

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 18th May, 2026

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

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

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. S. Rafter, Neighbourhood Integration Manager;
Mr. N. Gowdy, Project Manager (Property and Projects);
Mr. J. Ahvee, Project Manager (City & Neighbourhood
Services); and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Lord Mayor (Councillor Kelly) and Councillor Murray.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd February were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in item 5, Request to present at a future meeting – Rosario Football Club, in that his child was a member of the club. However, as it was an update, with no decisions being taken, he did not leave the meeting.

Presentation – Rosario Football Club and Youth Club

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Copeland, General Manager, and Ms. N. Robinson, Youth Worker in Charge, to the meeting.

Mr. M. Copeland outlined the success of Rosario Football Club, which was over 100 years old, with over 1500 members, 250 volunteers and 62 teams. The Club was proud to be cross community and he stated that they had organised and hosted one of the largest annual Mini-Soccer tournaments on the island. He provided an update on the development and growth of their Pan Disability football section and their Girls' and Ladies' Teams.

Mr. Copeland explained that Rosario was in the final stages of planning for a new Pavillion building and stand which would make it one of the best-equipped and resourced clubs in Belfast. The plans included new accessible changing facilities, additional 3G

pitch capacity, improved parking and access and community use space. He explained that funding applications were currently with the Department for Communities.

Ms. Robinson advised the Working Group that Rosario Youth Centre had been in operation since 1978. It was a full-time voluntary youth centre which provided a wide and varied range of social and educational activities and programmes for those aged 9-18, living in the Ormeau Road area and beyond.

A number of Members paid tribute to the success and ongoing hard work of the club.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Property and Projects advised that she was content to liaise with the representatives of Rosario in relation to potential funding streams.

Noted.

Presentation from NI Water on Drumglass Park

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Sefton and Mr. G. Heron from NI Water, Mr. P. Knox and Ms. E. McCarron from AECOM and Mr. D. Compston from the Department for Infrastructure to the meeting.

Mr. Sefton provided the Working Group with an overview of the Drumglass Park project, which was part of a broader initiative to implement sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) which aligned with the city's Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan and the Department for Infrastructure's "Living With Water" Strategy.

The Working Group was advised that Drumglass Park had a history of surface water drainage issues due to an underground culvert which connected to the combined sewer system. During heavy rainfall, the culvert increased pressure on the sewer network, leading to flooding and pollution risks.

The project proposed a nature-based solution, creating a permanent pond to manage surface water, improve ecological diversity, and provide educational and recreational benefits to the community.

The NI Water representatives explained that the pond would be situated in a naturally low-lying area of the park and was designed to store water during heavy rainfall, reducing pressure on the sewer system. It would have a depth of 70 cm, rising to a maximum of 120 cm during storm events, with a storage capacity of 300 m³.

A Member asked for further information regarding the engagement NI Water had undertaken with local schools and what educational resources the schools would like to see.

A further Member stated that, while the project was worthwhile, it was important not to lose any further open space within the park, which was vital for children to play on. She further suggested that NI Water would approach the nearby Victoria College Belfast and encourage any pupils interested in careers such as engineering or construction to be included in site visits or discussions as the project progressed. She added that pupils from other primary schools, such as Inchmarlo and Fane Street, could also be included.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised the Members that a litter pick had been organised with pupils from Victoria College for June. She added that she would liaise with the Project Manager (Property and Projects) regarding further educational outreach.

In response to a Member's query regarding the safety of an open body of water within a park, they advised the Working Group that the project would be reviewed by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. They also confirmed that the edges would be shallow and sloped, with a natural barrier of planting and clear signage.

A further Member queried the water monitoring situation at the site.

The Working Group thanked the officials and noted the update.

Nature Towns and Cities Programme

The Project Manager for Nature Towns and Cities provided the Working Group with an overview of the UK-wide initiative.

He outlined that 40 towns and cities, in 19 urban partnerships, would receive grants from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to improve access to nature and green spaces. Over the next 10 years, it aimed to help five million more people access nearby green and blue spaces and enable one million more children to play in nature close to home. That included various kinds of urban nature, for example, street trees, community growing spaces, urban woods, historic public parks, river and canal-sides and recreation grounds.

He explained that, in Belfast, the project "Breaking Through Barriers to Connect People and Nature" would be delivered by Ulster Wildlife in partnership with the Council, supported by £850,000 in funding. The project sought to create a greener, healthier city by identifying barriers that prevented people from connecting with nature and finding ways to introduce more natural spaces into everyday urban environments.

The work focused on five key areas:

- Supporting communities through skills and capacity building;
- Exploring opportunities to "green the grey" in built-up areas;
- Improving parks and open spaces for wildlife and climate resilience;
- Using better data to guide future planning and decisions; and
- Building long-term support through partnerships, volunteering, and training opportunities.

A number of Members raised the recent Motion stating the Council's support for Belfast to become a National Park City (NPC) and asked whether officers had been in touch with Wild Belfast. A Member stated that she felt the NPC status was a good goal for the Council and its partners to work towards. The Project Manager confirmed that he had met with Wild Belfast on a number of occasions and that they were returning soon to present a further update to the City and Neighbourhoods Department.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, thanked the officer for the update.

Noted.

Physical Programmes Update

The Director of Property and Projects presented the following report to the Working Group:

“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 – Capital Programme Alleygating Phase 5 and; DfC Lower Ormeau Youth Hub - St John Vianney; and,
- Note the update on the Local Community Ownership Fund (LCOF).

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	
<i>Stage/ Description:</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount (£)</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount/ (£)</i>
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 is complete and some maintenance works recently undertaken. Continuing to try to progress permissions regarding planters and artwork on several utility boxes.	Continue engagement with partners.

All 24 LIF projects in South Belfast have 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.

South	Stage 3 - Lagan Gateway - £2.1m; Market Arches - £1.3m; Bredagh GAC - £700k; Coffee Culture - £286k Stage 2 - Sandy Row Open Space project- £479k
Balmoral DEA	Stage 3 - Knockbreda Parish Church Hall - £250k; Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC - £250k

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF04	Lagan Gateway Phase 2	£1,428,650 <i>BIF- £579,324 DfI Greenways- £714,326</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	Awaiting Planning approval. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring landowners regarding Right of Way and Land Agreements.	Continue engagement with the public, landowners and key stakeholders.
BIF07	Market Arches	£3.3m <i>BIF -£1.3m UV – £2m</i>	Stage 3- Committed	The Executive Office is reviewing the business case. Procurement of design team underway.	Continue engagement with the group.

BIF46	Coffee Culture	£1,317,679 <i>BIF-£286,519 SOF-£100,000 Cost Risks- £100,000 UV- £531,160 DfC-£300,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Works have started on site with demolitions and ground works and are progressing well. Due for completion early 2027. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF33	Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC	£250,000	Stage 3- Committed	ICT procurement now underway.	Continue engagement with the group and partners.
BIF47	Sandy Row Open Space project	£479,314*	Stage 2- Uncommitted <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Phase 1 of Blythefield Park open to the public. Translink remediation works complete to Phase 2. Discussions underway regarding handover arrangements. Bentham Drive Playpark sensory equipment to be included. Discussions ongoing. <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 are complete. 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
SOF02 Coffee Culture	£1,149,821 <i>SOF-£100,000 BIF- £286,519 UV- £463,302 DfC-£300,000</i>	Works have started on site with demolitions and ground works and are progressing well. Due for completion early 2027.	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

South	<p>Stage 3 - Sólás New Build project, GVRT Branching Out project, Lagan Water Access Activity Hub, Redevelopment of former School of Music, Market Heritage Hub</p> <p>Stage 2 (<i>Reserve</i>) - Redevelopment of Riddel's Warehouse</p> <p>Stage 1 (<i>Reserve</i>) - <i>The Avenue Arts Centre, An Droichead Annex, Lagan Legacy</i></p>
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South Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
Sólás New Build project	£2.5m <i>NRF- £362,141 COF- £800,000 Various funders and group</i>	Stage 3- Committed <i>Delivery stage</i>	On Ground. Work is continuing on site. Expected to complete late 2026.	Continue engagement with the group.
GVRT- Branching Out project	£840,000 <i>NRF- £500,000 DiC- £40,000 (design fees) Garfield Weston - £300,000</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	Funding recently secured from Garfield Weston. Design team appointed to bring project up to contractor procurement.	Continue engagement with the group.
Lagan Water Access Activity Hub	£308,248	Stage 3 - Committed	Progressing through Planning.	Continue engagement with the group.
Redevelopment of former School of Music	£2,308,248 <i>NRF-£308,248 UV- £2m</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	The Executive Office is reviewing the business case. Procurement of design team underway.	Continue engagement with the group.
Market Heritage Hub	£800,000 <i>NRF- £500,000 COF- £300,000</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	NRF Funding expended. Group is preparing an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for restoration of the building and transformation into heritage facility.	Continue engagement with the group.

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
Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	<i>Stage 3 - Committed.</i> Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. Work is progressing.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Project complete.</i>
City Hall – Installation of Stained Glass Windows – LGBT and NHS	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Unveiling of new LGBTQ+ window completed in 2025. NHS – Artist appointed. Draft design signed off by City Hall Installations Working Group on 13 May. Project will go for approval to SP&R on 22 May 26.
City Hall External Christmas Tree provision	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Contractor appointed and tree order placed.
St George’s Market – New Stalls	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> 100 stalls and 100 baskets were installed at the end of April. Progressing the construction and assembly of the remaining stalls.
Communications Boards	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
Musgrave Park Sensory Garden	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Upgrade to sensory garden. Project is on site. Additional accessible playground equipment has been installed and work is now nearing completion on the sensory trail.
Basketball Courts	<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 finalising designs and preparing tender pack. Planning applications for Black’s Road and Páirc Nua Chollann required and to be submitted shortly. The other courts do not require planning permission.
Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Feature lighting to exterior of Ulster Hall. Design and delivery to be fully funded by DfC and Linen Quarter BID. Contractor appointed.
Electric Vehicle Charging Network	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Tender preparation is nearing completion and the tender is due to be issued imminently.
Depot Charging Scheme	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Installing EV chargers at five Council depot sites. Chargers installed at four sites – Blanchflower, Duncrue, Mallusk and the Zoo. Ormeau underway.
Staff Cycle Racks Installation at Council sites	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted –</i> Outline Business Case prepared regarding installation of new cycle racks in Cecil Ward Building, City Hall and other premises to improve provision.
Historic Cemeteries	<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 have been completed for Friar's Bush, Knock and Balmoral Cemetery.
Historic Tiled Street Signs	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Currently compiling a list of signs for pilot project to restore historic tiled street signs across the city.
Waterfront Hall Chiller Units	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Detailed design of the new chiller/heat pump system is continuing. In order to avoid potential cooling issues next season, a temporary chiller solution has been designed. Procurement exercise has completed and project is now ready to appoint the contractor subject to approval at SP&R.
Wilmont House H&S Works	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Procurement process underway for remedial works.
Palm House, Botanic Gardens	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Consultants are continuing to work on the Conservation Management Plan. Draft structural and horticulturalist reports complete and the full report will be finalised in the coming weeks.
City Hall Security Improvements	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Capital works put forward to make City Hall a safer place for visitors, employees and elected Members. Project out to tender for Integrated Consultancy Team.
City Hall Preservation	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Programme of works to ensure the preservation of the City Hall building.
2 Royal Avenue – Landlord Capital works	<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. Design team working on options for consideration and agreement.
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Market research and specification scoping is ongoing.
Wilmont House	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Redevelopment of Wilmont House. Feasibility study is underway and will progress after Health & Safety works are complete.

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
The Lockhouse - Gateway to the River / Walkway	Restarted onsite in February 2026.

Coffee Culture	As above at BIF46. Works have started on site with demolitions and ground works and are progressing well. Due for completion early 2027.
Market Arches	As above at BIF07. The Executive Office is reviewing business case. Procurement of design team underway.
Redevelopment of former School of Music	Business case being developed. Planning submitted. Timeline subject to TEO approvals process.
Donegall Pass Good Relations Hub	Business case being developed. Timeline subject to TEO approvals process.

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
Annadale Open Space	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. Planning to be submitted. Funding for pitch to be confirmed. Ongoing Stakeholder meetings.

DfC funded projects

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

DfC – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Lower Ormeau Youth Hub - St John Vianney	Project complete.
Holylands Alleygating and Cleansing Project	Link to the citywide Alleygating Phase 5 project.

DfI funded projects

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

DfI – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Lagan Gateway Phase 2	As above as BIF04. Planning Approval (green certificate) awaited. Contractor procurement complete and letter of award issued to successful contractor. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring landowners regarding Right of Way and Land Agreements.
Drumglass Park SuDS Project	Project in development.

9. Local Community Ownership Fund

Members will be aware that Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved the Local Community Ownership Fund (LCOF), a £1.5 million initiative investing in the transformation of local places, supporting community wealth building and capacity development.

The LCOF will support capital related projects that:

- support the acquisition of community assets or existing derelict sites for viable and sustainable community use.**
- prevent the risk of loss of such assets in local community areas and ensure that they are used for maximum community benefit.**
- enable existing community groups to move to new, larger and/or more appropriate locations within the same area.**
- strengthen local community ownership of assets.**
- strengthen social & community infrastructure that needs to be in place to allow local areas to thrive.**

The LCOF will involve an open call for applications, with three stages to the application and approval process. The fund will remain open to applications until respective area allocations are exhausted. The amount allocated to South Belfast is £297,418.

The Stage 1 Expression of Interest will open on Wednesday 20 May and will close on Wednesday 16 June. The Stage 2 Application process will open on Friday 19 June and will close on Friday 28 August. It is anticipated that updates on all applications and the assessment results will be brought to the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for decisions on next steps. Groups will be able to find information on the Council's website and Council officers will respond to queries throughout the application process."

She advised the Working Group that, although an update on the Blackstaff Greenway was accidentally missing from the report, she assured the Members that the project was still under development.

She highlighted the new Local Community Ownership Fund, which would open later in the week, and requested that the Members would share the details of it with any community groups which they thought could make use of it. In response to a Member's query, she confirmed that information from incoming applications would be used to help build a picture of potential future capital projects.

She further suggested that the Working Group could hold a meeting in one of the completed projects in the Autumn.

The Working Group noted the updates provided.

Chairperson