

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 11th August, 2021

## REMOTE MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and  
Councillors Beattie, Brooks, Donnelly, Gormley,  
Harvey, Heading, Howard, Hussey, Maskey,  
McLaughlin, McMullan, O'Hara and Spratt.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;  
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;  
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration  
and Development;  
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;  
Ms. E. Henry, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism;  
Ms. J. Wilson, Business Manager; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

Apologies for the inability to attend was reported on behalf of The High Sherriff, Councillor Long and Councillors Ferguson and Lyons.

### Minutes

The decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the Committee and the minutes of the meeting of 9th and 23rd June 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 July subject to:

- the omission of the minute under the heading "Just Eat Belfast Bikes Strategic Review", which was subject to a valid call-in requisition and was not before the Council for approval and adoption; and
- the amendment agreed under the heading "Sunday Opening Hours" namely "That the current extended Sunday trading hours are not brought back to the Committee for further extension beyond 5th September, 2021. And that the Council acknowledges the full range of challenges facing retail in the city, write to The Executive Office requesting an urgent meeting of the High Streets Task Force.

### Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

### Presentation

#### Translink Belfast Transport Hub - Weavers Cross

The Chairperson introduced representatives from Translink and Weavers Cross to the meeting: Mr. S. Wilson, Mr. L. McCombe, Mr D. McAllister, Mr. B. Gallagher and Ms. H. Harrison, to provide an update on the Belfast Transport Hub at Weavers Cross.

Representatives provided an overview of building works, together with estimated timeline of completion stages and advised that the main works had been contracted over the next four years with anticipated completion for Summer 2024.

Mr. McAllister explained the social value activities and metrics, such as partnership working with the Council to deliver job opportunities.

Mr. Wilson described the social, economic and environmental benefits of the scheme which included:

- 8,000+ FTE Jobs in Grade A offices with FDI potential;
- 30%+ uplift in property values and rates;
- 20m+per annum public transport passenger footfall with all island connectivity;
- £25m urban renewal investment;
- 20 acre brownfield site regeneration;
- Zero emission public transport by 2040; and
- 20,000+ tonnes per year reduction in GHG emissions.

Ms Harrison provided an update on the current planning stages of the scheme and impending consultations.

Mr. McAllister advised how the development would promote environmental sustainability by a new high quality sustainable connected neighbourhood centred around the Belfast Transport Hub, delivering sustainable mobility with the City Centre. He stated that the ambition was to reduce dependency on private cars and fossil fuel consumption by encouraging modal shift.

Mr. McCombe described how part of the development, Saltwater Square, was intended to be an active space and clarified how it would link to other parts of the city.

During discussion, the representatives explained further the Carbon Footprint of Construction and sustainable construction targets and techniques, in particular in relation to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change announcements on global warming.

Members of the Committee also raised queries on the streetscaping, cycling and walking paths, changes to existing road layouts and segregation of cycle paths.

One Member suggested that the Weavers Cross team prioritise active travel users and continue to liaise with the Department for Infrastructure to ensure safe and sustainable transport provision around the proposed development.

In relation to a query on Translink's Bikes on Trains Policy, representatives noted that they would get back to the Committee with an update in due course.

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

The Strategic Director drew Members attention to the report that accompanied the presentation and its recommendations.

After discussion, the Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note:

- The information provided in Translink's presentation in relation to the Belfast Transport Hub and the wider Weavers Cross regeneration scheme and that, where relevant, Translink would provide further information on the issues raised;
- In line with the Committee's approval in November 2019, the Council's Hope Street carpark facility is included in Translink's Weavers Cross master planning considerations and the site has been conditionally included in their marketing collateral seeking a master-developer partner with the financial means and relevant experience, skills and resources to realise the vision for Weavers Cross; and
- That a further report would be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in the near future on the detail of any subsequent land /development proposal and associated financial offer and, subject to Members' endorsement, for inclusion of the Hope Street carpark facility in any formal development agreement with Translink's nominated developer partner.

#### **Restricted Items**

**The information contained in the report associated with the following 4 items were restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.**

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

### **Financial Reporting - Quarter 4 2020/21**

The Strategic Director provided an overview of the report which outlined the year end finance report for 2020/21 and highlighted the Quarterly finance update which had been included as appendix 1.

During discussion, one Member highlighted that the recommendations outlined in the report had been discussed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meetings in June and Special Meeting in August.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note that the following recommendations outlined in the report had been agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June:
  - note the report and agree the 2020/21 balances,
  - agree to the year-end surplus of £5.4m being made available for re-allocation.
  - Retain the annual allocation of £500k for the summer diversionary festival programme with the purpose of running it later in the year.
- Note that, furthermore, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had considered the Summer Community Diversionary Festival Programme at a Special Meeting on 2nd August, at which some of the £500k for the summer diversionary festival programme funding had been allocated.

### **City Centre Property -Targeted Acquisition**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on the targeted acquisition of the City Centre and pointed out that further reports would be brought back to this Committee in respect of emerging proposals for future uses.

During discussion, Members welcomed the acquisition as a significant step in the Council's regeneration role in managing the future of the city centre. One Member raised the potential for the Council to look at other strategic acquisition opportunities within the city centre and across the city, in conjunction with statutory agencies, and for officers to consider other options for Targeted Acquisitions as part of an overall city regeneration and place-making approach.

After discussion, the Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, that the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated

authority for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 18th June, 2021, relating to City Centre Property - Targeted Acquisition was approved and adopted by Council on 1st July, 2021;

- Note strategic alignment of this acquisition with priorities identified by Members at the recent City Growth and Regeneration workshop – ‘Future of the City and Role of the City Centre’ in terms of place-making and diversification of city centre uses;
- Note the immediate next steps and further work proposed in relation to scoping out optimal uses for these premises aligned to strategic proposals for reimagining the city centre; and
- Note that further reports would be brought back to Committee with respect to emerging proposals for future uses of the property.

### **Belfast Destination Hub - Site Acquisition**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the acquisition of Site 10 for the Belfast Destination Hub.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note the following:

- The Council's Legal Services was progressing the acquisition of Site 10 at Royal Ave / North Street for the Belfast Destination Hub, as considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting of 18th June 2021 and ratified at the special meeting of the Council on 1st July 2021;
- Land and Property Services has been instructed to progress acquisition negotiations with owners of 108 – 112 Royal Avenue and 114 – 116 Royal Avenue as ratified at the special meeting of the Council on 1st July 2021; and
- All associated site assembly acquisitions would be subject to full title review, to be undertaken by Council Legal Services, with further updates to be brought back to Committee if required.

### **Request for loan of Portrait of Michael Longley – 'Light from Two Windies' by Jeffrey Morgan**

It was reported that the Northern Ireland Office was working with an expert panel to facilitate a major art exhibition and had requested the loan of Council's portrait of Michael Longley, 'Light from Two Windies' by Jeffrey Morgan, which was currently exhibited at Belfast Waterfront Hall.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to approve the loan of the Michael Longley Portrait for the duration of the Portrait of Northern Ireland Exhibition to support this important and unique exhibition.

## Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

### Connectivity and Active Travel Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1 To update Members on work regarding connectivity and active travel, including the City Centre Connectivity Study, and a number of emerging public realm / infrastructure projects, the design and delivery of which will be informed by the principles established by ‘A Bolder Vision’.

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note:

- The update on the Connectivity Study: A Bolder Vision, including the pending elected representatives’ workshop on the 23rd August and planned Public Consultation;
- The updates on individual public realm projects including the 5Cs, and Belfast Streets Ahead phases 3 and 5;
- The proposed amendments to the scope of the ‘5Cs’ public realm scheme, including the removal of College Avenue, which will now be delivered through Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5;
- The update regarding DfC plans for carriageway resurfacing at Queens Square;
- The update on the Junctions Working Group;
- The update on the Belfast THRIVES initiative, a pilot partnership to inform how Belfast’s public spaces can more effectively and inclusively contribute to the liveability of the city and the wellbeing of its inhabitants;
- The update regarding the BCC bid to the UK Community Renewal Fund.

#### **3.0 Main report**

##### **Background**

- 3.1 Connectivity is at the core of the Belfast Agenda. The Belfast Agenda seeks to develop a city that is vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable.

- 3.2 Sustainable connectivity and active travel requires a collaborative and holistic approach across a number of city stakeholders and partners to deliver strategic connections and improved access between, and into local communities and areas. At the April meeting of the CG&R Committee members requested a comprehensive report should be brought back to the Committee on Green and Blue Infrastructure / Active Travel related initiatives across the city along with Council proposals in relation to potential funding mechanisms. This is reflected in the prioritisation of the CG&R Committee Plan as agreed on the 9th June 2021 where one of the key pillars includes 'Working with stakeholders to bring forward improved, sustainable connectivity and active travel across the city'.**
- 3.3 The Community Planning Partnership Boards, as reported in May and June 2021, were established to translate the Belfast Agenda into action and to mobilise city partners to support the delivery and have clear synergies with the work of the CG&R Committee. The recently re-configured City Development Board has agreed the establishment of Active Travel and Connectivity as one of the four key pillars of work for the Board. The City Development Board, and as agreed by this Committee, recognises there is a need to focus on joint objectives and a targeted delivery approach across partners to accelerate opportunities to enhance accessibility, connectivity and active travel across the city. This is not only important to connect people to employment opportunities and investment hubs, but is important from a climate resilience perspective and will also create healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environments that promote health and emotional wellbeing**
- 3.4 The Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy identifies creating a green, walkable, cyclable centre and connecting to the city around as two of the eight key principles, recognising that active travel and connectivity are closely aligned to regeneration and development. In our ambition to attract 66,000 new residents to the city it is critical that connectivity considerations and alternative travel options can align with these growth ambitions. For example, the development of housing close to existing services may mean shorter, more localised journeys, allowing higher levels of cycling and walking or public transport, therefore reducing dependence upon the car and mitigating negative impacts such as traffic congestion and air pollution.**

- 3.5 Officers across the Council departments are working at pace to bring forward projects and initiatives that will help to achieve these goals, as well as assisting our statutory and city partners to enhance and further develop our collective ambitions.
- 3.6 While this report focuses on certain areas related to connectivity City Regeneration & Development Officers are working in conjunction with DfI, DfC, Physical Programmes, C&NS and Resilience to provide a strategic overview of our collective projects to focus the city's strategic priorities, opportunities, issues and funding options and an update will subsequently be provided to this Committee in the near future.

#### A Bolder Vision for Belfast

- 3.7 As reported previously, A Bolder Vision for Belfast was agreed by Council and endorsed by the DfC and DfI Ministers and is underpinned by four Visioning Principles:
- Creating a healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environment that promotes well-being for all, inclusive growth and innovation;
  - Fundamentally changing the centre of Belfast to prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car;
  - Providing lively, safe, and green streets linking inclusive shared spaces to promote resilience and enhance our built heritage;
  - Removing severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.
- 3.8 The Bolder Vision represents the building blocks that to be considered within public realm, connectivity and open space investments within the city centre and key connectors to surrounding communities, influencing the development of public and private regeneration developments to ensure that the city centre is developed with people at the heart of design, that the city is attractive to investment, thrives economically, is fit to meet our climate agenda and is vibrant and welcoming to all.
- 3.9 To this end a number of public realm and junction improvement projects are currently progressing through design development within and at the edges of the city centre, and officers are working with DfC and DfI to ensure the agreed principles of 'A Bolder Vision' are directly influencing these schemes so they release maximum benefit

for the city centre and surrounding communities. These principles have also informed the current place-shaping revitalisation work referred to in a separate report. Given the close alignment between the Bolder Vision and Connectivity and Active Travel update a detailed paper on the approach to the City Centre Open Spaces is included in a separate paper to this Committee meeting.

### Detail

#### A Bolder Vision: City Centre Connectivity Study

- 3.10 As reported to this Committee on 9 June 2021, a multi-disciplinary team led by Jacobs has been appointed to progress with Phases 2 and 3 of the joint BCC/DfI/DfC Bolder Vision Connectivity Study for Belfast. Members were advised that this work would include co-design workshops, the development of scenarios and interventions and the completion of a draft Strategy for public consultation in the autumn of 2021. The Bolder Vision approach involves a fundamental rethink of how streets and places are used to make them attractive, inclusive, accessible, healthy, and vibrant places.
- 3.11 Phase 2 of the City Centre Connectivity Study will provide scenarios and projects to inform the future of the city centre by shaping large infrastructure projects and developing supporting or enabling schemes and initiatives. As part of a co-design approach, five workshops took place in June with a range of community, voluntary, statutory and private sector stakeholders.
- 3.12 A cross-sector Visioning Workshop was held on 25 June, which included Vienna's former Vice Mayor who successfully implemented a transformation agenda comprising numerous innovative projects, as a keynote speaker. The workshop also considered what had changed since the completion of 'A Bolder Vision', and stimulated discussion on further 'What ifs', for the city centre.
- 3.13 Subsequently, four thematic workshops took place the following week covering Community, Heritage & Culture; Infrastructure, Energy and Environment; Economic Recovery, Development & Tourism, and Connectivity (Transport and Digital). This early engagement with a range of stakeholders provided a chance to explore opportunities and challenges and consider interventions to support positive transformation of the city centre.

- 3.14 As a continuation of the co-design process, a workshop with elected representatives including Councillors, MLAs and MPs is anticipated to take place on the 23rd August and will provide an opportunity to feed into the emerging scenarios, in advance of a 12 week public consultation that is due to commence on 27 September 2021 with a report to this Committee prior to launching the Consultation.
- 3.15 The public consultation document will include scenarios based on emerging infrastructure projects and development proposals and potential supporting or enabling projects to demonstrate concepts or test approaches that will enable the transformational changes required to create a connected and animated city core. Some of these could be delivered by partners such as the city stakeholders, for example the BIDs (subject to funding) whereas others may require a collaborative approach, particularly any significant proposals of a transformational nature and will be set out as short, medium and longer term projects and initiatives.
- 3.16 Following the public consultation, Phase 3 of the Connectivity Study will consist of the development of a Draft Strategy and Delivery Plan, Strategic Outline Business Case, and Monitoring Strategy. Critically, funding and commitment by central government agencies will be key to delivery going forward and through the City Development Board and other city fora we must ensure that these remain within the Programme for Government, Departmental and Council spending priorities. This includes the recent Reset for Growth Paper as published by the Belfast Innovation and Inclusive Growth recommendation inclusion of the Bolder Vision Strategy supported by a three year joint funding programme.

#### Public Realm Projects

- 3.17 A number of public realm projects are currently in development and officers have been working closely with DfI, DfC and other stakeholders to embed the principles of '*A Bolder Vision*' during design development, so that these schemes can begin to effect positive change in a number of parts of the city.

#### The 5Cs

- 3.18 The CG&R and SP&R Committees approved the development of the 5Cs 'catalyst' Public Realm Project utilising existing developer contributions to support delivery of public realm improvements in Chichester Street, Callender Street, College Street, College Court and College Avenue. Delivered by DfC, the 5C's project was originally estimated to have a value in

the region of £1.9m-£2m, with £765k provided through secured Developer Contributions and the remainder to be funded by DfC.

- 3.19 An integrated design team (IDT) has been leading the design development process, with a Council Stakeholder and Engagement Group providing cross-Departmental input to the project, while workshops have been facilitated for elected members. The IDT has also engaged with key stakeholders (including DfI, city centre business representatives and residents) in relation to emerging design concepts, before running a public consultation on initial concept designs from 30 September to 22 December 2020.
- 3.20 In response to feedback received during the public consultation period the IDT made a number of amendments to the design- including incorporating cycle infrastructure on Chichester Street, and rationalising parking / loading bays across the scheme to maximise pedestrian space.
- 3.21 Further stakeholder workshops were then undertaken which captured strong views regarding the potential to stop-up both Upper Arthur St and Montgomery St to create additional pedestrian and business spill-out space, while also enabling provision of a segregated cycle lane along Chichester St. The project area has been extended to include these areas which can bring significant value to the project, in line with '*A Bolder Vision*'.
- 3.22 The recently revised project cost based on revised concept designs is now c£3.5m, £1.5m over the original budget. This significant rise in costs prompted a Value Engineering exercise which identified a number of amendments, while seeking to retain an emphasis on design quality. The most significant amendment is the proposed removal of College Avenue from the scope, with DfC confirming this section would then be delivered as part of Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5.
- 3.23 Other amendments to the scheme include:
- Removal of Seymour Street from the project area- not originally included in the scope and minimal impact given very limited pedestrian usage.
  - Increasing soft landscaping on Upper Arthur Street and Montgomery Street (from Chichester Street to Arthur Lane).

- **Removal of Street lighting from the project scope- DfI and DfC are working to agree separate delivery of upgraded street lighting (in line with Belfast Streets Ahead palette) throughout the 5Cs project area using alternative funding.**
- 3.24 **Officers have reviewed the proposed amendments to the scheme relative to the terms of the developer agreements that have been committed to the project and are content these are unaffected by the changes. As noted above, the removal of College Avenue is the most significant change to the scope, but BSA5 represents an opportunity to deliver this section out with the 5Cs scheme. Further detail on BSA5 is included below.**
- 3.25 **An initial assessment indicates these amendments would yield cost savings that bring the total budget down to £2.1m, with Council's financial contribution unchanged. The IDT are preparing a revised concept design on this basis, which will be shared with Members when available, and detailed drawings will also be shared in advance of a planning application being submitted.**
- 3.26 **Further stakeholder engagement is also planned in order to provide clarity regarding scope and design of the scheme.**

### **Belfast Streets Ahead 3**

- 3.27 **The Belfast Streets Ahead Board is overseen by the BSA Programme Board, a cross-department board consisting of DfI, DfC, DoF and Council Officers to ensure adequate governance and alignment across our collective objectives. BSA 3 focuses on the areas of Royal Avenue, York Street, Frederick Street and the area around St Anne's Cathedral. The current and anticipated development of the northern end of the city centre including the Ulster University development and other private sector development has made this a priority area for investment by the Department, to help to reverse economic, social and physical decline in this part of the city.**
- 3.28 **BSA 3 had been on hold since August 2017 due to funding for the construction works not being available. The Project has now recommenced.**
- 3.29 **As the scheme designs were developed in 2014-2015 the Design Team are now carrying out a review of the project plans to take account of changes to policies, developments in the area, changes emerging as a result of the Belfast City Centre Connectivity Study (Bolder Vision), COVID 19 pandemic, etc.**

- 3.30 DfC has advised that the following are indicative key milestones for the BSA 3 project:

| Activity   | Start Date   | End Date      |
|--|--------------|---------------|
| Design Revision<br>(including stakeholder engagement, planning, consultation etc.) | August 2021  | December 2021 |
| Contractor Procurement & Pre-construction  | January 2022 | December 2022 |
| Site works   | January 2023 | July 2025     |

**Belfast Streets Ahead 5**

- 3.31 BSA 5 comprises Great Victoria Street, Shaftesbury Square, Dublin Road, Bedford Street, Blackstaff Square, and surrounding streets as well as the Thomas Thompson Memorial Fountain. The project has been accelerated to complement the planned Belfast Transport Hub and surrounding Weaver's Cross development.
- 3.32 McAdam Design were appointed to lead the Integrated Design Team for BSA 5 in February 2021, with OPEN Landscape Architects acting as Lead Designer. OPEN Landscape Architects are also part of the Jacobs team leading the second stage of the Bolder Vision Connectivity Study, and both teams have met with Council officers to ensure alignment of objectives and ambition, and will continue to work closely with both DfI and the Council to ensure that the designs take account of the visioning principles from the shared Bolder Vision that is currently underway. The scheme designs will also take account of emerging proposals for the next phase of DfI's Belfast Rapid Transit programme which is likely to include part of the BSA 5 area.
- 3.33 Initial work will involve producing a range of design options, which will be refined to identify a preferred option, for which the Department will seek planning approval. As affordability will be a key consideration, costs will be provided for the range of options developed and this will help inform the decision about which option is selected as the preferred one.

- 3.34 The design team will be engaging with stakeholders to ensure that the scheme designs create a healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environment that supports the local communities, inclusive economic growth and innovation.
- 3.35 DfC have provided the following indicative key milestones for the BSA 5 project:

| Activity  | Start Date    | End Date       |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| Design Development<br>(including public consultation) | August 2021   | October 2022   |
| Planning  | November 2022 | May 2023       |
| Contractor<br>Procurement                             | June 2023     | December 2023  |
| Site works  | March 2024    | September 2026 |

- 3.36 There are a number of timebound 'historic' developer contributions within the BSA 5 area, including in the vicinity of Blackstaff Square, and officers are continuing to explore delivery options with DfC to satisfy the terms of the agreements and deliver on regeneration potential in the area. The commitment of contributions will be reported through Strategic Policy & Resources Committee, with detail on proposals also to be brought to CGR

#### Queens Square

- 3.37 At the 6th November 2019 meeting of City Growth & Regeneration Committee, Members agreed *'that officers raise with the Department for Communities the Committee's concerns around its proposal to replace the granite carriageway in Queen's Square with a standard road construction, in the context of the transfer of assets, pedestrianisation and the wider connectivity study'*.
- 3.38 Officers have discussed the matter with DfC, and while minor revisions have been made, the most recent drawings submitted to Planning continue to propose the replacement of the existing granite carriageway with a standard road construction. Members may wish to note that Historic Environment Division had expressed concerns regarding the original proposal in terms of detrimental impact on listed buildings and the Conservation Area, but following engagement with the applicant, and subject to conditions,

have latterly noted the proposal to be acceptable. The application has yet to be determined, with a number of consultation responses currently outstanding.

#### Junctions Working Group

3.39 In October 2020 a Junctions Working Group was established with a view to developing proposals for a number of key junctions that fully reflect the shared commitment set out in 'A Bolder Vision'. This Group is chaired by DfC and comprises representatives from DfI, Belfast City Council, Ulster University, Clifton House (North Belfast Heritage Cluster) and more recently IMTAC, PSNI and Translink.

3.40 The work of the group has focused on:

3.41

- Clifton Gateway- the group has reviewed the previously developed designs with comments focused on reducing severance, reallocating space for pedestrians and cyclists, and introducing soft landscaping. Proposed amendments currently under review include the reduction of traffic lanes along Carrick Hill, the introduction of cycle lanes along North Queen St, Frederick St and Donegall St, and the removal of the left turn from Donegall St to Carrick Hill, although these decisions will be heavily influenced by the outcome of the BRT2 design development which opened to consultation on the 26th July 2021.
- Shankill Gateway- full planning approval was granted for the scheme in July 2020 although Members of the CG&R Committee subsequently expressed concern regarding the approved scheme in a letter to the DfC and DfI Minister. In response to this the Junctions Working Group is currently reviewing the designs and officers expect to bring the emerging designs into Committee in the near future.
- Great Patrick Street / Frederick Street / York Street Junction- informed by the views of the Group, DfI have developed a number of options for this key junction within the University Quarter. With the pending relocation of the University of Ulster and the influx of students there is a criticality to ensuring improvements are made in this area. A number of options have been shortlisted that propose amendments including removal of left turn slips, introduction of dedicated cycle lanes, reduction in the number of traffic lanes and the introduction of single-phase pedestrian crossings. An example of one of the options is provided in Appendix 1 with DfI undertaking to carry out modelling so as to identify a preferred option which can then be costed and a delivery route

agreed, informed by the junction's location within the BSA 3 project area. Members will be aware that the programming and delivery of this scheme is critical to support the integration of the student population, facilitate safe pedestrian and cycle movement, and to capitalise on a generational opportunity to promote and enable modal shift. This has been conveyed to the Minister in letters from this Committee and in direct conversations with the DfI Permanent Secretary. Updates will be provided to this Committee as designs and delivery mechanisms are developed.

- 3.42 Members will also be aware that Council agreed S76 contributions from developers of a number of student accommodation blocks adjacent to the junction, some of which could be directed towards the junction improvement scheme. At the October 2019 meeting of this committee, approval was granted to allocate '£100k of funding towards design and development of public realm and environmental improvement works', in a number of areas of the city including Greater Clarendon. Officers are working to develop a public realm scheme within Little York St / Little Patrick St which will further utilise these contributions to deliver local placemaking benefit. City Regeneration & Development officers are working with Physical Programmes to develop designs for this scheme and will report back to this Committee at a future date.

**Belfast THRIVES (Transformative Health & Regeneration Initiatives for Vibrancy, Equality and Sustainability)**

- 3.43 Belfast THRI(VES) is a pilot partnership between Ulster University [Urban Research Lab] and Belfast City Council, to inform how Belfast's public spaces can more effectively and inclusively contribute to the liveability of the city and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. The project is funded through Belfast City Council via the Department for Communities Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme, and the Department for Infrastructure. This practical research project will support BCC and DfI to develop new urban-health focused collaborative working practices across civic and private sectors, and with the public. The project will draw lessons from current processes to transform Belfast's public spaces in line with '*A Bolder Vision*', and in response to immediate health and socio-economic threats, and will evaluate public-private sector attitudes to the changing City Centre, including proposed building and infrastructure projects.

- 3.44 The project recognises that COVID recovery projects are emerging at pace with little to no time or resources put in place to evaluate their effectiveness against agreed criteria and datasets, or through user engagement to collect feedback and identify improvements for future schemes. In developing this partnership, the project will establish a base reference model that will reflect on how we have addressed the immediate needs of the pandemic, while also laying the groundwork from which to prepare for future environmental stressors. It is anticipated that this short-term project will lead to longer term benefits and potentially larger scale projects to monitor and evaluate interventions alongside socio-economic factors, capturing new primary data by implementing and testing new proposals.
- 3.45 As part of the project, a free online webinar took place on the 16th of June that featured four international speakers, and an online Symposium on 17th June with Belfast-focused panel discussions and next generation planning researchers. The events were very well received and provided a platform for a range of Belfast views to come forward and included input from AGENI, Belfast Healthy Cities, Belfast Charitable Society, Clifton House, Bryson CARE, Migrant Help, Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee, NI Women's European Platform, Belfast Chamber, Linen Quarter BIDs, Ulster University Youth Forum, Belfast City Centre Management, among others, see [Belfast THRI\(VES\) | ND Events](#)
- 3.46 As part of the project, UU will conduct four semi-structured focus group sessions with city centre business reps and BIDs, NI-UK professional bodies and expert organisations, Government and Council officers, NI based community and voluntary organisations. They will also be launching a survey to capture public views on how Belfast's public spaces can more effectively and inclusively contribute to the liveability of the city and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. There are a number of emerging opportunities for international dissemination of the findings and the final report will be available late 2021.
- UK Community Renewal Funding
- 3.47 In terms of the wider connectivity context, a bid for revenue funding under the UK Community Renewal Fund has been made to carry out a city-wide feasibility study that would examine gaps in the provision active travel infrastructure including greenway and urban active connectivity routes and

enabling infrastructure; explore opportunities to maximise social, economic and environmental outcomes from the range of connectivity and active travel ideas; assess proposals and options that would then form an overarching delivery plan that is feasible, deliverable and supported by partners. The plan would also inform key criteria for phasing delivery options for the emerging proposals to inform our capital requirements.

3.48 This work could provide an opportunity for Belfast to be a unique exemplar in terms of accessibility and connectivity, with the ability to access all areas of the city in an active and sustainable way. This links with aspirations which have already been put forward by Members including access to the hills, active travel and biodiversity gain, and links with other initiatives underway including Belfast Urban Greenway (BUG), BOSS (Belfast Open Spaces Strategy). An update on this bid was also reported to SPR 18 June as part of Physical Programmes Report.

3.49 The output of the study would also help prepare for and inform future capital funding bids and influence partnership delivery. At the time of writing this report, the outcome of the bid is expected to be communicated from late July onwards. In addition, as agreed in the recently approved CGR Committee Plan for 2021/22 and as a priority pillar of the City Development Board, a report will be brought to Committee on the overall Connectivity and Active Travel related projects/initiatives that Council is involved in. Furthermore, we will consider and identify key areas of collaboration with external partners to support effective delivery and maximise outcomes, particularly via the Community Planning Partnership City Development Board.

#### Financial & Resource Implications

3.50 None associated with this report.

#### Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.51 None associated with the report- EQIA Screening has been undertaken by DfC for the 5Cs project which Council are part funding. Project specific assessments will be undertaken by the relevant lead delivery body at the appropriate stage of the development process.”

During discussion, one Member questioned the time frame of the Public Realm projects, junction works at Ulster University, and the delay to the Street Licence at Union Street. Officer’s provided further detail on the process of bringing forward major public realm and infrastructure projects and advised that the Union Street License had been submitted in July.

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor O'Hara,  
Seconded by Councillor Hanvey and

Resolved - That In relation to the indicative timeline outlined in the report re Public Realm Projects, the Members of the Committee agree to write to the relevant Ministers to expedite processes in relation to the Public Realm Projects to assist in transforming the city at a faster pace.

Accordingly, the Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note:

- The update on the Connectivity Study: A Bolder Vision, including the pending elected representatives' workshop on the 23rd August and planned Public Consultation;
- The updates on individual public realm projects including the 5Cs, and Belfast Streets Ahead phases 3 and 5;
- The proposed amendments to the scope of the '5Cs' public realm scheme, including the removal of College Avenue, which would now be delivered through Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5;
- The update regarding Department for Communities plans for carriageway resurfacing at Queens Square;
- The update on the Junctions Working Group;
- The update on the Belfast THRIVES initiative, a pilot partnership to inform how Belfast's public spaces could more effectively and inclusively contribute to the liveability of the city and the wellbeing of its inhabitants;
- The update regarding the Council's bid to the UK Community Renewal Fund; and
- Agree that, in relation to the indicative timeline outlined in the report regarding the Public Realm Projects, the Council writes to the relevant Ministers to expedite processes in relation to the Public Realm Projects to assist in transforming the city at a faster pace.

**Department for Communities (DfC) Housing Supply Strategy: Call for Evidence**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in June, it was provided with an update on the emerging Department for Communities work to develop a Housing Supply Strategy as a key part of the housing programme to help meet the Programme for Government commitments to reduce housing stress and increase housing supply, together with details of the launch of a public Call for Evidence to inform this new Housing Supply Strategy.

The Committee subsequently recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercised her delegated authority to:

- *Agree that officers develop initial responses to the questions posed in the recent Housing Supply Strategy: Call for Evidence document that has been launched by DfC; and*
- *Agree that the draft response will subsequently be brought via Party Group Leaders given the closing date of 16 July for responses, with the final response brought back retrospectively to CGR Committee in August.*

However, due to other Council commitments the meeting of the Party Leaders Forum did not meet prior to the closing date of 16th July for responses. As a result, officers circulated an electronic copy of the draft responses to the Call for Evidence to the Members of the Party Group Leaders Forum and the Members of the Committee on the 2nd July for review and comment, with a requested return date for all comments of the 8th July.

In keeping with the timetable set out by DfC, the draft response was submitted on the 16th July, as included within Appendix 1 of the report (copy available [here](#)) pending Council ratification in September.

Accordingly, the Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note that a draft response to the DfC Housing Supply Strategy Call for Evidence was submitted to DfC on the 16th July; and
- Confirm the draft consultation response of the 16th July (Appendix 1) as the Council's final response.

### **City Centre Open Spaces**

The Committee considered the undernoted report together with the associated appendices:

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1 To update Members regarding ongoing work to develop and enable the creation and curation of a network of high quality open/green spaces across the city centre that are both accessible and attractive to a range of users.**

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:**

- Note the ongoing work to identify open space and additional greening opportunities across the city centre and connections to local communities;
- Note the update regarding Cathedral Gardens design development
- Agree to receive a presentation on the emerging Cathedral Gardens Masterplan in the near future;
- Agree to the proposal to consider opportunities to create a new temporary pop-up park in a suitable location during the permanent construction works for Cathedral Gardens;
- Note the work underway through the INW Open Space Framework to maximise the combined benefits of emerging open space and regeneration projects in the wider Cathedral and UU area and its alignment also with the ongoing Bolder Vision Connectivity work; BRT Phase 2; Belfast Streets Ahead etc;
- Note the update on other emerging projects, including City Quays Gardens and key connections between the City Quays and City Centre areas.
- Note the ongoing work on a 'Playful City'.

### **3.0 Main report**

#### **Background**

- 3.1 The City Centre Connectivity Study: 'A Bolder Vision', in line with the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), proposes the development of a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city centre with a greener, walkable and connected core that is more people and family-focussed. BCCRIS identifies that the city centre lacks major publicly accessible open spaces, and that the majority of open spaces are disconnect and have a hard landscape and character, with the centre lacking in greener streets that can provide relief in the most densely developed part of the city. BCCRIS also identifies the opportunity to provide a sizable new open space and greening opportunities by linking St. Anne's Cathedral to Cathedral Gardens and Writers Square. It goes onto say that 'the entire Inner Ring should be tamed, humanised and greened to reduce severance from adjacent communities.
- 3.2 It is well understood that there is a need to enhance existing, and develop new, high quality open spaces across the city centre, for the benefit of all users, including existing communities, and to support the growth of the resident population and diversification of uses in the city centre. This was reflected in the Future City Workshop held with Members of the CG&R Committee in May 2021 where Members agreed that the right infrastructure needed to be developed in order

to achieve the aims of diversification of use and supporting city centre living within the Future City Centre Programme. It was noted that this includes the provision of community infrastructure and high quality, inclusive and sustainable open spaces for families and city users to enjoy and utilise the outdoor environment.

- 3.3 At the Future of the City Centre Workshop in May 2021 Members had asked that officers look at the provision of open and green space across the city centre and opportunities to improve on this in order to attract families, build communities and support businesses. At the CG&R meeting in June 2021 Members had also raised some concerns in relation to the timeline of expected developments that were key to the Bolder Vision connectivity work and the importance, in the interim, of bringing forward existing plans and interventions, such as the greening of the city centre in a timely manner. Through ongoing work under the Future City Centre Programme officers will be bringing key pieces of work to provide a holistic approach to address the matters raised by Members, both from this Workshop and other Committee Meetings, to this Committee in the near future. This includes the City Centre Living Vision, the Bolder Vision and the City Centre Open Spaces work.
- 3.4 While this paper relates specifically to 'City Centre Open Spaces', additional papers to this Committee meeting address 'Connectivity & Active Travel', and an update on the interventions under the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme. It is important to note that the work referred to in these papers, including specific projects, form part of an integrated approach to addressing key city centre issues under the Future City Centre Programme in terms of maximising combined outcomes through targeted interventions. In this context, the aim is to develop a network of temporary and permanent spaces across the city centre that complement one another in terms of form and function, and that are connected by streets and other linkages that are designed for people and economic benefit.
- 3.5 An update regarding the second phase of the Bolder Vision is included in a separate paper to this Committee, and sets out next steps in terms of developing proposals that will seek to reimagine the city centre and connections to local communities, where streets and open spaces are designed to meet the changing needs of a diverse range of users, as well as supporting existing businesses alongside the diversification of city centre uses to promote resilience and wellbeing within a more sustainable, climate-resilient city.

**Providing Enhanced Open Spaces**

- 3.6** Officers have commenced work to scope a review of open space and ‘greening’ opportunities within the city centre, with a view to producing a recce of open spaces and identifying potential opportunities for improvements to existing spaces or greening opportunities. The focus of the work is to enhance usability and sustainability, as well as opportunities to create new spaces of varying size and function, with an emphasis on greening and softening otherwise hard and underutilised streetscapes. To bring forward proposals will require collaboration across Council departments, and with other agencies and landowners in terms of statutory approvals, consents and deliverability, funding opportunities and consideration of new models of maintenance and stewardship. To note also that such opportunities may also involve the private sector/developers etc, particularly in relation to lands or properties that are vacant or underutilised and where meanwhile uses may be explored. This proposal is aimed at ultimately providing a connected network of spaces that when knitted together enhance the overall experience of connectivity and usability of the city centre. As this work progresses, further detail will be provided at a future meeting of the CG&R Committee.
- 3.7** It is also considered that opportunities to temporarily utilise vacant sites (public / private) to provide open space ‘meanwhile uses’ should be fully explored, including sites pending development, taking account of the opportunity to release social value while protecting asset value and development potential. This would centre on the Council / wider public sector assets as well as private sector land ownerships linking in with and enhancing policies associated with the Clean, Green, Inclusive & Safe research, Resilience Strategy, the Cultural Strategy, the Belfast Open Space Strategy, the One Million Trees Initiative and the Cultural Strategy. Careful consideration will be required across Council departments in terms of delivery, funding and maintenance however this will not be viewed as a Council only initiative but will influence other public and private land holders to commit to and deliver the aims and objectives of the work.
- 3.8** To support the ambitions set out in the 10 year cultural strategy, A City Imagining and in the new tourism plan, a strategic and operational assessment of meanwhile sites in the city is to be carried out. Further detail will be presented to

committee as part of the culture and events programme development and will be subject to approval. This will include consideration of internal use of the Bank of Ireland building subject to a condition survey and options for the potential use of external space based on a cost analysis and the wider development timeline.

- 3.9 There are also a number of specific open space / public space projects in development by Council and others, which represent opportunities to deliver on the ambitions set out above and conveyed by the BCCRIS and '*A Bolder Vision*', with updates provided below.

#### Cathedral Gardens

- 3.10 Members will be aware of the temporary use of the Council's Cathedral Gardens site as a playpark, which was completed in August 2020 as a meanwhile use. In terms of its permanent redevelopment, as part the Council's Physical Programme a Master Plan for the space has been commissioned with the intention to create a unique urban space reflective of the changing nature of the city centre. As part of this Master Plan, and to inform the emerging design concepts, a number of engagement sessions have recently taken place with key city stakeholders and it is expected this process will be completed in early Autumn. The project is at Stage 2 ('Uncommitted') in terms of the Council's Physical Programme, and in line with the Council's governance process further updates on will this be provided to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee via the "Physical Programme Update". Upon completion of the draft Masterplan, which is envisaged late August, it is recommended that the plans are presented to the CG&R Committee in the near future.
- 3.11 The consultants developing the Master Plan are also assisting Council with the development of a temporary Active Travel Hub within Cathedral Gardens, to promote modal shift among user groups including the growing student population. This Active Travel Hub will be delivered through the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme with further details provided in the associated update report to this Committee meeting.
- 3.12 A consideration during delivery of the project will be how to offset the temporary loss of open space at Cathedral Gardens during the permanent construction works, with potential utilisation of vacant city centre lands for temporary open space currently under exploration by Officers. The existing play space has seen substantial usage, particularly during the pandemic when outdoor and family friendly space was at

a premium and has been recognised internationally as a leading example of how to create child friendly spaces in city centres while addressing issues associated with underused or derelict spaces. Pending agreement and subject to funding it is proposed to recreate this space within a suitable site to ensure a continuity of provision while construction works are undertaken. As further details are developed a report will be brought into this Committee for approval prior to proceeding.

**Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy:  
Inner North West Special Action Area; Open Space  
Framework**

- 3.13 As above, BCCRIS highlighted the opportunity to link the spaces of St Anne's, Cathedral Gardens, Writers Square and Streets Ahead 3. While Council are developing designs for Cathedral Gardens, a number of other schemes are emerging in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral Gardens site. St Anne's Cathedral (funded by DfC / HLF) have appointed Urban Scale Interventions to carry out an initial scoping exercise which will explore options for the future of the Cathedral, looking at both internal and external space within the theme of 'Reframing Reconciliation' (included Appendix 1). This work includes concept design development (to RIBA Stage 1) for land surrounding the Cathedral including creation of green space through a process involving gradual transition from meanwhile installations and partial landscaping to a fully green and integrated space connecting beyond to Cathedral Gardens and Writer's Square.
- 3.14 In addition to this, DfC have commenced a review of the Belfast Streets Ahead 3 scheme designs under the Principles of the Bolder Vision for Belfast and the BRT Phase 2 route options opened for consultation on the 26th July 2021. The Tribeca Scheme was granted planning approval in 2020 and includes proposals for North Street and Writer's Square. It should be noted that while developer discussions are ongoing, Writers Square currently remains within the ownership of DfC. The University of Ulster Greater Belfast Campus, due to open this year, through the Campus Community Regeneration Forum have prioritised the provision of sustainable and active travel connections, and enhanced provision of open spaces both in the city centre, and in the connections to local communities.
- 3.15 Given the strategic significance of the location and the range of schemes at different stages of design and delivery, officers are engaging consultants to ensure a fully considered and collaborative approach to placemaking across the emerging schemes that will maximise the delivery of the combined open space and public realm. As identified in BCCRIS, this will aim to provide an integrated approach in terms of both

form and function, while fully capitalising on the potential of the core area of Cathedral Gardens, Writers Sq., St Anne's Cathedral and surrounding infrastructure to maximise contribution of the combined investment to the immediate surrounds, adjacent areas and the wider city centre. This approach is supported by key stakeholders including St. Anne's, University of Ulster, DfC & Dfl.

- 3.16 This work will be informed by existing policy and strategy including BCCRIS, relevant masterplans and the visioning principles of '*A Bolder Vision*', and will enable the identification of synergies or disconnects, critical areas of collaboration, as well as opportunities to align approaches from a placemaking (and connectivity) perspective, through existing projects or via further commissions. Officers will consider the timing of design development and phasing of delivery across schemes, to ensure alignment of design ethos/approach, and to maximise efficiencies through delivery, future proofing etc, in order to work towards a collective vision to help inform current and future funding opportunities.

#### City Quays Gardens

- 3.17 Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) are continuing to develop design proposals for 'City Quays Gardens', which they have indicated will place significant emphasis on creating quality open and green space, incorporating active travel infrastructure and event space, enhancing connections with adjacent communities. The overall scheme is expected to exceed £20m and comprises 4 phases (Appendix 2), with BHC intending to submit a planning application for Phase 1 (Clarendon Gardens) in the coming weeks.
- 3.18 Subsequent phases extend beyond the BHC estate and potentially include lands in Council ownership. Officers will continue to engage with BHC to ensure Council land and operational interests are protected, while also seeking to collaborate with and capitalise upon the BHC scheme as a catalyst to deliver further regeneration benefit in line with BCCRIS and the Greater Clarendon & Sailortown masterplan (Appendix 3).
- 3.19 There are specific opportunities in this regard to deliver wider benefit through and alongside the Housing Led Regeneration programme of work, and to utilise committed and potential developer contributions in the area, to help reconnect and humanise streets and spaces in this part of the city.

- 3.20 BHC are developing the City Quays Gardens scheme in the context of a wider 'Placemaking Strategy', which is attached at Appendix 4.
- 3.21 The work of the INW Open Space Framework and the projects identified within the 'Connectivity and Active Travel' paper to this Committee Meeting, including the North/South Spine, the Little York/Little Patrick St scheme, and the Fredrick St Junction will provide enhanced connectivity between the emerging Open Spaces of Cathedral Gardens and City Quays Gardens. These projects will focus on linking open spaces through prioritised sustainable and active travel and enable a seamless link of quality places through and around the city centre (Appendix 5).

'Playful City'

- 3.22 Over the past three years, officers have worked to elevate and embed play in the city centre, placing emphasis on the need to create family-friendly places through engagement and participation with user groups during design development. For example, due to the multi-functional nature of the space, the temporary scheme completed at Cathedral Gardens in September 2020 involved children and other user groups early in the design process to develop an understanding of how people of all ages might use the space before design detail was considered.
- 3.23 In terms of taking an 'active learning' approach, the Urban Childhoods Report that shaped the Resilience Ambitions document as previously reported to SP&R was informed by the Castle Place pop up park and resulted in a shared approach to progressing a child-friendly city centre. Recently, an internal officer's workshop was held to explore issues, challenges and opportunities to progress a child-friendly city, in line with the aspirations of the Cultural Strategy and Resilience Strategy to establish Belfast as 'A Playful City' by 2023. Council teams involved to date include representatives from City & Neighbourhood Services, Physical Programmes, Local Development Plan, Tourism, Arts and Culture and City Innovation.
- 3.24 Drawing upon Belfast's membership of the Resilient Cities Network (RCN), officers worked with Placemaking X and the Real Play Coalition (ARUP, Lego, IKEA, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, National Geographic, and UNICEF) and identified a number of areas for focus, including, the engagement of children and young people in the design and development of

schemes and places, tangible projects and space for children and families in the city centre and the potential to leverage in policies and strategies to support a coherent approach.

3.25 This programme supports the wider Future City Centre programme and the diversification, re-imagination and liveability of the city centre. Play and leisure are key drivers for successful place-making and increase footfall and dwell time. It is also recognised that play is not just for children and supports the physical and emotional well-being of people, regardless of age.

3.26 Through this work with the RCN, Belfast has been invited to join the '*Strengthen Resilience through Play*' initiative and be one of a selected cohort of eight cities who will become an Ambassador City for Play. The initiative aims to promote the value of play in cities and support impactful play-focused ideas that contribute to children's well-being and development and strengthening the resilience of cities. This programme is being led through the Resilience Unit and will run from June 2021 to January 2022 with CRD and other officers from across the Council feeding into it at key intervals, including a knowledge sharing webinar. The aim of the programme is to have cities develop and sign up to a pledge in January 2022 and it is likely that our involvement will give us access to additional resources which will become available through the Real Play Coalition in 2022.

**Financial and Resource Implications**

4.0 Concept design work (up to £40k) for temporary play areas will be covered from within the CRD approved budget.

INW Open Space Framework (up to £20k) will be covered from within the CRD approved budget.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/  
Rural Needs Assessment**

5.0 None associated with the report- EQIA Screening will be undertaken by Council or lead partner organisations as required as projects are further developed."

During discussion, one Member questioned why the play element of Cathedral Gardens would not be brought forward into the Masterplan and pointed out that the temporary park at Cathedral Gardens had seen significant use since its establishment, providing a welcome space for families and residents. The Director of City Regeneration and Development stated that the Masterplan was still under development and would be brought to the Committee for consideration in the near future as part of the stakeholder engagement process.

In response to a Members question in relation to emerging and new public space opportunities, the Director of City Regeneration and Development explained further the approach to take a holistic overview of these spaces to provide enhanced open space in the city centre.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the ongoing work to identify open space and additional greening opportunities across the city centre and connections to local communities;
- Note the update regarding Cathedral Gardens design development;
- Agree to receive a presentation on the emerging Cathedral Gardens Masterplan in the near future;
- Agree to the proposal to consider opportunities to create a new temporary pop-up park in a suitable location during the permanent construction works for Cathedral Gardens;
- Note the work underway through the INW Open Space Framework to maximise the combined benefits of emerging open space and regeneration projects in the wider Cathedral and UU area and its alignment also with the ongoing Bolder Vision Connectivity work; BRT Phase 2; Belfast Streets Ahead etc;
- Note the update on other emerging projects, including City Quays Gardens and key connections between the City Quays and City Centre areas; and
- Note the ongoing work on a 'Playful City'.

### **Growing Business and the Economy**

#### **Employability NI - Belfast Labour Market Partnership Action Plan**

The Committee considered the following report:

##### **"1.0 Purpose of Report**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Strategic Assessment & Action Plan developed by the Belfast Labour Market Partnership (LMP).**

##### **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:**

- Note the outline Action Plan which will be used as a basis for engagement with the Department for Communities (DfC) in the coming weeks, in order to support delivery of activity from September 2021. If approved, the action plan will run from September 2021-March 2023.

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1** Members have recently received a number of reports on Employability NI and the emerging work of the Belfast Labour Market Partnership. At the June meeting of this committee, it was noted that the LMP action plan was under development and would be submitted to DfC in the coming months. Since that time, officers have undertaken further consultation with the interim partnership and are currently working with DfC with a view to formally submitting the action plan for review and approval in early August.

**3.2 Strategic Assessment & Action Planning Process**

Between February and June this year, the interim Belfast LMP undertook a Strategic Assessment of employability, skills, provision and local labour market conditions in Belfast. This exercise was undertaken to inform the priority areas of investment within the action plan.

**3.3** The LMP action plan is based on:

- A statistical assessment of labour market data and insights relating to both supply (those seeking work) and demand (nature/scale/type of job opportunities), with very local level data generated by Queen's University, Belfast
- Consideration of key policy documents including the Draft Programme for Government Outcomes Framework, the Belfast Agenda, Belfast City Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy and the draft skills strategy, in order to ensure alignment
- Input from the interim Belfast Labour Market Partnership members to shape and tailor emerging interventions.

**3.4** The action plan is for an initial period of 18 months from September 2021 until March 2023 with a subsequent 3-year action plan to be submitted for the period from April 2023 onwards. The current draft structure of the plan is focused on four priority areas of intervention. As previously noted, these are:

- **Quickly back to work:** Ensuring a co-ordinated response to the substantial number of people in the city who have been or are risk of being made unemployed, especially as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on helping people to move quickly back into employment and/or training (with a view to future employment);
- **Increasing Opportunities:** Empowering those furthest from the labour market to succeed through quality support, especially those who will be considered long-term unemployed as a consequence of COVID-19, as well as the economically inactive;
- **No-one Left Behind:** Targeting of those disadvantaged groups through the delivery of an integrated, comprehensive, inclusive, holistic and local employability approach; and
- **Catching Up:** Supporting access to careers pathways, re-skilling and upskilling for those unemployed as well as those on low incomes.

3.5 The Labour Market Partnership also identified a number of cross-cutting issues which are considered to be essential in order to improve the performance of the proposed active labour market programmes. These are:

- **Need for a strong and effective Belfast Labour Market Partnership, including operational arrangements to deliver Action Plan initiatives, in particular between Belfast City Council and Belfast's Jobs and Benefits Offices**
- **Priorities and actions to be intelligence-led:** our work to date has identified significant limitations with the existing labour market data, particularly when focusing on local geographies.
- **Need to support employers to build back better following the interruptions caused by COVID-19 lockdown. Providing flexible responses to employer requirements to recruit and train staff and supporting the aims of inclusive growth**
- **Need to create an integrated framework of provision in Belfast. There needs to be improved information about existing provision and help for individuals and employers to navigate the range of services on offer and make informed choices. In the longer term, there is a need to ensure that new interventions are more coherent and better aligned than in currently the case**
- **Need to ensure co-ordination with other Departments, particularly Department for Health (DoH) and Department for the Economy (DfE).**

**3.6** The LMP action plan seeks to target provision on those priority groups identified in section 3.4, recognising that not all interventions need be new ‘provision’ or ‘programmes’; sometimes it is equally important to profile and/or promote existing interventions. The headline programme of work within the action plan at present is as follows:

**3.7**

- **Gateway to Choice:** A key issue that emerged in our engagement with the LMP partners was the need for independent advice and guidance outside of mainstream JBO support for those who are out of work and non-job ready such as long-term unemployed and the economically inactive. In our engagement with LMP members, they considered that these groups required enhanced support to navigate the existing provision and identify the right support, at the right time, to help move them towards positive job, skills and qualification outcomes. It is proposed that the Gateway to Choice will support 1,000 people, engaging on a voluntary basis, over the 18 month period. Subject to DfC endorsement, it is proposed that the delivery model will be co-designed in the coming months, working with key stakeholders such as the JBO Network, Careers Service, VCSE sector etc. with a view to procuring the service following intensive pre-market engagement in early 2022.

**3.8**

- **Employment Pathways:** members will be aware that the Employment Academies model has been successful in helping an average of 350 people a year into employment over the last 4-5 years. The academies focus on those furthest from the labour market. Their success is due, to a significant extent, to the partnerships with local organisations that undertake the early engagement and outreach activity to identify those individuals that may be interested in taking part and ready to do so. The volatility of the labour market at present means that there are certain groups – such as people on furlough or at risk of redundancy – that could benefit from an abridged version of the Employment Academy model in order to help them find a more sustainable job role. Likewise, there are sectors where the levels of demand are significant and where there are opportunities to target those further back in the labour market as well as those impacted by COVID-19. These include:

- Logistics & transport
- Health & social care
- Anchor institutions/CPP partners
- Technical & professional services, including digital sectors
- Tourism and hospitality.

The proposal in the action plan is – in addition to those supported by Council’s resources to deliver Employment Academies - to support a minimum of 300 individuals through these interventions, helping at least 225 of those to find a new or better job. One of the new areas of work for this calendar year is a significant investment in curriculum development to create skills interventions at all levels in the green sector – particularly focusing on retrofitting and opportunities arising from the growth of electric vehicles and the associated infrastructure. We have established a strong partnership with BMC and NIHE in particular to support the development and delivery of these interventions and propose to be delivering employment pathways and academies at scale within 18 months.

### 3.9

- Enterprise Pathway: following an economic downturn, many of those who lose their job or risk doing so take the opportunity to become self-employed. Last year, we piloted a targeted enterprise pathway intervention for LTU individuals seeking to set up their own business. Given the uptake and the appetite for additional support, the action plan includes a proposal to support 40 people on out-of-work benefits, who are ready for self-employment but require intensive wrap-around support to do this.

### 3.10

- Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) Pilot: ILMs are paid employment interventions in specifically created posts. They are focused on specific individuals that are far from the labour market and generally operate on the basis of dedicated support alongside the time-bound role. The objective is to help the individual towards a permanent role – either within that position or within another post, following the period of labour market engagement. ILMs have previously been used in Belfast as part of wider labour market support interventions. It is proposed that scoping work is undertaken to develop a pilot ILM for up to 30 people, focusing on those aged over 25 with significant barriers to employment.

**3.11**

- **Digital Badges project:** The number of people in Belfast with no or low skills is significantly above the NI and UK average. This is based on formally recognised skills. Officers have recently been working with the RSA to explore how a Digital Badges scheme could be used to help recognise the non-accredited skills of these individuals, as well as working with employers to help them think about how some current practices are excluding those that may not have the formal qualifications but that have aptitudes and strengths that could make a valuable contribution to the workforce. The RSA has supported a number of pilots in other cities so we are reviewing the initial learning in order to shape the Belfast-based intervention, focusing on how the employability and skills providers within the city might create a collaborative approach and have access to digital badging that recognises the ‘hidden’ skills of their participants.

**3.12** While the initial delivery will focus on the Gateway, the Employment Pathways, the ILM and the Digital Badges work, there will also be a significant programme of development work to explore the potential for large-scale interventions in 2022/23. Initial areas of focus include:

- **Coordination of the employer-facing support services:** this has loosely been referenced as an ‘employer navigation service’. It acknowledges that Belfast is predominantly a micro and small business economy and that those businesses need support and guidance to navigate the wide range of employability and skills support interventions in place, focusing on the right solution for their business and helping them access the relevant support

**3.13**

- **Bridges to progression:** over the coming years, the training environment for level 1 and level 2 skills is changing. We know that, at present, up to 1000 young people in Belfast are entering these training interventions and that, in many cases, the outcomes (into employment, education or training) are very poor. This proposal will look at how the positive outcomes for these young people can be enhanced, through additional support and more structured exposure to the work of work – particularly in new growth sectors

3.14

- Targeted interventions for key groups/locations: the strategic assessment identified a number of key groups that were under-represented in the labour market or that faced significant barriers to finding work. These groups include (among others) those with a disability, justice system leavers, older people, lone parents, those living with health issues (including mental health), ethnic minorities. Likewise, the research identified that there are specific parts of the city where levels of LTU and economic inactivity are more than twice the city average. Government programmes over many years have tried different approaches to support these groups. We propose to explore some new models that are either target group-based and/or location-based in order to support incremental improvements in employment outcomes among the target populations. The development work on these interventions will take place until April 2022, with delivery coming forward after that time.

- 3.15 In order to support delivery of these priority interventions and to raise awareness of the opportunities for both job seekers and for businesses, it is proposed that a campaign loosely around the theme of 'Belfast: Back to Work' will be developed as well as supports for those on furlough who have no other access to employability advice and guidance within the city. This will be timed to coincide with the planned end of the furlough period, when the real impact on the employment numbers is likely to become clearer.

Financial and resource implications

- 3.16 No specific additional financial contribution required from council at this point. The resourcing plan for delivery of the agreed interventions will be agreed with DfC and funding will be allocated to Council through a funding agreement.

Equality implications/rural needs assessment

- 3.17 One of the key advantages of this approach is that it will enable us to target resources on specific groups, including those with particular access issues and barriers that currently prevent them from accessing training and employment opportunities.

**3.18 DfC proposes to establish Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships in all council areas in the course of the coming financial year.”**

During discussion, one Member suggested the need for smaller/individual providers to get the opportunity to provide training through more Council tenders being advertised. The Director of Economic Development advised that officer's were involved in the process of launching a Dynamic Procurement Gateway which would provide opportunities to all training providers in the future and a report would be brought back detailing the current procurement framework and the Dynamic Procurement Gateway, together with the analysis and results for consideration.

During further discussion, Members welcomed the focus on long term unemployed and the importance of engaging localised community based providers and participants.

After discussion, the Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note:

- The outline Action Plan which will be used as a basis for engagement with the Department for Communities (DfC) in the coming weeks, in order to support delivery of activity from September 2021. If approved, the action plan would run from September 2021-March 2023; and
- That a report be submitted to a future meeting providing further information on the current procurement framework and the Dynamic Procurement Gateway, together with the results, for consideration.

**Positioning Belfast to Compete**

**A City Imagining Investment Programme:  
Cultural multi-annual grants**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to:**

- Update Members on the investment programme that supports the cultural strategy, *A City Imagining 2020-2030*.
- Seek approval for the opening of the cultural multi-annual two-year scheme in September 2021 for funding from 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2024.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1** The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the contents of this report and agree to open cultural multi-annual grants in September 2021 for Arts and Heritage organisations and Events and Festivals for funding from 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2024 subject to final recommendations being agreed by Committee in February 2022.

## **3.0 Main report**

Members will be aware that at a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 28 August 2019 a new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, *A City Imagining*, was agreed. As part of this strategy a new investment approach was approved including phased implementation of new funding programmes. Similar to the Belfast Agenda, the recommended investment model for culture proposed a new partnership approach to supporting the cultural sector, with the aim of sustaining and developing accessible cultural activity and infrastructure across Belfast. This investment is central to creating positive cultural, social and economic impacts for the city, delivering on our overall targets for the period, positioning Belfast as a regional driver, and creating the conditions for long-term transformation.

**3.2** As included in the strategy, the aims of the cultural investment model are to:

- support the cultural life of the city by enabling citizens to be active, dynamic and creative agents of change
- invest in the cultural and creative sectors skills development and capacity for production and innovation
- position Belfast as an international testing ground for new approaches to cultural engagement, development and placemaking
- establish Belfast as a cultural destination.

**3.3** The first phased implementation of the cultural investment model commenced with the opening of a competitive funding programme for cultural multi-annual grants for the period April 2020 to March 2024. It was agreed that these multi-annual grants would cover two main areas:

- Arts and heritage organisations, which have a year-round programme of cultural activity (*Anchor* four-year grants and *Enable* two-year grants)
- Festivals and events organisations, which have a festival or event with an audience of 65,000 or more (*Imagine* four-year grants), or an audience of 10,000 or more (*Activate* two-year grants) by end of grant period.

3.4 These two strands of funding, Arts and Heritage and Festivals and Events, each with two tiers of investment available (two-year and four-year) replaced previous core multi-annual funding for arts and heritage and previous one-off funding agreements to events and festivals awarded on an annual basis via the Committee process.

3.5 The Arts and Heritage strand of funding is similar to and replaced the established core multi annual funding first implemented in 2013. It was designed to sustain our existing cultural offer covering both programmes and infrastructure. The Festivals and Events strand of funding was a new element and was designed to develop large events and festivals that will help Belfast become a year-round events destination. Furthermore it created a transparent and open process in line with the arts and heritage funding process.

#### Cultural multi-annual funding April 2020 Process

##### Applications received

3.6 In 2019 the process was completed to award funding for the period commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. A summary of this process is included below.

3.7 Cultural multi-annual grants opened for applications on 7 October 2019 and closed on 22 November 2019. The grants were advertised via websites, existing networks and on social media. Nine information sessions were held across the city, with 204 attendees in total. In addition, 137 one to one advice sessions took place. In total, officers engaged directly with 406 potential applicants in advance of the deadline.

3.8 84 applications were received in total, and 54 grants were recommended to be awarded across the two strands as follows:

##### 3.9 Festivals & Events cultural multi-annual funding

- Four-year *Imagine* grants: 11 applications were assessed, of which four were recommended and

received a grant. Seven applications were unsuccessful, of which six were considered for a two-year grant.

- Two-year *Activate* grants: 26 applications were assessed, of which 12 were recommended and received a grant. Eleven applications were unsuccessful, two were ineligible, and one was withdrawn.

### 3.10 Arts & Heritage cultural multi-annual funding

- Four-year *Anchor* awards: 13 applications were assessed, of which nine were recommended and received a grant. Four applications were unsuccessful, of which three were assessed for a two-year grant.
- Two-year *Enable* awards: 43 applications were assessed, of which 29 were recommended and received a grant. Thirteen applications were unsuccessful, and one was deemed ineligible.

### 3.11 Criteria for Decision making

Assessments were made and scoring applied under three key areas of criteria:

- Quality of programme: this includes their vision, content, audience experience and marketing and audience development.
- Impact of activity: this includes how the programme contributes to the four strategic themes (A City Belonging, A City Challenging, A City Creating and A City Exploring) and how they will monitor and evaluate that impact. A minimum score of 30 was required in this section to be eligible for a grant.
- Readiness for investment: this includes planning, financial management, staff, governance and environmental impact.

3.12 Assessments were made only on the basis of information supplied by the applicant within their submission. This included the application form and supporting documentation such as business plans and strategies.

### 3.13 Principles of the Assessment Process

Applications are received and eligibility checked by the Central Grants Unit before being passed to officers for scoring. A five-day rule is implemented consistently by the Central Grants Unit at the eligibility check stage for missing

key eligibility information such as annual accounts, bank statements and governing documents. Thereafter, officers do not return to applicants to request any additional details in relation to their applications.

3.14 Officers undertake a thorough assessment of all eligible applications. Applications and assessments are discussed and agreed at an internal moderation panel. Applications to Festivals and Events grants were assessed and moderated jointly between the Tourism Culture Arts & Heritage team and the City Events team. This was in order to combine the skills and knowledge of both teams. Given the substantial investment for the *Imagine* festivals and events grant strand, an independent external advisor was appointed via competitive quotation to complement the team in assessing and moderating these applications.

3.15 An independent assessment panel co-ordinated by Central Grants Unit and chaired by a Senior Managers is then convened. The role of this assessment panel is 'to ensure that the scoring of applications has been undertaken in an appropriate fashion and to provide verification or validation of sampled applications and the overall process'.

3.16 Rationale for funding allocations

The threshold for awarding grants was determined by the quality of applications and the budget available within each strand. This was a competitive process and the standard of applications was overall very high, with thresholds ranging from over 73% to over 79%.

3.17 Due to limits of budget available, volume of applications, and high scoring threshold, some parameters were set in place to help guide grant allocations. The following general rules were applied to help rationalise allocation of grants:

3.18 Festivals and Events organisations (*Activate* two-year grants):

- Those organisations recommended to receive an *Imagine* and an *Activate* grant, or two *Activate* grants for different festivals or events, received a maximum of £20,000 for their second festival or event.

3.19 Arts and Heritage organisations (*Enable* two-year grants)

- The following three steps were applied:
  1. Grant offer was 10% of turnover based on average of last two year's supplied audited accounts, or £30,000, or specific amount requested, whichever is the lowest (as published in the guidance notes).
  2. Maximum of standstill funding, if applicant was an existing core multi-annual funding recipient, where the minimum score of 30 had been achieved under the 'Impact' criteria within the scoring matrix.
  3. Where an uplift of funding was recommended following step one and the minimum impact score of 30 had been exceeded, then 90% of the amount calculated at step one was awarded. The exception is where this amounts to less than standstill funding for existing clients, at which point the amount recommended will revert to standstill, or maximum grant of £30,000, whichever is lower.

3.20 In calculating the level of award for organisations that met the scoring threshold and were not in receipt of a core multi-annual grant, the moderation panel took into consideration the level of turnover and discretionary factors such as nature of work and potential for alternative sources of income.

3.21 Key Issues

The total requested for Festivals and Events funding was £2,431,150.00, and for Arts & Heritage it was £2,014,963.50. This was a total request of £4,446,113.50 which was substantially more than the budget available.

3.22 51 organisations representing 54 grants received funding amounting to a total level investment of £ 2,363,264. Of these 54 grants 41 were for a 2-year period made up of:

- 29 Arts and Heritage organisations
- 12 Events and Festivals

These 2-year contracts are due to come to an end on 31st March 2021. In order to ensure new funding is in place it is recommended that a new 2-year scheme opens in September 2021 for grants for period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2024. This scheme would operate under the cultural strategy criteria as set out at 3.11.

**3.23 Review of current scheme**

Whilst the 2-year scheme falls into an overall 4-year programme with a commitment for a full review at the end of this period (March 2024) there is an opportunity to make a number of amendments at this stage. Therefore, officers have conducted a review of the current scheme including:

- 10 group engagement sessions
- 67 one to one meetings
- Analysis of end of year monitoring data
- Consideration of the application and assessment process for the 2020 scheme

**3.24 Key feedback includes;**

- Overall satisfaction at the funding process and systems
- Concern relating to certain eligibility thresholds, for example turnover and beneficiaries given the impact of COVID-19
- Greater parity between Arts and Heritage upper grant limit (£30,000) and Festival and Events (£50,000) upper grant limit
- Concerns that 4-year and 2-year tiers create a hierarchy within the cultural sector in the city

**3.25 In response to this feedback and based on an analysis of available information a number of amendments are proposed. These have also been informed by a review of the quality of applications received as part of the 2020 funding scheme including information relating to unsuccessful or ineligible application in order to better understand barriers to accessing multi-annual grants.**

**3.26 The proposed changes are as follows:**

**3.27**

- Lowering the turnover threshold from £100,000 to £60,000 to reflect how baselines have changed due to COVID-19. Consideration was given to requesting baselines relating to pre-COVID-19 period however this was felt to disadvantage new organisations or those that had continued to develop.
- The requirement to have a full-time equivalent staff member for the delivery of an event or festival is adapted so that this resource can be within a partner organisation where there is a clear legal relationship and where a commitment to delivering the Festival or Event can be demonstrated and measured.

- Inclusion of digital audiences as part of beneficiaries - both baselines and targets.
- Strengthening of criteria relating to sustainability (in particular environmental practices) and accessibility.
- Integration of criteria relating to proposals for Year of Culture to streamline process for applicants. This will be subject to a separate assessment and approvals process however is an efficient method for organisations to present information to Council.

### 3.28 Proposed process

It is therefore recommended that the amendments above are made to the scheme and that it opens in September 2021 and closes in November 2021. An extensive assessment process will be undertaken as outlined at 3.13. Final recommendations for funding will be presented to City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2022. Engagement with the sector will be sustained throughout the application process including:

- Group Advice Clinics facilitated by the Central Grants Unit and Culture and Tourism team offering information and guidance.
- In addition, officers will offer one to one meetings to any organisation considering applying to the scheme. Organisations who have applied to previous schemes will be offered detailed feedback on their applications.

### 3.29 Other Forms of Investment

It is important to note that Cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG) are only one form of funding provided by the Council to support cultural development in the city. As part of *A City Imagining* other schemes include:

- Community Festivals Fund – while this did not operate in 20/21 due to COVID-19, a letter of offer has now been received from Department for Communities and this scheme will launch in October 2021.
- Pathfinder Awards – for organisations not in receipt of core funding from any public sector body.
- Creative Bursaries – to support individuals who have clear career development paths aligned to the priorities of the cultural strategy.
- Project Funding – during COVID-19 this has been replaced by transition funding for organisations who had lost core funding. This scheme will be re-introduced in due course.

**3.30 Financial and Resource Implications**

There are currently no financial implications to this report. Final recommendations will be subject to Committee approval and confirmation of departmental budgets for 2022-23.

**3.31 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment**

An Equality Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Assessment was carried out for the Cultural Strategy. An equality screening was completed on the Investment Model including multi-annual grants which has been screened out with mitigating actions. Mitigating actions include: monitoring key population indicators and programme performance measures, in particular participation and attendance by disabled people; consider additional support and for sector-wide audience development of under-engaged audiences, in particular disabled people and older people; people and groups where there is evidence of additional barriers, such as LGBTQ+ and carers, and people with multiple identities; promotion and implementation of the council's Inclusive Events Guide for outdoor events and cultural festivals.”

During discussion, in response to a Members' question regarding Belfast Pride applying for funding as part of a consortia, the Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism confirmed that applications for this funding needed to be received from one accountable body, but that organisations could work in partnership if proper agreements were in place.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the contents of the report and agree to open cultural multi-annual grants in September 2021 for Arts and Heritage organisations and Events and Festivals for funding from 1st April, 2022 and 31st March, 2024, subject to final recommendations being agreed by Committee in February 2022.

**Finance, Procurement & Performance**

**The Zoo - Quarter 1 Performance Update Report**

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update in regard to the Zoo performance during Q1 (April-June) of the 2021-22 financial year, under the following areas:

- Visitor Services;
- Education Services;
- Animal Collection;
- Marketing and Events, and
- Financial performance.

In relation to Visitor Services, it was reported that the zoo had remained closed to the public at the start of Q1 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and reopened on 30th April as an outdoor attraction only, with a takeaway catering service provided in the zoo's small Treetop Café located the top of the zoo. The indoor animal houses (excluding the Rainforest House) had reopened to the public on 24th May.

The Business Manager explained that the zoo had implemented a range of health and safety measures in line with Covid-19 requirements and several zoo initiatives remained unavailable during Q1 due to health and safety requirements.

She advised that, upon reopening at the end of April, the zoo had seen significant visitor demand with the majority of weekends throughout May and June being fully booked. During Q1 the zoo welcomed 84k visitors over the two-month period it was open. She advised that this was an increase of 54% compared to average number of visitors (May-June) since 2014, even with the daily capacity restrictions in place.

She informed the Committee that the requirement of advance booking had helped with increased visitor demand, as people were planning in advance and were committed to visiting the zoo on their selected date. She confirmed that the zoo intended to keep this, in at least some form, even when Covid-19 restrictions were reduced or removed in future.

In relation to Education Services, she stated that the zoo had a small education team with two staff members. Due to limited staff resources and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, a normal education service was not available during Q1. School groups were accommodated on a reduced basis with self-guided visits only available.

The Business Manager highlighted that, regarding Animal Collection / Welfare, the zoo celebrated the birth of five Fijian banded baby iguanas which hatched in early January, marking the first new addition to the zoo of 2021. She also highlighted that a health and safety refurbishment of Belfast Zoo's sea lion pool in 2021 within the aquatic habitat was completed with fresh water being changed to saline water which enhanced the welfare of the animals.

Regarding Marketing and Events, the Committee was advised that the emphasis during Q1 was heavily focused on generating awareness that the zoo was 'Now Open', it also promoted its new Changing Places facility for visitors with disabilities and reopened its sea lion viewing window which was closed to the public for several years.

It was reported that the zoo welcomed several babies during Q1, including the birth of a giraffe calf, Ballysheen, in front of hundreds of visitors, a critically endangered bongo and six Madagascar tree boas.

The Committee was provided with an update on the Financial performance for the end of Q1: Income was £997k, which was £245k above budgeted income, generated primarily through admission, followed by retail, key commercial products and franchise concessions; and retail income was £205k which was £66k above budget.

The Business Manager highlighted that no catering commissions had been received yet for this financial year, as the commission threshold had not been met. However, the zoo's photography commission had seen increased demand.

During discussion, the Committee welcomed the increase in visitor numbers.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note the Zoo performance update report for the period April – June 2021.

### **Department for Communities (DfC) Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 To update Members on the progress of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme and to seek approvals to proceed with the recommendations regarding reallocation of budget lines within the overall programme.**

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:**

- **Note the updates on the DfC Revitalisation Programme projects contained within this paper and the continued importance of the use of streets and spaces to assist businesses and communities as part of a wider programme of work focused on Reimagining the Public Realm.**
- **To note the challenges and risk around delays in delivery, the request to DfC for an extension and the agreement, via a Letter of Variance process, to extend funding spend period to March 2022.**
- **To note the outcome of the Castle Place Hub procurement, with project costs now exceeding the current budget allocated;**
- **To note the DfC commitment to 100% funding Adelaide Street project and the proposed condition to reallocate Adelaide Street budget of £100,000 to Castle Place Hub scheme.**

- To note the £45,000 underspend of the Connectivity Scheme in Church Lane area following a procurement exercise and agree to reallocate this underspend to Castle Place Hub project.
- To agree that any further underspends realised are utilised to meet any additional cost increases on previously agreed and committed projects.
- To note the progress made with the E-cargo bike pilot and the appointment of a suitable operator to carry out the pilot project.
- To note the progress of the Covid-19 Business Grant, the potential underspend and to approve the reallocation of underspend to the overall Revitalisation Programme budget.
- To note the current position regarding the Business Cluster and Community grant scheme and the ratified decision at full Council 1 July to allocate Council monies towards the remaining applications (subject to the applications due diligence process).

### 3.0 Main report

#### Background

- 3.1 The CG&R Committee have received regular updates and provided approvals relating to the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme - a £4.039m programme funded via DfC to bring forward and deliver a range of economic, cultural and physical interventions to support businesses to trade efficiently during the Covid-19 restrictions and to maximise and create more outdoor space for businesses. To date a total of £2.250m has been spent or directly allocated to delivery partners up to the end of June 2021. The following sections provide an outline of certain works still in progress and programme challenges, with Appendix 1 Table providing a summary overview of the overall programme.
- 3.2 To date, some eight interventions/projects have been completed including marketing, branding, public safety messaging and communication activity; animation activity; revenue funding support for additional street cleansing and neighbourhood safety; and the replacement of the Belfast Bikes fleet with 450 new smart bikes. The first of the physical interventions completed and recently launched by the Lord Mayor and Department for Infrastructure Minister was the Linen Quarter parklet (see Appendix 2 photos). This new 10m parklet, located on the corner of Linenhall Street and Clarence Street, provides improved and enhanced outdoor

green, social space and bike racks. This parklet is the first of a number of new place-making and outdoor spaces across the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) areas that we are working in partnership with the BIDs, Dfl and other city stakeholders to deliver.

- 3.3 While much progress has been made and work continues to progress at pace across a number of strands, there are however challenges and risks to achieving the current programme deadline of September 2021. A key factor in the delay in progressing with a number of projects is the dependency of Council on external factors such as the reliance on Dfl Statutory approvals and /or Dfl enabling works delivery timeframes. As much of the physical public realm, parklet, and streetscape type interventions are on adopted pavements and roads this requires Dfl consent or have elements of enabling works that require Dfl delivery of the civils works elements. Ongoing delays have also resulted in the realisation of increases in contractor/supplier costs, increased lead-in times for delivery items, and limitations in contractor availability. Officers have taken a partnership approach to delivering many of the physical measures, and therefore are reliant on partner capacity and resources to support this partnership working at a time when many partners are stretched.
- 3.4 Given the expected delays in delivery in a number of interventions, officers requested an extension to the DfC Contract for Funding programme completion timeframe from September 2021 to March 2022. DfC have issued notice of their agreement to extend the completion timeframe in line with this request and will issue the associated Letter of Variance in the coming weeks.
- 3.5 As above, we are increasingly aware of external supplier environment in terms of increase in contractor/supplier costs. We continue to proactively manage the cost estimate process as effectively as possible through project scope review and value engineer processes and also via consideration of other sources of funding (e.g. Dfl, DfC), identified underspend opportunities within the Revitalisation Programme and agreed CRD Divisional budget. As outlined below there is an excess budget cost on one project (Castle Place Hub) but with underspend within another project (Church Lane) The proposed recommendations below will also be notified to DfC and included with the information to be submitted as part of the DfC Letter of Variance process.

**Project Specific updates**

**Castle Place Hub**

- 3.6 This project involves the creation of new public realm and streetscape enhancements, including a new cycle lane and a new kiosk that offers a unique city centre kiosk located in a prime retail pitch. Planning Permission has been granted although following further engagement with local businesses, an amendment to the Planning Consent will be sought in August 2021. DfC (with Council also on the assessment panel) have completed an external exercise to seek an operator for the new kiosk with 16 applications received, with the preferred operator notified. Other statutory approvals, including Experimental Road Orders, signalling design and relocation of bus and blue badge parking are currently underway by Dfl. A critical factor however in the overall delivery is Dfl delivery of the civils enabling works and finalising the necessary statutory approvals. Discussions remain ongoing with Dfl regarding programming these works into their works programme.
- 3.7 In terms of contractor appointment procurement has completed however the returned cost has exceeded the current project budget by approx. £150k. As outlined below there are proposals for reallocation of underspend from other interventions as well as the potential to lever in additional monies from other funders.

**Adelaide Street – parklet and public realm scheme**

- 3.8 This parklet / public realm scheme proposal has been developed in partnership with Dfl and will see pavement extensions and public realm improvements along the length of Adelaide Street. Given the wider benefits of the scheme Dfl have agreed to commit to 100% fund this scheme outside of the Revitalisation Programme, thereby releasing the previously allocated funding of £100,000, on the condition that the budget would be reallocated to Castle Place Hub given the Castle Place Hub budget issues (as above) and as this project contains a significant amount of Dfl-related improvements to the pavements/public highway. The funding commitment from Dfl for Adelaide Street scheme is currently going through Department of Finance approval process.
- 3.9 Subject to a satisfactory Contract for Funding offer from Dfl for £100,000 for the Adelaide Street Scheme, it is being recommended that the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation £100,000 budget is subsequently moved from Adelaide Street scheme to Castle Place Hub budget line.

**Connectivity Scheme in Church Lane area**

- 3.10 Following consultation with local businesses to refine the project scope, the emerging proposal will see a new lighting installation and open space enhancements via planters. The procurement process for a relevant contractor has now been completed. The reduction in the initial project proposal scope and confirmed project costs will result in a £45,000 underspend and it is being recommended that this underspend is reallocated to the Castle Place Hub project.
- 3.11 It is also worth noting that the illegal car parking and enforcement of the pedestrianised zone along Church Lane was raised as a specific issue by a number of stakeholders. Officers have been liaising with DfI to develop measures to address this issue.

**E-cargo delivery pilot**

- 3.12 This e-cargo delivery pilot aims to improve air quality, reduce kerb parking and congestion by providing a sustainable delivery options for first mile/last mile/onforwarding and only mile deliveries. As updated in the CG&R Committee Revitalisation report in May, an Expressions of Interest exercise was undertaken which subsequently informed a competitive tender process. This tender process closed on 9 July 2021. Following the assessment process, and contract discussions, a local business, StreetDock Systems Limited has been awarded the contract for the pilot which will commence operations in the Autumn.
- 3.13 This project will involve use of e-cargo delivery bikes to make urban logistics more convenient, efficient and environmentally sustainable. Seed-funding is often offered in city centres to bring forward innovative pilot schemes for breaching the issues created by the last and first mile deliveries. Previous bids for funding for sustainable solutions have been unsuccessful in the city centre, with successful bidders showing that once market viability is established the trend continues to grow. It will operate as a first, last and only mile delivery project through a hub-based approach that is scalable as demand grows. The successful operator is responsible for developing a long term and sustainable business plan, client base and operation of the e-cargo fleet. Key performance indicators have been established and will be reported on at agreed intervals to monitor the success of the project and longer-term commercial viability.

**Cathedral Gardens Active Travel Hub**

- 3.14 This pilot project involves the creation of new active travel physical hub on Council's Cathedral Gardens site as a meanwhile use. It will provide two key elements that will be run and operated by the successful operator following a competitive procurement competition:
1. Active Travel Support and Advice: Information, guidance and programming provision to encourage and support walking and cycling
  2. Bicycle and Bicycle Parking Provision: Supporting bike accessibility and provision through a range of cost-effective products and services
- 3.15 A Planning Application was submitted on the 9th July in conjunction with Physical Programmes and the design team for the proposed permanent Cathedral Gardens works. Discussions remain ongoing with a number of partners including the Public Health Agency, DoJ and the University of Ulster to finalise agreements on the required revenue funding for the temporary period. Any approvals in relation to asset implications (e.g. lease/licence) will be brought to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.

**Covid-19 Business Grants [up to £2.5k grant]**

- 3.16 The Covid-19 Business Grant, with an initial budget of £800k, is now closed and fully committed through mini grants up to £2.5k per application. Following additional funding provided by DfC in January 2021 an additional £154k was allocated to this scheme. In total 494 awards were made totalling £858,165.
- 3.17 The closing date for businesses to claim their awards through the scheme was the 25th June. To date £790,821 of funding has been drawn down by 445 businesses who were granted awards through the process. 49 businesses have withdrawn from the scheme and officers are currently processing the remaining 13 claims. There is currently an underspend within this budget line, and it is therefore recommended to reallocate any underspend from the fund to the overall Revitalisation Programme budget to meet some of the cost escalation currently being realised in other projects. The total amount of underspend and area of reallocation will be confirmed to this Committee when outstanding claims are processed.

**Business Cluster & Community Grants [£10k - £25k capital grants]**

- 3.18 Members will be aware of this capital grants scheme for environmental improvement proposals on arterial routes, in urban villages and local communities – proposals were sought on interventions that would support business operation and recovery; enhance physical spaces; increase civic participation and sense of ownership; and encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in local area. The scheme was originally allocated £363k from the Revitalisation Programme, with a further £300k and £95k allocated to the scheme following additional funding provided by DfC in January 2021 and from underspend in the Business Grant Scheme respectively and as agreed by this Committee. Members will also be aware that the Council received a total request for £1.34m from over 66 submitted applications. Grants were awarded on a first come basis, subject to appropriate due diligence checks, and 32 applications were approved with total committed funding of £690k.
- 3.19 As of end of June £531,160 has been provided to businesses. This represents the provision of the Integrated Design Team and the first 80% upfront payment to 27 of the successful applicants, with the remaining 20% to be paid on completion of the works and satisfactory completion of the monitoring and evaluation returns. Officers continue to work through the remaining successful applicants to secure relevant statutory approvals, however delays in securing relevant statutory approvals are anticipated and will result in an impact on delivery timelines, and subsequent funding spend beyond the initial proposed September deadline of the Funding Contract as paragraph 3.6 above.
- 3.20 Members will be aware of the oversubscription of applications to the funding allocated to this Business Cluster and Community Grants Scheme. Following Council ratification on the 1st July, the Council have committed to allocating £450,000 additional Council funding to meet the outstanding demand with an extended scheme delivery timeframe of March 2022. Officers have commenced engagement with business and organisations who previously applied, with the due diligence assessment process underway. Further updates on this next phase of application assessment will be brought back to Committee at a future date.

### **3.21 Financial and Resource Implications**

**Subject to a satisfactory Contract for Funding from DfI for £100,000 to fund the Adelaide Street parklet and public realm scheme, it is recommended that £100,000 initially allocated from the Adelaide St project is to be reallocated to Castle Place Hub. It is recommended the £45,000 underspend identified as part of the Connectivity Scheme in Church Lane area, to be allocated to Castle Place Hub scheme, and that any further underspends realised will be utilised to meet any additional cost increases on previously agreed and committed projects. Any overall Programme underspend will be brought into this Committee for agreement on allocation.**

### **3.22 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment**

**Impact assessment complete on overall programme and kept under review.”**

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority:

- To note the updates on the DfC Revitalisation Programme projects contained within the report and the continued importance of the use of streets and spaces to assist businesses and communities as part of a wider programme of work focused on Reimagining the Public Realm;
- To note the challenges and risk around delays in delivery, the request to DfC for an extension and the agreement, via a Letter of Variance process, to extend funding spend period to March 2022;
- To note the outcome of the Castle Place Hub procurement, with project costs now exceeding the current budget allocated;
- To note the Department for Infrastructure commitment to 100% funding Adelaide Street project and the proposed condition to reallocate Adelaide Street budget of £100,000 to Castle Place Hub scheme;
- To note the £45,000 underspend of the Connectivity Scheme in Church Lane area following a procurement exercise and agree to reallocate this underspend to Castle Place Hub project;
- To agree that any further underspends realised are utilised to meet any additional cost increases on previously agreed and committed projects;
- To note the progress made with the E-cargo bike pilot and the appointment of a suitable operator to carry out the pilot project;
- To note the progress of the Covid-19 Business Grant, the potential underspend and to approve the reallocation of underspend to the overall Revitalisation Programme budget; and

- To note the current position regarding the Business Cluster and Community grant scheme and the ratified decision at full Council on 1st July to allocate Council monies towards the remaining applications (subject to the applications due diligence process).

### Strategic and Operational Issues

#### Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) Accessible Parking Bay Proposals

The Members of the Committee were informed that correspondence had been received from the Department for Infrastructure regarding the following two consultations relating to accessible/disabled park bay proposals within the city:

- **St Jude's Parade** - Dfi propose to remove an accessible/disabled parking bay outside No. 26 St Jude's Parade and provide an accessible/disabled parking bay outside Nos. 24 and 28 St Jude's Parade. This proposal was in response to the bay outside No. 26 no longer being required and two subsequent applications from local residents for accessible parking bays outside Nos. 24 and 28.
- **80 Willowbank Gardens** - Dfi propose to remove an accessible/disabled parking bay outside No. 80 Willowbank Gardens as it was no longer required.

It was reported that these proposals would contribute to the provision of accessible parking and/or on-street parking in the respective localities and in the case of St Jude's Parade should provide improved accessibility for motorists with limited mobility.

In accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Members agreed that the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note the two proposed schemes as outlined.

#### Notice of Motion Quarterly Report

The Committee was provided with a quarterly update on the Notices of Motion. It was reported that the Committee was responsible for 11 active Motions and Issues Raised in Advance.

The Committee was reminded that, given the current pressures in responding to the pandemic, it had been difficult to afford the usual time towards progressing Motions. Nevertheless, there had been progress in a number of items and it was suggested that the following 4 Motions be now closed:

**Category 1 Recommended Closures** (Notices of Motion which contained an action that had been completed):

- **Sustainable Transport (Ref number 43)**. The Committee was reminded that a further report was considered by the Committee in May 2021 and a range of potential impacts and issues were discussed such as increased vehicles in shared bus/cycle lanes, segregated cycle provision, hackney and public hire vehicles, convenience for the public as

well as the impact of vehicles on air pollution and the need for better transport options. The Committee, at its meeting in May, noted that the proposed Notice of Motion as set out would not be taken forward.

**Category 2 Recommended Closures** (Notices of Motion have become Council policy or absorbed into a strategic programme of work):

- **Air Passenger Duty (Ref number 58)**. It was reported that this motion would be considered in the context of the new draft 10 year Tourism Plan, which would be included on the Committee agenda for consideration in September 2021.

- **Economic impact of retail closures and job losses (Ref number 92)**. The Committee was reminded that the Future of the City Committee Workshop on 25th May, 2021 provided an update on the current economic impact of Covid-19 on the city, including job losses and the vacancy rates in the city centre. This information was directly informing the Future City Centre Programme. Whilst this programme was initially developed around the key findings and recommendations outlined in the Pragma Consulting retail analysis, given the significant challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Future City Centre Programme had been recast to help address the issues impacting on the city centre and is aligned with the wider Belfast: Our Recovery framework priorities. The Committee was advised that it would continue to be monitored to reflect the changes in the city which would involve analysing the recent trends influencing the city centre and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a future report being submitted to the Committee, together with regular updates on the Future City Centre programme of work as it progressed.

- **Belfast Bikes – pilot Rolloe scheme (Ref number 102)**. As noted in the committee report of June 2021, Officers had been working with the company on the viability of pilot scheme and regular updates would be brought back to the Committee. The Committee was advised that this would be integrated into the Belfast Bikes programme of work.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the updates to all Notices of Motion that this Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1;
- Agree to the closure of a number of Notices of Motion, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in paragraph 3.6 of the report; and
- Note that a timeframe for the Car Parking Strategy Review would be submitted to the Committee in due course (as referred to under Notice of Motion Ref 153).

**Issues Raised in Advance by Members**

**20s Plenty for Us Campaign (Cllr McMullan to raise)**

Councillor McMullan suggested that the Committee invite representatives from the 20s Plenty Campaign, which advocate for a speed limit of 20mph to be normal on residential streets and in town and village centres, to present their work at a future meeting.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to agree to invite representatives of the 20s Plenty Campaign to present its work at a future meeting.

Chairperson