cold, unwelcoming or sterile and felt that the current design signalled that it was a government building – where the public is generally not welcome.

Others felt there should be greater continuity between the outside and the inside and clear what to expect from a visit.



Entrances & Frontage

There was strong support for the four entrances so that people would feel invited from all directions. This could also increase its usage by increasing the likelihood that people would “stumble across” its thresholds. People also liked that the entrances were wide and step-free.

The greening of the streetscape was strongly welcomed. Greenery and nature can make people feel more relaxed and space look more appealing.

People also felt that they would be encouraged by seeing other people meeting, gathering and enjoying themselves to ensure that the building isn't seen as insular, rather as warm and welcoming.



Things to note

- **Gates and doors, even unlocked, even transparent, can still be a barrier.**
- **The entrance should be light and bright is important to sign language users and people with vision impairment.**
- **A small number of people expected a primary entrance on Royal Avenue.**

Experience

Orientation

It was felt that any potential confusion around multiple entrances could be mitigated by good signage, which was also generally identified as creating a sense of welcome.

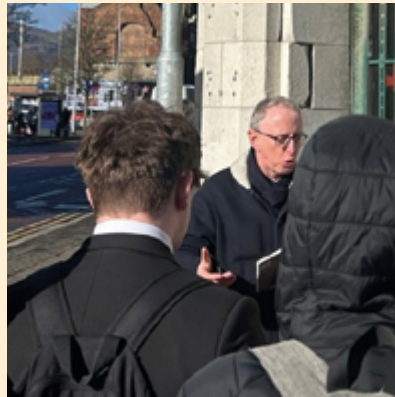
This is particularly important given the size of the site, which most people were (pleasantly) surprised to understand is significantly larger than the Bank of Ireland building.

It was also noted that signage should be in different languages, different formats including sign language and Braille, at an appropriate height and in an appropriate design and should be supported by adequate levels of helpful staff.

Staff

Staff were considered to be the main source of welcome and that their role should be to engage and interact with people, even accompanying visitors on their journey through the building, rather than simply signposting.

People emphasised the need for them to be friendly and well trained – including in supporting children and adults with additional requirements – with sign language interpretation being available provided by local interpreters in “our local language”.



Accessibility

People emphasised that best practice or universal access should be designed into the built fabric of Belfast Stories at this stage, rather than added after.

People also emphasised that access should be embedded in Belfast Stories' operation, including the provision of equipment to support people with limited mobility or sensory sensitivities.

The training, knowledge and skills of staff will be critical to ensuring quality of experience for all who visit.

A number of groups offered to test or snag Belfast Stories prior to its opening.

Others may be willing to continue to be involved in a steering, governance or critical friend role.

Public Space

The provision of free, quality, city centre public space appears to be the key attractor for residents and the open-air courtyard, and the roof-top garden were very strongly welcomed.

People liked that these spaces would connect people to nature through planting and views of the hills and create a place of tranquillity or sanctuary in the city centre.

Most people encouraged the use of local planting telling Belfast's nature story while supporting biodiversity and bioactivity.

There was strong support for community gardening whereby the green areas would be looked after by volunteers and visitors and local restaurants could use produce, similar to the 'meanwhile use' gardens currently on site.

Experience

The Courtyard

Similar to the frontage, it was felt that seeing into the courtyard and seeing people having fun there would feel welcoming.

People also expressed a desire for the courtyard to be further greened, blending the indoors and outdoors to create a welcoming sense of urban tranquillity.

As with the roof garden, there were some concerns about shelter from wind and rain. It was also suggested there could be a children's play area there.

Food

People were generally excited by the potential food offer and engaged by the idea of food stories being told across the building. Food and drink were considered a strong attractor, and good cafes and restaurants would help create a good social ambiance.

A variety of food offers would also support families, which also need to cater to different tastes. Many different people said it needed to be affordable and perhaps being able to bring your own food makes a visit more affordable still and more practical for people with restrictive diets.



Things to note

- Reverberations and reflections of hard and shiny surfaces can be difficult for older people, people with hearing loss, guide dogs and people with vision impairment who can use echolocation to aid navigation.
- Complex patterns and designs should be avoided as they can confuse and distract
- Suggested additional provision included a sensory garden, play facilities for children, a range of food offerings to suit people with dietary restrictions or to celebrate the diversity of Belfast's communities, and inclusive cafés.
- The inclusion of Irish language should be considered at the earliest stages of the design process and feel integrated into the overall experience.



Creativity

Arts and cultural activity

There was widespread enthusiasm from people for the wide range of arts and cultural activity envisaged for Belfast Stories.

People seemed to understand that it represents an opportunity for more and more accessible cultural activity that is inclusive, multigenerational and family-friendly.

Performance

- Live music including classical, experimental, trad and contemporary, from intimate gigs to large-scale concerts
- Theatre, including one-man shows and immersive performances
- Spoken word events including storytelling, comedy and poetry

Screenings

- Screenings of local and independent films

Special Events

- Special events including themed events, seasonal activities, outdoor screenings, festivals and pop-ups
- Collaborative festivals, events and activities partnering with existing providers
- Culturally diverse activity including food and language

Education & Outreach

- Educational activity such as talks, lectures and discussions on social and historical topics
- Outreach activities and events including story gathering
- Practical workshops where people could express their own stories, for example, through craft, creative writing, painting, animation or coding
- Intergenerational activity
- Cross-community activity
- Family-friendly and child-focused activities such as a dedicated kid zone with storytelling, interactive exhibits and workshops



Creativity



Page 183

Creative Hub

The creative hub was also welcomed by people as a much-needed space that could be used by artists, creatives, freelancers, students, start-ups, small businesses, community organisations and arts organisations.

People felt it could include:

Spaces

- A creative tech lab supporting, for example, editing, podcasting, coding, animation and VR
- Libraries of local publications, art books, materials, resources and equipment
- A reading room and quiet zones
- Flexible spaces for events, exhibitions, rehearsals and performances
- Drop-in and bookable workshop spaces for learning and meetings
- Artist studios for short, medium and long-term rental

Resources

- Free WiFi
- Computers
- Charging points
- Good lighting
- Comfortable seating



Visitor experience

People were generally enthusiastic about the visitor experience provided it is engaging and well balanced with a wide range of stories.

People felt that they would both enjoy and learn from the experience and that visitors would feel similar.

One person, reflecting on the storytelling that currently takes place throughout the city, loved that it would be a “permanent home for true stories”. Others felt that it shouldn’t be at the expense for further support for decentralised activity.

The concept design for how stories might be organised by time and space was positively received by people.

Feedback showed that third person narratives and history beyond living memory needs to be incorporated and developed further.

Majority of people either supported or accepted that conflict or Troubles related stories should be included.



Looking at these stories through a social prism where everyday stories are made remarkable was strongly supported.

Minority and minoritized communities in particular tended to like the idea that they and their stories would not be labelled, put into boxes or added to the edges. Rather, their stories would be integrated with others as a core part of the narrative, past, present and future.

Indeed, there was a general preference to experience the stories and lives of ordinary people, the “unsung heroes” and “everyday workers and families who built this city” rather than well-known celebrities, politicians or industrialists, although there was a desire to highlight lesser-known figures (particularly from the fields of music, sport, comedy, showbusiness and

industry). Where there was interest in famous people, it was usually in previously untold aspects of their personal, rather than public lives.

People expected stories to be told in a wide variety of ways appreciating that these would appeal to the preferences and needs of a diverse audience. Authenticity was felt to be essential to both enjoyment of the experience and trust in the story collection process.

People stressed that stories should not be sanitised, prioritising “unfiltered, sometimes challenging perspectives” over “polished narratives”. Generally, it was felt that language should be retained as told (including, for example, in sign or Irish).

Story gathering

3 out of 5 people asked said they would happily share their stories (and many more when the interaction was face-to-face). In fact, a common response was, "You'll find it hard to shut me up!"

But, what if...

People were clear about what they expected from the process:

- **Clarity** – simple and direct guidance on how it all works and how stories will be edited, interpreted and presented.
- **Respect** – confidence that stories will be safeguarded and respected.
- **Warmth** – a comfortable environment, a pleasant human conversation and maybe even a cup of tea!
- **Pride** – a sense of satisfaction that their stories will be part of a greater good that will benefit Belfast.

People did have some concerns about telling their stories so there needs to be:

- **Trust** – people need to be sure that Belfast Stories won't misuse their content in any way that misinterprets or twists it for any unstated commercial or political end.
- **Anonymity** – people want to feel confident that their anonymity will be protected and that they won't be opened up to ridicule or incrimination in any way.
- **Confidence** – people want to feel sure that their story is relevant and worth telling, particularly if they weren't born in Belfast or have just arrived.
- **Inclusivity** – people worried that their story would not be welcomed if it differed from traditional and 'normal' narratives.

Regenerating the city centre

Suggestions to help share the potential benefits of Belfast Stories included:

- **Engagement** – local and knowledgeable staff could encourage visitors to explore other parts of the city and follow up the locations of stories they like and connect with local communities.
- **Information** – excellent interpretation within Belfast Stories, explaining what visitors are looking at and how it complements other Belfast attractions such as museums and archives.
- **Connection** – easy ways to use Belfast Stories as a jumping off point for other experiences such as walking tours, restaurants, hotels, photo opportunities and experiences.
- **Diversity** – inclusion of stories from diverse communities within Belfast to ensure that visitors and participants have the chance to empathise with as wide a range of experiences as possible.



What we heard	What we will do
Many of you told us that you felt the concept designs had the potential to deliver an inclusive and welcoming building. However, you were worried that this could be lost as designs develop.	<p>We are committed to an ongoing process of review of the architectural and experience plans to maximise the sense of welcome and inclusion, particularly in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The four entrances • Signage and way finding • Public space • Accessibility
Some of you felt that the building was insular or inward looking and it could do more to connect with the surrounding streets.	Sustained engagement with the Equality Consultative Forum during RIBA stages and all S75 groups through an agreed long-term engagement plan.
Some of you expressed concerns that the city centre wouldn't be ready to welcome Belfast Stories and that further consideration needed to be given to the infrastructure and development required to fully maximise the regeneration potential.	<p>We are committed to working closely with teams within Belfast City Council and across the city to ensure that Belfast Stories can deliver for the people of Belfast. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with Translink, city council departments and government to design transport and travel solutions including accessible parking and sustainable transport options. • Engage with public and private stakeholders to maximise regeneration and reduce concerns around blight, safety and anti-social behaviour.

What we heard	What we will do
<p>You provided us with specific feedback in relation to the draft concept designs.</p> <p>We can't change the design based on every individual comment, but we've looked at common areas and have agreed to consider these in the next iteration of the design.</p>	<p>We've been working with our designs teams and will be doing further design on work on a number of areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the Bank of Ireland building is both sensitively restored and fully integrated into the visitor experience. Part of preserving the built heritage is to make it as active and accessible as possible. • Resolving the tension between the desire for a bold architectural statement and the need for the building to feel approachable and in context for the area. • Further consideration of the courtyard – use, weather protection, informal zones that feel safe and sociable. • Further consideration of the rooftop terrace/garden in relation to accessibility, public views, green space and gathering areas that are free to use. • Further considerations for an experience that is intuitive, layered, and multisensory, with moments of intensity and moments of calm. • Further consideration regarding the creative hub and the uses for creation and not just consumption. Requirement for flexible and hands on workshop spaces. • Consideration of how stories can be rendered throughout the building.



What we heard

Some of you felt that the idea of Belfast Stories was focussed more on visitors, and you were concerned that local people wouldn't feel welcome or connected.

What we will do

We recognise that how we engage and communicate with the city now will impact how people feel about Belfast Stories when it opens in 2030. We will therefore develop sustained programmes of engagement and review all our marketing and communications including:

- Agree and promote key messages in plain, accessible and augmented formats.
- Develop clear strategy for how Irish language will be integrated into the experience.
- Consider the multi-lingual options for story gathering and visitor servicing.
- Focused programme of engagement with all S75 groups during future RIBA stages to ensure integrated representation in the design of the building, experience and stories development.
- Develop initiatives to address feelings of 'exclusion' from the protestant and broader unionist communities.
- Further equality screening in 2026 as part of planning consultation.

What we heard

Many of you welcomed the progress that has been made since 2022 on how we propose to tell stories.

However, some of you continue to have concerns that storytelling will be partisan, binary or represent a narrow perspective of Belfast.

What we will do

- Acceleration of the ethical framework
- Development of a story gathering programme and curatorial guidelines that considers:
 - Priorities for further engagement such as older people.
 - An agreed approach to co-authorship, diverse representation, ongoing gathering of lived stories.
 - Testing of story gathering processes and tools with people who are less likely to come forward.



What we heard

Some of you were worried that your views wouldn't be taken on board and that there wouldn't be ongoing opportunities to input into the project as it moves through stages into more detailed designs and decisions.

This extended beyond the physical design of the building to areas such as the operational model including management, staffing and ticketing.

What we will do

We will develop a structured long-term programme of engagement up to 2030 that will include:

- Engagement plan and stakeholder mapping reviewed in advance of RIBA Stage 3.
- Consideration of what, how and when to consult in relation to operational model.
- Development of Belfast Stories champions or ambassadors.
- Ongoing collaboration with key stakeholder groups (for example, tourism, local business, local communities, communities of interest and identity) with the aim of creating good neighbours, good stories and good will. This should include:
 - Ongoing engagement with key groups who have expressed a strong interest in continuing to support the development.
 - Ongoing engagement with key groups who may be less supportive of the concept or who may face additional barriers to its benefits.
 - Ongoing engagement with a refreshed equality consultative forum.
 - Development of how to communicate and respond issues perceived, e.g. perceived prioritisation of tourists over locals, political or cultural bias etc.
 - Consideration for training and volunteering programmes.

How we will keep you updated



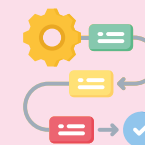
In response to what we've heard our designs teams have already made some changes and these will be set out in our end of stage report (RIBA stage 2) to be published in September 2025.



We'll be having a further public consultation as part of the planning process and it is anticipated that this will take place in October–November 2025.



We'll continue to take your feedback forward into the next design stage and report back at the end RIBA Stage 3 in 2026.



We will provide regular updates through our new engagement structures that we are planning to launch in October 2025.

In the meantime stay in touch with us through social media or contacting the team directly.

Get in touch

Online Hub

<https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfast-stories>

Social Media

Facebook @belfaststories

Instagram @belfast_stories

Website

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfaststories

If you are interested in hosting an event or would like us to attend a group that you are involved with, please contact the Belfast Stories team on:

028 9032 0202

belfaststories@belfastcity.gov.uk

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Belfast Stories Workplan 2025/26

ENGAGEMENT, COMUNICATIONS AND STORIES DEVELOPMENT

Reference Documents

Engagement (including public consultations)	Communications	Stories programme and development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public consultation 2022 documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Public consultation document 2022 o Equality Impact assessment (EQIA) and Rural Needs Impact Assessment 2022 o Public Consultation Report 2022/23 o EQIA decision report 2024/25 - Engagement and communications strategy 2024 - Draft Engagement Plan from interpretive masterplan team 2024 - Public consultation 2024/25 document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Public Consultation document 2024/25 o Equality Impact assessment (EQIA) and Rural Needs Impact Assessment 2024/25 o Public Consultation Report 2024/25 o EQIA decision report 2024/25 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communications Strategy 2024 - Key messaging 2023/24 - Belfast Stories partners toolkit 2024 - Issues management document 2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Story Collection Framework 2021/22 - Stories Audit 2023 - Stories Pilot Programme 2024 - Interpretive masterplan 2024 - Experience concept design 2025 - Ethical Framework (RAA) 2025

Key Activities – July 2025 – March 2026

Detailed action plans to be developed that respond to:

- Public Consultation Findings
- Draft Ethical Framework
- RIBA stage 2 – Final Concept Designs

Engagement	Complete by
Host programme of public tours of Bank of Ireland and site	Ongoing (May 2025 +)
Continue and commence planned creative engagement/ stories-based pilots with neighbouring communities in Carrickhill and Lower Shankill	Ongoing (February 2025 +)
Host Stories Network #4 to share public consultation findings and initial actions Schedule 1 to 1 follow up meetings	July 2025
Engage with local businesses to outline timeline and planned activity on the site	July / August 2025
Appoint engagement partner (quotation) to focus on engagement with S75 and manage groups such as the equality consultative forum and proposed young people forum	August 2025
Participate in European Heritage Open Days	September 2025
Review and update stakeholder mapping	September 2025
Develop structured & long-term engagement plan to 2030 with key stakeholders and groups incl. S75 groups	September 2025
Review structures and implement recommendations from the 2024/25 public consultation feedback i.e. Stories Network, Equality Consultative Forum, young people forum, statutory partner engagement	September 2025
Map out and deliver ongoing engagement with city stakeholders through established Council structures	September 2025 onwards
Deliver a third public consultation as part of the planning process	October 2025 – December 2025
Deliver key programmes and partnerships agreed in long term engagement plan	October 2025 – March 2026

Develop and implement a plan for ambassadors and project champions moving forward	December 2025
Complete an update to the equality screening as part of planning consultation	December 2025
Agree priorities for next phase of consumer testing and map out against design development and business modelling	February 2026
Communications	Complete by
Publicly share findings and report from Public Consultation 2024/25 (<i>following Committee Approval</i>)	July 2025
Social media – repost dates for public tours of the Bank of Ireland building and surrounding site	July 2025
Social media – European Heritage Open Day (EHOD) activity promotion and digital assets development	August 2025
Issues management (<i>site investigations begin late 2025</i>)	August 2025
Review of marketing and communications to promote key messages going forward including in plain, accessible and augmented formats	October 2025
Manage and media scan re new concept designs shared publicly as part of planning consultation	October 2025
Consultation launch (<i>RIBA Stage 3 planning consultation - planning and design</i>)	October 2025
Launch of stories gathering programmes and pilots	October 2025
Social media – consultation activities	November 2025
Develop branding brief and strategy to be taken forward following Contract for Funding	January 2026
Develop long-term marketing plans with critical path working with Tourism Ireland, Tourism NI and Visit Belfast	March 2026
Stories Programme and Development	Complete by
Stories development plan presented to SP&R to set out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated Ethical Framework - Stories Panel Terms of Reference - Relationship with Council’s heritage development and neighbourhood tourism programmes - Strategic Partners - Criteria for support for partner projects - Direct delivery – story gathering including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Story sharing sessions – format-based o Story sharing sessions – partner-based 	September 2025

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Digital story sharing campaign ○ Co-curation pilot (to interrogate time-space) 	
Set up Stories Panel	October 2025
Develop and implement Partnership Agreement with NI Screen	September 2025
Deliver Stories development plan	Oct 25 – March 26
Complete Phase 3 of Augment the City	January 2026
Develop and implement volunteering plan	January 2026
Pilot creative commissioning approaches including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local artist advisor group workshops - Pilot commissioning cycle (trial / open call) - Pilot pitching window (temporary / long term) - Belfast Stories artist in residence programme 	February 2026
Deliver project to test how Belfast Stories infrastructure and assets could act as a hub for communities – tools for togetherness pilot	March 2026
Deliver project on relationship between climate resilience and stories	March 2026
Develop specification for digital ‘stories engine’ and appoint software developer/contractor	March 2026
Agree commissioning model and curatorial guidelines	March 2026

Belfast Stories

Ethical Framework

Page 195

PREPARED BY RAA
JUNE 2025

RAA

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Methodology	3
2. What is Belfast Stories?	5
3. Ethical Guidelines	9
4. Practical Considerations / Next Steps	21
5. References	25

1. Introduction and Methodology

1.1 What is an ethical framework and why do we need it?

Birmingham Museums Trust framed its recent Citizens Jury initiative as follows:

‘What does Birmingham need and want from its museums, now and in the future; and what should Birmingham Museums Trust do to make these things happen?’

The Ethical Framework is a step on the path of Belfast Stories becoming Belfast Stories. Who are we? What do people need us to do? What are our values and principles? What do we need to do to make these things happen?

The Ethical Framework asks what it means to apply the project’s values in practice, with particular reference to the Story Cycle and Stories Engine: the two concepts that govern the who / what / how of the stories themselves. The Framework starts to establish structured approaches to addressing real issues and to help guide decision-making as the project moves forward.

The Framework is, by its nature, a living document that will continue to evolve. But there is no question that it needs to be in place now, even if we acknowledge that it is, and likely always will be, unfinished. Already, the design development and public consultation phases have raised scenarios that do or will require an ethics-based response (and, in some instances, have helped us understand what this response should be). Part of the process is about being open to change and actively seeking input—understanding that the Ethical Framework only makes sense as a collaborative endeavour.

1.2 Methodology

The first step of developing the Ethical Framework was to review the previous work that has laid out important groundwork and to carry out precedent research (all references are listed in Section 5). While some precedent projects were selected because they represent important standards in the field of cultural heritage (e.g. ICOM’s Code of Ethics), many of them are relevant because they model effective approaches to dealing with difficult, contested or marginalised stories; for these projects, living up to their values has often meant coming up with new ways of working. This is not about innovation for innovation’s sake, but about designing tools and processes with and for users.

The working principles were then developed as part of a back-and-forth creative dialogue between members of the IMP, taking inspiration from the Project Charter, the precedent research and findings from the public consultation. The workshop with members of the Equality Consultative Forum in February 2025 was particularly influential as it asked participants to work through issues relating to story collection.

How would you like to tell your story?

What might make you think twice about giving your story to Belfast Stories?

What might encourage you to give your story?

One of the threads that emerges in the Ethical Framework is that process is as important as outcome. That is, how we build a collection of stories is as important as the stories themselves. This is an ongoing process, that needs to be questioned, tested, improved. We understand that it’s actually by living out our ethical principles that we’ll achieve the ambition for Belfast Stories. We understand that we need to articulate these principles in a way that everyone and anyone joining the project can understand, so that we can achieve our outcomes together.

2. What is Belfast Stories?

2.1 What is Belfast Stories?

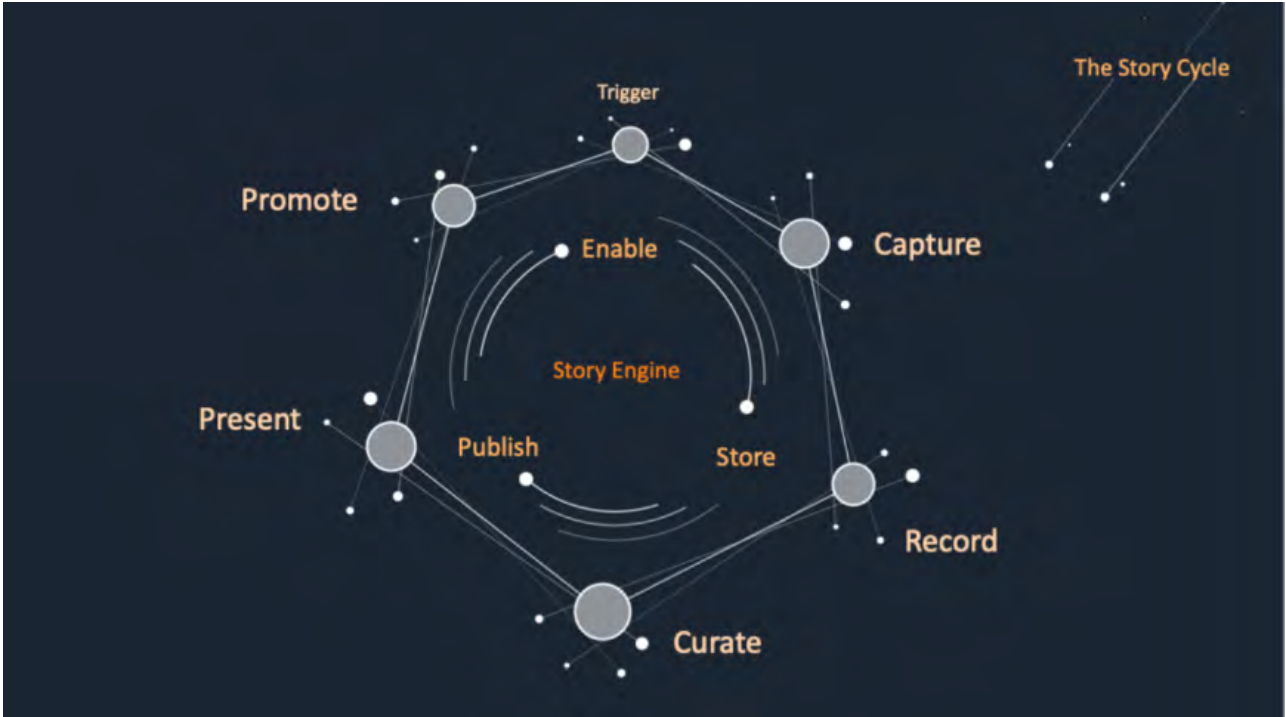
Belfast Stories is an ambitious new attraction for Belfast city centre. Its vision is to offer visitors and locals a way to connect with the stories of the people of Belfast told by the people who call it home. Full of passion, humour, joy and sorrow, Belfast Stories is a new and completely original way to enjoy the life and times of this vibrant, brilliant and complicated city. Some stories will be old, some will be new; all will weave together to create a new perspective on what we think we know about the place we call home.

[from The Journey So Far report, 2023]

The essence of Belfast Stories is the stories themselves. Without the physical building, there could still be Belfast Stories; but without the stories, the project doesn’t exist. Recognising this, Belfast Stories aspires to be a radical facilitator of stories. What does that mean? It means embracing alternative paradigms and challenging institutional approaches to storytelling. It means fostering a power dynamic at the heart of the process that acknowledges that the role of the organisation is explicitly to platform people’s stories—not the authority or the authorial voice of the organisation. It means approaching the task with humanity, humility and humour: designing processes that are built from the ground up, to meet the real needs of real people.

2.2 What is the Story Cycle?

The Story Cycle is the simple idea that behind any encounter with a story (in the visitor attraction, for example) sits a process. This process goes from the initial invitation or trigger for a story, through its collection, processing, presentation and more. Fundamentally, the process works as a cycle: Belfast Stories isn’t finite, it’s always growing. Each story can be the invitation for the next.



© Nerve Centre, 2024

2.3 What is the Stories Engine?

The Stories Engine is what powers Belfast Stories. It is both a philosophy and a practice that positions Belfast Stories as a radical facilitator of storytelling. It will exist in physical form as a series of spaces and resources, but before that, and alongside, it exists as a way of conceptualising and supporting the Story Cycle. In due course, the Stories Engine will include people (programmers, story collectors, curators, collection managers, archivists, teachers / trainers) and facilities (story gathering equipment, storage, workshop / classroom spaces, archive). Like any engine, the Stories Engine needs ongoing input and maintenance.

2.4 What do we value?

The Project Charter (2024) established a set of shared values that govern how we behave to each other as members of the project / professional teams. Having tested these values throughout the RIBA2 design and public consultation phase, we have experienced first-hand how useful the values are in directing behaviours and guiding decisions. We now believe that these values can be applied to all aspects of the project and, specifically, that they are an important foundation for the Ethical Framework.

We believe that our behaviours should reflect our shared values through a commitment to be:

- **Respectful**
of each other, honest in all our dealings with our people and our place
- **Brave**
courageous, confident, assured, emboldened, spirited, hopeful
- **Inclusive**
leaving no one behind, generous, participative, collaborative
- **Creative**
imaginative, visionary, authentic, dynamic
- **Regenerative**
sustainable, resilient, renewing

These values are a useful checklist for the work of the Stories Engine. Everything we set up should be checked in relation to the values, using them to hold ourselves accountable. This is not about imposing impossible expectations on the project. It's about creating generous boundaries that help us define the work we do and how we do it. Faced with choices and pressures, the values should help us to plan and prioritise.

2.5 What does it mean...?

We recognise that other projects may validly define things differently, but—in keeping with our values—we want to be upfront about Belfast Stories' interpretation. These key definitions have all been shaped by the project values, by public consultation and by the project development so far. It should be noted that in almost every instance we are keeping space for people's own interpretation. That said, we also understand that people like to know what we mean when we refer to some of these potentially slippery concepts.

Story: the Story Collection Framework (January 2022) introduced a deliberately broad definition of stories as 'voices, feelings, experiences, memories, and expressions that reveal past, present and future-constructed narratives and form connections with the people.' The Framework also advocated that 'multiple formats be considered to express the richness, dynamism and complexity of the city's stories'. Workshops with the Equality Consultative Forum supported the broad approach to formats and also underlined the fact that people have an instinctive understanding of what makes a story *when that's what they're asked for*. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but how someone frames an experience can change depending on whether they're asked to tell a story or whether they're being interviewed for, say, a piece of historical research. A story may be collected (from individuals as part of a stories network event, say, or from existing collections) or created (working with facilitators and resources at Belfast Stories). Whatever its genesis, every story is equally valued.

2.5 What does it mean...?

Belfast Story: over the course of consultation with the public people have asked, *what is a Belfast story?, do I have to be Belfast born and bred to contribute a story?, what about the stories of people who have left Belfast?* In keeping with the project’s commitment to inclusivity and an overall spirit of generosity, our approach is to be as open as possible. Anyone who feels a connection to Belfast and has what they think of as a Belfast Story is encouraged to participate. This includes visitors to the attraction.

Storyteller: the storyteller is primarily the person contributing the story of their lived experience. The project will present their authentic and unfiltered stories, with the voice of the storyteller ringing out loud and clear. That said, as the project has developed, we realise that a level of curation and facilitation is essential in the gathering, organising and presenting of stories. This means that in some (perhaps many) instances, a story will be a collaboration between the person who lived the experience and a mediator (who may be a curator, an artist or other facilitator). In every instance we will be clear about who was involved in telling the story, without drowning the experience in a process narrative!

First Person: representing someone’s own lived experience, told from their perspective. One of the core concepts for Belfast Stories is the absence of top-down narratives. Emphasising first-person stories helps us to build from the bottom-up. Similarly, although we recognise the power of community identity, we will work to acknowledge and present each storyteller as an individual, not as a representative of a bigger group. Personal experience can include a memory, a retelling, or

a rediscovery of a story. For example, a grandchild remembers their granny telling them a story of their childhood, or an archaeologist tells the story of uncovering evidence of people who lived in Belfast a thousand years ago. In this way, first person doesn’t limit us to living memory but lets us connect back through generations.

True: people are asked to contribute true stories. We acknowledge that storytelling is a fundamentally creative act and that memory is coloured by experience and emotion. Within those parameters, and ensuring that certain key safeguards are in place, we will work on the basis of trust and good faith: we won’t question a person’s truth, nor will we fact check the stories. That said, we reserve the right not to platform certain material and / or to contextualise it. NMNI’s Ethics Policy is a valuable precedent in this regard.

Time and Space: the Interpretive Masterplan (July 2024) moved away from thematic organisation in favour of two universal organising principles, time and space. Every story will be tagged with the time and location where it took place. In some cases this may need to be fluid—for example, people may provide make-believe or subjective times and places. The Interpretive Masterplan also suggested that each story be tagged with an emotion (or multiple emotions) and that tagging with secondary themes could be introduced by curators as useful metadata for the future.

Sliding Scale for Participation: consent, though vital to the story gathering process, is not participation. We don’t just want people to consent to their stories being part of the project; we want them to be actively involved. We want to avoid having storytellers feeling that Belfast Stories may house their

story but is something very removed from their lives: *for tourists, not for me*. But we also understand that people will participate in different ways. Some people will come to the project with a story fully formed. Others would like to participate but need support. Still others are willing for their story to be used by others but will need time before they are comfortable with other forms of involvement (if they ever are). The sliding scale is a way of acknowledging that we are trying to avoid proscribing how people should contribute stories and that at every stage of the Story Cycle we will offer a range of ways of participating.

The idea of the sliding scale of participation links to the idea that there are different ways that your story could be used (or reused) at Belfast Stories. These range from the short-term and ephemeral, to the longer term but still within the boundaries of the site, to use in digital sphere, as part of marketing campaigns, or as merchandise / commercial opportunities. There is also a scenario where stories (within the concept of the Story Cycle) are used as inspiration for a new creative work. As detailed in the Ethical Guidelines section, we will be very clear about these different uses and the rights of storytellers to choose if and how their stories are used.

3. Ethical Guidelines

3.1 Working Principles

The values, the ethical parameters developed for the Story Collection Framework and the precedent research have shaped a set of four working principles. These are a way of distilling multiple ideals for the project into value-based ways of working. The working principles can be understood as the bridge between the values and specific tasks and tools.



WORKING
TRANSPARENTLY



Working transparently is about showing the work, making the process visible. It acknowledges that there are different ways of doing things and, therefore, choices to be made. It is about being honest about those choices and the reasons they were taken—and about actively eliciting comment and critique. It’s about embedding a culture of accountability in the organisation: a willingness to confront problems and talk about them. Transparency helps to establish Belfast Stories as trustworthy, linking to the next principle: working reciprocally.

WORKING
RECIPROCALLY



Working reciprocally is fundamentally about trust. It is about working in good faith, about prioritising generosity and porosity, making it clear that this platform belongs to everyone. It’s about valuing each story and the integrity of each storyteller and resisting any idea of sanitising or tidying up stories. It acknowledges that the story gathering process is a two-way relationship that can only work in an environment of trust. It seeks out ways to share resources, learnings and ideas and is known for welcoming and supporting initiatives generated by others (ie Belfast Stories doesn’t always need to be the instigator or get the acclaim). It emphasises the notion of the cycle, as opposed to a finite, fixed journey, so that every output becomes the beginning of something new.

WORKING
CAREFULLY



Working carefully is about human-centred ways of working. It’s about learning from trauma-informed practice and developing processes that centre users and their needs. This includes robust safeguarding practices as well as mental health support for everyone involved in the Story Cycle—whether as storytellers, collectors, curators or other. It’s about weaving sustainability and sustainable practices into the Stories Engine, mindful that being careful is also about caring for future generations.

WORKING
RESPONSIVELY



Working responsively means meeting people where they are and listening to what they need. It’s about having a range of flexible formats and ways of working—and acknowledging that there’s always room for new ideas and processes and that many of these will and should come from outside the organisation. It’s about a commitment to learning, change and renewal, encouraging people to consider that what’s right for now, or was right then, might not be right in the future. It’s about the idea that Belfast Stories will always be unfinished.

3.2 Case Studies



Society of American Archivists

The Society of American Archivists’ Code of Ethics (which is used as a benchmark by multiple organisations, including the Oral History Association) is an example of coupling inspiration and practicality. It is notable for the clarity with which it connects a summary of the core work of archivists, to the values of archivists, to the code of ethics for archivists. In this way, the ethics don’t sit in a vacuum; the values inform the ethics, the ethics inform the work—and vice versa. The code emphasises the importance of transparency and accountability: the responsibility to record and share your work is presented as fundamental to the role of the archivist. The other key takeaway from the SAA’s Code of Ethics is that it has clearly been designed to be a useful resource to its members, not a document gathering dust on a shelf. It’s succinct, with an easy-to-follow logic and helpful real-world examples.



Birmingham Museums Trust Citizens Jury

The BMT Citizens Jury initiative was the first of its kind to take place in a UK museum, although others have taken place in Germany. The independently facilitated jury invited randomly selected citizens to take part in a process that honestly questioned the point of the BMT. It’s an example of an organisation listening (to a radical degree) to citizens’ wants and needs and using them to inform its future direction. It commits the Museum Trust to meeting these needs, not a set of outcomes developed in isolation. What comes across clearly in both the report of the BMT Citizens Jury and the sessions carried out for Belfast Stories with the Equality Consultative Forum is how open and generous the citizens are inclined to be ... albeit with an ingrained suspicion of institutional railroading. This speaks to the importance of good faith and trust. People want to trust us ... we need to be worthy of that trust, which means working with people in good faith.



War Childhood Museum

The award-winning War Childhood Museum documents the stories of people who experienced childhood in conflict zones. The project started as a Facebook project to provide a platform for people to share their experiences, and has grown to encompass a physical museum in Sarajevo as well as several satellite projects and a growing collection. Over the course of that transition, the museum has evolved processes to gather and share stories. As the WCM collects first-person testimonies, it has a lot of useful learnings for Belfast Stories. In particular, because the Museum is dealing with traumatic stories and, often, traumatised storytellers, it places great emphasis on trauma-informed practice, care and safeguarding. The Museum is extremely open and public-facing about its process, how and what it collects and what happens to the material. It provides a trained team to facilitate the gathering process and also provides emotional and psychological support for donors and staff.



Decade of Centenaries

In 2011, the National Lottery Heritage Fund worked with the Community Relations Council to develop a set of principles to be used in selecting events to be marked in the Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022. These principles are a useful case study for Belfast Stories because they start with the understanding that heritage (and, by extension, narrative) is a process and adopt a ‘conscious pluralist approach’. The principles promote multiple perspectives over a single viewpoint, emphasise the importance of drawing on expertise and critical analysis and of locating interpretation within a broad historical context. Although the principles were clearly developed to address the interpretation of a particular (and particularly contentious) series of historical events, nonetheless they are an important precedent in how a pluralist approach can work, particularly when multiple perspectives are placed against a shared setting. For the Decade of Centenaries, this was the national and European setting of the time; for Belfast Stories, the ‘time and space’ curatorial framework provides a common thread.

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

The guidelines have been developed by taking core activities from the Story Cycle and Stories Engine and applying the working principles to them. Going into this process, we were particularly mindful that collecting and sharing stories of the Troubles would require careful working through of deeply sensitive issues and a clear set of ethical standards. As we have developed the guidelines, we have come to understand the importance of extending the same ethical standards to all stories and storytellers, regardless of the subject matter.

Invitation

We believe that the first contact between (future) storytellers and Belfast Stories is a significant moment. The invitation to engage needs to be honest and open. Consent can be an ongoing process, but at this point it is important that Belfast Stories communicates clearly the ask, the opportunity and the rights of users. This is also a moment to flag any issues and obtain consent for the initial phase of participation.

WORKING TRANSPARENTLY



- Be clear about the ask and the process
- Be honest about who (else) will be involved
- Be transparent about the project’s finances, governance and the return for the public—particularly where stories are used as part of revenue generating activities (i.e. we’re asking you to contribute your story for free ... what do you get back?)

WORKING RECIPROCALLY



- Welcome input and acknowledge that the story-gathering process is a collaboration
- Emphasise listening and bring a humility to the process—this should be a meeting of equals
- Make it easy for people to understand the different ways stories can be used—and the fact that not all stories will feature in the exhibition
- Make the process of opting-in / out user-friendly: avoid legal or other jargon

WORKING CAREFULLY



- Be informed about any potential issues and about the rights of users
- Design the process with the needs of storytellers in mind—make it as easy as possible for as many people as possible to get involved
- Be ready to adapt the invitation for different people and different contexts

WORKING RESPONSIVELY



- Offer a range of ways of engaging and be open to suggestions
- Make it clear to storytellers that they can change their mind about level of participation during the process—whether that’s about giving limited consent initially and then potentially extending that, consenting to a broad selection of uses and later narrowing the selection, or deciding they want to withdraw from the process entirely.

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

Collection

Story collection can happen in a number of ways. It might be self-led, where a storyteller writes, records or in another way creates their story to contribute to the project. It might be supported by a story collector who provides prompts and guidelines to draw out the story and records it for the storyteller. It might be facilitated by an artist or producer. However it happens, the process is as important as the outcome. Put simply, if people don't find the process to be positive, they won't want to contribute their stories. The following guidelines reflect trauma-informed practice.

WORKING TRANSPARENTLY



- Restate clearly the different ways people can choose to engage and the process of opting in / out
- Make it clear that storytellers are empowered to make choices: decision-making rests with them
- Aim to accept all stories, but make any limitations on what will be accepted clear and be ready to answer questions and help people to find creative workarounds (the most obvious limitations will be in relation to size / format e.g. we won't collect a huge object, but there may also be stories that have to be rejected because they break the law or infringe on somebody's rights.)

WORKING RECIPROCALLY



- Establish an open-door culture for the Stories Engine
- Recognise the privilege that comes with being part of an organisation and that this can create an inequitable power dynamic (e.g. 'experts' vs 'inexpert members of the public')
- Acknowledge and celebrate the authority and expertise of the storytellers: they are the holders of the Belfast Story/ies
- Work to ensure that the people collecting and facilitating stories reflect the diversity of the city, understanding that this is a long-term commitment and will take time to establish trust

WORKING CAREFULLY



- Wherever story collection takes place, invest time and resources in creating a warm, comfortable and safe environment, accessible to all
- Check in with storytellers about consent and their comfort with their chosen level of participation
- Provide easy-to-follow directions to guide people through the story collection process
- Provide emotional and mental health support to participants and collectors / facilitators. Normalise the idea that this is part of the process.

WORKING RESPONSIVELY



- One size doesn't fit all! Tailor collecting methods to the needs of different people and support as many different formats as possible
- Be open to including new and different formats; facilitate digital and physical collecting side by side
- Regularly review processes and facilities for story collection and allocate annual resource for updating / amending them

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

Processing

Once collected, Belfast Stories has a duty of care to the stories it holds. Part of this is how stories are processed: how they're tagged, what metadata is applied to them, how they enter the collection. The Interpretive Masterplan suggested that every story be tagged with time, place and emotion. It also allowed for the inclusion of secondary tags and the possibility of including demographic information, responding to the brief to ensure stories reflect the diversity of the city. Any secondary tagging needs to be approached with a great deal of thought and care, to avoid identity 'straitjackets' being introduced by the back door. At the same time, we recognise that this information could be of use to future researchers and storytellers. The question of how stories are stored with care is addressed in Section 4.

WORKING TRANSPARENTLY



- Document the processing methodology and make it publicly available
- Invite regular reviews of the process, including the choice of tags and other metadata that are used
- Set up an oversight group that includes a range of perspectives, from within and outside heritage / cultural fields

WORKING RECIPROCALLY



- Commit to preserving the authentic meaning of each story and respecting the integrity of the storyteller ... don't impose any post-rationalisation or sanitisation
- Partner with other organisations engaged in this kind of work and share learning and resources
- Consider a generous approach to the idea of ownership: if copyright rests with Belfast Stories, can Belfast Stories adopt a Creative Commons licence to share as much material as possible? (See Section 4: IP and Rights)

WORKING CAREFULLY



- Acknowledge that the custodianship and stewardship of people's stories is a sensitive and important task
- Embed a culture of care for stories in the organisation: every single story and storyteller is valued

WORKING RESPONSIVELY



- Ensure that there is an accessible and responsive interface in place for the public to explore and work with the story collection
- Regularly review processes and facilities and allocate annual resource for updating / amending them

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

Curation

Belfast Stories wants to avoid introducing an institutional ‘we’ that would elide the presence and role of people in the processing, selection and presentation of stories. We will be transparent about the involvement of a curatorial team (and others involved in the Stories Engine), flag their input and share their process. This is never about making team members feel exposed or vulnerable, but about making the work behind the scenes visible. A collective approach to curation helps to cultivate a supportive culture, making it easier to ask and answer difficult questions and to take interesting and brave decisions.

WORKING TRANSPARENTLY



- Be upfront about the role of curators and the Stories Engine and make their inputs part of the experience

WORKING RECIPROCALLY



- Make sure that we don’t inadvertently endow the curators with a position of privilege. This is an important job, but on the same level as the contribution of storytellers. Belfast Stories needs both to thrive.
- Encourage curators to tell their stories so they can experience the Story Cycle from the perspective of storytellers
- Establish collective curatorial decision-making as the norm

WORKING CAREFULLY



- Support curators and empower them to make decisions
- Create a supportive environment that welcomes different perspectives and invites challenge

WORKING RESPONSIVELY



- Take curation out into the city, rather than working behind closed doors
- Regular workshops and with collaborators and partners to discuss curatorial principles and explore new approaches, responding to live issues and opportunities
- Regularly review processes and facilities and allocate annual resource for updating / amending them

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

Presentation

The mark of a good story is that it elicits an emotional response. People (storytellers, staff, visitors) will have emotional responses to the presentation of content, particularly in the paid visitor attraction, and we need to respond with empathy. The presentation will also require curatorial decisions about which stories are included, where they are located, and which stories sit next to each other. There are particular sensitivities relating to stories of conflict, but the reality is that a careful approach needs to be extended to all stories. The issue of having stories representing different perspectives and beliefs and, potentially, very different feelings (joy next to sorrow, for example) has been discussed at length. While we believe that these juxtapositions are part of the identity and the impact of Belfast Stories (in the words of one of the members of the Equality Consultative Forum, ‘that’s what life is like’) we also understand that this could be difficult for many and needs to be approached with awareness and sensitivity.

WORKING TRANSPARENTLY



- Be clear about the decisions that have informed the presentation and the choices made with regard to the selection and co-location of stories, particularly (though not exclusively) with reference to conflict-related stories

WORKING RECIPROCALLY



- Offer storytellers free / discounted access to the exhibition
- Make it easy for storytellers to find their stories in the exhibition
- Set aside times for storytellers and their families to visit the exhibition

WORKING CAREFULLY



- Belfast Stories is committed to not sanitising stories. However, some stories of an explicit or graphic nature may be inappropriate for a general audience. Any such material will be the subject of consultation and we will look for ways of sharing it without compromising the safety of, for example, children and vulnerable people.
- Provide support tools and resources for visitors (e.g. content advisories) and have trained staff in the attraction to welcome, answer questions, help people navigate and provide emotional support
- Provide context for stories, not to either amplify or minimise someone’s story, but to provide background that can help people engage in good faith
- Set aside times for people with specific needs to visit the exhibition (e.g. relaxed slots for neurodivergent visitors)

WORKING RESPONSIVELY



- Design a highly flexible exhibition structure, in line with the commitment to present as many different stories as possible in as many different formats as possible
- Commit to a regular cycle of change in the paid attraction
- Create space for people to respond to the stories

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

Authorship, Collaboration & Acknowledgement

Belfast Stories will attribute authorship to storytellers: even if storytellers choose anonymity, we will respect the voice of the creator and never subsume them within an institutional voice or compromise their integrity. This also extends to naming or otherwise recognising the authorship of curatorial contributions e.g. the person who wrote contextual material for a part of the exhibition. We will be clear where stories have been edited in any way. Recognising that sometimes a story can be a collective effort, we will acknowledge the participation of collaborators. This approach extends from the idea of radical facilitation: the role of the Stories Engine is to facilitate, but never to get in the way of, or obscure, the storytellers and their stories.

WORKING TRANSPARENTLY



- Assign an author/s to each story, even if that author is ‘anonymous’
- Flag the input of curators
- We anticipate that sometimes a story may need to be edited for length. If a story has been edited, this will be communicated in a simple and straightforward way.
- We are committed to not sanitising stories. Where a story raises difficult issues, or contains potentially confusing language or content, we will address this through annotation / contextualisation rather than editing.

WORKING RECIPROCALLY



- Be generous in acknowledging the contribution of storytellers—people should feel ownership and pride in their stories

WORKING CAREFULLY



- Contributing a story means people are putting a piece of themselves out in the world. We need to recognise this vulnerability and ensure that the principle ‘all stories and all storytellers are valued’ is entrenched in the organisation.

WORKING RESPONSIVELY



- Although community identity is important to people, Belfast Stories will emphasise the individuality of each storyteller and will make no assumptions, nor invite assumptions, that any individual speaks for a wider group or community. If a story is created through collaboration and / or as a group effort this will be acknowledged but, again, making it clear that the group speaks for themselves.
- Acknowledgement matters to people. We want to change paradigms about how people’s contributions are recognised and promote the idea that Belfast Stories is a collective creative effort.

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

Communication & Promotion

Communication is a thread that runs through the whole Story Cycle. Good communication is vital at each stage of the process: ensuring storytellers are informed, confident of their rights and options (including the right to change their mind), supported, positive. But communication and promotion also have an important place in making sure that the cycle continues ... both process and stories need to be shared externally in a way that is consistent with the values and ethical principles of the project and encourages people to get involved. Making it obvious that Belfast Stories is open to (and positively thrives on) input and challenge is an ongoing task, not a short-term effort. It needs to become part of the organisation’s culture that every communication that goes out explicitly invites input / engagement in some way.

WORKING
TRANSPARENTLY



- Regularly share updates on what’s going on in Belfast Stories and be open about difficulties as well as successes
- Make it easy for people to follow processes and methodologies e.g. by publishing them online, by making it second nature to explain the work ... in a way that’s accessible to the general public

WORKING
RECIPROCALLY



- Approach all communication in good faith
- Set up a citizens’ forum that brings people together to test Belfast Stories’ propositions and interrogate its processes and methods

WORKING
CAREFULLY



- What we say and how we say it is vital. We can (and should) be funny and real, but never glib, never losing sight of the responsibility of caring for storytellers and their stories.

WORKING
RESPONSIVELY



- Remember that we are committed to meeting people where they are and think about this when planning communications and promoting the project
- Use communication and promotion as an opportunity to start a dialogue, create a new story

3.3 Ethical Guidelines

Partnerships

The Stories Audit carried out by Starling Start (May 2023) is an excellent resource in terms of identifying existing story collections / collectors in Belfast and outlining barriers and recommendations in relation to accessing collections and partnership working. The following points are drawn extensively from Starling Start’s report, augmented by follow up discussions during the RIBA 2 design development phase.

WORKING TRANSPARENTLY



- Acknowledge the wealth of storytelling and story collecting organisations across Belfast and their contribution to the ‘story ecosystem’ of the city ... Belfast Stories could not exist without them

WORKING RECIPROCALLY



- The Stories Audit flagged the danger of duplicating existing offerings and advocated cultivating a sense of co-ownership between collection holders
- Before Belfast Stories presents material already in the public realm, the team needs to ask itself honestly: is our presentation going to tell people something new about this, or help people to see it in a new light? Or should we be signposting other collections in the city and sending people to them?
- Work with partner organisations in an open way: share platforms, spaces and resources. Don’t gatekeep!

WORKING CAREFULLY



- Treat all partners, no matter how big or small, as valued collaborators
- Ensure that Belfast Stories standards and policies reflect or exceed best practice—making it as easy as possible to work alongside partner organisations

WORKING RESPONSIVELY



- Existing story collection organisations, while typically open to the idea of partnership working, have limited resources. Belfast Stories needs to add to the overall resource, rather than placing additional demands on existing teams.
- Listen to existing organisations about how Belfast Stories could support them or augment their resources
- Co-design future partnerships on the basis of mutual support and benefit
- Initiate new partnerships to address gaps in the stories and reach people who might not otherwise come forward with their stories.

4. Practical Considerations / Next Steps

4.1 Stories Engine Set Up

The immediate next step is to test the implications of this Ethical Framework with individuals and organisations who are already working with stories and storytelling across the city. Our ambition is to develop a project manifesto that will further illustrate what it means to take our principles and apply them to the day-to-day activities of Belfast Stories. We believe that this testing will hone our principles and processes sufficiently to support the establishment of the first iteration of the Stories Engine in the coming months: that is, a working body explicitly set up to collect, process and store stories. Initially, the work of the Stories Engine will feed into the work of the design teams, with the longer view that the stories gathered will form the nucleus of Belfast Stories’ collection. This ‘incubator’ Stories Engine will also enable us to test and design the next, ‘permanent’ iteration of the Stories Engine, which will need to be in place to collect all of the content required before Belfast Stories opens to the public and on an ongoing basis.

4.2 Collection Management

A collection needs to be stored, cared for, easy to access and use.

The most important point to underline is that by asking for, and accepting, stories, Belfast Stories has an ethical responsibility and duty of care towards those stories and the storytellers who contributed them. This requires the creation of a Collection Management Plan and System that addresses the organisation’s actions at every point along the acquisition-accession-storage-disposal continuum. Collections Management is closely tied to governance, so we suggest that this plan is developed when the governance structure for the project is in place.

Storage

At this point, it seems likely that the collection will comprise stories in both physical and digital form. As a thought experiment, we considered what it would mean if stories were only accepted in digital formats. However, this feels against the principles of the project (trying to be as open and responsive as possible to what ‘story’ is and the format it appears in) and doesn’t mitigate the need for storage, it just changes the infrastructure.

That said, we’ve also applied the values and principles of this Ethical Framework to find creative approaches to storage, which—whether it’s about storing physical assets or data—is space- and resource-hungry and raises flags in relation to sustainability. A full Collection Management Plan should set out the process of deaccessioning and disposal—how long will material be kept, who decides if material should no longer be stored, what happens to the material afterwards etc.

On-site Storage

Although the schedule of accommodation for the building doesn’t include collection storage, we suggest allocating a small area with a controlled environment adjacent to the exhibition space where stories in physical formats can be securely housed prior to being put on or taken off display. This space is important in making change / story rotation easy for staff to manage. Without it, there will be limitations on how often stories can be changed.

There is an option where some degree of data storage is accommodated on-site. By this we mean secure data servers with back ups housed in a controlled environment. We recommend a study into the viability of this be carried out in the next design phase.

Off-site Storage

With regards to physical stories, there are two options worth considering (likely in parallel). One is that physical stories are typically accepted or housed on a temporary basis for display in the visitor attraction. When they are taken off display, they will be returned to the storyteller. This kind of arrangement will require some resource to manage, but can use systems developed by galleries and museums for loans.

The other option is that in an instance where Belfast Stories and a storyteller agree that a physical story should be housed in a collection permanently (ie not returned to the storyteller), that Belfast Stories develops a partnership with a professional repository / collecting body to house the Belfast Stories Collection.

4.2 Collection Management

For off-site data storage, again, we recommend a study into the requirements be carried out in the next design phase. One important decision that needs to be made is the length of time Belfast Stories is prepared to commit to storing digital stories. In perpetuity? Or for a shorter, clearly specified length of time. It’s worth noting that some storytellers might welcome the idea that their story will not be kept forever.

On-site Access

The RIBA2 design reports identify some key story repository points where people can access and explore multiple stories (this is distinct from the ways stories might be presented or encountered across the site). The Mediatheque and Stories Lounge are spaces where people could browse the full database of stories according to their own interest, rather than through curatorial choice.

Off-site Access

An online portal for the Belfast Stories Collection means that people all over the world can access the stories; more, that the stories can become the basis of all kinds of meaningful connections and creative journeys.

We suggest that the portal is based on Mitchell Whitelaw’s concept of the generous interface (2015). Whitelaw’s core finding was that the then standard GLAM model of database + search box is limited and ‘ungenerous’ and doesn’t reveal the richness of a collection or work in a human-centred way. The ‘ungenerous interface’ tends to assume people already know what they’re looking for and doesn’t allow for moments of serendipity.

In Issue 11 of Europeana Tech Insights (2019)¹, David Haskiya summarised four qualities of the generous interface:

- Show first, don’t ask (provide rich overviews without search)
- Provide samples and clues (using collection content)
- Show relationships (between collection features)
- Provide rich primary content (deliver on the promise)

This points towards a space where stories can be browsed, discovered, explored ... but also where new stories or new works can be created, either by bringing stories together or by using stories as the basis for something new. Unlike some of the precedent projects for this approach (Rijksstudio, Smithsonian Open Access), Belfast Stories will have to require consent from every storyteller for their story to a) be accessible online and b) be used in new works. We imagine that a larger number will consent to the first and a smaller to the second, but that this is still worth pursuing.

4.3 Resources

Time and again during the public consultation, participants flagged the importance of people to the success of Belfast Stories. In the Equality Consultative Forum sessions, where we went into the story collection process in more detail, participants agreed that having the ‘right’ person to talk to, to help you, would make all the difference and could be the deciding factor in whether you would contribute a story. So it’s no exaggeration to say that designing the team for the Stories Engine is a make-or-break process for the project.

Living up to the values and principles argues for a team makeup and dynamic that emphasises the collective and builds in change. Having diverse and inclusive teams takes work—although we believe the effort will be rewarded.

Because Belfast Stories is a mix of different functions and facilities, we should seek to learn from a wide range of cultural and other organisations in the city. At the same time, there can be a tendency for new organisations to default to what’s known, what other people are doing, whereas the nature of Belfast Stories may mean creating some systems that are unique to this project.

4.3 Resources

The structure of the Stories Engine team is still in development, but work on the Ethical Framework has flagged some key positions and considerations:

Collectors

- Reflect the diversity of the city (age, race, gender, sexual orientation, physical needs, neurodiversity +++)
- Rotating: bringing in new people regularly
- Compensated for their work and acknowledged as essential to the process—sometimes field collectors are perceived as lower in the hierarchy

Curators

- Reflect the diversity of the city
- Three as minimum to avoid silos
- From different professional backgrounds, bringing in a variety of perspectives and skills
- Work as a collective, with shared responsibility and decision-making
- Welcome secondments and exchanges, from local and international organisations

Creative facilitators

- Reflect the diversity of the city
- Rotating: bringing in new people regularly
- Cultivate partnerships with existing organisations and projects and look at sharing staff
- Include practitioners from all artforms and creative practices

Trauma support / councillors

- Facilitate regular sessions for storytellers, staff and visitors
- Train staff in trauma-informed practice

IP / legal specialist

- Advise on rights and IP issues with the goal of sharing the stories as widely and generously as possible
- Ensure that storytellers and staff feel informed, safe and supported

4.4 IP and Legal Issues

It will be important to get professional advice on Intellectual Property and other legal issues.

The Ethical Framework assumes that the likely scenario will be that Belfast Stories asks storytellers to assign copyright of their stories to the organisation (either for a limited period of time or for the maximum copyright period) while acknowledging the moral rights of the author:

- Right of paternity
- Right of integrity
- Right not to suffer false attribution
- Right to privacy

The organisation needs to understand the different uses of stories and be clear about which rights it is asking storytellers to assign, as well as the implications. In keeping with the values and working principles, we propose that the opportunity for sharing stories via a Creative Commons licence be explored.

The project aspires to be open and generous in relation to accepting stories and to approach the work in good faith. However, working in good faith also means protecting our staff. While we think it will be a rare occurrence, there is a scenario where someone submits a story that may break the law—because it includes obscene material, for example—or that compromises or infringes a third party’s rights. We need to make sure that staff (particularly story collectors) understand what to do and are supported in the event this happens.

It is also important to flag issues around anonymity and disclosure. In 2014, Oral History Network Ireland issued a response to the Belfast Project case that underscored the importance of informed consent:

The Boston College Belfast Project case highlights the fact that no confidentiality agreement or deposit agreement supersedes the law of the state. Participants may be offered closure only within the confines of the law and, as illustrated clearly by this case, the law is subject to change. Participants must be apprised of the possible implications of the information that they are providing in order to make informed decisions about participation, anonymity, closure periods and the type of future access or dissemination that they will allow.

It was interesting to note the observation from the workshop **Dealing with Difficult Pasts: Institutional Abuse**, that *official structures (enquiry reports and organisational archives) only tell part of the story or the story from a particular angle, usually top down*. Given Belfast Stories’ emphasis on bottom-up stories and lived experience, we should consider what it means to approach these and other legal issues from the point of view of individual storytellers. At the very least it should mean devising a thoughtful and accessible explanation of the issues requiring informed consent and making it easy for people to understand what they are (or are not) consenting to.

5. References

The Ethical Framework builds on a number of key pieces of work, all of which have helped the project get to where it is now. With every phase we complete, we understand more about who we are and how we want to work. In particular, the ongoing design and public consultation work have moved key aspects of the project from being very theoretical to being much more grounded ... although there remains a lot of work still to come. The design and consultation processes have helped to address some questions, raised new ones but, perhaps most importantly, given us the context to explore more specific scenarios with the public e.g. *how would you like to tell your story? what might make you think twice about giving your story to Belfast Stories?*

The **Story Collection Framework** (Lord, January 2022) articulated the issues and sensitivities around collecting first-person stories and established a set of guiding principles for the project, which in turn informed a set of story gathering pilots. The guiding principles underlined the importance of a people-centred approach and emphasised the need for transparency and honesty in all processes. A direct line can be traced from this work in 2021/2 to the values (Project Charter, June 2024) and working principles used to shape the Ethical Guidelines. The Story Collection Framework also made a series of recommendations for the work going forward, including an initial set of key ethical parameters and potential approaches to governance and collection infrastructure. These recommendations were reviewed, reflected on and have also fed into the development of this Ethical Framework.

Guiding Principles

- Equality and Inclusiveness
- Increased Accessibility
- Pressure Free
- Respect
- People centred

Ethical Parameters

- Authenticity
- Transparency
- Listening
- Methodology
- Stewardship
- Culturally respectful
- Multiple perspectives
- Confidentiality, privacy and data protection
- Access and use
- Copyright

The **Stories Audit** (Starling Start, May 2023) mapped a range of organisations and bodies involved in collecting and provided important insights for partnering and collaborating with existing organisations. The work identified a number of ethical considerations, for example questions of consent and ownership, that have been an ongoing part of discussions that have led to the creation of this Ethical Framework. The audit also provided a very useful matrix of barriers to participation and while the Ethical Framework doesn’t pretend to have solutions to all of them, we recognise that the success of Belfast Stories story gathering initiatives rests on an ongoing determination to address these barriers.

The **Interpretive Masterplan** (Barker Langham & RAA, July 2024) established a curatorial framework for the project and also provided significantly more detail around the visitor experience. With this in place, more definition around the

story gathering process was also possible: taking it from something largely theoretical to something more specific (albeit still at an early stage of development). Building from the people-centred guiding principles described in the Story Collection Framework, the Interpretive Masterplan emphasised the importance of reciprocation—the contract of trust that Belfast Stories needs to establish with every story contributor or potential contributor. In moving away from chronological or subject-based themes in favour of the two overarching organising principles of time and space, the Masterplan also considered this might affect how content would be organised and processed, as well as imagining scenarios in which story gathering could happen.

The **Engagement Plan** (Barker Langham & RAA, July 2024), developed alongside the Interpretive Masterplan, set out a series of approaches for engaging the public with the project. Although these approaches were initially intended to inform engagement in its widest sense (including public consultation), they have also shaped the thinking around the Ethical Framework, bearing in mind that story gathering is an essential part of the project’s engagement with the city. Again, there is a throughline of people-centred processes, with respect, recognition and reflection identified as three essentials for engagement. The Engagement Plan also identified a number of emerging priorities, which have been folded into the development of the Ethical Framework.

- Meeting communities where they are
- Different formats for engaging
- Safeguarding
- Mental health support
- Listening not asking
- Universality
- Continuity

Other References

- **9ft In Common: A Manifesto for the Alleys**
<https://9ftincommon.com>
- **Belfast Stories Project Charter**
- **Birmingham Museums Trust Citizens’ Jury**
<https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/about/what-we-do/citizens-jury>
- **Decade of Centenaries**
<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/dealing-difficult-and-challenging-heritage>
- **The Empathy Museum**
<https://www.empathymuseum.com>
- **Equality Consultative Forum**
Notes from workshop sessions undertaken as part of Public Consultation 2024-5
- **Generous Interfaces for Digital Cultural Collections** by Mitchell Whitelaw
<https://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/9/1/000205/000205.html>
- **Glasgow Women’s Library**
<https://womenslibrary.org.uk/about-us/> and interview with co-founder and director Adele Patrick, November 2024

- **Hayao Miyazaki’s Museum Vision – This is the Kind of Museum I Want to Make!**
<https://www.ghibli-museum.jp/en/kind/>
- **NMNI Ethics Policy**
<https://cms.nationalmuseumsni.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/National-Museums-NI-Ethics-Policy.pdf>
- **NMNI Corporate Strategy 2025-30**
<https://www.nationalmuseumsni.org/corporate-strategy-2025-2030>
- **ICOM Code of Ethics**
<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>
- **The Importance of Ethical and Shared Remembering**
Organised by The John and Pat Hume Foundation / Peace Summit (Notes from Nuala McElroy, Belfast Stories project office)
- **Katharine Wheeler’s Ethical Framework in Practice**
<https://www.katharinewheeler.com/working-principles>
- **Knowing the North?**
How we know and interpret the past: Cross-disciplinary approaches to dealing with difficult, recent pasts in the North of Ireland. Workshop 9 April 2025: Dealing with Difficult Pasts: Institutional Abuse (Notes from Nuala McElroy, Belfast Stories project office)

- **Manchester Art Gallery: Trauma Informed Gallery**
<https://manchesterartgallery.org/trauma-informed-gallery/>
- **Museums Association Code of Ethics**
<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/ethics/code-of-ethics/>
- **Museum of Homelessness**
<https://museumofhomelessness.org>
- **Oral History Association Statement on Ethics**
<https://oralhistory.org/oha-statement-on-ethics/>
- **Orhan Pamuk’s Modest Manifest for Museums**
<https://www.masumiyetmuzesi.org/en/mani-festo>
- **Pillars for Peace-Building Toolkit**
<https://www.pillarsforpeace.org/toolkit>
- **Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland: Trauma Informed Toolkit**
<https://www.safeguardingni.org/resources/trauma-informed-toolkit>
- **Society of American Archivists Code of Ethics**
<https://www2.archivists.org/node/15398/sprunkimod.app>
- **War Childhood Museum**
<https://warchildhood.org> and interview with director Amina Krvavac, 7th February 2025



Subject:	Physical Programme Update
Date:	20 June 2025
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	Shauna Murtagh, Portfolio Manager David Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
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After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The Council's Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council's Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme and an update on the Fleet Programme 2025/26 - replacement of the Lord Mayor's car, and signage at Forth Meadow Community Greenway and Olympia Leisure Centre.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Programme Movements - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IT Programme – Service Desk Management System Solution - Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme and moved to Stage 3 – Committed and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated with a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. ○ Black Mountain Pathway/ Greenway - Agree that the project is moved to Stage 3 – Committed and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated with a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. ○ Historic Cemeteries – Health & Safety Works at Clifton Street Cemetery - Agree that this project is moved to Stage 3 – Committed and that a satisfactory tender return has been received for the works that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £231,000 be allocated ○ Beacon Programme - Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> with a maximum allocation of up to £103,250. ○ Strangford Avenue Playing Fields Enabling Works - Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Open Streetscene (OSS) Machinery Replacement Programme – Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> to allow a business case to be developed.○ Asset Management System – Integrated Work Management System – Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> to allow a business case to be developed.• Note the update on the Fleet Programme 2025/26 - replacement of the Lord Mayor's car at 3.12 and agree if they are content to approve the lease of the Skoda Enyaq Estate for the Lord Mayor's Car instead of the previously agreed Kia EV6• Note the update re the timelines for the installation of dual-language signage at Forth Meadow Community Greenway and Olympia Leisure Centre at 3.13																					
3.0	Main report <u>Key Issues</u>																					
3.1	Physical Programme Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. The Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.																					
3.2	<u>Capital Programme - Proposed Movements</u> As outlined above Members have agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme: <table><tr><th>Project</th><th>Overview</th><th>Stage movement</th></tr><tr><td>IT Programme – Service Desk Management System Solution</td><td>Implementation of a new IT service desk solution</td><td>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</td></tr><tr><td>Black Mountain Pathway/ Greenway</td><td>Connections from land at Upper Whiterock to Black Mountain</td><td>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</td></tr><tr><td>Historic Cemeteries – Clifton Street</td><td>Health & Safety works at Clifton Street Cemetery</td><td>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</td></tr><tr><td>Beacon Programme</td><td>Provision of beacons as an alternative to traditional bonfires.</td><td>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</td></tr><tr><td>Strangford Avenue Playing Fields Enabling Works</td><td>Enabling works for active travel container and gate improvements</td><td>Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</td></tr><tr><td>Open Streetscene (OSS) Machinery Replacement Programme</td><td>Rolling programme to replace grounds maintenance machinery which is beyond its lifespan</td><td>Add as Stage 1 – Emerging</td></tr></table>	Project	Overview	Stage movement	IT Programme – Service Desk Management System Solution	Implementation of a new IT service desk solution	Move to Stage 3 – Committed	Black Mountain Pathway/ Greenway	Connections from land at Upper Whiterock to Black Mountain	Move to Stage 3 – Committed	Historic Cemeteries – Clifton Street	Health & Safety works at Clifton Street Cemetery	Move to Stage 3 – Committed	Beacon Programme	Provision of beacons as an alternative to traditional bonfires.	Move to Stage 3 – Committed	Strangford Avenue Playing Fields Enabling Works	Enabling works for active travel container and gate improvements	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted	Open Streetscene (OSS) Machinery Replacement Programme	Rolling programme to replace grounds maintenance machinery which is beyond its lifespan	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging
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3.3	<p>IT Programme – Service Desk Management System</p> <p>This project will enable the implementation of a new IT service desk solution to enhance operational capability and efficiency, user experience, and service response. It will replace the current inhouse legacy CRM system and align IT services with organisational goals. This project is part of the overall IT Programme and a business case has been submitted. Members are asked to agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme and moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk, pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated. A contract will be awarded based on the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</p>			
3.4	<p>Black Mountain Pathway/ Greenway</p> <p>This proposed project will improve access to the Belfast Hills via lands and pathways at the top of the Upper Whiterock Road with a view to connecting this to existing National Trust pathways on Divis Mountain. This project is part of the overall Access to the Hills/ Connectivity Programme and a business case has been submitted. A series of community consultations have been undertaken and the project received positive feedback and support from the local community and key stakeholders. Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3– Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. Match funding opportunities are being explored for this project. Members are also asked to note that work is ongoing on the other Access to the Hills/Connectivity projects.</p>			
3.5	<p>Historic Cemeteries</p> <p>SP&R, at its meeting last month, noted that the first phase of the historic cemeteries project to be brought forward would be health and safety monument works. The first works to be undertaken are immediate health and safety works at Clifton St Cemetery. Members are asked to agree that ‘Historic Cemeteries - Clifton St Cemetery monuments safety works’ is moved to Stage 3 – Committed; note that a satisfactory tender return has been received, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of £231,000 be allocated to this project.</p>			
3.6	<p>Beacon Programme</p>			

	<p>Members will be aware that demand is increasing for beacons as a managed, environmentally more acceptable alternative to traditional bonfires. Members are asked to agree that this project is moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a capital allocation of up to £103,250. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p>
3.7	<p>Strangford Avenue Playing Fields Enabling Works</p> <p>This project was added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> in April 2025. Members will recall that capital monies were received from UKSPF for existing schemes last financial year, which freed up resources for additional schemes including the Strangford Avenue Playing Fields Enabling Works. The project involves the transfer of 2 existing Council owned containers to Strangford Avenue Playing Fields and the associated enabling works in preparation for the delivery of these 2 containers. It is envisaged that one container is fitted for bike storage, the other is fitted with a small kitchenette and will act as an outdoor classroom/ parks outreach hub, improving accessibility and enabling further community programming in the park. Members are asked to agree that ‘Strangford Playing Fields Enabling Works’ is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.</p>
3.8	<p>Open Street Scene (OSS) Machinery Replacement Programme</p> <p>The project is a rolling programme to replace grounds maintenance machinery to maintain service provision across the Council’s estate. Members are asked to agree that the OSS Machinery Replacement Programme is added to the Capital Programme at Stage 1 – Emerging to allow a business case to be developed.</p>
3.9	<p>Asset Management System – Integrated Work Management System</p> <p>The project is to procure and implement a new Asset Management Integrated Work Management System (IWMS). A single corporate asset register is fundamental to the management of assets and the Council’s ability to take a strategic approach to the planning and use of assets, the management of risk and delivery of value for money and quality. Members are asked to agree that the Asset Management System – Integrated Work Management System is added to the Capital Programme at Stage 1 – Emerging to allow a business case to be developed.</p>
3.10	<p>Fleet Programme 2025/26 - replacement of the Lord Mayor’s car</p> <p>Members will recall that in February 2025 an update was presented on the Fleet Programme for 2025/26 including the replacement of the Lord Mayor’s official car. Members considered a range of options and agreed to the lease of the KIA EV6 Electric Estate for a period of 4 years under the Fleet Programme for 2025/26, with the amount of £6,711 per year and a total of £26,844 over the four-year contract period.</p>

3.11	<p>To ensure that value for money is obtained further market analysis which has been undertaken in advance of the new lease being undertaken. This analysis identified a cheaper, larger capacity vehicle, a Skoda Enyaq Estate, than the previously agreed Kia EV6 Electric Estate. A comparison of the two models is outlined below</p> <table><tr><th>MODEL</th><th>Range (miles)</th><th>Annual cost of lease</th><th>Total cost of lease (over 4 years)</th></tr><tr><td>KIA EV6 Electric Estate 239kW gt Line 84kWh (Agreed in February 2025)</td><td>443</td><td>£6,711</td><td>£26,844</td></tr><tr><td>Skoda Enyaq Estate 210kW 85 Edition 82kWh</td><td>440</td><td>£5,529</td><td>£22,116</td></tr></table> <p>In summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The Skoda Enyaq Estate lease is £1,182 less per year, providing a saving of £4,728 over the 4-year lease plan and thus demonstrates better value for money;○ The range is similar to the Kia EV6 Electric Estate model;○ It has a larger luggage capacity and provides greater rear legroom.	MODEL	Range (miles)	Annual cost of lease	Total cost of lease (over 4 years)	KIA EV6 Electric Estate 239kW gt Line 84kWh (Agreed in February 2025)	443	£6,711	£26,844	Skoda Enyaq Estate 210kW 85 Edition 82kWh	440	£5,529	£22,116
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3.12	<p>Members are asked to note the information provided and agree if they are content to approve the lease of the Skoda Enyaq Estate for the Lord Mayor’s Car. If agreed the proposed new lease will be £5,529 per year which equates to a total of £22,116 over the four-year contract period. This represents a saving of £4,728 over the four-year period compared to the current proposed model (KIA EV6 Electric Estate).</p>												
3.13	<p>Forth Meadow Community Greenway and Olympia Leisure Centre – signage</p> <p>Members will recall that last month it was agreed that an update on the timeline for the implementation of dual language signage at Olympia and Forth Meadow Community Greenway would be brought to Committee this month in line with Committee agreements on these. Members are asked to note the updates for both projects as below -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forth Meadow Community Greenway –Design team appointment for the dual language versions has commenced and will be appointed by August. Installation, following design, approval and manufacture is programmed to take place early next year. Lead-in time for the physical signage is approx. 4 months. Members will be kept up to date re progress.• Olympia Leisure Centre – work is underway with all signs to be installed by the end of September 25. Scope of works is based upon existing templates in Andersonstown and Brook.												

3.14	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p><i>Financial Implications –</i></p> <p>Historic Cemeteries – Clifton St Cemetery immediate H&S works – up to £231,000.</p> <p>Beacon Programme - capital allocation of up to £103,250.</p> <p>Fleet Replacement Programme 2025/26 – this is an existing rolling allocation of £2.2m on the Capital Programme relating to the Council's fleet including the replacement of the Lord Mayor's official car, estimated at £22,116.</p> <p>The Director of Finance has confirmed that these are within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p><i>Resource Implications –</i> Officer time to deliver.</p>
3.15	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>

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