

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 4th June, 2026

MEETING OF THE EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Long (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Abernethy;
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor,
and Rodgers; and
Councillors Bell, R. Brooks, D. Douglas,
S. Douglas, P. Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn,
Maghie, McAteer and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. R. Campbell-Palmer, Culture Development Manager;
Ms. S. McGowan, Culture Development Officer;
Mr. J. Ahvee, Project Manager (Nature Towns and Cities
Programme);
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Election of Chairperson

The Area Working Group noted that it was required to elect a Chairperson for the coming year.

Proposal

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – that Councillor Long be elected to serve as Chairperson of the East Belfast Area Working Group until the date of the Local Government Elections in May, 2027.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Bower, Hanvey and McCormick.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 5th March, 2026, were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

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Legal Graffiti Walls Project Update

The Culture Development Manager and the Culture Development Officer provided the Working Group with an update on the Legal Graffiti Walls Pilot Project.

The Culture Development Officer provided the Working Group with an overview of the project, which was developed by the Council in 2024 as part of its Cultural Strategy 'A City Imagining 2020-23' to support the street art scene and encourage engagement in street art skills in a safe, legal and supported capacity.

She advised the Working Group that Seedhead Arts had been appointed to the deliver the Legal Walls Pilot, alongside the Council's Culture Unit, and that there were currently two legal walls located at Little Patrick Street and Corporation Street. She outlined the established rules for the walls and advised that they were monitored by Seedhead Arts alongside the local artist H.M Constance.

The Working Group was provided with further information in relation to the key impacts and highlights of the pilot project, which included high levels of engagement, positive feedback from both residents and visitors to the city, use of the walls by the Belfast School of Art, and an increase in the number of female artists who had utilised the walls which had resulted in commissions as part of the 'Hit the North' festival. It was reported that there had been no increase in anti-social behaviour associated with the legal walls and no incidents of hate speech or sectarianism.

The Culture Development Officer informed the Working Group that there was an ongoing commitment, through the Culture Unit's agreed workplan for 2026/27, to continue the legal walls pilot.

During discussion, the Culture Development Manager and the Culture Development Officer answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the artists using the walls, the promotion of the walls and the monitoring of the walls.

Noted.

Nature Towns and Cities Programme Update (Verbal Update)

The Project Manager for the Nature Towns and Cities (NTC) Programme presented the Working Group with an update on the UK-wide initiative, which was committed to bring nature and green space to urban areas for everyone's benefit and to help put nature, green infrastructure and heritage at the heart of local decision making.

He stated that, by 2035, the NTC programme aimed to connect five million more people with nature close to home, transform one hundred towns and cities through better natural environments, help one million more children access nature-rich spaces, and support one thousand communities in taking climate action.

He informed the Working Group that Belfast was one of nineteen towns and cities which had been awarded capacity building grants in 2025. It was reported that the Council would deliver the Belfast project 'Breaking Through Barriers to Connect People and Nature', in partnership with Ulster Wildlife, and be supported by £850,000 of funding from

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the National Lottery Heritage Fund to help enable work with communities and partners across Belfast to create a greener and healthier city.

The Working Group was provided with an overview of the city's project, which included detail on the:

- Vision - urban spaces as key community assets, connecting people, enhancing nature and helping the city adapt to climate change;
- Project area;
- Belfast Environmental Justice Index;
- Challenges - biodiversity loss, climate resilience and access to nature and sustainability;
- Opportunities - building on existing ongoing work to address challenges, the knowledge and lived experiences of the city's people, and the broad range of stakeholders; and
- Objectives - capacity building, partnership nurturing, engaging and empowering communities and designing a shared blueprint for Belfast.

The Project Manager highlighted that the shared blueprint would facilitate informed decision making to create a nature-rich, climate resilient and thriving city. He provided the Working Group with further information in respect of the stakeholder engagement to help design the shared blueprint, which would focus on the following five key areas:

- Supporting communities and stakeholders through skills and capacity building;
- Exploring opportunities to 'green the grey' in built-up areas;
- Identifying how parks and open spaces could be better managed for wildlife and climate resilience;
- Assess the data we use, and how we can use it to make better informed decisions; and
- Building long-term support through partnerships, volunteering, and training opportunities.

During discussion, the Project Manager answered a number of questions from the Members on the work of the project and in relation to the stakeholder and community engagement.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided and agreed that the Project Manager would attend the Working Group biannually to provide an update on the work of the project.

Physical Programmes 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 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 including the recently completed projects – Capital Programme Playground Improvement Programme 25/26- Finvoy Street playground; and Alleygating Phase 5 at Appendix 1;
- Consider the revised proposal from Cycling Ireland and reallocation of LIF; and
- Note the update on the Local Community Ownership Fund (LCOF).

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	Storage facilities	£65,000 <i>(£30k plus £35k reallocation)</i>	On Ground	Complete except for Dundela FC – container to be delivered after pitch is complete.	Continue engagement with the groups.
ELIF29	Cycling Ireland	£70,000	Due Diligence	See below.	Continue engagement with the group.

Recommendation on LIF reallocation - Members will recall that in March the East AWG recommended that £70,000 be reallocated from LIF Cycling Ireland to Clarawood Tenants Hall (£40,000) and Ballyhackamore Parklet Project (£30,000), subject to due diligence. At SP&R Committee, that recommendation was referred to a special meeting which was scheduled in April but cancelled. Also in March, SP&R agreed as part of the Council’s Capital Programme of improvements to its own assets, to progress the Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme to *Stage 3 – Committed* which is to include the Ballyhackamore Parklet.

LIF Cycling Ireland - Council officers met with a Cycling Ireland representative in April. The group recognise that the original proposal on the Henry Jones site is not achievable under LIF. Cycling Ireland remain committed to a project in East Belfast and are willing to explore other more suitable venues with the Council. The group also advised that a new Ulster Development officer is now being recruited. The group has worked up alternative proposals with a reduced scope for Members’ consideration: 1) Learn to Cycle Track e.g. cycling proficiency and 2) Modular Pump Track. Subject to Members’ reconsideration of the recommendation on reallocation, options can be brought back to Members in due course.

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Members are asked to consider the revised proposal from Cycling Ireland and reallocation of LIF.

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:

East	Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£655k Stage 2— <i>Lagan Village Youth & 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>
Outer East	Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh Presbyterian Church—£382k

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 are progressing well and are due to complete in Autumn 2026. Discussion ongoing with DfC regarding potential additional funding.	Continue engagement with the group and funders.
BIF13	Bloomfield Community Association	£715,009 <i>BIF - £655,000 LIF - £60,009</i>	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	In development. Business Case Addendum being developed for submission to DfC. Planning designs and updated costs being developed based on Dixon Playing Fields location.	Continue engagement with the group and design team.

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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>	Value engineering process is continuing. Group is actively seeking more funding opportunities so that sustainability enhancements can be introduced. Planning application to be submitted once additional funding is sourced.	Continued engagement with the group.

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
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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	As above. Value engineering process is continuing. Group is actively seeking more funding opportunities so that sustainability enhancements can be introduced. Planning application to be submitted	Continued engagement with the group.

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			once additional funding is sourced.	
Portview Exchange	£3.6m <i>Comprising: NRF-£600k TEO- £2.9m Group- £25k</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	Linked to UV project. UV business case almost complete and BCC await its submission. Procurement documentation being prepared for approval by UV and ready to issue once business case is accepted.	Continue engagement with the group.
Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park	£500,000	Stage 3 - Committed	In Planning. After a long delay, NI Water responded on 15 May 2026. Special Environmental Services have been reconsulted - target date for response is 5 June. Dundela FC await a decision on their DCMS/IFA funding application.	Continue engagement with planners re update of planning application.
Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road	£380,000 <i>Comprising: NRF-£300k WF- £80k</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	In Planning. Design team procurement nearing completion.	Continue engagement with the group.

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 and Contractor procurement complete. At the March Council meeting, Members noted that the decision of 20 February 2026 relating to the crematorium had been Called-in and therefore was not before the Council for consideration.
Cremated Remains Burial Plots	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Planning application was submitted in March 2026.
Playground Improvement Programme 25/26	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Agreed at P&C Committee in May 2025. Works complete at White Rise, Ohio Street, and Finvoy Street playgrounds. Refurbishment will be undertaken in Roddens Crescent playground in the Summer.

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Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	<i>Project underway.</i> Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. In East, Belfast Met Campus (Montgomery Road) small-sided games pitches completed and operational.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	Project complete.
Communications Boards in playgrounds	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
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.
Pitches Programme	<i>Stage 3 - Committed.</i> Agreed at SP&R Committee in February 2026. Draft implementation plan being refined.
Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme 2025-2027	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Programme of improvement works to parks and open spaces across the Council estate. Progressing.
Sydenham Greenway	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> DfI Greenways Fund Letter of Offer (50% funding) received. Design team has been 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.
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.
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.
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.
Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Creation of lit spine and associated path/ access improvements to facilitate extended opening hours on selected parks.
Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East	<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.
Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan	<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
Titanic People Exhibition	Project on site - due to project delays, handover is expected to take place in Spring 2026. Launch initially planned for early June 2026.
Portview Exchange <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i>	<i>Business case stage.</i> UV business case almost complete and BCC await its submission. Procurement documentation being prepared for approval by UV and ready to issue once business case is accepted.

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. Procurement process for contractor has begun.

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
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 bridge. Stage 2 Report due for completion June 2026.

9. Local Community Ownership Fund

Members will be aware that Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved the Local Community Ownership Fund

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(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 East Belfast is £337,810.

The Stage 1 Expression of Interest opened on Wednesday 20 May and will close on Wednesday 17 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. Members are asked to note the update on the Local Community Ownership Fund."

The Director of Property and Projects reminded the Working Group that, at its meeting in March, 2026, it had agreed to recommend, subject to due diligence, that the £70,000 allocated to Cycling Ireland under the Local Investment Fund (LIF) be reallocated to Clarawood Tennants Hall (£40,000) and the Ballyhackamore Parklet Project (£30,000). She highlighted that, at its meeting in March, 2026, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had agreed to progress the Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme to 'Stage 3 – Committed', which would include the Ballyhackamore Parklet.

The Director informed the Working Group that officers had engaged with Cycling Ireland who had recognised that the original proposal and site would not be achievable under the LIF funding. She stated that Cycling Ireland remained committed to deliver a project within East Belfast and would engage with Council officers to explore more suitable venues.

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She advised the Working Group, for its consideration, that there was also £30,000 of LIF underspend available.

Proposal

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,
Seconded by Councillor Long (Chairperson) and

Resolved – That the Working Group agrees to recommend that, subject to due diligence, the £70,000 allocated to the Cycling Ireland project under the Local Investment Fund (LIF) and the £30,000 of LIF underspend, be reallocated as follows:

- £50,000 to Clarawood Tenants Hall;
- £30,000 to Cycling Ireland; and
- £20,000 to Hosford Community Homes.

The Working Group agreed also that officers would continue to engage with Cycling Ireland to explore alternative sites for a cycling project in East Belfast and that a report be submitted to its next meeting which would outline potential options.

Request to Present - The Larder

The Working Group agreed to receive a presentation from the Larder at its next meeting on 3rd September, 2026.

Knocknagoney Park Mural Project

Councillor Flynn reminded the Working Group that, at its meeting March, 2026, it had approved the intent for a piece of artwork to be installed within Knocknagoney Linear Park as part of the initiative 'Inspiring Youth - Bridge of Voices' by the local Knocknagoney, Garnerville and Orchard Residents' Group.

He highlighted the positive sessions which had been held by the residents' group in relation to the initiative, which he and several other Members of the Working Group had attended, and advised that the resident's group would be keen to explore a further local initiative to install a second piece of artwork within the park.

At the request of Councillor Flynn, the Working Group agreed that officers would engage with the residents' group in respect of the potential for a further local initiative to install a second piece of artwork within the Knocknagoney Linear Park.

Chairperson