

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 10th April, 2025

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Councillors Anglin, Bower, Brennan, R. Brooks,
T. Brooks, Collins, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
P. Donnelly, S. Douglas, Flynn, Harvey,
Long, Magee and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th March, 2025 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st April, 2025.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme update

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. C. O'Neill, Project Manager of the Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme representing the Department for Infrastructure Rivers, to the meeting.

Ms. O'Neill reminded the Committee that the scheme dealt with the risk of tidal flood waters overtopping the quay walls and flooding into the city. It did not include any measures to address pluvial or surface water flooding, fluvial flooding from any tributaries of the Lagan or any back drainage issues, including potential surcharging from existing drainage systems during flood events in the Lagan.

She advised that tidal events were typically forecast which allowed time to enact any emergency plans.

It was reported that the project model had identified that there were currently over 1500 properties in Belfast at risk of tidal flooding and, based on the application of climate change allowances: over 3900 by 2080 and over 7300 by 2117.

Ms. O'Neill explained the impact of climate change on increased storm surges and the need for the scheme.

She provided an overview of the scheme details which extended from Belfast Harbour to the Stranmillis Weir covering the extent of the tidal influence on the Lagan. She advised that the scheme was designed to reduce the impacts of tidal flooding from events up to the 1 in 200 year (0.5% AEP) event, including an allowance for climate change to 2080.

She highlighted that, to ensure a long term approach, the design of the RC Floodwalls were adaptable, providing an element of future proofing for the scheme enabling the walls to be raised to 2117 predicted levels. She pointed out that, as a secondary intervention, this catered for future refinement of the sea levels rises within any second intervention.

Ms. O'Neill outlined the line of defences along the river which also provided equal access with improved pathway surfaces integrating open spaces rather than creating corridors.

She described the different types of defences that had been included in the scheme, the environmental consideration and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report which had been undertaken.

She advised that the emergency responses in cases of flooding risk required assistance from multi-agency partners and that emergency planning exercises would be undertaken to inform the resource requirement and time needed to deploy.

Ms. O'Neill pointed out that there were helpful resources in the presentation regarding Capital Projects and Department webpages that provided further information on the issue.

She concluded that it was intended that this project would help Belfast manage the flood risk impacts presented by climate change by ultimately delivering enhanced protection for over 3000 homes and businesses from tidal flooding.

During discussion, Ms. O'Neill answered a range of question in relation to the flood barriers used across the city, the Lagan Weir, lessons learnt and environmental screening, planning policy and developments, and future proofing.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. O'Neill for her attendance and she retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

UPSURGE Project Update

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To provide an update on progress on the Horizon UPSURGE project.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to note:

- i. Progress made in delivering the UPSURGE project;
- ii. Programme of activity under the Place Lab Action Plan for the remainder of the project up to February 2025;
- iii. The use of the project and the city as part of the TalX2 climate adaptation research project;
- iv. Risks and mitigations in place for the successful close out of the project in February 2026.

3.0 Progress on UPSURGE

The UPSURGE project has been running now since September 2021 and is now in its final year. The project is an action research project developing a model for cities across Europe through testing nature based solutions for renaturing urban space, addressing challenges of cities' carbon footprint and air pollution. Belfast is one of five cities developing a demonstrator and testing different nature-based solutions and support learning on how adaptive practices and management of green spaces in the city can support pollution alleviation, citizen health and climate resilience.

The main demonstrator site is at Lower Botanic Gardens and has been working in partnership with QUB, Friends of the Field, Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens and more recently the All Island Climate Co+ Centre to deploy and test the following nature based solutions:

1. A research site testing soil contamination and urban growing
2. An agroecological community growing space and tree nursery
3. A climate resilience garden
4. Habitat restoration and improvement

In the past twelve months the community growing space has been established with a polytunnel, raised beds, compostable toilet, an outdoor learning space, mixed species hedgerow planting. A range of open days and volunteering days are facilitated by all the partners to enable greater stewardship of the space and build capacity and learning about urban growing. Habitat restoration works have taken place on the grassland to introduce wetland areas to boost biodiversity, improve soil quality and enable natural flood resilience on the site.

A range of visits to the space have also taken place to facilitate learning and knowledge exchange. In September, the city hosted 50 delegates from across the project partners and 5 cities as part of a Project Group Meeting. In March 2025, the DAERA Minister visited the site and met many of the community groups involved in growing in the area and learned of the partnership approach to building place based research into nature based solutions. A range of demonstrations have taken place including hydroseeding, scything, hedgerow planting, habitat restoration, cooking demos, and more. In September 2024, the project also supported the certification of 12 community growers in the city in Permaculture Design by running the first course of its kind in Northern Ireland, recognising the large skills and capacity gaps that currently exist in climate friendly practices in urban growing.

The four nature based solutions being tested on site are underway. Works still to be completed this year include the installation of environmental sensors, solar PV, fit out of the polytunnel, establishment of rainwater collection and harvesting, establishment of the climate resilience garden and development of a tree nursery.

3.1 Place Lab Action Plan

As part of the project a Place Lab Action Plan has been developed with partners to engage with citizens on five key themes related to nature based solutions. In Belfast the following five objectives were set. They are:

1. **Ecosensitisation:** demonstrating the benefits of nature friendly land management to increase biodiversity. This will be delivered through open garden days, bioblitzes, engagement with schools, universities and citizen science projects.
2. **Social Benefits:** fostering greater engagement and equality of marginalised groups, when engaging with green spaces to support health and wellbeing. This is being delivered through growing workshops, cooking and sharing events, tree planting etc.
3. **Gender based NBS:** identifying and engaging with the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and QUB Working Group to understand systemic issues relating to women and girls' experience and engagement in green spaces in Belfast.
4. **Economic Opportunities:** understanding how community growing spaces could become economically sustainable, supporting skills development, training and more resilient funding models, whilst teaching skills in food production, composting, cooking, renewable energy etc.

5. **Political Capital:** increasing understanding of what nature based solutions are and the multiple co-benefits that they can deliver for communities. This will be achieved through visits, interpretation and knowledge sharing throughout 2025.

Request for Belfast to be used for a Living Lab as part of the TalX2 project

- 3.2 The Climate Team has been approached by Climate NI who are one of the partners on the TALX 2 project to request Belfast be used as one of three living labs for testing climate adaptation with communities, along with Dublin and Mayo. Talx 2 builds on the outputs of TalX1 to develop place-based adaptation partnerships, by building 'living labs' to engage communities and government to plan and adapt for an uncertain future. To achieve this the research has four objectives:

1. Identify and analyse a range of place-based climate action partnerships both nationally and internationally and identify key principles employed in successful partnership working including the co-benefits and trade-offs;
2. Establish living labs across the island of Ireland and using the TALX framework, work to advance climate action partnerships in these real world settings, unlock co-benefits, and identify no regret adaptation pathways in line with local, regional and national plans and policies;
3. Identify cross-border areas where transboundary dialogue facilitation would enhance partnership working and provide a programme of activities to help to exploit potential opportunities for partnership working and minimising cascading/ transboundary risks;
4. Evaluate and reflect on how the living labs and the cross-border programme of activities have developed over the course of the project and how engaged and embedded research/researchers can better enable place-based climate action partnerships, develop local adaptive capacity and support decision-making for climate action in Ireland by providing guidance and recommendations for other organisations and communities.

Following discussions with UPSURGE and UP2030 teams it is proposed that this Living Lab work alongside the UPSURGE Place Lab to share greater learning and knowledge exchange on how to deliver effective climate adaptation in Belfast. The project will run to March 2027 and can provide continuation of the learning in UPSURGE, which

is due to end in February 2026. This partnership will include workshops, capacity building and co-developing communication materials for communities around climate adaptation.

3.3 Close out of the project and the future of the demonstrator site at Botanic Gardens

The project has experienced a number of delays to the deployment of the capital works and sensor technology, due to a number of factors affecting demonstrator cities. As a result the project has been given a no cost extension to February 2026 by the funder, Horizon Europe.

As part of the close out of the project, the future of the site as a space for demonstration and learning for climate change should be considered as part of wider strategies for the redevelopment of the PEC at Queen's, the Pitch Strategy and the 200th anniversary celebrations of Belfast's Botanic Gardens in 2028.

3.1 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial implications for Belfast City Council.

**4.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

None.”

During discussion, the Climate Commissioner suggested that a site visit to the project would be useful and would be organised in due course.

In response to a Member's question in relation to one of the project's objectives to identify and engage with the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, the Climate Commissioner advised that further information would be provided on this action.

The Committee noted:

- I. The progress made in delivering the UPSURGE project;
- II. The programme of activity under the Place Lab Action Plan for the remainder of the project up to February 2026;
- III. The use of the project and the city as part of the TalX2 climate adaptation research project;
- IV. Risks and mitigations in place for the successful close out of the project in February 2026.

The Committee also agreed that a site visit would be arranged to the UPSURGE project.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the report associated with the following item is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Shared Island Funding Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update in relation to the Council’s current involvement under the Shared Island Initiative, and the role of officers in progressing projects and exploring future funding opportunities under this initiative for the Council and with organisations across the city.

The Committee:

- Noted the update provided in relation to the work underway in bringing forward council projects under the Shared Island Programme and a summary update of the projects at Appendix A;
- Agreed to extend an invitation to the Department of the Taoiseach’s Shared Island Unit (SIU) to attend a future meeting to update the Committee on the Shared Island Initiative and potential future opportunities for the city; and
- Agreed that Dr A. Soares, Director of the Centre of Cross Border Studies, be invited to present at a future Committee.

Chairperson