

# Legal and Civic Services Department

## Democratic Services Section



Your reference

Being dealt with by Ms Eilish McGoldrick

Our reference EMDFC171220SG

Ext. 6307

Date 17th December, 2020

Minister Hargey  
Minister for Communities  
Causeway Exchange  
1-7 Bedford Street  
BELFAST  
BT2 7EG

Dear Minister Hargey & Minister Mallon,

### **Re: City Growth and Regeneration Committee: Public Realm Scheme at Shankill Gateway and Frederick Street**

At its meeting in November, Belfast City Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee agreed that the Council would write to you to reiterate its concerns regarding the Shankill Gateway Public Realm Scheme as set out in our previous letter to you dated 12 October 2020. Furthermore, Council is concerned that the opportunity to make impactful change at this strategic junction will be missed if it is not realised now.

It was noted at Committee that during the design development there was a positive co-client and co-design work between our collective organisations to build and arrive at a consensus for the design of this junction. This also followed a period of extensive community and statutory engagement which resulted in support of the original designs as submitted for planning approval. The proposal included alterations to the junction including the rationalisation of the road infrastructure and the uncontrolled pedestrian crossing while simultaneously increasing pavement space and introducing additional green landscaping. The proposal as agreed through the consultation process would have minimised the number of pedestrian crossings required to traverse the junction while removing uncontrolled pedestrian crossings while increasing the provision of cycling infrastructure. In doing so, it encouraged safe and active travel, and reduced severance between local communities and the city centre. This approach was supported by this council.

Council was disappointed to learn that this design was superseded immediately prior to the granting of planning approval, and without wider consultation, with a design that maintained the layout of the current junction. At its meeting on 11 November 2020 the City Growth and Regeneration Committee reiterated the concerns around this major junction progressing without provision for pedestrian and cycling priority as previously envisaged within the scheme designs that were subject to public consultation. It was considered that the preservation of the current junction configuration represented a missed opportunity to address the issues presented by the hard infrastructure layout of the inner ring and did not take into account the collective Council, DfI and DfC visioning principles of the 'Bolder Vision for Belfast'. The Bolder

Vision, jointly commissioned and endorsed by both Departments and Council states that we should prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car, that Belfast should be providing lively, safe and green streets, and that we should collectively remove severance and barriers to movement between the city centre and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.

Elected Members reiterated their concerns regarding the adequacy of the existing junction to safely meet the active and sustainable travel needs of the neighbouring communities and raised issues in terms of the design of road infrastructure for pre-pandemic peak traffic volumes. Members highlighted that if the right choices were not made now at these key locations that this presented a missed opportunity to address the imbalance and negative consequences of our road dominated landscape and the severance issues created by the Inner Ring Road.

Council Members believe that improvements can be made to this scheme that will greatly contribute to reducing the impact of the hard infrastructure of the Inner Ring by providing improved key connections to local communities and prioritising active and sustainable travel. In addition, this will provide a much greater contribution to the place-making potential of the local area, while providing adequate provision for the transportation network. We also believe that the deferral of the planned upgrade of the Peter's Hill junction until an unspecified future date risks undermining public confidence in the consultation process especially when the emerging designs have been discarded in favour of maintaining the status quo, effectively the 'do nothing' option.

In your respective letters of response to the committee the Departments referenced a joint BCC/DfI/DfC Junctions Working Group to address the issues raised at the Shankill Gateway Scheme, the Clifton Gateway Scheme and the proposed catalyst project of the Frederick St/Patrick St Junction. While this approach was welcomed by the Committee it is now understood that the Shankill Gateway Scheme no longer forms a part of the agenda for this group, and that the emerging design for the Frederick St/ Patrick St Junction remains unclear some 16 months after the initial agreement that the works should be accelerated to provide some level of provision to support the critical modal shift requirements of the University of Ulster opening in September 2021.

I look forward to receiving your comments on these issues raised by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

Yours sincerely



**Eilish McGoldrick**  
Democratic Services Officer

*Cc: Minister N. Mallon*

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