



Subject:	Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition
Date:	21 November 2025
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Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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Insert number

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

<input type="checkbox"/>
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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	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Note the update on the Belfast Regeneration Place Based Growth Proposition, including the completion of the Business Case for Place-Based Investment which has been forwarded to UK Government for consideration. II. Note the update on ongoing strategic engagement with the UK Government in Westminster, and the Northern Ireland Executive. III. Approve attendance of Elected Members as set out in the report at the Scottish Cities Alliance roundtable, as part of advocacy and engagement activities to support the Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition. IV. Note the continued role for Members in terms of political party engagement at local, MP and ministerial level.
3.0	Background
3.1	Members will recall that an update was brought to this Committee in April 2025 and the City Growth & Regeneration Committee in June and September 2025 on the Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition and the development of a full five-part business case to underpin the ask. which sets out the case for enhanced regeneration funding in line with other UK cities, aligned to a clear growth proposition underpinned by regeneration priorities for the city.
3.2	As previously reported, the Place Based Growth Proposition sets out the compelling case for Belfast but notes that there are significant levers required for the city to realise it's growth potential. It notes that due to a combination of Regeneration and place based funds not being applicable to the devolved administrations, and Northern Ireland receiving relatively lower allocations from funds operating on a competitive basis, results in Northern Ireland having 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 the 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.

3.3	<p>The wider context for seeking enhanced powers and funding was outlined previously to the Committee. 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 Authorities across the whole of England will allow Councils to set and deliver on priorities that better respond to local needs and drive growth. 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. Strategic Authorities designated at the Established Mayoral level of devolution will receive Integrated Settlements. By way of example, West Midlands Combined Authority will receive £388.6m for 2025-26 and Greater Manchester will receive £630m for 2025/26. Other areas include the North East, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Liverpool City Region and Greater London Authority, where the process for determining the value of the integrated settlements has been published but not the funding allocations currently.</p>
3.4	<p>In addition, the spending review, June 2025, the Government set an ambition to deliver around 300,000 social and affordable homes through the new £39bn Social and Affordable Homes programme. At this stage it is uncertain if comparable funding will be allocated to the Devolved Administrations via the Barnett Formula, however it is understood that it will not. Homes England, the government’s housing and regeneration agency, has recently started working more closely with Combined Authorities which reflects Homes England remit to include a range of regeneration activities i.e. wider than just housing delivery. Between 2018 – 2023 Homes England has supported the development of 186,413 new homes, unlocked land with the capacity for a further 392,000 homes and invested £11.1bn. The recently announced Land Fund (BIL) which is a £1bn capital programme, is targeting unlocking 40,000 new homes and up to 200,000sqm employment floorspace.</p>
3.5	<p>Major regeneration schemes that are being funded by Homes England include a UK Government approved £121m funding package to bring forward new homes, public realm and commercial space at Forth Yards, a 50-acre water frontage brownfield site in Newcastle. Funding will allow for site remediation, ground works and infrastructure activity, fixing complex land issues in advance of procurement process to appoint a private sector delivery partner. The business case was developed by Homes England, working in partnership with Newcastle</p>

	<p>City Council, North East Mayoral Combined Authority and Network Rail. Homes England has also just announced a regeneration scheme they are supporting with Plymouth City Council and City College Plymouth with £18.4m grant funding from their BIL Fund which includes transforming the listed Civic Centre for residential use, alongside the College Campus. It is to pay for a programme of remediation work to bring the building to a point where residential units can be fitted out and delivered by a private developer. Additional funding for this wider regeneration scheme has come from other public sector sources including the Levelling Up Fund and Future High Streets Fund, as well as Council funding. The purpose of BIL funding is to deliver housing led brownfield infrastructure and land projects but is only available in England.</p>
3.6	<p>It is clear that 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>
3.7	<p>The Growth Proposition seeks to secure regeneration funding for Belfast from UK Government and sets out asks for a Regeneration, Housing and Infrastructure Fund seeded by the Government focussed on potential priority areas to transform Belfast. It also seeks capacity (revenue) funding to further regeneration priorities, in line with similar funding received by the Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and Strategic Authorities in England. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Led, Mixed Use Regeneration including measures to address dereliction • Improved infrastructure, connectivity, public realm, place making, public and green spaces • Unlocking Major Regeneration Schemes
3.8	<p>Development of the Proposition has been informed through significant engagement with a range of cross-sector stakeholders and in line with the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) Stocktake findings which received political and stakeholder endorsement.</p>
4.0	Main Report
4.1	<p>Belfast Business Case for Place-Based Investment</p> <p>As noted to Committee in April 2025, the Place Proposition was to be supported by a full five part business case. This is now completed and outlines the strategic, economic, commercial, financial and management case to support the request to Westminster. The business case sets out how BCC has spent the last 18 months laying the groundwork to develop the proposition and establish the conditions for successful delivery. This has included stakeholder engagement with elected representatives and business, investor and local communities, and</p>

	<p>builds on more than 10 years of wider community and stakeholder engagement through the Belfast Agenda and BCCRIS. The recommendations have been informed through previous engagement with Members, Belfast MPs, Executive Ministers and engagement with BCC officers, senior officials from DoF, DfI and DfC and representatives from local development, business and local communities to inform the priority areas, and to assist with quantifying the ask.</p>
4.2	<p>The business case includes a comprehensive evidence base to provide insight about Belfast's economic, demographic, housing, business, labour market and commercial property performance. The analysis recognises the city's strategic role within the wider region and its function as the capital city of Northern Ireland. The proposal builds on the success of the Belfast Region City Deal, and targets the city's legacy of physical regeneration challenges, and the wider 'regeneration deficit' that has seen Belfast struggle to match the power and dynamism of the English and Scottish Core Cities. This proposition sets out a compelling case for change and notes that unlike its peers, Belfast has lacked the means and resources to correct what could be seen as 'regeneration deficit'. Public spending on 'regeneration' has been about one half of its English counterparts, while decision-making remains fragmented and difficult. It notes that there are significant opportunities to be gained from an uplift in place-based regeneration and that this is best addressed by public-sector led investments which can provide the leadership and confidence to the private sector and strategic stakeholders. It outlines how BCC is seeking to equip itself with the ability and responsibilities to drive growth and investment in the city and is seeking to establish a new City Regeneration Fund (CRF) designed to drive catalytic change - focusing on people and city living, delivering active and sustained travel, developing green and climate resilient public realm, unlocking stalled major redevelopment schemes, addressing dereliction and vacancy and taking a multi-agency approach to place making and city management.</p>
4.3	<p>Critically, the proposition is based on an evidence-led understanding of market failures and a shared vision for the future. The business case highlights that the proposed areas of focus provide value for money and deliverability. Conservatively based economic analysis shows that the proposal will achieve a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of at least 1.5 (as assessed against MHCLG criteria and indicates that £1 public expenditure returns £1.50- £2 in benefits achieved). However, it notes HM Treasury has recognised that the current place-based appraisal approach inadequately captures the wider economic impacts associated with regeneration activity. Therefore, it suggests that this understates the dynamic impact that the Fund could have on the wider economy and anticipates long-term benefits will be transformational for the wider region.</p>

4.4	<p>The proposal builds on established systems and existing work streams undertaken by BCC and its partners. This includes the strong governance and administrative structures already in place, and a Regeneration Framework which can prioritise investments and activities. It proposes that the current governance structures in place to support the City Regeneration Fund provide a mechanism for supporting the CRF.</p>
4.5	<p>It recognises the incredibly difficult financial conditions across the United Kingdom but highlights that this proposal is about unleashing potential and growth and is a statement of intent for the future of the whole of Northern Ireland. It notes that our asks mirror arrangements in other parts of the country, and requests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A £250m City-Wide Infrastructure, Housing and Regeneration Fund - seeded by the UK Government and supported in the long term by greater business rates retention. This would be targeted on delivering housing led regeneration, green urban infrastructure and placemaking and unlocking strategic regeneration schemes. To address the 'regeneration deficit', we would ask that this be provided on the same basis as a City Deal, that is over and above the Northern Ireland Block Grant settlement. • £1m Capacity (revenue) funding per annum for three years – to provide the support needed to building house capacity .
4.6	<p>The Proposition, and the business case is premised as a Barnett Bypass. It will not affect the core settlement and highlights that Council are committed to working in partnership with the Executive if successful through a new model of collaboration. It is not seeking to “unpick” the current core settlement via Barnett but seeks to ensure that Belfast receives comparable funding to other UK cities on foot of recently announced funding of Strategic Mayoral Authorities via Home England regeneration funding. The Proposition and business case highlight that a successful Belfast is a successful Northern Ireland. This has been demonstrated via the Innovation & Inclusive Growth Commission, the BRCD and extensive economic analysis and empirical evidence. It is important to highlight that Belfast’s city region geography like Birmingham and Manchester’s, benefits from a central urban area with a higher density of economic activity. As such Belfast is highly attractive to knowledge based economic activity which is highly productive and which delivers prosperity and opportunity through the region</p>
4.7	<p>In order to develop the full model business case specimen projects were identified. Projects were identified on the fundamental basis of growth output. Given that the Proposition is predicated on delivering growth projects identified were on the basis that they were catalytic in nature and had the ability to deliver the expected growth. The Regeneration Framework as previously agreed by Committee assisted in drawing down on specimen projects for inclusion.</p>

	<p>This approach allows for some degree of agility to permit the inclusion of other schemes going forward if they can deliver similar economic growth outcomes. The specimen schemes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Housing Led Regeneration Programme including BCC seed sites, wider viability support for housing-led regeneration, H.O.U.S.E (Homes over upper spaces for everyone, aimed at reactivating vacant spaces on upper floors for retrofit delivery) - Unlocking Major Developments including Tribeca, Waterside, Dunbar Street and the The Sixth - A Bolder Vision including Belfast Streets Ahead public realm, High Street Investment Fund, Under the Bridges, Inner North West Placemaking and Castle Street and Environs.
4.8	<p>As updated at PLCF in November, the Business Case has been recently completed and submitted to UK Government for consideration. This is in line with advice on the need to ensure the compelling case is with Government in advance of the Chancellors Budget Statement on 26 November 2025. It is recognised that this submission is in the backdrop of a time of fiscal constraint. The Mayoral Combined Authorities in England have however been successful in securing investment because they have built a clear growth story. The business case articulates Belfast's growth proposition.</p>
4.9	<p>Advocacy & Engagement</p> <p>Work has continued on engagement and advocacy activities to support the Proposition, including engagement with NI Executive and Westminster at official and political level. As noted to Committee in April 2025, a joint Ministerial meeting with Ministers for Finance, Economy, Infrastructure and Communities has now taken place. This meeting was held in late September 2025 and follows a meeting with the Minister for Finance in April 2025 which was facilitated by the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership. The feedback from Ministers was positive and noting the case for Belfast as the Regional Economic Driver.</p>
4.10	<p>As previously noted by the City Growth & Regeneration Committee engagement has included attendance at the Labour Party Annual Conference 2025. The conference took place in Liverpool from 28 September – 1 October 2025. This provided an opportunity to engage with key Labour MP's and officials, in pursuing the case for change as set out in the Place Based Growth Proposition.</p>
4.11	<p>Following submission of the Business Case to Government work on a wider communication and engagement plan, with supporting messaging documents aligned to the business case findings, is advancing. Continued support from Members in advocating for this Proposition,</p>

	notably through party political channels, will be very important to raise visibility for this Proposition within NI Executive and Westminster at local, MP / MLA and Ministerial level.
4.12	<p>Scottish Cities Alliance</p> <p>The Scottish Cities Alliance have issued an invitation for Council to participate in a roundtable discussion with city leaders from Scotland and Wales to discuss the English devolution white paper, and response from cities in devolved nations. The invitation is for the attendance of the Lord Mayor, and as Belfast City Council are the lead Authority for the BRCD the invite was extended to Council's nominated Elected Member who would Chair the BRCD Council Panel when BCC host meetings. It is understood that the Scottish Cities Alliance are considering inviting the other BRCD Councils.</p>
4.13	<p>The session will focus on how to respond to the pace and scale of English devolution to ensure city regions in the devolved nations remain competitive for investment and growth including best practice in demonstrating the strength of partnership working within existing and established governance models which can ensure the UK Industrial Strategy supports balanced growth across all nations and regions. It will consider how the devolved nations capitalise on their strong established brand to compete for investment alongside Mayoral Strategic Authorities at events such as UKREiiF as well as opportunities for collaboration across shared sectoral strengths. Political leaders from all eight Scottish cities will attend, Cardiff Capital Region have also indicated that their political leaders will attend. This event will take place on 21 January 2026 in London. Committee approval is sought for Elected Members attendance and travel.</p>
5.0	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
5.1	<p>Financial impact directly associated with the proposition and business case recommendations will be brought back to Committee in due course following consideration by UK Government.</p> <p>Costs including travel and subsistence for the Scottish Cities Alliance roundtable at the time of preparing the report for Committee are estimated at £500 per person.</p>
6.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
6.1	None associated with this report.
7.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None