BELFAST STORIES

Public Consultation

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Public consultation report

19 November 2024 to 9 March 2025

JUNE 2025

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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 5,000m^2.

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 feedback[1], 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

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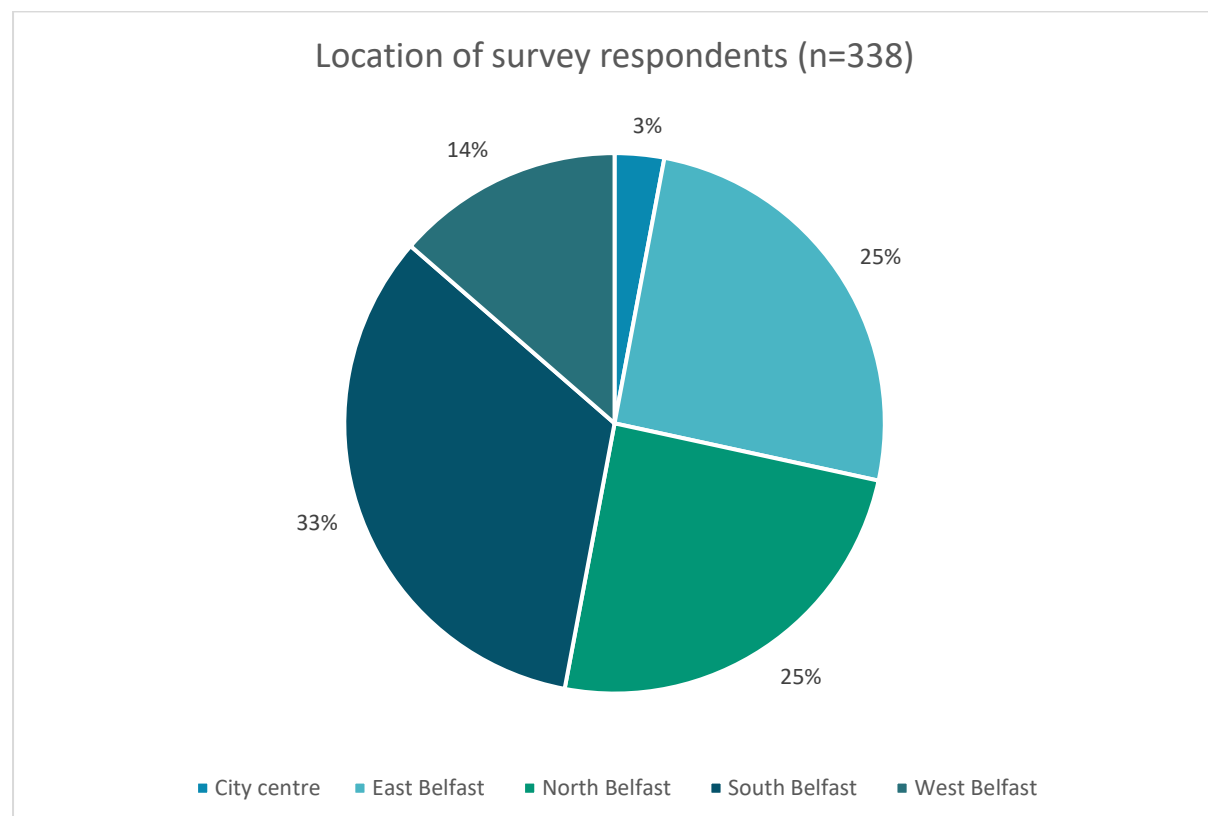
The survey was particularly effective at engaging 25- to 44-year-olds, who made up nearly half of the responses.

Age of respondents (n=484)

- Under 18 — 0%
- 18 to 24 — 5%
- 25 to 44 — 48%
- 45 to 59 — 28%
- 60 or over — 17%
- I prefer not to say — 2%
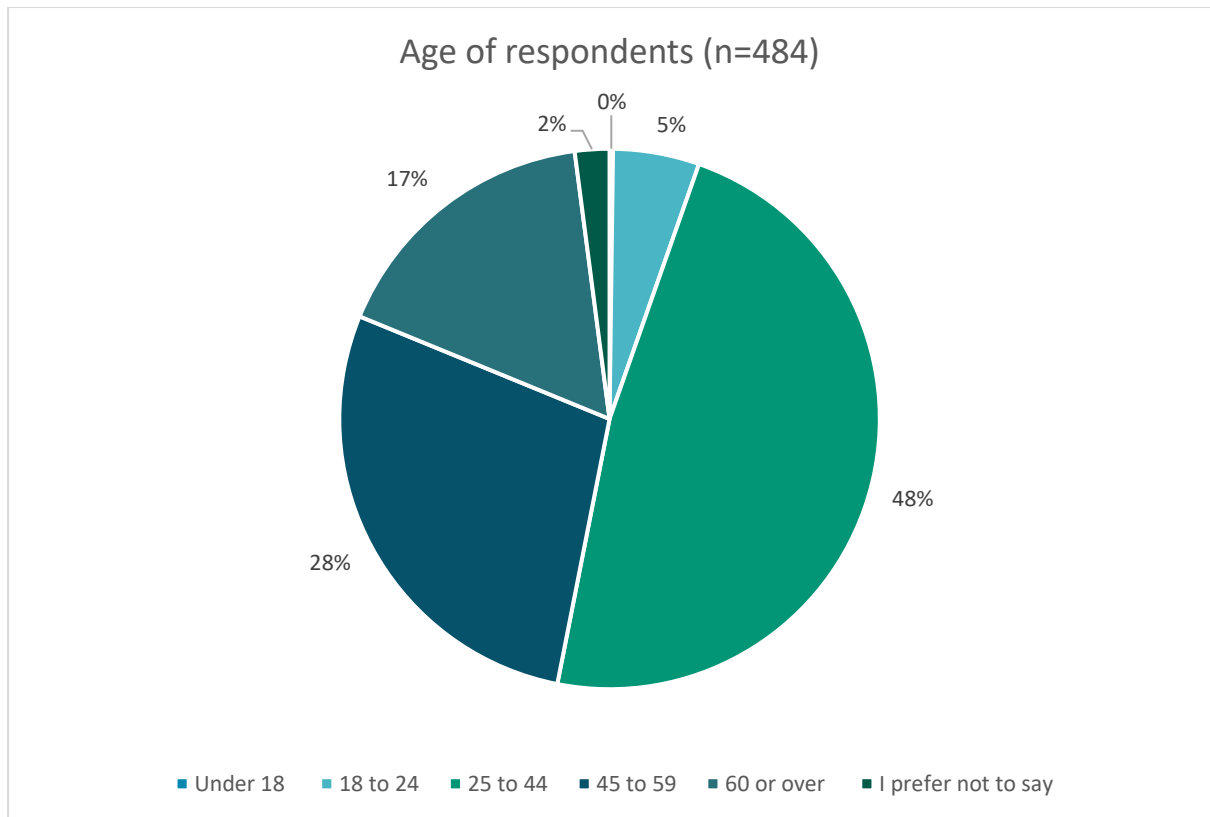
Approximately half the respondents were female and half, male.

Gender of respondents (n=485)

- Man or boy — 47%
- Woman or girl — 46%
- Non-binary — 1%
- I prefer to describe in another way — 1%
- I prefer not to say — 5%
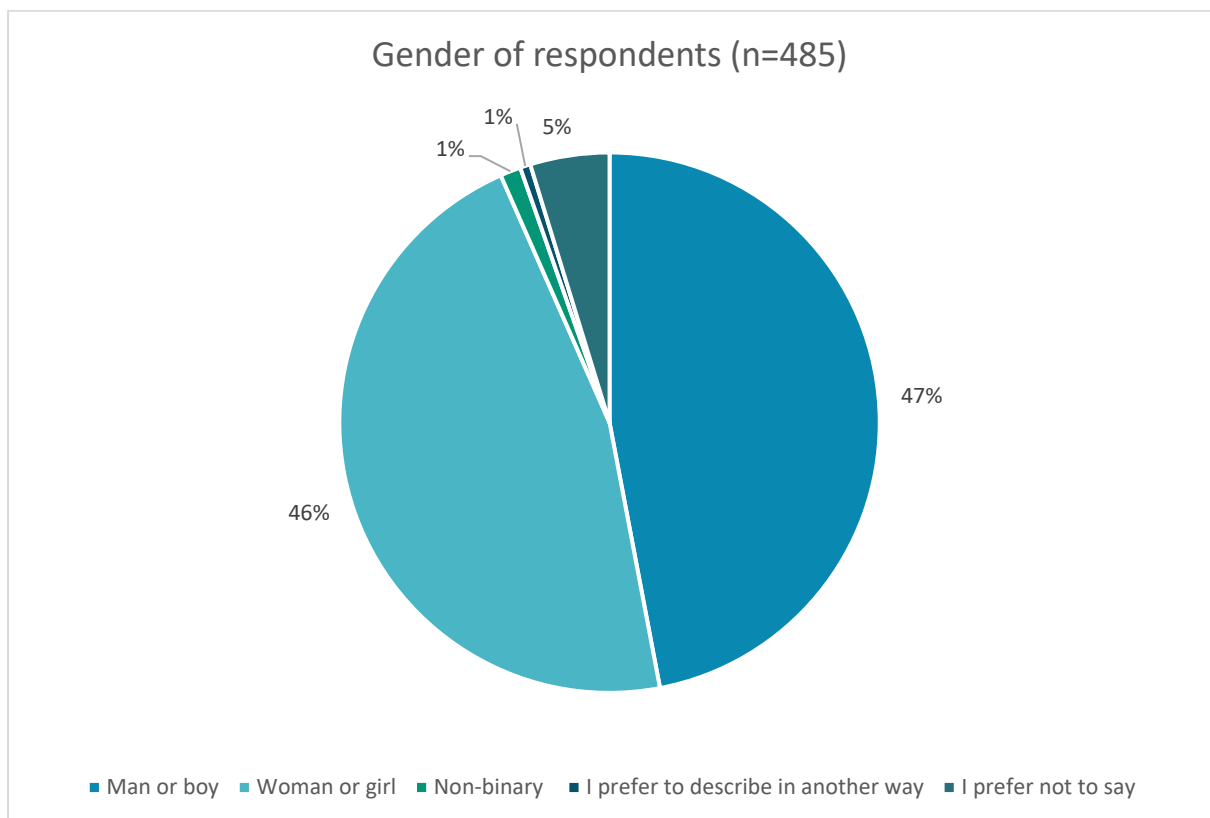
Nearly 4 in 10 respondents have caring responsibilities.

Caring responsibilities (n=484)

8%

38%

54%

■ No   ■ Yes   ■ I prefer not to say
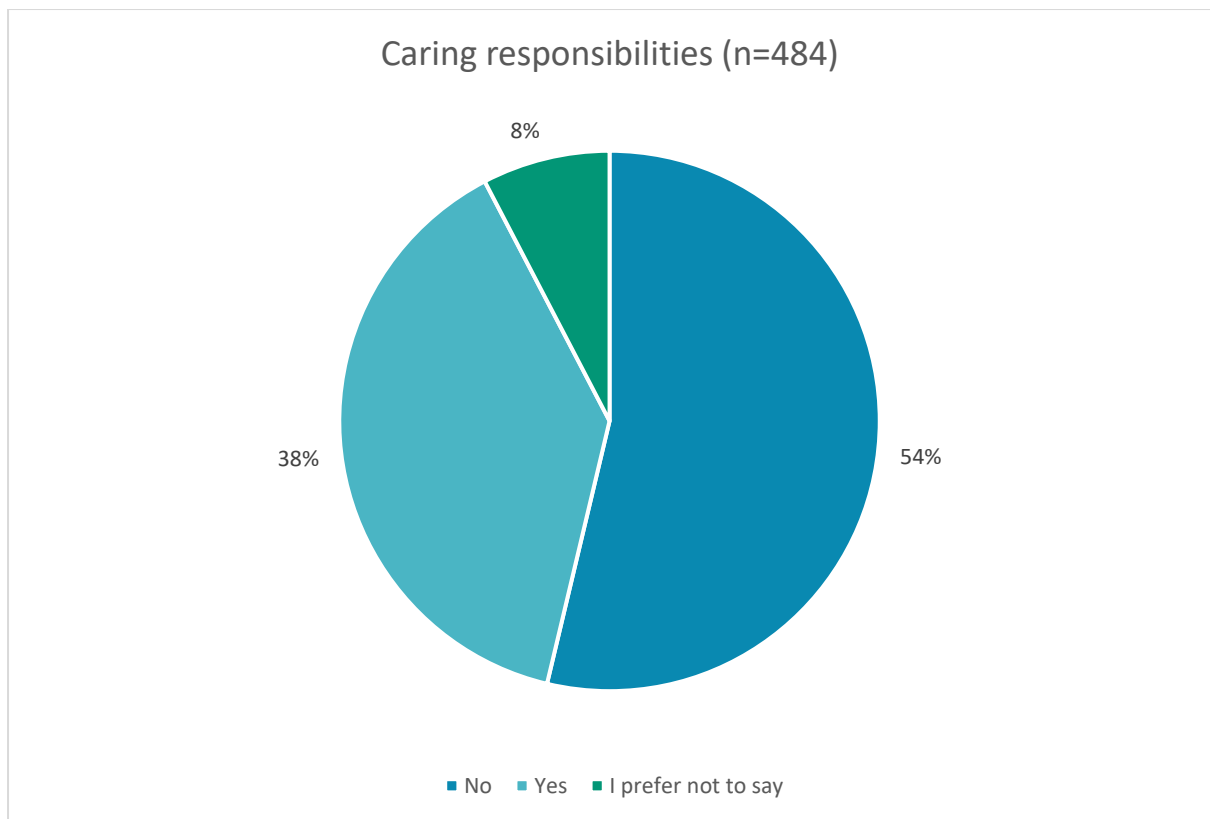
At 16 per cent of respondents, the survey was particularly effective at engaging people from LGBTQ+ communities.

Sexual orientation (n=482)

6%

10%

13%

2%

69%

■ I am bisexual   ■ I am gay or lesbian
■ I am straight (heterosexual)   ■ I prefer to describe in another way
■ I prefer not to say
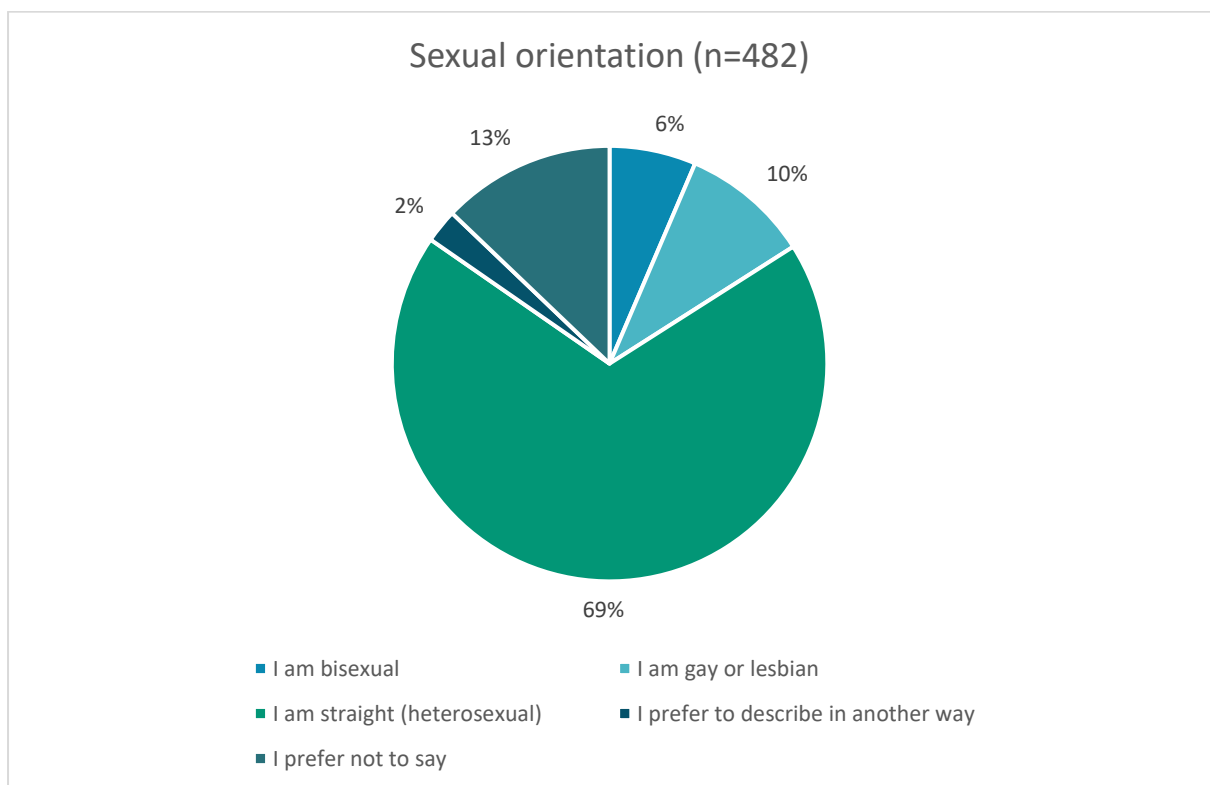
12 per cent of respondents indicated that they have a long-term health condition or disability that limits their day-to-day activity.

Disabliity or long-term health condition (n=482)

8%

12%

80%

■ No   ■ Yes   ■ I prefer not to say
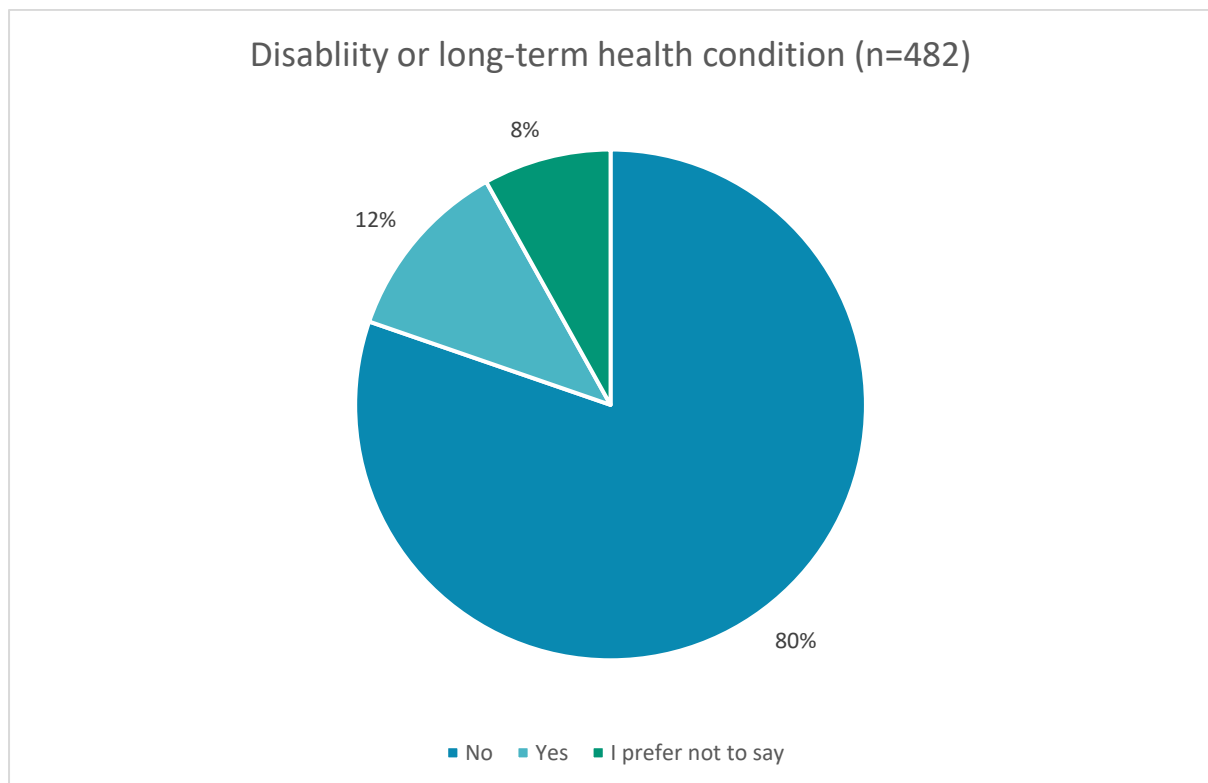
The survey was particularly good at engaging people from outside the two main religions (31 per cent). 31 per cent also identified as belonging to the Catholic community. 22 per cent identified as from the Protestant community.

Community background (n=480)

16%

31%

31%

22%

■ I am a member of the Catholic community

■ I am a member of the Protestant community

■ I am not a member of either the Protestant or Catholic community

■ I prefer not to say
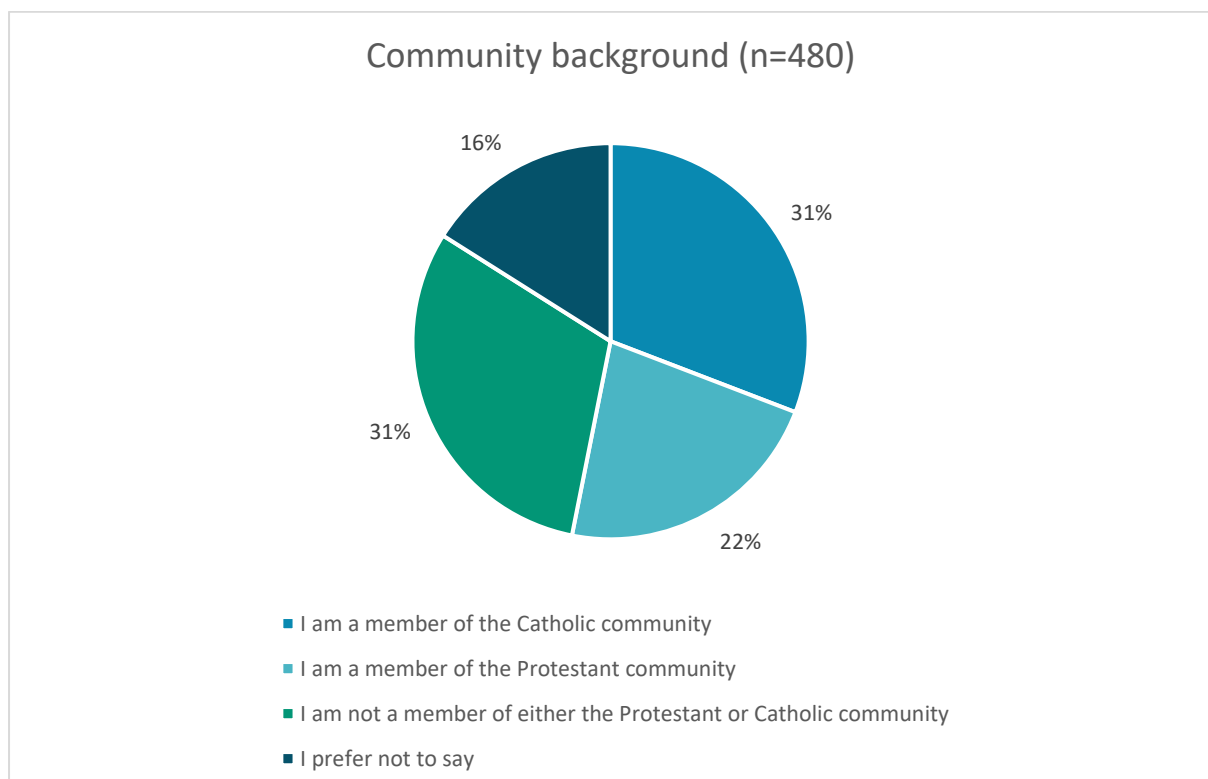
98 per cent of respondents identified as white, and 2 per cent identified as being from another ethnic group including Chinese, Irish Traveller and mixed.

Ethnic background (n=470)

- White
- Other ethnic group
- I prefer not to say
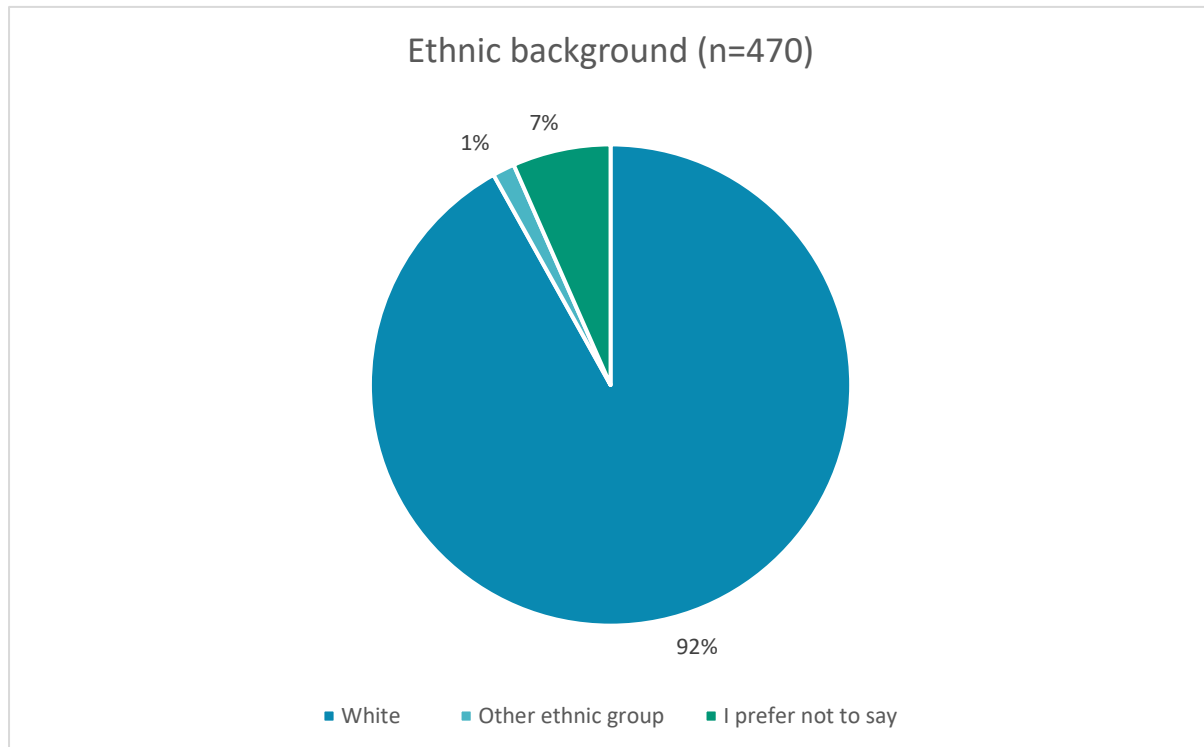
Equality consultative forum

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.

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[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 VCSE[3] 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

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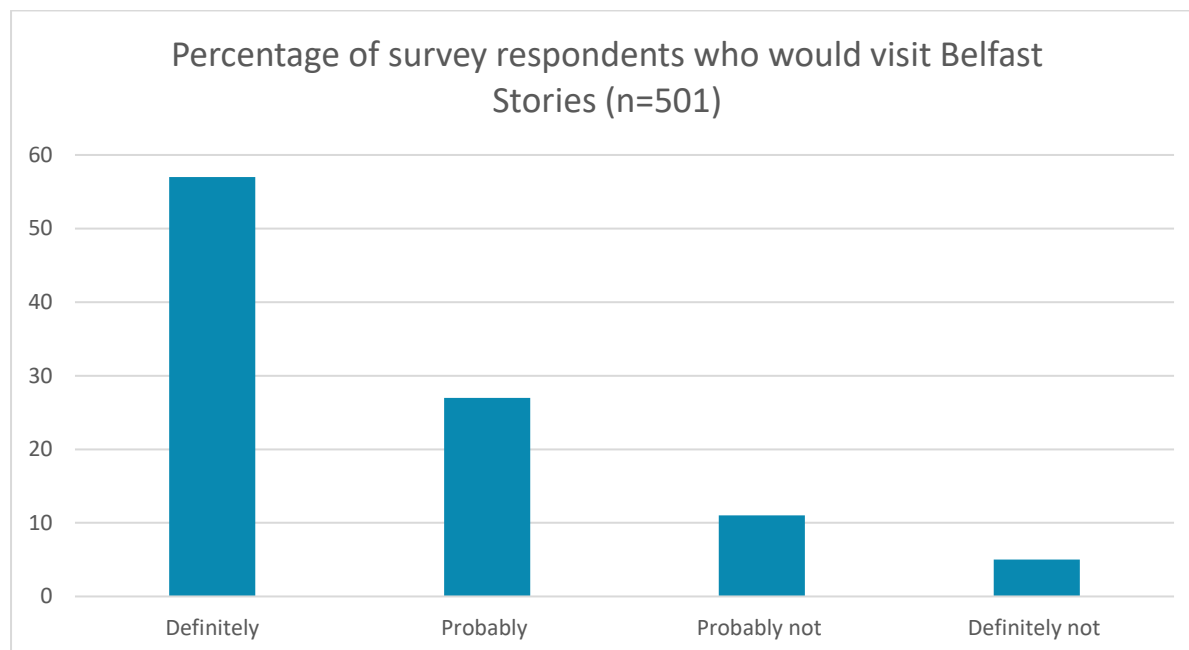
Stronger levels of support were found during face-to-face engagements where the vast majority where keen or even very keen to visit. The remainder were largely unsure, wanting to know or understand more about Belfast Stories before they made up their mind or

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 Trouble
- s 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.)

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[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.

Perception of Belfast Stories by area of residence
(1 is very positive; 5 is very negative (n=83))
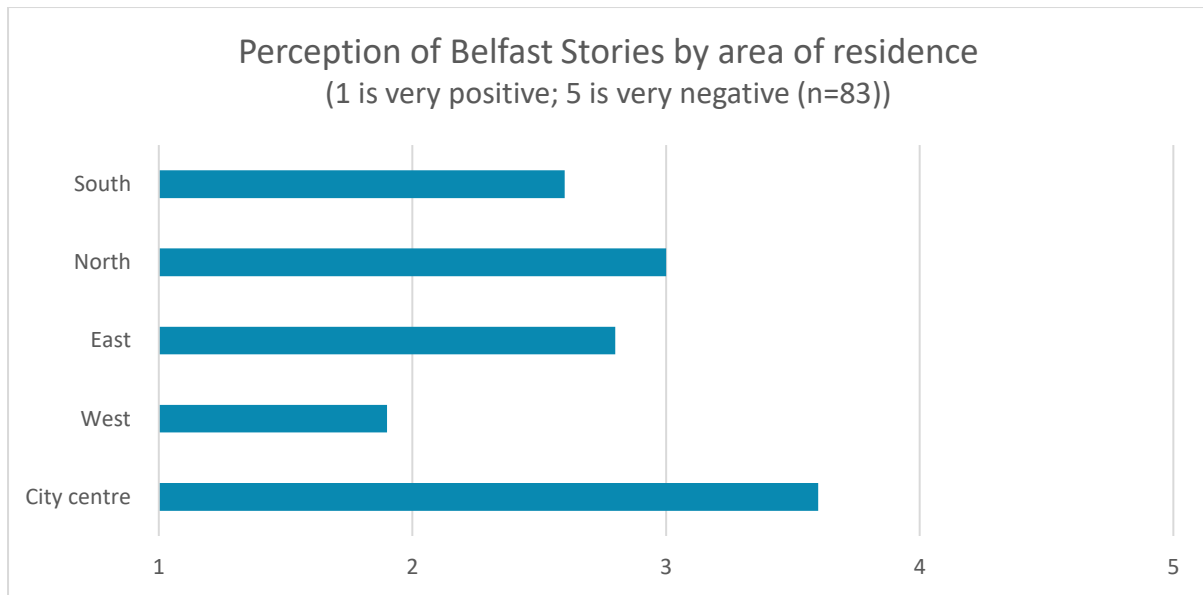
Sexual orientation

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.

Perception of Belfast Stories by sexual orientation
(1 is very positive; 5 is very negative (n=111))
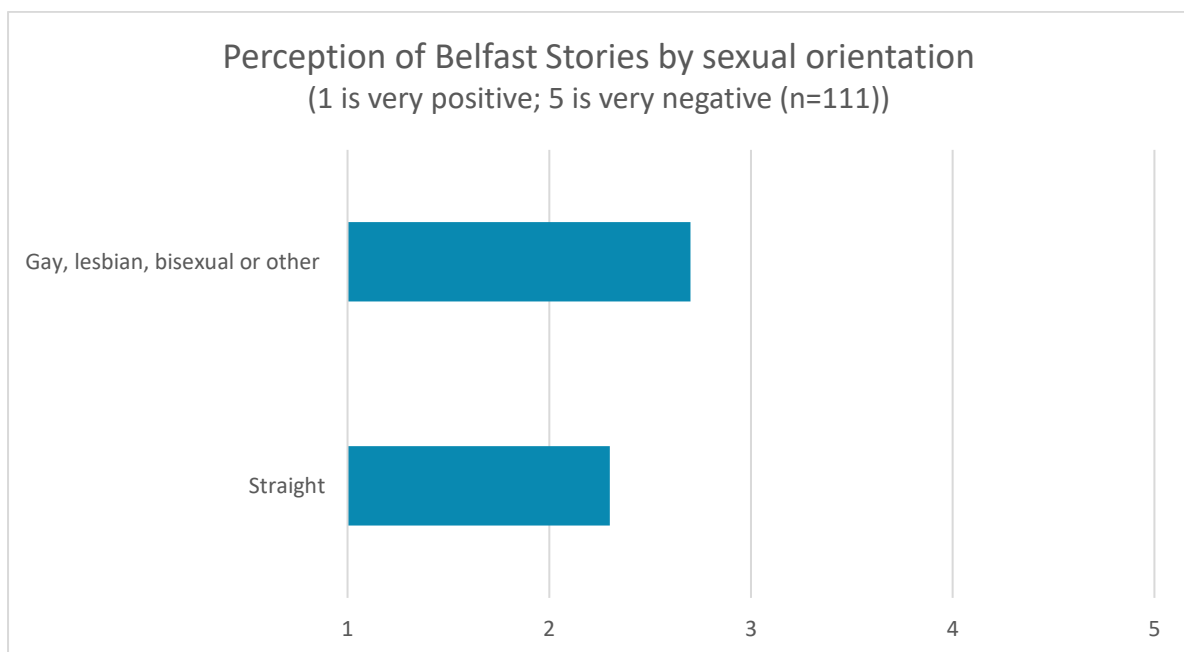
Disability

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

19

Perception of Belfast Stories by disablity
(1 is very positive; 5 is very negative (n=111))

Non-disabled

Disabled

1   2   3   4   5
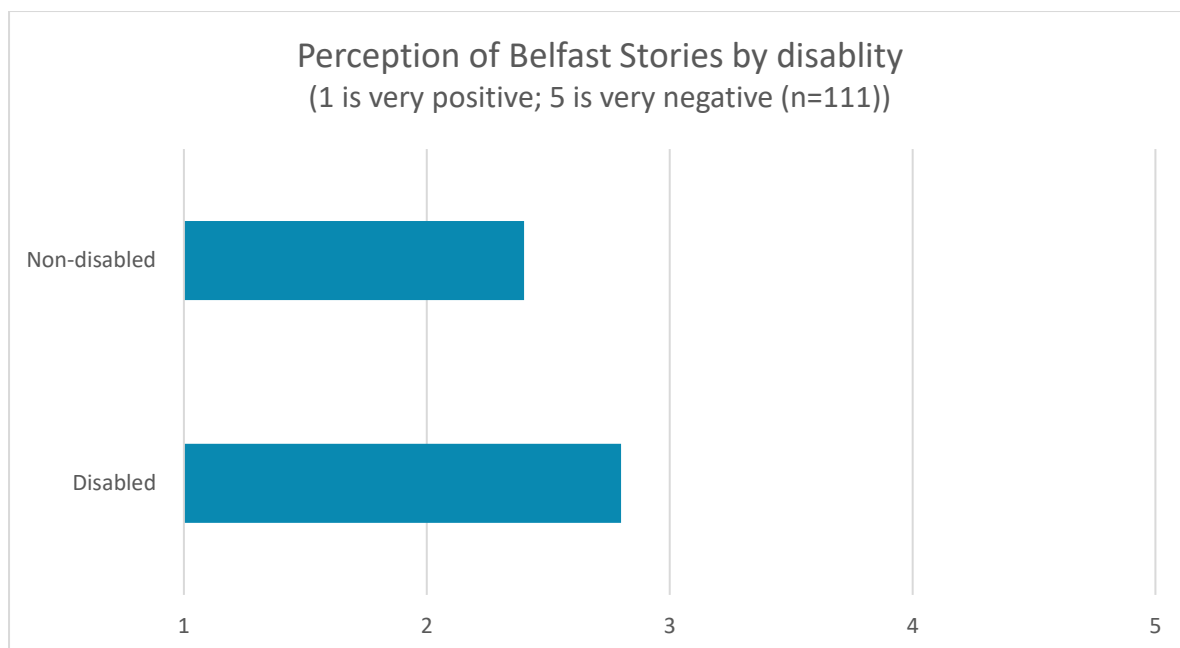
Community background

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.

Perception of Belfast Stories by community background
(1 is very positive; 5 is very negative (n=109))

I am a member of the Protestant community

I am a member of the Catholic community

I am not a member of either the Protestant or Catholic community

1   2   3   4   5
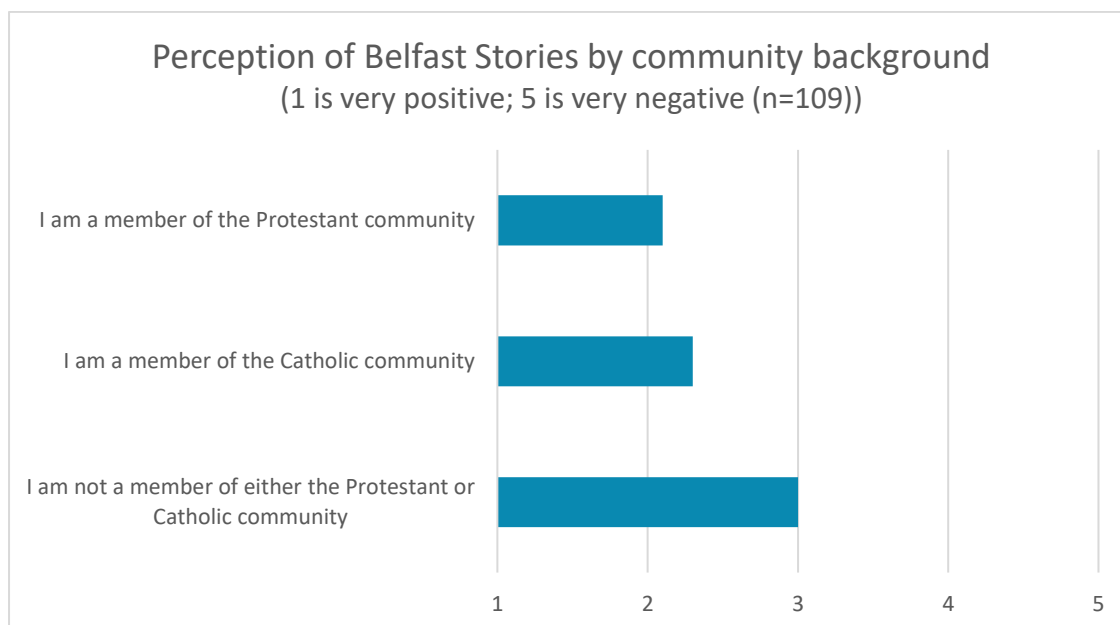
Ethnic background

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.

Perception of Belfast Stories by ethnic background
(1 is very positive; 5 is very negative (n=111))

Other	
White	

1 2 3 4 5
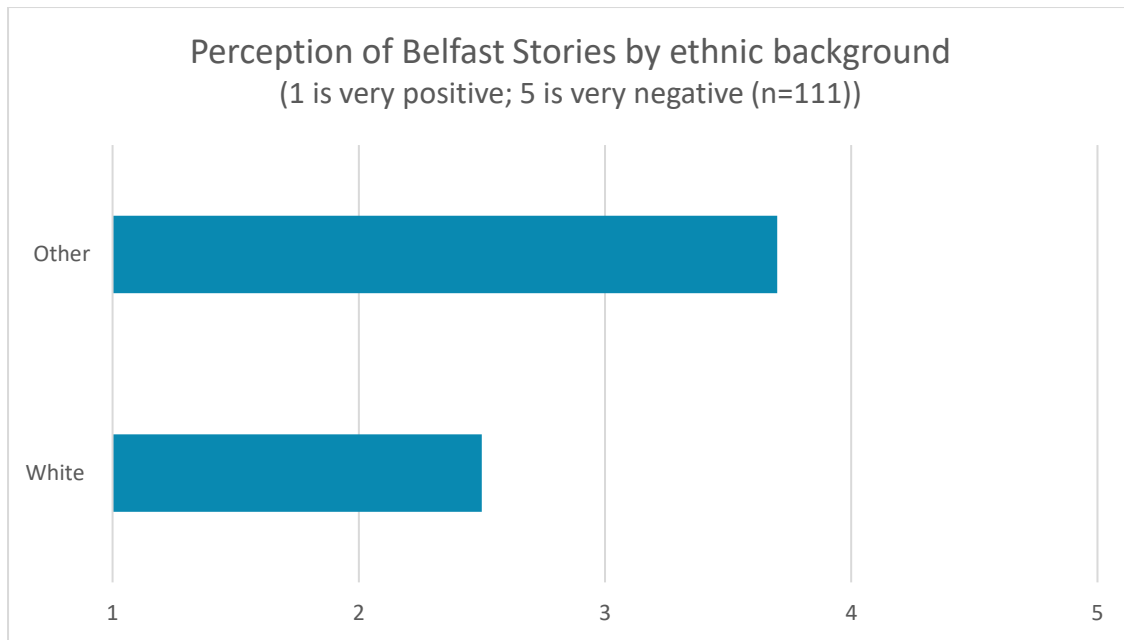
Age

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

Perceived impact of Belfast Stories by age
(1 is very positive; 5 is very negative (n=122))

60+	
45 to 59	
24 to 44	
18 to 24	

1 2 3 4 5
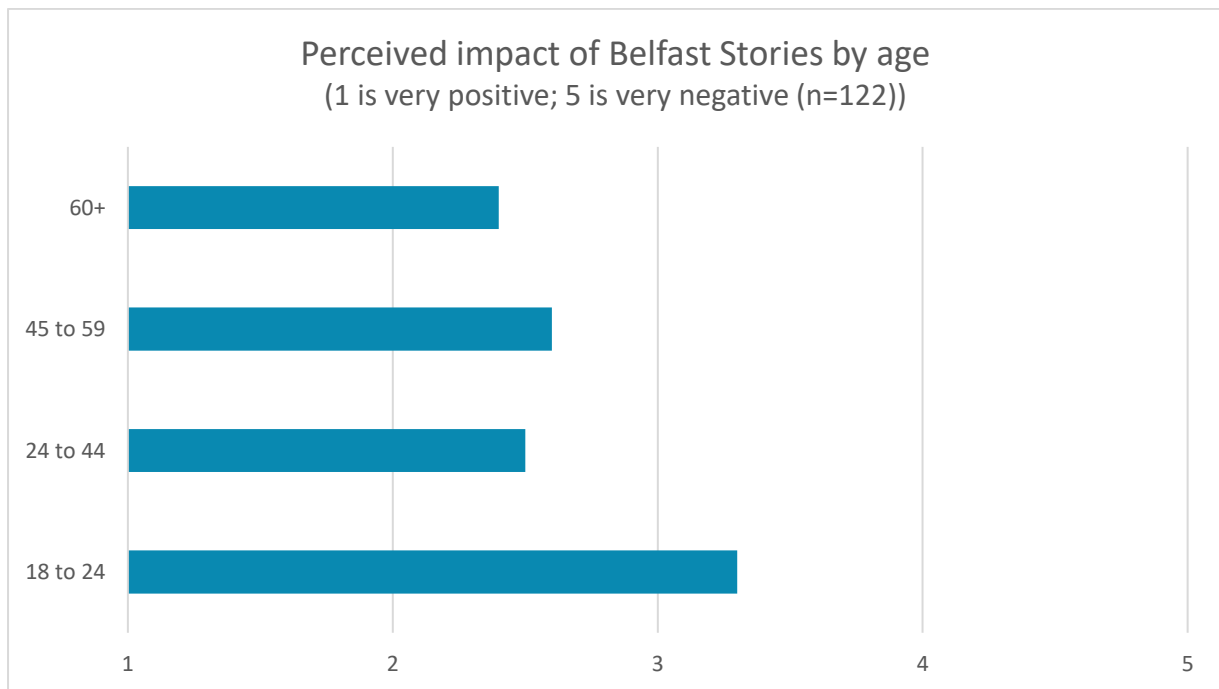
Gender

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.

Percentage of survey respondents who would recommend Belfast Stories to a friend visiting Belfast (n=500)

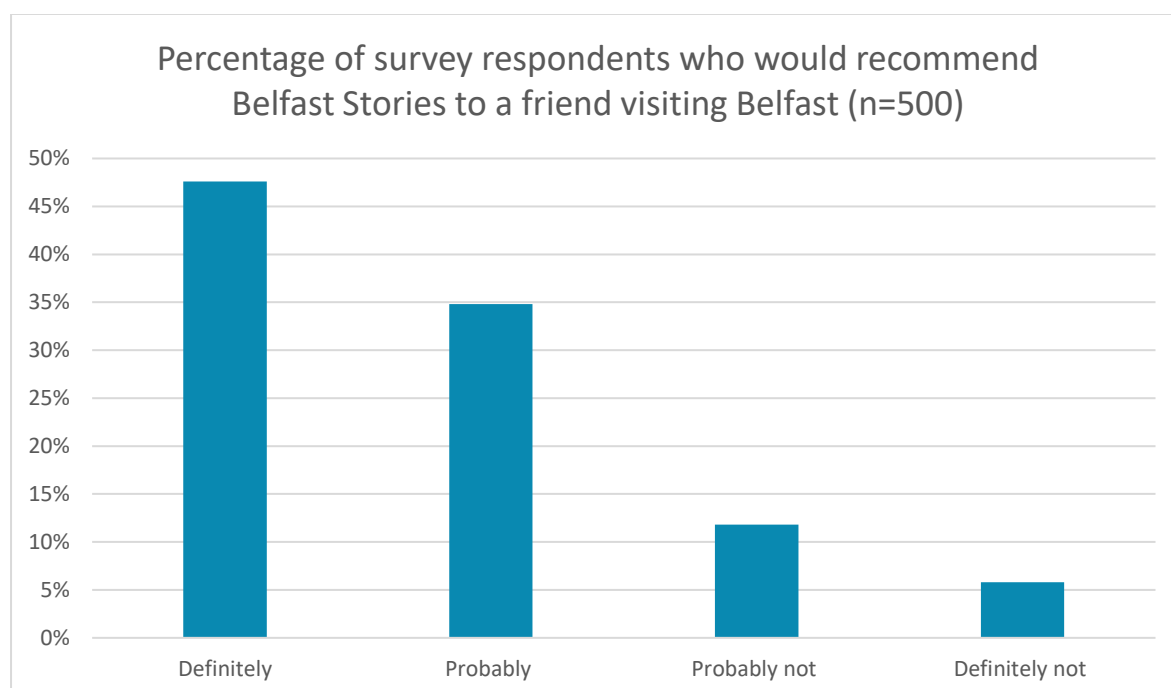People shared a deep personal connection to Belfast and a desire to share its stories with visitors. They stated they would feel proud to have an authentic representation of the city's stories, history, resilience, culture and potential that is positive and forward looking while being respectful of the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

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[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]?"

Across all consultees, people talked about the following activities:

- Exploring the visitor experience
- Using the roof garden, particularly to relax, enjoy the views or socialise (see also Public space)
- Meeting friends and socialising including with friends, colleagues and family (see also Who they would go with)
- Dining (see also Food stories)
- Shopping (see also Retail stories)
- Arts and culture
- Work or study (see also Creative hub)
- Using free WiFi
- Relaxing (some people asked for mobile-free areas within the building to support this)
- Bring visitors from outside NI (see also Who they would go with)

Consultees particularly welcomed the opportunity to use a space without spending money. This has become increasingly important in the economic downturn. Some group leaders noted that even the cost of public transport to get to Belfast Stories may be prohibitive currently for some of their members. Others said that they sometimes bought coffee in a café just to have somewhere to sit in Belfast. Being able to bring your own food and drink – for cost, cultural or health (including prescribed, restrictive and therapeutic diets) reasons – is important.

"I love free space and being able to dander around with no expectation of spending money."

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 of 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.
- Deterring 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.

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 of 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 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.

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[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 respondents[8] 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".

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[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 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 regarding 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"

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
    o The four entrances
    o Signage and way finding
    o Public space
    o 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 VCSE[9] 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

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[9] Voluntary, community and social enterprise
[10] Written responses were also received from four individuals.