

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 12th February, 2026

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Donnelly (Chairperson);
Alderman McCoubrey;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, R. Brooks, T. Brooks,
P. Donnelly, S. Douglas,
Ferguson, Groogan, Lyons, Magee,
McCann, Meenehan, Murray and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Mr. O. Crolly, Local Energy Systems Advisor;
Ms. M. Quigley, Adaptation and Resilience Advisor;
Ms. B. Roddy, Project Support Officer (Climate); and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was recorded from Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 15th January were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 9th February.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor T. Brooks declared an interest in Item 2a, UPSURGE EU Horizon Project Update, in that she was employed by Queen's University Belfast, but she advised that she did not feel it was necessary to leave the room for the item.

Installation of Solar PV on Donegal Pass Community Centre

The Local Energy Systems Advisor presented the Committee with the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To provide an update on delivery of the solar photovoltaic (PV) installations on Donegal Pass Community Centre - funded through the Shared Island Fund.**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to note that:

- I. €46,620 was secured from the Shared Island Fund to install solar PV on Donegal Pass Community Centre with an additional €4,500 secured allowing for the installation of battery storage;**
- II. Donegal Pass Community centre will be used as a test site to explore renewable energy generation potential for other council sites; and**
- III. Engagement is planned with the centre's users to build awareness about the advantages of solar PV.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

In 2023 Belfast City Council partnered with Cork City Council on a Shared Island funded feasibility study that assessed the solar PV potential on a number of high consuming council sites in both Cork and Belfast. In Belfast, the potential solar PV generation for 25 council owned buildings was estimated and linked with electricity consumption.

The results of the study were then used to complete a joint application with Cork City Council last summer to access capital funding to install solar PV on three community centres in Belfast (Donegall Pass Community Centre) and Cork (Fairhill Fairfield Community Association and St. Vincent's Hurling and Football Club). One of the conditions of the funding was that it had to have a community focus. These community buildings were selected due to their high potential solar PV generation matched to high energy consumption levels as highlighted in the feasibility study.

3.2 Progress to date

The panels have since been installed and have the potential to generate 37,898kWh/year against a current energy consumption of approximately 19,000kWh/year (ie the panels will produce approximately double the amount of energy currently used). This would reduce carbon emissions in the city by approximately 13 tonnes CO₂e/kWh annually (equivalent to charging a smart phone 120,000 times) and save around £7000 per year on the electricity bill. A further application was submitted to request additional funding to purchase batteries to store excess electricity generated

during times of high generation and low usage. The aim is to use the Donegal Pass Community Centre to test the workings of solar array and battery storage and explore its potential on other council sites across the estate.

3.3 Funding process

Belfast City Council (Property and Projects) issued the tenders for the installation of the panels. The tender included the replacement of the electric board with a separate additional section for the quotation of retrofitting of battery equipment. The battery installation was not part of the initial grant offer, however the opportunity to access reserve funding arose and the council was able to take advantage of this to purchase battery storage.

One of the main conditions of the funding was that the project had to be completed within 18 months (by February 2026) and it has been completed successfully on time.

3.4 Community engagement

The Climate team is currently working with the Energy Manager, outreach staff and community centre staff to engage with the centre's users to build awareness about the benefits of the solar panels, how they reduce carbon emissions from the centre and save money allowing for funds to be redirected to other activities.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

The project was funded through a €51,120 grant from the Shared Island Fund.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

During discussion, a Member requested that information be provided to the Committee illustrating the percentages of cost savings which had been generated from the solar PV on Council sites across the City.

A further Member queried the potential use of geothermal energy in the City. In response, the Climate Commissioner advised that officers had an upcoming meeting with Causeway Geothermal regarding a high-level feasibility study.

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After discussion, the Committee noted that:

- i. €46,620 had been secured from the Shared Island Fund to install solar PV on Donegal Pass Community Centre with an additional €4,500 secured allowing for the installation of battery storage;
- ii. Donegal Pass Community centre would be used as a test site to explore renewable energy generation potential for other council sites;
- iii. Engagement was planned with the centre's users to build awareness about the advantages of solar PV; and
- iv. The rescheduled site visit to Leeds, regarding the District Heating Network, was being planned for as soon as possible after elections, which were taking place in Leeds on 20th May, 2026, and that the agreed dates would be circulated to Members in due course.

Update on the GROW Community Garden

The Adaptation and Resilience Advisor provided the Committee with an update on the €30,000 Growing and Greening capital program, funded through the Shared Island Fund, which aimed to support community-led sustainable urban food growing and biodiversity initiatives in Belfast.

The program, developed in partnership with Cork City Council, Wild Belfast, Brink!, and Belfast Healthy Cities, focused on enhancing the GROW NI site at The Waterworks.

It included the installation of innovative facilities such as a solar energy array, a 200litre hot composting system, a community shelter, and a composting toilet. The upgrades aimed to extend the teaching season, increase volunteer engagement, and serve as a demonstrator for other community projects. The capital investments totalled £21,351.

The Members were advised that the solar energy array would quadruple energy generation, while the hot composter would reduce composting costs and time. The community shelter would enable workshops to be held year-round, potentially doubling the number of participants. The composting toilet aligned with the ecological values of the project and addresses practical challenges.

The project was on track for completion by the end of February 2026, with plans to utilise any remaining funds for additional relevant capital items.

The Committee was advised that the GROW NI site had also been selected as one of four satellite sites for the EU Horizon-funded UPSURGE project, which focused on urban sustainability. The designation allowed the site to serve as a test bed for innovative solutions, such as the solar energy system and composting toilet, and share knowledge with other community growing initiatives.

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The Adaptation and Resilience Advisor explained that a knowledge-sharing event was planned for February 2026 to showcase the project's achievements. The event would include demonstrations of the hot composter and tours of the upgraded site, aiming to inspire other community groups and council staff to adopt similar sustainable practices across the City.

In response to a Member's query, the Project Support Officer outlined why the Team had purchased the particular hot composter, highlighting that, as the site was close to housing, there were certain health and safety considerations which had to be taken into consideration, as well as its potential to produce long-term savings.

In response to a further Member's query, she confirmed that the site was scalable and that the items on site were moveable.

After discussion, the Committee noted:

- i. the installation of facilities to increase the volunteer base and extend the teaching season of a community growing project led by GROW NI at the Waterworks site including a solar energy array, an innovative hot composting system, a shelter for hosting workshops, and a composting toilet;
- ii. that the site was also one of four sites selected to serve as a satellite site to the demonstrator site at Lower Botanic funded through the EU Horizon funded UPSURGE project;
- iii. the support of community partners Wild Belfast, Brink! and Belfast Healthy Cities in project design and management;
- iv. the consultative processes used for selecting the site and the cross-departmental collaboration and support provided across Council departments to ensure the project was delivered on time;
- v. the opportunity for sharing knowledge, replicating across other community growing sites, with a knowledge sharing event scheduled for February 2026;
- vi. that delivery was scheduled for completion by the end of February 2026 and that opportunities for utilising any underspend were being pursued; and
- vii. a final report would be brought back to Committee in due course.

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Request to Present at a Future Meeting

**Great Big Green Week –
Councillor T. Brooks to raise**

At the request of the Members, the Committee agreed to invite Ms. Sara McCracken, Climate Coalition, to a future meeting to present on the Great Big Green Week which would take place in June.

Issue Raised in Advance by a Member

UPSURGE project - Councillor T. Brooks

Councillor T. Brooks posed a number of questions in relation to the UPSURGE project at Botanic.

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised the Committee that the “Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan” would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in March, which would include an impact assessment on the UPSURGE project.

A number of Members stated that they were of the understanding that the UPSURGE project was a learning project, for meanwhile use and that there should be no surprise that the site would be brought back into use as a pitch.

The Climate Commissioner stated that the agreement surrounding the UPSURGE project pre-dated most of the Members and Officers present and that discussions had been held with the EU and the UPSURGE Project Manager to better understand the history of the project and the obligations in the grant agreement.

During further discussion, where some Members raised concerns regarding the legal processes and ramifications if the site was to be brought back into use as a pitch, the Committee agreed that it be provided with an update in respect of the UPSURGE project, considering the questions raised, in due course.

Chairperson