



<b>Subject:</b>	Pilot Sunday City Animation Project
<b>Date:</b>	20 June 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal & Civic Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control

### Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

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Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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### Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The report sets out the results of recent engagement on a proposed Sunday Trading and animation pilot in the city centre and proposes an amended approach to undertaking the pilot for Summer 2025.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>Members are asked to note the contents of the report and the results of the recent engagement and either:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree to a Sunday trading and animation pilot in Summer 2025 by designating the city centre (as defined in draft BMAP) as a Holiday Resort under paragraph (9) of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and agree that a review of the pilot will inform a decision in early 2026 whether to continue the Holiday Resort designation, extend the Holiday resort designation or revoke the designation, or</li> <li>2. Agree not to run a pilot in Summer 2025 but to undertake further consultation and engagement specifically on Holiday Resort designation to inform a decision in early 2026 on whether to designate the City Centre or other areas of the city as a Holiday Resort on an ongoing basis and agree that the proposed animation set out in the report can be run in Summer 2025.</li> </ol>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <p>At its meeting in April 2025, Members agreed that officers should look to engage with the BIDS and Belfast Chamber to ascertain whether there is an appetite for the pilot Sunday trading and animation project and the timescales for implementation.</p>
3.2	Since April, there have been a number of discussions with key stakeholders in relation to the pilot including management at Victoria Square, Castle Court and the Kennedy Centre, Belfast One, Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter BIDs, Belfast Chamber, Retail NI, NI Hotel Federation, Visit Belfast, Translink, USDAW and the Department for Communities.
3.3	<p>Shopping Centre management teams were generally supportive of any proposal to extend hours of opening on Sundays, suggesting that retailer buy-in to the proposal shouldn't be an issue. Views were expressed that flexibility was key for retailers and their workers and that most would probably want to open from 11am onwards rather than anything earlier. Concerns were expressed around the timing of a pilot over summer and the ability to get a proposal in place within weeks of the decision and be able to communicate and promote that consistently.</p>
3.4	The BIDS were also all generally supportive of the proposal for longer opening on Sundays with strong indication that it would be preferable to move towards Holiday Resort status to give more certainty for retailers over the proposals. There would be significant input from the BIDS in relation to the animation proposed in the City over the summer and it was felt that the longer opening hours would support this. Concern was also expressed by the BIDs in relation to the ability to put a proposal in place quickly and promote it.
3.5	Belfast Chamber were also supportive of the proposal for longer opening on Sundays and indicated that it would be preferable to move towards holiday resort status, but if a pilot was to be undertaken then it should be longer than six weeks. This reflects concerns around the required lead in time for a pilot and to be able to engage with staff and communicate and promote the proposals consistently. The need to have an appropriate mechanism in place to evaluate the impact of the pilot /designation was also highlighted.
3.6	Hotel Federation & Visit Belfast were both supportive of the proposal and considered that animation in the city would be significantly different without a retail offering. Figures have

	<p>shown that overnight trips may be reducing, and with competition for overnight stays elsewhere in the UK and Europe, it was considered that Belfast should do all it can to attract visitors and with earlier Sunday opening commonplace across many cities, it is expected when people visit. Over the summer months, there are expected to be 330,000 cruise ship visitors with 21 ships and 54,000 people docking in Belfast on Sundays over the summer.</p>
3.7	<p>Retail NI &amp; USDAW wrote to all members and made a deputation to the Council in May 2025 outlining their opposition to any pilot, and discussions covered many of the topics set out in the deputation, which largely mirrored previous representations on this issue. Figures were provided from surveys undertaken when hours were extended in 2012 which showed: 33% of stores were almost empty, 32% were quiet, 30% had the same number of customers as usual on a Sunday and only 5% were very busy. The same survey showed that during the 8 weeks of extra opening 23% of stores did not increase staff numbers, 26% of stores used only volunteers to increase staff numbers, in 51% of stores staff were pressured to work extra hours and 56% of reps reported staff were put under pressure work extra hours.</p>
3.8	<p>Translink outlined that further Metro services were introduced on Sunday mornings during covid and remain in place, with rail services providing good frequency on a Sunday morning. It would be challenging to introduce any additional services or increased frequency in time to facilitate a pilot over the summer as advance notice is needed for any timetable changes.</p>
3.9	<p>The Department for Communities were unable to comment in detail on the pilot as a definitive proposal on the details of the pilot had not been submitted. The Department were clear that the Minister would need to consider their view if the Council were to temporarily relax enforcement of the relevant legislation.</p>
3.10	<p>Officers have taken on board the views of DfC and also considered the representations made by Retail NI and USDAW. Officers consider that a further formal consultation is highly unlikely to demonstrate a change in position from those who object to extended Sunday opening hours.</p>
3.11	<p>Therefore, if a pilot is to be run in Summer 2025, officers would strongly recommend that instead of temporarily relaxing the enforcement of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 the Council should instead look to designate an appropriate area as a Holiday Resort based on the significant amount of previous consultation undertaken as well as recent engagement. It should be noted that previous engagement on designation as a Holiday Resort was focussed on the City Centre and therefore if any designation is to rely on the previous consultation, it should also be limited to the city centre.</p>
3.12	<p>The designation as a Holiday Resort will be a pilot and the outcomes will be evaluated after the end of September. It is considered that this will allow members to make an informed decision as to whether the designation should continue. As part of that review process, there will be further engagement with stakeholders and possibly some further public consultation to consider the impacts of the pilot. On the basis of that evaluation, the Council could then determine whether to continue to designate the City Centre as a holiday resort, seek to extend the designation to other areas in the city (based on appropriate consultation) or revoke the designation.</p>
3.13	<p><b><u>Designation as a Holiday Resort</u></b> Under paragraph (9) of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 a Council may designate “<i>any area in its district as a holiday resort</i>”. Designation means that for 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year (apart from Easter Day) a shop may open on Sundays in accordance with notice given to Council.</p>
3.14	<p>Before making any designation, the Order is clear that a Council should consult those likely to be affected by the proposed designation. The council has consulted on the designation of the city centre as a holiday destination under the legislation on a number of previous</p>

	<p>occasions, most recently in 2019. The terms of reference for the 2019 engagement exercise included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying barriers accessing the city centre on Sundays and engage with partners to collaborate on solutions</li> <li>• Understanding approaches in other cities and learnings relevant to Belfast</li> <li>• Considering the socio-economic impact of city centre animation on Sundays</li> <li>• Considering the impact that change to opening hours may have on the city centre</li> <li>• Considering the investment required to boost visitor numbers to the city on Sundays</li> <li>• Building a business case to lever resources from partner organisations, in the context of city revitalisation.</li> </ul>
3.15	On the previous occasions, there was engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including retailers (small and large); trades unions; statutory bodies; cultural sector; families; young people; tourism and hospitality representatives and transport providers. Previous Committee reports are included in Appendix 1-6.
3.16	The issues behind the proposals to designate the city centre as a holiday resort were similar to the current position: ongoing challenges to city centre viability; a desire to accommodate a growing tourism audience and a recognition that there was limited retail and hospitality provision in the city centre on a Sunday morning, compared to other days of the week.
3.17	The most recent engagement has confirmed that the positions taken, and views expressed in previous consultations remain relevant.
3.18	For the purposes of a pilot, members should note that previous consultation focussed on the City Centre and therefore members should consider designation of the City Centre as defined by draft BMAP and shown in Appendix 7. This is justified by previous consultation and would provide a robust definition for the purposes of the pilot. Should members wish to extend Holiday Resort Status beyond the City Centre, appropriate consultation as set out in the Order would have to be undertaken. This could take place as part of the review of the pilot with the results to be considered in early 2026.
3.19	The 1997 Order sets out in paragraph 10 that any resolution to designate a Holiday Resort can only take effect from a specified date, which must be at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed. Should a decision be taken at this Committee, following due process the specified date on which the decision could take effect would be Sunday 10 August 2025. The Council will also have to publish notice of the designation in such a manner as it considers appropriate. The pilot could therefore run from Sunday 10 August 2025 for 8 weeks until Sunday 28 September.
3.20	These timescales are later in the summer than suggested by some of the shopping centres and BIDS in the recent engagement, but the Holiday Resort designation and timings are set out in legislation and are considered to provide a significantly more robust approach to the pilot for the Council and retailers than relaxation of enforcement. It would also allow a longer period of time to put in place co-ordinated communication around the pilot.
3.21	The Council would be required to keep a register of shops that have given notice of their intention to open which would be available to inspection by members of the public at all reasonable times. Shops wanting to open for longer on Sunday 10 August would need to give notice to the Council by Friday 25 July (14 days before the start of the pilot, unless the Committee agrees that a shorter period is required).
3.22	If it is the intention of the Council to run a Sunday trading and animation pilot. Designation as a Holiday Resort would enable shops to open (subject to appropriate notice being given) on Sundays until the end of September 2025. Following this, officers will review the impact of the pilot, once again engaging with stakeholders and with the potential for public

	<p>consultation. A report would then be brought before this Committee in early 2026 and a decision could be made to either continue with the Holiday Resort Designation on a permanent basis or revoke the designation and return to the current Sunday opening hours.</p> <p><b><u>Animation</u></b></p>
3.23	<p>Officers have identified a number of events and venues that are providing activity across the July &amp; August period and are accessible on Sundays. These are outlined in Appendix 8 and could form the basis of promotional activity to encourage Sunday footfall.</p>
3.24	<p>In addition officers have engaged with the BIDs to understand what would be possible to support additional animation and uplift activity across the summer period with expenditure up to the value of £120,000.</p>
3.25	<p>This would be split across the BIDs to support activity as below, members should note that these are indicative planning assumptions while detailed plans are finalised and are focussed on July and August and may need to be reviewed and aligned with pilot period.</p>
3.26	<p><b>CQ Bid</b> are providing activation each week in July and August to animate Writers Square. With additional support they would look to include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Urban beach</b> at the riverside near the lagan lookout. Sand area for kids to play with seating for parents. This would be available every day in July and August.</li> <li>• <b>Sunday Craft/Art/Makers market</b> along Hill St. Sunday from Am to 3-4pm. Subject to road closures.</li> </ul>
3.27	<p><b>LQ Bid</b> are also providing activation across July and August. With additional support of up to they would look to extend and include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick up and play pétanque at Blackstaff Square. The sessions will be facilitated by staff on location from Linen Quarter BID, with expert support from Ormeau Pétanque Club.</li> <li>• Musical animation. This will be at high footfall areas – Grand Central Station have agreed four of six Sundays and engagement has occurred with Halt to suggest a collaborative music with street food combination.</li> <li>• Arts Ekta cultural animation. Includes mini-Mela type activities in high footfall locations in the Linen Quarter, probably co-located with other activities – e.g. Blackstaff Square, Grand Central Station, or Halt.</li> </ul>
3.28	<p><b>Bid One</b> have outlined an Animating Sunday's programme for 6/8 weeks, strategically focused on enhancing the vibrancy, dwell time, and visitor experience within Belfast city Centre.</p>
3.29	<p>With additional support they would look to extend and include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Teddy Bear's Picnic</b> at City hall grounds</li> <li>• <b>Belfast One Outdoor Summer Cinema Series</b> at City Hall Grounds (extended by a further two dates)</li> <li>• <b>Street Performers &amp; Roving Acts.</b></li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p>
3.30	<p>The costs of the proposed animation programme for 2025 will be met through existing budgets on a one-off basis.</p>
	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p>
3.31	<p>None associated with this report.</p>

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 – Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report 16.02.18 Appendix 2 - Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report 20.04.18 Appendix 3 - Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report 18.05.18 Appendix 4 – City Growth and Regeneration Committee report 11.09.19 Appendix 5 – City Growth and Regeneration Committee report 12.02.20 Appendix 6 – City Growth and Regeneration Committee report 04.03.20 Appendix 7 – Definition of City Centre (draft BMAP) Appendix 8 – Animation proposals