

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 4th December, 2025

MEETING OF THE EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: The High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer;
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors R. Brooks, D. Douglas, de Faoite,
P. Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn, Long and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. M. Wilson, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Chairperson

In the absence of the Chairperson, Alderman Lawlor, the Working Group agreed that Councillor de Faoite would act as Chairperson for the duration of the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of the Chairperson (Alderman Lawlor), Alderman Copeland and Councillors Abernethy, Bower and S. Douglas.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 4th September were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor D. Douglas declared an interest in relation to the item “Physical Programmes Update” in that his children played for Bloomfield Football Club, which was referenced within the report under the Local Investment Fund update. As this project did not become the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the meeting.

Physical Programmes Update

(Mr. D. Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Senior Programme Delivery Manager presented the undernoted report to the Working Group:

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“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. Further, an East Belfast Physical Programme map is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the physical programme update for East Belfast including recently completed projects – Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Clonduff FC storage facilities, and Lands at Castlehill Manor – Belmont Park Improvements at Appendix 2.
- Agree in principle the change in project location and recommend to SP&R Committee to approve the relocation of Bloomfield Community Association BIF project from Hyndford Street to Dixon Playing Fields.
- Note the updated list of external capital funding opportunities attached at Appendix 3.

3. Local Investment Fund

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 with the East being allocated £1.127m under LIF1 and £1.2m under LIF2.

Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding spend to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 22 projects received In Principle support under LIF1 and LIF2, 19 have been completed, 1 project is at delivery stage and 1 project is at due diligence stage.

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| LIF breakdown – East | | LIF 1 | | LIF 2 | |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Stage/ Description | | Projects | Amount/ Value (£) | Projects | Amount/ Value (£) |
| Number of Projects Completed | 8 (80%) | £931,902 | | 12 (100%) | £1,161,589 |
| Number of Projects in Delivery | 1(10%) | £30,000 | | | |
| Number of Projects in Pre-construction | | | | | |
| Number of Projects at Initial Stage (Due Diligence) | 1 (10%) | £70,000 | | | |
| Total Number of Approved Projects | 10 | £1,031,902 | | 12 | £1,161,589 |

The table below provides an overview of progress and actions around the remaining live projects.

| Ref | Project | Funding | Stage | Status | Action / Recommendation |
|--------|---|--|---------------|---|--|
| ELIF31 | Bloomfield FC, Clonduff FC, East Belfast FC and Dundela FC, Tullycarnet, Cregagh Wanderers, Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Bredagh GAC – storage facilities | £65,000 (£30k plus £35k reallocation) | On Ground | <p>Bloomfield FC, East Belfast FC, Tullycarnet FC, Cregagh Wanderers, Bredagh GAC – completed. Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Clonduff FC storage facilities delivered/ completed.</p> <p>Dundela FC – Club would prefer that container is delivered after the proposed NRF pitch works complete.</p> | Continue engagement with the groups. |
| ELIF29 | Cycling Ireland | £70,000 | Due Diligence | <p>The group have updated the council on their priorities. Officers are waiting for the group to provide more detail on the desired specification for the proposed facilities. A proposal to refresh the feasibility study has been discussed, but there is no funding for it. Group considering possibility of seeking match funding, but no funding has been secured yet.</p> | Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders. |

4. Belfast Investment Fund

Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250,000 investment from Council. In East Belfast, 9 projects have received an In-Principle funding commitment under BIF. There are 5 projects on the longer BIF list. Each of

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the In-Principle projects are taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. The table below provides a summary of BIF allocated projects i.e. project stage; project title; and the funding allocated.

Summary of BIF allocated projects:

| | |
|------------|---|
| East | <p>Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£655k</p> <p><i>Stage 2—Lagan Village Youth & Community—no commitment</i></p> <p><i>Stage 1—East Belfast Mission; Belmont Bowling Club; Bloomfield Presbyterian Church; St. John's Orangefield, Church of Ireland, Tullycarnet Community Support Services—no commitment / on long list</i></p> |
| Outer East | <p>Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh Presbyterian Church—£382k</p> |

The table below provides an overview of the remaining projects. Members are asked to note the actions and recommendations.

| Ref | Project | Funding | Stage | Status | Action/ Recommendation |
|-------|----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| BIF12 | Strand Arts Centre | £6,782,069 <i>LUF- £4,094,000 BIF- £1,550,000 HF- £255,000 (Development Grant), £768,069 (Delivery Grant) Several Trusts- £115,000</i> | On Ground | On Ground. Works began on site in early January 2025 and are progressing well, with completion due in second quarter of 2026. Discussion ongoing with DfC regarding potential additional funding. Site visit with Councillors took place 4/9/2025. | Continue engagement with the group and funders. |
| BIF13 | Bloomfield Community Association | £715,009 <i>BIF - £655,000 LIF - £60,009</i> | Stage 3 - Committee d – In Principle | New project location being proposed – see details below. | AWG is asked to consider/ agree on the change in project location. |

Bloomfield Community Association (BIF13)

Bloomfield Community Association (BCA) has been allocated £715k towards demolition of their existing premises at Hyndford Street in East Belfast and creation of a new facility with community spaces, offices, and a multi-use hall. In June 2025, DfC announced plans to contribute funding towards the project. BCA has operated from their premises on Hyndford Street for over 40 years and currently deliver a wide range of activities to support the local community including a

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playgroup, after school club, youth programme, detached youth work, yoga classes, senior activities and a musical theatre group. The success of the organisation has outgrown the existing building, and the building's age, condition, size and layout limit the potential for additional activities to take place. Notwithstanding the need for bigger premises, the existing site is confined, and Hyndford Street is a narrow, residential street with no outdoor space or dedicated parking provision.

BCA has approached BCC with a request to relocate to Dixon Playing Fields. As a more spacious site, it is considered that Dixon Playing Fields presents a better opportunity to develop a fit for purpose facility that meets the needs of the organisation and the wider community. The relocation to Dixon Playing Fields would also complement the existing community facilities (pitches and greenway) in the area which in turn would provide open space, greater accessibility and parking provision. Upon approval, officers will commence the due diligence process and designs will be developed further. Engagement will also be undertaken with Estates, Planning and existing user groups.

Members are asked to agree in principle the change in project location and recommend to SP&R Committee to approve the relocation of Bloomfield Community Association BIF project from Hyndford Street to Dixon Playing Fields. Also, Members are asked to authorise officers to explore lease arrangements to facilitate development of Bloomfield Community Association at Dixon Playing Fields.

5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. There is one project under SOF for East Belfast - Eastside Visitor Centre – with an In-Principle funding commitment. Similar to BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award.

| Project | SOF Award | Status | Action/ Recommendation |
|--|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| EastSide Hotel & Visitor Centre <i>(links to NRF project)</i> | £2,050,000 <i>Comprising: SOF- £700,000 NRF- £950,000 Group- £400k</i> | Continuing to work with the design team and project promoter to finalise a design which meets the needs of the group and project budget. | Continued engagement with the group. |

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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 East was £2,351,551 and 4 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.

East Belfast – NRF overview

| | |
|------|--|
| East | Stage 3 - Eastside Container Hotel, Portview Exchange, Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park, Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road Stage 2 - Impact Belfast, Nevin Spence Centre Visitor Experience |
|------|--|

East Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

| Project name | Funding | Stage | Status | Action/ Recommendation |
|--|---|---------------------|---|---|
| EastSide Hotel & Visitor Centre <i>(links to SOF project)</i> | £2,050,000 <i>Comprising: SOF- £700k NRF- £950k Group- £400k</i> | Stage 3 - Committed | Continuing to work with the design team and project promoter to finalise a design which meets the needs of the group and project budget. | Continued engagement with the group. |
| Portview Exchange | £600,000 | Stage 3 - Committed | Linked to UV project. Business case being updated and is at final draft stage. Design team procurement prepared and ready to be issued on receipt of letter of offer. | Continue engagement with the group. |
| Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park | £500,000 | Stage 3 - Committed | Live planning application is ongoing. The Council and group continue to actively seek alternative funding to cover shortfall, which is estimated of up to £300k. The club were unsuccessful in obtaining the NI Football Fund but are aware DCMS funding will be reopening in the new year. | Continue engagement with the group and design team. |
| Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road | £300,000 | Stage 3 - Committed | Application submitted to Wolfson Foundation for funding with decision due in December. Once the full funding package is secured, a design team can be appointed. | Continue engagement with the group. |

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7. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building / buying new assets. Members are reminded of the 3-stage approval process in place for every project on council's Capital Programme, as agreed by SP&R Committee. The table below provides an update on current live projects in East Belfast. Members are asked to note the status and update.

East Belfast – Capital programme overview

| Project | Status and update |
|--|---|
| New Crematorium | <i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Technical Design is complete. Procurement exercise for the main contractor has been completed. A review of the business case has been undertaken. In September 2025, a dedicated Members workshop was held to inform a Strategic Analysis and Options Appraisal on the project. An additional report will be brought back to Committee. |
| Cremated Remains Burial Plots | <i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> A procurement process to appoint a contractor has started. |
| Playground Improvement Programme 25/26 | <i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Agreed at P&C Committee in May 2025. Playgrounds selected for refurbishment are White Rise, Ohio Street, Roddens Crescent, and Finvoy Street playgrounds. Progressing. |
| Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26 | <i>Stage 3 Committed.</i> Options being worked up with CNS. |
| Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide | <i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> 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. |
| Communications Boards in playgrounds | <i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Progressing – boards on order, installations due to commence by February 2026. |
| Basketball Courts | <i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> The work includes creation or upgrades 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. We are currently out for procurement for a design team to take the project through delivery. |
| Historic Cemeteries | <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar's Bush, Knock Cemetery, Clifton Street Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. 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. |

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| | |
|---|--|
| Historic Tiled Street Signs | Stage 2 – Uncommitted. Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Scoping of signs is continuing along with opportunities for external funding. |
| Sydenham Greenway | Stage 2- Uncommitted. Ongoing discussion with DfI regarding a partnership approach. Suggestion for Council to deliver the 'feeder path' through Tommy Patton Millennium Park with DfI part funding. Business Case has been submitted to DfI Greenways Fund (50% funding). A decision is awaited in December 2025. |
| Electric Vehicle Charging Network | Stage 3 – Committed. 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. |
| Mobile Changing Places modular facility | Stage 1 – Emerging. This facility will be for use across the city. Specification developed and project moving to procurement. |
| Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East | Stage 1- Emerging. Link to Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan. Education Authority (EA) is continuing to develop a business case for capital funding for youth provision at the council owned Ballymacarrett site. Officers are continuing to liaise with EA on the way forward. |
| Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan | Stage 1- Emerging. Link to the Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East project. |
| Belfast Bikes Expansion | New provider/ operator has been appointed. New scheme was launched 17 th September 2025. |
| Lands at Castlehill Manor – Belmont Park Improvements | This work is under S76 Developer Contributions for Open Space. Project completed. Belmont Park woodland trail and accessible picnic area completed in Spring 2023. Addition accessible equipment was installed at Belmont Park in September 2025. |

8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for a number of government departments on significant capital investment programmes, namely the Urban Villages Initiative (UV) funded by the Executive Office, and number of schemes with DfC. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to East Belfast.

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Urban Villages Initiative

| Project | Status and update |
|--|---|
| Titanic People Exhibition | <i>Project underway. Due to project delays, handover is expected to take place in early 2026.</i> |
| Portview Exchange <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i> | <i>Business case stage. Business case being updated and is at final draft stage. Design team procurement prepared and ready to be issued on receipt of letter of offer.</i> |

PEACEPLUS – Capital Project

Members are asked to note updates on the capital project under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

East Belfast – PEACEPLUS LAP Capital Project overview

| Project | Status and update |
|--------------------------|---|
| Sanctuary Theatre | Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Refurbishment of the Sanctuary Theatre at Castlereagh Street. Design Team has been appointed. Steering group and design team meeting held and project progressing. |

DfI funded project

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

DfI – East Belfast projects overview

| Project | Status and update |
|---|--|
| Sailortown/ Titanic Quarter Bridge | Consultants have been appointed to undertake RIBA Stage 1 & 2 design services for a proposed new cross harbour pedestrian and cycle swing bridge. The bridge could complete the Harbour Loop and provide connections between Sailortown and North Belfast to the economic and educational opportunities on Queen's Island, as well as, providing a critical active travel connection to the newly completed York Street Train Station. |

9. Capital funding opportunities

Members are asked to note the updated version of the list of external capital funding opportunities attached at Appendix 3 which may be of assistance to groups and clubs.”

The Senior Programme Delivery Manager highlighted that a request had been received from the Bloomfield Community Association, which had been allocated funds towards the demolition of its existing premises at Hyndford Street and the creation of a new facility, to relocate to Dixon Playing Fields. In response, a Member welcomed the proposed relocation of the project and stated that it would provide the Bloomfield

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Community Association with a better opportunity whilst also benefiting Dixon Playing Fields.

During discussion, the Senior Programme Manager answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the Local Investment Fund and the Capital Programme projects outlined within the report, including the Historic Tiled Street Signs Programme and the Belfast Bikes Expansion.

In response to a Member's query, the Senior Programme Manager advised that he would provide the Working Group with further information in respect of land adjacent to the Knocknagoney Community Centre within the Knocknagoney Linear Park.

After discussion, the Working Group:

- i. noted the physical programme update for East Belfast including the following recently completed projects:
 - Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Clonduff Football Club storage facilities; and
 - Lands at Castlehill Manor – Belmont Park Improvements;
- ii. agreed, in principle, to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the Bloomfield Community Association project be relocated from Hyndford Street to Dixon Playing Fields; and
- iii. noted the updated list of external capital funding opportunities.

Citywide Vacant to Vibrant Grant Scheme

(Ms. C. Persic, City Regeneration Development Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Working Group considered a report which provided an update on the Citywide Vacant to Vibrant Scheme.

The City Regeneration Development Manager advised the Working Group that funding had been secured from the Department for Communities which, alongside additional Council funding, had enabled the extension of the Citywide Vacant to Vibrant Scheme. It was reported that the extended citywide scheme had reopened for applications at the beginning of December, 2025, and that information sessions to promote the scheme would be held across the city in January, 2026.

The Working Group noted that the Citywide Vacant to Vibrant Scheme had been extended and that information sessions would be held in January, 2026, to promote the scheme.

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Presentation

Phoenix Education Centre

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. E. Shaw, Executive Director, Phoenix Education Centre, to the meeting.

Ms. Shaw provided the Working Group with an overview of the Phoenix Education Centre, which had been founded to tackle educational underachievement within East Belfast and provide mentoring, support, education and training opportunities for the local community.

Ms. Shaw outlined the wide range of daytime and evening programmes that the centre currently delivered. She emphasised that the programmes had been co-designed with the community to identify local needs in order to improve the education of children with low school attendance, disengaged youth and disengaged young men. In addition to the programmes being delivered, she pointed out that the centre also provided wraparound support which included meals, uniforms, counselling and referrals.

The Working Group was informed that the education model of the Phoenix Education Centre combined accredited Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN NI) courses, mentoring and personal development in partnership with schools, Councils, and youth and community organisations, which ensured its work complemented the wider education system.

In concluding her presentation, Ms. Shaw stated that the centre was operating at capacity, and she drew the Members' attention to the challenges it currently faced. In respect of funding, Ms. Shaw explained that the centre operated on short-term project grants which did not provide long-term stability and that, unlike schools, the centre must secure its own funding each year. She highlighted the need for community education to be recognised as part of a more equitable education system.

Following the presentation, the Members thanked Ms. Shaw for the work currently being undertaken by the Phoenix Education Centre to tackle educational underachievement within East Belfast.

During discussion, Ms. Shaw answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the support for young people to reintegrate back into the school system, the support for neurodivergent pupils and improving accessibility within schools, and the funding challenges faced by the Phoenix Education Centre.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked Ms. Shaw for the presentation and the information provided to the Working Group and she retired from the meeting.

Noted.

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Local Policies Plan (Verbal 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. G. Thornton, Senior Planning Officer, attended in connection with this item.)

The Acting Planning Manager and the Senior Planning Officers provided the Working Group with an overview of the site-specific proposals, designations and land use zonings for the development and use of lands within East Belfast as identified through the draft Local Policies Plan (LPP) as part of the Local Development Plan (LDP).

Housing

The Senior Planning Officers presented an update on the proposed zones and designations for housing, including mixed-use, within East Belfast. The Senior Planning Officers also provided further information in respect of the ‘Call for Sites’ process, which provided an opportunity for individuals, landowners and developers to suggest sites within the Council area for new development, and the policy areas in relation to Housing Management Areas (HMAs) and Housing Management Orders (HMOs).

Employment and Retail

The Working Group was provided with an update in relation to the proposed LPP designations in relation to employment and retail. The Senior Planning Officers outlined proposed areas for employment land, retail cores and mixed-use sites, and emphasised the need to balance residential, employment, and retail to support the area’s economic growth and community development.

Environmental

In relation to the environmental assets within East Belfast, the Senior Planning Officers highlighted the proposed Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs), Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs) and Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs) within East Belfast.

During discussion, the Acting Planning Manager and the Senior Planning Officers answered a number of questions from the Members in relation to specific sites outlined within the presentation.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the officers for the presentation and the Working Group noted the information provided.

Chairperson