



Subject:	Improving City Centre Connections
Date:	6th November, 2019
Reporting Officer:	Sean Dolan, Acting Director, City Regeneration and Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	This report provides an update on (i) the City Centre Connectivity Study (CCCS), co-commissioned with DfC and DfI, including the proposed process and engagement to develop the City centre Future Vision, and (ii) on the emerging work programme with DfC in relation to civic spaces.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to: i. note the appointment of the Jacobs consultancy team to carry out the CCCS and develop the future vision for Belfast city centre. This will include examining models of pedestrianisation and other initiatives in a way which facilitates the development of the

	<p>city centre, enabling both pedestrian enjoyment and public transport access while ensuring a vibrant and inclusive space for the future city centre;</p> <p>ii. agree to develop communication and awareness raising programme that builds interest and discussion in the city about the future shape and functions of the city centre;</p> <p>iii. agree to progress the exploratory work to determine the impact of the proposed transfer of civic spaces from DfC to the Council;</p> <p>iv. agree to the Jacobs Consultancy team presenting the draft Future Vision to the Committee in February, 2020.</p>
3.0	Main Report
	<u>City Centre Connectivity Study</u>
3.1	<p>The Belfast Agenda outlines the City's ambition to promote the development of sustainable transport and includes promoting walking and cycling. The support, and concept, of sustainable place-making in the city reflects one of the key policies in the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), which seeks to create a green, walkable, cycleable city centre. It specifically references the lack of green space and tree-lined streets, and identifies the need for rebalancing the scales between tarmac and soft landscaping and recognises that there is no provision for children in the city centre.</p>
3.2	<p>As outlined at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting in June, the Council, the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure have agreed to jointly commission a study to examine how the City Centre could develop in a way that is people-focused, inclusive and welcoming for all. The focus of the study is on place-making and will include an examination of models of pedestrianisation and other initiatives, which would facilitate the development of the City Centre, enabling both pedestrian enjoyment and sustainable access. The area of focus for the study will be the primary retail core of the city centre but it will also address the connectivity issues between the city centre and adjacent communities and key connectivity routes. A joint, BCC, DfC and DfI press release was issued following the meeting that reiterated the agreed commitment to undertaking an holistic and ambitious study of the city centre. Coupled with the recent council declaration of a Climate Emergency the study provides an opportunity to explore issues and solutions within, and around the city centre, and is in line with the Air Quality Action Plan and emerging Resilience Strategy.</p>

3.3	<p>The study will be delivered through a staged approach that provides analysis, addresses future growth and sets out a vision for the city centre based on stakeholder engagement and analysis. The Terms of Reference and the Specification were agreed by BCC, DfC and DfI and an open tender for Phase 1 of the study was issued on 23 August and closed on 13 September. Jacobs was successful in the tender and are proactively working with officers and departmental officials to develop the draft Future Vision for the city centre.</p>
3.4	<p>Phase 1 Sept – Dec 2019: Within this initial Phase there are three elements of work that will result in the shared Vision for the city centre. Step one, <i>Understanding Best Practice</i> will inform the debate on how Belfast could address some of the current issues through analysis of established benefits and dis-benefits of approaches that other cities with similar characteristics have implemented to transform their city centre. Step two, <i>Understanding Belfast City Centre</i>, will look at how the city centre functions to ensure a balance between the different requirements and needs of users. This section will establish a baseline in terms of access, city centre servicing, deliveries, movement and footfall, modes of transport and land use. Step 2 will also explore the changing nature of the city centre, including mapping out the emerging and built / under-construction developments that will deliver the diversification of the city centre including enhanced tourism, city centre living, working, leisure and open and green infrastructure. Building on this information and best practice, the final step will be to develop an ambitious vision of how people could better use the spaces where they live, work and play.</p>
3.5	<p>Phase 2 April 2020: Develop an action plan to provide options based on the delivery of the Future Vision. The action plan and options will be used to inform discussions with key city partners, statutory authorities and city leaders, and during the proposed public consultation in Phase 3.</p>
3.6	<p>Phase 3 Apr – Sept 2020: Carry out a 12 week, city-wide public consultation on the options to deliver the Future Vision and the emerging recommendations for action. This consultation will include a range of public events and engagement, detailed engagement with existing city centre residents and key focus groups prior to finalisation of the Future Vision and delivery plan.</p>

	<p><i>Stakeholder Engagement Phase 1</i></p>
3.7	<p>To develop the draft Future Vision stakeholder engagement across sectors and in particular, with adjacent city centre communities, is critical to the success of the scale and ambition of this project and will take place during each phase of the project. The BCC/DfC/DfI Steering Group meets regularly and a Stakeholder Engagement Plan is currently under-development with the following engagement proposed to inform the draft Future Vision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to one engagement with key stakeholders, statutory authorities, delivery partners and focus groups; • A Visioning Workshop will take place in November with key civic partners and organisations to establish an agreed ambition for the Future Vision; • A briefing workshop will be held with Members in November to provide an update on the engagement, to test the emerging ambition and to input and contribute to the draft Future Vision • A programme of public engagement and communications focused on maintaining the awareness of the study and to provide the public with an opportunity to contribute the development of the draft Future Vision.
3.8	<p>Members will be briefed further following the finalisation of the draft Future Vision and agreement sought prior to advancing to the next stage of the study.</p> <p><u>Transfer of Civic Spaces</u></p>
3.9	<p>In 2015, a number of DfC owned Civic Open Spaces were scheduled to be transferred to BCC as part of Local Government Reform. Among these publicly-owned assets DfC have focused on ownership of a number of civic open spaces in the city centre, including Custom House Square, Bank Sq., Blackstaff Sq., Cotton Court, Donegall Quay, Hanover Quay and Writer's Sq. A key theme of the City Centre Regeneration Task Force theme of 'Re-imagining and Diversification' of the city centre and making better use of publicly-owned assets.</p>
3.10	<p>DfC has written seeking Council's view on whether there would be agreement in principle to transferring these particular civic open spaces into Council ownership. DfC have had preliminary discussions with the Strategic Investment Board to explore viability of transferring ownership of these civic spaces to the Council and have identified a number of issues for</p>

	further consideration and to establish lifecycle costs, potential liabilities, valuations and any conditions on transfer.
3.11	<p>A number of workshops have been held with DfC/BCC/SIB to progress agreement around technical due diligence and procurement of condition surveys. These surveys will be a joint commission, but fully funded by DfC, to provide visibility around cost associated with bringing the spaces up to a 'compliant' standard and also to look at whole life budgeting on enhanced specifications. SIB have provide a draft specification for a pilot survey that would test the potential transfer methodology to be adopted. A future progress report will be presented to Committee in the coming months.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p>
3.12	<p>There are no negative Equality, Good Relation or Rural Needs implications at this point. The Council's Equality and Diversity Officer will be consulted during any future consultation process and any proposed approach will be subject to the Council's screening requirements to ensure that Equality and Good Relations implications and Rural Needs are fully considered.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.13	<p>The costs for the proposed publicity and awareness rising will be approximately £20,000 and will be met within current budget.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None