



Subject:	UP2030 Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework
Date:	26 November 2025
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development
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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

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. 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
7. 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 present the final UP2030 Belfast Net Zero (NZ) Neighbourhood Framework for approval that is based on stakeholder engagement, data, analysis, case studies and Members' feedback.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. To approve the UP2030 Belfast Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework in advance of submission of UP2030 Horizon Europe Consortium after Council ratification on 1 December 2025. II. To note the content and process to develop the Framework around the three main themes of Greening, Retrofit and Active Travel, and how the UP2030 project can be upscaled to help build understanding and capacity for communities about NZ III. To consider the opportunity to use the Framework to integrate and inform both local community plans and Council workstreams such as the area planning approach; climate-related work programmes; housing led regeneration programme and how it will fit with the Belfast Agenda Community Planning Boards Action Plans. IV. To note a presentation will be made on the Framework at the Special CG&R Committee meeting, 26 November 2025
3.0	Background
	<p>Council has been involved in a three-year Horizon Europe consortium programme called Urban Planning 2030 (UP2030) that aims to guide cities through the transitions required to meet their climate neutrality ambitions. Belfast is one of 11 pilot cities within a large consortium of 47 partners from 14 countries, which has provided opportunities to engage with tool providers, learn from others as well as share our findings and insights. This project supports Council's Net Zero Roadmap and Belfast Resilience Strategy and the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and the city's ambition to become net zero by 2050.</p>
3.1	<p>Committee will be aware that this is a joint project between the City Regeneration & Development and Climate Team, which has meant that there was an emphasis on understanding how climate action could be integrated at a local level and help address challenges in relation to the biggest emitters of carbon, buildings and transport. Therefore, the focus of the Framework is based around three thematic areas: active travel, greening and retrofit and these themes are underpinned by the UP2030 pillars of a fair and just transition, carbon neutrality and resilience. However, during the development of the Framework it became clear that communication, engagement and capacity building is another critical area that</p>

	required additional focus and as a result there is a specific section dedicated to this within the Framework.
3.2	The geographic area of the UP2030 pilot was agreed at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in March 2023 and covers the Linen Quarter and surrounding city centre communities of Barrack Street, Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Market and has a population of approximately 10,000 people. Whilst this work was undertaken within a defined boundary the purpose was to produce a Framework that provide a menu of options that could be adapted and used within other communities to support net zero approaches, attract funding and deliver climate adaption plans tailored for the uses of that specific locality. These options, called Opportunities for the Way Forward, are found in Section 7 in the Framework.
3.2	Over the project period there has been engagement with communities and wider city partners at each key stage and this has fundamentally shaped the document. Members received an update at the CG&R and Climate and City Resilience Committees January this year that outlined the stakeholder engagement, workshops, key milestones and highlighted wider alignment of the UP2030 programme with other workstreams. As the final Framework was taking shape there were follow up workshops in the local areas and Council officers held a specific sense-checking workshop for Members in June 2025 that garnered additional feedback that shaped the final content of the Framework.
3.3	The Framework is designed to support a wide range of audiences who are working toward more sustainable and inclusive urban futures. It aims to act as a guide to connect communities placemakers and decision makers to strategic climate priorities through the exploration of the transition to NZ at a local level yet also provides transferable lessons for other cities and partners who are exploring place-based pathways to net zero. The Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework is included in Appendix 1 and has been informed by data, stakeholder engagement, Members' input and the use of climate tools to support analysis, including mapping and data. A copy of the Framework and supporting documents are included in the appendices.
4.0	Main Report
4.1	<p><u>Development of the Framework</u></p> <p>Central to the process was community co-design to shape the solutions and helped to identify the challenges, opportunities and systemic shifts required to get to net zero by 2050. The Framework was developed in three phases:</p>

	<p>Visioning phase: understanding the lived experience of those in the area, barriers and priorities</p> <p>Action phase: a series of action workshops with cross sector stakeholders to further develop and test ideas</p> <p>Upscale phase: a reflection on the learning and feedback and identification of opportunities to scale approaches.</p>
4.2	<p>The Framework is based around the following chapter outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreword • Executive Summary • Introduction of the UP2030 project • Climate Change in Belfast • The Neighbourhood • Vision, Themes, Pillars • Communication and engagement in the Neighbourhood • Belfast to Carbon emissions data study in the neighbourhood • Net Zero Enablers in Belfast • Opportunities for the Way Forward • Appendices • Bibliography • Acknowledgments
4.3	<p>Vision phase: Cross-sector stakeholder engagement</p> <p>As detailed in January 2025, stakeholder engagement was a key feature throughout the project and at all phases of the development of the Framework. This took place within the local communities and with thematic, statutory, and citywide partners, who have a broad remit or are prospective delivery partners. A full list of stakeholders is included in the Acknowledgements but includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market Development Association Donegall Pass Community Forum Donegall Pass Seniors Group Belfast South Community Resources Residents of John Street and Hamill Street Belfast South Alternatives Youth Group Belfast Youth Council Local residents from the UP2030 project area that attended workshops Northern Ireland Housing Executive

	<p>Belfast Healthy Cities</p> <p>Climate NI</p> <p>Translink</p> <p>Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formally known as Sustrans)</p> <p>Linen Quarter BID</p> <p>Belfast Healthy Cities: Greening the City Advisory Group</p> <p>Department for Communities</p> <p>Department for Infrastructure</p> <p>Queen's University Belfast</p> <p>Ulster University</p> <p>Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub</p> <p>Belfast Agenda CAST Group</p> <p>Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs</p>
4.4	<p>Engagement took different forms and included a mix of workshops, interactive sessions and thematic meetings, where stakeholders were presented with data and information to build a shared understanding and vision for the area which was agreed through cross sector workshops and underpinned by the UP2030 pillars of a just transition, resilience and carbon neutrality: <i>To create a net zero neighbourhood that adapts and mitigates climate risks through increased greening, better active and sustainable transport and more energy efficient low carbon buildings and to act as a beacon of success for other neighbourhoods.</i></p>
4.5	<p>Information and data from the UP2030 tool providers, including Mapping for Change and University of Cambridge alongside geospatial information from Council's Climate team helped create a picture of the neighbourhood that included demographics, travel behaviour and climate risks. The full detail of the UP2030 neighbourhood profile is found in Section 2 and was an essential part of the wider engagement process.</p>
4.6	<p>Climate conversations</p> <p>Since net zero could be perceived as something abstract and not related to everyday life, officers sought to engage in climate conversations and link net zero to quality-of-life issues and local priorities, such as cost of energy, home heating, food and transport or the lack of green space, poor air quality or flooding. Taking this approach helped to break down barriers and foster a better understanding of climate change, thus moving away from abstract ideas to everyday concerns. To further assist this approach, five personae were created based on feedback which used a storytelling, people-centred approach grounded in lived experience. For example, 'Thomas' is a climate sceptic frustrated by climate messaging and wants less talk and more solutions like better housing and transport, or there is 'Zoe', a young student who has</p>

climate anxiety and wants to find ways to live a more sustainable life but finding it difficult to make the right choices. The five different personae were used to open conversations and stakeholders were asked, “Does this sound familiar to you?” and “What else would you add?”. This storytelling method elicited additional feedback that further helped refine the personae and fostered deeper conversations that helped to move beyond data and helped connect people to the issues and identify solutions and actions.

4.7 **Action Phase: Testing Net Zero options**

The second phased focused on testing options that could be included in the NZ Framework under the three themes, active travel, greening and retrofit. The exploration of solutions helped to identify and trial approaches or actions that could contribute towards the achievement of NZ whilst also providing an opportunity to engage with citizens on the key themes of the project. The piloting of these approaches helped to capture lessons learned and shaped the Opportunities for the Way Forward and facilitated better understanding of the capacity building and knowledge exchange required to help communities take forward climate action together. The detail on each of the thematic case studies below are found within the Framework in Section 3.

- 4.8
- **Retrofit:** Since 50% of Belfast’s carbon emissions come from buildings, the retrofit of public, commercial and residential is vital to supporting decarbonisation. Taking a ‘fabric first’ approach to improve the existing building fabric would improve energy efficiency and reduce costs and reduce energy waste. Convened by Council, the Belfast Retrofit Hub has over 70 member organisations and brings together key stakeholders to identify opportunities, develop projects and overcome barriers to retrofit activity. To test potentially scalable solutions at local level, a series of workshops were held to explore retrofit issues across all sectors, identifying barriers and opportunities.
- During these sessions data from the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) was reproduced on maps to help explore potential opportunities for a neighbourhood retrofit programme across all building types. Working in sectoral groups, the Retrofit Hub members considered both theoretical and practical application where retrofit could be used to development pilot projects. Community representatives brought lived experience and consumer insight that informed potential approaches. Key challenges emerging from the residential retrofit work included: lack of householder access to grant funding; shortage of capacity and information; disruption and inability to deal with the changes and inconvenience. Similarly, the public and commercial challenges centred on access to finance and funding streams, risks and return on investment, capacity and expertise to identify and implement projects and the need for clarify on future policy that would help drive change. For all building types, key aspects are financing, ensuring there is a

	<p>trained and mobilised workforce, clear information and support and a willingness to take a tailored approach to the different building types.</p>
4.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Active Travel:</u> Transport is the second largest source of carbon emissions with cars as the primary contributor. In Belfast over 60% of journeys under two miles are made by car but these could provide a significant opportunity for emission reduction. Aligned to the Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel Action Plan in the Belfast Agenda officers linked in with Belfast Healthy Cities and an UP2030 tool providers, Design Clips and Mapping for Change, to pilot a walking bus in the pilot area that would be funded and delivered by Belfast Healthy Cities by March 2025. A Walking Bus is a group of children walking to school together in the morning. They are supported by an adult at the front and at the back of the group, acting as the 'driver' and 'conductor' of the walking bus.
4.10	<p>This pilot drew upon the expertise of Design Clips, who are an architectural practice specialising in participatory planning and placemaking with a focus on co-design with children, and with Belfast Healthy Cities, who deliver walking buses. Despite being a low cost and seemingly light touch intervention, there were significant challenges to delivering the walking bus and despite offers of support, materials and information schools in the UP2030 area were unable to take up the opportunity. However, as part of the feedback received from schools along with insights from Belfast Healthy Cities and Design Clips, highlighted the challenges of community-led active travel programme and the need for smaller steps to build capacity and confidence and to build a network of parents to support this extracurricular activity.</p>
4.11	<p>The key output from this pilot is the 'Safe Routes, Healthy Places' toolkit and teacher training materials have been developed encouraging children to 'audit' their route to school and considering how their neighbourhood could be cleaner, greener and healthier, creating safe routes and healthy places. This includes a Walking Bus toolkit, teaching materials and activity materials that is a free resource for any school or community in Belfast and is an example of how the UP2030 NZ approach can be scaled up in other areas.</p>
4.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Greening:</u> Stakeholder engagement consistently flagged the impact of the road infrastructure, air and noise pollution and the lack of green space and trees in the UP2030 area. The Tree Establishment Strategy survey identified existing tree canopy cover across the city and highlighted that the UP2030 area has only 6% compared to the city average of 18%. Planting and maintaining trees in an urban setting is

	<p>challenging and the Donegall Pass Residents wanted to understand if a CityTree, a moss-based filter designed to capture particulate matter and cool the surrounding air, could help improve the air quality in their area, which is one of Belfast's Air Quality Management Areas.</p>
4.12	<p>Based on residents' concerns about air quality, we saw this as an opportunity to test whether such technology could play a meaningful role in Belfast's wider greening strategy. Using the CityTree Executive Booklet (October 2024) which claims that the CityTree product reduces the CO₂ equivalent of 44 trees, and cooling equivalent of 81 trees, we carried out a cost benefit analysis comparing CityTree with 44 real trees, looking at costs, delivery challenges and wider environmental benefits. The aim was not to position one against the other, but to understand how they might complement each other in tackling air pollution and climate impacts in constrained urban environments where space is at a premium.</p>
4.13	<p>The key finding from the analysis is that CityTree and real trees are different in their purpose and impact, and it is not possible to simply compare like for like. CityTree is not a replacement for real trees but are effective in spaces such as train stations, shopping malls or school yards. Real trees offer wider impacts other than carbon capture and provide benefits in terms of biodiversity, habitat creation, health and well-being and play a vital role in climate resilience.</p>
4.14	<p><u>Upscaling phase: Capturing the learning and shaping the Framework</u></p> <p>The vision, data, case studies, research and engagement shaped the final document and resource materials and offers insights into how to co-design with communities and help embed climate priorities into area planning. There are takeaways and reflections based on the case studies and real-world learning from Belfast's unique context which considers the impact of division on the urban form and how this effects the net zero journey. Belfast faces additional hurdles due to the segregated nature of the city and the duplication of resources that deepens the city's challenge to decarbonise and tackle the wider resilience issues. In practical terms, this means that there are additional or longer journeys that increase carbon emissions due to physical or social barriers. Similarly, the duplication of buildings, services or resources means that there is additional energy, carbon emissions and financial costs to operate and maintain buildings.</p>
4.15	<p>To support the scaling and tailoring of efforts at local level, the lessons and interventions are set out as Opportunities for the Way Forward that can be adapted and modified to address local needs and bring co-benefits through climate action in other areas. These are set out on a</p>

	<p>thematic basis in Section 7 and are framed by five core elements that could guide placemakers and practitioners seeking to better connect communities and climate action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage – Understand the lived experience and identify opportunities for climate solutions to address social challenges by meeting people where they are at. • Educate – Raise the awareness and profile of the importance of this work through knowledge sharing. • Elevate – Disseminate the learning; upskill and upgrade placemaking approaches. • Enable – Build capacity and enable communities to bring forward climate priorities in area planning. • Embed – Upgrade existing governance systems and partnerships, as well as current and future work streams and projects
4.16	<p><u>Next steps</u></p> <p>The NZ Neighbourhood Framework must be submitted to the UP2030 Consortium in December 2025 and will be made available online. However, central to this project is how the learning is embedded and supports Council, and partners, adapt and prepare for climate change. It is hoped that the Framework will help diverse audiences both locally and further afield, to understand what a transition to net zero could look like through the three themes of retrofit, greening and active travel, and the urgency of sequenced actions required.</p> <p>In terms of oversight and governance, and as a mechanism for embedding in future work programmes there are a number of existing structures in place, including the Climate and City Resilience Committee the Belfast Agenda's Our Planet Board, Strategic Oversight Group, as well as the Net Zero Delivery Group, Data Group, Retrofit Hub and the Sustainable Food Partnership. They all ultimately support the reduction of emissions and the establishment of a sustainable, nature positive, low carbon climate resilient economy for the city.</p> <p>A key opportunity for Council is how climate action is enabled and embedded in local communities and bring co-benefits that improve the quality of life of residents. Within area planning there is the chance to ensure there is a climate 'lens' applied to help communities understand and prepare for the impact of climate change and to bring forward climate related priorities for action, helping to develop resilient, low-carbon communities.</p>
5.0	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The project completes in December 2025.</p>
6.0	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Officers will carry on an Equality Screening on the final NZ Framework and will incorporate within the emerging proposals.</p>
7.0	<p><u>Appendices</u></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appendix A – Belfast Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework• Appendix B – Safe Routes Healthy Places Belfast Toolkit (Framework Appendix 2)• Appendix C - Belfast UP2030 Project Area: Carbon Accounting Findings (Framework Appendix 3)• Appendix D - The Role of Data in Net Zero and Climate Change (Framework Appendix 4)
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