

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 9th October, 2025

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Donnelly (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland and McCoubrey;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, R. Brooks, T. Brooks,
Collins, P. Donnelly, S. Douglas,
Ferguson, Groogan, Magee, McCann,
Meenehan, Murray and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st October.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentations

(Ms. M. Quigley, Adaptation and Resilience Advisor, attended in connection with these two items.)

Review of the Belfast Stories site (BRINK!)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. G. Morrison and Mr. P. Kelly, Brink!, to the meeting.

Together they outlined that Brink! was dedicated to addressing climate breakdown through discussion, education, and action. They used art and citizen science to explore innovative ways of living in a rapidly changing environment. They encouraged individuals to rethink urban spaces, highlighting their recent “meanwhile use” of the Belfast Stories site within the city centre.

They advised the Committee that they had hosted workshops, panels, and community events to engage participants in meaningful conversations and hands-on

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activities to develop skills to build a sustainable future. They promoted sustainable practices such as reducing waste, rethinking consumption, and empowering communities to take action. The Members were advised that Brink! aimed to inspire change and invited people to join the movement and to contribute to the transformation of their city.

In response to a number of Members' questions as to what was next for Brink! and how the Council could help, the representatives explained that, while the meanwhile use of the Belfast Stories site was undoubtedly a success, available sites were difficult to come by, highlighting there was often a lot of bureaucracy and delays in the way of making progress with such projects.

In response to a further Member's point, they outlined that they had had discussions with the Cathedral Quarter Trust in respect of the North Street Arcade.

A further Member asked whether they had worked with local schools in respect of local growing. They explained that they had trialled reaching out to a number of different age groups but that schools, in particular, had significantly more health and safety requirements in regards to reaching a city centre site with uneven ground, for example. They stated, however, that, given more lead in time, they would be happy to work with local schools on such projects.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the representatives for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

Noted.

The future of Urban Treescapes in the UK (Involve)

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. R. McCabe (Involve), Mr. I. McArthur and Ms. J. Holmes, to the meeting.

Ms. McCabe, Head of Northern Ireland at Involve, explained that the "Our Future Treescapes" public dialogue had brought together 48 members of the public from across the UK to envision the future of trees, woodlands, and forests over the next 50 years. The participants, including Mr. McArthur and Ms. Holmes in NI, had been selected through a civic lottery and had engaged in a four-month process involving place-based and online sessions to explore how treescapes could meet environmental, societal, and individual needs.

The Committee was advised that six principles and 15 calls to action had been developed specifically for Belfast, focusing on fair access, public involvement, and sustainable treescape management. The representatives reported that the recommendations resulting from the process included promoting locally sourced seeds, education initiatives, public engagement strategies and intentional planting. The conversations had emphasised collaboration among local authorities, Non-Governmental Organisations, schools and communities to ensure long-term resilience and ecological benefits. The Members were advised that the programme aimed

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to support local projects, share findings with decision-makers, and promote treescape expansion through advocacy and education.

In response to a Member's questions, Ms. McCabe confirmed that they were liaising with Mr. Conor McKinney, Wild Belfast, regarding the National Park City initiative.

In response to a further Member's question, Mr. McArthur and Ms. Holmes stated that they had been delighted to have participated in the initiative and that the model of dialogue had been incredibly interesting, having heard from so many different perspectives, and that they had been able to come up with practical solutions and plans for the future.

The Adaptation and Resilience Advisor advised the Committee that it had been energising to be involved in the project and that the Council had clear actions through its Climate Action Plan.

A further number of Members stated that it was important to recognise that the young people were taking ownership and pride in their City and that they were often ahead of the curve in terms of Climate action. They commended those Council staff who were working within the community to engage young people in activities such as tree planting.

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

Noted.

Notices of Motion Update

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy presented the Members with four Notices of Motion/Issues Raised in Advance for which the Committee was responsible.

In relation to the Motion "New Ireland Forum and Citizens Assemblies", a Member requested that a further follow up letter be sent to the Taoiseach, given that no response had been received to date.

After discussion the Committee:

1. noted the updates to the Notices of Motion / Issues Raised in Advance for which Climate and City Resilience Committee was responsible; and
2. agreed to issue a further follow up letter to the Taoiseach regarding the New Ireland Forum and Citizens Assemblies.

DAERA NI Climate Action Plan Consultation Response

(Ms. B. Roddy, Project Support Officer (Climate), attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members about the recent public consultation on the Draft NI Climate Action Plan 2023-2027

2.0 Recommendation

- I. Members are asked to note the proposals set out in the consultation document and to approve the draft Council response as attached at appendix 1. Subject to approval by Council, the response will be submitted to DAERA via their online consultation platform.**
- II. Approve the officer response that was submitted by Belfast City Council to the public consultation which closed on 8th October 2025.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 committed Northern Ireland to reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to net zero by 2050, with a series of five year carbon budgets set to ensure steady progress from the outset. In December 2024, the Executive agreed that for the period of this plan, 2023-2027, GHG gas emissions need to be reduced by an annual average of 33% from 1990 levels.

Importantly, the Act places a specific legal duty on all Northern Ireland departments to exercise their functions, as far as possible, in a way that supports achieving targets and carbon budgets. This ensures a shared responsibility both to reduce emissions through policies and proposals included in this plan and to monitor any likely impact on emissions of emerging policies and proposals during this first carbon budget period, 2023-2027.

The draft Climate Action Plan sets out 52 policies and proposals designed to reduce emissions across nine sectors:

- **energy production and supply;**
- **transport;**
- **business and industrial processes;**
- **residential buildings;**
- **public buildings;**
- **waste management;**
- **agriculture;**
- **land use, land-use change and forestry; and**
- **fisheries.**

Some sectors are expected to contribute more than others; some policies and proposals have a greater impact than others; some contribute to emissions savings across more than one sector. Together, these policies and proposals set a roadmap of action needed to reduce emissions and keep Northern Ireland on track for future targets. Policies and programmes referenced also vary in terms of states of readiness, with some well established and others still under development.

The CAP attempts to quantify the potential GHG emission reductions that the 52 policies and programmes might result in, with analysis based on a number of stretching assumptions.

3.2 Draft Council Response

Overall, the approach of the CAP's policies and proposals outlined is welcomed and supported, as is the recognition by DAERA that without adequate, secured funding and political and public backing, achieving the carbon budget will be challenging. Within the draft consultation response, a number of key points and recommendations were made, as summarised below.

- **Energy - we welcomed more detail on the proposed Renewable Electricity Support Scheme for Northern Ireland but cautioned that without a complementary additional policy towards storage, it could lead to higher electricity bills for consumers and additional challenges for the grid operator. The response also highlighted that significantly more investment will be needed than is currently planned to meet rising electricity demand and increased supply of renewable electricity.**

- **Transport** - re-ordering the three proposed transport policy priorities (of switching fuels to lower emission versions, switching modes of transport and reducing the need and length of journeys) to prioritise reducing car journeys and modal shift in urban areas, recognising the risk around the global supply chain for critical minerals needed for the proposed fuels and technologies. Transport related policies should also consider targeted financial support, such as grants, for low-income households and consider instruments to promote the used electric vehicle market as well as incentives for rural users.
- **Business and industrial processes** – a major challenge is the labour skills gap both in terms of number of workers and skills for new low carbon services and technology. A limitation of the current Energy and Resource Efficiency Programme is that the technical consultancy support is only available for businesses spending over £30k annually on energy and resources, which excludes many small businesses (80,000 registered SMEs and 70,000 micro businesses in operation across Northern Ireland). The need for policies to incentivise the re-use of waste heat from industrial processes for heat networks was also highlighted.
- **Residential buildings** - lack of finance is a major barrier to the implementation of domestic retrofit in NI. The response welcomed a radical scaling up of the proposed energy efficiency and warmer healthier homes programmes to a scale that mirrors schemes available in GB and RoI. In addition to strengthening Building Regulations to improve building fabric, householders require impartial support and advice to help them access funds and improve the energy efficiency of their homes. The response also cautioned against policies that would incentivise the continued use of oil boilers in urban areas.
- **Public buildings sector** - councils should be included in future government energy efficiency schemes. Although councils do not represent a large proportion of emissions in this sector, they have an important presence in communities and should be seen to be leading by example in terms of energy consumption and best practice. Climate should be considered throughout public sector capital projects, factoring in considerations such as Sustainable Urban Drainage and Whole Life Carbon Modelling as standard. The need for a specific support mechanism to help develop heat networks and make them competitive with gas heating, in particular mechanisms to support/facilitate the connection of public buildings to heat networks as this will avoid the costly grid upgrades

that would be required if all public buildings were fitted with individual heat pumps.

- **Waste** – a 65% municipal recycling rate whilst reducing waste to landfill to not more than 10% by 2035, will not be met without the inclusion of all commercial and industrial waste and there must be greater emphasis on statutory buy-in from this sector. To meet these targets, Northern Ireland requires clear strategic direction in the form of policy and legislation supported with adequate finances. There is also a need for improved data provision from the commercial and industrial sectors to assist with waste projections and ensure compliance with waste legislation.
- **Agriculture** - rather than seeking interventions to address pollutants caused through over stocking the pollution should be decreased at source by moving to more regenerative farming practices, identifying the carrying capacity of land to assess sustainable livestock numbers and taking into account factors such as soil type and local hydrology.
- **Land use, land-use change and forestry** – the response challenges the claim ‘that sustainable forestry, including afforestation meets the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard and open habitat restoration, is, by definition, a nature-based project’, as it does not meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature definition. Likewise, coniferous forests are not nature-based projects as claimed in the plan. The response advises alignment with the UK Forestry Standard which recommends 5% native broadleaved trees or shrubs; 10% of other tree species; and 10% open ground, or ground managed for biodiversity as the primary objective. The response also recommends an assessment of current forest estate planted on peat and identify opportunities to restore these peatland areas.
- **Economic Impact Assessment of the CAP** – the response highlights the failure of the Plan to frame climate action as a cost avoided, treating the short-term costs of climate action in isolation, without comparing them to the much higher economic, social, and environmental costs of climate inaction. Cost avoidance is critical to justifying the upfront investment. Also, there is no mention of intergenerational equity, acknowledging that climate action today helps avoid passing greater costs and risks onto future generations.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 At this stage there is no immediate resource or financial ask of the Council to respond to this public consultation.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Consideration of equality, good relations and rural needs was embedded in the consultation document questions by DAERA and in Belfast City Council responses.”

In response to a Member’s question, the Climate Commissioner confirmed to the Members that Council officers regularly collaborated with other Councils and with central Government through a number of forums.

A Member stated that they felt the stackable home recycling boxes should be reviewed. He also felt that the unrecyclable waste at the Council’s recycling centres was given too prominent a location, making it too easy for people to dispose of waste to landfill without considering the environmental impact.

A further Member stated that the cycle lanes throughout the City needed considerable investment before any further money was contributed towards the Belfast Bikes scheme.

After discussion the Committee adopted the recommendations within the report.

Innovate UK Project - Belfast Net Zero Pathfinder

(Mr. O. Croll, Local Energy Systems Advisor, attended in connection with this item.)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. O. Croll, Local Energy Systems Advisor, to his first Committee meeting.

He presented the following report to the Committee:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To update members on the completion of the Belfast Net Zero Pathfinder project.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to note that:

- I. the project ended on 31st July 2025 with the completion of six strategic work packages which**

- have helped de-risk two of the priority projects identified in the city's Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP), namely the heat network and rooftop solar;
- II. The outputs of the project been used to develop a new funding bid, for round 3 of Pathfinders Net Zero Living funding from Innovate UK with a decision expected in Oct 2025.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

The Pathfinders Net Zero Living project kicked off in June 2024 with £149,964 secured in funding to help de-risk two key energy interventions listed within the Local Area Energy Plan as priority projects for Belfast. Belfast City Council worked in partnership with the Energy Systems Catapult (ESC) to deliver the work packages. The two key energy interventions were the city centre heat network and rooftop solar deployment.

- 3.2 To address non-technical barriers, the project focused on market readiness, organisational capacity, business model clarity, legal and commercial frameworks and community opportunities. The project was structured into 6 distinct work packages. The Summary Report, attached as an Appendix gives more detail on each work package and the overall project.

3.3 Work Package 1: Project assessment

- Established project definitions, scoped two priority projects and analysed non-technical barriers.

3.4 Work Package 2: Market readiness assessment

- Provided an understanding of the readiness of market actors (potential off-takers, investors, supply chain stakeholders etc) to engage and deliver decarbonisation projects ESC conducted structured interviews with various market actors.
- Identified market constraints and off-taker requirements.

3.5 Work Package 3: Stakeholder capacity

- Knowledge sharing across city-wide working groups and an internal council working group.

3.6 Work Package 4: Commercial viability and route to finance

- WP4a Business model analysis assessed the viability of various rooftop solar business model, with the innovative portfolio PPA for rooftop solar aggregation included.
- WP4b Legal and Commercial arrangements provided analysis of potential delivery vehicles for a Belfast City Centre heat network, with the JV ESCo and Golden Share emerging as the most favourable.

3.7 Work Package 5: Community Opportunities

- Assessed opportunities for net zero investments (heat network or significant uptake of solar PV) to upskill /empower excluded groups and identified ways to support underrepresented groups to communities.

3.8 Work Package 6: Impact Assessment

- Assessed the economic, environmental and social impacts associated with the implementation of the heat network and rooftop solar interventions.

3.9 The BCC Working Group continues to support delivery and the work is coordinated at the City level through the Belfast Net Zero group which reports into the Our Planet Board. This work is also a key part of the 2025/26 Corporate Annual Delivery Plan.

Next steps

3.10 BCC was invited to bid in a closed competition (for £50-150k projects) to enable projects to build on the innovation delivered so far. A bid was submitted in September within the short competition window (3 weeks). If successful, (notification by 14th October) the project will start on 1st December and complete by 31st March. The funding would provide an additional resource to develop delivery pathways for LAEP projects in the City. The proposed project focuses on further developing the innovative portfolio PPA and investigating the economic benefits of the thermal store element of the heat network as methods to lower the price of heat. The project would also further engage potential heat off-takers, produce a procurement roadmap for the heat network and engage other local authorities in knowledge sharing.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

This work was funded through a £150k grant from Innovate UK. The proposed project would also be funded through a £150k grant from Innovate UK.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Intelligence around diversity, inclusion, fairness and equality in the projects impact on the transition to net zero has been integrated into the project under WP6.”

In response to a Member’s question as to the expected timeframe for the work, the Local Energy Systems Advisor advised the Committee that an optimistic timeframe was likely four years.

In response to a query regarding any associated enabling works which were required, the officers confirmed that they were working with the Systems Operator Northern Ireland (SONI) with regards to digging up roads, for example.

The Climate Commissioner added that Local Development Orders would be a real game changer and that grant finance was unfortunately not available in NI, unlike the rest of the UK. She explained that certain networks in the UK were receiving £34 million in grant finance.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations within the report.

Chairperson