

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 18th August, 2025

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Groogan (Chairperson);
The Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly;
Councillors T. Brooks, Bunting, Lyons,
McKay, McKeown and Murray.

In attendance: Mr. D. Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager;
Ms. S. O'Regan, Employability and Skills Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and
Governance Coordinator.

Election of Chairperson

The Working Group agreed that Councillor Groogan be elected to serve as Chairperson for the period to end on the date of the annual meeting of the Council in 2026.

(Councillor Groogan in the Chair.)

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Brennan and McDonough-Brown.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th May were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Groogan declared an interest under item 4. Employability and Skills (Verbal Update) in that she was employed by Forward South, who were referenced in the update, however, it was noted that she was not required to retire from the meeting whilst the item was being discussed.

Presentation

Blackstaff Residents' Association: Workhouse Museum and Interpretive Centre

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. B. Dickson and Mr. K. Martin to the meeting, on behalf of the Blackstaff Residents' Association.

Mr Dickson provided an overview of a proposal for a workhouse museum and interpretive centre to be located in or near the old Workhouse building within the grounds of Belfast City Hospital. He explained that the proposed museum would provide a general history of the Workhouse and highlighted the importance of the burial ground.

He informed the Working Group that the Department of Health had been contacted about the proposal and a site visit would be undertaken in the near future to assess its viability.

Mr. Martin highlighted the need for more tourist destinations in South Belfast and suggested that the proposal would add value to the city, both culturally and economically.

The representatives requested that the Working Group support the proposal for the historic site and advised that they would keep Member's informed of its progress.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for attending, following which the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Physical Programme Update

The Working Group considered the following report:

1. Introduction

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the Physical Programme update for South Belfast including the recently completed projects – Finaghy Bridge and City Hall – Installation of LGBT Stained Glass Windows at Appendix 1.**
- Note the stage movements for Sandy Row Open Space project under BIF to *Stage 2- Uncommitted*.**

3. Local Investment Fund (LIF)

Members are reminded that LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each

AWG area; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation. Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding spend to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 24 projects received 'In Principle' letters under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 23 have been completed and 1 project is still at initial stage. Further details are below.

LIF breakdown – South	LIF 1		LIF 2	
<i>Stage/ Description:</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount (£)</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount/ (£)</i>
Number of Projects Completed	12 (92%)	£1,053,600	11 (100%)	£796,000
Number of Projects in Delivery	1 (8%)	£30,000		
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects in Initial Stage (Due Diligence)				
Total Number of Approved Projects	13	£1,083,600	11	£796,000

The table below provides an overview of the remaining live project. Members are asked to note the status and ongoing actions.

LIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
SLIF017	Finaghy Bridge	£30,000	Delivery stage – nearing completion	Approved at SP&R Committee in May 2016 to undertake improvements to the bridge. Tender exercise seeking an artist to carry out the Council-led reimagining of the bridge complete. DfI approval received. Works are underway at the minute and is due to complete in the weekend (17 August 2025).	Continue engagement with the group and DfI.

4. Belfast Investment Fund (BIF)

Members are reminded that BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250k investment from Council. BIF – South Belfast was allocated £5.5m; with an additional £500k ringfenced for new areas (outer South) that had joined the District area under Local Government Reform. In South Belfast, 6 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment, thereby fully allocating its £5.5m, and £500k pot of funding. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

Summary of BIF allocated projects.

South	Stage 3 - Lagan Gateway - £2.1m; Lanyon Tunnels - £1.3m; Bredagh GAC - £700k; Arts & Digital Hub - £584k; Coffee Culture - £286k Stage 1 - Sandy Row Open Space project- £479k
Balmoral DEA	Stage 3 - Knockbreda Parish Church Hall - £250k Stage 2 - Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC - £250k

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF04	Lagan Gateway	£6,545,000 BIF - £2.15m UGV- £950k DfC - £470k DfI- £2m DfI Rivers - £975k	Stage 3 - Committed	Planning Approval received in June 2025. External match funding is in place from DfI. The contractor procurement is under evaluation and moderation. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring land owners regarding Right of Way and Land Agreements.	Continue engagement with the public and key stakeholders.
BIF07	Market Arches	£3.3m BIF -£1.3m UV – £2m t	Stage 3- Committed	Business case being developed.	Officer engagement with Executive Office, DfC and DfI as key funders
BIF48	Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub	£1,129,023 BIF-£584,167 UV-£706,856	Stage 3- Committed	On site. Planned completion in Summer 2025. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF46	Coffee Culture	£1,149,821 BIF-£286,519 SOF- £100,000	Stage 3- Committed	Letter of award has been issued however contractor has requested an uplift and unable to stand by the price submitted. The	Continue engagement with the group.

		UV- £463,302 DfC-£300,000		award was void and the team have issued a tender rerun to ensure a fair and competitive process. Forecasting appointment of contractor end of August 2025. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	
BIF33	Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC	£250,000	Stage 3- Committed	Agreement reached between Belvoir FC and NIHE on lease - valuation to be updated. The lease process is ongoing and Solicitors have been appointed. Progressing.	Continue engagement with the group and partners.
BIF47	Sandy Row Open Space project	£479,314*	Stage 1- Emerging <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Ongoing engagement between the Council and Translink in relation to the potential project site at Blythefield. Concept design presented to local community at Design Information Sessions. Next steps are for Translink to confirm design team appointment and outline designs to be approved by BCC in line with community requirements. <i>*The remaining balance of the ringfenced allocation for the Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Continue engagement with the group. Move to Stage 2- Uncommitted.

5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is a £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. 3 projects in South Belfast received an In-Principle funding commitment, and 2 have completed. Similar to LIF and BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. Members are asked to note the progress update of the remaining project in the table below.

SOF – South Belfast project overview

Project	Award	Status and update	Action/ Recommendation
SOF02 Coffee Culture	£1,149,821 SOF-£100,000 BIF-£286,519 UV- £463,302 DfC-£300,000	Letter of award has been issued however contractor has requested an uplift and unable to stand by the price submitted. The award was void and the team have issued a tender rerun to ensure a fair and competitive	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.

		process. Forecasting appointment of contractor end of August 2025.	
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6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital fund with a current overall budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The overall NRF allocation for South was £1,978,637, and 5 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each NRF project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. Projects remaining at Stage 2 continue to have the support of a Client Manager for their proposals.

South Belfast – NRF overview

South	Stage 3 - Sólás New Build project, GVRT Branching Out project, Lagan Water Access Activity Hub, Redevelopment of former School of Music, Market Heritage Hub Stage 2 (Reserve) - Redevelopment of Riddel's Warehouse Stage 1 (Reserve) - The Avenue Arts Centre, An Droichead Annex, Lagan Legacy
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South Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/Recommendation
Sólás New Build project	£2.5m NRF- £362,141 COF- £800,000 Various funders and group	Stage 3- Committed	Funding package has been secured by Sólás from NRF, Community Ownership Fund, various foundations and the Group's own funds. Procurement of contractor is underway. Working with Legal Services to finalise funding agreement.	Continue engagement with the group.
GVRT- Branching Out project	£500,000	Stage 3- Committed	Discussions continue with potential funders.	Continue engagement with the group.
Lagan Water Access Activity Hub	£308,248	Stage 3- Committed	Planning application for boathouse submitted and await decision.	Continue engagement with the group.
Redevelopment of former	£2,308,248 NRF-£308,248 UV- £2m	Stage 3- Committed	Business case being developed by Urban Villages regarding	Continue engagement with the group.

School of Music			potential investment in the scheme.	
Market Heritage Hub	£800,000 <i>NRF- £500,000</i> <i>COF- £300,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Due Diligence complete and funding agreement being prepared regarding building purchase. Council and Group are preparing for an application to Heritage Fund for restoration of the building.	Continue engagement with the group.

7. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is a rolling programme to either enhance existing Council assets or build / buy new assets or facilities. Table below provides an update on current live projects South Belfast area. Members are asked to note status and update.

South Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
Playground Improvement Programme 24/25	<i>Stage 3 Committed.</i> City-wide playgrounds improvements. Works at three sites across the city including Balfour Avenue Playground. Progressing. Balfour Avenue Playground nearing completion. Handover is scheduled for Friday 22nd August 2025.
Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	<i>Stage 3 Committed.</i> Details being worked up with CNS.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Works progressing. Progress made with the commencement of the installation for Phase 5a. 115 gates remain to be installed and works to be completed by February 2026.
City Hall – Installation of Stained Glass Windows – LGBT and NHS	<i>Stage 3 – Committed. Unveiling of new LGBTQ+ window completed.</i> NHS – Members agreed that scope of window be extended to include request from Families Bereaved From Covid for a permanent memorial be included in design of new window. Officers to engage with organisation to seek their views on proposed way forward. Progressing.
Communications Boards	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Outline business case prepared and request at August SP&R to move to Stage 3.
Strangford Ave Playing Fields Enabling Works	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Enabling works for active travel container and gate improvements. Design for enabling

	works is completed and contractor will be appointed imminently. Outline business case prepared and request at August SP&R to move to Stage 3.
Historic Cemeteries	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friars Bush, Knock Cemetery, Clifton Street Cemetery and Balmoral Cemetery. Scoping work underway for Phase 2 works, whilst the Phase 1 H&S works to Clifton Street are currently on site and due to complete October 2025.
Historic Tiled Street Signs	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Scoping of signs is continuing along with opportunities for external funding.
Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Feature lighting to exterior of Ulster Hall. Design and delivery is to be fully funded by DfC and Linen Quarter BID. Progressing.
City Hall External Christmas Tree provision	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Options are being explored and the City Hall Installations Working Group is receiving updates. Outline business case prepared and request at August SP&R to move to Stage 3.
Electric Vehicle Charging Network	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Land Asset Assessment underway to identify a long list of sites suitable in principle. Outline business case being worked up. Progressing.
Waterfront Hall Chiller Units	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Detailed design of the new chiller system is underway and due to be completed August 2025.
Waterfront Hall Smoke Curtains	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Modelling of the auditorium has been completed. Following this exercise, and agreement from Building Control & the Fire Service, no major remedial works are required and the Fire Strategy is to be updated accordingly.
Palm House, Botanic Gardens	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This early-stage Council heritage asset project is being considered as a candidate for partnership working with the Heritage Fund. Consultants have been appointed to prepare a Conservation Management Plan to support the application process.
City Hall Preservation	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Programme of works to ensure the preservation of the City Hall building.
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Specification developed and project moving to procurement.
Ormeau Park Basketball upgrade	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Upgrade to existing court. Strategic outline case prepared and request at August SP&R to move to Stage 2.
Musgrave Park Sensory Garden	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Upgrade to sensory garden. Strategic outline case prepared and request at August SP&R to move to Stage 2.

Belfast Bikes Expansion	The tender for a new provider/ operator has been completed. Project delivery progressing, with the new bikes due to come into operation in Autumn 2025.
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8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for several government departments on key capital investment programmes, namely Urban Villages (UV) from the Executive Office as well as a number of schemes with DfC and DfI. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to South Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

The table below is the status update on UV projects in South Belfast – note the UV programme has a defined South Belfast geography (Sandy Row; Donegall Pass and Markets).

UV – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
The Lockhouse - Gateway to the River / Walkway	Stalled on site due to NI Water issue. Option to resolve this issue agreed by project board. Architects have changed the design accordingly and discussions with contractor ongoing. Hoping to be onsite in January 2026.
Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub	As above at BIF48. Planned completion in Summer 2025.
Coffee Culture	As above at BIF46. Forecasting appointment of contractor end of August 2025.
Market Arches	As above at BIF07. Business case being developed.
Redevelopment of former School of Music	As above at NRF. Business case being developed.
Donegall Pass Good Relations Hub	Business case being developed.

PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan - Capital Project

Members are asked to note the update on PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan capital project in South Belfast. The Letter of Offer has been accepted and returned to SEUPB.

Project	Status and update
Annadale Open Space	Part of the overall Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. The procurement for the design team is underway and anticipate that a design team will be appointed in August 2025, with the view to submit a planning application by Autumn 2025. Stakeholder

	meetings to include all elected Members, will be held on a quarterly basis to provide status updates and to receive community feedback.
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DfC funded projects

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Communities in South Belfast.

DfC – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Holylands Alleygating and Cleansing Project	Link to the citywide Alleygating Phase 5 project.

DfI funded projects

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Infrastructure in South Belfast.

DfI – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Lagan Gateway	As above as BIF04. Planning Approval granted for Phase 2. External match funding is in place from DfI. The contractor procurement is under evaluation and moderation. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring land owners regarding the Right of Way and Land Agreements.

During discussion, in response to a Member's question in relation to Sandy Row Open Space project, Blythefield Park, the Senior Programme Delivery Manager advised that officers were working with Translink regarding an extension and the Community would be kept informed.

After discussion, the Working Group:

- Noted the Physical Programme update for South Belfast, including the recently completed projects at Finaghy Bridge and the City Hall Installation of the LGBT Stained Glass Window; and
- Noted the stage movements for Sandy Row Open Space project under BIF to Stage 2- Uncommitted.

Memorial at Donegall Road

The Working Group considered the options for a suitable Memorial to commemorate a burial ground at the Donegall Road site, including the wording and the type of memorial which should be erected.

It was reported that the location had been proposed for a Gatepost, situated between 263 – 265 Donegall Road and would be a permitted development subject to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive approval process.

The Senior Programme Delivery Manager explained that Dr. R. Atcheson, who was a social historian and history communicator, had been advocating for the installation of a memorial on the burial site and believed there might be as many as 50,000 or 60,000 burials within the site.

He advised that a meeting with Dr. Atcheson had taken place in June, and that she had suggested that the appropriate location to install a memorial plaque would be on the front of the remaining gatepost of the Belfast Workhouse.

The Working Group considered the following draft wording which Dr. Atcheson had prepared for the memorial:

BELFAST WORKHOUSE

This was the site of the Belfast Workhouse burial ground in use from 1848 to 1908. Tens of thousands of men, women and children were buried here in unmarked graves.

THEY ALL HAD NAMES

The Working Group also considered the type of materials for the memorial and illustrative plaque examples.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed to the aforementioned wording of the plaque and that illustrative mock-ups of materials and placement on the pillar, together with indicative costs, would be submitted to the next meeting for consideration.

Employability and Skills (Verbal Update)

The Employability and Skills Manager provided an update on the forthcoming Council Roadshows for the Employment Academies. She explained that these were targeted to areas with low participation rates and, as South Belfast was currently overrepresented, there would only be one Roadshow in this cycle. She highlighted that the Gateway Service Team would also be present at the Roadshows.

She provided an overview of the various academies currently available such as transport, childminding, beauty, plant operators, classroom assistants and technology, together with the potential for a ship building academy. She advised that there was also an academy for deaf and blind participants.

She encouraged the Working Group to sign up to the Employability and Skills monthly newsletter on the Council's website to promote the provision across the city.

Noted.

Request to Present at a Future Meeting – Hearth NI: Update on Riddel's Warehouse

The Working Group granted approval for a representative of Hearth NI to present to a future meeting to provide an update on Riddel's Warehouse.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that its next meeting would be held at 5.15 p.m. on 24th November.

Chairperson