



Subject:	Update on DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund
Date:	12 October 2022
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development
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<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 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.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>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.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to receipt of funding approve the delivery of projects outlined within this report, including any 3<sup>rd</sup> party funding agreements, consultancy and procurement as appropriate. Noting that funding and the Letter of Offer will be subject to SP&amp;R Committee approval, via the Capital Programme process in conjunction with Physical Programmes or in conjunction with 3<sup>rd</sup> party delivery partners as outlined within this report with regular updates to be brought back to this Committee.</li> <li>• 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&amp;R Committee approval via the Capital Programme process in conjunction with Physical Programmes.</li> <li>• Note and agree the PHA funding to deliver branding on the Cathedral Gardens Active Travel Hub.</li> <li>• Note the potential of return of funding of the Spokesafe proposal approved under the 21/22 B&amp;G Infrastructure Fund and approve the inclusion of this funding allocation with this phase of secure parking delivery.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p>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&amp;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.</p>
3.2	<p>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.</p>

3.3	<p><b>The proposals within this paper for Active Travel Enablers, South-West Quarter Streetscape Improvements &amp; 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&amp;R Committee.</b> 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.</p>
3.4	<p>The funding proposals as well as planned and existing projects / interventions are summarised below:</p>
3.5	<p><b>Great Victoria St / Shaftesbury Square</b></p> <p>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.</p>
3.6	<p>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 <b>DfI Blue &amp; Green funding (subject to funding award and approval via SP&amp;R)</b> and via Council's existing grant programming to encourage and attract further public and private sector investment and curation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Streetscape Improvement Works;</b> 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</li> </ul>

	<p>to improve the pedestrian experience aligned to the provision of a Civic Spine as envisaged under A Bolder Vision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Revitalisation Programme; Applying for and delivering of funding from DfC</b> 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.</li> </ul>
3.7	<p>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 &amp; 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.</p>
3.8	<p><b>Grey to Green Programme</b></p> <p>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.</p>
3.9	<p>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.</p>
3.10	<p>It is proposed that this element of the DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure funding will be delivered through a number of mechanisms as outlined below;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

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 Dfl 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

DfI 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

	<p>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&amp;R Committee.</p>
3.16	<p><b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p><b>Dfl Blue and Green Infrastructure funding 21/22</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p><b>Dfl Blue and Green Infrastructure funding 22/23</b></p> <p>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&amp;R Committee as part of the Capital Programme for the following amounts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £402,500 for Active Travel Enablers</li> <li>• £300,000 Great Victoria Street / Shaftesbury Square Streetscape Improvement Works</li> <li>• £400,000 Grey to Green</li> <li>• £633,600 (profiled over 3 years) Lagan Gateway Greenway</li> </ul> <p>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.</p> <p><b>DfC Revitalisation funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £250,000 Great Victoria Street / Shaftesbury Square Revitalisation Programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>Public Health Agency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £2,500 additional revenue funding to deliver branding to the Cathedral Gardens Active Travel Hub.</li> </ul>
3.17	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>Officers are currently developing the Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Screening and will incorporate within the emerging proposals.</p>
4.0	<p><b>Appendices – Documents attached</b></p>
	<p>None</p>