

# South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 24th November, 2025

## MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Groogan (Chairperson); Councillors Brennan, Bunting, McKay and McKeown.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects; Ms. S. Rafter, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

### Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was received from The Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th August were approved by the Working Group.

### Declarations of Interest

The Chairperson, Councillor Groogan, declared an interest in the Vacant to Vibrant item, in that her employer had applied for funding through the scheme, however, as the item was just an update on the scheme, she was not required to leave the meeting.

### Presentation

#### Hearth Historic Buildings Trust – Update on Riddel's Warehouse

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, welcomed Ms. R. Campbell-Palmer, Heritage Development Officer, and Mr. M. Patton, Vice Chair, Hearth Historic Buildings Trust to the meeting.

Mr. Patton outlined the history of Riddel's Warehouse, a Grade B+ listed building which had been constructed in 1867 and was a rare example of Ruskinian design and cast-iron construction. Originally part of Riddel & Co, a prominent ironmongery firm, the warehouse held significant historical value, including industrial features like a weighbridge and crane, as well as records and oral histories from former workers. Located in Belfast's historic market area, it represented the legacy of the ironmongery industry and the City's maritime heritage.

Ms. Campbell-Palmer provided the Working Group with an overview of the regeneration plan for the Warehouse, which focused on heritage-led development to create a sustainable, multi-functional space that supported urban renewal. It aimed to

preserve the building's architectural heritage while fostering community engagement, creativity, and economic growth. The project emphasised adaptive reuse, renewable technologies, and urban greenspaces, while providing cultural, social, and learning spaces to benefit Belfast's residents and visitors.

She provided the Members with an overview of the funding for the project, whereby they were aiming to unlock £5.2 million in UK investment. She highlighted that Riddel's Warehouse was envisioned as a flagship regeneration initiative that would enhance Belfast's cultural and economic vibrancy, contributing to the city's long-term development goals.

The Chairperson stated that she wished them well with the project and that it was a striking and unique historical venue which was an asset to the City.

The Working Group thanked the representatives for the information they had provided and they retired from the room.

### **Local Development Plan (LDP) Update**

(Mr. D. O'Kane (Acting Planning Manager (Plans and Policy)), Mr. M. Smithson (Senior Planning Officer), Ms. J. Doherty (Senior Planning Officer) and Mr. M. Whittaker (Senior Planning Officer) attended in connection with this item.)

The Acting Planning Manager presented an overview of housing and environmental planning proposals for South Belfast, focusing on the need for strategic zoning, site utilisation, and policy adjustments to meet housing demands, support economic activities, and preserve environmental assets.

The Senior Planning officers outlined the housing numbers, proposed zones for housing and explained why certain sites had been discounted. The Members were provided with information relating to Housing Management Areas (HMAs) and Inner Housing Needs (IHNs), and Housing Management Order (HMO) policy areas.

In regards to employment and retail designations, they outlined proposed areas for employment land and retail cores. They emphasised the importance of balancing residential, employment, and retail needs to support the area's economic growth and community development.

The environmental assets within South Belfast were highlighted, including proposed Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs), Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs) and Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs).

Overall, the Members were reminded that the proposals aimed to create a balanced and sustainable urban environment which addressed the needs of residents and businesses while protecting the area's natural and built heritage. The Planning Manager explained that the Local Development Plan would go out for public consultation in the new year subject to Members' agreement. He added that any comments should be forwarded to the LDP Team.

The Working Group requested that the slides be circulated to the Members and they thanked the officers for the update provided.

## Physical Programmes Update

The Director of Property and Projects presented the following report:

### **1. Introduction**

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

### **2. Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- Note the Physical Programme update for South Belfast including the recently completed projects – Balfour Avenue playground.
- Note the updated list of external capital funding opportunities at Appendix 3.

### **3. Local Investment Fund (LIF)**

Members are reminded that LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG area; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation.

A summary is provided below.

LIF breakdown – South		LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description:		No. Projects	Amount (£)	No. Projects	Amount/ (£)
Number of Projects Completed		13 (100%)	£1,083,600	11 (100%)	£796,000
Total Number of Approved Projects		13	£1,083,600	11	£796,000

The table below shows an overview of the recently completed project.

LIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
SLIF017	Finaghy Bridge	£30,000	Complete	Artwork on the bridge was	Continue engagement with

			completed in August 2025. Investigating the potential to further the environmental improvements at the bridge with planters and artwork on a number of utility boxes.	partners. Obtain quote for planters and identify owners of the utility boxes on Finaghy Road North.
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All 24 LIF projects in South Belfast have now been completed.

4. **Belfast Investment Fund (BIF)**

Members are reminded that BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250k investment from Council. BIF – South Belfast was allocated £5.5m; with an additional £500k ringfenced for new areas (outer South) that had joined the District area under Local Government Reform. In South Belfast, 6 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment, thereby fully allocating its £5.5m, and £500k pot of funding. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

***Summary of BIF allocated projects.***

<b>South</b>	Stage 3 - Lagan Gateway - £2.1m; Lanyon Tunnels - £1.3m; Bredagh GAC - £700k; Arts & Digital Hub - £584k; Coffee Culture - £286k Stage 2 - Sandy Row Open Space project- £479k
<b>Balmoral DEA</b>	Stage 3 - Knockbreda Parish Church Hall - £250k; Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC - £250k

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
<b>BIF04</b>	<b>Lagan Gateway Phase 2</b>	£1,428,650 <i>BIF- £579,324 DfI Greenways- £714,326</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	Planning Approval expected end of 2025. External match funding is in place from DfI. The contractor procurement has completed. Awaiting CPD sign off to issue awards letter. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring landowners regarding Right of Way and Land Agreements.	Continue engagement with the public, landowners and key stakeholders.

<b>BIF07</b>	<b>Market Arches</b>	£3.3m <i>BIF-£1.3m UV-£2m t</i>	Stage 3-Committed	Different options costed and OBC completed for submission to The Executive Office (TEO).	Officer engagement with TEO, DfC and DfI as key funders.
<b>BIF48</b>	<b>Sandy Row Arts &amp; Digital Hub</b>	£1,129,023 <i>BIF-£584,167 UV-£706,856</i>	Stage 3-Committed	Planned completion November 2025. Official opening proposed January 2026 to allow new facility to be fully operational. Date to be agreed with BSCR in conjunction with Lord Mayor's Office. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>BIF46</b>	<b>Coffee Culture</b>	£1,149,821 <i>BIF-£286,519 SOF-£100,000 UV-£463,302 DfC-£300,000</i>	Stage 3-Committed	Contractor appointed. Pre-start meeting has taken place with contractor to provide their programme of works. Date for sod cutting will be organised with opening of Arts & Digital Hub. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>BIF33</b>	<b>Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC</b>	£250,000	Stage 3-Committed	Belvoir FC has agreed to lease land from NIHE. Updated LPS valuation May 2025 - 25 year lease assessed at £4,500pa, with rent reviews every five years. NIHE will revert back when they have sought internal approval.	Continue engagement with the group and partners.
<b>BIF47</b>	<b>Sandy Row Open Space project</b>	£479,314*	Stage 2- Uncommitted <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Council has proceeded with procurement of Design Team and process is nearing completion. Ongoing issues with Translink in relation to progressing the scheme, taking account the requirements of their licence. <i>*The remaining balance of the ringfenced allocation for the Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Continue engagement with the group.

## 5. Social Outcomes Fund

**SOF** is a £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. 3 projects in South Belfast received an In-Principle funding commitment, and 2 have completed. Similar to LIF and BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. Members are asked to note the progress update of the remaining project in the table below.

### ***SOF – South Belfast project overview***

Project	Award	Status and update	Action/ Recommendation
<b>SOF02 Coffee Culture</b>	£1,149,821 <i>SOF-£100,000 BIF-£286,519 UV-£463,302 DfC-£300,000</i>	Contractor appointed. Pre-start meeting has taken place with contractor to provide their programme of works. Date for sod cutting will be organised with opening of Arts & Digital Hub.	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.

## 6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital fund with a current overall budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The overall NRF allocation for South was £1,978,637, and 5 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each NRF project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. Projects remaining at Stage 2 continue to have the support of a Client Manager for their proposals.

### ***South Belfast – NRF overview***

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
<b>Sólás New Build project</b>	£2.5m <i>NRF- £362,141 COF- £800,000 Various funders and group</i>	Stage 3- Committed Delivery stage	<b><i>On Ground.</i></b> Work recently started on site. NRF funding will be used towards the fit-out. Working with Legal Services to finalise funding agreement.	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>GVRT- Branching Out project</b>	£540,000 <i>NRF- £500,000 DfC- £40,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed	DfC funding (£40k) secured to further develop project designs. Design Team procurement to conclude in early	Continue engagement with the group.

			2026. Discussions continue with potential funders.	
<b>Lagan Water Access Activity Hub</b>	£308,248	Stage 3-Committed	Planning application for boathouse submitted and await decision.	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>Redevelopment of former School of Music</b>	£2,308,248 <i>NRF-£308,248 UV- £2m</i>	Stage 3-Committed	Business case being developed by TEO Urban Villages. Approval forecasted in Winter 25/26.	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>Market Heritage Hub</b>	£800,000 <i>NRF- £500,000 COF- £300,000</i>	Stage 3-Committed	<b>Building purchase has been completed via NRF funding and the Community Ownership Fund.</b> Group is preparing for an application to Heritage Fund for restoration of the building and transformation into heritage facility.	Continue engagement with the group. Assist with funding application towards building restoration & transformation into heritage facility.

### South Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
<b>Sólás New Build project</b>	£2.5m <i>NRF- £362,141 COF- £800,000 Various funders and group</i>	Stage 3-Committed <i>Delivery stage</i>	<b>On Ground.</b> Work recently started on site. NRF funding will be used towards the fit-out. Working with Legal Services to finalise funding agreement.	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>GVRT- Branching Out project</b>	£540,000 <i>NRF- £500,000 DfC- £40,000</i>	Stage 3-Committed	DfC funding (£40k) secured to further develop project designs. Design Team procurement to conclude in early 2026. Discussions continue with potential funders.	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>Lagan Water Access Activity Hub</b>	£308,248	Stage 3-Committed	Planning application for boathouse submitted and await decision.	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>Redevelopment of former School of Music</b>	£2,308,248 <i>NRF-£308,248 UV- £2m</i>	Stage 3-Committed	Business case being developed by TEO Urban Villages. Approval forecasted in Winter 25/26.	Continue engagement with the group.

<b>Market Heritage Hub</b>	£800,000 NRF- £500,000 COF- £300,000	Stage 3- Committed	<b>Building purchase has been completed via NRF funding and the Community Ownership Fund.</b> Group is preparing for an application to Heritage Fund for restoration of the building and transformation into heritage facility.	Continue engagement with the group. Assist with funding application towards building restoration & transformation into heritage facility.
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## 7. Capital Programme

**The Capital Programme is a rolling programme to either enhance existing Council assets or build/buy new assets or facilities. Table below provides an update on current live projects South Belfast area. Members are asked to note status and update.**

### South Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
<b>Playground Improvement Programme 24/25</b>	<b>Project completed.</b> Works at three sites across the city including Balfour Avenue Playground has been completed.
<b>Strangford Ave Playing Fields Enabling Works</b>	<b>On Ground.</b> Project nearing completion. Enabling works have been completed and the active travel containers have been transferred. New design to be installed on exterior of containers and disability toilet in old pavilion to be re-opened.
<b>Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26</b>	<b>Stage 3 Committed.</b> Options being worked up with CNS.
<b>Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide</b>	<b>Stage 3 – Committed.</b> Works progressing. Progress made with the commencement of the installation for Phase 5a. 115 gates remain to be installed and works to be completed by February 2026.
<b>City Hall – Installation of Stained Glass Windows – LGBT and NHS</b>	<b>Stage 3 – Committed.</b> Unveiling of new LGBTQ+ window completed. NHS – Procurement process commenced further updates to be provided via City Hall Working Group.
<b>City Hall External Christmas Tree provision</b>	<b>Stage 3 – Committed.</b> Procurement concluded with details of successful operator to be reported to City Hall Working Group at its meeting on 18 November 2025.
<b>Communications Boards</b>	<b>Stage 3 – Committed.</b> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Progressing – boards ordered, installations due to commence February 2026.
<b>Musgrave Park Sensory Garden</b>	<b>Stage 3 – Committed.</b> Upgrade to sensory garden. Design details being worked up.
<b>Basketball Courts</b>	<b>Stage 3 – Committed.</b> The work includes creation or upgrade of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. Concept designs being developed. Currently undertaking design team procurement.
<b>Electric Vehicle Charging Network</b>	<b>Stage 3 – Committed.</b> Council agreed that officers begin the tender process based on a Concession Operating model and defers consideration of the specific locations of the proposed Phase One sites so that a broader list could be submitted to the Committee.

<b>Historic Cemeteries</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar's Bush, Knock Cemetery, Clifton Street Cemetery and Balmoral Cemetery. Consultants appointed to undertake surveys for the Phase 2 works. The Phase 1 Health & Safety works at Clifton Street have been completed. Successful application to DfC Historic Environment Fund (HEF) Revival Stream fund for a contribution towards design fees for Phase 2.
<b>Historic Tiled Street Signs</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Scoping of signs is continuing along with opportunities for external funding.
<b>Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Feature lighting to exterior of Ulster Hall. Design and delivery is to be fully funded by DfC and Linen Quarter BID. Progressing.
<b>Waterfront Hall Chiller Units</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Detailed design of the new chiller system is underway. The structural integrity of the building is being assessed around the areas of the proposed new units and in advance of finalising the designs. In order to avoid potential cooling issues next season, a temporary chiller installation is being considered.
<b>Waterfront Hall Smoke Curtains</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Modelling of the auditorium has been completed. Following this exercise, and with agreement from Building Control & the Fire Service, no major remedial works are required and the Fire Strategy is to be updated accordingly.
<b>Palm House, Botanic Gardens</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This early-stage Council heritage asset project is being considered as a candidate for partnership working with the Heritage Fund. Consultants are continuing to prepare a Conservation Management Plan to support the application process.
<b>City Hall Preservation</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Programme of works to ensure the preservation of the City Hall building.
<b>City Hall Security Improvements</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Capital works put forward to make City Hall a safer place for visitors, employees and elected Members.
<b>2 Royal Avenue – Landlord Capital works</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Capital works to the ground and first floor to meet its obligation to prospective occupiers and ensure the building is fully fit for purpose. Currently compiling the Outline Business Case as part of Stage 2 development that will involve the production of an updated condition report for the building.
<b>Mobile Changing Places modular facility</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Specification developed and project moving to procurement.
<b>Belfast Bikes Expansion</b>	New provider/ operator has been appointed. New scheme was launched 17 September 2025.

## 8. Externally funded programmes

**The Council is the delivery partner for several government departments on key capital investment programmes, namely Urban Villages (UV) from the Executive Office as well as a number of schemes with DfC and DfI. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to South Belfast.**

### Urban Villages Initiative

**The table below is the status update on UV projects in South Belfast – note the UV programme has a defined South Belfast geography (Sandy Row; Donegall Pass and Markets).**

### **UV – South Belfast projects overview**

Project	Status and update
<b>The Lockhouse - Gateway to the River / Walkway</b>	Stalled on site due to NI Water issue. Option to resolve this issue agreed by project board. New planning application submitted in September 2025. Hoping to be onsite in New Year.
<b>Sandy Row Arts &amp; Digital Hub</b>	As above at BIF48. Planned completion November 2025. Official opening proposed January 2026 to allow new facility to be fully operational.
<b>Coffee Culture</b>	As above at BIF46. Contractor appointed. Date for sod cutting will be organised with opening of A&DH.
<b>Market Arches</b>	As above at BIF07. Business case being developed.
<b>Redevelopment of former School of Music</b>	As above at NRF. Business case being developed. Approval forecasted Winter.
<b>Donegall Pass Good Relations Hub</b>	Business case being developed. Approval forecasted by March 2026.

### **PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan - Capital Project**

**Members are asked to note the update on PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan capital project in South Belfast. The Letter of Offer has been accepted and returned to SEUPB.**

Project	Status and update
<b>Annadale Open Space</b>	Part of the overall Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Development of a playpark, basketball hoop and a small men's shed. The council is actively seeking funding to develop a 5 aside pitch on the same site. The design team has been appointed, and design is underway, with the view to submitting a planning application in Winter 2025. Stakeholder meetings to include elected Members, will be held on a quarterly basis to provide status updates and to receive community feedback. The second stakeholder meeting will be held on 17 November 2025.

### **DfC funded projects**

**Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Communities in South Belfast.**

### **DfC – South Belfast projects overview**

Project	Status and update
<b>Holylands Alleygating and Cleansing Project</b>	Link to the citywide Alleygating Phase 5 project.

### **DfI funded projects**

**Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Infrastructure in South Belfast.**

## **DfI – South Belfast projects overview**

Project	Status and update
<b>Lagan Gateway Phase 2</b>	As above as BIF04. Planning Approval expected end of 2025. External match funding is in place from DfI. Contractor procurement has completed. Awaiting CPD sign off to issue awards letter. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring landowners regarding Right of Way and Land Agreements.

### **9. Capital funding opportunities**

**Members are asked to note the updated version of the list of external capital funding opportunities at Appendix 2 which may be of assistance to groups and clubs.”**

The Working Group noted the update provided.

#### **Citywide Vacant to Vibrant Grant Scheme**

(Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager - City Centre Regeneration, attended in connection with this item)

The Senior Development Manager provided the Members with an update on the Citywide Vacant to Vibrant Programme and with a list of proposed engagement sessions planned in the South of the City in January 2026.

The Working Group noted:

- the proposed extension of the Citywide Vacant to Vibrant scheme, subject to the approval by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee; and
- the proposed engagement sessions planned, pending the launch of the city-wide extension.

#### **Memorial at Donegall Road Update**

The Director of Property and Projects reminded the Working Group that, at its meeting on 18th August, 2025, it had agreed to the below wording of the plaque memorial to be erected on a Gatepost between 263 - 265 Donegall Road.

***Belfast Workhouse***  
***This was the site of the Belfast Workhouse burial***  
***ground in use from 1848 to 1908.***  
***Tens of thousands of men, women and children were***  
***buried here in unmarked graves.***  
***They all had names.***

The Director explained that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive owned the land where the gatepost was situated and that NIHE had given its consent to install the

memorial plaque on the wall. She also confirmed that no planning permission was required.

She added that there was a graffitied utility box adjacent to the gatepost in question, and that officers were investigating whether there was the potential for this to be painted, subject to ownership checks, approvals etc.

The Working Group considered two illustrative mock-ups of the wording using different materials, together with indicative costs.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed the following:

- that the plaque be made of granite, with white writing on black, if possible;
- that a comma be added after the word “ground”;
- that officers would investigate whether it was necessary to include the Council logo on the plaque; and
- that any proposed street art on the utility box, subject to approvals, adjacent to the gatepost would be in keeping with the burial ground.

The Director of Property and Projects agreed to circulate a final mock-up of the plaque encompassing the above changes.

Chairperson