

# East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 5th March, 2026

## MEETING OF THE EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND  
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Alderman Lawlor (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Copeland and Rodgers; and  
Councillors Abernethy, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks,  
D. Douglas, S. Douglas, de Faoite, P. Donnelly,  
Ferguson, Flynn, Hanvey, Long, Maghie, McAteer,  
McCormick and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;  
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and  
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

No apologies were reported.

### **Minutes**

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 4th December, 2025 were an accurate record of proceedings.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor P. Donnelly declared an interest in relation to the item 'Physical Programme Update' in that he was associated with a project referenced within the report. As the project did not become the subject of discussion, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor McCormick declared an interest within the same item in that he was a member of Clara Residents Association and left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion in relation to Clarawood Tenants Hall.

### **Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund Update**

The Working Group noted the following report:

#### **"1. Introduction**

**The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital programme with a budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The NRF Programme is currently at Stage 3 – Delivery Stage. It is an outcomes**

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focused programme aligned to three key themes of social economy, environmental sustainability and neighbourhood tourism. Members are updated on a quarterly basis on the headline status of the NRF projects via Area Working Groups as part of the Physical Programmes Update report. This report provides more detailed information on the Fund and the status of projects in East Belfast.

**2. Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- Note the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund update for East Belfast.
- Consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.

**3. NRF Allocation Model and Allocations**

The allocation model per area for NRF as agreed by Members is based on 50% proportion of population per quadrant of the city and 50% proportion of the population that is in the top 20% area of multiple deprivation. Members agreed the allocations of the total programme budget of £10,280,000 as shown below.

***NRF – Area budgets and agreed allocations***

Area	Total budget allocation	Allocated to projects in principle	Contingency	Unallocated
North	£2,503,158	£2,434,979	£68,179	0
South	£1,978,637	£1,978,637	0	0
<b>East</b>	<b>£2,351,551</b>	<b>£2,350,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>£1,551</b>
West	£3,446,654	£3,426,875	£19,762 (Shankill)	£17

**In East Belfast the financial position to date is shown below:**

Total budget allocation	Total Net Spend to date	Balance Remaining
£2,351,551	£22,909 (1%)	£2,328,642 (99%)

**4. NRF Process**

Members agreed a 3 Stage process for the NRF projects:

- Stage 1 - Application (Emerging project)
- Stage 2 - Development (Uncommitted project)
- Stage 3 - Delivery (Committed project)

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A total of 20 projects are at *Stage 3 – Delivery* and received in-principle allocations. A total of three projects remain at *Stage 2 – Development* which means business cases were completed, but allocations were not made; and a total of 23 applicants remain at Stage 1 which means the applications passed threshold. Projects at Stages 1 and 2 form the reserve list which comprises 26 projects.

5. Current Overall Status

Offers In Principle - Letters of Offer in Principle have been issued to all 20 projects - South, North, West (24 Jan 2024), East (11 Jul 2024) which initiated the full Due Diligence process.

Design stage - Design consultant teams are in place for 16 of the 20 projects and have completed or are working up detailed designs and costings.

Planning process – Planning approval has been secured for eight projects, a decision is awaited on five lodged applications. Planning permission is not necessary for two projects.

Partnership funding – Match funding of approximately £14m has been secured in principle across 14 projects.

Project Funding Agreements – as under LIF and BIF, NRF funding agreements are issued to groups after Due Diligence and tender stage. These agreements confirm the funding offer once the contract amount is known. Four agreements have been issued to groups under NRF.

Projects underway – Five projects are currently on site – Belfast Orange Hall, Michael Davitt’s Community Heritage Centre, Sólás new build project, Act Initiative Community Hub & Visitor Centre and Ardoyne Youth Enterprise (AYE) Community Hub. Two building purchases have completed – Act Initiative and Market Heritage Hub.

6. East Belfast NRF Update

In East Belfast there are four Stage 3 projects under NRF. Two projects have funding shortfalls - EastSide Hotel & EastSide Visitor Centre and the Sporting Hub at Wilgar Park. Hosford Community Homes at 335 Newtownards Road recently bridged their funding gap with a successful application to the Wolfson Foundation. Portview Exchange is at final draft Business Case stage with TEO Urban Villages and has a funding offer in principle. For additional detailed information, please see the table below.

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**In East Belfast, there are two Stage 2 projects and there are three Stage 1 (Reserve) projects.**

<b>Stage 3 Projects</b>				
<b>Project Name &amp; NRF Themes</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Cost Estimate</b>	<b>NRF allocation &amp; match funding secured</b>	<b>Current status</b>
<b>EastSide Hotel &amp; EastSide Visitor Centre</b>  <i>Social Economy &amp; Neighbourhood Tourism</i>	Construction of a new 10 bed hotel and extension of the current EastSide Visitor Centre by EastSide Partnership	£2,250,000	NRF - £950,000 SOF - £700,000 EastSide - £400,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfer of land between Council and EastSide Partnership agreed.</li> <li>• Design Team appointed and value engineering has taken place. Options are still over budget at approximately £200,000.</li> <li>• Group is exploring funding opportunities to increase the overall budget.</li> <li>• Planning application to be submitted.</li> <li>• Contractor to be appointed.</li> </ul>
<b>Portview Exchange</b>  <i>Social Economy &amp; Neighbourhood Tourism</i>	Development of a state-of-the-art studio on the Newtownards Road by BURC comprising significant additional artist studio space as well as private rooms, workshops, test labs, a kiln and a retail shop frontage.	£3,229,365	NRF - £600,000 TEO (tbc) - £2,604,090	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business case is being updated and is at final draft.</li> <li>• Design Team to be appointed.</li> <li>• Planning is required.</li> <li>• Match funding in principle from TEO Urban Villages.</li> </ul>
<b>Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road</b>  <i>Social Economy &amp; Environmental Sustainability</i>	Demolition, alterations and refurbishment of building by East Belfast Mission into two apartments for the people who have been homeless and creation of a community/ commercial space on the ground floor.	£381,690	NRF - £300,000 Wolfson Foundation - £80,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning application submitted.</li> <li>• Wolfson Foundation has approved a grant towards the refurbishment costs of £80,000.</li> <li>• Design Team currently out for procurement and likely to be appointed in Spring 26.</li> </ul>
<b>Sporting Hub at Wilgar Park</b>  <i>Social Economy</i>	Construction of a state-of-the-art 3G community sports pitch by Dundela FC. The project will greatly enhance sporting and recreational facilities in the heart of East Belfast.	£881,394	NRF - £500,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design Team appointed.</li> <li>• Planning application submitted in December 2024 and is ongoing. Delayed by NI Water response. Water drainage assessment now underway.</li> </ul>

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current funding gap anticipated is £381,000.</li><li>• Group is actively exploring other funding opportunities.</li><li>• Council has agreed that officers will work with Dundela FC to support a DCMS/IFA funding application.</li></ul>
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**7. Next Steps**

**The Teams will continue to work with the groups to develop the NRF projects, taking them through Due Diligence, Design, Planning and contractor appointment stages as required, in line with the project pathway and best practice in construction.**

**Members will be aware as with all physical projects, challenges can emerge throughout the delivery stage such as planning and building consent approvals, or issues with title or land etc. This has been greatly minimised because of early Due Diligence that was carried out, as well as the business case process.**

**Furthermore, funding gaps remain a key challenge for a number of projects that were not allocated a full funding package via the NRF Programme. Officers will continue to work with the groups to find potential additional sources of external funding. Escalating costs represent a significant challenge for all projects in the current economic climate.**

**Members will continue to be updated via the Physical Programme AWG Update reports each quarter.**

**Members are asked to note the update provided on projects under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund.**

**Members may wish to consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.”**

**Physical Programme Update**

The Working Group considered 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**

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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 East Belfast.

**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.

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		
<b>Total Number of Approved Projects</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>£1,031,902</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>£1,161,589</b>

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	£65,000 (£30k plus £35k reallocation)	On Ground	Bloomfield FC, East Belfast FC, Tullycarnet FC, Cregagh Wanderers, Bredagh GAC Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Clonduff FC	Continue engagement with the groups.

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	<b>Wanderers, Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Bredagh GAC – storage facilities</b>			storage – completed.  Dundela FC – remaining container to be delivered. The club want to wait until after the pitch is complete before they arrange delivery.	
<b>ELIF29</b>	<b>Cycling Ireland</b>	£70,000	Due Diligence	Cycling Ireland have not decided what they want to use this funding for. They have proposed/considered a number of developments but are still undecided. Council officers are waiting more feedback from the group.	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 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:**

<b>East</b>	Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£655k Stage 2— <i>Lagan Village Youth &amp; Community—no commitment</i> Stage 1— <i>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>
<b>Outer East</b>	Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh Presbyterian Church—£382k

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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	<b>Strand Arts Centre</b>	£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	<b>On Ground.</b> Works began on site in early January 2025 and are progressing well, with completion due third quarter of 2026. Discussion ongoing with DfC regarding potential additional funding.	Continue engagement with the group and funders.
BIF13	<b>Bloomfield Community Association</b>	£715,009 <i>BIF - £655,000 LIF - £60,009</i>	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	New project location at Dixon Playing Fields agreed. Business Case Addendum being developed for submission to DfC. Designs being developed for planning. Updated costs to be provided by Design Team.	Continue engagement with the group and design team.

**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
<b>EastSide Hotel &amp; Visitor Centre</b> <i>(links to NRF project)</i>	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising: SOF- £700,000 NRF- £950,000 Group- £400k</i>	Transfer of land between Council and EastSide Partnership agreed. Design Team appointed and value engineering has taken place. Options are still over budget at approximately £200,000. Group is exploring funding opportunities to increase the overall budget. Planning application to be submitted once additional funding is sourced.	Continued engagement with the group.

**6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**

See separate detailed report on NRF.

**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.

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**East Belfast – Capital programme overview**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Status and update</b>
<b>New Crematorium</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Technical Design is complete. Procurement exercise for the main contractor has been completed. In September 2025, a dedicated Members workshop was held to inform a Strategic Analysis and Options Appraisal on the project. A report has been presented to SP&R Committee on 20 February 2026, which will go to Council on 2 March 2026.
<b>Cremated Remains Burial Plots</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Investigatory surveys underway, anticipated the Planning submission will be March 2026.
<b>Playground Improvement Programme 25/26</b>	<i>Project underway.</i> Playgrounds agreed for refurbishment are White Rise, Ohio Street, Roddens Crescent, and Finvoy Street playgrounds. Refurbishment works programmed to start at Finvoy Street in March 2026, and at Roddens Crescent in April 2026. Lagmore Activity Park (White Rise) playground refurbishment complete 17 <sup>th</sup> February 2026.
<b>Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26</b>	<i>Project underway.</i> Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. Belfast Met Campus (Montgomery Road) small-sided games pitches completed and now operational. Westlands fencing/ gates completed November 2025. Also, Planning approvals now obtained for Falls Park and Clarendon Playing Fields. Planning decision for Marrowbone Park expected in March 2026.
<b>Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide</b>	<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 March 2026.
<b>Communications Boards in playgrounds</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Delivery of 94no. boards received in January 2026, citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
<b>Basketball Courts</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> 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. Design team is currently working on outline designs and preparing tender pack.
<b>Sydenham Greenway</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> DfI Greenways Fund Letter of Offer (50% funding) received. Project progressing to procurement.
<b>Historic Cemeteries</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar's Bush, Knock Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. Surveys underway and due to complete by Spring 2026.
<b>Historic Tiled Street Signs</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Outline business case prepared. Further engagement with Members being considered.
<b>Electric Vehicle Charging Network</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Council agreed that officers begin the tender process based on a Concession Operating model. Specific locations agreed at SP&R Committee in January 2026.
<b>Depot Charging Scheme</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Installing EV chargers at 5 Council depot sites – Duncrue, Ormeau, Mallusk, Blanchflower and Belfast Zoo. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3.
<b>Mobile Changing Places modular facility</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Market research and specification scoping is currently ongoing.
<b>Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East</b>	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> 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.

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<b>Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan</b>	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to the Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East project.
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**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.

**Urban Villages Initiative**

Project	Status and update
<b>Titanic People Exhibition</b>	<i>Project underway.</i> Due to project delays, handover is expected to take place in Spring 2026.
<b>Portview Exchange</b> <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i>	<i>Business case stage.</i> UV forecast business case approval March 2026. Design team procurement prepared and ready to be issued on receipt of letter of offer.

**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
<b>Sanctuary Theatre</b>	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.

**Dfl funded project**

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

***Dfl – East Belfast projects overview***

Project	Status and update
<b>Sailortown/ Titanic Quarter Bridge</b>	Consultants have been appointed to undertake RIBA Stage 1 & 2 design services for a proposed new cross harbour pedestrian and cycle bridge. Stage 1 report now complete. “

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**Proposal**

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,  
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

“That the Working Group agrees, subject to due diligence, that the £70,000 allocated to the Cycling Ireland project under the Local Investment Fund (LIF) be reallocated as follows:

- £40,000 to Clarawood Tenants Hall; and
- £30,000 to the Ballyhackamore Parklet Project.”

On a vote, ten Members voted for the proposal and eight against and it was declared carried.

During discussion, The Director of Property and Projects advised that, following completion of the relevant due diligence, a report would be submitted to the Working Group on the proposed reallocation of funds to ensure that the projects had met the funding criteria. A Member requested that the report include also information on the potential for the Ballyhackamore Parklet project to be extended to other vacant Council land within the area.

**Further Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Long,  
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers, and

Resolved – That the Working Group agrees to write to the Minister for Communities to request an update in respect of the Department for Communities providing funding support to the redevelopment of the Strand Arts Centre.

Accordingly, the Working Group agreed:

- i. that, subject to due diligence, the £70,000 allocated to the Cycling Ireland project under the Local Investment Fund, be reallocated as follows:
  - £40,000 to Clarawood Tenants Hall; and
  - £30,000 to the Ballyhackamore Parklet Project;
- ii. that, following completion of the relevant due diligence to ensure that the projects had met the funding criteria, a report be submitted to a future meeting on the proposed reallocation of the funding, and include also information on the potential for the Ballyhackamore Parklet project to be extended to other vacant Council land within that area; and
- iii. to write to the Minister for Communities to request an update in respect of the Department for Communities providing funding support to the redevelopment of the Strand Arts Centre.

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**Knocknagoney Park Mural Project Update**

The Working Group considered a request to support the 'Bridges of Voices' youth programme, which would include a large-scale positive community mural at the tunnel/bridge within Knocknagoney Linear Park.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that the youth programme would bring together young people from Knocknagoney, Garneville and Orchard Court areas with the aim to empower young people to take pride in their local area, promote positive mental health, foster environmental awareness and reduce anti-social behavior. It was reported that the programme would involve design workshops, graffiti art training, and hands-on mural painting, led by experienced community artists.

During discussion, a Member requested that a report be brought back to the next meeting of the Working Group to provide an update in respect of the legal graffiti walls pilot.

After discussion, the Working Group

- i. noted the programme of work;
- ii. approved the intent to install a piece of artwork within Knocknagoney Linear Park; and
- iii. agreed that a report be submitted to its next meeting to provide an update on the legal graffiti walls pilot.

**Ending Violence Against Women and Girls**  
**Momentum Area Project (East) - Oral Update**

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the project details for East Belfast.

She advised that a workshop would be held in March, 2026, which would include delivery partners for the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. It was reported that a further event was planned for April, 2026, which would focus on the feedback from the March workshop and planning going forward.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that further information in relation to the events would be circulated to Members when available.

Chairperson