

**DFI Roads  
Eastern Division**

Eilish McGoldrick  
Belfast City Council  
City Growth and Regeneration Committee



Department for

**Infrastructure**

An Roinn

**Bonneagair**

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Your reference:

Our reference:

Date 4 December 2023

Dear Eilish

## **DFI SPECIAL PRESENTATION TO CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE**

I refer to the meeting of the Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee held on 22 November 2023 at which the Department was invited to present the Annual Report 2023 to Council.

A number of action points were raised in advance by Councillors Micky Murray and Sammy Douglas which were not addressed at the meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to respond to each of the action points raised by the Councillors:-

### **Councillor Micky Murray**

**Orpen – What is the most recent update on the traffic management survey, when will the details be shared with elected members and what are the plans going forward? -**

With regard to Orpen Park traffic calming alterations, there has been one objection to the formal consultation which to date has not been resolved. This involves the ability for the resident to assess their property with the revised traffic calming in place.

As such, we are currently reviewing the scheme design to establish if there is a viable solution. Unfortunately, we currently have no timescale on when this matter will be concluded.

**Flags – We're seeing an increase in flags being erected where they aren't wanted by local residents, what are the Department doing to remove these from their property?**

- The problem of illegal flags and emblems on street furniture is a persistent one that requires a comprehensive and lasting solution.
- Article 87 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 makes it an offence to attach unauthorised signs or advertisements to structures such as lamp posts. One of the Department's primary considerations is the safety of the public and where unauthorised flags or attachments pose a hazard to road users, the Department will seek to remove that danger. Where there is no such danger, the Department will liaise closely with other key stakeholders and seek to provide a solution.
- Our approach to date recognises that the health and safety of our staff and contractors is of paramount importance. For this reason, we will always consult with partner agencies when considering whether to remove any attachments from our equipment and infrastructure.
- The Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, which was established as part of the Fresh Start Agreement, was tasked with exploring and finding consensus on a range of issues, including the flying of flags. The report was published but failed to recommend any workable solutions.

**Belfast Cycle Network – Can we get an update on where the Department are with the Belfast Cycle Network rollout, including updates on the short-term goals, have these been delivered, are they close to being delivered, and what is the time frame for delivery. Also, do the envisage the medium/long term goals being started/delivered on time? –**

- The Department published 'Making Belfast an Active City – Belfast Cycling Network 2021' in June 2021, which demonstrates how it envisages a change for cycling in Belfast over the next ten years.
- The Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan was published in March 2022. This sets out plans for the implementation of coherent, connected and safe cycling routes for everyday cycling in the city over the next ten years. Funding of this and other programmes will of course be subject to future budget settlements.
- The key to implementation will be through consultation and the Department would appreciate the continued support from Assembly Members to ensure we achieve this vision, to benefit all of Belfast's communities.
- Officials are currently working on plans to implement a number of schemes on the delivery plan.
- Montgomery Road consultation is live and designs nearing completion on West Belfast Greenway phase 1a and Colin Paths (Lagmore Avenue). Designs on most schemes on short term list progressing, apart from a small number likely to be impacted by Eastern Transport Plan considerations.
- In July 2023, a pedestrian and cyclist safety improvement scheme was completed at the A55 junction with the Cregagh Road, providing improved access to the Connswater Greenway and Cregagh Glen. The scheme is an important link

within the Connswater Community Greenway route as identified in The Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan.

- With regards to Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle bridge there is a gap in funding for this project. The Department is working closely with the BRCD team to address the funding issue. It is hoped that the Department will be in a position to commence a market engagement exercise with suppliers in the coming months with the aim of proceeding to procurement later in 2024, subject to resolution of the funding issue.
- The Outline Business Case approved by DoF is being updated to reflect the increased cost. A design and build approach is being adopted and the programme is on target for appointing a contractor at the end of 2024. Design and construction is expected to take 18 - 24 months from award of the contract.

**Lagan Valley Regional Park – The Department recently reduced their funding amount to LVRP, which in turn has decreased the services LVRP are providing on behalf of the Department. Can the Department provide information on the work they've carried out in LVRP in this financial year and what they see their responsibility is within the boundaries of LVRP. –**

Councillors were advised that this work does not involve DfI Roads.

**Finaghy Bridge – Update on works to the bridge.**

The barriers are put in place after the Selby rail crash and are designed to prevent vehicles accidentally entering the rail line. The Department accepts that they are not aesthetically pleasing and are prone to vandalism. They are functional and structurally sound and replacement, for aesthetic reasons, would cost in the region of £630k. Given the current financial pressures this is not a priority for the Department. We will, however, engage with community groups who wish to use art to improve the appearance of the barriers.

The Department is content in principle with the barriers being painted subject to our conditions being met including formal council approval of the painting plan and NIR approval. Health and safety of the artists and road users is of paramount importance and would need to be well planned to include temporary traffic management arrangements. Public liability insurance will also be required to indemnify the Department against third part claims.

**Councillor Sammy Douglas**

**Under the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 DfI must develop sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on Active Travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%. Could you please update us on the proposed expenditure for the next financial year on Active Travel and planned projects?**

Unfortunately, we are not in a position to give any sense of likely budgets for next year. The Department is anticipating a significant overspend this year following a like for like 14% cut in resource budget. Similarly, the current capital budget is under significant pressure and we are currently having to consider savings across all planned spend for the remainder of 23/24 which makes predicting future years very

challenging. It is worth observing that, in addition to our duty to spend on active travel, about 95% of the remainder of the Departments spending is also on things we are required to do by law which significantly limits our room for manoeuvre.

That said, we are working to expand our delivery capacity to increase spend on Active Travel in line with the Act. We hope to issue a NI wide Active Travel Delivery Plan for consultation in the first half of 2024 – this will include details of a wide range of projects that are proposed over the short medium and long term, subject to budget being available. We have also taken a decision to make more use of consultancy support in order to generate better progress on existing schemes including those contained in the Belfast Cycle Network.

**Sustrans runs the Active Schools Travel programme on behalf of DfI and the Public Health Agency. Getting young children walking and cycling to and from school is an essential, part of the Active Travel policy. Can DfI confirm its ongoing full financial commitment re revenue and capital, for this vital programme; including on-road cycle training and capital works linked to infrastructure around schools?**


Unfortunately, due to the current significant overspend which we are likely to still be facing next year we are not in a position to give any sense of likely budgets for next year. We value the Active Travel Schools Programme and it was one of the few areas of discretionary spend that we prioritised with some degree of protection from cuts this year. We agree that working to support active school travel is an important and valuable part of active travel delivery and remain committed to it as part of our portfolio of work in this area.

**The Glider has been a great success for Belfast and much of that was due to the dedicated team that delivered the project. Can the Department confirm that a similar, dedicated team is or will be put in place to deliver the next North / South phase?**

At the moment the BRT 2 project has funding shortfall of about £100 million. As such we are considering if and how we can proceed to deliver elements of the scheme, for example the introduction of bus priority measures and new halts. At the moment, internal delivery capacity is one of the issues we are factoring into our deliberations – within TRAM Group alone in the Department there are about 450 vacant posts but only 38 of those are currently funded. We would however agree that a dedicated delivery team will be needed for the project to proceed in any material form.

**The Highway Code has recently been revised updated in GB. When does DfI intend updating the Code in N Ireland, given the importance of the changes that will help with the development of Active Travel?**

The Department has recently commissioned an internal exercise to fully review the NI Code and consider the changes that are needed to it, whether to align with the GB changes (although this is not essential) or otherwise. The feedback from the internal review will inform the development of a consultation document to engage with the public and wider stakeholders on the potential changes and seek their views on them. We hope to bring this forward next year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DES MCFARLANE', enclosed within a faint, light-colored rectangular border.

**DES MCFARLANE**  
**Divisional Roads Manager**