

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 7th May, 2025

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nelson (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCormick;
The High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer;
Alderman Lawlor; and
Councillors Black, de Faoite, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Hanvey, Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, McCabe,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin, O'Neill and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Ms. C. Persic, Development Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st May.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Smyth declared an interest in relation to item 2(c) 'Coach Operators Update' in that his wife was employed by an organisation referenced in the report and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in relation to item 3(a) 'Request to Present – Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP)' in that he was a member of the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

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Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports 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 items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Vacant to Vibrant Programme

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on the Vacant to Vibrant Scheme and outlined the recommendations from the Vacant to Vibrant Assessment Panel following the receipt and assessment of recent applications.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update in relation to the Vacant to Vibrant Programme and that it would be supporting up to 58 businesses/organisations to locate or expand into long term vacant units; and
- ii. agreed the recommended city-wide grant award as outlined within Section 3.19 of the report.

**Sandy Row/Grosvenor Road
Revitalisation Fund Update**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the ongoing work strands in relation to revitalisation funding from the Department for Communities (DfC) for the Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road areas.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised the Committee that a formal application would be submitted to DfC in respect of funding for the proposed Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Scheme and outlined the potential eligibility criteria, subject to DfC approval.

Several Members thanked the officers for the work that had been undertaken to date in relation to support for the areas of Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road.

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The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the DfC funded Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme;
- ii. noted the update on the potential DfC funded Grosvenor Road Area Revitalisation Scheme; and
- iii. agreed the potential eligibility criteria for the Grosvenor Road Area Revitalisation Scheme, as outlined within the report, subject to DfC approval.

Coach Operators Update

The Senior Manager Culture, Tourism and Events provided the Committee with an update in relation to hop-on hop-off coach provision within the city centre and the development of a Voluntary Code of Conduct for tour operators.

She reminded the Committee that, at its meeting in May, 2024, it had agreed, in principle, to sign up to a draft Code of Conduct along with Visit Belfast, other statutory agencies and operators.

It was reported that there had been continued engagement with operators and partners through a Visit Belfast coordinated forum to develop the Voluntary Code of Conduct and associated endorsement mark for operators.

The Committee approved;

- i. the continued engagement of Council officers with the Visit Belfast coordinated forum;
- ii. that the Council be a signature on the Voluntary Code of Conduct for hop-on hop-off coach operators; and
- iii. the use of an endorsed quality mark by compliant operators.

Requests to Present

**Request to Present - Belfast City and
Region Place Partnership (BCRPP)**

The Committee considered a request from the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) to present at a future meeting an update on its current programme of work, proposed activities for 2025/26 and its priority issues and objectives for moving forward.

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from BCRPP representatives at its meeting in June, 2025.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

**A Bolder Vision Connectivity and
Place Making Projects Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on funding received from the Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) to support connectivity, placemaking and active travel projects aligned with A Bolder Vision Key Move of Embracing the River. This paper also provides an update on three public realm improvement works schemes, currently under design development and funded or part funded utilising Developer Contributions: Blackstaff Square, 5Cs and Little Patrick/Little York Street.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- I. Note the Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) funding received to support the development of the Under the Bridges project and Sailortown-Titanic Quarter Bridge proposals and the timeframes associated with the next steps.
- II. Note the update on progress in relation to the Little Patrick/Little York Street, 5Cs and Blackstaff Square Developer Contributions schemes and the timeframe for the associated planning applications.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Dfi Active travel funding

In January 2025 Members were advised that Council submitted applications for the Dfi Greenways and Active Travel Enabling funding to avail of within the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years and, subject to funding approval, approved the progression of the projects outlined below.

- 3.2** The Letters of Offer were received from Dfi on 21 March 2025 for the three projects, Under the Bridges, Sailortown-Titanic Quarter Bridge and the Belfast Bikes expansion, with full expenditure required by 31 March 2026.

- **Under The Bridges (UTB):** Expanding on the 'North-South Spine' project following the Waterfront Framework, UTB seeks to improve connectivity provision including new public realm, active travel infrastructure and reimaging open spaces under the M3 bridges.
- **Sailortown-Titanic Quarter Bridge:** Improving connectivity provision with a focus on active travel infrastructure and associated public realm provision.
- **Belfast Bikes:** Introduction of e-bikes into the scheme; supply and commissioning of 300 new pedal bikes and 100 e-bikes

3.3 Under The Bridges (UTB)

Expanding on the 'North-South Spine' project following the Waterfront Framework, the UTB project seeks to provide a safe connectivity between the City Centre and the Sailortown / City Quays area including new public realm, active travel infrastructure and reimaging underutilised spaces under the M3 bridges to improve safety and to bring forward innovative outdoor leisure uses that can provide amenity space for local residents and users of the area. This project is being brought forward in conjunction with the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, as a co-client for the delivery of the project. As detailed in January 2025, the funding will build upon the initial feasibility study and progress the technical design development for Under the Bridges placemaking and connectivity project to RIBA Stage 3, including Planning approval of a viable proposal that can be used to seek future capital funding. In line with the RIBA Plan of Work, preparation of design information to Stage 3 would include:

- **RIBA Stage 3 Report**
- **Outline Specification**
- **Cost Plan**
- **Planning application submitted**

3.4 In order to meet the DfI spend deadlines, procurement for the UTB commenced in December 2024 and Atkins Réalis has been appointed as the design team. In the coming months there will be consultation with community representatives, local stakeholders, and landowners to inform the design process with regular updates to be brought to the CG&R Committee for information.

3.5 Sailortown-Titanic Bridge

As reported and agreed at the CG&R Committee meetings in August and October 2023, and in January 2025, the Sailortown to Queen's Island Bridge was identified as a major element of active travel infrastructure that will deliver a much-needed high quality active travel corridor, enhanced public realm and amenity space and aligns with key city strategies including the Belfast Agenda, A Bolder Vision, the emerging Eastern Transport Plan and the Belfast Cycling Network.

3.6 The proposed bridge would provide a new iconic and distinctive cross harbour cycle and walking swing bridge that could complete the Harbour Loop and provide connections between Sailortown and North Belfast to economic, educational and opportunities on Queen's Island as well as providing a critical active travel connection to the newly completed Yorkgate Train Station.

3.7 Members were advised that the proposal for funding from DfI would develop the project to RIBA Stage 2 which will include concept design, technical requirements, cost plan and outline specification and provide the feasibility information, including capex and opex requirements that will clarify the long-term asset owner and the optimum route to long term operation and maintenance.

3.8 At the time it was proposed that under the existing BCC/Belfast Harbour Commissioners Memorandum of Understanding the BHC would undertake the procurement and project management of the project, overseen by BCC/BHC Client Team. However, due to operational and procurement constraints it has been agreed that Council will take up the role of the contracting authority and oversee the procurement and project management. A joint BCC/BHC Client Team will remain in place throughout the duration of the project and the scope of services has been drafted and procurement will commence in the coming weeks.

3.9 Belfast Bikes: Introduction of e-bikes into the scheme

The DfI funding for the Belfast Bikes will enable the introduction of eBikes into the scheme. The update on the DfI Letters of Offer for the Belfast Bikes as well as UTB and the Sailortown-Titanic Bridge were brought to SP&R on 18 April 2025 where it was agreed to add the Belfast eBikes project to the Capital Programme at Stage 1—*Emerging* to allow the business case to be developed.

3.10 Developer Contribution Led Schemes

Members will be aware that there are a number of public realm improvement schemes coming forward in the city centre that are aligned with historical Developer Contributions. In June 2023 Members agreed to progress with the Five Cs, Little Patrick/Little York Street and Blackstaff Square schemes that would see the Developer Contributions combined with funding from the Department for Communities to deliver public realm schemes aligned to the parameters outlined within the Section 76 Legal Agreements. In June 2024, Members received an update that outlined progress to date on these Public Realm Improvement Works delivered via Developer Contributions.

3.11

I. The Five Cs Project update

The Five Cs Public Realm Environmental Improvement scheme (c£2.4m), in the core of the city centre is being progressed in partnership with DfC, with DfC undertaking the delivery of the scheme. Council have committed £746,610 of Developer Contributions with DfC providing the remainder of the funding.

3.12 The planning application was submitted on 03 April 2025 LA04/2025/0609/F for the College Street and College Court areas of the scheme. Integrated Consultant Team (ICT) is due to submit the planning application for Callendar Street mid-May 2025 and once both planning applications are approved detailed design and construction procurement will commence, with construction works due to commence in Summer 2026. As previously reported, the Chichester Street element of this scheme will come forward at a future date following the completion of the Eastern Transport Plan Belfast City Centre Chapter.

3.13

II. Little Patrick Street & Little York Street Public Realm Improvement Works

As previously agreed, the Little York Street/Little Patrick Street Scheme is being brought forward to deliver Section 76 Developer Contributions secured, specifically for public realm, (£1,298,101) within the area. This scheme is located within the University Quarter of the Greater Clarendon and Sailortown area, with the Developer Contributions secured from a number of Purpose-Built & Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA) Blocks within the area. The scheme is adjoining a number of the PBMSA blocks, existing local

businesses and adjacent to existing communities in the Lancaster Street area. The scheme will see the development of a high-quality placemaking public realm and environmental improvement scheme that will address road safety issues connected with 'rat runs' through the area and safety issues in general that exist due to the environment surrounding these student blocks.

3.14 Planning approval for the scheme was granted in December 2024 and there has been ongoing engagement with DfI Eastern Division in relation to the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process. In April the TRO Scheme Stages Report was submitted, including an Application for the Amendment to Traffic Regulation Orders to enact the reconfiguration of Little Patrick Street to a single lane carriageway, introduce traffic calming and restricted access to enable servicing and emergency access, and other works to include installation of planters with integrated seating, tree planting, rain gardens, bespoke lighting pillars, catenary lighting, and surface improvements.

3.15 The next stage in the TRO process would require the Department to undertake a review of transport legislation and preparation of a draft order ahead of public advertising Notices of Intention of the discrete TROs. Pending confirmation of timeframes of this process detailed design and construction procurement will commence.

3.16

III. Blackstaff Square & surrounding streets Public Realm Improvement Works

As per agreement in January 2023, Developer Contributions (for public realm) within the Blackstaff Square area (£615,315) are being taken forward in conjunction with DfC to progress public realm improvement works at Blackstaff Square and surrounding streets.

3.17 The project scope includes Blackstaff Square, Brunswick Street, Amelia Street, Bain Place, James Street South (up to Bedford St. junction), Franklin Street (up to Bedford St. junction), McClintock Street and Clarence Street West.

3.18 McAdam Design is the ICT taking forward the Blackstaff Square scheme as the first part of the Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5 (BSA 5) project. The project is at RIBA Stage 2, Concept Design, with a planning application expected to be submitted in Summer 2025 pending feedback from DfI on the movement framework that is aligned to the Belfast Cycling Network.

- 3.19 The Blackstaff Square and the surrounding streets were identified as a catalyst project within the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), and the Council's Linen Quarter Masterplan. This is a key public space, but it is often subject to anti-social behaviour and consists of low-quality public realm, often subject to utilisation as bin and keg storage by local businesses. The area has been subject to some short-term interventions in recent years although these have been delivered by different organisations and resulted in disparate designs and uses within the area.**
- 3.20 With the opening of Grand Central Station footfall has increased through the area and bringing forward designs for Blackstaff Square and the connecting streets will complement and enhance the public realm improvement works that will be undertaken by the Belfast Grand Central Station scheme on Great Victoria Street, Grosvenor Road, Durham Street and Glengall Street.**

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

The financial requirements associated within this paper are met from externally funded, or previously approved budgets.

The Capex and Opex requirements for the UTBs and the Sailortown-Titanic Bridge will be reported to this Committee and to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committees as appropriate pending the completion of the staged design work outlined within this paper.

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

Equality, good relations and rural needs screening will be carried out as part of capital project development."

During discussion, the Director of City Regeneration and Development and the Development Manager advised the Committee that the funding received from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to support the development of the 'Under the Bridges' project to RIBA Stage 3 and 'Sailortown-Titanic Bridge' project to RIBA Stage 2 would require full expenditure by 31st March, 2026.

In response to a Member's query in relation to Castle Street, it was suggested that a report be submitted to the Committee that would provide an update on the animation and regeneration of the area.

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Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted that funding had been received from DfI to support the development of the Under the Bridges and Sailortown-Titanic Quarter Bridge projects, and the timeframes associated with the next steps;
- ii. noted the progress update in relation to the public realm improvement works developer contribution schemes of Little Patrick Street and Little York Street, the Five Cs and Blackstaff Square, and the timeframes associated with the planning applications; and
- iii. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update in relation to the animation and regeneration of Castle Street and the steps to address the wider issues within the area.

Strategic and Operational Issues

**Committee Plan 2025/26 and
End of Year Report 2024/25**

The Strategic Director, Place and Economy submitted for the Committee's consideration a report and associated appendices in relation to the Committee's End of Year Report for 2024/25 and the draft Committee Plan for 2025/26.

During discussion, in relation to the draft Committee plan for 2025/26, a Member suggested that the plan should include a focus on progressing proposals in respect of commercial assets, including Belfast Zoo, Belfast Castle and Malone House, with a plan to move them toward more sustainable models.

The Member highlighted that, given the Committee's role in relation to regeneration and the updates provided to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the City Regeneration Members' Working Group, it should receive more regular updates on regeneration and development issues.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the End of Year Report for 2024/25;
- ii. approved the draft Committee Plan for 2025/26, subject to additional performance information being brought to the Committee meeting in June and provision being made in relation to consideration of the long-term sustainability of commercial assets;
- iii. approved the priority work areas and budget allocations as set out in the Culture Development and Tourism and Events Workplans for 2025/26; and

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- iv. approved the contribution to support the ongoing development of the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (work to be coordinated through Newry, Mourne and Down District Council) up to a maximum of £35,000; and
- v. agreed that it should be provided with more regular updates in relation to city regeneration and development issues and to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the requirement for the City Regeneration Members' Working Group be reconsidered.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

**Proposed US Tariff on Films Made Outside
of the US (Councillor de Faoite to raise)**

Councillor de Faoite raised concern in relation to a recent announcement by the US President that he would authorise the US Department of Commerce and the US Trade Representative to immediately begin the process of imposing a 100 percent tariff on films produced outside of the US.

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister for the Economy, the UK Minister of State for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism and the Irish Minister for Arts, Culture, Communications, Media and Sport to highlight the importance of the local film and creative industries to Belfast and its concern in relation to the potential impact of any proposed US tariff on films produced outside of the US.

Chairperson