



Subject:	City Centre Revitalisation and Connectivity
Date:	12 October 2022
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
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.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Members of the Committee are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the Dfl plans relating to the opening of the Ulster University City Centre Campus;</li> <li>• Agree the comments provided by Officers to the Dfl Consultation to the York St Controlled zone and provide any additional comments as required to this Committee Meeting</li> <li>• Note the interim measures to the Fredrick St Junction planned to commence in October 2022 and note that Dfl will be presenting to the Committee in November 2022 where Members will have an opportunity to raise queries directly with Dfl Officials</li> <li>• Note the pending Consultation on Amendments to the Footway (Prohibition of Waiting) Order and to provide initial comments to this Committee meeting</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Note the Dfl proposals not to reopen the area encapsulated by the Bank Buildings hoarding to traffic in advance of the finalisation of the Bolder Vision Strategy</li> <li>• Note the Dfl request for an environmental improvement scheme in the area and the proposed actions put forward by Officers</li> <li>• Agree that officers apply for Dfl/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&amp;R as appropriate).</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
3.1	<p>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 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2022. The visit to the Campus will include a tour of the campus and a discussion on how best to maximise the</p>

	<p>impact of the new Campus for the city and its neighbouring communities to ensure its successful integration within the city.</p>
3.2	<p>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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.</p>
3.3	<p>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.</p>
3.4	<p>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 &amp; Castle Place.</p>
3.5	<p>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.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Ulster University Belfast Campus Opening</b>

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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 DfI.

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 damaging 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage DfC to consider Castle St for a public realm scheme pending the outcome of the finalisation of the Bolder Vision strategy.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
4.9	<p>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.</p>
4.10	<p>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.</p>
4.11	<p><b>Waterfront Task Group</b></p> <p>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.</p>
4.12	<p>One strand of this, and in conjunction with the Maritime Belfast Trust, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, DfC, DfI &amp; Titanic Quarter Limited, a Waterfront Task Group is being established that will also involve local communities and stakeholders with the intention of</p>

4.13	<p>bringing forward a focused action and delivery plan with one of its key objectives being to bring forward the 'Embracing the River' proposals.</p> <p>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.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Finance &amp; Resource Implications</b>
5.1	<p>Any capital costs for the Castle St area Environmental Improvement Scheme to be secured from DfI/DfC.</p> <p>£10,000 contribution to the development of the Waterfront Task Group Framework to be met from existing approved department budgets.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</b>
6.1	None associated with this report.
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
7.1	Appendix 1 – Letter to Council “ <b>Amendment to the Footway (Prohibition of Waiting) Order</b> ”