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**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

3rd November, 2025

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

As previously notified to you, I enclose copies of the reports for the following items to be considered at the meeting to be held on Wednesday 5th November, 2025 at 5.15 pm.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

3. Restricted Items

- (c) Vacant to Vibrant Programme (Pages 1 - 18)

5. Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

- (a) Housing Association Grant (HAG) Update (Pages 19 - 24)
- (b) Department for Infrastructure Consultation on Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements - Council Response (Pages 25 - 40)

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Housing Association Grant Update
Date:	5 th November 2025
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development Kate Bentley, Director of Planning & Building Control
Contact Officer:	Paula Conway, Development Manager, City Regeneration & Development

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To advise Members of recent changes to Housing Association Grant (HAG) rates announced by the Department for Communities (DfC) and outline the potential implications for the delivery of social housing within Belfast.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. note the recent changes to Housing Association Grant (HAG) announced by DfC; II. note the potential challenges these changes present for the delivery of social housing in Belfast; and III. note that a more comprehensive report will be brought back to Committee at a later stage following detailed review of this announcement and further engagement with the statutory partners and delivery agents.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The Minister for Communities has recently announced changes in grant funding for the delivery of new social homes across Northern Ireland. The Minister confirmed that the proportion of Housing Association Grant funding (HAG) provided by the Department for Communities (DfC) for new social housing starts will decrease, with the average grant reducing from 54% to 46% of total costs. The benchmark costs will increase by 13.7 percentage points on average to take account of changes to construction costs, inflation, rent levels and interest rates and will apply from 1 December 2025 until the end of the 2026/27 financial year. However, the grant associated with the development of new social housing will reduce by 7.7 percentage points on average. What this means is that the calculation has taken account of relevant recent changes to costs and concluded that against these higher costs, and anticipated higher income from rent, the grant can reduce slightly.
3.2	The Minister explained that, given the challenging financial context, the changes are intended to secure the maximum number of new homes from the Department's £177.5 million budget this year.
3.3	The Department has confirmed that the revised framework will reduce the average level of grant support available to housing associations, with the stated aim of ensuring consistency across the region and maximising the number of schemes that can be supported within existing budgets.
3.4	The Minister acknowledged that meeting the Programme for Government target of 5,850 new social homes within this mandate will be difficult. However, he emphasised the need to

	<p>“achieve more, for less” and expressed confidence that housing associations will continue to deliver for those most in need.</p>
3.5	<p>Under the previous funding model, Belfast received an average grant level of around 54% of scheme costs. As previously discussed with Members, this level of grant funding presented viability challenges for delivery of certain housing products within the Belfast Boundary area. These challenges were particularly acute in the City Centre where the Local Development Plan identifies significant housing growth as a strategic priority.</p>
3.6	<p>Following the announcement, the regional average grant rate has now been reduced from 54% to 46%, a decrease of 8 percentage points. Belfast is set to receive an even lower rate of 42.5%, which is 11.5 percentage points below its previous level. For Belfast, this represents just over 21% reduction relative to the original regional average, placing Belfast at a distinct disadvantage compared to other areas. Housing Associations will need to secure more private finance or absorb higher costs to deliver the same schemes.</p>
3.7	<p>While the Department has emphasised the need for efficiency, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) has expressed serious concern about the impact of these changes. NIFHA warned that <i>“the budget for the Social Housing Development Programme is already insufficient to meet need, and that the reduction in grant rates will render many schemes financially unviable, particularly in Belfast where costs are higher”</i>. Analysis carried out last year <i>“indicated that, at a 48% regional grant rate and 44.5% for Belfast, 70% of 75 sites examined were unviable and unlikely to progress. With the Belfast rate now expected to fall further to 42.5%, notably below the new regional average, the consequences are expected to be more severe, with a significant proportion of planned developments at risk of delay or cancellation”</i>. NIFHA have also expressed concerns that <i>“as the funding gap will have to be met by housing associations, this will require longer repayment terms and higher borrowing costs which in turn could have the potential to impact rents. For Housing Associations, pursuing schemes where rents become unaffordable is simply not viable”</i>. NIFHA also advise that the <i>“initial investigation into the impact of the rate changes suggest new build developments appear to be more viable in regional and rural areas outside of Belfast”</i>.</p>
3.8	<p>At this stage, the full impact of the Department’s announcement is yet to be fully understood. However, following the joint meeting of the City Regeneration & Growth and People & Communities Committee on 27th August 2025 when NIHE presented on the city centre waiting list, officers had already commenced work to assess the viability challenges associated with delivering homes within the city centre under the then-existing Total Cost Indicators (TCI) and Housing Association Grant (HAG) levels. The relationship between these calculations in determining the level of grant funding is outlined in Appendix 1. These rates were already perceived as insufficient to support delivery in high-cost urban areas. Work to date has</p>

<p>3.9</p> <p>3.10</p> <p>3.11</p>	<p>included engagement across the sector to consider the cost basis specific for city centre housing development and explore how housing associations, the private sector and Council might advocate for a more refined, market sensitive approach, particularly in progressing a dedicated city centre TCI. This would reflect the Local Development Plan's demographic assessment and the strategic importance of housing in the city centre.</p> <p>With this recent announcement of further reductions to the grant rate, it is now critical to understand the full impact of these revised grant levels, which seem to have the potential to exacerbate existing viability concerns and pose greater risks to housing delivery especially given the current housing need of 13,599 people across the city (as at June 2025, NIHE data), spanning families, young people, and the elderly. Of these, 11,371 have been identified as being in housing stress.</p> <p>Whilst further analysis will be required there are concerns that lower grant rates are likely to slow the pace of new social housing delivery, reduce the number of schemes that can proceed, and make it harder to meet housing targets.</p> <p>Council officers will continue to engage with DfC, the Housing Executive, Housing Associations, Developers and NIFHA to understand the detailed implications for Belfast-based schemes. A fuller report will be brought back to Council in due course, setting out the scale of the impact, options for mitigating risks, and any recommendations for Council engagement or advocacy.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
<p>5.0</p>	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report.</p>
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Appendices –</p> <p>Appendix 1: Explanation of relationship between Total Cost Indicators (TCI's) and Housing Association Grant (HAG)</p>

Appendix 1: Explanation of relationship between Total Cost Indicators (TCI's) and Housing Association Grant (HAG)

Total Cost Indicators (TCI's)

TCIs are 'all-in' forecast unit costs used to assess social housing funding covering three main cost elements:

- **Acquisition** Element (Cost of land/property),
- **Works** Cost (Construction & building costs); and
- **On-Cost** (Professional fees etc)

Each council area is placed into a TCI Cost Group by DfC which determines how much grant funding housing associations receive through the Housing Association Grant (HAG).

Housing Association Grant Rate (HAG)

This rate determines actual grant funding for each scheme when applied to above TCI figure.

Grant Rates typically cover c 55% of total scheme costs with housing associations fund the remaining c45%.

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Subject:	Department for Infrastructure Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements Draft Consultation Response
Date:	5 November 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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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Some time in the future

Never

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☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

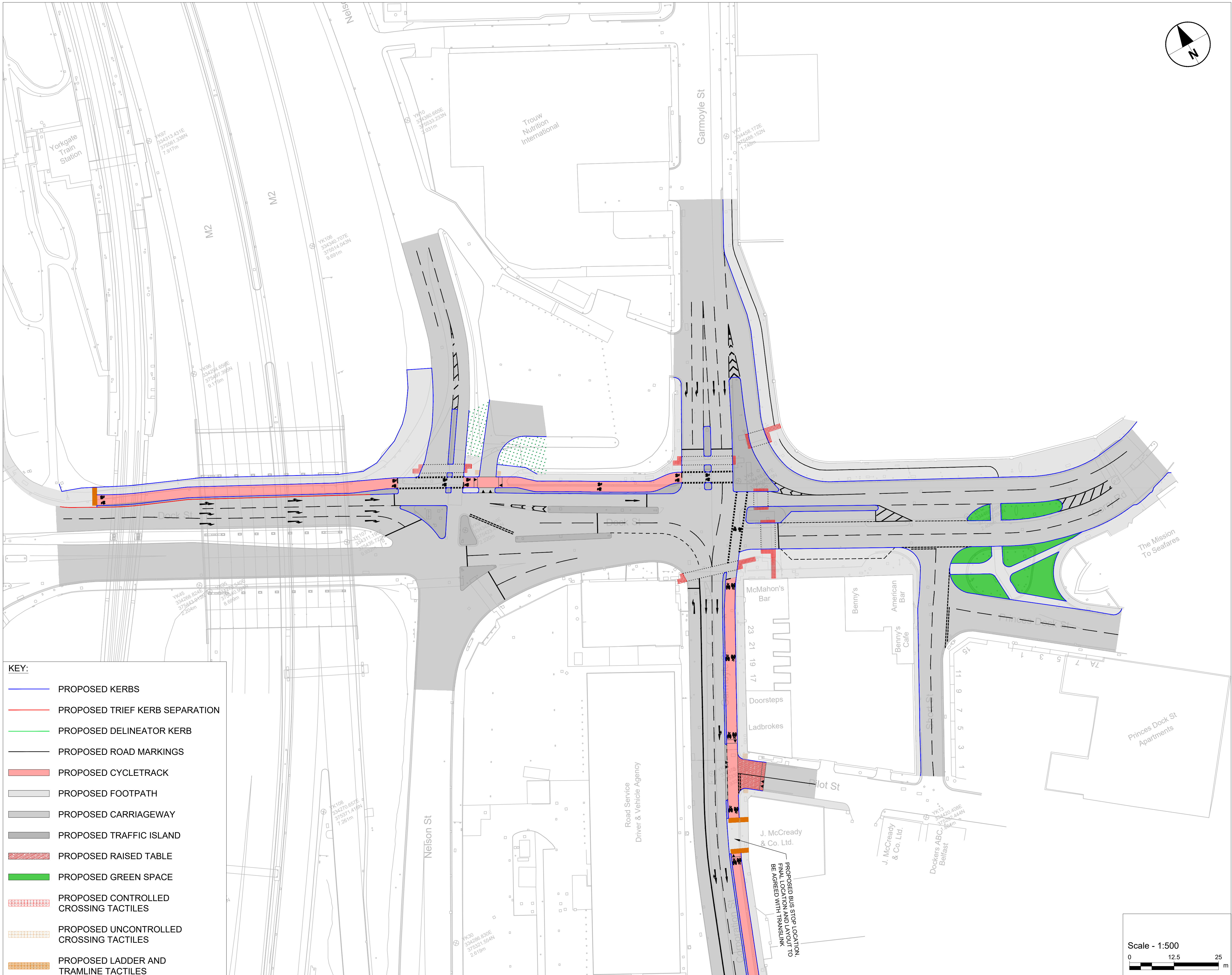
1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements currently out for consultation by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI), and to agree the draft response to be submitted from Belfast City Council.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Note the content of this report in relation to the proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements that are currently out for consultation. II. Agree the Council's draft consultation response submission to DfI on the proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements as enclosed with this report in Appendix B, which will be submitted to DfI on the 14th November subject to Council ratification on the 1st December.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	<p>The Department for Infrastructure has developed proposals for Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycle improvements. These proposals aim to provide 1.5km of new high quality active travel infrastructure, connecting York Street Station to Ulster University and the Cathedral Quarter via Dock St, Corporation St and the Dunbar Link. This route forms a key route identified within the Belfast Cycle Network. A link to the consultation is included here https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/sailortown-and-ulster-university-pedestrian-and-cycling-improvements , with construction drawings included within Appendix A of this report. The closing date for the Consultation is the 14th November 2025.</p>
3.2	<p>Key features include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new segregated cycle facility and improved footways between Yorkgate Train Station and the University of Ulster Campus via Dock St, Corporation St and the Dunbar Link. • Installation of new pedestrian and cyclist crossing points to improve accessibility and safety at Corporation St and across the Dunbar Link. • Improved connectivity to key destinations, including Sailortown, City Quays, the emerging residential and amenity opportunities in the Corporation St and Tomb area, including the Under the Bridges project.

3.3	<p>A Consultation drop in event was held on the 23rd October 2025 where members of the City Regeneration and Development team attended and provided feedback in person. The feedback provided has been captured in the attached response (Appendix B of this report).</p>
	<p><u>Main Report</u></p>
3.4	<p>The draft consultation response is focused on several key points under the following headings that are summarised below;</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic Context 2. Alignment with emerging development landscape 3. General comments
	<p><i>1. Strategic Context</i></p>
3.5	<p>The proposed works align with the ambitions and targets set out in The Belfast Agenda, the city's Community Plan and 'A Bolder Vision' therefore Belfast City Council is supportive of the vision and the ambitions set out within the Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements scheme. The scheme would contribute to realising the vision for Belfast as set out in the Agenda, to be 'beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant and being a sustainable city, shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict.'</p>
3.6	<p>A Bolder Vision is an ambitious blueprint for Belfast to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city, developed by Belfast City Council. The Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements proposal will help to support the strategy's vision to 'fundamentally change the centre of Belfast to prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car' and to 'remove severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all' in part by reducing the vehicular spatial allocation of the Dunbar Link.</p>
3.7	<p>The Belfast Cycling Network (BCN) and the Strategic Plan for Greenways are already in place and the Active Travel Delivery Plan aims to add to these existing strategies by providing a plan for active travel infrastructure for the rest of NI. Specifically, it sets out how DfI will prioritise and deliver high-quality active travel infrastructure in the urban and rural settlements over the next ten years. Similar to the BCN, it aims to ensure that infrastructure is designed to be safe, accessible and interconnected, thus encouraging people to build active travel into their travel choices. Given the importance of the provision of an Active Travel Network for Belfast, and the</p>

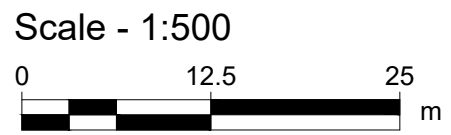
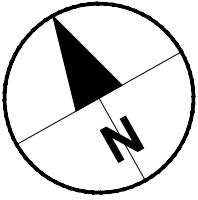
	<p>proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements, it is important that Belfast City Council inputs into this consultation process to ensure alignment with emerging capital developments in the area, including Council's Under the Bridges scheme, the planned housing led regeneration scheme on Corporation St being taken forward through the our Delivery Partner, Grahams and the proposed Sailortown / Titanic Quarter Bridge.</p>
3.8	<p><i>2. Alignment with emerging development landscape</i></p> <p>The proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvement scheme will provide active travel provision along Dock Street, Corporation Street, and the Dunbar Link for pedestrians and cyclists, and will help to re-establish links between communities and the city centre. The proposal is cognisant of the upcoming development landscape in the area, providing improved connectivity links from north Belfast, Sailortown, City Quay's, the Waterfront and the city centre for existing and future residents.</p>
3.9	<p>The landscape of this area of the city is working through a period of transformation with more than 4,000 student units have been constructed within the York Street, Great Patrick Steet and Nelson Street area's since 2015, with a further pipeline of development opportunities including several residential schemes bringing forward c2,000 additional units in the near future. These schemes include Councils Housing Led Regeneration Opportunity site at Corporation St (c280 homes) 39 Corporation Street (895 student), Clarendon Wharf (600 residential) 21-29 Corporation Street (298 residential), Exchange Street (246 residential) and City Quay's 4 (256 residential).</p>
3.10	<p>The Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvement scheme also provides the opportunity to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect to the Council's '<i>Under the Bridges</i>' project to improve the connectivity links between the City Centre and City Quays / Sailortown and to provide an enhanced amenity / urban recreation space in the area under the M3 bridges. • Provide a connection between the proposed Sailortown to Titanic Bridge and the Yorkgate Train Station and North Belfast. • Provide a direct link between the city centre and Sailortown/City Quays through the provision of new pedestrian crossings at Dunbar Link and Corporation St. • Address safety and connectivity issues between Sailortown and North Belfast, specifically at the Dock Street Underpasses.

3.11	<p><i>General Comments</i></p> <p>With this in mind Belfast City Council wish to raise a number of specific points in response to the proposed plans as outlined in the consultation response;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to engage with the local communities to address the safety concerns highlighted with the Dock St Underpass arrangement • Continue to engage with the Under the Bridges design team to optimise the key connectivity links that both schemes will bring to the area, including maximising the desire lines between City Quays/Sailortown and the city centre along Gamble Street, • Support the creation of a 2-way cycle lane through the Under the Bridges site to connect Corporation Street with Donegal Quay, • Council welcomes the introduction of the proposed pedestrian crossings to Corporation St and the Dunbar Linl and ask that DfI continue to engage with the Under the Bridges and the Corporation Street Housing Led Regeneration design teams to optimise the locations of these proposed crossings. • Council would ask that the Department takes cognisance of the proposed 'Sailortown / Titanic Quarter Bridge,' to ensure alignment with future active travel provision within the area.
3.12	<p>In conclusion, Belfast City Council is supportive of the proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements but requests that the Department for Infrastructure take into consideration when finalising its plans and during their implementation, the matters raised by Council in this response.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Belfast City Council Draft Consultation Response</u></p> <p>Members are asked to provide comment and to approve the Council's draft consultation response submission to the Department for Infrastructure, enclosed with this report at Appendix B.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <p>Subject to approval at this committee, Belfast City Council will formally submit its draft response (Appendix 1) to the Department for Infrastructure for consideration. Officers will highlight that the submission is a draft response which will be subject to ratification by Council</p>

	on 1 st December 2025 and any further comments or amends at Council will be forwarded to the Department.
4.0	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
4.1	None associated with this report.
5.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
5.1	The implications of the Equality or Goods Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessments will need to be undertaken by the Department for Infrastructure in line with their own policy positions and prior to undertaking implementation.
6.0	Appendices
6.1	Appendix A; Sailortown and UU Pedestrian & Cycling Improvements Drawings Appendix B: Belfast City Council Draft response to the Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements Consultation.



- KEY:**
- PROPOSED KERBS
 - PROPOSED TRIEF KERB SEPARATION
 - PROPOSED DELINEATOR KERB
 - PROPOSED ROAD MARKINGS
 - PROPOSED CYCLETRACK
 - PROPOSED FOOTPATH
 - PROPOSED CARRIAGEWAY
 - PROPOSED TRAFFIC ISLAND
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 - PROPOSED LADDER AND TRAMLINE TACTILES

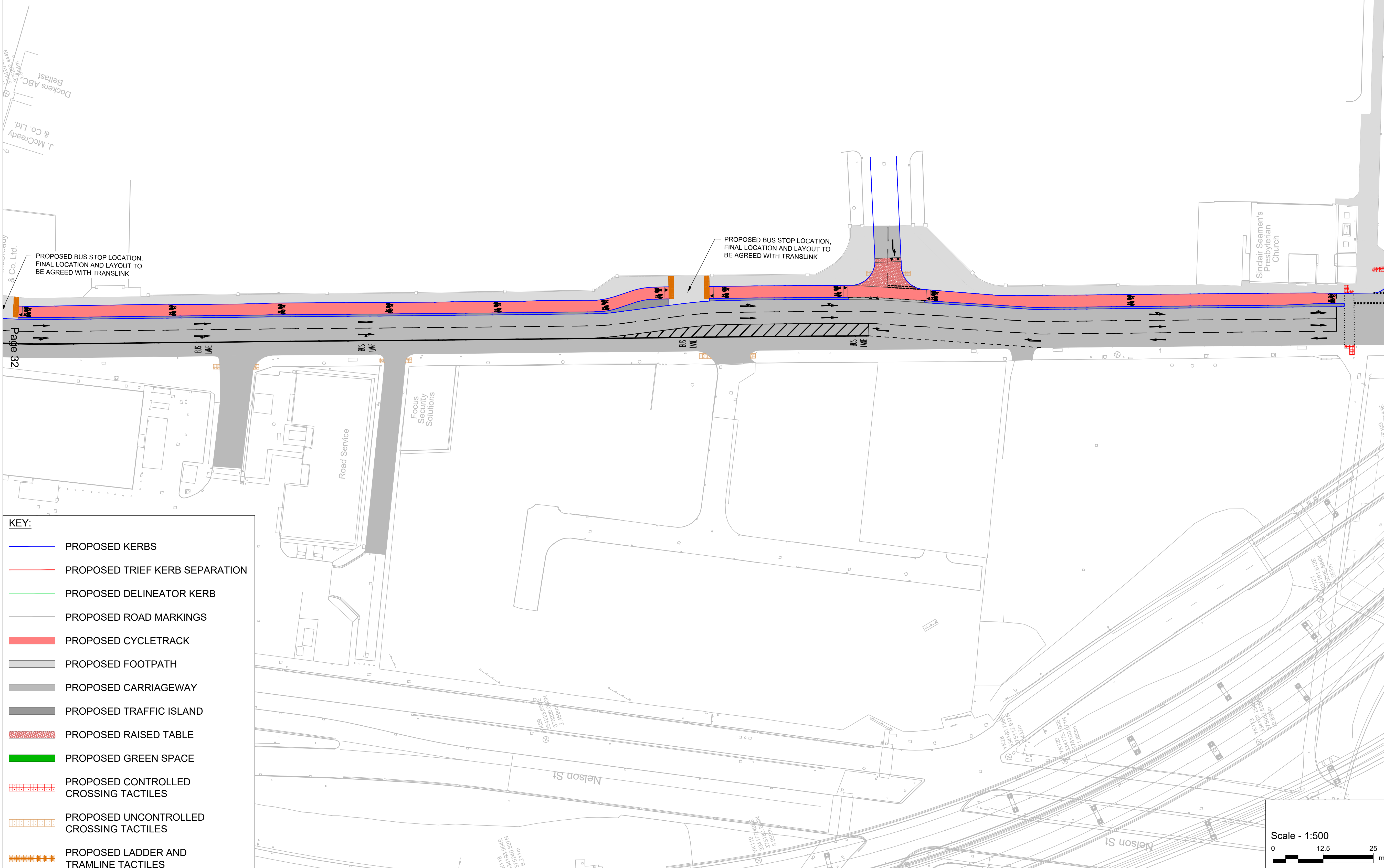


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Revision Details	By	Date	Check	Suffix
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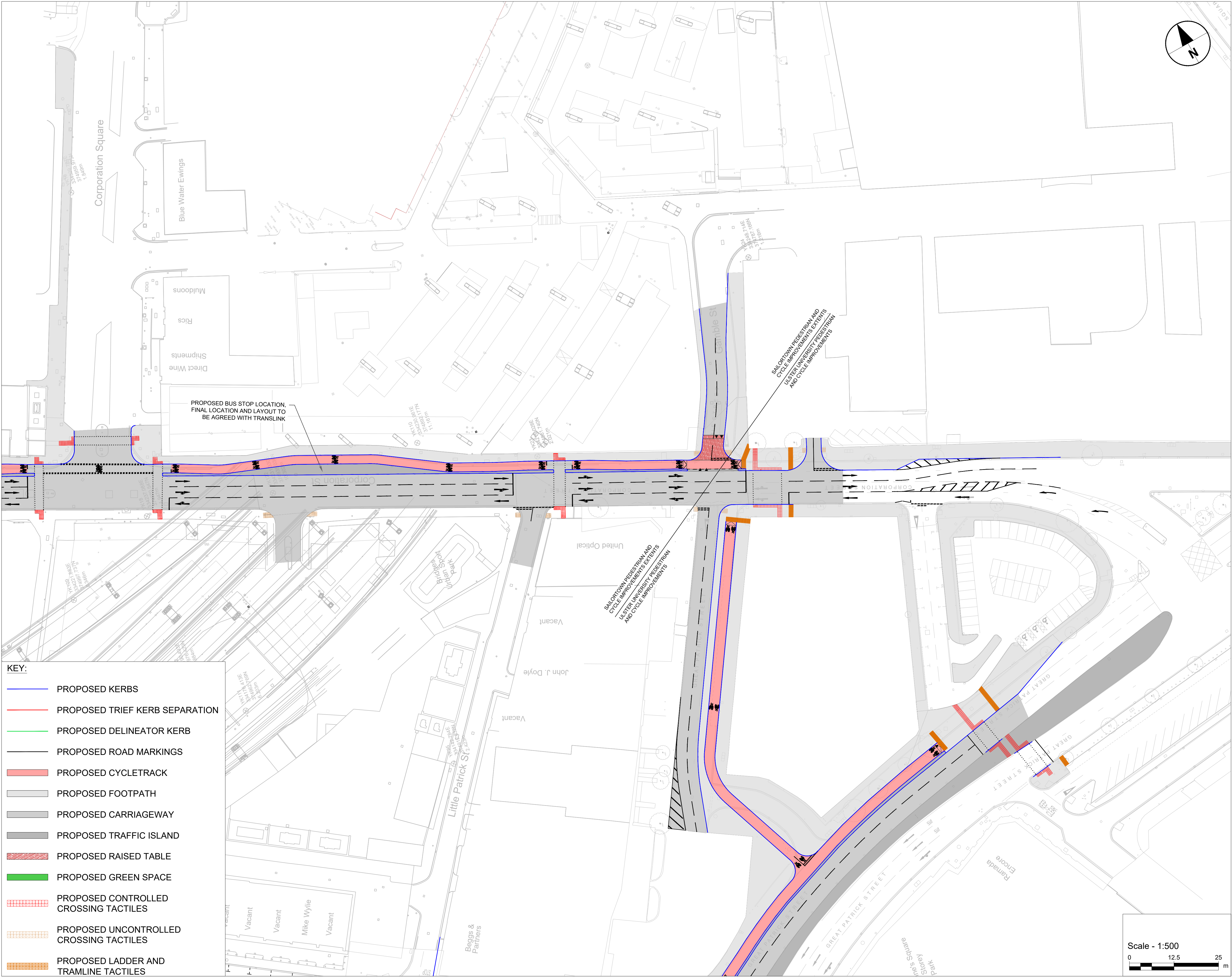
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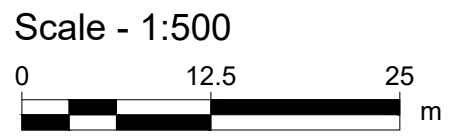
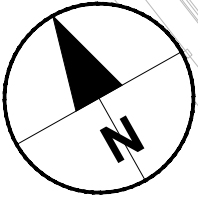
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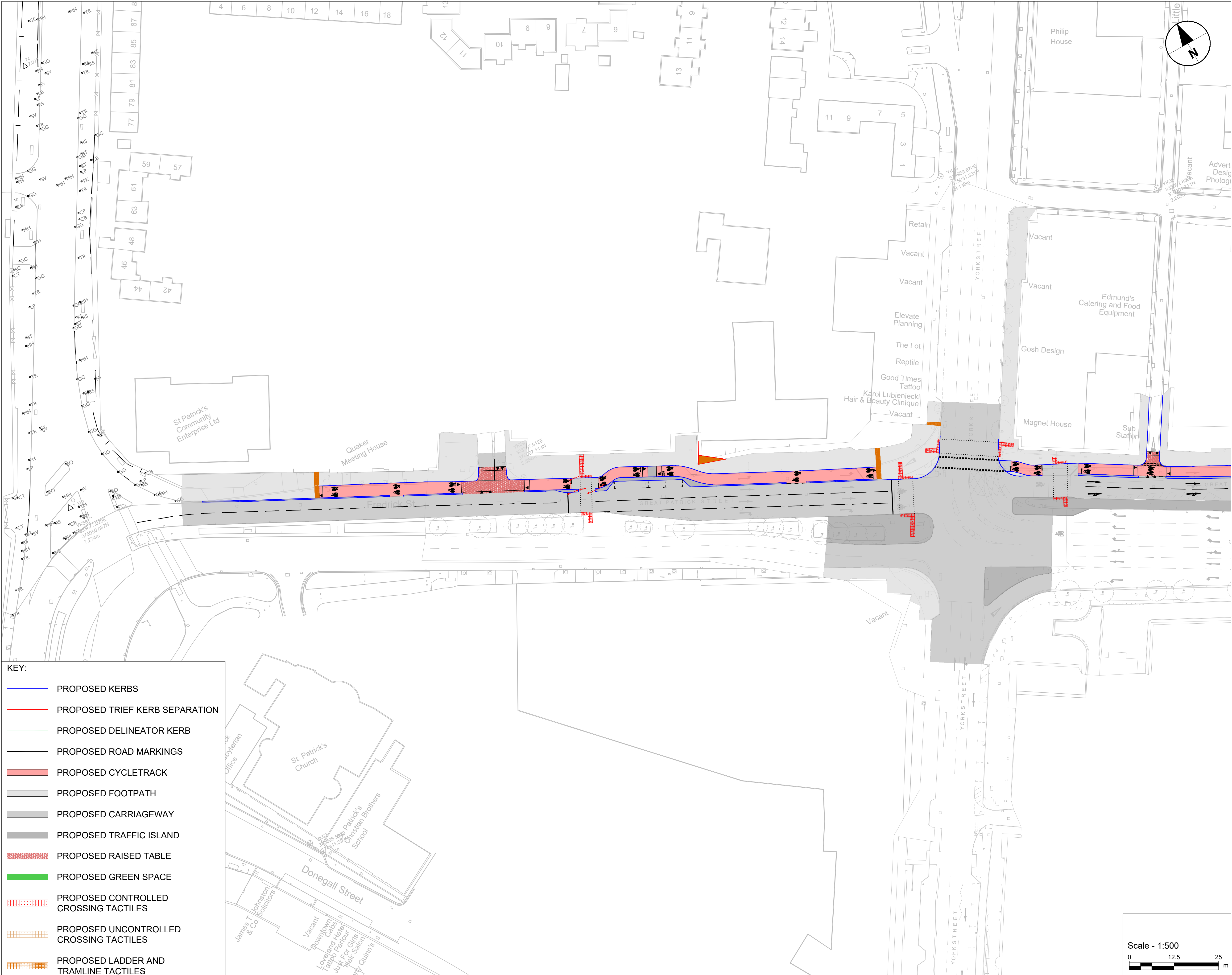
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Purpose of issue

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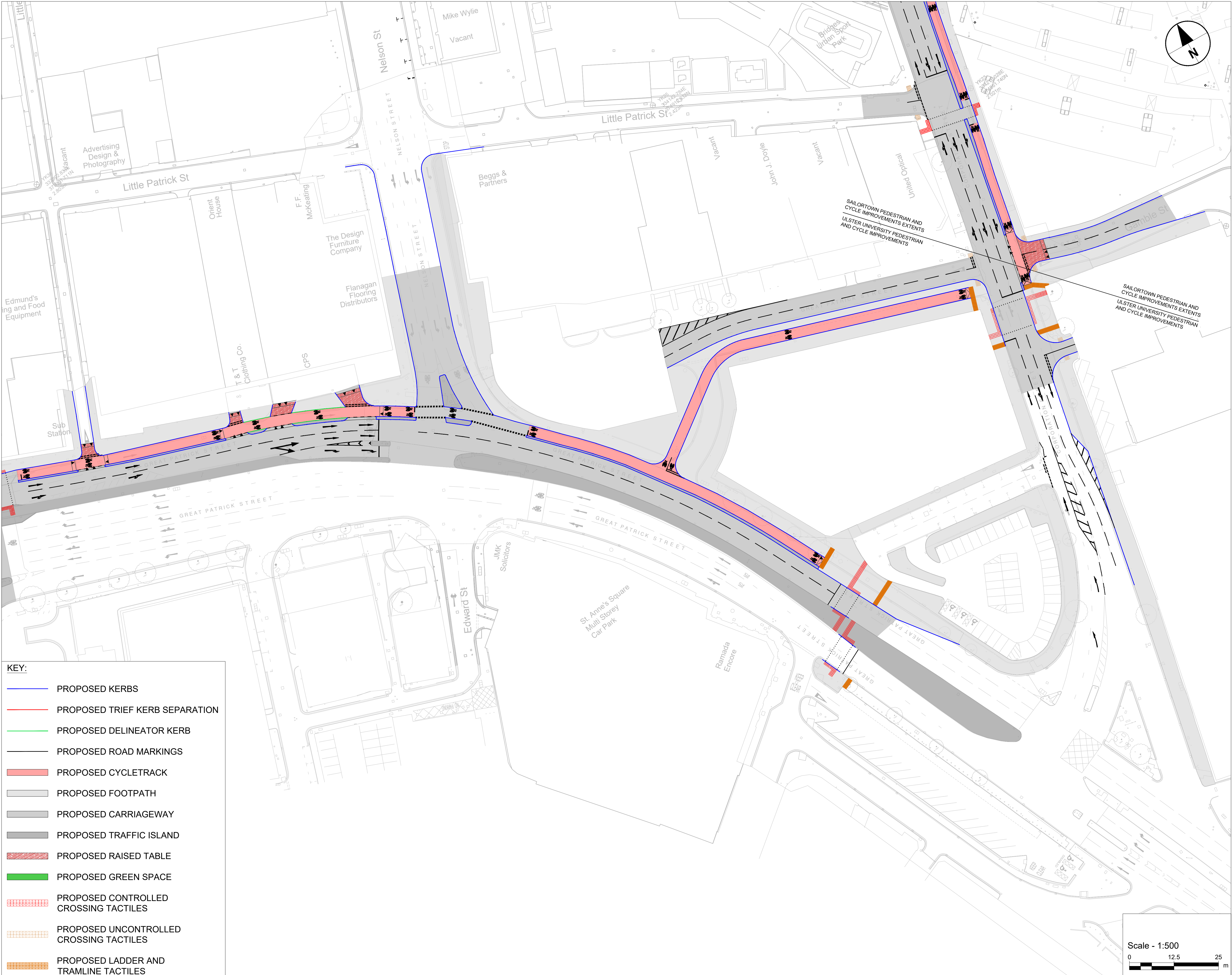
Project Title

**ULSTER UNIVERSITY
PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE
IMPROVEMENTS**

Drawing Title

**GENERAL ARRANGEMENT
SHEET 1 OF 2
GENERAL ARRANGEMENT
SHEET 1 OF 2**

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KEY:

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Designed RM	Drawn RD	Checked JB	Approved JH	Date 13/10/2025
Internal Project No. N/A			Suitability FOR CONSULTATION	
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Project Title

**ULSTER UNIVERSITY
PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE
IMPROVEMENTS**

Drawing Title

**GENERAL ARRANGEMENT
SHEET 2 OF 2**

Drawing Number	Rev
DE-24-02-P-0005	P01

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Your Reference:
Our Reference:

Being dealt with by: Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager, City Regeneration & Development
Date: 5th November 2025

DfI Active Travel,
Hydebank House,
4a Hospital Road,
Ballydollahagan,
Belfast, BT8 8JL

Email: activetravel.eastern@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Dear Sir / Madam,

Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements

Belfast City Council welcomes this opportunity to respond to the consultation on the proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements. The Council is generally supportive of the vision and the ambitions set out within the Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements scheme. The plans to provide 1.5km of new high quality active travel infrastructure, connecting York Street Station to Ulster University and the Cathedral Quarter, will support the city to achieve the targets set out in 'The Belfast Agenda,' and 'A Bolder Vision.'

The recommendations would contribute to realising the vision for Belfast as set out in the Belfast Agenda, to be 'beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant and being a sustainable city, shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict.' In addition to assisting in meeting the Agenda's targets to 'reduce the city's carbon emissions by 80%' and for 'the economy to support 46,000 additional jobs by 2035.'

This proposal would specifically deliver on the strategic intent to support behavioural change projects that replace car journeys with walking, wheeling and cycling' and the action to 'deliver enhanced cycling infrastructure across the city' within the 'Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel' action plan within the Agenda.

A Bolder Vision is an ambitious blueprint for Belfast to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city, developed by Belfast City Council. The Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements proposal will help to support the strategy's vision to 'fundamentally change the centre of Belfast to prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car' and to 'remove severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.'

The proposal will also compliment Council's 'Under the Bridges' project to address its aim to improve the connectivity links between the City Centre and City Quays / Sailortown and to provide an enhanced amenity / urban recreation space in the area under the M3 bridges.



The need to improve the connection between the city and the harbour area has been highlighted in previous plans including the Great Clarendon (Sailortown) Masterplan, A Bolder Vision and the Belfast Waterfront Framework, and is of increasing importance to overcome the long-standing severance to communities and given the growth in population as a result of new residential developments, educational and leisure opportunities within the area. There is fragmentation in the urban form and blight caused by large road infrastructure that generates air and noise pollution and creates a hostile environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The sporadic lighting and unoccupied spaces also raise issues in relation to personal safety, which prevents people from taking this route, despite it being a direct link to the city centre and the Sailortown and City Quays areas.

In relation to the design, Council would ask that the Department considers the following;

- Continue to engage with the local communities to address the safety concerns highlighted with the Dock St Underpass arrangement through effective design within the scheme.
- Continue to engage with the Under the Bridges design team to optimise the key connectivity links that both schemes will bring to the area, including maximising the desire lines between City Quays/Sailortown and the city centre along Gamble Street,
- Support the creation of a 2-way cycle lane through the Under the Bridges site to connect Corporation Street with Donegal Quay,
- Council welcomes the introduction of the proposed pedestrian crossings to Corporation St and the Dunbar Linl and ask that DfI continue to engage with the Under the Bridges and the Corporation Street Housing Led Regeneration design teams to optimise the locations of these proposed crossings.
- Council would ask that the Department takes cognisance of the proposed 'Sailortown / Titanic Quarter Bridge,' to ensure alignment with future active travel provision within the area.

In conclusion, Belfast City Council is supportive of the proposed Sailortown and Ulster University Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements but requests that the Department for Infrastructure take into consideration when finalising its plans and during their implementation, the matters raised by Council in this response.

The Council would highlight that this response is being submitted as draft, given the deadline for submissions, it is subject to Council ratification on 1 December 2025. Following the meeting of full Council on 1 December 2025, the Council will follow up to confirm if this response should be treated as final or if there are further addendums which Elected Members have requested.

Yours sincerely,



Belfast
City Council

CATHY REYNOLDS
DIRECTOR OF CITY REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT

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