



Subject:	Innovate UK Project – Belfast Net Zero Pathfinder
Date:	9 th October 2025
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director Organisational and City Strategy
Contact Officer:	Debbie Caldwell, Belfast Climate Commissioner

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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 <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. 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 matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. 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	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update members on the completion of the Belfast Net Zero Pathfinder project.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. the project ended on 31st July 2025 with the completion of six strategic work packages which have helped de-risk two of the priority projects identified in the city's Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP), namely the heat network and rooftop solar; II. The outputs of the project been used to develop a new funding bid, for round 3 of Pathfinders Net Zero Living funding from Innovate UK with a decision expected in Oct 2025.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>The Pathfinders Net Zero Living project kicked off in June 2024 with £149,964 secured in funding to help de-risk two key energy interventions listed within the Local Area Energy Plan as priority projects for Belfast. Belfast City Council worked in partnership with the Energy Systems Catapult (ESC) to deliver the work packages. The two key energy interventions were the city centre heat network and rooftop solar deployment.</p>
3.2	<p>To address non-technical barriers, the project focused on market readiness, organisational capacity, business model clarity, legal and commercial frameworks and community opportunities. The project was structured into 6 distinct work packages. The Summary Report, attached as an Appendix gives more detail on each work package and the overall project.</p>
3.3	<p>Work Package 1: Project assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established project definitions, scoped two priority projects and analysed non-technical barriers.
3.4	<p>Work Package 2: Market readiness assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided an understanding of the readiness of market actors (potential off-takers, investors, supply chain stakeholders etc) to engage and deliver decarbonisation projects ESC conducted structured interviews with various market actors. Identified market constraints and off-taker requirements.
3.5	<p>Work Package 3: Stakeholder capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge sharing across city-wide working groups and an internal council working group.
3.6	<p>Work Package 4: Commercial viability and route to finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WP4a Business model analysis assessed the viability of various rooftop solar business model, with the innovative portfolio PPA for rooftop solar aggregation included. WP4b Legal and Commercial arrangements provided analysis of potential delivery vehicles for a Belfast City Centre heat network, with the JV ESCo and Golden Share emerging as the most favourable.
3.7	<p>Work Package 5: Community Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed opportunities for net zero investments (heat network or significant uptake of solar PV) to upskill /empower excluded groups and identified ways to support underrepresented groups to communities.
3.8	<p>Work Package 6: Impact Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed the economic, environmental and social impacts associated with the implementation of the heat network and rooftop solar interventions.

3.9	The BCC Working Group continues to support delivery and the work is coordinated at the City level through the Belfast Net Zero group which reports into the Our Planet Board. This work is also a key part of the 2025/26 Corporate Annual Delivery Plan.
3.10	<p>Next steps</p> <p>BCC was invited to bid in a closed competition (for £50-150k projects) to enable projects to build on the innovation delivered so far. A bid was submitted in September within the short competition window (3 weeks). If successful, (notification by 14th October) the project will start on 1st December and complete by 31st March. The funding would provide an additional resource to develop delivery pathways for LAEP projects in the City. The proposed project focuses on further developing the innovative portfolio PPA and investigating the economic benefits of the thermal store element of the heat network as methods to lower the price of heat. The project would also further engage potential heat off-takers, produce a procurement roadmap for the heat network and engage other local authorities in knowledge sharing.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>This work was funded through a £150k grant from Innovate UK. The proposed project would also be funded through a £150k grant from Innovate UK.</p>
5.0	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Intelligence around diversity, inclusion, fairness and equality in the projects impact on the transition to net zero has been integrated into the project under WP6.</p>
6.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p> <p>Appendix I - Summary of Net Zero Belfast Project</p>