

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 6th April, 2022

## HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);  
Alderman Dorrian; and  
Councillors, Beattie, Donnelly, Gormley, Harvey,  
Howard, Hussey, T. Kelly, Maskey, McLaughlin,  
McMullan and O'Hara.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration  
and Development;  
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;  
and  
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

Apologies for inability to attend were reported for Alderman Kingston and Councillor Long.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee of 9th March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th April.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Beattie and O'Hara declared an interest in relation to item 3(d), under the heading 'DfI Blue Green Infrastructure Fund – Active Travel Projects' in that, they were on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and left the meeting while the motion was under consideration.

### **Request to present to the Committee** **Translink - Weavers Cross**

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from Translink on the Weavers Cross Regeneration Scheme at its Special Meeting, scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 27th April, 2022.

## **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**

### **Future City Centre Programme - Vacant to Vibrant Expression of Interest Update**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on the programme of work which had been developed in response to the rise in the number of vacant properties across the city centre.

She reported that, given the range of global and local factors, a toolkit approach had been undertaken, which comprised a number of forms of intervention, that included a mix of grant support and Council-led or delivered projects.

She outlined the work which had been undertaken to develop the following strands:

- Data;
- Retail and Leisure Performance Strategy;
- Matchmaking Service;
- Targeted Acquisition; and
- Capital Grant Pilot Programme – ‘Vacant to Vibrant’.

She explained that the Capital Grant Pilot Programme, ‘Vacant to Vibrant’, had been focussed within the city centre, to maximise its impact, with limited funding, and that, it had been proposed that property owners, businesses and organisations interested in renovating or repurposing a vacant space could apply for a grant and would be expected to contribute a minimum of ten percent match funding while also demonstrating quality assurance and clear commercial viability, which would be evidenced through a robust three-year business and financial plan.

She informed the Committee that the expression of interest process, which had been undertaken to gauge interest and to help shape the grant scheme and the level of support services which would be required, was still in the review stage and that an initial analysis of the responses received had indicated that the level of interest for the grant was likely to exceed the available funding of £700,000 over the identified two year period.

She summarised the findings from the Expression of Interest and reported that the process had also gathered information with regard to the demand for various forms of support for businesses seeking to occupy a vacant space and work had been ongoing to fully consider the range of support required.

She pointed out that the process had identified that access to capital was the most common challenge to occupying vacant space in the city centre, followed closely by rent and rates. She asked the Committee to note that the ‘Back in Business’ scheme, which had recently been launched by the Minister for Finance, offering a 50% rates discount for up to two years for the occupation of a vacant shop unit, only applied to premises which were or had previously been used for retail purposes.

The Committee:

- Noted the update in relation to the overall Vacancy Programme, including data; the 'matchmaking' service to assist potential occupiers; a revised Retail & Leisure Performance Strategy; targeted acquisition and the 'Vacant to Vibrant' grant scheme;
- Noted the outcomes of the Expression of Interest regarding the proposed 'Vacant to Vibrant' pilot capital grant scheme, which included the potential demand for both capital funding and wrap around business support services;
- Noted that officers would continue to establish demand for the grant programme and the requirements for wrap around support services (for example, business plan preparation) and that a further report would be brought forward should additional services be required;
- Agreed that the grant application process would open in May / June 2022 and that further updates would be brought back to the Committee;
- Noted that officers would continue to explore other funding opportunities to support the capital grant programme, given the anticipated level of interest; and
- Noted the launch of the Department of Finance's 'Back in Business' scheme offering businesses a 50% rates discount for up to two years if they occupy a vacant shop unit.

**Future City Centre Programme –  
Tactical Regeneration Programme and  
'Grey to Green' Initiative**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

**The purpose of the report is to update Members in relation to a proposed Tactical Regeneration Programme; the Entries Phase 2 scheme; a 5Cs Revitalisation scheme and a 'Grey to Green' initiative for the city centre and linking to surrounding communities.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**Members are requested to:**

- (i) **Note the initial work to develop a 'Tactical Regeneration Programme' aligned to A Bolder Vision, and approve its further development to progress feasibility of potential future projects,**

- including an initial focus on the Great Victoria Street area;
- (ii) Note the DfC offer of capital funding to deliver the '5Cs Revitalisation' project, and approve Council support for the project by way of progressing design and delivery; note also the opportunity this presents for Castle Street with a potential further phase of work during 2022/23;
  - (iii) Note that Council have received and accepted via the Capital Letters of Offer process a LoO from DfC in respect of the Entries Phase 2 project and that work is progressing in line with this to deliver the scope of works included within the Entries Phase 2 scheme;
  - (iv) Note the opportunity to deliver on a 'Grey to Green' initiative for the city centre and linking to surrounding communities and approve the approach to developing potential future projects and funding applications.

### 3.0 Main report

#### Background

The Future City Centre (FCC) Programme has been developed in line with the Belfast Agenda, the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Cultural Strategy and has been informed by the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy. The FCC Programme sets out a framework to deliver on priorities including diversification of uses, enhanced connectivity, investment, and inclusive economic and cultural growth although it is recognised that it needs to remain agile to deal with the ever-changing challenges of the city centre. The FCC programme has six cross-cutting pillars and includes 'tactical regeneration' as a key area of work that has potential to make a significant contribution, alongside other interventions, in helping to achieve the overall objective of a reimagined city centre.

Tactical Regeneration represents an opportunity to deliver against the principles and objectives of A Bolder Vision, by delivering shorter term improvements that enhance and better connect spaces and places throughout the city centre, while also testing temporary interventions that can shape and inform delivery of permanent public realm, regeneration or infrastructure projects.

### **Tactical Regeneration**

**‘Tactical Regeneration’ is about being pro-active to deliver simple and creative interventions that are relatively quick and low cost. It is a form of temporary place-making that help address issues of vacancy and dereliction and to test potential interventions that can inform long term change and act as a catalyst for future permanent regeneration projects. It represents an opportunity to deliver against the principles and objectives of A Bolder Vision, by delivering shorter term improvements that enhance and better connect spaces and places, while also testing temporary interventions that can shape and inform delivery of permanent public realm, regeneration or infrastructure projects.**

**It can also enable better engagement with property owners, agents and others to develop a better understanding of the barriers to delivery and work in partnership to improve specific areas.**

**Tactical Regeneration can work on a number of levels, with a variety of outputs, but with a consistent objective to produce outcomes that are well curated, site sensitive and engaged, with a view to making a site or space a more people friendly place while influencing longer term use. Tactical Regeneration is intended to react quickly to immediate need, and where appropriate, go beyond the traditional concept of ‘space’ (for example, street or park) and also explore opportunities to utilise vacant sites or units for a range of uses.**

**There are two main forms of tactical regeneration that Council, working with others can deploy:**

- i. ‘Tried and Tested’- a back to basics, replicable approach which includes deep cleans, general painting, greening, lighting etc.**
- ii. Opportunity to ‘Try and Test’- a site specific approach involving small to medium scale interventions in the public realm, vacant sites, or buildings. These interventions are intended to instigate and encourage positive use, opportunities for civic engagement and participation, for urban prototyping and experimentation. Outputs can include parklets, bespoke site-specific artworks, and features to create destination points, considered and designed venues/locations to facilitate and host meanwhile social, cultural and economic activities.**

Working in partnership with multiple stakeholders, Council have delivered a number of recent initiatives that have included elements of Tactical Regeneration.

#### **Belfast Entries Project**

While this project includes large and complex interventions intended to be in place for several years, such as bespoke feature lighting, it also involved the curation of a number of smaller scale elements, that collectively have significant impact within individual entries, and across the scheme as a whole. Through a general refresh of the area, coupled with bold artworks and lighting schemes, the Entries Programme has added interest and contributed to wayfinding through the city centre, while promoting the heritage and culture of the entries themselves and have acted as destinations in their own right. Members may also recall that the Entries project won an award in the public-private partnership category at the all-Ireland Urban Land Institute and CBRE Excellence in Placemaking Awards for 2021.

#### **Marquis Street and Other Examples**

Officers worked with local traders, designers, and craftspeople to complete an upgrade to Marquis Street, a key connection from Castle Street into the city centre. Works included general painting, cut and clear of overgrowth, festoon lighting, interpretive panel (to tie in with the Entries and Lanes initiative) and a site-specific artwork. Local businesses have also sought to utilise the enhanced environment, including by securing pavement café licences to enable active use of outdoor space.

There are other examples of schemes of varying scale and complexity which have been delivered by Council, including a building wrap around vacant properties pending development at Lower Garfield St; a shutter painting scheme in Fountain St; interactive lighting of properties in Castle St and Brunswick St and the temporary lighting installation at the former Bank of Ireland building on Royal Avenue. While generally involving larger scale interventions, the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation programme has also included elements of tactical regeneration, such as, Union St, Adelaide St, Brunswick St, the Linenhall parklets and the Business Cluster & Community Grant projects.

### **Tactical Regeneration Programme**

Officers propose to develop a Tactical Regeneration Programme that will enable a more strategic approach to be taken to the prioritisation and development of individual projects as part of a wider body of work. This approach would support the development of a 'pipeline' of projects tailored to specific locations and circumstances, but, curated and delivered to a consistently high standard that reflects and supports other initiatives and wider city development objectives.

By working up individual schemes in this context Council would be better placed to capitalise on funding opportunities that often arise at short notice and with limited timescales for delivery, often requiring delivery in line with 'in year' funding requirements from central government. The approach proposed would enable Council to respond quickly with projects that have been developed (for example, outline design / business case where applicable).

In relation to the proposed development of a tactical regeneration programme, there are a number of emerging project opportunities as below and identified in Appendix B:

### **5C's Revitalisation Scheme**

Through Developer Contributions Council are working with DfC to develop this public realm scheme across a number of city centre streets - Chichester Street (including sections of Montgomery St & Upper Arthur St), Callender Street, College Street and College Court. Officers have also worked with DfC to identify potential short-term interventions that could be delivered within the project area in advance of the main scheme, and which would address issues outside the scope of a traditional public realm scheme, including treatment of dead frontages, interpretation and wayfinding, feature lighting and additional greening. The interventions would bring short-term benefit to these streets, ahead of the delivery of larger scale permanent works, such as, footway realignment and resurfacing (Appendix B).

DfC have identified an opportunity to support this initiative with capital funding and, pending receipt of a Letter of Offer, approval is sought to support design and delivery of this scheme.

As the 5Cs project area is immediately adjacent to Castle Street, there is also an opportunity for Council to consider extending a wider programme of improvements to take in Castle St and to deliver as a further phase of work during 2022/23 as part of the wider proposed Tactical Regeneration Programme.

#### Great Victoria Street /Shaftsbury Square

The decline in this area has been raised by this Committee and a number of other Stakeholders on a number of occasions, referencing the period of decline in recent years, with a number of prominent vacant and derelict properties alongside a poor quality of public realm, particularly on Great Victoria Street. Whilst certain businesses have sustained a presence in the area and continue to make a positive contribution in terms of well-maintained active frontages, there are a number of vacancies and the wider area is in need of significant intervention. It should be noted that there are several development proposals progressing through the planning process in the wider area, and major public sector placemaking and infrastructure projects like Belfast Streets Ahead 5 and BRT 2 also have the potential to have a transformative impact.

However, the timescales associated with emerging or committed public and private projects in this area are lengthy, and in some cases uncertain, and there is a growing consensus among local stakeholders that there is a need for shorter term action. DfC had convened a Shaftesbury Square Masterplan Group, while a further group comprising a mix of private sector business and other interests, including Council officers, Translink, NIHE, DfC and DfI has more recently formed by way of a 'South West Quarter Stakeholder Group' in relation to issues and opportunities across the wider 'South West Quarter' area, which takes in Great Victoria Street, Shaftesbury Square, Dublin Road and Sandy Row. Both of these groups acknowledge the longer-term opportunities in the area but have expressed support for Council, working with other partners, to bring forward tactical regeneration proposals to enhance the area in the short term.

Officers are proposing that a tactical regeneration scheme is worked up for part of this area initially and whilst the detail needs to be developed it could include a combination of minor works to building frontages, while also taking advantage of generous footway widths along Great Victoria Street through measures, such as, removal of street clutter and introduction of soft landscaping and greening opportunities where possible (Appendix B). It is proposed



that a scheme be developed that focuses on Great Victoria Street (east and west sides, from Bruce St to Donegall Rd), as a priority given the condition of this area. Potential interventions for other parts of Shaftesbury Square will be identified alongside this work, informed by the potential for funding. DfC have indicated that funding may be available in the 22/23 financial period if projects can be developed up into a business case status. There is also potential for funding from other stakeholders within this South West Quarter Stakeholders Group. The scale and timeframe of funding is yet to be determined however it is proposed to develop a suite of potential interventions within this area that can be tailored to suit the available funding.

The approach to these interventions will reflect and test the placemaking objectives of the 'Civic Spine' as set out by A Bolder Vision, which is currently being considered in part through Belfast Streets Ahead 5 and Belfast Streets Ahead 3. The BSA 5 team have engaged in recent Bolder Vision workshops, and are currently developing traffic modelling scenarios within the project area, including for Bedford Street, Dublin Road and Great Victoria Street. This modelling will inform further concept design work for BSA 5 and future updates will be brought into this Committee as the plans are developed.

This report is seeking approval to further develop the feasibility of a Tactical Regeneration Programme, which would include progressing outline designs for the Great Victoria St and Castle Street areas. Officers will continue to identify further areas that would benefit from similar types of intervention, for example, Royal Ave.

Further reports will be brought to this committee and SP&R as appropriate as projects are identified and developed, and as funding opportunities for the capital delivery of these emerge.

### Entries Phase 2

Based on the success of the first phase, alongside significant support from city stakeholders, Phase 2 of Belfast Entries was included within the Belfast City Recovery Revitalisation Programme. The reopening of Sugarhouse Entry is a core element of this work, and DfC propose to fund the main works in this location, in addition to in-kind contributions committed by NI Water and the private sector. Phase 2 of the Entries will also include a refresh to Pattersons Place, College St Mews, Exchange Place, Wellington St and High St Court (Appendix C).

Reopening Sugarhouse Entry will provide an alternative connection between the retail core, via Pottinger's Entry, to the Cathedral Quarter via Waring Street, and will complement the forthcoming High Street public realm and cycle scheme. The scheme will deliver on the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy priorities by improving connectivity and the city living experience, driving regeneration and creating a welcoming, safe and vibrant centre, and supports the aims of A Bolder Vision. Works in this location will be subject to approval from DfI in relation to re-opening this entry.

In addition to the funding provided through the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme and, working in collaboration with DfC, Officers have submitted a business case and received a Letter of offer for additional capital funding to deliver the scope of works included within the Entries Phase 2 scheme.

#### 'Grey to Green'

Further to the report on 'City Centre Open Spaces' brought to Committee in August 2021 which updated members on a number of strands of city greening work, officers have undertaken a review of open space and other 'greening' opportunities within the city centre linking to surrounding communities. This work identifies opportunities for improvements to existing, or creation of new, green spaces, with a particular focus on connecting routes with adjoining communities. While in some instances these 'grey to green' improvements can be delivered as a component of larger scale capital projects, or as standalone schemes themselves, there is also an opportunity to bring short term benefit and pilot innovative approaches through tactical regeneration projects such as those referred to in this report.

It is proposed that the incorporation of soft landscaping / city greening forms a key component of the Tactical Regeneration Programme that could include a range of responses to different typologies of space across the city, from an under-utilised space in the primary retail core, to an edge of city centre residential area. The delivery route for these types of improvements will vary and will often involve close co-working with other public, private and community partners. There is an opportunity, through the Tactical Regeneration Programme and more specifically as part of a 'Grey to Green' initiative to develop this area of work with a view to identifying a range of potential interventions and exploring deliverability with other stakeholders and funders.

There are opportunities within the city centre to work with the private sector and BIDs and to work with community stakeholders through initiatives like the 'Garden Grid' which has involved a number of community organisations working together to co-design green solutions for a network of sites in the inner north area. Led by Ashton, this project proposes to bring multiple small sites into use and link them into a 'grid' of spaces under a common land management organisation as a social enterprise plant nursery. The proposal includes use of 'pop-up' containers and mobile planting techniques to allow for a variety of sites to be adapted quickly with minimal capital. As well as making productive use of spaces, the project aims to work with residents on issues of health and well-being, street safety and food growing initiatives. Officers have been engaging with Ashton and others in relation to this initiative and will bring a further report back to Committee in the near future.

Co-working across a number of Council departments will also be required to ensure alignment of workstreams including 'Clean, Green, Inclusive & Safe', the Resilience Strategy, the Cultural Strategy, the Belfast Open Space Strategy, the One Million Trees and 'Urban Forest' initiatives.

While officers have carried out an initial analysis to identify potential sites where greening 'Grey to Green' interventions could be brought forward, there is a need to further assess feasibility and deliverability in order to develop a series of priority projects which could then be designed and costed. Funding options and future delivery and management models could then be considered against these more detailed project proposals, and further reports brought to CG&R and SP&R as appropriate. Approval is therefore sought to develop the 'Grey to Green' programme to business case status with an objective to apply for funding from a number of sources, including DfC and DfI.

#### **Financial & Resource Implications**

Tactical Regeneration Programme - £100,000 will be met from approved City Regeneration and Development Budget for 22/23 (Future City Centre Programme budget line).

5Cs Revitalisation Project – DfC offer of capital funding of £162,000. £20,000 will be met from approved City Regeneration and Development Budget for 22/23 (Future City Centre Programme budget line).

Entries Phase 2 – DfC capital funding of £150,000.

Grey to Green Programme - £30,000 will be met from approved City Regeneration and Development Budget for 22/23 (Future City Centre Programme budget line).

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

The Future City Centre Programme is a high-level regeneration plan. The significant projects taken forward within the plan will be screened in their own right by the lead delivery division.

Where appropriate, emerging work strands will be individually screened for Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment.

The Committee:

- Noted the initial work to develop a 'Tactical Regeneration Programme' aligned to A Bolder Vision and approved its further development to progress feasibility of potential future projects, which included an initial focus on the Great Victoria Street area;
- Noted the DfC offer of capital funding to deliver the '5Cs Revitalisation' project and approved Council support for the project by way of progressing design and delivery;
- noted the opportunity presented for Castle Street, with a potential further phase of work during 2022/23;
- Noted that the Council had received and accepted, via the Capital Letters of Offer process a Letter of Offer from DfC, in respect of the Entries Phase 2 project and that work had been progressing to deliver the scope of works included within the Entries Phase 2 scheme; and
- Noted the opportunity to deliver on a 'Grey to Green' initiative for the city centre and linking to surrounding communities and approved the approach to developing potential future projects and funding applications.

**DfI Inconsiderate Pavement Parking –  
Options Paper: Draft Response**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the draft submission to the DfI Inconsiderate Pavement Parking consultation that closed on 18th March 2022. A draft response was submitted on behalf of Belfast City Council on

the basis that it remains subject to agreement by this committee, and subsequent Council ratification in May.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

Approve the Council's draft response submission to the DFI Inconsiderate Pavement Parking consultation enclosed with this report at Appendix 2. Members are asked to note that a draft response was submitted by the closing date of 18 March 2022 on the basis that it remains subject to the approval of this Committee and subsequent Council ratification in May.

## **3.0 Main report**

### **Background**

The Department for Infrastructure is seeking a resolution to the difficulties caused by inconsiderate parking on the pavement. Initial exploratory work undertaken by the Department is presented in the document Inconsiderate Pavement Parking – An options paper (Appendix 1). The paper provides background on the issue, looks at the position elsewhere in the UK and Ireland and sets out some associated considerations before setting out what the Department considers would be the most practical options for dealing with the issue.

### **Context**

There is currently no legislation in place to stop vehicles from inconsiderate or obstructive pavement parking and it is clear that this presents dangers to pedestrians, especially people with disabilities and parents or carers with prams and young children. While drivers often think they are doing the right thing by keeping the road clear for other motorists they fail to recognise that this blocks the pavement for those who walk, wheel or cycle. It can also force these people onto the road placing them at a high risk of harm.

The options being considered by the Department and which the consultation sought views on, are the following:

Option 1: introduce individual bans using the Department's existing powers.

**Option 2: introduce an outright ban on pavement parking possibly with some exceptions.**

**Option 3: introduce powers that would allow the Department's Traffic Attendants to enforce against vehicles found to be parked on the pavement and causing an obstruction.**

The Department also sought views on how to deal with vehicles parked across dropped kerbs which have been lowered specifically to help people cross the road.

#### **Belfast City Council Draft Consultation Response**

Members are asked to approve the Council's draft consultation response submission to the DFI Inconsiderate Pavement Parking – Options Paper, as included within Appendix 2 of this report. Given the tight timeframes for the submission to the consultation this response was submitted in line with the timeframes outlined within the Consultation, however, included a caveat that the response remains subject to agreement by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, and subsequent Council ratification in May. Officers will advise the consultation team of any further comments or amendment requests following this Committee meeting and the Council meeting in May.

The draft response sets out the Council preference for Option 2 - introduce an outright ban on pavement parking, possibly with some exceptions out of the three options presented within the Department's options paper. This option most closely aligns with the Council's Car Parking Strategy. It is also supported by the visioning principles of A Bolder Vision for Belfast, particularly principles two and three which seek to prioritise active travel, end car dominance, and promote safer streets for those who walk, wheel or cycle.

The response also notes that there can be no one-size-fits-all resolution to the issue of inconsiderate pavement parking or obstruction of blocked kerbs and that proper and meaningful consultation will be required. Clearly Disability and Inclusive Mobility Advisory groups such as IMTAC should be consulted to provide expertise and insights prior to a final decision being made. However, it is felt that it would be beneficial for everyone, not just people with disabilities, for an outright ban on pavement parking to be introduced, with the only exceptions being emergency situations.

The draft consultation response also highlighted the issue of inconsiderate parking within the inner-city residential areas where parking availability is particularly constrained.

**We propose that there is improved management and regulation measures in city residential areas proportionate to location specific layout and viability, in recognition that many streets are not designed to accommodate current volumes of traffic and vehicle numbers.**

**Financial & Resource Implications**

**None associated with this report.**

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

**The implications of the Equality or Goods Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessments will need to be undertaken forward by the Department for Infrastructure in line with their own policy positions and prior to undertaking an implementation.”**

In response to a request from a Member, the Director of City Regeneration and Development agreed that she would include a request to address inconsiderate parking within cycle lanes in the response submission.

The Committee approved the Council’s draft response submission to the DfI Inconsiderate Pavement Parking consultation, including the aforementioned inclusion, and noted that a draft response had been submitted by the closing date of 18 March 2022, on the basis that, it remained subject to the approval of the Committee and subsequent Council ratification in May.

**DfI Blue Green Infrastructure Fund – Active Travel Projects**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on the Department for Infrastructure’s Blue Green Infrastructure Funding related to Active Travel Projects.

She informed the Members that the Letter of Offer in respect of the project proposal for Active Travel Enablers had been signed and returned to the Department with progress having been made against delivery, in terms of scoping and procurement.

She reported that a series of discussions between Council officers and the Department for Infrastructure had taken place regarding the funding proposal around the development of designs for the Greater Clarendon North South Spine. She added that, following submission of the business case to the Department for Infrastructure, the funding had not been awarded but that there had been an indication from the Department that an offer of around 50% funding could possibly be made and that, with further development of the proposal, with a cost plan and initial designs, there could be a possibility of further funding in future years to support delivery and construction.

She pointed out that the proposal aligned with the principles of A Bolder Vision and would help connect the communities in Sailortown with the city centre and might include enhanced pedestrian crossings, dedicated cycle lanes, soft landscaping, lighting, resurfacing, open space and street furniture.

The Director stated that discussions which had taken place with Belfast Harbour Commissioners had resulted in a proposal that the feasibility work for the North South Spine Scheme could be co-funded and co-delivered by the Council and the Harbour Commissioners up to RIBA Stage 3 and would be brought forward under the existing Memorandum of Understanding, with a view to preparing the scheme to a position that could attract project delivery partner funding in future years.

The Committee:

- Noted that the Letter of Offer from the Department for Infrastructure, for capital funding to deliver Active Travel Enabling projects, had been signed and that officers were working to deliver the secure cycle units, covered cycle units and cycle repair stands under the Letter of Offer; and
- Agreed to progress the proposal to develop the designs for the Greater Clarendon North South Spine connectivity project, in conjunction with Belfast Harbour Commissioners, with a view to attracting further capital funding for delivery.

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

#### **Make Yourself at Home – Planning for the future of Tourism**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

**At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in September 2021, it was agreed that the draft tourism plan for Belfast, *Make Yourself at Home* would complete a 12-week public consultation. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of feedback and present the final plan for approval.**

##### **2.0 Recommendations**

**Members are asked to:**

- **Note the contents of this report and feedback received as part of the public consultation.**



- Agree the final plan, *Make Yourself at Home* including the priorities as set out at appendix 2 for year one and associated budgets.

### 3.0 Main report

Members will be aware that at a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in September 2021 it was agreed that the *draft* tourism plan, *Make Yourself at Home* would complete a 12-week public consultation. The purpose of this plan is to:

- Deliver on the tourism priorities set out in the *Belfast Agenda* recognising the importance of tourism to *Growing the economy* and *City Development*.
- Align to the ten-year cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, in order to ensure that tourism development supports cultural development and is based upon an authentic and sustainable Belfast offer.
- Support economic and social recovery in the context of COVID-19 including stabilisation, recovery and growth with the opportunity to build back better.
- Provide strategic context to the Belfast Region City Deal that sets out wider city priorities to ensure Belfast's appeal internationally and ability to attract out of state visitors.

#### Tourism Growth Pre Covid-19

Despite significant growth and the success of flagship projects such as Titanic Belfast there is still a gap in scale and maturity of the local industry when compared with other regions. Notably, Northern Ireland lags behind UK regions and Republic of Ireland with respect to tourism as a driver for job growth. However, the positive trajectory in place before Covid-19 had identified tourism growth as both feasible and a necessary part of inclusive economic growth. The challenge of any tourism development plan will be to create a sustainable model that continues to support the growth that is essential for city success and the creation of jobs.

Belfast's tourism and hospitality sectors directly support 19,300 jobs, one third of the sector in Northern Ireland. Key tourism sectors such as Accommodation & Food Services, Arts, Entertainment & Recreation and Transportation have been impacted by COVID-19 however if Belfast's recovery from the pandemic is managed then the growth potential remains high. The hospitality sector is an employment-intensive one, supporting a disproportionate number of jobs

compared with the average sectoral GVA: jobs ratio. Between 2013 and 2019 employment in Accommodation and Food Services in Belfast increased by 18.2 percent, compared with 8.5 percent growth in the city's total employment.

It was in this context that Tourism NI set the ambitious target of doubling the value of the tourism industry to £2 billion by 2030. A key element of this opportunity further reinforced by ambitions of the Belfast Region City Deal was getting a bigger share of the international visitors coming to the island of Ireland to travel to Belfast and the Belfast region.

#### Impact of Covid-19

While the full impact of Covid-19 is as yet unknown what is clear is that recovery will require new and innovative approaches in an increasingly competitive market. As the regional driver, Belfast will be hugely significant to this growth ambition, both in terms of visitor spend and the creation of new jobs. It is therefore imperative that our city break destination is developed in a strategic way which maximises the economic benefits that can be derived from tourism for local industries, businesses and communities, as well as increasing visitor numbers and spend and improving overall satisfaction levels.

#### Developing a ten-year plan

The *Make Yourself at Home* tourism plan sets out a vision for the future of tourism in the city that is centred on a people-based and sustainable model of development with a focus on:

- Increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience
- Supporting quality authentic products
- Developing skills
- Strengthening the city's position through marketing and communications

#### The approach

The past two decades have given rise to a number of trends within tourism development. This has included the popularity of approaches such as cultural tourism, green tourism or local tourism. What each of these approaches and associated models have in common is an increasing awareness that sustainable forms of tourism must respect the local context and support the economic, social, environmental and cultural values of a place.

In the context of Belfast, even before COVID-19, this is a complex proposition. The city requires further growth with a clear international agenda and need to continue to attract and grow out of state visitors. The new tourism plan seeks to set out how this growth can be achieved in a responsible and

inclusive way recognising that the city's greatest asset is its people.

The plan sets out a shared vision for tourism in the city and is supported by 4 strategic themes and three of catalyst projects. The strategic themes are:

- Grow Belfast
- Experience Belfast
- Position Belfast
- Sustainable Belfast

Each theme is supported by an evidence-based body of work and research.

#### **Public Consultation**

Following approval by City Growth and Regeneration Committee, the *draft Make Yourself at Home – A vision for the future of tourism* completed a 12-week public consultation. As part of this process Council engaged directly with over 330 stakeholders including:

- **Online citizens and stakeholder engagement:**  
The council carried out an online 12-week consultation via the Council's YourSay engagement platform to gather information, and this provided an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to review proposals, provide feedback and help shape the final plan. Results indicated 123 visitors and 30 full responses to the survey.
- **Workshops and Presentations** - nearly 200 attended these workshops tailored around the themes of the plan including a dedicated session on Belfast Stories. Attendance included a wide range of community tourism organisations, tourism businesses, partners and cultural organisations.
- **Council's Section 75 consultee list:** The council issued the consultation to our Section 75 list and provided representative groups with an opportunity to respond. Presentations were delivered to the Council's Equality Consultative Forum and Disability Advisory Panel.
- **Response to requests for one-to-one meetings and presentations** with a variety of stakeholders across the city, gave the opportunity for focused and in-depth engagement with stakeholders. This helped to foster a greater understanding of how the draft Tourism Plan can feed into their field of work, as well as identifying opportunities for city wide partnership working and collaboration.

- Presentation of the draft Tourism Plan as an integral part of recent Belfast Stories engagement.
- Council's stakeholder list: The council issued the consultation to a wide range of organisations including: Tourism Ireland, Tourism NI, Visit Belfast (500 tourism business partners), Community Tourism projects via Fáilte Feirste Thair, Eastside Partnership, Shankill Partnership and South Belfast Partnership, Belfast Hills Partnership and Colin Glen Trust and National Trust, tourism sector businesses, visitor attraction representatives, tour guides, individual artists and organisations within the cultural sector and trade representative organisations.

The overall feedback on the plan was very positive with the principles of being people-centred, responsible and sustainable strongly welcomed. General areas of feedback included:

- Support for an inclusive approach that recognises need for investment in neighbourhoods and creates opportunities for co-design with local communities. There is a need for long-term investment and capacity building to allow for engagement, development and delivery. This should be tailored to recognise that not all parts of the city or communities are at the same stage of development.
- Importance of Council's leadership role as well as direct delivery especially in relation to the principle of responsibility.
- Importance of an all encompassing approach to sustainability that includes an economic and social dimension as well as environmental.
- Affordability – need to minimise negative impact of tourism on locals and maximise positive impacts.
- Importance of alignment with climate and resilience programmes.
- Inclusivity is important and this should consider thematic as well as geographic alignment to reflect diversity within the city. Organisations that don't fit into neighbourhoods also need to be afforded opportunity to avail of funding and the governance structure should reflect this.
- Importance of measuring benefits to local communities beyond economic impact. The

- plan sets out a comprehensive approach to measuring success that includes economic and social benefits.
- Opportunity to position innovation in tourism using our digital and creative industries to come up with new ways to enhance experiences and improve connectivity.
- As well as new developments Council should commit to building on city's existing asset base and address challenges such as infrastructure to improve access.

### **Strategic Themes**

***Strategic theme 1: Grow Belfast*** (supported by EY Recovery report)

This theme focuses on the role of tourism in city recovery including the need for stabilisation of the tourism sector and the requirement for further growth in Belfast. This includes:

- Strategic context and evidence-based proposition that Belfast acts as a catalyst for the region.
- Measurement of the attractiveness of the city as a destination and how this plays a key role in maximising the economic impact of each visitor by increasing average length of stay and daily spending levels.
- Priority areas for investment e.g. catalyst projects.
- Introducing social, cultural and environmental measures to better understand and advocate for the true value of responsible tourism growth.

Specific areas for feedback to be addressed in implementation plans and alignment to ***Bolder Vision*** and ***A City Imagining***:

- Need to ensure that there is investment in existing assets
- Important to recognise and support key elements of Belfast's existing offer and wider Belfast stories such as maritime, music, culture and arts
- Relationship between regeneration and tourism including need to improve access to tourism assets through better connectivity – addressing areas of low footfall, dereliction etc.

***Strategic Theme 2: Position Belfast*** (supported by a Positioning Review completed by Blue Sail Consulting).

A critical dimension to any tourism development plan is understanding the market and how the brand operates in this space. In order to develop an effective strategy there also needs to be consideration of the brand architecture for the city and the region. The result should be clarity of roles and responsibilities for agencies working in this field including Council's own role and city partners such as Visit Belfast and Tourism NI. *Make Yourself at Home* sets out a dynamic model for city positioning that strengthens Belfast's role as the gateway to the region in a way that responds to key markets including:

- Business Tourism and sub-sectors within this group.
- Leisure tourism target markets including - geographic considerations and the visitor journey.

This theme takes forward a new approach that pushes beyond traditional marketing methods towards enabling the people creating the Belfast experience to tell their story. Therefore, the approach is narrative driven and the new plan sets out areas of support on:

- How do we tell Belfast stories? How do we enable people to tell their Belfast story?
  - How do we create an emotional connection with visitors?
  - How do we make local stories resonate internationally?
- The theme brings forward actions that support an effective way of working and will be particularly dependent on successful establishment of governance and leadership support mechanisms that will be strengthened to support the overall delivery of the plan.

Specific areas for feedback to be addressed in implementation plans and through work with Visit Belfast, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland:

- Need to ensure that as well as a Gateway to Northern Ireland that Belfast is positioned as a must-see urban destination on the island of Ireland by capturing GB and ROI city break market and attracting greater share of Out of State visitors to Ireland.
- Belfast Stories needs to extend beyond city centre proposal to strengthen and support organisations already telling stories across the city.

***Strategic theme 3: Experience Belfast*** (supported by Visitor Experience Framework developed with CHL Consulting)

The plan provides a summary of key actions to strengthen the coherency of Belfast's overall visitor experience. The plan contains strategic priorities that:

- include experiences that can be brought to life through the development of an optimal mix of 'anchor' and ancillary products that get people into an area and keep them there
- focuses on encouraging international visitors to immerse themselves actively in the locale, interacting with people, engaging the senses and learning the history and stories of the places.
- prioritises delivering immersive moments that inspire tourists not only to share their experience with others but also make them want to return to the city.

This theme is critical to the overall success of the plan due to:

- the role of Belfast City Council in developing the Belfast experience through the development of Council assets.
- Support for local initiatives and development plans through geographic or thematic based community development.

In developing this theme, a number of pieces of foundational work have been completed including:

- A mapping exercise which maps our existing tourism assets against the city's 'Belfast brand' and Tourism NI 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' brand. Assessment of the quality, market fit and sustainability of existing products. Development of a proposed combination of thematic and geographical clustering.
- Undertaken a gap analysis of potential experience-based products. The gap analysis reviewed what was missing from the tourism offer taking into consideration issues such as seasonality, immersive experiences, events and festival animation, and opportunities to meet local people for instance.

- Consideration of investment and evaluation criteria for longer term priorities and programmes of support incorporating social, environmental and economic factors.

Specific areas for feedback to be addressed in implementation plans include:

- Importance of investing in local tourism is recognised however this has to take a thematic approach as well as being geographic or place-based. There is an opportunity to develop clusters that helps to increase visibility of existing assets.
- The overall visitor experience will only be delivered if there are also improvements in connectivity and accessibility.

***Strategic theme 4: Sustain Belfast*** (supported by benchmarking of Belfast as part of Global Destination Sustainability Index)

This theme is shaped by recommendations emerging from the benchmarking completed as part of Global Destination Sustainability Index. Members will be aware that Belfast signed up to this benchmarking following Committee approval in August 2020. The Global Destination Sustainability Index is the world's leading benchmarking and performance Index for cities, their events and their visitor economy. Its purpose is to engage, enable and inspire cities to become more sustainable places to visit, meet and thrive in. In addition to benchmarking a city's environmental strategy and social sustainability performance, the GDS-Index assess criteria that are industry specific: industry supplier support (restaurants, hotels, conference centres) and convention bureau strategy and initiatives. Alongside benchmarking it helps destination management organisations, convention bureaus, key industry associations suppliers and clients to develop effective strategies and practices in support of sustainability goals.

Since 2019, over 60 cities have started the process of benchmarking and assessment. The goal is to have 300 cities collaborating by 2023. The Index is based on 69 Indicators broken down into four categories:

- City Environmental Performance
- City Social Performance
- Supplier Performance
- Destination Management Performance



Belfast has now completed a second year of benchmarking resulting in significant improvement taking our place within top 20 cities. A series of related recommendations are included in *Make Yourself at Home*. A number of these relate to Visit Belfast's role as the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and Visit Belfast have already made significant progress in implementing these as part of their current funding agreement with a commitment to build on this on a multi-annual basis. However, Council also has a direct role and recommendations within the plan include the establishment of a taskforce and a sustainability lab for tourism in Belfast. Further action is also set out in relation to improving Council owned assets and supporting the supply chain.

Specific areas for feedback to be addressed in implementation plans and as part of ongoing work with Visit Belfast on Global Sustainability Index and Tourism NI on regenerative tourism:

- There is a market imperative to support this area of work based on consumer attitudes as well as a social responsibility.
- It is important for Belfast to maintain ranking on GDSI to ensure that we are striving to meet international standards.
- As well as overarching sustainability principles there should also be support for develop sustainable tourism products.

### Catalyst Projects

All four of these strategic themes are underpinned by the need to support inclusive economic growth and to differentiate the Belfast offer in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. A fifth strand to the plan considers key strategic opportunities that could bolster investment in the sector in order to support recovery and future growth. These are catalyst or accelerator projects and are outlined below.

#### Catalyst Project 1: Our Place – support for local tourism

Adopting a place-based approach to the development of our neighbourhoods through local tourism investment that supports product development, jobs creation and destination management including the design and delivery of a Belfast Experience Development Fund to support product development. There are also opportunities to support capital development through alignment with existing programmes such as the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund.

### **Catalyst 2: Make Yourself at Home**

This is a renewed commitment to long-term initiatives contained in the cultural strategy including signature Belfast events, International Year of Culture and UNESCO City of Music. The global summit of One Young World has been secured for 2023. A plan will be developed to bid for other major events that support the ambitions set out in the plan. Members will be aware that Belfast had planned to host a year of culture in 2023 in line with the original European Capital of Culture bid. However, the ongoing impact of COVID-19 at a city level in terms of the capacity of our local sector to deliver something of this scale in 18 months and the trajectory for the full return of international markets increasing makes this challenging. Therefore, it is now proposed that a multi-annual approach is taken forward focussing initially on the period 2022-24. Building on the cultural strategy, we have positioned events as one of the catalyst programmes for tourism to help contribute to the city's long term growth (visitor numbers, dwell time, spend and brand positioning) and in particular act as a key motivator for GB and Ireland visitors as part of the next phase of recovery. Over this initial period this would include at least 2 flagship events each with a critical mass of homegrown activity in 2024.

### **Catalyst Project 3: Our Stories**

Delivering the Belfast Stories as part of the tourism pillar of the Belfast Regional City Deal must be part of an overall integrated approach to tourism development and inclusive economic growth for the city. Belfast Stories will connect to local tourism product development and infrastructure through a hub and spoke model. Importantly the Hub will be an exemplar for responsible and sustainable tourism demonstrating the principles set out in the ten-year plan. Through the focus on Belfast Stories, the project will also be transformative for the positioning of the city. The development programme for this project as part of BRCD is fully aligned to this tourism plan with cross-cutting priorities and synergies.

### **Implementation**

The success of the plan will require ongoing review and delivery. To support this a number of key early actions have been identified including:

- Setting up of proposed governance and partnership model to drive the implementation of Make Yourself at Home
- Scoping short and long-term investment priorities and financing strategy
- Tailored action plans to address areas of priority.

Appendix 2 sets out priority actions for Year 1 of the new plan. This includes the development of a new investment programme for local tourism. The detail of this fund will be presented to Committee in due course setting out proposed process, criteria and timeframes.

Members will be aware that Council has supported local tourism conduits Fáilte Feirste Thiar and Eastside Tourism for a number of years under the City Connections Programme. This has included working in partnership to increase connectivity across the city, conducting consumer research and developing local partnerships. It is proposed that this programme is replaced by the new investment programme however in order to support transition and given that the new programme will not be operational until later in the year it is proposed that £25,000 is allocated (25% of previous annual investment) to these organisations.

As part of implementation and in response to consultation feedback, a number key areas of development are identified for Council to lead including:

- A detailed accessible (inclusive) programme to include working with tourism sector to review communications, train staff and improve facilities.
- A detailed sustainable tourism programme to address key weaknesses as identified by Global Sustainability Index (GDSI).
- A detailed food tourism programme to support hospitality and food businesses focused on local produce.

### City Events

Members will be aware that significant work has taken place in recent years to realign City Events with Council's wider cultural and tourism ambitions. This has included a renewed focus on working in partnership and developing programmes that support the local cultural sector and represent an authentic Belfast Experience. Included in Appendix 2 are the proposed events for 2022/23. Further detail on approach and programmes will be presented to Committee at relevant points throughout the year. Members will note that there are currently no plans to deliver Hallowe'en in 2022. It is proposed that this event is reviewed in line with the development work that has taken place on other events. This should include options for city events to represent greater cultural diversity within the city and how a partnership model could be developed. An update will be presented in due course.

### **Financial & Resource Implications**

There are currently no immediate new financial implications to this report. Appendix 2 sets out a breakdown of budget against programmes of work to be allocated from existing departmental budgets. Further detail on proposals for investment in local tourism will be presented to Committee in due course.

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

The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). A specific screening has been carried out on this associated tourism plan and was included as part of the consultation exercise. Mitigating actions have been considered as part of the implementation plans. Catalyst projects such as Belfast Stories will be subject to a separate Equality Impact Assessment. It is also anticipated that should any investment programmes emerge from this plan these will be subject to further equality screening.”

The Committee

- Noted the contents of the report and the feedback received as part of the public consultation; and
- Agreed the final plan, *Make Yourself at Home*, which included the priorities for year one and associated budgets.

### **Employability and Skills - Update and Workplan**

The Director of Economic Development reported that, following the series of lockdowns and restrictions in 2020 and 2021, there had been significant volatility within the labour market. He pointed out that the Council’s employment academies had been designed in conjunction with employers to address the existing job vacancies and, since April, 2021, 816 people had been brought through the Employment Academies with an into-work rate of 75% for those who successfully completed the scheme.

He informed the Committee that, for 2022/23, it had been expected that the Employment Academies would engage around 540 participants with at least 70% expected to gain employment in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, care and customer service.

He pointed out that a number of initiatives were in place for young people, both in the formal education setting and outside of the school environment, focussed on improving educational attainment and helping young people at risk to find positive employment and training outcomes. He then summarised the following initiatives:

- GCSE Support Programme;
- Youth Support Programme; and
- A new initiative that was being developed based on the Boston Summer Scheme model.

He outlined the priority areas of focus for the Labour Market Partnership and reported that the resources from the partnership enabled the Council to significantly increase the volume of activity and subsequent job outcomes. The Partnership also created a platform for engagement with government departments.

He stated that the Department for the Economy had allocated 90% of the requested match funding for European Social Fund projects, with the intention of releasing the remaining 10% within the 2022/23 financial year.

In response to a question from a Member regarding issues with applications for taxi licenses, the Director stated that he would bring a report back to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee:

- Noted the work that had been undertaken in the financial year to date, and the positive employability and jobs outcomes associated with the work; and
- Approved the priority interventions for the 2022/2023 financial year.

### **Supporting Business Start Up and Growth in Belfast**

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update on activity which had taken place to support the development of new and existing businesses across the city through the Enterprise and Business Growth Team.

He pointed out that the activities which had taken place in 2021/22 had been developed in partnership with a range of organisations which included Invest NI, Catalyse and Local Enterprise Agencies and highlighted the following areas of activity:

- Enterprise awareness activity: engaged 760 individuals through a range of activities. Some specialist support work undertaken with female entrepreneurs and student start-ups;
- Start a business activity: 279 new jobs created through the Go for It support, with 75 businesses receiving additional follow-on mentoring and financial support;
- Support for Social Enterprise and Co-operatives: 56 organisations had been supported with one-to-one mentoring, advice and guidance, including six new co-operatives;
- Business growth supports: 327 businesses had engaged in a range of business support workshops and 357 had been supported through one-to-one engagement to help them to implement growth strategies and become more resilient;

- Innovation Factory: was at 70% occupancy, the operator had ambitious plans to increase those numbers in 2022/23. The centre had seen a high level of interest from new firms in sectors including TV/film, digital, engineering and green tech. Over the previous year, 84 businesses had engaged in masterclasses at the centre and, as part of their social and economic regeneration activity, over 30 work placements had been facilitated by IF customers over recent months, a series of school engagement activities had taken place and 10 local people had been trained as Digital Champions;
- Scaling and growth: in partnership with Catalyst and Invest NI, the Way to Scale programme supported 60 individuals to participate on a series of bootcamps to transform their businesses and support them to scale and grow to turnover of more than £3million. 10 were supported to participate in a one week residential at MIT and access a peer-to-peer workshop series with Catalyst and a Go to Market residential in Boston which focused on go to market strategies and tactics;
- City Vibrancy: In January 2002, the Vibrant Business Destinations programme had been launched, in partnership with DfC. To date, there had been 17 enquiries in relation to the programme and officers had been engaging with businesses to support them with the expression of interest process; and
- Investment had been undertaken in technology solutions to enable tracking of the impact of investment and carry out regular evaluations of programmes in order to measure their effectiveness. A bi-annual Belfast Business Survey had been relaunched, in conjunction with Belfast Chamber and responses from over 400 businesses were being analysed, the insights of which, would be shared with partners to build a collective understanding of the needs of businesses in the city and agree on priority interventions to address those needs.

He reported that work had been underway to develop an Economic Strategy to support sustainable and inclusive growth in Belfast from 2022 to 2030 and that it would clearly articulate the role of Belfast in the regional economy and would identify a series of key propositions to build on areas of competitive advantage in a rapidly changing global business context. He added that it would align with the ambitions of the 10X Economic Vision, as it would focus on how the return on investment could be maximised to secure transformational change that can benefit all residents.

The Director of Economic Development outlined to the Members, the proposed activity for 2022/23 and that there would be a focus on a number of new areas of programme development and delivery, which included:

- Starting a Business: Working with the other councils across the region, Invest NI and DfE to bring forward plans to revamp the approach to business start-up post-2023;
- Social Enterprise and Co-operative Development: In 2022/23, to refresh the social economy action plan based on ongoing research that had been taking place with the sector;
- Growing a Business: Responding to both the opportunities and challenges generated as a result of climate change, close engagement would be undertaken with the Climate and Waste teams, in order to identify opportunities to help businesses to become more environmentally sustainable;
- Support to Scale and Grow: Working with the City Innovation team to pilot interventions in order to access future opportunities through Challenge Funds, particularly for those businesses in growth sectors; and
- Investing in Belfast: Focus would be on refreshing the City Investment Service to ensure that it provides the right support to new and potential investors in the city and complement the work of partners such as Innovation City Belfast.

He reported that, in June each year, over the past decade, the New York New Belfast Conference had taken place which showcased the best of Belfast business, education, tourism and cultural offer to a wide audience of New York and US influencers and decision makers, and that, in 2022, the event would take place on 23rd and 24th June.

He stated that it had been expected that the event would attract up to 150 US based delegates and would be hosted by the Mayor of New York City, Mr. Eric Adams and that there would be a series of presentations from Belfast based business organisations, with a number of side meetings with relevant political and business representatives.

He reported that an invitation had been received for the Lord Mayor to co-host the event and that, given the significant progress in the city since the last New York New Belfast in-person events, it had been proposed that the Council agrees to the attendance of the Lord Mayor, Chief Executive and the Director of Economic Development, or their nominees, in order to articulate the focused investment narrative.

The Committee:

- Noted the Council's performance and contribution to delivering against Belfast Agenda ambitions to grow the Belfast economy, which had focussed on the support for Business Start-up and Growth;

- Noted the ongoing work on the Belfast Economic Strategy and agreed to receive future updates on this work in the new electoral term;
- Noted and agreed the priority work areas for the 2022/23 financial year; and
- Agreed attendance by the Lord Mayor, Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development, or their nominees, at the New York New Belfast Conference in June 2022 and approved the associated budget allocation of £6,000 from existing resources.

**PWC Good Growth for Cities 2022 Report:  
Taking Action on Levelling Up**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

The purpose of this report is to:

Update Members on PwC’s Good Growth for Cities 2022 report: Taking Action on Levelling Up

**2.0 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

Note the update on - PwC’s Good Growth for Cities 2022: Taking Action on Levelling Up report which measures the performance of cities and regions across the UK as indicators of ‘Good Growth’ and ranked Belfast as the highest-ranking city from the devolved nation.

**3.0 Main report**

**Background**

The Demos-PwC Good Growth for Cities Index is an annual report which looks at broad measures of economic performance alongside well-being indicators to develop a metric for ‘Good Growth’ of cities. Specifically, the report ranks 50 of the UK’s largest cities based on people’s assessment of 12 key economic wellbeing factors, including jobs, health, income and skills, as well as work-life balance, house affordability, travel-to-work times, income equality, environment and business start-ups. This year’s report also includes two new indicators covering safety and vibrancy of local high streets. Indicators within the report align to the Council’s strategic objectives and of this Committee, as set out within the CG&R Committee Plan, the Belfast Agenda, Corporate Plan, BRCD. Belfast City Centre and Regeneration Strategy (BCCRIS), Bolder Vision for Belfast and the Reset



for Growth report, as well as a number of other strategies and programmes.

Using these 'Good Growth' indicators, the report ranked Belfast in eighth place, and highest ranked city from the devolved nations. Other cities in the top 10 include London, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool, Leicester, Sheffield and Bristol. Members will be aware of the projects and programmes Council are delivering aimed at job creation, regeneration and place making, vibrancy and making Belfast a city a great place to live, work, visit and invest. The recent findings from this report are a positive sense check in terms of our direction and focused priorities, and also highlighting the need to ensure that we continue to work to position the city to compete both nationally and globally.

Contained within the report are case studies of best practice at how investment in townscapes, support in community cohesion, efforts to foster local pride and attract new types of businesses are being used to boost growth. Belfast was selected as a case study for inclusion within the report, referencing a balanced and deliberately interventionist approach to regeneration. Work being undertaken by the city to invest in place-making, open and green spaces, community infrastructure, connectivity and cultural and tourism offerings in order to create a more attractive, accessible, and vibrant city centre which connects to surrounding communities are highlighted as best practice. It also referred to city investment plans including a citywide commitment to investing in neighbourhoods, leisure and community facilities and to strategies that integrate physical regeneration with cultural, social and environmental regeneration. It highlighted the Bolder Vision for Belfast as being key to a stronger and more resilient city core and acting as a call to action for the council, civic partners, local businesses and the wider local community. It also highlighted how Belfast is working to establish itself as a cultural centre in order to realise its global cultural and economic ambitions, referencing the 10-year cultural programme, UNESCO City of Music and the Belfast Stories development plans. The city's innovation and inclusive economic growth plans, supported by the BRCD investment and Belfast's position as the number one city for FinTech investments were referenced and that further investment in digital connectivity and supporting centres of excellence would drive Belfast forward as a global digital and scientific centre and globally significant destination for innovation

While the report welcomes the Levelling Up White Paper, analysis within the report demonstrates that Government, public and private sectors need to continue to work collaboratively to address regional inequalities and capitalise on the once in a generation opportunity to create successful places and deliver good growth. Members will be aware that the Council is working collaboratively with public, private, community and key anchor institution partners across a number of partnerships including Innovation City Belfast, Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor, Belfast Region City Deal and the Climate Commission and to deliver strategic programmes of work including A Bolder Vision, a Future City Centre Programme and neighbourhood regeneration aimed at delivering our shared collective ambitions as outlined within the Belfast Agenda.

The report notes that in general cities which performed well in this year's index had strong local economies, and strong environmental and safety credentials. It also notes that the pandemic has caused a shift in public priorities, with people wanting to be more connected with their local communities and to live in greener, fairer places. Members will be aware of the effects of the pandemic in Belfast, and efforts by the Council to address the impact on our communities and businesses, including the delivery of the DfC Covid Recovery Revitalisation Programme and via Belfast: Our Recovery plan. The report has found that the shift in public priorities has also altered the growth prospects of cities and regions as people change how and where they want to work and live, with small and provincial cities benefitting more in the context of the levelling up agenda. This provides an opportunity for Belfast in terms of its desire to attract and retain residents in the city to deliver on our Belfast Agenda ambitions including to attract 66,000 new residents by 2035.

The report tracks regional and city recovery across different demographic and societal groups including young workers, ethnic groups, and women, however it does not publish the breakdown per city and region.

The report also proposed four key areas for cities and regions to consider as they develop Levelling Up plans and continue to address economic recovery. In order to secure a fairer economic recovery and build sustainable growth it highlights that local and central government and the private sector should focus on the following:

1. Levelling up and the reality of regional inequality
2. Capitalising on growth outside the larger metropolitan cities
3. Driving social mobility and addressing intergenerational inequality
4. Green growth to provide the basis for all future action

There are various actions that sit below these priority areas for central and local government and businesses relating to investment in relationships across the public, private and third sectors to develop place strategies for place based transformation; investment in high streets; sector focused employment investment; reskilling and apprenticeships; local economic strategies; housing education; improved transportation links; circular economy and green growth; net zero and sustainability.

These action areas align to Belfast's strategic ambitions as outlined in the Belfast Agenda, and propositions outlined within the Innovation & Growth Commission 'Reset for Growth' report aimed at amplifying the city and region's future success focused around priorities on being more globally relevant; immediate action on climate change and turning this into an economic opportunity; housing development; developing a stronger core city and delivery of a Bolder Vision and a focus on building world-renowned business clusters.

#### **Financial & Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

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

None associated with this report.

The Committee noted the update on PwC's Good Growth for Cities 2022: Taking Action on Levelling Up report.

#### **Strategic and Operational Issues**

#### **Community Planning Update: Belfast Agenda Review, City Development and Jobs, Skills and Education Delivery Boards**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the progress of the Belfast Agenda Review, including the action planning phase, with a specific focus on the work being taken forward by the City Development and Jobs, Skills and Education delivery Boards.

**2.0 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

- i. Note that a report was presented to the March SP&R Committee outlining the progress of the development of the refreshed Belfast Agenda Strategy document and supporting four-year Delivery Action Plans.
- ii. Note the progress for the City Development and Jobs, Skills and Education Boards as set out in this report.
- iii. Consider and provide comments on the emerging strategic intents and measures of success (stretch goals) as set out in slides 12-22 in Appendix 1.
- iv. Note the proposed next steps and timeline as set out in slide 33 in Appendix 1.
- v. Note the plans for continued elected member engagement, detailed in section 3.5.

**3.0 Main report**

**Background**

Members will be aware of the Belfast Agenda: Continuing the Conversation engagement that commenced in June 2021 to inform the refreshed Belfast Agenda for the period 2022-26. During this engagement there was broad agreement that the existing long-term vision and outcomes of the Belfast Agenda remain relevant, and the proposed priorities of focus were the things that stakeholders and communities believed community planning could help address over the next 4-year period. As a result of feedback received some minor changes have been made to the framing of priority areas such as changing ‘Economic Recovery’ to ‘Sustainable & Inclusive Economic Growth’ and the creation of a specific priority for City Development. A summary of the current Belfast Agenda priority framework is attached at Appendix 1

**Bringing focus and commitment to delivery**

Members will recall that in order to ensure that the vision and ambitions set out within the Belfast Agenda translates into delivery, four cross-sectoral Boards have been formed (City

**Development | Jobs, Skills and Education | Living Here | Resilience and Sustainability) under the auspices of the Community Planning Partnership.**

**Building on the recommendations and consensus reached through Phase 1, the Community Planning Partnership, Delivery Boards and Council have committed to co-design specific and measurable action plans which underpin the priority areas of focus. This has been the focus of each of the respective delivery boards, who have designated small groups of core partners to develop the co-design approach for each priority area. This has involved analysing the range of outputs from the phase 1 engagement process; assessing relevant strategies, plans and local intelligence; feedback from community focus groups & surveys; feedback from Delivery Board workshops and legacy actions contained within previous action plans.**

**Based on this initial analysis, partners prepared a strategic framework to help bring focus to the emerging co-designed action plans consisting of:**

- 1. What are we trying to achieve over the next 4 years (strategic intent)**
- 2. How will we measure success (stretch goals); and**
- 3. How will we realise such success (SMART Action Plan(s)).**

**Sections 3.3 & 3.4 outlines how a structured and informed approach is being taken forward with respect to the City Development Board & Jobs, Skills & Education Board priority areas, ambitions, measures of success and importantly the focus for collaborative action.**

#### **City Development Update**

**Members will recall that in January 2022, an update was presented on the City Development Board workshop which took place in November 2021. Since the workshop, significant work has been undertaken with partners to co-design action plans. Some specific points we would highlight for Members include:**

#### **Housing-Led Regeneration**

**A Housing-Led Regeneration Group, chaired by the NIHE Chief Executive with representation from BCC, DfC, and LPS has been established to drive forward collaborative action through community planning. The following draft strategic intents have been defined:**

1. Increase housing supply across all tenures in the Belfast City Council area (including a strategic sites assessment exercise of all public sector assets).
2. Increase the city centre residential population
3. Address dereliction in local areas
4. Adopt a placeshaping approach to local development
5. Identify housing stock which requires retrofit to reduce fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency

#### **Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel**

Work is underway with partners from DfI, Translink, Sustrans, Council and community partners to establish the right mechanism to deliver on this priority. The following draft strategic intents have been defined:

1. Reduce private car use to improve individual, community, environmental and economic well-being
2. Enable connections to and from the city centre, enhancing permeability with neighbourhoods by improving active travel and sustainable travel routes across Belfast

#### **City Regeneration and Investment**

Work is underway with partners from SIB, Council, the private sector and community representatives to establish the right mechanism to deliver on the City Regeneration and Investment priority with recognition that this priority must have citywide impact. To date, the following draft strategic intents have been defined:

1. Working collaboratively to maximise social, environmental and economic benefits of citywide regeneration schemes
2. Working collaboratively to unlock barriers to driving forward major regeneration schemes
3. Working in partnership to address dereliction and maximise placemaking and regeneration opportunities across the city and neighbourhoods

4. To create a vibrant, thriving city centre which positions the city to compete
5. Developing opportunities in line with strengths to position the city to compete globally

#### **Future City Centre Programme**

Members will also recall that in January 2022 it was agreed that a City Centre Delivery Group would be established to focus on the city centre. Particular areas of focus include regeneration, city centre living, connectivity, investment, vibrancy, cultural and tourism offering and digital innovation. On-going work is currently being undertaken via City & Neighbourhoods Services in relation to a Clean Green, Safe and Inclusive Action Plan based on a multi-agency approach. Discussions are underway with various partners to bring focus to the Future City Centre priority including accelerating some areas of work which have been identified in A Bolder Vision. To date, the following draft strategic intents have been identified:

1. Drive the physical, cultural and tourism regeneration of the city centre
2. Create a thriving city core through diversifying and enhancing the city centre offer
3. To build the foundations and establish Belfast as a globally significant destination for innovation
4. Facilitate a clean, green, safe and inclusive city centre

We will continue to work with partners and communities, including a recent City Development Board meeting held on 11 March 2022, to co-design delivery plans over the forthcoming weeks and months. This represents an ongoing and complex process, which requires participation and involvement across public and private sectors and communities at multiple levels, which has resulted in some priorities being more developed than others. It was also agreed at the recent meeting of the Board that there be VCSE / community representation on emerging sub structures. The emerging frameworks for each of the priorities are attached as part of the presentation attached at Appendix 1 (slides 12 to 22) which had been discussed with the All-Party Working group on Community Planning when it met on 23 February 2022. The strategic intents and stretch goals have subsequently been further developed, particularly the City Development elements following the Board meeting on Friday 11 March. This reflects the dynamic nature of the co-design process which remains a work in progress.

**Jobs, Skills and Education Update**

The Jobs, Skills & Education Board met on 7th March 2022 and agreed on the following strategic framework for its three priority areas of focus, to be considered further at the next meeting of the Community Planning Partnership and through wider consultation and engagement.

**Educational Inequalities**

Community planning partners have committed to ensuring that everyone in Belfast fulfils their potential, which means that upon leaving school young people will be supported into a positive destination of their choosing where they enjoy active participation in all areas of life. Educational attainment has a strong impact on individual wellbeing and the opportunities that people have to fulfil their potential. A specific task group comprised of community planning partners has been established to drive activity in this area, aligned with the Department of Education's A Fair Start Report & Action Plan.

**Strategic Intent:**

1. Every child and young person is supported in their wellbeing and learning so that they develop the skills and capabilities to fulfil their potential and progress to a positive destination.

**Targets to be achieved by 2026:**

- All schools, family and community place-based partnerships will devise and implement a whole community approach to the learning and development of children and young people; this will be evidenced in School Development Plans, relevant action plans and community partnership plans;
- Increase the percentage of school leavers progressing into positive destinations from 93% to 96%;
- Support children in their early years in disadvantaged areas in a seamless journey from antenatal, to pre-school, school and beyond;
- Reduce the proportion of pupils with less than 85% attendance from 12% to 8%.



### **Employability & Skills**

Having a good job is important to people in Belfast and is key to ensuring we deliver inclusive growth for all our residents. The labour market in Belfast is complex and changing and there are many challenges regarding the skill levels of the city's resident. In order to make Belfast a city where everyone benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy and fulfils their potential, it is imperative that we work collectively to increase skills attainment while also matching people and skills to opportunities. Within this context we have worked with the Department for Communities and community planning partners to establish a labour market partnership that will seek to achieve the following:

#### **Strategic Intent:**

1. Quickly back to work – mitigate the economic impact of Covid-19 on the labour market by supporting those who have been or are at-risk of being made unemployed.
2. Increase opportunities – empower those furthest from the labour market to succeed and progress in employment.
3. No-one left behind – target disadvantaged groups through the delivery of an integrated, comprehensive, inclusive, holistic and local employability approach.
4. Catching-up – support access to careers paths, reskilling and upskilling for those who are out of work and those on low incomes.

#### **Targets to be achieved by 2026:**

- Decrease the proportion of residents who are unemployed, yet actively seeking employment, to 1.5%.
- Cut the proportion of working-age population with no qualifications to 12.0%.
- Reduce the working-age economic inactivity rate (excluding students) within the city from a baseline of 23.5% to 18%.
- Increase to the working-age population who have attained Level 4 or above qualifications to 56.0%.

#### **Sustainable & Inclusive Economic Growth:**

A thriving and prosperous economy is the engine of change for our city and the critical contributor to all the outcomes that we wish to achieve. As the region's capital city, its major population centre and the hub for business and employment, Belfast is critical to Northern Ireland's

economic future. Therefore, growing an inclusive and sustainable economy is one of our key priorities. Creating more and better jobs that are sustainable, rewarding, provide a career path and are financially rewarding has consistently been the major concern raised by residents and other stakeholders.

As a city, Belfast faces a number of economic challenges which affect our ability to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth, some of these challenges are deep rooted structural issues, which have been further exacerbated through COVID-19. Some of our challenges include lagging productivity, low levels of business start-up, innovation and export and ongoing issues with economic inactivity and high rates of unemployment.

The next iteration of the Belfast Agenda will be informed by an economic strategy which will support sustainable and inclusive growth for the period 2022-30. The strategy will clearly articulate the role of Belfast in the regional economy and will identify a series of key propositions to build on areas of competitive advantage in a rapidly changing global business context while ensuring that structural and environmental challenges are considered in order to drive sustainable and inclusive economic growth. A number of strategic intents, which are subject to further consultation, are outlined below and will inform the strategic intent, targets and actions for this priority area within the Belfast Agenda.

**Strategic Intents:**

1. Foster growth of indigenous businesses in Belfast by improving innovation, scale up, growth and survival rates in sectors aligned with Northern Ireland's vision for a 10x Economy
2. Create new and better jobs in the city by driving innovation and increasing value add of business activity
3. Build and maintain a skills pipeline that addresses the skills gaps of Belfast's current and future businesses, with clear pathways for employee growth and development into priority sectors
4. Improve socio-economic inclusion in the city by providing fair access to well paid jobs

5. **Grow levels of exports and foreign direct investment in Belfast, supporting businesses to capitalise on Belfast's unique geographical opportunities**
6. **Establish Belfast as a vibrant place to invest, live, work and play and attract a diverse and skilled workforce for the future**
7. **Establish Belfast as a resilient, net-zero, circular economy and deliver business opportunities in green technology such as green hydrogen.**

**Targets to be achieved by 2026:**

**While targets are still to be agreed through the progression of the economic strategy, some initial thoughts for further consideration include the following:**

- **Increase the number of new business start-ups and the survival rates of existing businesses**
- **Increase the number of businesses in the city who are exporting and undertaking R&D activity**
- **Decrease the proportion of residents who are unemployed, yet actively seeking employment, to xxx**
- **Achieve an x% increase in our overall Inclusive Growth score (will depend on what framework we decide to go with)**
- **Increase the GVA growth rate for Belfast and the surrounding region**
- **Grow economic participation within priority sectors**
- **Increase productivity of businesses and employees across sectors, focusing on skills required in priority sectors**
- **Maintain improvements in 'quality of life' indices to maintain attractiveness of the city for current and future population**
- **Reduce traffic congestion and improve transport links to areas of the city with potential for future growth**

**It is proposed that the timeline for developing the refreshed Belfast Agenda strategy document and underpinning delivery plans includes sufficient time for direct and genuine engagement with partners, communities/ communities of interest and specific sectors including the business and private sector over April and May 2022. In addition, more formal and intensive consultation activities are planned on the strategy document as well as further**

engagement to co-design the action plans during May and June 2022. Slide 33 in Appendix 1 outlines the proposed next steps and timeline for this process. It is felt that the timeline will allow for greater input and enable valuable buy-in to the emerging plans.

**Political engagement with elected members**

It is intended that regular updates will be brought to future meetings of Committee for consideration and input. The intention would be to bring a further iteration of the draft strategy and emerging action plans to Committee in May 2022 for further consideration, input, and refinement.

Members are asked to consider and provide feedback on the emerging frameworks outlined by 20 April 2022 to [communityplanning@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:communityplanning@belfastcity.gov.uk). This feedback will then be reflected in future iterations and can be discussed further with members as the strategy is further refined.

**Financial & Resource Implications**

Any financial implications arising from this report will be covered from existing budgets. The review process will continue to involve the participation of all community planning partners, who will need to commit their resources to the review process and the agreed action plans.

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

It is recommended that the consultation and engagement activities to review the Belfast Agenda will take account of the draft Audit of Inequalities and include specific sessions with targeted harder to reach groups to ensure that equality implications are considered as part of the review process.

The Committee:

- Noted that a report had been presented to the March Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, which outlined the progress of the development of the refreshed Belfast Agenda Strategy document and supporting four-year Delivery Action Plans;

- Noted the progress for the City Development and Jobs, Skills and Education Boards;
- Noted the proposed next steps and timeline; and
- Noted the plans for continued Elected Member engagement.

**Positioning Belfast to Compete**

**External Market Application –  
Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival Bazaar**

The Director of Economic Development informed the Committee that an application had been received on behalf of Firefox Events to hold a market of up to 40 traders, on the premises of the Common Market on 2nd May, 2022, as part of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival.

He pointed out that officers had been satisfied that the market would be well placed in the Common Market space and that it would be compliant with all relevant regulations and statutory requirements. He added that all of the traders would be local to Northern Ireland and were producing local and artisan products and that the local traders had indicated that they were fully supportive of the market event taking place.

The Committee agreed to grant a market licence to the Firefox Events to hold the one-off market as part of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival on Monday 2nd May 2022 from 1- 5pm.

Chairperson