

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 12th October, 2022

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Alderman Dorrian:
Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Duffy, Ferguson,
Harvey, Heading, Hussey, T. Kelly, Lyons,
Maskey, McCabe, McLaughlin, Murray, Nelson,
O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. A. Cairns, Zoo Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee of 28th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd October.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 5.a) Improving Employability Outcomes: focus on young people at risk, Councillor Duffy declared an interest, in that he was a co-ordinator for the GCSE Support Programme for the West Belfast Partnership Board.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest regarding item 3.a) Request to present - Artemis Technologies, as he worked for Queen's University and left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion.

Restricted Items

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following 3 items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of

exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 1 2022/2023

The Committee considered the Quarter 1 financial position and a forecast of the year end outturn, which included a summary of the financial indicators and an executive summary.

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

Belfast Zoo - Q1 Performance Update Report

The Committee was provided with an update on the Zoo performance during Q1 (April to June) of the 2022-23 financial year, together with an overview of the following areas:

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

The Zoo Manager highlighted that the zoo had won the following awards during Quarter one:

- ***Belfast Telegraph Business Awards***
 - Highly Commended for Best Use of Digital or Social Media for Off-Peak Promotions.
- ***British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) Awards***
 - Gold for Diversity and Inclusivity for Accessibility Improvement Plan;
 - Silver for PR, Marketing and Digital Events for Off-Peak Promotions; and
 - Bronze for Sustainability for Christmas 'treecycle' campaign.

During discussion, one Member highlighted that a wider range of low value gifts to purchase in the Zoo gift shop would be beneficial.

After discussion, the Committee noted the Zoo performance update report for the period April to June 2022 and the Chairperson agreed to write a letter of congratulations to the staff on their recent awards on behalf of the Committee.

Housing Led Regeneration Programme Update

The minute for this item has been restricted due to commercial sensitivity. The restriction will be lifted in due course.

Request to Present

Artemis Technologies

It was reported that a request had been received from Artemis Technologies to present an update to a future Committee on the Strength in Places-funded Belfast Maritime Consortium programme and development of Artemis eFoiler™.

The Committee noted the progress update and agreed to receive a presentation from Artemis Technologies on the Artemis eFoiler™ project at its Special Meeting in October.

The Committee also agreed that representatives of Queen's University be invited to attend, in conjunction with this presentation, to discuss the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on both its staff and students, the possible reduction in student numbers, and to provide an update on the work of the City Deal.

Business Improvement Districts

The Committee agreed to receive an annual presentation from representatives of the three Business Improvement Districts at future meetings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

Regenerating Places & Improving Infrastructure

Blue and Green Infrastructure Funding

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on elements of the Council's Connectivity Programme, Grey to Green Programme and the Great Victoria St tactical regeneration scheme and the proposed funding proposals for these schemes via the DfI Green & Blue Infrastructure Fund and DfC Revitalisation Scheme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note receipt of the Letter of Intent from DfI to provide in year capital funding for the delivery of projects associated with Council priorities aligned with the Belfast Agenda and A Bolder Vision in terms of connectivity, greenways, active travel and place-making.**

- Subject to receipt of funding approve the delivery of projects outlined within this report, including any 3rd party funding agreements, consultancy and procurement as appropriate. Noting that funding and the Letter of Offer will be subject to SP&R Committee approval, via the Capital Programme process in conjunction with Physical Programmes or in conjunction with 3rd party delivery partners as outlined within this report with regular updates to be brought back to this Committee.
- Note the opportunity for DfC funding to deliver a Revitalisation Programme in the Gt Victoria Street / Southwest Quarter area, and subject to award of funding approve the delivery of the revitalisation programme, noting that this will be subject to SP&R Committee approval via the Capital Programme process in conjunction with Physical Programmes.
- Note and agree the PHA funding to deliver branding on the Cathedral Gardens Active Travel Hub.
- Note the potential of return of funding of the Spokesafe proposal approved under the 21/22 B&G Infrastructure Fund and approve the inclusion of this funding allocation with this phase of secure parking delivery.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 In June 2022, DfI sought proposals from Council for greenway and active travel projects that could potentially receive capital grant funding this financial year under the DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund 2022/23 and Active Travel Projects. Given the tight timeframe for delivery, in September, the Council submitted proposals with a focus on enhancements to live projects that have the best chance for delivery within this financial year. This fund aligns with Council's commitments as articulated in the Corporate Plan, the CG&R Committee Plan and the Community Planning Partnership City Development Board priorities to bring forward a city-wide connectivity programme, of which A Bolder Vision forms a key part. The proposals brought forward within this paper also presents an opportunity to bring forward projects / programmes previously agreed by this Committee, including 'Grey to Green' and 'Great Victoria St/Shafsbury Sq' in April 2022, as well as Active Travel Enabler projects as previously agreed and delivered through previous Blue and Green Infrastructure Funding streams.
- 3.2 DfI have provided to the Council a Letter of Intent under the Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund to provide 100% of in-year capital funding for Active Travel Enablers, Grey to Green and South-West Quarter/Great Victoria Street projects.

As an existing live greenway project, the Lagan Gateway has also received an intention to provide 50% funding of capital, profiled over three years.

- 3.3 The proposals within this paper for Active Travel Enablers, South-West Quarter Streetscape Improvements & Grey to Green projects are all subject to DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure funding, and approval of any Letter of Offer via the Capital Programme and the SP&R Committee. Whilst funding has not been secured or approved given funding conditions are that this will be required to be spent in year, Officers have continued to work closely with DfI to strengthen the deliverability. This includes identifying delivery partners who can assist in the delivery of the capital projects, and critically undertake to manage and deliver the longer-term maintenance of the interventions.
- 3.4 The funding proposals as well as planned and existing projects / interventions are summarised below:

3.5 Great Victoria St / Shaftesbury Square

As previously agreed by Committee in April 2022, officers have progressed the feasibility of a tactical regeneration programme for the Great Victoria Street / Shaftesbury Square area. There are a number of prominent vacant and derelict properties alongside a poor quality and decaying public realm. 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, Belfast Grand Central Station and BRT 2 also have the potential to have a transformative impact here, although these are longer term projects in terms of delivery.

- 3.6 Recently a focused approach to the regeneration of the area has been led through the South-West Quarter Stakeholders Group, a combination of private and public sector stakeholders including BCC DfI, DfC, and private sector landowners, developers and tenants to identify short / medium and long term interventions for the area to improve connectivity, increase safety, address dereliction and increase occupancy. This will include a number of approaches as outlined below which will focus on making streetscape improvements through the DfI Blue & Green funding (subject to funding award and approval via SP&R) and via Council's existing grant programming to encourage and attract further public and private sector investment and curation:

- **Streetscape Improvement Works;** Subject to DfI Blue and Green Funding delivering streetscape improvement works including resurfacing with resin bond gravel and providing planters and improvements to problematic areas along the street to improve the pedestrian experience aligned to the provision of a Civic Spine as envisaged under A Bolder Vision.
- **Revitalisation Programme; Applying for and delivering of funding from DfC** to deliver a Revitalisation Programme to provide property boundary treatments to help to address urban decay and dilapidation through innovative artwork, minor capital works and physical enhancements along this connectivity corridor.

3.7 The combination of the proposed funding to come forward under the DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure fund 22/23 in conjunction with existing funding programmes (Vacant to Vibrant, Business Cluster and Community Grant) and working with the private sector within the area represents an opportunity to act as a catalyst for investment and seek to provide confidence in the area that may assist in bringing forward footfall, investment and increased activity. Work is underway to engage with property owners in the area to encourage them to undertake improvement work to vacant and derelict buildings and sites. This approach also aligns to A Bolder Vision and Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), by delivering shorter term improvements that enhance and better connect spaces, while also testing temporary interventions that can shape and inform delivery of permanent public realm or infrastructure projects.

3.8 **Grey to Green Programme**

As previously agreed by this Committee in April 2022 a number of opportunities have been identified to improve or create of new, green spaces, with a particular focus on key routes, or linkages, between adjoining communities within the city centre.

3.9 The focus of this project will be to provide the support and resource for city stakeholders, business/property owners and resident groups to deliver worthwhile projects within their own area while ensuring commitment from these partners to undertake to maintain and preserve these interventions. It is proposed to progress this by way of Environmental Greening Grants. There would be an emphasis on biodiversity and sustainability including pollinators and pollution-combating plants as well as bug/insect houses.

3.10 It is proposed that this element of the Dfl Blue and Green Infrastructure funding will be delivered through a number of mechanisms as outlined below;

- Small capital grants up to £1000 to business (SME's), charities or community groups to deliver small scale greening projects within their ownership boundary with a total allocation of £40k. (grants to be administrated through an external body proficient in the delivery of greening grant schemes.)
- Larger capital funding agreements up to £10k to bring forward larger greening interventions including green walls, green infrastructure to boundary fencing/hoarding, community gardens with a total allocation of £50k.
- Funding agreements to the three BID areas (Linen Quarter BID, Destination CQ and BIDOne) to deliver and maintain green infrastructure within their respective districts up to £260k
- Up to £50k for a Demonstrator Project that would be delivered alongside Belfast Healthy Cities, PHA and other key partners as part of Belfast Healthy Cities' "Greening the City" action plan. Officers are working with stakeholders to define the project scope and possible locations.

3.11 Pending Committee approval to bring forward this Grey to Green project it is proposed to engage the city stakeholders & partners through an Expression of Interest to establish demand, potential locations and project proposals to support prior to proceeding with the delivery phase.

3.12 Active Travel Enablers

City-wide active travel and connectivity are strategic priorities for Belfast, as identified within the draft Programme for Government 2016-2021, the Belfast Agenda, and A Bolder Vision for Belfast as well as forming a part of the agreed Corporate and Committee Plans. There is a need to address connectivity and active travel right across the city in order to provide safer and more convenient access for communities to key destinations and facilities. While Dfl are continuing to develop up the delivery of the Belfast Cycle Network Council and Dfl officials have been working collaboratively to bring forward measures aimed at increasing and improving active and sustainable travel provision through A Bolder Vision, the Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme and the second phase of Active Travel Projects which are being

delivered via DfI Blue Green Infrastructure Funding (2021-2022) and via the Councils Capital Investment in Greenways.

3.13 These active travel enablers will continue to support modal change by helping to reassure cyclists that their bikes are safe and secure. This will build on a recent programme of investment by Council in cycling infrastructure across the city that included the replacement of the 'Belfast Bikes' fleet, and the installation of several covered cycle stands across Belfast, two new Active Travel Hubs and a secured cycle parking facility in the city centre. An increase in high-quality safe storage for cycling should help to increase the number of people choosing to cycle and encourage more people to consider cycling as a genuine alternative to their private car. In the 2021/22 Blue and Green Infrastructure Funding allocation we planned to deliver two secured units. The first of these new facilities called The Bike Yard was launched on 4 October in CastleCourt and is free and open to the public and holds up to 24 bikes. The original intention was for a second unit to open in the Q-Park at Victoria Sq, but due to a number of deliverability issues this was not achievable and the operator, SpokeSafe is currently working to identify alternative locations in the city centre for the next round of funding. Should the previously approved funding for the SpokeSafe proposal be returned to Council it is proposed that this funding is recycled into the 22/23 phase of funding for secure cycle infrastructure. A key challenge is securing land or buildings in suitable locations that are feasible and viable and Officers are seeking to address this demand and will continue to work with prospective operators in anticipation and readiness for this pending tranche of the Blue and Green Infrastructure Funding. The project proposals for the 22/23 B&G fund will include;

- Deliver 10 covered cycle stands at previously agreed (CG&R June 2022) city wide locations and to work with businesses and landowners to expand this list to provide covered cycle stands across the city;
- Deliver up to 8 more publicly accessible secure cycle facilities across the city in conjunction with partners who will be confirmed through an Expression of Interest process;
- Deliver additional cycle repair stations.

3.14 Council officers will continue to develop the emerging proposals in conjunction with stakeholder engagement to ensure support for these, and to make sure that the proposals are tailored to meet local needs and requirements. It is envisaged that the DfI will write to councils in late October or early November with a formal Letter of Offer confirming the funding allocations at which point it is

expected that the funding amount will be released immediately.

- 3.15 Dfl has stipulated a requirement for the funding to be spent within the 2022/23 financial year and this will place significant pressures on Council to adequately resource and manage project delivery within such a constrained timeframe. As such, approval is being sought for a pragmatic approach that would see procurement activity proceed 'at risk' pending a Letter of Offer which is expected in late October or early November. In addition, while it is intended that some projects will be directly delivered, a lack of resource and time pressures mean that a number of projects have been earmarked for coordination and delivery by other agencies due to delivery pressures. To this end approval is sought to enable Officers to proceed with the delivery of the projects outlined within this report with regular update reports to be brought into the CG&R Committee.

3.16 **Financial & Resource Implications**

Dfl Blue and Green Infrastructure funding 21/22

- Potential of £20,000 from 21/22 Dfl Blue and Green Infrastructure funding to be returned to Council, it is proposed that this funding is recycled into the 22/23 phase of funding for secure cycle infrastructure.

Dfl Blue and Green Infrastructure funding 22/23

A formal Letter of Offer from Dfl has not yet been received or approved by Council. Subject to funding award the Letter of Offer will be reported through the SP&R Committee as part of the Capital Programme for the following amounts:

- £402,500 for Active Travel Enablers
- £300,000 Great Victoria Street / Shaftesbury Square Streetscape Improvement Works
- £400,000 Grey to Green
- £633,600 (profiled over 3 years) Lagan Gateway Greenway

The Dfl funding for 2022/23 is based on management costs of the fund being covered by the Council. This is due to the in-year funding constraints, however, we need to give consideration to future delivery mechanisms, including seeking a project management fee for Council and other outsourcing requirements.

DfC Revitalisation funding

- **£250,000 Great Victoria Street / Shaftesbury Square Revitalisation Programme.**

Public Health Agency

- **£2,500 additional revenue funding to deliver branding to the Cathedral Gardens Active Travel Hub.**

3.17 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Officers are currently developing the Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Screening and will incorporate within the emerging proposals.”

During discussion, the Director of City Regeneration and Development explained further the delivery timeframe and the need to focus on the projects that would be completed by the end of the financial year. One Member proposed that the Committee write to the Department for Infrastructure to outline its concerns in relation to the short timeframe and suggest the potential for multi-year funding in the future.

In relation to the Great Victoria Street Scheme, she clarified that improvements to the streetscape were intended via environmental improvement type interventions, for example, soft planting. She also advised that engagement was ongoing with the Department for Infrastructure in terms of the Streets Ahead project regarding the provision of a cycle path in the area.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted receipt of the Letter of Intent from the Department for Infrastructure to provide in year capital funding for the delivery of projects associated with Council priorities aligned with the Belfast Agenda and A Bolder Vision in terms of connectivity, greenways, active travel and place-making;
- Approved, subject to receipt of funding, the delivery of projects outlined within the report, including any third-party funding agreements, consultancy and procurement as appropriate. The Committee noted that funding and the Letter of Offer would be subject to approval from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, via the Capital Programme process in conjunction with Physical Programmes or in conjunction with third party delivery partners as outlined within the report and regular updates would be submitted to the Committee;

- Agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure to outline concerns in relation to the short timeframe for the delivery of the greenway and active travel projects under the DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund 2022/23 and suggest the potential for multi-year funding in the future, so that opportunities for strategic alignment of such projects could be achieved;
- Noted the opportunity for the Department for Communities funding to deliver a Revitalisation Programme in the Gt Victoria Street / Southwest Quarter area, and subject to award of funding, approved the delivery of the revitalisation programme. The Committee noted that this would also be subject to SP&R Committee approval via the Capital Programme process in conjunction with Physical Programmes;
- Agreed to the PHA funding to deliver branding on the Cathedral Gardens Active Travel Hub; and
- Noted the potential of return of funding of the Spokesafe proposal approved under the 21/22 Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund and approved the inclusion of this funding allocation with this phase of secure parking delivery.

City Centre Revitalisation and Connectivity

The Committee considered the undernoted report and associated appendix:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on current infrastructure projects within the city centre, the pending reopening of Primark - Bank Buildings, its impact on the city centre and specifically how it impacts the Castle Street area, and to provide an update in relation to interim road measures to the Fredrick St Junction adjacent to Ulster University, and to further advise on proposals for a Waterfront Task Group.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to:

- **Note the DfI plans relating to the opening of the Ulster University City Centre Campus;**
- **Agree the comments provided by Officers to the DfI Consultation to the York St Controlled zone and provide any additional comments as required to this Committee Meeting**

- Note the interim measures to the Fredrick St Junction planned to commence in October 2022 and note that DfI will be presenting to the Committee in November 2022 where Members will have an opportunity to raise queries directly with DfI Officials
- Note the pending Consultation on Amendments to the Footway (Prohibition of Waiting) Order and to provide initial comments to this Committee meeting
- Note that the Bank Buildings refurbishment is almost complete, and that Primark have advised they plan to open the store ahead of schedule in November 2022.
- Note the DfI proposals not to reopen the area encapsulated by the Bank Buildings hoarding to traffic in advance of the finalisation of the Bolder Vision Strategy
- Note the DfI request for an environmental improvement scheme in the area and the proposed actions put forward by Officers
- Agree that officers apply for DfI/DfC funding to deliver the interventions outlined within this paper, and to procure and deliver the interventions in conjunction with local businesses and stakeholders with regular updates to be brought back to this Committee (and SP&R as appropriate).
- Note the emerging Waterfront Task Group and agree to contribute funding to the development of a framework for a fully connected waterfront - building on existing and proposed plans and schemes and aligned to local and central government objectives including A Bolder Vision, private sector development and community group proposals.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Ulster University Campus opened to its full cohort of staff and students in September 2022. As a significant regeneration project and catalyst for change within the City Centre Members of this Committee have received regular updates on the progress of the campus, the wider work of the Community Campus Regeneration Forum and have been invited to attend a session with the University of Ulster on the 11th of October 2022. The visit to the Campus will include a tour of the campus and a discussion on how best to maximise the impact of the new Campus for the city and its neighbouring communities to ensure its successful integration within the city.
- 3.2 This Committee has also raised several items with the DfI Minister relating to the opening of the Ulster University and the safety of the surrounding road infrastructure and provision of active and sustainable travel measures to

enable the modal shift that the University was seeking to instil from day one of the opening. Council at their meeting on the 1st September agreed to request a meeting with the DfI Permanent Secretary and the University. This meeting has been requested and further details will be brought to this Committee. Included within this report is an update on some of the measures currently proposed by DfI in relation to the opening of the University.

- 3.3 In addition to this works have continued in relation to the completion of the refurbishment works at Bank Buildings, and Primark recently announced they would be opening the store ahead of schedule with a target date of early November. This is welcomed news for the city centre and particularly the businesses and organisations within its immediate vicinity including Castle Street given the positive impacts that this will have for the city centre in general, both in terms of footfall, attraction, vibrancy and reopening of key connectivity links that have been closed or restricted now since August 2018.
- 3.4 The removal of the Bank Buildings hoarding has a close alignment with the Bolder Vision Strategy, which remains subject to final Ministerial sign-off from DfI in relation to the Civic Spine and the level of public transport penetration of Royal Avenue and Donegall Place, and subsequently Castle St and Castle Place. The Strategy was developed at risk based on a one-way South Bound Public Transport Movement on Donegall Place and Royal Ave, west bound movement only on Castle Place, and Castle St pedestrianised between Queen St & Castle Place.
- 3.5 Stakeholders within the area have been coming together via a Castle Street Multi – Agency Stakeholder Group, which was established to address issues within the immediate area including issues emanating from the closure of Bank Buildings and the bottom of Castle Street, and to discuss the development opportunities within the area to help to inform the longer-term approach to the regeneration of the area.

4.0 Main Report

4.1 Ulster University Belfast Campus Opening

The Ulster University Campus opened in full in September 2022 and at the time of writing this report early anecdotal indications are that the opening has seen a significant rise in footfall within the area, and in particular through the Royal Avenue and Donegall Place elements of the Civic Spine. There have not been any significant issues reported through

the UU Transport and Readiness Operational Group, and through the Community Campus Regeneration Forum (consisting of BCC, UU, DfI, DfC, CQ BID and local Communities) commitments were made by the relevant stakeholders to undertaking enhanced cleansing and monitoring of the area, including enhanced patrols by PSNI and traffic enforcement officers to minimise the potential disruption within the area that could have arisen from the University opening. In addition to this DfI have, or plan to undertake some mitigation works as outlined below;

4.2 York Street Traffic Control Scheme

On the 14th September 2022 DfI opened the consultation process to bring forward a Traffic Control Zone, i.e. blue badge and public transport access only between 11am and 6pm, between Donegall St and the Fredrick St Junction which relates to the direct frontage of the university buildings. The department will also close off access to on-street parking bays, with the exception of blue badge parking, within the zone using planters in the short-term prior to the delivery of a bicycle lane at some stage in the future. The Consultation closed on the 6th October and officers provided the following comments back to the Department;

- Due to the short-time frame in bringing forward this Order an opportunity has been missed to link this controlled zone up with the Control Zone between Donegall Place/Donegall Square North and Royal Avenue/North Street. It is requested that the implementation of a full control zone between Donegal Sq North and Fredrick St should be considered and brought forward
- This order will not have the desired impact without the implementation of adequate enforcement and recommend that enforcement cameras are introduced to implement the Controlled zone
- BCC request that DfI provide timelines and delivery mechanisms for the delivery of the cycle infrastructure or any other measures to be delivered as a part of this scheme
- DfI were informed that this response was subject to Committee approval and that Members may provide further comment. To this end Members are asked to consider and provide any additional comment to this consultation.

4.3 Fredrick St Junction

Members have provided several requests to the DfI Minister for the immediate implementation of sustainable and active travel measures to the Fredrick St Junction, citing safety concerns aligned to the current configuration that prioritises and caters for road travel. In particular Members have cited the dangers associated with the Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation units on the northern side of the Fredrick St junction as a significant contributor to footfall across this junction without adequate provision for safe pedestrian movement. DfI are currently proposing that the Fredrick St Junction is delivered as a part of Belfast Streets Ahead, although at this stage there is no firm timelines or budget to deliver the BSA3 scheme. In the interim DfI are proposing to undertake interim alignment works to the junction, with works proposed to begin in October 2022. These measures include:

- Closure of the left turn slip from Fredrick St to York St and widening of the northwest Footpath at the junction location & widening of the Fredrick St central reservation

This will reduce Fredrick St from four lanes east bound and two lanes west bound to three lanes east bound and two lanes westbound

- Widening the north-east footpath, realigning some lines on Great Patrick Street and installing new kerbing, tactile paving central reservation barrier, introduction of cycle stop areas at the traffic lights etc to the junction. There will be net change to lanes on Great Patrick St, however the overall crossing distance is reduced by approximately 1.5m-2m through the realignment of lanes.

DfI are coming to present to Committee in November and have been asked to provide an update on this junction.

4.4 Amendment to the Footway (Prohibition of Waiting) Order

DfI wrote to BCC on the 13th September 2022 (as Appendix 1) to inform the Council of proposed amendments to the Footpath (Prohibition of Waiting) Order. This will include restrictions to prohibit vehicles from waiting on a footpath adjacent to a bus stand, a cycle lane or school keep clear. While this is a positive move it does not meet some of the issues previously raised by this Council including banning

on footpaths. While further opportunity will be provided to provide response to these amendments when the Department bring the order out Consultation Members are asked to provide any comment on the proposals at this stage for input back to Dfl.

4.5 Bank Buildings Reopening

Primark are working to pace to complete the restoration works to the Bank Buildings following the fire in August 2018. The containers stabilising the façade are now removed, and the restoration works are visible again for the first time in four years. Works proceed to fit out the shop and to reinstall the public realm damaged during the stabilisation and restoration works and Primark are working with Dfl to hand the area back to the same standard of public realm area that existed prior to the fire. In September 2022 Primark confirmed that they were ahead of programme and proceeding at pace to open the store and adjacent streets & footpaths in early November 2022.

4.6 This is a significant milestone for the city and will provide a key source of footfall & vibrancy coming into the Christmas period, and critically will reopen the heart of the city centre that has been substantially constricted over the previous four-year period.

4.7 Subsequent to the announcement by Primark Dfl have confirmed that they do not intend to revert the city's infrastructure back to the pre-fire situation in advance of the Bolder Vision decision on the level of public transport penetration through the Civic Spine. At a street level this means that;

- Castle St will remain closed to through traffic from Fountain St to Castle Junction
- The temporary Castle Place cycle lane will remain in place
- Royal Avenue will remain open for southbound traffic only
- Dfl are working with Translink to ensure effective provision of public transport into and out of the city centre, in particular in the run up to the Christmas period.

4.8 In advance of the Bolder Vision decision on Public Transport penetration of the Civic Spine it is unknown how long this scenario will be in place however Dfl & DfC have requested that BCC apply to Dfl & DfC for funding for Council to deliver an environmental improvement scheme in Castle in the interim. Given the timeframes it is unlikely that a scheme

could be delivered in advance of the Christmas period and the Christmas Embargo however Officers are working on building up the following proposals to put to Dfl for consideration;

- Enhanced Christmas animation including utilising the lower section of Castle St for larger animation, and potentially further up Castle St for street buskers etc.
- Engage Dfl to extend the Castle St closure to Queen St.
- Engage DfC to consider Castle St for a public realm scheme pending the outcome of the finalisation of the Bolder Vision strategy.
- Designing, pricing and delivering an environmental improvement scheme that could be in place between Castle Junction and Fountain Street until the delivery of BSA Phase 3.

4.9 Given the timeframes involved Officers are still developing these proposals, however, will have to deliver at pace when funding has been secured. Members are asked to approve this approach for Christmas animation and environment improvement scheme for Castle St and its environs. Members are also asked to approve Officers applying for funding and delivering the environment improvement scheme with regular updates to be brought back to this Committee.

4.10 Previous Council investment in the Castle St area has included three capital grants awarded through the Business Cluster and Community Grant scheme to provide shop frontage improvements and outdoor facilities for hospitality outlets in the area, innovative lighting interventions and the acquisition of 2 Royal Avenue with work ongoing to further develop both the meanwhile and longer-term proposals for this location. Officers are also investigating further opportunities for investment within the Castle St area and in line with the aspirations as set out in the Inner North West Masterplan and action plan as previously agreed by this Committee. This includes promotion and ongoing engagement in relation to the Vacant to Vibrant Capital Grant scheme, and monitoring other strategic acquisitions and development plans to bring forward activation and animation in the area, and to increase footfall and dwell time in the area.

4.11 Waterfront Task Group

Under the Bolder Vision, the 'Embracing the River' theme forms one of the key moves and focuses on reanimating and

activating the River Lagan corridor, improving the active travel connections and connecting local communities along the waterside to this key connectivity and leisure corridor. Officers are working alongside other stakeholders to further develop this Key Move, to include undertaking co-design work with local communities and consideration of funding opportunities with the aim of bringing forward capital investment and delivery along the Lagan Corridor.

4.12 One strand of this, and in conjunction with the Maritime Belfast Trust, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, DfC, DfI & Titanic Quarter Limited, a Waterfront Task Group is being established that will also involve local communities and stakeholders with the intention of bringing forward a focused action and delivery plan with one of its key objectives being to bring forward the 'Embracing the River' proposals.

4.13 To further progress the main Waterfront Task Group partners are to co fund a focused scope of works that considers the overall development and integration of the waterfront that maximises the economic, social and environmental impact for the city and all adjoining residential and business communities as well as institutions. This will include the development of co-design workshops to bring forward communities along the waterfront, maximising the pedestrian connectivity to and from the water, activation on the water and to develop a prioritised pipeline of projects to further enhance future joint funding bids or private sector investment and development aligned to the Bolder Vision. Further information on the development and integration of this work will be brought back to future meetings of this Committee. It is proposed that Council contribute £10,000 from existing approved budgets to this joint study.

5.0 Finance & Resource Implications

5.1 Any capital costs for the Castle St area Environmental Improvement Scheme to be secured from DfI/DfC.

£10,000 contribution to the development of the Waterfront Task Group Framework to be met from existing approved department budgets.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

6.1 None associated with this report.”

During discussion, Members raised queries regarding the mapping of cycle lanes to promote access across the city, the problem of footpath parking, and the timeframe of the Bolder Vision. The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that there was an opportunity to raise these issues with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) when they attended the Committee in November.

In relation to the Waterfront Task Group and its development of a framework, one Member highlighted the need to incorporate the river corridor itself in this work.

During further discussion, one Member raised concerns regarding the lack of investment within the City centre and the potential for the Council to acquire two vacant sites in the area.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy,

Resolved - That the Council undertakes a scoping exercise in relation to the potential acquisition or transfer of two derelict sites within the City centre area.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- Noted the Department for Infrastructure plans relating to the opening of the Ulster University City Centre Campus;
- Agreed the comments provided by Officers to the Department for Infrastructure Consultation to the York St Controlled zone;
- Noted the interim measures to the Fredrick St Junction planned to commence in October 2022;
- Noted that the Department for Infrastructure would be presenting to the Committee in November 2022 where Members would have the opportunity to raise queries directly with DfI Officials;
- Noted the pending Consultation on Amendments to the Footway (Prohibition of Waiting) Order;
- Noted that the Bank Buildings refurbishment was almost complete, and that Primark had advised that they planned to open the store ahead of schedule in November 2022;
- Agreed that the Council undertakes a scoping exercise in relation to the potential acquisition or transfer of 2 derelict sites within the City centre area, and noted that a report be submitted to a future meeting on how the proposal could be progressed, resourced and managed;
- Noted the Department for Infrastructure proposals not to reopen the area encapsulated by the Bank Buildings hoarding to traffic in advance of the finalisation of the Bolder Vision Strategy;
- Noted the Department for Infrastructure request for an environmental improvement scheme in the area and the proposed actions put forward by officers;

- Agreed that the Council would apply for Department for Infrastructure /Department for Communities funding to deliver the interventions outlined within this report, and to procure and deliver the interventions in conjunction with local businesses and stakeholders with regular updates to be submitted to the Committee (and Strategic Policy and Resources as appropriate); and
- Noted the emerging Waterfront Task Group and agreed to contribute funding to the development of a framework for a fully connected waterfront - building on existing and proposed plans and schemes which would be aligned to local and central government objectives including A Bolder Vision, private sector development and community group proposals.

Growing Business & the Economy

Improving Employability Outcomes: Focus on young people at risk

The Director of Economic Development provided an update on the development work in improving the employability outcomes of young people at risk and the review of delivery which was currently underway.

He provided an overview of the proposed new intervention – “Bridges to Progression” – intended to be developed through the Belfast Labour Market Partnership.

He advised that the Council’s employability and skills support in this area had focused on developing a continuum of support and testing potential solutions for those young people, who were not in education, employment or training, and who would not generally participate in existing provision. These interventions included:

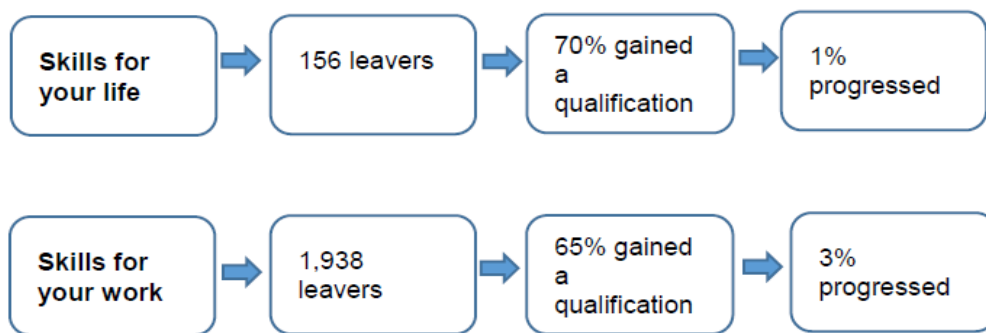
- **GCSE Support Programme** - In total, 517 young people across the city had benefitted from access to support to help with their GCSE English and GCSE Maths over the last year. This support had taken the form of both schools-based and community-based classes, revision and exam preparation;
- **Youth Support Programme** – supported 170 young people (14-24 years old) who were disengaged and aimed to create a progression pathway in Belfast for young people at risk, thereby reducing the number that were disengaging at an early age. Scheduled to run until September 2023, the Council was likely to engage a further 160 young people;
- **Summer Work Experience Programme** - Piloted in summer 2022, this intervention was aligned with the Youth Support Programme and targeted young people aged 14-16 years at highest risk or who had already disengaged from the formal education system. The programme offered six weeks paid work experience at £40 per week (equivalent to EMA) and was designed to expose participants to a range of employment opportunities and pathways into various sectors.

The Director of Economic Development advised that work was currently underway to evaluate and review all of the activity within this space. When this was completed, the Committee would be asked to consider recommendations, which would focus on a continuum of supports at critical stages for young people and/or where there was no existing provision or barriers to entry and engagement.

The Committee was reminded that the Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) represented a cross-governmental approach to co-designing a sustainable future strategic employment offer. The Belfast LMP was focused on four main strategic and cross-cutting themes: Quickly Back to Work; Increasing opportunities; No-one left Behind; and Catching-up.

Under the theme No-one Left Behind, the Belfast LMPs had agreed that the action plan included a proposed intervention to 'turn the curve' on the poor outcomes for young people on Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work programme (TfS/SfL&W) programmes in Belfast which The Department for Education had reported in the illustration below:

Funding and Outcomes of Training for Success, DfE, December 2020



The research indicated that less than 1 in 30 of the young people engaging on those interventions were entering a positive destination (employment/further training) at the end of the programme. In order to understand the reasons behind this performance, officers had been engaging with providers across the city and had co-designed a bridging intervention that aimed to increase the positive outcomes for young people and maximise the impact of the mainstream programme.

The Director of Economic Development provided an overview of the Skills for Life and Work training programme for young people who wanted to develop their skills and get ready for work. He explained that the Bridges to Progression had been developed to work alongside the existing provision by providing extra support for those participants at risk of early exit from the programme, in order to retain their engagement and enhance their prospects of a positive outcome. He described the barriers young people on the programme experienced, together with the contributory factors to the high attrition levels.

He advised that, having explored a range of potential approaches, it was proposed that the most expedient methodology for managing this intervention was to set aside an allocation of up to £90,000 from the Labour Market Partnership budget that would be ringfenced for the Belfast-based Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work providers. Should the providers identify that a participant was facing a specific area of challenge that was not related to the core programme content but that risked them falling out of provision, they could make the case to access funding to pull in the relevant support services or refer the individual towards the support. He reported that this pilot programme would target at least 120 young people at risk, and it was likely that the investment would be used for referrals to a range of support services including:

- Mental health support and counselling;
- One-to-one coaching;
- Housing support and advice;
- Self-esteem and confidence building;
- Childcare and parenting support;
- Travel and living costs where appropriate;
- Learning support to complete (for example, where a participant had 'run out of time' and could not complete the accreditation);and
- Addiction support services – gambling, alcohol, drug use etc.

He highlighted the providers that hold Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work contracts with DfE within Belfast and that this support would specifically work with: Workforce Training; Springvale Training; Dairyfarm/People 1st; Impact Training; Academy Hair and Beauty Training School; Belfast Metropolitan College; Belfast Central Training; Bryson FutureSkills; Rutledge Training; and Springboard Opportunities.

The Director of Economic Development explained further how the Bridges to Progression fund would be used and pointed out that officers would ensure that delivery did not duplicate, but rather add value to, this provision in order to improve employability outcomes for participants of Training for Success/Skills for Life & Work.

He advised that, subject to the Council's endorsement, officers would undertake assessment of the applications from Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work providers for funding for participants in line with the approach detailed in the report. He confirmed that a report would be presented at a future meeting of the Committee outlining the outcomes and learning from this approach, and going forward, Bridges to Progression would be factored into to the recommendations of the review of all youth-focused employability and skills interventions.

During discussion, in answer to a Member's question on the potential to offend participants by using the term 'NEET' (young people who were not in education, employment or training) in the report, the Director of Economic Development advised that he would address this terminology in future reports. He also explained further details of the employment outcomes and the support given to the participants of the programme.

During further discussion, the Committee praised the work of the Youth Programmes, in particular the GCSE Support Programme.

The Committee:

- Noted the development work and activity to date in improving the employability outcomes of young people at risk and the review of delivery currently underway; and
- Noted the proposal to manage the Bridges to Progression funding distribution in partnership with Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work providers through an agreed application process on behalf of those young people identified.

Supporting Business Start Up and Growth in Belfast – Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with a progress update on activity in 2022/2023 to support the development of new and existing businesses across the city through the Enterprise and Business Growth team. The report sets out key priority areas of work for the remainder of the 2022/23 financial year.

1.2 The report also provides an update to members setting out a proposed interim approach to delivering business start up activity, pending confirmation of funding from a range of external sources to deliver a new model of support. In addition, it details a proposed intervention to encourage more growth-focused and scaling businesses, building on a successful partnership model.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the Council’s performance and contribution to delivering against Belfast Agenda ambitions to grow the Belfast economy, focusing on the current support for Business Start-up and Growth**
- **Note and endorse the proposal to invest in the Way to Scale programme up to a maximum of £43,000**
- **Note and agree attendance of party group leaders, Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development and senior officers to attend the best practice visit for sustainability and circular economy in Dublin on the 4 November.**

3.0 Main report

- 3.1** Members will be aware that within the 2022/23 period the Enterprise and Business Growth team have been working to develop and deliver a range of activity to support the growth and development of new and existing businesses across the city, aligned with the Growing the Economy pillar of the Belfast Agenda and Inclusive Growth Strategy. It also aims to align and add value to work underway through the Belfast Region City Deal, Innovation City Belfast and the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission. This range of activity was approved at the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on the 6 April 2022.
- 3.2** The 2022/23 financial year sees the conclusion of some of our most significant business support interventions funded through the European Regional Development Fund and Invest Northern Ireland. There is also a considerable programme of work underway to identify future resources to address future funding gaps to support the delivery of a new, more ambitious programme of start-up and growth support which seeks to revamp the current offer and increase the number, survival and growth rates of new businesses across the city. In addition to the developmental work required to achieve this we continue to deliver a range of supports for new and existing businesses across the city. Over the last six months, some of our key achievements have included:
- 3.3** Enterprise and Start a Business - We have worked with 514 individuals to help them test and develop new business ideas through a range of events and workshops across the city. This included events targeted at individuals who are currently economically inactive, and those from a range of underrepresented groups which aimed to promote a culture of enterprise and build skills and confidence. We also ran the Belfast Business Idea Award which was designed to unearth, recognise, and help to fast track the best business ideas in Belfast. This year's competition was won by Insurin who received £2,500 and a business support package worth over £3,000. Four runners up also received a support package worth over £3,000.
- 3.4** Our business start-up activity has engaged 257 individuals, 223 of those developed a business plan through the Go For It programme, which supported the creation of 134 jobs. We provided additional support to 56 individuals through 1-1 mentoring and access to incentives of £1,500 to help kick start their business, and enabled test trading opportunities for 16 new businesses through our dedicated start up space at St George's Market.

- 3.5 Support for Social Enterprise and Cooperatives - 22 organisations have been supported this year to date through one-to-one mentoring advice and guidance to develop new social enterprises and cooperatives. To increase awareness of the sector we have facilitated 1 Outreach Event, 2 Ideas Generation/Refinement Workshops and 1 Stakeholder Meeting. To further raise awareness of the Co-operative sector and increase engagement we facilitated, 3 Training Webinars and a fortnightly cooperative event.**
- 3.6 In September we launched a pitching competition for social enterprises and cooperatives, successful applicants to the competition with pitch on Friday 11 November. 1 winner will be able to access a potential award of £10,000 to help with getting started or to grow, runners up will also access a range of support to help grow their enterprise.**
- 3.7 In October we also launched the new youth project which will engage a minimum of 42 participants across 8 groups and will include support for young people to explore the concept of social economy and develop the skills required to establish an organisation in the sector.**
- 3.8 Growing a Business- Through our business growth support, we have delivered one to one mentoring to 188 businesses to help them to implement growth strategies and become more resilient. The type of support offered includes enhancing their digital and online presence, improving tendering skills and specialist support for businesses with high growth potential. We have also introduced environmental sustainability to test the demand after recent surveys suggested that this is a current priority for local businesses. 225 businesses attended 15 workshops and events.**
- 3.9 74 companies across the region have been supported to implement new digital acceleration plans, 14 of whom are from Belfast. 17 Masterclasses and workshops have been delivered, covering key emerging technology areas including blockchain, immersive technology, robotics, and innovation strategy development.**
- 3.10 Innovation Factory - Occupancy at the centre is now at 88%, the highest level to date. The centre has seen a high level of interest from new firms in sectors including TV/film, digital, engineering and green tech. Over the year 24 businesses have engaged in masterclasses and events at the centre. As part of IF's social and economic regeneration activity, 11 work placements have been facilitated by IF customers over the**

past 12 months, 117 FTE have been created this year and 76 Hours of business mentoring support has been provided. Plans are also underway to provide linkages between the centre and businesses on wider business support, we are also focusing on the social and regeneration aspect of the centre and how we can maximise the benefits of this.

- 3.11 **City Vibrancy** - In January 2022 we launched the Vibrant Business Destinations programme in partnership with DfC which aims to support local business associations to develop and deliver interventions that will drive footfall and create vibrancy in areas outside of the city centre. To date there have been 46 expressions of interest across the North, South, East and West of the city, this scheme is in place to October 2023.
- 3.12 **Scaling and Growth** - Officers have been working with the Council's innovation team to develop a programme of support for the creative digital sector that will help build capacity, networks and access to finance for creative digital companies working with new and emerging technologies such as immersive tech and virtual production. With new challenge funding and finance available through private sector partners for the development and prototyping of new products, services and experiences focused on immersive and virtual production, there is an opportunity to help local SMEs scale and innovate through building their capacity to bid and secure this new funding.
- 3.13 **Investing in Belfast** - Officers continue to work with our seven partner councils along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) to identify business and new collaborative opportunities. Belfast City Council is leading on the development of the strategy and action plan for the partnership, which will conclude in October 2022. Work will then take place to identify funding and resources to support the delivery of the action plan such opportunities through Peace Plus and Shared Island. Over the period we have successfully secured funding through Shared Island to deliver a feasibility study to support the development of regional innovation hubs across the DBEC area.
- 3.14 In addition to this we have been further developing our partnership with Dublin City Council to enable shared learning and support the development of collaborative opportunities across a number of thematic areas including sustainability, circular economy, innovation and regeneration. Through this partnership we have successfully secured funding to assess feasibility of the

development of a circular economy hub through Shared Island. Work is now underway to bring this forward.

- 3.15 To further develop the partnership, support shared learning a number of best practice visits will now be programmed aligned with the thematic areas identified. The first of these visits will take place in Dublin on the 4 November focussing on sustainability and the circular economy, it is proposed that attendees will include party group leaders from Belfast, the Chief executive, and relevant senior officers. Attendees from the Dublin City Council area will also include party group leaders and senior officer. The draft agenda will include a meet and greet in Dublin Civic Headquarters, a visit and briefing on the Dublin Heat Network along with a visit to the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun and Community Mobility Charging Hub. An invitation for the visit will be issued to members along with the final version of the agenda. Costs associated with travel to the event will be covered through the existing Enterprise and Business Growth budget. It is expected that Belfast City Council will facilitate a return visit in December/January.
- 3.16 Taking account of the wider strategic activity we continue to deliver for the entrepreneurs and businesses across the city through our entrepreneurship, business start, social enterprise and cooperative supports and business growth activity. Some new areas of programme development and delivery are as follows:
- 3.17 Future Business Support

At the August 2022 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members were provided with an update on the approach to deliver interim business start-up activity in 2023. The report noted that there was still a significant programme of work to do to seek the additional financial resources required to deliver new activity and to ensure that it can be operational once the current programme concludes in March 2023. Members were advised of ongoing engagement with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) regarding the prospect of accessing resources through the Shared Prosperity Fund. However, given the timeframes to put in place new funding streams councils have had to consider several options to put in place interim approaches until such resources are confirmed.

- 3.18** Following further engagement with DLUHC and the 10 other councils there has been agreement to extend the current delivery of the Go for It programme for an initial period of six months, until there is greater clarity on the financial position to support a new programme and until the commissioning process for delivery of the enhanced programme is completed. We expect to be in a position to launch the new business support service in September 2023. This approach ensures that councils have a mechanism in place to deliver against our statutory requirements relating to business start-up activity.
- 3.19** In parallel, work will continue to progress the enhanced approach to business start-up and growth support set out to this Committee in April 2022, with the ambition of phasing the new interventions in as resources are firmed up. Building on the business case we will coordinate our partners to ensure mechanisms are in place to roll out the service in 2023. This will include the implementation of a procurement framework to support future delivery and ensure while there is regional consistency across the model there are opportunities for councils to adapt support to meet local needs and align with internal working arrangements. We will also work to ensure that financial resources are in place to support our ambitions and deliver our statutory obligations through SPF, Invest NI, DfE and DfC.
- 3.20** Innovation and scaling
- We continue to work with partners across the city to develop interventions which encourage more businesses to scale and grow to turnover £3m+. This is a key challenge for us as highlighted through our Enterprise Framework, the 10X Economy vision, which identifies the need to drive up the rate of new business starts and create an environment that actively supports entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable businesses.
- 3.21** Following the success of the Way to Scale Initiative in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI, officers have been working to enhance this to complement Belfast City Council's core Enterprise and Business Growth Support Programmes. Way to Scale provides support across a number of areas including internationalisation, access to finance, business modelling and sales strategy support for those businesses with the ambition to scale.
- 3.22** Through last year's programme, 40 businesses accessed support through a series of workshops and events with leading entrepreneurs from MIT in Boston. A further

9 companies progressed on to the Entrepreneurship Development Programme at MIT in Boston, and a one week residential in Boston to develop market strategies and build network support to realise the growth ambitions of their businesses.

- 3.23 Building on the feedback from last year, it is proposed to support the Way to Scale programme for 2023 to support a new cohort of companies participate. The programme will be delivered in partnership with Catalyst Inc. and Invest Northern Ireland. The overall cost of the programme will be £180,000. Given the alignment with the ambitions set out in the enterprise framework, it is recommended that this is supported with Council funding of £43,000 to maximise the take-up by Belfast-based businesses. Invest NI, Catalyst Inc and the participating companies will cover the remainder of the costs.

3.24 Supporting Business Growth

We will continue to engage with businesses across the city to better understand the challenges they face in the current climate and work to ensure that support is in place to overcome them. We are working to put in place a new procurement framework across our services to enable us to provide more agile supports that can adapt to the needs of the business community. Across the remainder of the financial year, we will look to enhance support for businesses to become more sustainable and resilient to ensure they can put mechanisms in place to overcome the implications associated with ongoing rising costs.

3.25 Investing in Belfast

Across the remainder of the financial year we will focus on refreshing our City Investment Service to ensure that it provides the right support to new and potential investors in the City. We will also work to build on our partnerships in London and Dublin to identify new opportunities to profile the city for investment. Using the recommendations from the draft economic strategy we will also look to identify new cities to build partnerships with in order to increase opportunities for businesses in key growth sectors and to support the development of clusters in core technologies such as Fintech, MedTech, Advanced Manufacturing and Creative and Digital Industries.

3.26 Social enterprise and Cooperatives

We have been working with internal and external partners to refresh our social economy action plan which aims to detail an integrated approach to supporting social enterprises and cooperatives, using multiple levers across the council to deliver cohesive support, with specific targets for engagement. Using the recommendations from the draft economic strategy we are also working to identify new support mechanisms for social enterprises and cooperatives to put in place more sustainable funding models, and access opportunities through council's new social value procurement policy.

3.27 Financial & Resource Implications

The enterprise and business growth activities outlined within this report will be resourced through the existing Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23.

The Way to Scale programme was included as part of the Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23, as presented to this Committee on 6 April 2022. This budget was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022.

3.28 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

The unit is currently undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme, this will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of this project.”

During discussion, in response to Member's request, the Director of Economic Development confirmed that a report be submitted to a future meeting to outline the location data of the organisations who had registered an interest in the 'Way to Scale' programme. He also explained the procurement and legal complexities regarding the possible engagement of the current 'Go for It' programme providers.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy and

Resolved – That, regarding the extension of the current delivery of the 'Go for It' programme, the Committee agrees that officers engage with its providers in relation to future business start-up activity and the new business support service.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the Council's performance and contribution to delivering against Belfast Agenda ambitions to grow the Belfast economy, focusing on the current support for Business Start-up and Growth;
- Regarding the extension of the current delivery of the 'Go for It' programme, agreed that officers engage with its providers in relation to future business start-up activity and the new business support service;
- Noted and endorsed the proposal to invest in the Way to Scale programme up to a maximum of £43,000 and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting to outline the location data of the organisations who had registered an interest in the programme for 2023; and
- Noted and agreed the attendance of Party Group Leaders, the Chief Executive, Director of Economic Development and senior officers to attend the best practice visit for sustainability and circular economy in Dublin on 4th November.

Positioning Belfast to Compete

Co-Design Framework for Culture, Arts and Heritage

The Committee deferred consideration of the report to enable a wider range of cultural organisation to be consulted on the development of the co-design framework.

Performance Update on Belfast Bikes Scheme

The Director of Economic Development provided an update on the performance of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes scheme in the first quarter (1 April to 30 June 2022) of year 7 of operation, together with an update on the installation of covered cycle stands in the city – Phase 1 funded by COVID Revitalisation Fund and Phase 2 by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Green and Blue Infrastructure Fund.

The Committee was reminded that the Belfast Bikes scheme was launched in 2015 as part Belfast City Council's physical investment programme. The Department for Regional Development had provided initial capital funding for the scheme as part of its Active Travel Demonstration Projects budget. The scheme was launched with a network of 30 docking stations and 300 bikes. The scheme had been operated by NSL continually since inception using bikes and supporting infrastructure from "Nextbike GmbH". The scheme currently operated with over 430 bikes and 49 docking stations.

Regarding the expansion of the Scheme, the Director of Economic Development highlighted that, in May 2021, the Committee had agreed that an additional four Belfast Bikes docking stations would be deployed using DfI Active Travel funding. He confirmed installation had began in Quarter 1 and consisted of the following:

- Docking station at Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre was installed on 7 July 2022 and was operational;
- Olympia Leisure Centre – works had commenced with an expected completion date of early September 2022;
- Kennedy Centre – works scheduled to commence in September 2022;
- Waterworks – the illegal van and structure that were located on the site had been removed and work would be scheduled following a competition of the other two sites, with an indicative date of late September/early October 2022; and
- An additional station at Titanic Quarter was completed in May 2022, funded by a developer contribution.

He reminded the Committee that, at its meeting in June 2021, it had agreed to proceed with 15 docking stations outlined in the expansion proposal (Appendix 1). An investment of approximately £525,000 was required, based on cost estimates from previous network expansions. At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June 2021, it had been agreed that £500,000 be invested in the expansion proposal.

He stated that a procurement exercise had commenced for the installation of eight stations in Phase 1:

- North: Yorkgate and Shore Road;
- West: St Mary's College and Shankill Road;
- South: Lisburn Road and Malone Road;
- East: Castlereagh Road, Upper Newtownards Road; and
- Seven stations would follow in Phase 2 the following year.

As previously agreed by the Committee, agreement through Area Working Groups was required to determine the exact locations and consider those against the Site Expansion Matrix as outlined in Appendix 2. These site options and discussions were scheduled to begin with relevant Area Working Groups in the coming months.

The Director of Economic Development provided an overview of the Operational Performance, which included the availability of bikes and the impact of replacement parts. He provided an update on Membership Levels, highlighting that there were 21,756 active Belfast Bike members at the end of Quarter 1, which was an increase of 67% compared to the same period in Year 6 (13,000). He advised that there had been 1,236,408 journeys since the scheme was launched and 38,907 journeys during Quarter 1 Year 7, pointing out that demand for bike rental had not returned to pre-pandemic levels, with the current cost-of-living crisis, reduced city centre footfall, remote working and competition from other means of travel all likely factors in the reduction in usage evidenced in Quarter 1. He advised, it should also be noted that there was an exceptionally high level of usage in 2021 that could have been due to a number of factors, not least COVID-19 restrictions.

He reported that vandalism of the Bikes was an ongoing problem, which cost £6,980 in Quarter 1, of which £4,077 was payable by the Council and community engagement initiatives with the PSNI continued to help decrease vandalism incidents.

In relation to Subscriptions and Usage Revenue, the Director of Economic Development highlighted that income from subscriptions and usage charges at the end of Quarter 1 was £52,091. This was significantly below Year 6 amount for the same period, however, it should be noted that Year 6 was an exceptional year with usage significantly higher than average.

He provided an overview of the marketing activity during Q1 which included advertising in City Matters magazine, social media posts and press releases.

He advised that NSL continued to operate the Belfast Bikes scheme, with a contract renewal available until 2024. Council staff were reviewing the scheme and would make future recommendations for the management, operation and potential expansion of the scheme as part of a new procurement package. Considerations include:

- Planned network improvement and expansion;
- Anti-vandalism measures;
- Inclusion of e-bikes;
- Potential inclusion of e-scooters (subject to legislation), cargo bikes and adapted bikes/tricycles;
- Application of discounts;
- Application of user rewards;
- Links with social enterprises and co-operatives;
- Integration of sponsorship into operator package;
- Marketing activity;
- Community and education engagement activity;
- Employability and skills training; and
- CoMoUK accreditation.

The Director of Economic Development updated Members on the Motion, in the name of Councillor O'Hara, which had been agreed by the Committee in March 2020 to investigate "*as part of the current strategic review of the Belfast Bikes Scheme, consideration be given to granting free access to young people 25 years of age and under to the scheme*". He stated that NSL did not currently collect age data of users, however, the operator had confirmed that 'Date of Birth' could be added as an essential registration criterion for new users. He explained the process and highlighted that this might be subject to a cost which was being sought via the operator. The Director went on to draw the Committee's attention to additional considerations of providing free access to Bike Users:

- With free access, there was no impetus to redock the bike after usage, which would likely lead to reduced bike availability for all users, including paying users. Additional bikes might have to be purchased, at a cost, to ensure all users could be serviced.

Further costs would be payable by the Council to the operator to handle increased bike numbers;

- With free access, there was no impetus to redock the bike after usage, which would likely lead to theft and/or vandalism, which seemed to be primarily from the younger age market (as evidenced on social media). Repair costs payable by the Council to the operator would increase;
- It should be noted that some other schemes, including Edinburgh, Derby and Cardiff, had previously closed due to high levels of vandalism, theft and associated costs; and
- It would be difficult to reduce fraudulent activity on a free offer for young people or example adults signing up as a young person, leading to further reduced income.

The Committee was informed that alternative proposals would be explored and proposed in a future report, including discounted rates for certain users, for example: 18-to-24-year age group, students; senior citizens and corporate discounts.

In relation to covered cycle stands across the city, the Director of Economic Development explained that, whilst the Covered Cycle Stands initiative was not part of the Belfast Bikes scheme, both initiatives were aligned to the Bolder Vision with a focus on improvements in the active travel provision and infrastructure across the city. Covered Cycle Stands were part of the Active Travel Enablers project.

He advised that under the DfI Sustainable and Active Travel elements of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, 10 covered cycle stands were funded city-wide. Phase 1 locations had previously been agreed by the Committee and after a procurement process a supplier was appointed and the design of the cycle stands as well as the agreements for the specific locations progressed over the following nine months. He confirmed that production had started during Quarter 1 on the following areas:

Gasworks	Inverary Community Centre
St. George's Market	Belfast Zoo
Grosvenor Community Centre	Waterworks
Shankill Leisure Centre	Belvoir Activity Centre
Belmont Park	Mary Peter's Track

He reminded the Committee that, regarding Phase 2 of the initiative, it had received an update on the DfI funding for the Active Travel Enabling Projects in March 2022 that outlined the projects, budget and timeframe for delivery. In terms of the covered cycle stands, officers had drawn upon the priority areas identified by Sustrans, and these locations were also assessed in terms of the deliverability within the timeframe as well as the key criteria aligned to cycle infrastructure provision. Following a procurement process a supplier and contractor were currently being appointed for the next 10 covered cycle stands being delivered in-year.

During discussion, one Member suggested the scope for free usage of Belfast Bikes for those on benefits and asylum seekers could also be investigated. The Director of Economic Development explained further the consultation process which took place with landowners before bike docking stations were put in place, together with the timeline phasing of the initiatives.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the update of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes performance for Year 7 Q1 (April to June 2022);
- Noted the update to the notice of motion regarding free access for young people;
- Noted the update of the installation of covered cycle stands in the city;
- Noted the progress with regard to phase one phase two expansion; and
- Noted that a report be submitted to a future meeting to provide further detail on the potential for discounted rates for certain users, to include those on benefits and asylum seekers.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update

The Committee was provided with an update on the Motions which had been assigned to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. It was highlighted that one Motion had been recommended for closure.

The Committee:

- Noted the updates to the Motions under its remit, as referenced in Appendix 1; and
- Agreed to the closure of 1 Motion, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in the report, under paragraph 3.5.

Community Planning / Belfast Agenda Refresh – Progress Update

The Committee was reminded that, in April 2022, it had received an update on the emerging findings and recommendations following the Phase 1 of the 'Belfast Agenda: Continuing the Conversation' engagement process which would inform the refresh and focus of the Belfast Agenda (BA) for the period 2022-2026.

It was reported that, since its launch in 2017, the Belfast Agenda had been a city leadership document, coalescing partners beyond the core legislative requirements of community planning with a focus on addressing key city challenges. The approach adopted had enhanced the relationship between the public, voluntary and community private sector to drive forward real change addressing inequalities and improve quality of life within and across the city.

The refreshed Belfast Agenda would maintain the same level of ambition and collective leadership commitment to deliver the long-term vision and outcomes previously agreed. It would be delivery and outcome focused and would be positioned as a City Strategy which would identify the major transformational programmes and investment opportunities for the city. Community Planning Priority Actions Work continued with community planning partners and wider stakeholders to unpack and understand the scope of the agreed priority areas for focus over the next four years, Underpinning and composite delivery action plans were being co-designed and agreed with partners. A core set of guiding principles had been applied in developing the action plans to test and identify the most appropriate interventions to delivery greatest impact. These included:

- **Adding clear value:** The Council could achieve significant gains by collaborating across its partnership and sectors in a way it could not through its existing single agency or thematic 'business as usual'.
- **Impact for Belfast's people, place, economy:** The work the Council delivered together would be felt in practical ways by individuals, families, communities, residents and businesses in Belfast, delivering tangible outcomes.
- **With Belfast's Communities:** The work the Council do would fully engage Belfast's residents, communities and businesses, building on their strengths and ensuring their voice was central to planning and delivery. The Council would work 'with and alongside' its communities, not 'To or For' them.
- **Intelligence led priorities and action:** The Council would focus its collaboration on the things that data, evidence and community insights tell them matter most to Belfast and it would deliver together in ways that evidence tells them would make a real difference.
- **Resourcing:** Delivery would require joint resourcing and effort, (i.e. staff time, services or investment). Should be a leadership commitment to jointly resource the initiative.

It was reported that the draft emerging action plans remained live documents and would be subject to further discussions and refinement with Members and wider stakeholders as set out in the report.

It was reported that Phase Two Engagement events that had been arranged for September, had now been rescheduled to take place throughout October and into November, with a greater focus, discussion and input around the strategic intent and scope of the priority areas, how success would be measured in terms of stretch goals and the high-level delivery action plans.

The following events were proposed and would be publicised online, via the VCSE panel network and via posters in local community-based assets and facilities:

EVENT	DATE & TIME	VENUE
North Belfast Workshop	11 Oct. 10am-1pm	Girdwood
Online Workshop	12 Oct 7pm-9pm	Online
South Belfast Workshop	13 Oct. 10am-1pm	Crescent Arts Centre
East Belfast Workshop	18 Oct. 10am – 1pm	Skainos
Online Workshop	19 Oct. 2pm–4pm	Online
Communities of Interest	7 Nov. 5pm – 7pm	City Hall
City Centre Workshop	8 Nov. 10am – 1pm	City Hall
West Belfast Workshop	10 Nov. 10am – 1pm	St. Comgall's

In addition, two online and facilitated engagement sessions would be organised for those that were not able to make the above events or would feel more comfortable attending an online session. A business and development workshop had also been arranged to take place on 27th October at Queen's University, together with the continued use of a range of engagement tools, including Your Say Belfast platform, to extend the reach and enable people to input into the process.

An independent facilitator was also being procured to help host the engagement events and to prepare an independent report with an analysis of the main issues raised during the sessions and how this was reflected in the refreshed Belfast Agenda and action plans.

Feedback from the phase 2 engagement would be reflected in the draft strategy document and action plans. These would be brought through the Community Planning Partnership, established CPP Delivery Boards and relevant Council Committees for consideration and approval in advance of being published for a 12-week formal consultation period. It was highlighted that an easy read version would also be created to help make the document more accessible.

The Committee:

- Noted the progress of the development of the refreshed Belfast Agenda and supporting four-year Delivery Action Plans as set out in the report;
- Note the update around Phase 2 engagement, which had been endorsed by the Community Planning Partnership; and
- Noted the timeline for progressing the revised Belfast Agenda to public consultation.

Chairperson