



<b>Subject:</b>	Proposed Alleyway Transformation Programme
<b>Date:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2020
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhoods Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Stephen Leonard, Neighbour Services Manager (South)

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Some time in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to give the committee an update on progress to date in response to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Motion proposed by Councillor Dorrian and Seconded by Councillor Newton (September 2018): “This Council will engage with relevant agencies to develop protocols in respect to addressing issues around unadopted alleyways across the City, recognising health and safety and public hygiene concerns. All efforts should be also made to identify legal owners and compel them to meet their obligations.”</li><li>• A request from Cllr Kelly(August 2020): ‘following the success of initiatives such as Wildflower Alley and similar projects across the city, that the Committee would write the Department for Communities, Department of Justice and Department for</li></ul>

1.2	<p>Infrastructure with a view to co-ordinating support and assistance for residents and groups who would like to transform and regenerate communal and open spaces throughout the city.’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minute action from February 2020: Members will recall at the Feb 2020 People and communities Committee, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of appointing an external alleygate review, to enable a further report to be submitted on the possibility of the evaluation being undertaken in-house or options to reduce costs associated with an external evaluation.</li> <li>• The Motion which had been moved by Councillor McKeown and seconded by Councillor de Faoite (September 2020, People &amp; Communities Committee): ‘Determines that a new funded alleygating programme is included as part of Council’s Recovery Plan, recognising the intrinsic benefit and popularity of existing alleygating programmes. Agrees that this new alleygating programme, when determining eligible streets, should give equal consideration and scoring to the efforts of communities to develop and maintain their alleyways as is currently given to crime-reduction and anti-social behaviour concerns.’</li> </ul> <p>In response to this motion, the September meeting of the People &amp; Communities Committee agreed that a comprehensive report on Alleygates and Alleyways would be submitted to a future meeting, which would consider previous Motions along with the financial resources available and reference any potential external funding opportunities.</p>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note the work carried out to date in response to the un-adopted alleyways Notice of Motion,</li> <li>- Note the update on alleyway transformation in particular the follow up meetings with the Department of Infrastructure and Department for Justice</li> </ul>
2.2	<p>The committee is also asked to note that following consideration by officers it is not in a position to undertake an in-house evaluation of the phases 1-4 of the alleygating scheme. Members are therefore asked to agree that the Council procure an external consultant to</p>

	complete this evaluation and that this evaluation is carried out in accordance with the criteria listed in paragraph 3:30 of this report.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
	<b><u>Key Issues</u></b>
3.1	<p>It is acknowledged that there is different levels of support required from different Council departments to deal with issues presented by alleyways across the city. This level of support can vary according to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the condition of alleyway,</li> <li>- the ownership (privately owned, adopted / un-adopted)</li> <li>- the level of anti-social behaviour in the area</li> <li>- the current level of community engagement and/or community capacity to support any interventions in their areas.</li> </ul>
3.2	<p>This report updates members on work officers have been carrying out in respect of un-adopted alleyways, alley transformation and sourcing financial support for alleyway transformation schemes. It also reports back to members on a request from this committee to explore the feasibility of carrying out a review of the alley-gating scheme internally.</p>
3.3	<p>Officers have since went back and looked at the option of carrying out an 'in house' review and have concluded that this is not a feasible option, as they do not have the required expertise or resources in house to do so.</p>
3.4	<p>Officers are still recommending that an external contractor is appointed to conduct the alleygate review and have developed a specification framework to guide the successful consultant through the evaluation process. The specification has incorporated consideration to issues raised by councillors in the fore-mentioned notice of motions. It is hoped the outcome of the review can help to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- recommend long-term solutions for unadopted alleyways,</li> <li>- provide options for transformation/regeneration of alleyways,</li> <li>- as well as reviewing current alleygate criteria, taking into account the potential amendment to include consideration of community effort in maintaining their alleyways, in addition to the use of anti-social behaviour statistics.</li> </ul>

- 3.5 **Adoption/Ownership of Alleyways:**  
**Un-Adopted Alleyways**
- 3.6 Un-adopted alleyways are an issue of particular concern for Belfast City Council. Many of these areas have poor, uneven surfaces; are overgrown with vegetation; often have surface water accumulations and are generally in a very poor state of repair. Generally, they are not maintained by anyone. This creates difficulties for residents in terms of their ability to leave bins for collection and for Council staff in moving bins within these areas. Given the dangerous nature of some un-adopted back alleyways, it is difficult, and in some instances prohibitive, for Council staff to collect bins, litter pick or remove bulky items. Councils believe that this position is not acceptable or sustainable and previously have written to the NI Assembly requesting that due consideration is given to how un-adopted alleyways are kept maintained and fit-for-purpose.
- 3.7 Our Regulatory Services team receive regular complaints in relation to illegal dumping, pest infestations etc. Despite interventions by them and our Open Space & Streetscene teams these problems continue to recur
- 3.8 If an alleyway is 'adopted DFI will manage and maintain it'. If it is not adopted the responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance is the responsibility of those properties that frontage these alleyways. Unfortunately none of the un-adopted alleyways are in a good state of repair and the Department will not consider adopting them unless they are brought up to the required standard. In most cases the costs of upgrading can be beyond the means of residents that frontage these areas. In the absence of adoption the only option available to statutory authorities is to identify if there is an owner of the land which could determine liability. In response to the Notice Of Motion
- 3.9 An interdepartmental approach has been taken and a working group set up involving the council environmental health, legal and estates departments. This group have identified the top 20 most problematic unadopted alleyways. This was based on the alleyways that had the most recorded complaints in relation to pest control, cleansing and public health nuisance.
- 3.10 Currently the council estates team are trying to identify ownership of the top 20 alleyways based on local knowledge. If owners are identified via this method, the council enforcement

team will use their statutory power to compel the owners to meet their obligations and address sub-standard conditions.

3.11 In the case where no legal owners can be identified, officers are proposing to adopt a pilot project, whereby the council legal team will seek to identify the ownership of four unadopted alleyways, one from each area of the city: North, South, East and West. The aim of this pilot is to:

- firstly identify ownership of the top 4 alleyways
- Secondly, to refine a process whereby ownership can be identified, including approximate cost and time resources required, to apply a phased approach identifying ownership of the remaining top 16 alleyways over the next 2 - 3 years.

3.12 Parallel to this work officers from Regulatory Services and Building Control will audit the alleyways. The availability of owner information will assist officers with any subsequent enforcement work. DFI are aware of the working group and the work carried out to date and have committed to supporting the work where they can.

#### **Transformation / Regeneration**

3.13 It is recognised that the COVID-19 crisis has allowed local communities to develop a greater appreciation of open and green spaces throughout the city. Some communities have shown capacity and have independently taken an active role in improving their communal spaces, providing an opportunity for their community to enjoy fresh air, activity and socially distanced interaction during the difficult months of lockdown.

3.14 The council currently offer support to empower communities to improve their own communal spaces. This includes support to develop community gardens, set-up parklets and the regeneration of communal alleyways and open spaces. Support from council parks and community development teams includes: educational support and skill development, assistance with grant applications and as well as gifting communities with small items such as planters, plants, seeds etc.

3.15 Feedback from officers involved in supporting these programmes suggest that the most successful and sustainable programmes are those which are community led. Officers will continue to work within communities to support such endeavours, in consultation with local community groups and councillors.

**Partnership with DOJ and DFI**

- 3.16 In response to People and Communities request in August 2020, City and Neighbourhood services wrote the Department for Communities, Department of Justice and Department for Infrastructure with a view to co-ordinating support and assistance for residents and groups who would like to transform and regenerate communal and open spaces throughout the city.
- 3.17 To date meetings have taken place with Department of Justice and Department for Infrastructure. As yet there has been no response from Department of Communities and a follow up letter has been issued.
- 3.18 Attached is letter of support from Department of Justice. A subsequent meeting with DOJ officer indicated that it may be possible to provide some financial support for alleyway transformation in interface areas via PCSP funding. Reference was also made to the possibility of accessing funding from Assets Recovery Funding and Police Property Fund. The logistics of this is to be explored further and DOJ are to provide an update on whether this funding could be accessed by the council. DOJ have also agreed in principle to support the development of a 'How to guide', to empower communities, providing a useful tool to support community led open space regeneration programmes. Officers are currently pursuing this with DOJ. Officers are also progressing the Justice Minister's suggestion to apply for PCSP funding.
- 3.19 The meeting held with DfI was positive. DfI are currently consulting with their Active Travel team and have agreed to come back to confirm whether alleyway transformation support can be obtained via strategic opportunities like the Belfast Urban Greenway monies.

**Alleygate Background:**

- 3.20 Phases 1 – 4 of the alleygating project have now been completed.
- 3.21 Councillors may be aware that the initial phase (phase 1) of Alleygating was carried out in 2005-2007 as a pilot. This enabled 200 gates to be erected with a further 20 gates being installed through the Renewing the Routes programme in Lower Ormeau.
- 3.22 In February 2009, phase 2 commenced, when the council allocated £500K of capital funding to the project, with £125,000 being equally distributed to each area North, South, East and West. A ranked list was then approved by committee and a further 174 Alleygates were then

installed within the pilot project areas with further areas identified using the prioritised list (Ardoyne, Avoniel, Ballygomartin Road, Glenbank, La Salle, Whiterock).

- 3.23 In February 2012, phase 3 commenced. £700,000 was made available for further alleygating interventions throughout Belfast. The lists of streets were prioritised against the agreed criteria and 60 streets were identified for gating (148 gates) on equal basis across North, South, East and West.
- 3.24 Phase 4 commenced in 2016, when £700K of capital monies was made available to the Area Working Groups (South £140k, North 140k, East £210k and West £210k). Statistical analysis was brought to each Area Working Group to inform Members and the final gate locations were selected by elected members by using their local knowledge.
- 3.25 This current phase (phase 4) is completed and added an additional 362 gates to the existing stock of 712, meaning a total of 1074 Alleygates is currently being managed by City & Neighbourhood Services.

#### **Alleygate Evaluation**

- 3.26 The council are continuing to receive requests for gates, especially in areas where gates have been installed and as a consequence, dispersed issues to surrounding streets. However, there has not been an evaluation since the pilot project was completed in 2007. Therefore officers recommend that an evaluation is necessary before continuing with a proposed phase 5.
- 3.27 There is some concern that new proposed locations are not suitable for alleygates, are not alleyways (as only an alleyway by definition of DfI can be gated) and the legal threshold for installation can be difficult to meet given the low consultation responses.
- 3.28 A request to appoint external contractor to review the Alleygate Programme, was brought to People & Communities Committee on 3 February 2020. The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter to enable a further report to be submitted on the possibility of the evaluation being undertaken in-house or options to reduce costs associated with an external evaluation.

3.29	Officers have since went back and looked at the option of carrying out an 'in house' review and have concluded that this is not a feasible option, as they do not have the required expertise or resources in house to do so.
3.30	<p>It is therefore recommended, that Council engage a suitably qualified contractor to under a review of the Alleygates Programme to date, specifically exploring the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the benefits of the scheme within neighbourhoods and how the overall scheme performs against CIPTED principles</li><li>• to review the current selection process and identify potential future options for selection of alleygate locations taking in to account what has worked well and what could be improved to date.</li><li>• To consider the merit in amending the current eligibility criteria to give equal consideration and scoring to the efforts of communities to develop and maintain their alleyways as is currently given to crime-reduction and anti-social behaviour concerns</li><li>• to examine if there has been any reduction in crime / return for investment in areas where there has been intense alleygate installation</li><li>• to examine whether there have been any long-term impacts or reduction in crime within gated areas in general</li><li>• to identify opportunities to maximise the benefits of alleygating by working closer with other partners in the context of wider neighbourhood regeneration</li><li>• to make recommendations about how to maximise the benefits and opportunities from the Alleygate Project, taking into consideration other Council work streams and external strategies</li><li>• to consider the longer-term impact of the continuous alleygating investment (Phase 1 to Phase 4) to date in the city</li><li>• Consideration of alternative interventions to alleygating like Alleyway Transformation schemes and funding to improve the standard and condition of un-adopted alleyways. Linking with other partners to secure funding for both etc.</li></ul>
3.31	The completion of the evaluation and it's findings will be used to inform the scoping of any future alleygating schemes and alleyway transformation initiatives.



	<b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b>
3.22	The pilot proposed in respect of un-adopted alleyways is covered within existing revenue estimates. The cost will be considered again once the four pilot sites have been completed.
3.23	The approximate cost of the evaluation of the alleygating scheme would be £10K–15K with a significant level of in house support from the Alleygating team which would be from within existing budgets.
3.24	At present there is no capital financing to deliver a future alleygating programme, however a growth proposal of £500k is being considered as part of the estimates process for 21/22.
	<b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b>
3.25	There are no known Equality, Good Relations or Rural needs implications.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 - List of top 20 unadopted alleyways Appendix 2 - Map of top 20 alleyways Appendix 3 -Letter of Support from Department for Justice

