

DUBLIN ROAD AND BOTANIC AVENUE PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLING IMPROVEMENTS

Thank you for the opportunity to consider and respond to the Department's proposal to enhance active travel infrastructure to improve the connectivity for cyclists, pedestrians and wheeled users along Dublin Road, Shaftesbury Square and Botanic Avenue.

1. Introduction

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Infrastructure's preliminary engagement on the proposed improvements to Dublin Road, Shaftesbury Square and Botanic Avenue. This corridor is one of the most strategically important routes in the city, linking the commercial and civic heart of Belfast with the university quarter, major employment clusters and the surrounding communities of South Belfast.

The proposal arrives at a moment when Belfast is collectively reshaping how people move around, reside in and experience our city centre. Across the Council's strategic frameworks - the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan (LDP), the BCCRIS Stocktake, A Bolder Vision for Belfast, the Net Zero Carbon Roadmap, the Resilience Strategy - and now the Department's emerging Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) there is a consistent direction of travel, Belfast must transition toward a people first, climate resilient, inclusive and accessible city centre.

The Dublin Road–Botanic corridor is therefore not simply a transport scheme. It is a strategic demonstration project for the type of city Belfast intends to become.

2. Strategic Alignment

2.1 Belfast Agenda – Connectivity, Active & Sustainable Travel (CAST)

The Belfast Agenda identifies Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel (CAST) as a cross-cutting priority. The CAST action plan commits partners to supporting behavioural change away from private car use and enabling more journeys by walking, wheeling and cycling.

The Dublin Road–Botanic scheme is a practical delivery mechanism for these commitments, linking major trip generators and supporting the Belfast Agenda's wider ambitions for health, wellbeing and inclusive growth.

2.2 A Bolder Vision for Belfast (2026)

A Bolder Vision (ABV) calls for a fundamental shift away from private car dominance towards streets that prioritise walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport. It emphasises the creation of safe, accessible, flexible and healthy places that work for everyone, embedding climate adaptation, inclusive design and social wellbeing into every intervention.

The Dublin Road–Botanic corridor is an important and significant segment of the Civic Spine, one of ABV's four Key Moves. Its transformation is essential to delivering ABV's ambition for a connected, vibrant and people focused city centre. The scheme supports ABV's commitments to remove severance, create lively and inclusive streets, embed climate led placemaking, and improve perceptions of safety, particularly for women, girls and vulnerable users.

2.3 Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) Stocktake (2024)

The 2024 stocktake provides a clear rationale for interventions of this nature. Stakeholders consistently identified the need for improved connectivity, better public transport integration, high quality public realm and a reduction in car dominance. The stocktake notes that while Belfast has made significant progress, "the car is still too dominant and there are not enough trees or green spaces", and that the next decade must focus on infrastructure, connectivity and public realm improvements.

The proposed scheme to introduce two-way segregated cycle lanes from Bankmore Square to Queen's University responds directly to these findings and represents the type of catalytic, people centred intervention the stocktake calls for.

2.4 Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) Plan Strategy (2023)

The LDP provides the statutory planning framework for the city and places a clear emphasis on sustainable mobility, inclusive design and high-quality public realm. Policies SP7, TRAN 1, TRAN 2, CC1, CC2, ENV 3 and DES 2 collectively require the type of intervention proposed here: continuous, safe active travel routes; improved crossings; inclusive design; and climate resilient streets.

The scheme is therefore fully aligned with the LDP's transport hierarchy and its vision for a modern, sustainable city.

2.5 Emerging Eastern Transport Plan (ETP)

The Department's emerging Eastern Transport Plan represents a significant shift in regional transport policy. It adopts a "vision and validate" approach, prioritising the creation of places for people and explicitly supporting a modal hierarchy that places walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport above private car use.

ETP aligns closely with ABV and reinforces the need to reduce through traffic, enhance walkability and create safer, gender inclusive environments. The Dublin Road–Botanic corridor is one of the clearest opportunities to demonstrate early delivery of the ETP's principles. The Council therefore expects that the scheme will be designed and assessed in a way that is fully consistent with the ETP's emerging priorities, including:

- reducing general traffic dominance
- improving bus reliability and journey times
- creating continuous, safe active travel corridors
- integrating blue–green infrastructure
- supporting city centre living and regeneration

3. Design Standards and Inclusive Mobility Expectations

The Council wishes to be explicit that support for the scheme is contingent on the design meeting the highest standards of safety, accessibility and inclusivity.

3.1 LTN 1/20 – Cycle Infrastructure Design

The Council expects the scheme to be designed in full accordance with the Department for Transport's LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design, including:

- coherent, direct, safe and comfortable routes
- junction treatments that minimise conflict
- inclusive design for non-standard cycles

LTN 1/20 should be treated as a minimum standard, not an aspiration.

3.2 Wheels for Wellbeing – A Guide to Inclusive Cycling (4th Edition, 2020)

The Council also expects the scheme to reflect the principles set out in Wheels for Wellbeing's Guide to Inclusive Cycling, ensuring that:

- non standard cycles can use the route safely
- turning radii, widths and gradients accommodate all users
- access controls do not exclude cyclists with a disability

- resting points and clear sightlines support neurodivergent users

3.3 The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) – “A New Approach to Travel, Our Streets and Our Places” (2022)

The Council further expects the scheme to reflect the recommendations of IMTAC’s 2022 paper, a useful resource that sets out requirements to engender the ‘normalisation’ of cycling, and emphasises:

- the primacy of pedestrian safety
- the need for streets designed for people with visual or mobility impairments first
- the need for meaningful engagement with people with a disability
- the importance of predictable, legible layouts
- the avoidance of shared surface ambiguity

The Council seeks assurances from DfI that these standards and principles will be embedded from the earliest design stages.

4. Scheme-Specific Comments

4.1 Dublin Road & Bankmore Square

Bankmore Square is a key gateway into the city centre. The proposed improvements should reinforce this role by creating a seamless, legible and generous connection between the square and the active travel corridor. Public realm materials, lighting, planting and seating should be consistent with the standards set through Belfast Streets Ahead. Bus stop placement and servicing arrangements must be carefully managed to avoid undermining the safety and continuity of the pedestrian and cycle corridors.

4.2 Shaftesbury Square

Shaftesbury Square remains one of the most challenging junctions in the city. Its current layout creates severance, poor pedestrian experience and safety concerns. The Council strongly supports efforts to simplify the junction, reduce vehicle speeds and provide continuous, protected cycling provision. Pedestrian crossings should be direct, generous and aligned with desire lines. This location also presents an opportunity to begin the transformation of the square from a traffic dominated space into a civic node, with tree planting, lighting and placemaking elements that reflect ABV’s ambitions.

4.3 Botanic Avenue

Botanic Avenue is a vibrant mixed use corridor with high footfall, a strong evening economy and a significant student population. The proposed improvements should reflect its character and function. Wider footways, decluttered pavements, improved crossings and pedestrian priority side streets will support local businesses and enhance safety. Lighting, sightlines and design should explicitly address perceptions of safety, particularly for women and girls. There is also a strong opportunity to integrate street trees, SuDS and biodiversity features to create a greener, more climate resilient street.

5. Equality, Inclusion & Accessibility

The Council emphasises the importance of embedding inclusive design from the outset. Streets must work for people with a disability, older people, children, neurodivergent users and those with visual and mobility impairments. This requires careful attention to gradients, tactile paving, kerb heights, crossing timings and rest points. Engagement should include disability organisations, women’s groups, youth forums and older people’s representatives. This approach is consistent with DES 2 of the LDP, ABV’s commitment to inclusive streets, and IMTAC’s 2022 recommendations.

6. Climate Resilience & Blue–Green Infrastructure

The Council strongly encourages DfI to integrate climate led placemaking into the scheme. Sustainable

Drainage Systems (SuDS), street trees, biodiverse planting and permeable surfaces should be treated as essential components, not optional enhancements. These measures directly support ENV 3 of the LDP, the Resilience Strategy and ABV's climate adaptation objectives.

7. Delivery, Monitoring & Next Steps

The Council encourages close collaboration between DfI, Department for Communities and Council teams to ensure alignment with other major city centre projects, including Belfast Streets Ahead, Housing Led Regeneration seed sites, the Future City Centre Programme, the Waterfront Promenade Framework, Belfast Bikes expansion and Greenways. Monitoring should include mode share, traffic volumes, air quality, collision data and user perceptions of safety and accessibility. The scheme should also anticipate future ABV, ETP and Belfast Cycling Network interventions to ensure that the corridor functions as a coherent part of a wider active travel network.

The Council also encourages the Department to undertake meaningful and ongoing engagement with residents, businesses, community organisations and institutions along the corridor. Given the scale of change proposed, it is essential that those who live, work and trade in the area are fully involved in shaping the final design, ensuring that the scheme supports local economic vitality, accessibility and community wellbeing.

8. Conclusion

Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed Dublin Road and Botanic Avenue improvements. The scheme is fully aligned with the city's strategic direction and statutory planning framework. It advances the ambitions of A Bolder Vision, responds directly to the findings of the BCCRIS Stocktake, delivers on the Belfast Agenda, implements the LDP transport hierarchy, supports the Net Zero Roadmap and Resilience Strategy, and reflects the emerging priorities of the Eastern Transport Plan. Most importantly, it represents the type of bold, people-centred intervention that will help Belfast transition toward a more inclusive, sustainable and vibrant city centre