



Subject:	Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation Response
Date:	10 September 2025
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

- (i) Information relating to any individual
- (ii) Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
- (iii) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
- (iv) Information in connection with any labour relations matter
- (v) Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
- (vi) Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
- (vii) Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide an update on the current DfC consultation on their proposed 'Shaping Sustainable Places' programme and to seek agreement on the Council response to the consultation.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Note the current DfC public consultation on their proposed 'Shaping Sustainable Places' programme. (ii) Approve the draft Council response to the Shaping Sustainable Places consultation, subject to any further comments from the SP&R Committee. (iii) Note that the response will be brought to the SP&R Committee on the 19th September given the potential financial and resource implications of the programme, and that the response will be submitted to DfC on the 21st September, subject to Council ratification on the 1st October 2025.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	DfC launched a public consultation on the 23 rd June on their proposed 'Shaping Sustainable Places' programme (attached at Appendix B), with consultation responses required by the 21 st September 2025. This programme is proposed to take a similar approach to the DfC led Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, with DfC, DfI & DEARA working together to provide a long-term regeneration strategy for the region's villages, towns and city centres. The initiative aims to address issues like dereliction, vacancy, and declining footfall by investing in placemaking, adaptive reuse of buildings, and climate-resilient infrastructure.
3.2	Each government department (DfC, DAERA and DfI) are proposing to jointly fund a multi-year approach to enable councils across NI to deliver on departmental/council priorities. Pending approval through DoF, the partners intend to provide £5m each per annum of capital funding to a region wide funding pot for 10 years, totalling £150m with each Department contributing £50million over a ten-year period. At this stage it is not clear how the funding would be allocated per Council area, although some concepts for this are tested within the consultation.
3.3	The funding model proposed assumes a further minimum contribution of 10% (approximately £15 million) from Local Councils, which is important to clarify that such contributions cannot be presumed. It has been highlighted within the attached draft response (Appendix A) that councils operate within defined governance frameworks and statutory processes regarding capital expenditure, and any financial commitment must be subject to formal approval. It is assumed that this will be assessed on a project-by-project basis.

3.4	<p>Officer meetings with DfC have confirmed the types of projects that DfC would expect to come through this programme. The expectation is that the funding would align with the specific funders /departmental normal remit, for DfC this may align with High Street Revitalisation issues such as addressing vacancy/dereliction, place-making & public realm, for DfI it may align to priorities in the emerging Eastern Transport Plan such as active travel provision and pedestrianisation. The DAERA element requires further assessment as currently it is assumed that this funding would be broadly aligned more to rural development rather than urban and rural projects.</p>
3.5	<p>The draft Council response, attached at Appendix A, broadly supports the proposed vision and principles of Shaping Sustainable Places, particularly its emphasis on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place-based regeneration • Early and meaningful community engagement • Collaborative delivery models • Long-term, secured funding
3.6	<p>These principles strongly align with the Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, which articulates a shared vision for Belfast as an inclusive, resilient, and thriving city.</p> <p><u>Key Considerations Contained within the Draft Response</u></p>
3.7	<p>i) General support for a multi-year approach</p> <p>Belfast City Council welcomes the proposal for a multi-year, secured funding model recognising that this approach would provide greater stability. It would enable council to plan, design and deliver complex projects with appropriate lead in times whilst achieving value for money.</p> <p>However, further clarity is required on the allocation framework specifically how the £150m will be distributed across councils. The draft response calls for a transparent, needs based model that reflects Belfast's scale as a capital city, complexity, population, regional role and strategic importance along with supporting projects with the greatest economic impact.</p>
3.8	<p>ii) Clarification on Departmental aims and additionality</p> <p>It remains unclear how this proposed programme will operate within existing constrained budgets and existing Executive level commitments. The draft response seeks clarification on whether this funding is additional to existing Executive level commitments/budgets/programmes, or whether Councils would be expected to deliver government priorities using this programme, i.e. will Councils be expected to consider,</p>

prioritise and deliver projects such as elements of the Eastern Transport Plan, Belfast Streets Ahead etc or will these remain within the Executive departments, and if so what are impacts of allocating budget to the Shaping Sustainable Places on the delivery timeframes of Executive strategic projects.

The scale of under investment in Belfast is significant, especially when considering that Belfast City Centre is the economic driver for the Region. Belfast currently has multiple major schemes pending funding, primarily via DfC and DfI, for example:

- Belfast Streets Ahead Phases 3 and 5 (DfC).
- Gateway projects at Shankill, Clifton and Fredrick Streets
- Belfast Cycle Network, BRT Phase 2 and other active infrastructure (DfI)
- Under the Bridges, Sailortown Bridge and emerging schemes linked to the Eastern Transport Plan

This is exacerbated by the lack of specific regeneration funding streams that are available to Belfast (and wider NI region) as compared to elsewhere in the UK. As set out in a separate report to this Committee on the Place Based Growth Proposition for Belfast, the city has experienced a regeneration deficit as it historically has not attracted as much funding, investment or spend on regeneration and local growth as other cities in the UK.

A combination of funds not being applicable to the devolved administrations and Northern Ireland receiving relatively lower allocations from funds operating on a competitive basis means that Northern Ireland has amongst the lowest spend on regeneration and local growth per head of population, compared to Scotland, Wales and English regions – nearly half the regional average spend per capita. This outcome is not reflective of need for regeneration in Belfast relative to other cities in England, Scotland or Wales or Northern Ireland more broadly. Arguably the need is greater in a Northern Ireland context. A number of specific regeneration funds available in the rest of the UK have not been available in Northern Ireland which has led to a clear deficit and a missed opportunity for growth and positive economic, regeneration, social and environmental outcomes.

The English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, envisions a fundamental change of the relationship between Whitehall and local government in England – with the intent of tackling regional inequality by transferring authority and funding over key policy areas and funding, such as economic development, housing, planning, transport and skills. There is now a presumption in favour of devolution on foot of this White Paper and with the creation of new Strategic Authorities this means funding and legislative powers will be further devolved in other UK cities. The transfer of additional funding and power to these Strategic

	<p>Authorities across the whole of England will allow Councils to set and deliver on priorities that better respond to local needs and drive growth.</p> <p>Increased funding pots and flexibilities are to be afforded to those Strategic Authorities that progress within the devolution framework, with single-pot integrated settlements over 30 years and access to consolidated funding pots covering local growth, place, housing, and regeneration, non-apprenticeship adult skills and transport. These funding agreements provide a 30-year investment promise – by way of example, Cambridge and Peterborough will receive £30m per annum, North of Tyne £48m per annum and West Midlands £36m per annum.</p> <p>Belfast is already facing a regeneration deficit in both powers and funding and could be left even further behind if there are not commensurate levels of funding as with other core cities. This could make it even harder for the city to attract the resources needed to unlock demand and growth.</p> <p>It is therefore essential that Departments clarify whether this new funding stream will replace historic investment programmes or run alongside them and that recognition. Without this clarity, there is significant risk that the ambition of the programme will far exceed its funding capacity. In addition, the Council would ask that DfC, DfI and DAERA support them in their ask for additional place based regeneration funding via Westminster commensurate with the approach and level of funding pots being afforded to other UK cities as a result of the Devolution White Paper proposals</p>
3.9	<p>iii) Council contribution and governance considerations</p> <p>Whilst a minimum 10% contribution is assumed, the draft response makes it clear that financial contributions cannot be assumed and would be subject to Councils own governance and approvals processes.</p>
3.10	<p>iv) Delivery capacity and resources</p> <p>Effective delivery of complex regeneration projects requires not only robust governance but also sufficient resourcing to navigate statutory approvals and technical processes. Where councils are expected to take a leadership role, resources must extend beyond capital allocation and include dedicated funding for inhouse delivery teams, provision for a management fee to support project management functions, and specialist feasibility development support to prepare capital ready pipelines. To enable this, it is recommended that a portion of funding is ringfenced for early-stage activities including feasibility assessment, design development and meaningful community engagement, ensuring that projects are both</p>

	<p>viable and deliverable before significant capital spend is committed. It is also proposed that the requested 10% contribution could be assessed in terms of in-kind contribution in terms of staff and resource to deliver, although as above this will also be subject to Councils own governance and approvals process.</p>
3.11	<p>v) Statutory approvals and processes</p> <p>Current placemaking schemes face lengthy delays due to complex statutory approval requirements and are often hindered by Statutory Consultees ability to adequately allocate sufficient resource, which can significantly slow down delivery. A new model must therefore address this challenge, potentially through streamlining processes or prioritising cross departmental/Council approvals process. If DfI is no longer the direct delivery body, its level of obligation and responsiveness to approval processes should be reviewed to avoid unnecessary setbacks.</p> <p>It is recommended that establishing a co-ordinated statutory approvals framework, supported by strong departmental leadership, is essential to unlocking delivery pace. This should include clarifying roles, simplifying processes and ensuring that all enabling partners including funders and utilities are actively engaged from the outset.</p>
3.12	<p>vi) The role of DAERA in urban regeneration</p> <p>The current document provides limited insight into the potential interventions from the DAERA in Belfast. Whilst DAERA'S remit has traditionally been centred on rural regeneration, the implementation of climate mitigation and risk measures within capital projects is strategically significant for the city's future resilience</p> <p>Further clarity is required on how DAERA'S investment will directly support the outcomes in Belfast, particularly in relation to the delivery of climate mitigation and adaptation infrastructure. Ensuring that Belfast is adequately assessed and resourced within DAERA's framework will be essential to embedding sustainable regeneration practices and meeting long term climate change objectives.</p>
3.13	<p>vii) Support for competitive funding streams</p> <p>The draft response supports the use of thematic competitive funding (e.g. heritage assets, climate resilience, and economic centres) as a means to catalyse targeted investment and unlock place-based economic potential. These thematic streams can stimulate local enterprise, attract co-investment, and accelerate regeneration outcomes when aligned with strategic priorities. However, it is important to highlight that competitive mechanisms must complement and not compromise the foundational funding required to plan and deliver</p>

	coherent programmes at scale. The assessment criteria needs to clearly set out how projects would be evaluated, with a particular focus on the economic impact of the investment to ensure the greatest delivery of benefit.
3.14	<p>viii) Mid-term review and evaluation</p> <p>We recommend that an embedded, structured mid-term review mechanism is established to assess progress, measure impact, and enable course correction where necessary. This approach would reinforce accountability, strengthen transparency and ensure that delivery models remain responsive and adaptable to evolving local contexts. By building in a formal review stage, programmes can better align resources with outcomes and maintain momentum over the full investment cycle. This review would need to be subject to Council input, including through Councils own governance and approval process.</p>
3.15	<p>ix) Alignment with existing plans and programmes</p> <p>We strongly support the use of existing strategic plans (e.g. Belfast Agenda, Local Development Plan) to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue.</p>
3.16	<p>Members are asked to consider and input to the Councils draft response to the Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation, prior to agreeing the final draft. Members are also asked to note that the agreed response from this Committee will be brought to the SP&R Committee on the 19th September for consideration and approval of the elements of the response relating to Council contributions and resource allocation. The draft response will be submitted to DfC following the SP&R meeting, and will be submitted subject to final Council ratification on the 1st October.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The SP&R Committee will be asked to consider and agree the response to the Financial & Resource implications included within this response.</p>
5.0	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Equality, Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment have not been undertaken in the drafting of this response, although they have been considered. Detailed assessments will be required should the programme come forward.</p>
6.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
6.1	<p>Appendix A - Shaping Sustainable Places consultation (draft) Corporate Response</p> <p>Appendix B - Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation 2025: https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/Shaping-Sustainable-Places-consultation.pdf</p>

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