

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 4th September, 2025

MEETING OF THE EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

**HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Members present: The High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer;
Aldermen Copeland and Rodgers; and
Councillors Abernethy, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks,
D. Douglas, S. Douglas, de Faoite,
P. Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn, Hanvey,
Long and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. D. Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager;
Mr. K. Donaghy, Labour Market Partnership Co-Ordinator;
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Chairperson

In the absence of the Chairperson, Alderman Lawlor, the Working Group agreed that Councillor Flynn would act as Chairperson for the duration of the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of the Chairperson, Alderman Lawlor, and Councillors Maghie and McCormick.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 5th June were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McAteer declared an interest in relation to item 2(b) "EastSide Partnership Presentation" in that EastSide Greenways was one of her chosen charities as High Sheriff, however, she was not required to leave the meeting whilst the item was being discussed.

Presentations

East Belfast Community Development Association (EBCDA)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Briggs, Executive Director, East Belfast Community Development Association (EBCDA), to the meeting.

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Mr. Briggs provided the Working Group with background information on the EBCDA and its role within East Belfast including its mission, namely, to provide resources, support and capacity building programmes for community groups that are based upon partnerships, equal opportunities and sustainable outcomes.

He presented the Working Group with an overview of the EBCDA Strategic Plan for 2025-2030, 'People Continue to Build Communities', which included detail on:

- **Community Development** - Adopted from the Community Development National Occupational Standards to enable people to work collectively to bring about positive social change; to enable communities to identify their own needs and actions; take collective action using their strength and resources; develop their confidence, skills and knowledge; challenge unequal power relationships; and promote social justice, equality and inclusion.
- **Values** - The community development process was underpinned by a set of five key values - social justice and equality; community empowerment; collective action; anti-discrimination; and working and learning together.
- **Strategic Themes** - Community Development Support; Community Resource and Finance Support; and Community Health Development Support.

Mr. Briggs provided the Working Group with a breakdown of the EBCDA membership, which included full and associate members. He also provided a breakdown in respect of EBCDA's total income.

He advised that EBCDA managed the East Belfast Network Centre, which was located in the former Templemore Avenue Elementary School building, and included an office base for EBCDA, Dementia Navigators, Engage With Age, uHub Counselling Centre, East Belfast Independent Advice Centre, East Belfast Surestart, Replay Theatre Company, Arts and Business, and conference and meeting space.

During discussion Mr. Briggs answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the EBCDA membership, volunteering and the challenges currently facing the voluntary sector, Council support and the collaboration within the Network Centre.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Briggs for his attendance and presentation, and he retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

EastSide Partnership

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. M. Bryans, Chief Executive, and Ms. G. Hamilton, Partnership Manager, representing EastSide Partnership to the meeting.

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The representatives presented the Working Group with an update in relation to EastSide Greenways with a focus on the funding which it had recently received through the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund as part of a project to create a climate-resilient Connswater Community Greenway.

Ms. Bryans and Ms. Hamilton provided context to the project, which was to link climate action to the everyday lives and interests of local communities, inspire action, and to influence communities at a regional and national level. She advised that £1.3 million had been awarded over five years and had commenced at the beginning of September. It was reported that the funding would support neighbourhood led projects with the scope to feed into and help shape city-wide and regional agendas, and projects which could be scaled up. The Working Group was then provided with an overview of the Climate Action Fund Partnership model.

The representatives outlined the projects desired outcomes which included to:

- understand the natural environment;
- raise awareness of climate change;
- build capacity within communities;
- develop scalable pilot projects;
- movement building;
- empower communities; and
- influence and inform policy and strategy.

During discussion the representatives answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the pilot projects, collation of relevant existing data in relation to air and water pollution, biodiversity, EastSide Partnership resources and community and youth engagement.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and presentation, and they retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Request to Present - Phoenix Education Centre

The Working Group acceded to a request from the Phoenix Education Centre to present to a future meeting an overview of the work it is doing within East Belfast to tackle educational inequality, support young people and families, and provide accessible accredited learning.

Physical Programmes Update

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

1. Introduction

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the

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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 East Belfast including recently completed projects at Appendix 1 – Castlereagh Presbyterian Church and Parklands, Knocknagoney Dale - Knocknagoney Park Improvements;
- note the scheduled date regarding the dedicated workshop session facilitated by the consultants on the new crematorium project on Thursday, 18th September 2025. All Members of the AWG and SP&R Committee can attend.

3. Local Investment Fund

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 areas; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation with the East being allocated £1.127m under LIF1 and £1.2m under LIF2.

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: 22 projects received In Principle support under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 19 have been completed and 1 project is at delivery stage and 1 project is at due diligence stage.

LIF breakdown – East	LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	8 (80%)	£931,902	12 (100%)	£1,161,589
Number of Projects in Delivery	1(10%)	£30,000		
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects at Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	1 (10%)	£70,000		

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Total Number of Approved Projects	10	£1,031,902	12	£1,161,589
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The table below provides an overview of progress and actions around the remaining live projects.

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action / Recommendation
ELIF31	Bloomfield FC, Clonduff FC, East Belfast FC and Dundela FC, Tullycarnet, Cregagh Wanderers, Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Bredagh GAC – storage facilities	£65,000 (£30k plus £35k reallocation)	On Ground	Bloomfield FC, East Belfast FC, Tullycarnet FC, Cregagh Wanderers and Bredagh GAC - completed. Clonduff FC – awaiting delivery of the container (expected to be Sept). Nettlefield Multi-Sports – signed off at DD in June. Awaiting club to return signed funding agreement to enable delivery of the container. Dundela FC – funding agreement to be finalised. Club preferred that container will be delivered after the proposed NRF pitch work is complete.	Continue engagement with the groups.
ELIF29	Cycling Ireland	£70,000	Due Diligence	The group have recently updated the council on their current priorities. Officers are waiting for the group to provide more detail on the desired specification of the proposed facilities. A proposal to refresh the feasibility study has been discussed, but there is no funding	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.

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				for it. Group considers possibility of seeking match funding, but no monies has been secured yet.	
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4. Belfast Investment Fund

Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250,000 investment from Council. In East Belfast, 9 projects have received an In-Principle funding commitment under BIF. There are 5 projects on the longer BIF list. Each of the In-Principle projects are taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. The table below provides a summary of BIF allocated projects i.e. project stage; project title; and the funding allocated.

Summary of BIF allocated projects:

East	Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£655k Stage 2— <i>Lagan Village Youth & Community—no commitment</i> Stage 1— <i>East Belfast Mission; Belmont Bowling Club; Bloomfield Presbyterian Church; St. John's Orangefield, Church of Ireland, Tullycarnet Community Support Services—no commitment / on long list</i>
Outer East	Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh Presbyterian Church—£382k

The table below provides an overview of the remaining projects. Members are asked to note the actions and recommendations.

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF12	Strand Arts Centre	£6,782,069 <i>LUF- £4,094,000</i> <i>BIF- £1,550,000</i> <i>HF- £255,000 (Development Grant), £768,069 (Delivery Grant) Several</i>	On Ground	On Ground. Works began on site in early January 2025 and are progressing well, with completion due 2nd quarter 2026. Discussion ongoing with DfC regarding potential additional funding. Site visit was	Continue engagement with the group and funders.

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		<i>Trusts- £115,000</i>		arranged earlier same day (4th September).	
BIF13	Bloomfield Community Association	£715,009 <i>BIF - £655,000 LIF - £60,009</i>	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	DfC funding commitment announced on 2 June 2025. ICT currently being procured. Due Diligence ongoing.	Continue engagement with the group.

Outer East BIF Projects

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF38	Castlereagh Presbyterian Church	£382,000	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	Project completed. Project handover held on Monday 25th August 2025.	Continued engagement with the group.

5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. There is one project under SOF for East Belfast - Eastside Visitor Centre – with an In-Principle funding commitment. Similar to BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award.

Project	SOF Award	Status	Action/ Recommendation
EastSide Hotel & Visitor Centre <i>(links to NRF project)</i>	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising: SOF- £700,000 NRF- £950,000 Group- £400k</i>	Design Team progressing with detailed design.	Continued engagement with the group.

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 East was £2,351,551 and 4 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.

East Belfast – NRF overview

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East	Stage 3 - Eastside Container Hotel, Portview Exchange, Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park, Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road Stage 2 - Impact Belfast, Nevin Spence Centre Visitor Experience
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East Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project name	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
EastSide Hotel & Visitor Centre <i>(links to SOF project)</i>	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising: SOF- £700k NRF- £950k Group- £400k</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	Design Team progressing with detailed design.	Continued engagement with the group.
Portview Exchange	£600,000	Stage 3 - Committed	Linked to UV project. Business case being updated.	Continue engagement with the group.
Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park	£500,000	Stage 3 - Committed	Planning application ongoing. Group is awaiting decision on funding application to secure the remaining budget required.	Continue engagement with the group and integrated design team.
Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road	£300,000	Stage 3 - Committed	Planning Application submitted. Group is continuing to source additional funding. Design team procurement planned for autumn 2025.	Continue engagement with the group.

7. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building / buying new assets. Members are reminded of the 3-stage approval process in place for every project on council's Capital Programme, as agreed by SP&R Committee. The table below provides an

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update on current live projects in East Belfast. Members are asked to note the status and update.

East Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
New Crematorium	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Technical Design is complete. Procurement exercise for the main contractor has been completed. A review of the business case is being undertaken. In June 2025, SP&R Committee agreed to hold a dedicated workshop to inform a Strategic Analysis and Options Appraisal on the project. The date of the workshop is now set on Thursday 18th September 2025.
Playground Improvement Programme 25/26	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Agreed at P&C Committee in May 2025. Playgrounds selected for refurbishment are White Rise, Ohio Street, Roddens Crescent, and Finvoy Street playgrounds. Progressing.
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.
Communications Boards in playgrounds	<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.
Cremated Remains Burial Plots	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Feasibility study has been completed. An outline business case has been prepared and under review.
Historic Cemeteries	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friars Bush, Knock Cemetery, Clifton Street Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. 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.
Sydenham Greenway	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Ongoing discussion with DfI regarding a partnership approach. DfI plan to deliver Phase 1A (Victoria Park to Inverary Community Centre) in current financial year. DfI are developing design options for the entrance to Victoria Park and asking to present these options to the next AWG. Suggestion for Council to deliver the 'feeder path' through Tommy Patton Millenium Park with DfI funding. Business Case

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	being developed currently to be submitted to DfI Greenways Fund (to be launched in September).
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.
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.
Basketball Courts	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> The work includes creation or upgrades of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. Strategic outline case prepared and request at August SP&R to move to Stage 2.
Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan. Education Authority (EA) is continuing to develop a business case for capital funding for youth provision at the council owned Ballymacarrett site. Officers are continuing to liaise with EA on the way forward.
Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to the Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East project.
Belfast Bikes Expansion	A new provider/ operator has been appointed. Project delivery progressing, with the new bikes due to come into operation in Autumn 2025.
Parklands, Knocknagoney Dale - Knocknagoney Park Improvements	This work is under S76 Developer Contributions for Open Space. Project completed. Car park improvements and new access path/ lighting complete July 2024. Tree planting and installation of additional park seating completed in June 2025.
Lands at Castlehill Manor – Belmont Park Improvements	This work is under S76 Developer Contributions for Open Space. Belmont Park woodland trail and accessible picnic area completed in Spring 2023. Additional sensory play equipment to be installed in Autumn 2025.

8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for a number of government departments on significant capital investment programmes, namely the Urban Villages Initiative (UV) funded by the Executive Office, and number of schemes with DfC. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to East Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

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Project	Status and update
Titanic People Exhibition	<i>Project underway.</i> Due to project delays handover is expected to take place in late Autumn 2025.
Portview Exchange <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i>	<i>Business case stage.</i> Business case being updated.

PEACEPLUS – Capital Project

Members are asked to note updates on the capital project under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

East Belfast – PEACEPLUS LAP Capital Project overview

Project	Status and update
Sanctuary Theatre	Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Refurbishment of the Sanctuary Theatre at Castlereagh Street. Moderation process now concluded, Intention to Award letter issued to appoint Design Team who will be in place by early September 2025. Project steering group and stakeholder engagement ongoing.

The Working Group:

- i. noted the physical programme update for East Belfast including the recently completed projects at Castlereagh Presbyterian Church and the Improvements at Parklands, Knocknagoney Dale/Knocknagoney Park; and
- ii. noted that a dedicated workshop session on the new crematorium project, to be facilitated by the consultants, would be held on Thursday 18th September, 2025, and that all Members of the East Belfast Area Working Group and Strategic Policy and Resources Committee could attend.

Employability and Skills (Verbal Update)

The Labour Market Partnership Co-ordinator provided the Working Group with an update on the forthcoming Council roadshows which would offer information on the Employment Academies that were open for recruitment such as classroom assistants, transport, business services, childcare, health and social care, beauty and construction.

He reported that a series of roadshows would be held across the city, including in East Belfast on Tuesday 9th September, 2025, in the Skainos Centre, Newtownards Road, and would be supported by the Gateway to Choice service to provide information, advice and guidance.

He drew Members attention to the Employability and Skills Network, which provided further information on the employability and skills initiatives, programmes and

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opportunities that were available across the city, and encouraged Members to register on to the Network.

The Labour Market Partnership Co-ordinator highlighted to the Working Group that Harland and Wolff shipyard employees had recently completed an upskilling welding academy, which was essential to fulfil a new contract, and advised that there was work being undertaken to carry out a maritime and shipbuilding skills audit, which would focus on both the Council's plans in relation to the sector and the regional plans for the sector going forward.

The Working Group noted the Employability and Skills update provided.

Chairperson