

Reset for Growth

A report by the Belfast Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission



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Foreword

Welcome to “Reset for Growth”, a report by the Belfast Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission.

The Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission was established and resourced by Belfast City Council to build on the Belfast Agenda and to identify actions to advance its objective of inclusive growth. We were charged with taking an independent view of the challenges and opportunities facing the city, the surrounding region and Northern Ireland as a whole. The challenges have been magnified over the duration of our work, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK’s departure from the EU, but we have also identified new opportunities.

The Commission draws together a range of individuals who hold influential positions in key Belfast institutions, both public and private. To these are added a small number of authoritative voices who bring experience and understanding from elsewhere. We are confident that together this enables us to be challenging but also sensitive to local circumstances. We are clear that our conclusions need to be tested by those who govern the city and Northern Ireland, as well as those in the UK who control the wider policy context, exchequer funding and international relations.

We also want them to be sense checked by local people and have laid the foundations of a public engagement exercise for that purpose.

We have been working together for nearly two years taking evidence from local, national and international witnesses; drawing on our own experience and understanding and engaging with representatives of Belfast City Council, the Northern Ireland Executive, UK government and laterally, the Shared Island Unit. Our work has been extended and complicated by COVID-19, but we hope our conclusions may be the richer for that.

Throughout our work together, we have been driven by a series of overriding concerns. We share a common commitment to the objective of inclusive

growth - growth that reduces the gaps between the living standards of local residents rather than increasing them. We know that far too often this ambition is jettisoned in any push for growth or prosperity. We acknowledge the inevitable tension between the search for growth and the now pressing need to put environmental concerns to the fore and have emphasised actions which seem able to meet both objectives. We have tried to maintain a collective optimism whilst avoiding bland assurance that “things will work out”, so we have given greater weight to the opportunities we identify as opposed to the risks, which are clear for all to see. We have nonetheless tried to avoid the temptation to “big up” recent successes and good work in progress; intent instead on painting a picture of Belfast and its surrounding region which will be recognised by those who live and work here. We sincerely believe that Belfast’s trading and maritime history coupled with its unique geo-political location are assets for the future.

We set out to ensure that our conclusions would take the form of a series of proposals for action by government bodies (local, NI wide and UK) and other agencies and organisations, both private and public. Finally, we have been intent on avoiding the “revolving door” of public policy discussion whereby reports replace each other with new jargon and objectives, often without any real impact on our lives. Our work builds on the still robust objectives of the Belfast Agenda and tries to offer a route map for some of the steps that need to be taken.

We have organised our conclusions in four clear sections or “pillars” with one over-riding strand running through - that is the importance of skills, education and training to both inclusive growth and innovation. Perhaps more than any other area of our work, this holds the key to early success and the building of a future in which all residents - including those making a home here for the first time -

Sir Michael Lyons



share a stake. Each pillar incorporates a number of key propositions for action and these are supplemented by a series of specific proposals which, we feel, will accelerate delivery.

We don’t have a crystal ball so, like our readers, we can only discern the future through past and current experiences. We have spent much time reflecting on the future role of cities like Belfast and recognise new challenges as behaviours change in response to the impact of the pandemic and the impact of digital technology. We are confident that Belfast remains critical to the future health and prosperity not only of Northern Ireland but also the UK. That needs to be reflected in public policy and government expenditures. But the city and its people can do much for themselves. You can reach out to learn and collaborate with other cities and model your city on successes across the world. You can also take advantage of your compact scale to test initiatives, especially in reducing carbon use, which will be emulated by others.

Bold leadership will be essential and the City Council is in a unique position to provide that, working with local residents, government and key agencies to ensure progress on this action plan. The Commission itself demonstrates the desire and ability of local agencies, public and private, to work together, making full use of their energies, resources and connections to pursue a shared agenda. There is much to build on.

In closing, let me add a note of acknowledgment and thanks: to Suzanne Wylie and Grainia Long for recruiting the Commission members and helping us shape our initial discussions and enquiries; to John Greer, Lynsey Cameron and others for supporting our work and drafting the final report. The conclusions are our responsibility.



Executive summary

Over the past two decades, Belfast has worked hard to reinvent itself, creating a growing knowledge economy and changing perceptions associated with long-running social tensions. Despite this, it has continued to lag behind on competitiveness and has not adequately addressed disadvantage and exclusion, issues which have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

This Commission is concerned that Belfast, as a key part of the region's economy, is at a tipping point. We consider that there is an urgent need to press the reset button on how the city should develop in the next ten years. We are recommending a strongly interventionist, highly-focused and radical approach, which will require new ways of working and innovative investment models between the city, its agencies and across all levels of government.

The Commission is clear about the city's attributes. Our view is that these need to be built on and rapidly scaled. Examples include the world-class research in disciplines such as clinical health, bio-medicine and data analytics as well as global, sectoral specialisms in fields such as Cyber Security, Financial Technology, Aeronautics and Renewables. Underpinning the sectoral growth is a highly talented workforce, driven by the local universities and colleges.

However, the Commission sees a fragility in the city's economy across a number of areas. There are limitations on the numbers of highly skilled people, gaps in innovation capability, a lack of a coherent and funded plan to address the climate emergency, a highly impacted city core as a result of COVID-19 and a reticence to grasp the trading opportunity created from access to two close markets.

A very strong theme that runs through this report is the moral and economic responsibility to turn around the fact that much of growth achieved in the past 20 years was not felt equally by all residents, leaving levels of poverty and income inequality still stubbornly high.

The Commission took evidence from many local and world leading experts and stakeholders. This enabled members not only to understand the uniqueness of the NI context and the specific challenges and opportunities that exist, but also to present a manifesto for change which, if adopted, led, financed and delivered, will create a huge step change in prosperity across all of the region, whilst at the same time driving down inequality and exclusion.

We recognise that we are not starting from scratch. The government, the city and its businesses and anchor institutions have many policies, initiatives, and investments underway which can support this challenge to press the reset button. Our recommendations can help in the delivery of the Northern Ireland Executive's Strategies including 10X (the new economic vision which focuses on innovation with a view to delivering a ten times better economy with benefits for all), skills, energy and housing as well as the Programme for Government, and will generate ideas for access to levelling up programmers and other UK funds.

They will also help to accelerate the impact of the Belfast Region City Deal investments, the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, the city's Net Zero Carbon Roadmap, the joint 'Bolder Vision' for a re-imagined city centre, the Inclusive Growth Charter, the ambitions of the newly-formed partnership known as Innovation City Belfast and many more.

However, our recommendations go further. They pick up on gaps such as development of clean tech clusters and also present a number of actions which would not only kick start this step change but solve multiple problems at once, such as city centre house building at scale and housing retrofit. The focus on making Belfast a globally significant innovation hub in key sectors is a very deliberate city read out of 10X, alongside building skills pathways into these jobs. The Commission members all felt very strongly that the city needs to play a significant part in seeking out and landing the advantages of NI's geo-political positioning and trading advantages and should increasingly see itself on a global stage.

The ambition of this Commission is to leave Belfast and Northern Ireland PLC with a set of deliverable recommendations which can be implemented at pace and which will not only secure the city's future viability but ensure it performs as a thriving, sustainable, inclusive, innovative global city, sitting at the heart of a successful and more equitable future for the people of NI.

We have therefore focused on the following pillars for action:

Renewed Future City: more accessible, liveable and multifunctional, with a focus on building homes in the city core and reimagining space and transport.

Sustainable Future: immediate action to bring down carbon emissions, starting with energy efficient homes, decarbonising transport and growing clean tech.

Intelligent Future: creating globally significant innovative growth clusters, capability and talent.

Global Future: capitalising on trading advantages; building strong global co-operation frameworks.

A more detailed summary of the four key pillars is set out on the following pages.

Each of these four pillars is also underpinned by an inclusive growth agenda, with inbuilt expectations of addressing disadvantage and inequality, for example through innovative skills pathways, addressing housing stress and focusing on a just carbon transition.

Delivery will depend on the ability of those holding the purse strings to plan in multi-year cycles and to recognise the role of place-based delivery and a willingness on the part of leaders across the city and the Executive to drive these recommendations forward.

The Commission's wish after spending two years developing this framework, is that the local and regional leadership sees the very present risks to future prosperity and inequalities, magnified by COVID-19, and that they have the foresight to recognise that, at this particular point in time, there is a unique opportunity and an urgent need to work together and reset for growth by driving this very focused set of recommendations forward now. Belfast City Council is committed to taking a lead role in convening our city partners around this shared agenda.

Ultimately the collective delivery of these proposals for action can, in our view, close the long-standing chasm between high level policy and ambition and delivery on the ground in a way which will underpin wider regional growth and re-balancing.

Renewed Future City

Prior to the global pandemic, Belfast had successfully re-positioned itself as a global hub of Foreign Direct Investment and had seen a resurgence in real estate transactions. But, like many cities, the impact of Covid-19 and the associated acceleration of trends such as home working and online shopping has shaken the foundation of the city, resulting in an 80% reduction in footfall.

For regions to prosper they require vibrant, prosperous cities that act as hubs for innovation, creativity, culture, and people. In Northern Ireland's case, Belfast, as the regional capital, needs to create a re-imagined, liveable and



resurgent city core that provides unique experiences to attract visitors and welcome additional residents. If we don't take action to address this, the city and the region's economic resilience will be fundamentally weakened.

In most successful urban areas, residential development is a core element of the mix. People living in city centres bring vibrancy to the place and support the local business base. As debates continue around how city centres can bounce back from the challenges brought about by the pandemic, it is essential that efforts in Belfast are focused on bringing forward residential schemes of quality in the city centre. While much of this will come from the private sector, a generation of new social and affordable homes is also required to meet existing housing needs and address housing stress. The move away from a traditional model of retail-focused city centres, while underway for some time, has been massively accelerated by the impact of COVID-19. Belfast must bring forward a vision for a renewed, mixed-use city centre, and public bodies must engage actively with the market and with investment partners in this work. In doing

so, consideration needs to be given to powers and levers at the city's disposal.

There will be a need for a more radical re-think on issues such as the agility of the planning system in supporting development and ensuring those developments are smart and sustainable and address relevant social issues. To enable this bolder thinking, policies are required in the areas of transport and public realm that enable lands to be re-purposed to make healthy, urban communities. This will require mature public-private collaboration to bring forward major private sector-led regeneration schemes that have the potential to deliver significant economic benefits and support inclusive growth.

Our key propositions:

1. Create sustainable, vibrant communities in the city centre, delivering 11,500 new homes by 2035
2. Create a connected and animated core city centre through the delivery of key commitments in the Bolder Vision Connectivity Strategy by 2026

Sustainable Future

Belfast, like all global cities, faces challenges associated with climate change. While there has been some progress, Belfast remains reliant on fossil fuels to heat its buildings, power its transport, and move people, goods, and services around the city. That reliance makes Belfast's most vulnerable communities exposed to high levels of pollution and volatility in energy markets that result in one in six Belfast residents living in fuel poverty.

Over the last few years, the discussion on city development has been



reframed, placing resilience and emissions reductions at the heart of the debate. The city's new climate plan sets out a Net Zero Emissions roadmap which has demonstrated that rapid decarbonisation and energy independence offer significant benefits to the city.

Focusing on sustainable growth can not only support economic and environmental goals, it can help address some of the deep-rooted social challenges such as improving health outcomes and addressing fuel poverty in many of the city's neighbourhoods.

The Commission endorses the need for investment at scale in a retrofit programme across public and private housing stock, working in close partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

We note the ongoing engagement around a significant investment in upskilling and re-skilling to provide this solution and we believe that this proposition can not only help meet the carbon reduction targets, but

also provide skilled employment opportunities in a challenging labour market.

This report identifies the need for the city to look closely at new financing and investment models and to bring these forward as a matter of urgency. Public partners need to explore and implement new ways of working if the investment required is to come forward.

In our view, Belfast has a unique opportunity to position a significant housing building programme at the heart of its economic recovery plans. The Commission sees this investment in housing stock as having the potential to address a number of economic and social problems.

Our key propositions:

1. Implement a rapid carbon reduction programme at city level, securing a 66% drop in carbon emissions by 2025
2. Develop a comprehensive strategy for green tech support and investment that aims to deliver five major foreign direct investments by 2025 and 100% growth in the value of sales from our indigenous green tech sector

Intelligent Future

Belfast is a city of creators and inventors. Innovation is in the DNA. The city is home to a vibrant and engaged community of SMEs, researchers, corporations, and start-ups and is the location for academic and research centres of excellence, set alongside dynamic indigenous companies and a strong support ecosystem. These ingredients combine to make Belfast a great place to nurture new ideas, to grow a business, to solve urban challenges, and to impress the world.

Over the next decade, innovative technologies are going to have profound



impacts on our economy and on society. With Belfast's proud history of research excellence, its vibrant community of innovators and start-ups and significant investment on the horizon through the Belfast Region City Deal, the city is perfectly positioned to make the most of opportunities presented by innovation - not least by creating more and better jobs and improving the quality of life.

But the jigsaw is not yet complete. There are critical infrastructure gaps that, if addressed, could ensure delivery of the city's ambitions in this regard. These include interventions such as catapults and additional centres of excellence to mirror and support key business clusters. Likewise, there is a need to extend the scope of innovation. Belfast is a micro-business economy and it is essential that we drive more innovation-focused businesses that can grow and scale, contributing to city vibrancy and creating a solid foundation across not just the growth sectors, but also the wider business base.

New partnership structures such as Innovation City Belfast appear to be making good progress in building strong coalitions to focus on priority areas and drive delivery. This coherent narrative will be critical if the city is to maximise

emerging investment opportunities such as the imminent CSR round and future Innovation Strategy funds.

The Commission recognises the strength of talent generated through the local universities and colleges. However, we are aware of emerging skills challenges in some sectors and suggest that there is a need for deeper academic-business engagement to service this growth and ensure the resilience and further development of these sectors - given their importance to city competitiveness. Likewise, the Commission is clear that there needs to be a strong commitment to inclusive innovation, widening access to participation by creating new pathways and extending the talent pool.

Our key propositions:

1. Secure commitments to investment in critical research and digital infrastructure that delivers a Northern Ireland Digital Catapult Centre and £300m of annual ring-fenced research and development funding by 2025
2. Deliver a unique innovation environment which enables key business clusters of global significance to thrive and deliver a decade of innovation, creating over 5,000 new entrepreneurs by 2025 and quadrupling the number of start-ups that survive and scale

Global Future

Belfast has a strong global brand and an extensive diaspora network. It has made significant progress as an investment location in key sectors in recent years and benefits from a unique strategic geographical location that offers the potential for further growth.

Yet the Commission feels that there is still work to do. For us, the key issue is the need to work collaboratively, taking a more strategic approach to exploring and developing market opportunities, building strategic networks and relationships and developing viable investment propositions to bring to market.



There is an increasing recognition of the power of place across government. New governance constructs developed to deliver City and Growth Deals as well as emerging partnership structures such as Innovation City Belfast demonstrate the value of place-based interventions. The Commission is of the view that the Northern Ireland Executive needs to consider how such partnerships can be commissioned to work alongside existing structures and bodies in the development and delivery of strategic economic growth interventions.

International city to city linkages can play a key role in creating the conditions for strong investment and trading relationships. Belfast has long-standing city partnerships in China and the USA. These links have already resulted in exchanges between the cities, universities and businesses and there are further opportunities to drill deeper. Likewise, while there is some engagement in networks such as Core Cities UK, opportunities exist to learn from and exchange practice across a range of key global networks such as the Global Covenant of Mayors and Urban 20. Closer to home, through our engagement with businesses, we consistently heard of the need for the

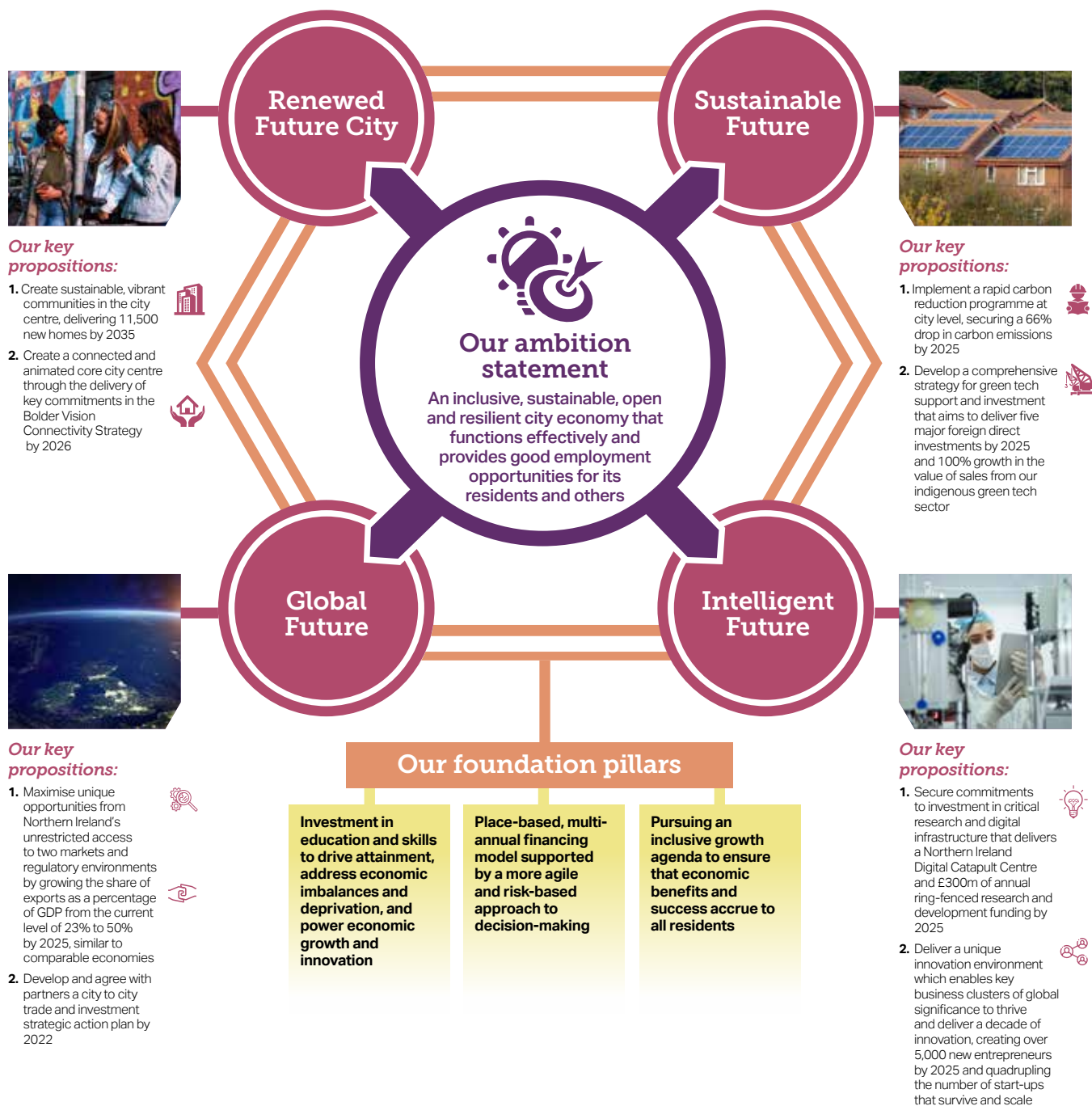
city to capitalise on linkages with Dublin and London. The development of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor presents significant opportunities to bring forward sector propositions of scale as well as collective investment proposals in key areas of research and innovation. In keeping with experience from successful economic corridor models elsewhere, this will require an appropriate governance and resourcing framework.

A critical point at this juncture is that the changing economic landscape arising from the UK's exit from the European Union will have material consequences for Northern Ireland. It is imperative that measures are put in place to maintain close trading relationships and maximise the opportunities arising from the region's unique trading position post Brexit.

Our key propositions:

1. Maximise unique opportunities from Northern Ireland's unrestricted access to two markets and regulatory environments by growing the share of exports as a percentage of GDP from the current level of 23% to 50% by 2025, similar to comparable economies
2. Develop and agree with partners a city to city trade and investment strategic action plan by 2022

Manifesto for action



Context

Prior to the pandemic, Northern Ireland was on a positive economic trajectory. National and international visitor numbers were on the up and foreign direct investment (FDI) was generating significant employment opportunities across a range of tech sectors and professional services in particular.

But change in Belfast and Northern Ireland, like everywhere, has been constant. In the early part of the twentieth century, Belfast was recognised as one of the leading industrial cities in the UK. A combination of declining industries, global competition and a long running socio-political conflict impacted negatively on the regional economy and embedded structural weaknesses that have been so hard to shift.

Those structural economic weaknesses have included low productivity, low levels of entrepreneurial activity, low wages, low educational attainment for some parts of society and lower levels of economic activity than all other UK regions. Not surprisingly, these economic challenges have had knock-on effects on society in Belfast, including high levels of deprivation, poor health, low life expectancy, low social mobility and poor community cohesion relative to most other parts of Northern Ireland and to the UK as a whole.

Whilst poor economic performance has contributed to these societal challenges, it's clear to commissioners that it's impossible to disentangle the relationship between the legacy of the 'Troubles', the relatively lower levels of economic opportunity and other societal impacts that have persisted in the Belfast City Region and Northern Ireland.

However, in understanding the influence and interplay between the economic, environmental, and societal factors, the Commission sees an opportunity for the deployment of strategic interventions that have the potential to address these inter-related factors at scale.

Our report is a call to action, focusing on using this opportunity to reset for growth. It acknowledges these weaknesses and introduces a series of practical solutions for change that will require focus, courage and ambition to deliver. We feel that these investments are critical to move on from the status quo.

Research suggests that those areas that were economically fragile before the pandemic have been, and will be most severely impacted by it. For Belfast and Northern Ireland, the risks are significant:

- Residents, particularly young people, will move further from the labour market, increasing levels of economic inactivity
- Social mobility will decrease, causing further social division in already divided communities
- Health amongst deprived communities will suffer
- The gap in educational attainment across the population will grow

This simply cannot be allowed to happen. Current and future governments and public bodies would never be forgiven if they did not intervene and put measures in place to mitigate against this.

These impacts, if realised, will further impact on Northern Ireland's competitiveness, which has consistently lagged other regions and continued to erode as other countries have improved and outpaced Northern Ireland. In 2020, the UUEPC Competitiveness Scorecard suggested Northern Ireland was behind 59% of OECD/European comparator regions and would be behind 61% of

those regions by 2030 - and that predated the impact of COVID-19.

Improvements can only come about if partners across the public and private sector work together to create the right conditions for growth and commit to system-wide change. There are some positive models emerging, in particular through the Belfast Region City Deal, where partners across the public and private sectors have designed interventions to support inclusive economic growth.

The Commission considers that the time for incremental change has passed. What is needed now is a much more radical approach to change, moving faster and deeper. We consider that there is a need to reset and reframe the conversation, coalescing partners around a shared agenda for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Despite the deep-rooted economic and societal challenges, the Commission is struck by the unique assets of this place:

- One of the youngest populations in Europe: 53% under the age of 40
- A growing global reputation in areas including Cyber Security, MedTech and FinTech
- World class universities with strong industry engagement, creating a solid talent pipeline
- Established economic corridors with London and Dublin and global relationships including the United States and China
- Dual market access providing a trade gateway to GB/Europe
- £1 billion of investment into the economy via the Belfast Region City Deal
- Availability of development land and the existence of a single public sector landlord, at scale, along with excellent housing delivery partners
- Local partners with assets, resources and buying power working in deep partnership to deliver social and economic improvements
- Growing private/public sector approaches to investment

Through its combined experience, the Commission believes these attributes, if harnessed and allied with innovative policy interventions and public and private investment, could support a financially-efficient, jobs-led recovery.

Renewed Future City

Where are we now?

Belfast's re-positioning as a global hub for Foreign Direct Investment and a more recent bounce in the real estate market has strengthened the city's investment prospectus.

This has helped create a vibrant city core, with a stronger than average focus on independent retail and hospitality alongside a partly-revived waterfront.

However, COVID-19 has rocked the foundations of this renewal. Formerly the beating heart of the city, its workplaces, leisure spaces and cultural assets have become deserted as a result of the pandemic. With footfall levels falling back by more than 80% from previous numbers, there is a need to radically re-think the form, function and structure of the city centre.

None of this can happen without a focused investment plan. The High Street Task Force has been established as a collective forum for government and business engagement on how best to respond to the economic and social challenges facing town and city centres across Northern Ireland. The Task Force has no access to new resources and, by its own admission, is a long-term project.

Belfast and its city centre need immediate commitments and actions focusing on issues such as transport, environment and infrastructure, with consideration given to wider issues such as rating policy and planning.

Many of these developments are in train - but without any apparent immediacy or change of focus since the pandemic.

While COVID-19 has shone the spotlight on many of these issues and flagged the need for immediate actions, it is important too that the policy response to the pandemic is separated from the longer-term need to acknowledge the

role of cities as economic drivers. Belfast supports more than 30% of employment across the region and drives regional productivity levels through higher value jobs which require agglomeration and co-location.

One of the unique factors in Belfast city centre is its very limited residential population. Estimates suggest that the city centre has a population of just over 9,000 people. In our experience, city centre residents provide vibrancy and round-the-clock presence. They work and live in the city and their spending power contributes to the local economy. Scaling up and bringing forward new mixed tenure city centre residential developments must be at the core of the new city centre vision.

The housing issue goes beyond the city centre. With significant levels of housing stress and a stated commitment to growth of the city's population by 66,000 by 2035, its clear that housing development needs to sit at the core of the city's renewal plans. The provision, quality and affordability of housing is key ingredient to a city's attractiveness as well as offering a significant economic benefit.

Development at scale in the past two decades in Belfast has overwhelmingly been in commercial real estate. Residential development has been much slower, particularly following the financial crash in 2008. However there is now significant demand in the city, leading to housing stress. This points to the need for a radical re-think of investment models, involving both the public and private sectors.



Housing

What needs to be done?

Like all cities, Belfast has many problems to solve in this decade. Economic recovery from COVID-19, reducing poverty and income inequality, tackling persistent health challenges, resolving housing need and reducing our dependency on carbon. This Commission believes that well planned sustainable urban development can enable the city to respond to several challenges at once.

We consider that the policy position, as articulated through the Belfast Agenda, remains sound. It focuses on a number of key areas to drive city renewal including:



Growing the population of the city by 66,000 additional people



Meeting an associated need of 31,600 new homes



Supporting 46,000 additional jobs by 2035

However, our view is that the levers required to action these commitments at the pace and scale necessary to make an impact on these ambitions are not currently in place. We see a number of key gaps, principally in terms of the structural models required to support public-private collaboration and access to finance to bring forward developments.

We propose the establishment of a number of new institutions, namely a Strategic Land Partnerships and Housing Investment Funds.

	Strategic Land Partnerships	Housing Investment Funds
What is it?	The purpose of strategic land partnerships across the public sector will be to identify physical assets suitable for assembly into investable propositions of scale for housing or other development purposes	Housing Investment Funds will be dedicated funds that provide financing through a range of innovative vehicles aimed specifically at bringing forward housing development at pace
How will it work?	Strategic Land Partnerships will bring together public and statutory bodies to make more effective use of public lands, providing a stable, sustainable supply of land for housing or other development types, in line with strategic ambitions	These vehicles will address market challenges related to risk and yield that have historically acted as a barrier to investment in housing in Belfast and Northern Ireland, they will work by de-risking investment
Who needs to be involved?	Relevant public sector organisations including Department for Communities, Belfast City Council (for Belfast investment projects), Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Department of Finance as well as other major public sector land owners and private sector as appropriate	Partners to include local councils and other public sector land owners and private sector as appropriate
What advantages would it have?	Simplified governance and management process to release land for agreed uses, supporting delivery of strategic ambitions relating to housing and economic growth	It would provide assurances to the market to support the delivery of city and regional ambitions and would potentially lever additional resources for investment

Given the overwhelming focus on commercial property development in recent years, it is unsurprising that there are relatively few recent examples of new funding models to boost housing supply. The Commission notes with interest the recent announcement by the Minister for Communities to reform the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, establishing a new funding model that would enable borrowing for investment in existing stock and new build. This is a timely

step, with a target date of 2025, albeit some way off, given the scale of need for new social and affordable housing across the city.

It is also positive to note that the Department for Communities is developing a Housing Supply Strategy aimed at bringing forward institutional, regulatory and policy change. It is critical however that this ambition will be matched with appropriate levels of funding and policy changes to deliver significant impact.

However, we feel that the scale of the task will require further intervention, particularly in stimulating private sector development, including affordable housing provision. For this reason, we are also suggesting that the regional government and the Treasury should consider developing a Housing Investment Fund. This model has been successful in stimulating new housing construction at scale across a range of classes in many UK cities.



A planned and strategic approach to new housing development is critical to ensuring that the city can both address the existing needs of those currently living in the city, those in housing stress and those wanting to move into the city. This Commission believes that, by making social and affordable housing a cornerstone of its economic strategy, Belfast could re-energise the city centre and establish a new generation of young people growing up in the city.

A housebuilding programme of scale can have multiple benefits as illustrated here:



Reimagining the city core

While the economy is clearly volatile at present, we suggest that the time is now right for public sector partners to step up with vision and a willingness to look at things differently. This will require a focused approach on the city centre, given the depth of change that has been accelerated as a result of COVID-19. While the drive to increase the residential population will undoubtedly be at its core, this new place-shaping approach must incorporate a re-modelled, experience-based retail, leisure and hospitality offer alongside modern workplaces and investment in public transport and quality open and green space. The commitment by government partners to *A Bolder Vision* is welcomed: the vision now needs to be supported by appropriate policy levers and adequate levels of investment to bring forward the scale of change required.

Across the city, there is a need to look beyond the immediate term and ensure that a place-shaping approach remains at the core of how the city approaches its development and renewal.

For the Commission, there are a number of elements that are fundamental in this regard:

-  Ensuring that the water, energy and transport requirements of a place are considered at an earlier stage in the development process
-  Giving priority to a new generation of sustainable transport: this cannot be 'secondary' to the car, or an 'afterthought' in design terms
-  Investing in the development of quality green space: the Commission notes exciting plans such as "One Million Trees" which provides an opportunity to ensure mass tree planting and advocates an extension to successful greenway proposals in parts of the city
-  Investing in significant transformational interventions arising from the Bolder Vision, as well as wider city to community connectivity, including greenways and active travel routes

Renewed Future City

Our key propositions:

1

Proposition 1:
Create sustainable, vibrant communities in the city centre, delivering 11,500 new homes by 2035



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

- Belfast City Council, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and Department for Communities (DfC) to establish a delivery vehicle to utilise public sector land and undertake land assembly to facilitate new low carbon housing at scale across the city centre
- Vehicle will also develop housing mix, amenities and neighbourhood development plan for city core. Target: 11,500 new homes in 10 years
- Create new financial instruments including Housing Investment Funds to address market challenges related to risk and yield

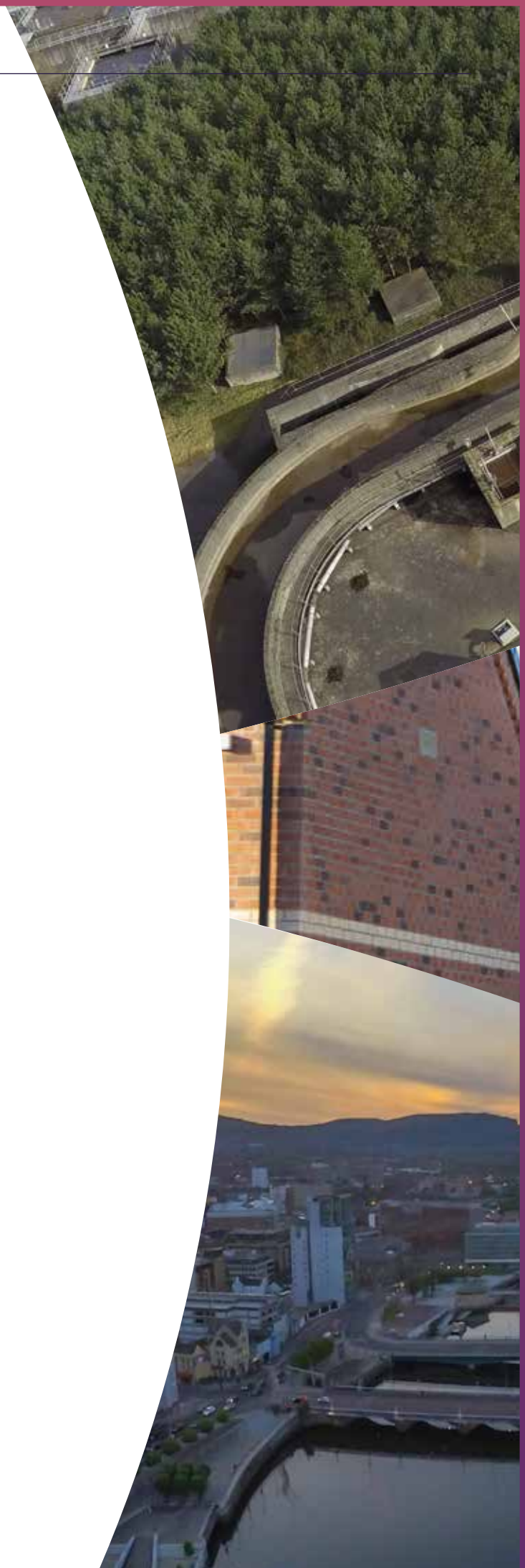
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Proposition 2:
Create a connected and animated core city centre through the delivery of key commitments in the Bolder Vision Connectivity Strategy by 2026



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

- Establish a long-term town and city revitalisation programme to support active travel, pedestrianisation and green spaces schemes along with large-scale investment in tourism and cultural infrastructure and activities. For Belfast, deliver the Bolder Vision for the city centre, supported by a three year joint funding programme
- Secure changes in planning and permitting legislation and powers to allow rapid urban development





Sustainable Future

Where are we now?

Despite some progress over the last two decades, Belfast remains dependent on fossil fuels to heat its buildings, power its transport and move people, goods and services around the city. While there have been positive developments over the last number of years to focus collective efforts on ensuring sustainable urban development, it is imperative that this is maintained over the long term, given the scale of the challenge.

The city's energy demand is projected to increase substantially, with expenditure set to grow by almost 50%, from a £296 million annual bill in 2019 to a projected £466 million per year in 2050.

This level of reliance means the city is exposed to high levels of volatility in energy markets and energy supply, which will have increasingly negative consequences for households and businesses. Achieving the commitment articulated in the Belfast Carbon Roadmap - to work towards being carbon neutral by 2050 - will be challenging.

Taking action to address this challenge is essential if Belfast is to avoid an environmental, economic and social crisis. Almost one in six Belfast residents is in fuel poverty, and research has shown that poor energy efficiency and high fuel bills can have a significant

negative impact on health outcomes, with those in the poorest households most adversely affected.

However aligned to this challenge, there is also significant opportunity. This lies in the potential for job creation as energy efficiency and carbon reduction interventions are brought forward.

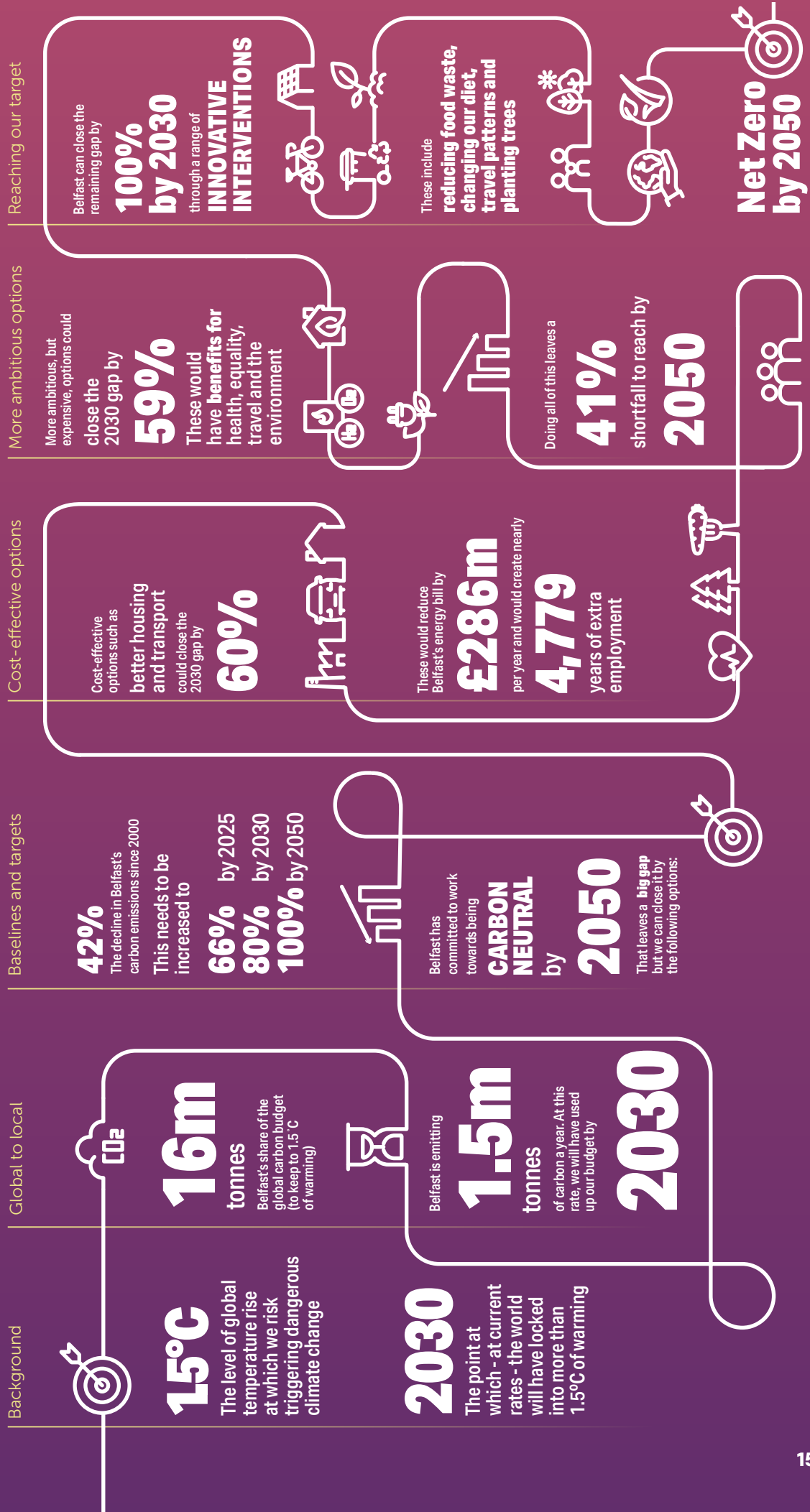
Belfast, like other global cities, has seen its economic performance flatline over the last twelve months due to COVID-19. The Commission supports recent research on urban responses to economic crises which concluded that a green route out of the COVID-19 crisis can be highly economically effective.

Belfast must focus on aligning the environmental and economic policy frameworks across varying levels of government if it is to position itself for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.



Belfast Carbon Roadmap - Pathway to Net Zero

The roadmap suggests the carbon emissions baseline of the city is 1.5m units per annum. It proposes and costs a series of low carbon interventions which will help Belfast align to the UK legislative target of net zero carbon by 2050.





What needs to be done?

The Commission has been encouraged and impressed by the enhanced focus placed on sustainability and environmental issues in Belfast over the last few years.

The establishment of a Resilience and Sustainability Board as part of the city's Community Planning structures, as well as the creation of the Belfast Climate Commission demonstrates the focus on sustainable approaches to economic growth. The commissioning of the Belfast Mini Stern - the first independent and authoritative study that demonstrates the economic dividends to be gained from decarbonisation - points to a collective acknowledgement of the need for energy policy and economic policy to be aligned.

The Mini Stern illustrates the critical "market-making" role that government agencies and the wider public sector can play. By making changes to how they build homes and invest in public transport as well as incentivising more sustainable and accessible transport and greater energy efficiency in homes, they can help create the necessary step change in carbon consumption. The tables on this page demonstrate the most cost-effective and the most carbon-effective emission reduction options.

While it is pragmatic to focus on these in order to build momentum, the Climate Commission and the Resilience and Sustainability Board must continue to shine the spotlight on the longer-term, more challenging issues. These have been identified through the recently-published consultation document on the regional Energy Strategy and should be considered as the "third pillar" in the city's approach to energy resilience.



Belfast's top ten most cost-effective emission reduction options

Rank	Measure	Cost Effectiveness (£/tCO ₂ e)
1	Compressed air systems in industry	-603
2	Diesel car to diesel bus journeys	-492
3	Pump upgrades, repairs and maintenance in industry	-478
4	Fabric improvements in retail buildings	-432
5	Petrol car to diesel bus journeys	-376
6	Fabric improvements in public buildings	-367
7	Diesel car to walk journeys	-362
8	Petrol car to walk journeys	-356
9	Improved cooling in retail buildings	-326
10	Diesel car to bicycle journeys	-322



Belfast's top ten most carbon-effective emission reduction options

Rank	Measure	Emission Reduction Potential (ktCO ₂ e)
1	Insulating domestic buildings	1,162
2	Petrol car to bicycle journeys	1,014
3	Upgraded heating controls in domestic buildings	998
4	Petrol car to walk journeys	982
5	Electrical upgrades in domestic buildings	811
6	Installing heat pumps in domestic buildings	808
7	Petrol car to EV journeys	725
8	Petrol car to electric bus journeys	700
9	Diesel car to walk journeys	675
10	Fabric improvements in public buildings	663



There are two key areas that will require focused collaboration across a range of city partners to contribute to the net zero commitments: housing and transport.

Housing

Despite the fact that the UK is a leader in smart technology adoption, it is lagging behind Europe on energy efficiency. In Northern Ireland, less than 50% of housing has an Energy Efficiency Rating (EER) band at C or above.

In our June 2020 update, this Commission identified that a retrofit programme at scale across Belfast would provide a significant boost to the local economy. Our discussions with officials across government have encouraged us that this will be a priority area of focus for the region.

The Commission has been encouraged by the findings of an independent study, commissioned by the Department for the Economy, which recommends “dramatic change in policy extent and funding levels... for Northern Ireland to put building energy performance in line with the UK’s net zero carbon emissions commitment”. The study concluded that policies would need to drive an annual peak of retrofits for over 50,000 buildings (across Northern Ireland) within the next decade. In practical terms, this means trebling the current

pace of retrofits. The Commission strongly advocates this step change in activity, not only for its contribution to environmental targets, but also because of the potential that it offers to create new jobs and address Belfast’s high level of fuel poverty.

As the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is leading several retrofit programmes aimed at ensuring innovation and quality in the delivery of energy efficient homes. It is currently committed to delivering 3,000 retrofits across its homes in Belfast in the next three years through a jointly funded NIHE-ERDF programme, which will enable the organisation to develop its approach to innovation and retrofit and for up-scaling in this decade.

In keeping with this scaling up of effort,

it is essential that an energy efficiency standard is established, for application across buildings. This will help provide clarity to the market and will also ensure that the investment can deliver in a measurable way on the significant challenges around carbon reduction.

To date, one of the most significant challenges has been the limitations of the funding models to support this work. The current landscape is relatively limited but it can be revamped, drawing on experience from cities across Europe to examine optimum models, ensuring affordability and equity of access. A number of new ‘green finance’ opportunities are available, and several cities are exploring the potential for community municipal bonds, for retrofit of public buildings and social and affordable housing or for low-income households.



Transport

The Belfast Mini Stern identified transport as the other primary source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the city and set out a number of key performance indicators for measures to be taken across the transport sector.

This Commission concurs with these indicators. However, we feel that they can only realistically be achieved if Belfast approaches this challenge in a holistic way.



Achieving a sustainable modal shift

The Commission acknowledges that there is already work underway across a range of public and private partners that will help move the city towards its transport emissions reduction targets.



Public transport

We are encouraged by Translink's plans to transition to zero emissions public transport for city services by 2030. This will involve the procurement of a new generation of zero emissions fleet, expecting an 80/20 split between electric and hydrogen powered vehicles over the coming decade. This needs to be supported by a modal shift to increase the number of public transport journeys.



Sustainable travel - walking and cycling

As part of a decade-long re-imagining of the city, decision makers must accept the economic, as well as the social and environmental reality - that an over-dependence on the car acts as a drag on city economies.



Electric vehicle infrastructure

As part of a shift towards zero-emissions transport and transit, a network of electric vehicle infrastructure is essential to Belfast's future. Northern Ireland has been slow to develop this infrastructure due to a number of regulatory hurdles, which have been removed. Central government now needs to set aside public realm for charge points.



Transit and fleet

At present, Belfast deploys a range of carbon-intensive systems to move waste, freight and deliveries across the city. As a relatively compact port city, greater integration and planning of transit systems at a city-wide level could achieve a step-change in emissions from transit. There is a clear role here for city organisations, such as Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and other public sector bodies, alongside private companies.

Achieving Belfast's sectoral emissions reductions KPIs for transport

What we need to do



6km of high quality, protected cycling highways built



40 additional new electric buses procured and in service each year



2 million additional public transport trips taken each year



3,000 additional electric vehicles to replace conventional private cars each year

How we can do it



Moving goods and services around the city in a more efficient and **zero carbon** way



Re-imagining public space - and prioritising walking and cycling routes



Proactive demand management interventions to **reduce car journeys**



Comprehensive infrastructure investment **plan**



The economic imperative

If the city can make inroads to decarbonising its housing and transport systems rapidly, the potential for job creation, for enhancing local supply chains and for investment in innovation could be transformational.

Several cities across the UK and Ireland have already taken steps to place the transition to a green economy at the core of their economic strategies. COVID-19 has accelerated that movement, placing a spotlight on sustainability, encouraging the strengthening of local supply chains and creating challenges for local employment markets. If Belfast is to capitalise on this opportunity, it is essential that partners mobilise quickly, moving forward with public investment in housing and transport and promoting innovation and research in new areas such as hydrogen production.

The green economy offers opportunities for upskilling and reskilling but the current provision is not sufficient to meet projected needs, suggesting the need for targeted interventions aimed at a range of skills levels and work areas. Close working relationships between economic development, education partners, employers and investors across the city are vital to structure the qualifications necessary so that skills are available to support the expansion of green technology, construction, maritime and transport.

Sustainable Future Our key propositions:

1

Proposition 1:

Implement a rapid carbon reduction programme at city level, securing a 66% drop in carbon emissions by 2025



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

- Secure funding for and commence delivery on a long-term at scale housing retrofit programme as soon as possible. Start with a three year programme, then scale. Target 3,000 properties in the first three years
- Develop large scale upskilling/re-skilling academies for retrofit and low carbon build
- Establish revolving funding instruments for green building and infrastructure and secure access to UK funds
- Develop a green mobility plan for the metropolitan area to include investments in decarbonising public transport and public sector fleets and encouraging modal shifts to active travel
- Develop a programme for electrification of building heat
- Amend current building regulations to ensure new homes support decarbonisation

2

Proposition 2:

Develop a comprehensive strategy for green tech support and investment that aims to deliver five major foreign direct investments by 2025 and 100% growth in the value of sales from our indigenous green tech sector



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

- Develop a local place-based green tech growth strategy to attract FDI and grow new business, enabling access to national and regional R&D investments and challenge funding
- Access investment in highly innovative green technology / design capability, including a Smart Design Centre for net zero carbon transport
- Develop a new green business stimulus investment vehicle that recognises the long-term return from energy savings and carbon reduction
- Develop and fund education and employability programmes to ensure a skilled workforce is in place to fuel green growth

Intelligent Future

Where are we now?

Belfast has long been recognised as a city of creators and inventors. Today, the city is home to a vibrant and engaged community of SMEs, researchers, corporations, and start-ups and is the location for academic and research centres of excellence, set alongside dynamic indigenous companies and a strong support ecosystem. And while the level of progress has been substantial, significant gaps remain.

As we move towards economic recovery, there is a clear ambition to put innovation at the core of the city's collective response efforts. This partnership approach - driven by Innovation City Belfast - aims to accelerate growth in Belfast's most exciting knowledge economy clusters, while at the same time supporting businesses and residents to prepare for the transformational impact of innovation.

Pre-COVID-19, Belfast accounted for around 30% of jobs across the region. The resilience of some sectors, particularly tech and digital, and the fundamental challenges faced by others such as retail and hospitality, means that there is likely to be a shift in what the "new" economy looks like as we emerge from a series of lockdowns. The progress of technology has become even more pervasive over that period, impacting all sectors to an unprecedented extent, and this will present additional challenges for the labour market as businesses look for new skills, particularly those with a digital focus.

The Department for the Economy's 10X vision for a decade of innovation recognises the need for a focused effort to drive innovation in key growth areas while also achieving a fairer distribution of opportunities for people to participate in and benefit from that growth. This is wholly complementary to the Innovation City Belfast ambition and presents an opportunity to come together across the sectors and deliver rapidly at scale within the city.

But gaps remain in the city's toolkit. There are a number of missing pieces in digital infrastructure, while R&D investment levels fall significantly below those in the rest of the UK. As a micro-business economy, the volume of businesses actively engaging in innovation needs to increase. And while the universities and colleges have made a significant contribution to creating a strong talent pipeline, challenges remain in key growth sectors. In terms of inclusion, too many people have low skills - and many of these have poor digital skills. The City Deal investment will provide a strong catalyst for change, driving investment in critical infrastructure and creating new place-based partnerships for action. These will be critical in helping articulate the case for investment ahead of significant new funding interventions being established at regional and national level.



What needs to be done?

Ulster University's Competitiveness Scorecard identifies four key policy inputs that can contribute to future economic competitiveness.

These are:

- Infrastructure investment
- Education and skills
- Innovation, research and development
- Business environment

While the business environment is largely shaped by national policies and regulations, targeted investment in the first three elements can make a significant impact on the city's growth potential.

Infrastructure investment

The vision for Innovation City Belfast is to make the city a place where global excellence in innovation supports inclusive economic growth, delivers more and better jobs, and has a sustainable positive impact on our city, its citizens and the wider region. Key to delivery of this vision are a series of investments including the development of an Innovation District, the establishment of a city centre-focused Smart District, creation of a Smart Port and significant investment in advanced wireless networks.

The Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) will have a significant impact on the city region's ability to drive its future growth ambitions. Central to this work will be the strategic investment in a number of catalytic innovation projects, focused on the key growth sectors. These new centres of research excellence, alongside existing centres of excellence, will offer a unique resource to drive inclusive economic recovery and support urban transformation through mission-oriented innovation.

Capital investment alone is not sufficient to create the step change required in business performance. This point is illustrated in a 2020 report by Oxford Economics which includes a Digital Propensity Index to show how digital infrastructure, and SMEs inclination and ability to use digital tools, varied across the UK's regions. The key finding is that the majority of Northern Ireland sits within the bottom two quintiles of the Index. In the Belfast region, the infrastructure rank is 2 out of 170 areas yet the inclination amongst SMEs is very poor - at 111 out of 170 areas, across the UK. 95% of the businesses in Belfast are micro and small businesses and many lack the capability to fully benefit from these investments. To address this lack of capability there needs to be a strong focused programme of support for micro and small businesses to enhance their digital capabilities and help

them understand the potential for digital to transform the business. We recognise the recent collective investment by all local authorities in this area and consider that this provides a strong platform from which to test and scale-up future investment.

Alongside R&D funding there is a requirement for R&D infrastructure. Northern Ireland remains the only UK region that does not have a dedicated Catapult facility. Catapults provide businesses with access to their expertise and facilities, enabling them to test, demonstrate and improve their ideas and collaborate with others. Given the underlying structural weaknesses in the regional economy, we consider that additional infrastructure of this type could be a critical tool in addressing productivity challenges, supporting employment and, ultimately, delivering an increase in living in standards across the region.

Commission members recognise global examples of economic corridors and their ability to generate additional economic growth through collaborative efforts, building on priority interventions. We note the emerging work on the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor and consider that there are significant opportunities to build an innovation corridor at scale between the two cities.





Education and skills

While investment in innovation and R&D is a defining characteristic of many successful urban economies, it is also clear that globalisation and skill-biased technical change are factors that have contributed to rising inequalities.

This Commission is acutely aware, therefore, that placing innovation at the centre of our economic strategy requires careful design and management to ensure that those who are most vulnerable do not face further exclusion. This is all the more acute at the present time as inequalities are exacerbated by the perfect storm of a global pandemic and the acceleration of new technologies across almost all sectors. Ensuring that citizens are equipped with the right skills to meet employer demands is central to driving inclusive city growth.

The Belfast Agenda makes a commitment to supporting more than 40,000 new jobs in the city by 2035. The Skills Barometer for Belfast gives some insights into which sectors and areas of work those jobs are likely to come from. These are largely based

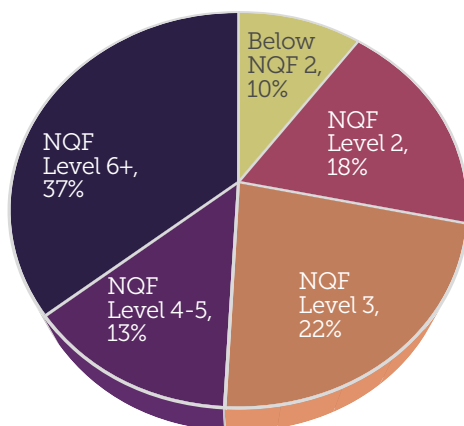
across the services sector - dominated by scientific and technical professionals and business services roles. Conversely, only limited growth is expected across areas such as retail and manufacturing (and these pre-COVID-19 estimates are likely to be optimistic given what we know about the increased challenges faced by these sectors).

The World Economic Forum's 2020 report on The Future of Jobs underlines the need for the public sector to provide stronger support for reskilling and upskilling for at-risk or displaced workers. At their peak, 16,000 Belfast residents were on furlough and many of them are employed in sectors that are unlikely to return to growth for some time. It is therefore essential that there is a coordinated and speedy response across the public sector to support individuals back into previous roles or

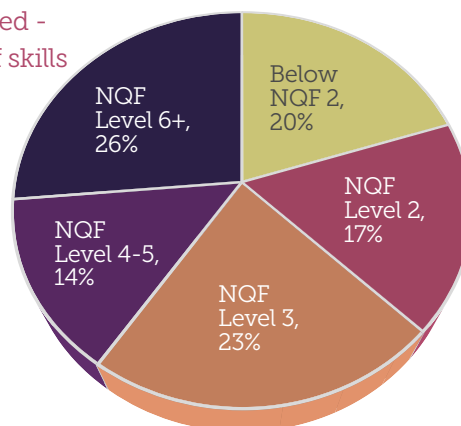
to equip them with the skills to move into new work areas. In keeping with the Commission's view that the economic strategy for the city should focus on a small number of areas that have the most significant potential for return, we propose that the emerging skills strategy needs to provide significant investment for those key growth sectors - particularly Cyber, Fin Tech, Sustainable Technologies and Cloud Computing. The delivery system must become more flexible and agile to meet new and emerging areas of need and potential growth.

Skills demand v supply

Average net requirement for skills in Belfast (2017-27)



Employed - Stock of skills (2017)



NQF= National Qualifications Framework

Source: Belfast Skills Barometer, UUEPC, 2017

Innovation, research and development

One of the emerging priorities identified through this work is the chasm in the investment levels in innovation and R&D in Northern Ireland, when benchmarked with other parts of the UK. This Commission concurs with the findings of the NESTA study: *The Missing £4 Billion (May 2020)*, which highlights regional funding inequalities, and estimates that additional UK Government investment of about £200-300m pa for Northern Ireland R&D is required to “level-up”. With its commitment to put research and innovation at the heart of the UK Industrial Strategy and to increase total R&D expenditure, the Commission sees the opportunity for Belfast and Northern Ireland to target additional resources and investment. Partners have already effectively articulated their ability to use these resources: the challenge now is to drive further investment in order to maximise the economic impact.

The importance of the City Deal cannot be understated. Not only will it help bring forward up to £1billion of investment, it also represents a new form of working that fosters collaboration between industry, academia and the public sector.

The emergence of new partnerships such as the Innovation City Belfast Partnership presents an opportunity for co-developing strategic approaches to support inclusive innovation. With strong industry engagement, the partnership approach can articulate the future needs of the world of work and ensure greater alignment across a range of public policy areas. It also allows a “full system” approach to inclusive innovation, taking account of issues such as data access, ethics and skills requirements.

Intelligent Future Our key propositions:

1

Proposition 1:

Secure commitments to investment in critical research and digital infrastructure that delivers a Northern Ireland Digital Catapult Centre and £300m of annual ring-fenced research and development funding by 2025



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

- Secure commitment to equitable ring-fenced funding for university R&D focusing on growing priority sectors
- Secure the establishment of a NI-based Digital Catapult
- Scale up existing and establish further interventions to maximise digital capacity and capabilities of business to engage in R&D
- Develop a digital inclusion programme for communities
- Deliver digital upskilling and re-skilling pathways at scale
- Deliver City Deal digital investment programme alongside private sector investment from Belfast Harbour to create Smart/Innovation districts

2

Proposition 2:

Deliver a unique innovation environment which enables key business clusters of global significance to thrive and deliver a decade of innovation, creating over 5,000 new entrepreneurs by 2025 and quadrupling the number of start-ups that survive and scale



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

- Place-based partnerships such as Innovation City Belfast (ICB) to be formally considered as part of the delivery structure for the 10x strategy. ICB should be commissioned to develop new funding bids and bring forward new ideas
- Establish a comprehensive and long-term funding mechanism for resourcing place-based approaches to entrepreneurship, start-up support and business scaling concentrated within growth sectors
- Support the development of world class health tech at scale, utilising City Deal-funded i-Reach and CDHD Centres of Excellence and promote as FDI opportunity
- Support establishment of a Global Centre for Secure and Intelligent Regulatory Technology in Belfast
- Develop incentivisation schemes for promoting innovation clusters in defined innovation districts (linked to Free Port concept)



Global Future

Where are we now?

Belfast benefits from a unique strategic geographical location that offers significant potential for further growth. At this critical juncture in the city's economic future, it is essential that partners work collaboratively to develop market opportunities in line with emerging strengths, build strategic networks and relationships and develop viable investment propositions to position the city globally.

The global pandemic has accelerated a structural shift in economies, with some sectors experiencing rapid decline and unemployment, and others benefiting from increased growth. The pandemic has also had a marked impact on people's behaviours and lifestyles. Almost every region has implemented restrictions that have resulted in homeworking / schooling and forced greater use of online channels. The question as we emerge from the pandemic is if, and to what extent, these changes will persist.

As cities and places understand the legacy effect of COVID-19, there will be a need to change, re-imagine and re-purpose their role and function. Early research suggests that those who are most vulnerable in society will be disproportionately impacted as a result of the pandemic. Given the significant pockets of deprivation in Belfast and many other locations across Northern Ireland, it will be essential to ensure that recovery efforts take account of the specific needs of these groups.

The Commission considers that Belfast and Northern Ireland have many assets that position them well for recovery. Critical among these are the availability of development land, clusters and specialities in growth sectors, trading advantages and strategic investments such as the Belfast Region City Deal. There is also the advantageous geographic position: located between London and Dublin, Northern Ireland already has access to several unique trading and investment advantages, strong key international relationships, and an extensive and passionate diaspora.

However, as an 'island off an island', Northern Ireland is challenged by a relatively small domestic population and increased cost and friction in moving people, goods, services and knowledge. The infrastructure requirements are complicated by the geographic location. While the region is served by three airports, services are limited in terms of direct international flights. A report by Oxford Economics in 2019 found that around 70 percent of Northern Ireland's air traffic was to Great Britain. With a small domestic population and potential market, the Commission views connectivity between Belfast/Northern Ireland and the rest of the world as being vitally important.

From an investment perspective, recent performance has been promising. In 2019, Northern Ireland attracted over 40 FDIs, supporting more than 2,300 jobs. There has also been significant capital investment. There is, of course, a level of uncertainty within the investment landscape as economies emerge from the global pandemic. However, the Commission sees opportunities arising from new patterns of trade and investment. To maximise those opportunities, we believe that new markets and relationships must be developed, while deepening the scope of existing relationships. The Commission recognises that two thirds of the world's population will be in Asia by 2050, so it's vital to build on existing connections in China and build relationships with Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean and ASEAN cities.





What needs to be done?

The Commission's initial observation is that more should be done to market opportunities, build strategic relationships and develop viable investment propositions with properly-funded action plans and the right level of collaborative leadership. The Commission is convinced that without a strategic approach being taken to this work, the impact created by implementing the other pillars in this report will be reduced and a significant long-term opportunity lost. In other words, it is our view that this pillar, while potentially the most challenging, is also the one that will reap the greatest long-term economic benefits.

International city to city linkages can play a key role in creating the conditions for strong investment and trading relationships. Belfast has sister city relationships with Boston and Nashville in the United States and Shenyang in China. Both Boston and Nashville are globally recognised technology centres in Cyber Security and Health Technology, and these strengths are mirrored in Belfast. The links with Shenyang have supported the establishment of the Shenyang Queen's University China Medical University, resulting in more than 2,500 Chinese students attending Queen's University Belfast each year. These relationships have already resulted in exchanges between the cities, universities and businesses and there are further opportunities to drill deeper with these linkages.

Cities, regions and places need to develop with sustainability, resilience and inclusivity at their core. To help Belfast and Northern Ireland to realise

the opportunities inherent with these changes, it is vital to engage in and develop new networks including the C40, Global Covenant of Mayors and Urban 20 alongside existing networks such as Core Cities UK to learn and partner with similar cities and regions. The Commission recommends the development of an action plan targeting global cities with whom to develop linkages for mutual economic benefit, including those where city partners such as Invest NI may already have strong connections and presence.

The process of identifying strategic target cities and regions should be based on the presence of:

- Complementary business clusters
- Complementary research and innovation infrastructure
- Presence of relevant investment funds/organisations

This action plan should be developed and delivered with Invest NI and the Department for International Trade (DIT) with the go to market plan delivered targeting FDI and capital investment. The Commission recommends that this place-based approach to executing strategies, global relationships and marketing investment propositions is consistently kept under review.

The focus of Invest NI is now more targeted at global relationships than ever before. In this context the Commission believes that trade and investment propositions need to be considered through the lens of place.

They must also take account of both scale and trading advantages, and this will require co-operation and strategic development of place-based collaborations such as:

- Dublin - Belfast Economic Corridor: the Commission sees this initiative as a central pillar for the development of long-term inclusive economic sustainability in Belfast and Northern Ireland. The Commission recommends the development of a strategic action plan with associated resources to support the work of the corridor. Consideration should be given to the establishment of an economic entity, overseen by the North South Ministerial Council and funded via the Northern Ireland Office and the Shared Island Unit. A key focus of that unit should be the development of a corridor-specific approach to research & development investment, infrastructure and skills. This will enable the corridor to develop capabilities at scale that can lever further investment.
- The place-specific competitive advantage afforded through new trading patterns and conditions will create opportunities for new investment and trading opportunities. City to city linkages such as Belfast-London will require further focus to maximise the potential return.

City to city connections

The Commission has recognised that the importance of city to city diplomacy needs to be more fully understood by the devolved and national administrations. Cities and regions have an ability to react rapidly to emerging opportunities and threats. This agility in reacting to change can be used to support the development of national policies by using regional interventions as test beds. There is a recognition that cities and regions, through their informal and formal structures and networks, can effectively engage with communities to understand their needs and work with them to co-design interventions, thus making an agile system for designing policy and interventions. The Belfast Region City Deal has demonstrated this with new working relationships developed across universities, colleges, businesses, local government and central government.

The Commission recommends that these new partnership structures are formalised and recognised by government, leading to further devolution and funding for those activities. The Commission sees that, with new powers and funding, these structures could use their demonstrated innovation and agility to build new investment propositions and interventions that exploit specific attributes of places to drive jobs, productivity and social benefit.

There is an accepted recognition of the power of places and this recognition is manifesting itself across government. The UK Government has recognised the importance of place through its commitment to the development of a place-based approach to Research & Innovation. In Scotland there is a commitment to place-based local outcome improvement plans. These approaches combine public and private sector parties to focus on specific challenge areas and develop action plans to bring about positive improvements. The Commission is firmly of the view that to support and realise the full benefit of City and Growth Deals in Northern Ireland, it is the time for the Northern Ireland Government to commission place-based partnerships to work alongside existing structures and bodies.

As places specialise and redefine themselves post-pandemic, significant opportunities for FDI and capital that provide a financial benefit for the investor and a social benefit for the user will be created, thus providing another opportunity to address multiple challenges. For example, a housing retrofit at scale focused on sustainable smart buildings provides a significant commercial and innovation opportunity. But importantly, it can provide many social benefits, for example, improving health and reducing fuel poverty. There is an important role for policy makers to create the conditions for private investors to access these market opportunities and realise the positive social benefits.

Global Future

Our key propositions:

1

Proposition 1:

Maximise unique opportunities from Northern Ireland's unrestricted access to two markets and regulatory environments by growing the share of exports as a percentage of GDP from the current level of 23% to 50% by 2025, similar to comparable economies



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

- Develop and invest in initiatives to build more stable and robust supply chains in key sectors most impacted by the changed trading relationships
- Develop a specific FDI proposition for those sectors set to gain most from advantages
- Develop agreement with Enterprise Ireland / IDA on a joint proposition for business sectors which may gain from dual location
- Develop support interventions to assist key business to capitalise on trading advantage

2

Proposition 2:

Develop and agree with partners a city to city trade and investment strategic action plan by 2022



Our proposals to accelerate delivery:

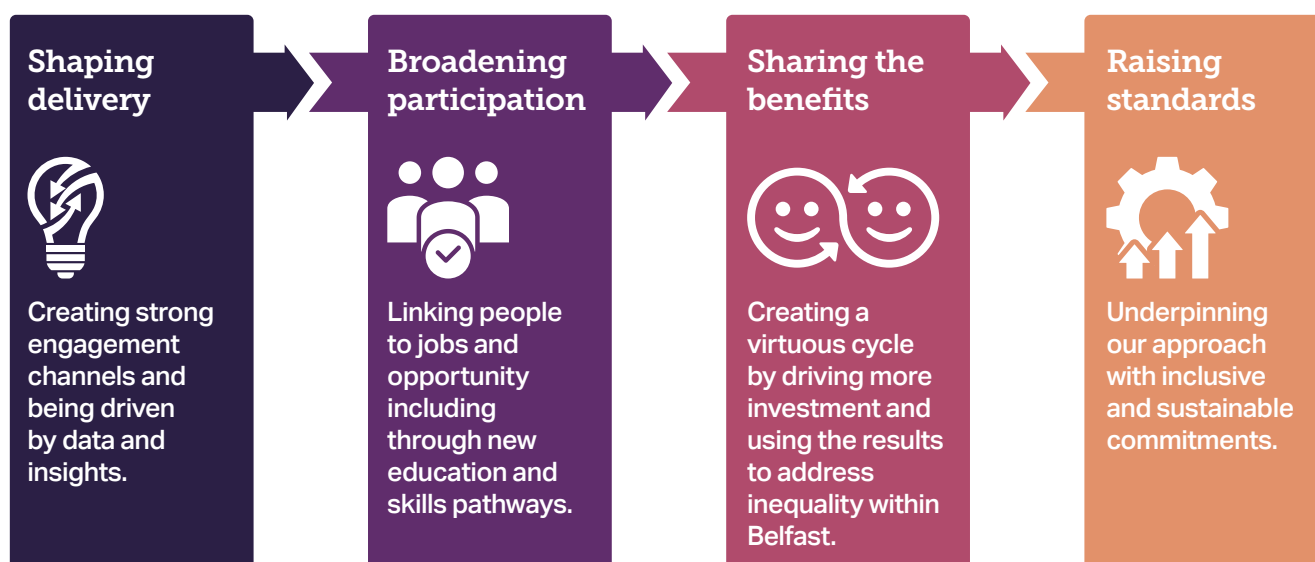
- Develop market-specific investment propositions, focused on Northern Ireland's unique regulatory advantages in FinTech & MedTech sectors
- Create a dedicated vehicle to fully realise the potential of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) with a focus on shared R&D hubs and business clustering at scale and a specific FDI proposition
- Maximise the potential of the Belfast-Dublin-London relationships

Inclusive Growth: at the core of our collective ambition

The Commissioners' discussions and our engagement with partners generated a range of views and perspectives as to what was required to reset the Belfast economy for growth. However, there was one common feature of our debate: the fundamental view that the city must be focused and determined in pursuing an inclusive growth agenda.

We have made numerous references to the current inequalities and the resultant impact on levels of deprivation and unemployment, as well as the associated social tensions and challenges. These issues can de-stabilise communities and cities, threaten investment and make it more difficult for marginalised communities and residents to engage with and benefit from economic growth.

Pursuing an inclusive growth agenda means ensuring economic benefits and success accrue to all members of a population. In making an explicit commitment to an inclusive growth agenda, the city needs to articulate what that means and rigorously ensure that interventions are in place to support delivery. This approach is detailed below.



Skills have a huge role to play in driving inclusive growth. Currently more than 20% of Belfast residents are skilled to level 2 and below; yet only 10% of jobs are open to those with qualifications up to level 2. Among the city's GCSE students, only 62% attain 5 GCSEs including English and Maths - and this can represent a significant barrier for those wishing to proceed to further and/or vocational training. Low attainment levels tend to be geographically focused in north and west Belfast, reinforcing the spatial nature of the challenges

However, the link between low skills / attainment and poor health and living standards is played out across the region with the Derry District and Strabane Council area, like Belfast, consistently having the highest economic inactivity rates in the UK.

Pursuing an inclusive growth agenda means introducing targeted interventions to address these challenges as well

as working with employers to create bespoke and alternative pathways into jobs, thinking differently about how they can build a sustainable talent pipeline.

The work on the Inclusive City Charter has created a firm foundation on which to generate an understanding of the benefits of this approach. It has also helped build a strong coalition across the public and private sectors, bringing together organisations that have shown a willingness and commitment to move towards this way of working.

This coalition is already developing a range of interventions including:

- Digital skills pathways - providing opportunities for those with low or no relevant skills to access job opportunities within the technology sector
- Green Tech Skills Academies - developing targeted upskilling and re-skilling interventions to meet future growth needs

The city is also working on how it can lever its own spend and joint strategic investments to deliver inclusive economic growth through the development a social value procurement policy. The policy will require Belfast City Council to include inclusive growth interventions when commissioning goods or services. It is hoped that this approach to commissioning could be adopted wholly or partially by partners, and provide significant investment to tackle economic inactivity, unemployment and inequality.

Inclusive growth interventions can improve not only economic outcomes but also social and health outcomes, reducing inequalities and enhancing sustainability. As the economy is rebuilt in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that city partners combine in large numbers to pursue an inclusive growth agenda, for the benefit of all.

Final recommendations

Under each of our priority pillars, we have articulated a number of key propositions as well as a series of concrete proposals to accelerate delivery. This section brings all of those together alongside the rationale for prioritisation. We have also drawn out details of the "development leads" who will drive forward each of the propositions, and have identified those organisations that will play a key support role.

Renewed Future City

Our key propositions	Why is this important for Belfast and Northern Ireland?	Our proposals to accelerate delivery	Development lead	Key departments/agencies
Create sustainable, vibrant communities in the city centre, delivering 11,500 new homes by 2035	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 11,500 Belfast households in housing stress • Only 3,700 completed homes in all of Belfast (1,300 social and 2,400 private) over last five years • Need a strategic shift in city centre living in line with other cities • Domestic housing in the city accounts for 39% of total carbon emissions - at scale sustainable new build programme is needed to meet targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast City Council, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and Department for Communities (DfC) to establish a delivery vehicle to utilise public sector land and undertake land assembly to facilitate new low carbon housing at scale across the city centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint NIHE/BCC and DfC Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Associations • Department of Finance (DoF) • FTC Fund Managers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicle will also develop housing mix, amenities and neighbourhood development plan for city core. Target: 11,500 new homes in 10 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new financial instruments including Housing Investment Funds to address market challenges related to risk and yield 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above 	
Create a connected and animated core city centre through the delivery of key commitments in the Bolder Vision Connectivity Strategy by 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful regions need vibrant and socially sustainable core cities. UK Cities are 21 % more productive than non-urban areas and host 72% of all highly skilled jobs • Cities offer scale benefits with clusters of critical infrastructure / assets such as universities and research centres. • Cities are favoured by Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBS), KIBS jobs are 2x as likely to be concentrated in city centres • Northern Ireland's 10x economic vision needs a vibrant city • The impact of COVID-19 has been greater in city - increased retail vacancies, office homeworking and a stark decline in tourism. Long-term reshaping of the use of cities required, facilitated and funded by government • Current complex governance and funding arrangements need to be streamlined to protect and reshape urban environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a long-term town and city revitalisation programme to support active travel, pedestrianisation and green spaces schemes along with large-scale investment in tourism and cultural infrastructure and activities. For Belfast, deliver the Bolder Vision for the city centre, supported by a three year joint funding programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCC, DfI and DfC Permanent Secretary Delivery Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Economy (DfE) • DoF • Local authorities • BIDs • High Street Task Force
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure changes in planning and permitting legislation and powers to allow rapid urban development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast City Council to lead on developing proposals 	

Sustainable Future

Our key propositions	Why is this important for Belfast and Northern Ireland?	Our proposals to accelerate delivery	Development lead	Key departments/agencies
<p>Implement a rapid carbon reduction programme at city level, securing a 66% drop in carbon emissions by 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belfast emits c.1.5 million units of carbon a year, so will use up its carbon budget by 2030 Carbon-intensive and inefficient housing, buildings and transport systems create financial burden, poor health and impact standard of living Reliance on carbon-based energy will continue to expose Belfast to high levels of price volatility for its energy and impact the disadvantaged the most Investment in retrofit will provide return on investment in a number of ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funding for and commence delivery on a long-term at scale housing retrofit programme as soon as possible. Start with a three year programme then scale. Target 3,000 properties in the first three years Develop large scale upskilling/re-skilling academies for retrofit and low carbon build Establish revolving funding instruments for green building and infrastructure and secure access to UK funds Develop a green mobility plan for the metropolitan area to include investments in decarbonising public transport and public sector fleets and encouraging modal shifts to active travel Develop a programme for electrification of building heat Amend current building regulations to ensure new homes support decarbonisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIHE NIHE and BCC BCC with Green Growth Oversight Group BCC with DfI and Translink Energy Strategy lead, DfE Belfast City Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Investment Board (SIB) Commercial Finance Other local authorities Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships
<p>Develop a comprehensive strategy for green tech support and investment that aims to deliver five major foreign direct investments by 2025 and 100% growth in the value of sales from our indigenous green tech sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is undoubtedly a demand window in green tech. We need to ensure that residents and businesses in Belfast and Northern Ireland benefit from that opportunity by utilising our existing strengths and building new capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a local place-based green tech growth strategy to attract FDI and grow new business, enabling access to national and regional R&D investments and challenge funding Access investment in highly innovative green technology/design capability, including a Smart Design Centre for net zero carbon transport Develop a new green business stimulus investment vehicle that recognises the long-term return from energy savings and carbon reduction Develop and fund education and employability programmes to ensure a skilled workforce is in place to fuel green growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DfE Innovation City Belfast and industry consortia DfE BCC through Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI Belfast City Council Local universities and colleges/research institutions Belfast Climate Commission Department for Agriculture Environment, and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

Intelligent Future

Our key propositions	Why is this important for Belfast and Northern Ireland?	Our proposals to accelerate delivery	Development lead	Key departments/agencies
<p>Secure commitments to investment in critical research and digital infrastructure that delivers a Northern Ireland Digital Catapult Centre and £300m of annual ring-fenced research and development funding by 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current level of investment is £200m - £300m less annually than many other UK regions - impacting negatively on competitiveness NI lacks a commercially-focused research centre of excellence to support the development of new products and services by local businesses Identified gaps in digital infrastructure including 5G, broadband provision and wireless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure commitment to equitable ring-fenced funding for university R&D focusing on growing priority sectors Secure the establishment of a NI-based Digital Catapult Scale up existing and establish further interventions to maximise digital capacity and capabilities of business to engage in R&D Develop a digital inclusion programme for communities Deliver digital upskilling and re-skilling pathways at scale Deliver City Deal digital investment programme alongside private sector investment from Belfast Harbour to create Smart/Innovation districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital Innovation Commissioner with DfE Digital Innovation Commissioner with DfE Councils with Invest NI Council with DfC Digital Innovation Commissioner with DfE Innovation City Belfast partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation City Belfast partners Business Energy and Industrial Strategy City Deal Digital Advisory Board Universities and BMC Belfast Harbour
<p>Deliver a unique innovation environment which enables key business clusters of global significance to thrive and deliver a decade of innovation, creating over 5,000 new entrepreneurs by 2025 and quadrupling the number of start-ups that survive and scale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Previous lack of priority and co-ordination - sub optimal in attracting funding support New DfE-led 10x economic strategy prioritises innovation clusters City Deal investment in 5 R&D centres New partnership models such as Innovation City Belfast represent triple helix collaboration with strong networks and engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place-based partnerships such as Innovation City Belfast (ICB) to be formally considered as part of the delivery structure for the 10x strategy. ICB should be commissioned to develop new funding bids and bring forward new ideas Establish a comprehensive and long-term funding mechanism for resourcing place-based approaches to entrepreneurship, start-up support and business scaling concentrated within growth sectors Support the development of world class health tech at scale, utilising City Deal-funded i-Reach and CDHD Centres of Excellence and promote as FDI opportunity Support establishment of a Global Centre for Secure and Intelligent Regulatory Technology in Belfast Develop incentivisation schemes for promoting innovation clusters in defined innovation districts (linked to Free Port concept) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DfE DfE/Invest NI Specific consortium under Innovation City Belfast Digital Innovation Commissioner with DfE ICB to lead the lobby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local universities Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Local Businesses Belfast Harbour

Global Future

Our key propositions	Why is this important for Belfast and Northern Ireland?	Our proposals to accelerate delivery	Development lead	Key departments/agencies
Maximise unique opportunities from Northern Ireland's unrestricted access to two markets and regulatory environments by growing the share of exports as a percentage of GDP from the current level of 23% to 50% by 2025, similar to comparable economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognised relative competitive trading advantage within key growth sectors including Med Tech, Fin Tech and advanced manufacturing Further opportunities for FDI Historic low levels of export activity in Northern Ireland negatively affecting productivity Opportunities to build more robust local supply chains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and invest in sectors and supply chain development in sectors that have been impacted or can benefit from the changed trading conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authorities DIT
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a specific FDI proposition for those sectors set to gain most from advantages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI - supported by BCC at city level 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop agreement with Enterprise Ireland / IDA on a joint proposition for business sectors which may gain from dual location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop support interventions to assist key businesses to capitalise on trading advantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI 	
Develop and agree with partners a city to city trade and investment strategic action plan by 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for strategic connections to play a key role in creating the conditions for strong investment and trading relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop market-specific investment propositions, focused on Northern Ireland's unique regulatory advantages in FinTech & MedTech sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation City Belfast to develop the lobby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI Belfast City Council DIT Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor partners Shared Island Unit Relevant NI/Rol government departments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a dedicated vehicle to fully realise the potential of the Dublin- Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) with a focus on shared R&D hubs and business clustering at scale and a specific FDI proposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCC with partner councils and DfE 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximise the potential of the Belfast-Dublin-London relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belfast City Council 	

Inclusive future opportunities

Our key propositions	Why is this important for Belfast and Northern Ireland?	Our proposals to accelerate delivery	Development lead	Key departments/agencies
<p>Create a comprehensive programme of inclusive pathways to new growth areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in labour market supply risks creating significant skills gaps Cap on numbers means that ability to add to graduate numbers is limited Commitment to inclusive growth requires alternative approaches to build the talent pipeline A lack of skills in critical growth areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and coordinate new pathway models at scale in conjunction with employers, focusing on key growth sectors, securing mainstream resources to support delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belfast Inclusive Labour Market Partnership, in conjunction with DfE and DfC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DfC DfE Local businesses Innovation City Belfast partners Local authorities Community and voluntary sector Local colleges, universities and training providers
<p>Develop at-scale interventions to address the legacy of low skills to support inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almost 1 in 5 Belfast residents currently skilled to level 2 or below Future demand forecasts suggest that only 1 in 10 jobs will require level 2 skills or less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in in-school support to enhance attainment levels (particularly at GCSE level), focusing on areas of deprivation Develop a funded programme to expand in-work essential skills provision, focusing particularly on those employed in low-skilled sectors Develop alternative skills accreditation models and explore new pathways of informal and formal learning Re-scope funded employability and skills support programmes (including ESF provision) to improve outcomes for participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department for Education/ Education Authority Belfast Inclusive Labour Market Partnership Belfast Inclusive Labour Market Partnership, in conjunction with RSA Belfast Inclusive Labour Market Partnership, in conjunction with DfE and DfC (and relevant funders) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DfE Local colleges and skills providers Local authorities Schools Area Learning Communities Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government
<p>Focus on digital skills at scale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tech and digital sectors have been resilient and are driving city growth - need to ensure appropriate supply of talent to maintain competitiveness and drive further investment Labour market challenges may create opportunities to establish new pathways, creating a wider talent pool to support business resilience and demonstrate commitments to inclusive innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and secure resources for comprehensive digital skills plan to service existing and future demand, including consideration of new access routes into the tech and digital sector to support inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation City Belfast Partnership, in conjunction with Belfast Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DfE Local colleges, universities and training providers DfC
<p>Scale up higher skills provision in key growth areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future demand forecasts identify need for 10% increase in vocationally relevant subject areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use place-based partnerships (e.g. Innovation City Belfast) to support greater alignment between skills supply and demand ensuring responsive, solution-focused engagement to meet future growth needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation City Belfast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DfE Universities and colleges



What happens next?

We believe Belfast and Northern Ireland stand at an inflection point, with windows of opportunity at both macro and institutional levels to create a positive generational benefit for both the city and the region.

At this juncture, we consider that the city's leaders must reset, refocus and regroup with a singular commitment to delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth that will drive prosperity for all residents and address the structural challenges in the economy.

Emerging strategies and new approaches such as the 10x Economic Vision, the work of Innovation City Belfast and the emerging investment through the Belfast Region City Deal are indicative of a high level of ambition supported by critical investment proposals. However, they will only be realised if we are successful in convincing our partners across the various government departments and within the Northern

Ireland Executive to think innovatively about developing a different relationship with the city, its agencies, its anchor institutions and its businesses.

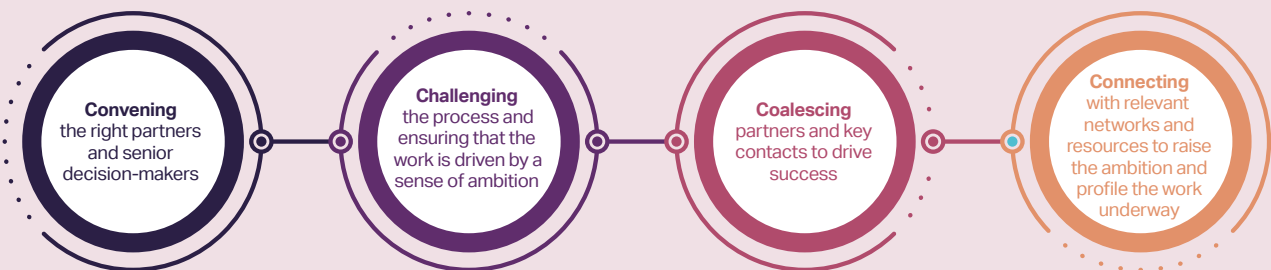
Commission members are acutely aware that our proposals are far-reaching and involve system-wide change. We recognise that, while these proposals are borne of our collective experiences in other cities and places, they cannot simply be transplanted into Belfast. We know that understanding local context is critical and our two years of work here have demonstrated to us the unique complexities of this place. For that reason, we feel that we will only be able to make traction with these proposals if we can build collaborative coalitions

to bring forward these proposals for the benefit of residents, businesses, communities and in support of wider city and regional ambitions. In practical terms, this will involve bringing together partners to test and shape interventions, secure resources and oversee delivery, as well as successfully influencing government partners to ensure that they consider and take account of these proposals in emerging policy approaches. We recognise that these propositions cover a wide range of areas, so we have suggested that the Development Leads convene senior representatives to develop delivery plans and secure resources to bring forward the commitments.

Commission champions

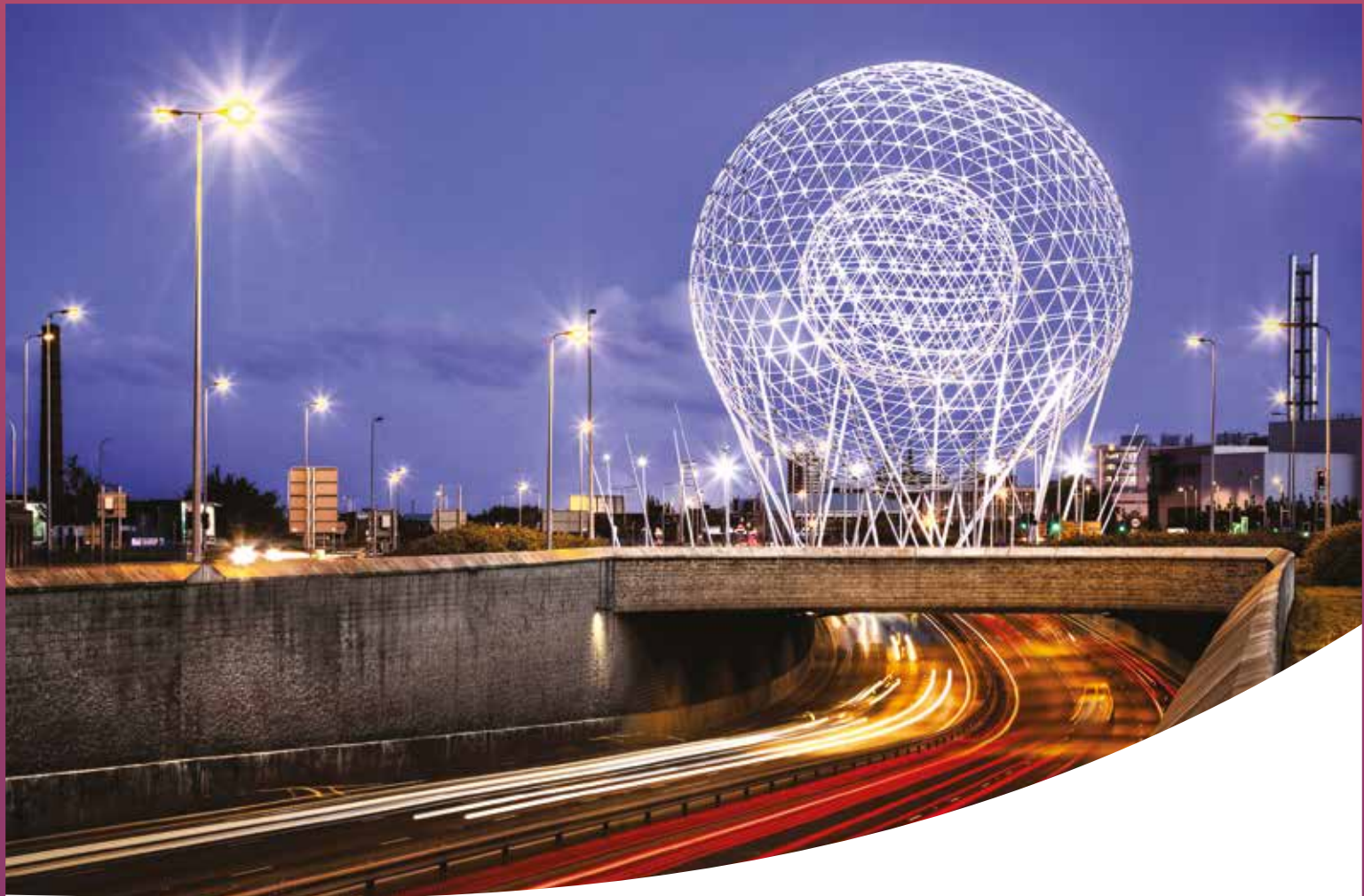
The Commissioners each feel passionately that the propositions in this report, if actioned, can help move Belfast and Northern Ireland towards a more inclusive and sustainable future. That commitment has driven us over the last two years and, having reached this point, we want to help, where we can, to move these ambitions forward.

Working alongside the Development Leads and other responsible agencies, a number of the Commissioners have agreed to champion key propositions in the document. The role of the champion will be to use their position, knowledge and networks to influence delivery by:



The respective champions are:

- Renewed Future City: city centre development**
 Suzanne Wylie, Belfast City Council
- Renewed Future City: housing development**
 Grainia Long, Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Sustainable Future: net zero**
 Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner
- Sustainable Future: energy**
 Dame Rotha Johnston, NIE Networks
- Intelligent Future City**
 Professor Ian Greer, Queen's University Belfast
- Global Future**
 Ann McGregor, Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Inclusive Future Opportunities**
 Ed Vernon, Strategic Advisor to BT, Deputy Chair of Queen's University Foundation Board and non-executive director of a number of technology businesses



The Commission was established by Belfast City Council. Continuation beyond the production of this report was never in our gift. The proposed way forward is to establish a new City Innovation and Inclusive Growth Advisory Forum. This will involve senior Belfast-based representatives across the public and private sectors. This forum will work with nominated development leads to convene challenge teams comprising relevant partners to test, develop and source the required resources to deliver our recommendations. The forum will report progress to the Commission and in 12 months' time, at that point we will reconvene to review progress and, where appropriate, create a further call to action.

We want to mobilise local organisations to take ownership of these recommendations. We need our local businesses to endorse the proposed areas of investment as those that can make a difference to them. We need our local communities to engage with these proposals and to see them as solutions to some of the inequalities and challenges that they face. We also need to look beyond the city, positioning Belfast and its abundant economic assets as a dynamic location for investment, attracting the resources and financing to help deliver on some of the ambitions in this report.

We recognise the volatility of the economy at present. However, we have positioned this work as a 10 year

plan. In order to stand any chance of successful implementation, the political environment will require greater stability and the operational environment will require greater commitment to collaboration, with more joined-up, long-term planning and multi-annual budget windows.

Our experience to date suggests that the commitment and ambition is in place among city partners. We remain committed to seeing this through and will re-engage in twelve months to review progress and offer our reflections at that point.



George Best
BELFAST CITY AIRPORT



Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission members

The Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission is a collaboration between Belfast City Council, Belfast Harbour, Queen's University, Ulster University and a number of city partners, which was set up with the goal of agreeing an ambitious economic strategy for the city. Details of Commission members are included below:

Chair

Sir Michael Lyons

Non-Exec Chairman, English Cities Fund

Chairman of the English Cities Fund, Chairman of SQW Ltd, a director of Redrow Homes PLC and strategic adviser on public asset management and regeneration. He is a former Chairman of the BBC (from May 2007 to end of April 2011). Following a distinguished career in public service, he was knighted for services to Local Government in 2001.

During 2014 he led the Lyons Housing Commission, to produce a road map for building 200,000 homes a year by 2020. He led the national 'Lyons Inquiry' into the functions and funding of local government, which argued for greater devolution and emphasised the local authority's role in placeshaping and two other significant reviews concerning the relocation of government services (2004) and the management of public assets (2004). A former Deputy Chairman of the Audit Commission (2003 to 2006) and Professor of Public Policy at Birmingham University (2001 to 2006).

Members

Tim Brundle

Director of Research and Impact, Ulster University

Tim Brundle is Director of Research and Impact at Ulster University. Tim directs Ulster's research strategy, governance and administration, and guides its commercial output through knowledge transfer and intellectual property commercialisation. He also holds the position of Executive Director of Innovation Ulster Ltd, Ulster's venturing and investment company.

Tim has worked throughout his career in research-led organisations, with a focus on developing their customer-orientation, economic impact, business outcomes and shareholder value. He has led the establishment of more than 40 high tech start-up companies, secured over £400m of venture capital, managed a profitable investment fund and ensured investor value from company acquisitions and a stock market floatation. He has served as a Director of many of Ulster's spin out companies, Invest NI and the UK Knowledge Transfer Network.

Members (continued)

Emma Cariaga

Joint Head of Canada Water Development, British Land

Emma leads the development of Canada Water, a 53 acre project delivering a major new town centre in Central London. She joined the Executive Committee in 2019.

Emma is a Non-executive Director of Assura plc, as well as Non-executive Director of TEDI-London, a higher education provider for future engineers founded by Arizona State University, King's College London & UNSW Sydney.

Emma joined British Land in 2014 from Landsec where she delivered a number of Central London developments as well as overseeing their strategic land portfolio. Prior to this, Emma held development and land management roles at Barratt and Crest Nicholson.

Alice Charles

Lead, Cities, Infrastructure and Urban Services, World Economic Forum

Alice Charles leads the Cities and Real Estate workstreams at the World Economic Forum. This includes the Global Future Council on Cities and Urbanization, the Future of Real Estate, co-leading the Net Zero Carbon Cities: An integrated approach initiative and the Biodiverse Cities initiative, the production of all cities and real estate related content and events at World Economic Forum Summits (including Davos).

She is also a Member of the European Commission Intelligent Cities Advisory Board, a member of the UN Habitat Stakeholder Advisory Group, a member of the Commission for Innovation and Inclusive Growth for the City of Belfast, a member of the Mayors' Global Council for the City of Buenos Aires, a member of the Visiting Committee of the Senseable City Lab, MIT, a member of the Urban Leadership Council (ULC) for the Coalition for Urban Transitions, jury member of the WWF One Planet City Challenge and a jury member of the Real Play City Challenge.

She has nineteen years' experience working in the areas of cities, urban development, town planning, real estate, infrastructure, environment, climate change and public policy globally. She was previously an External Board Member of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), Ireland Planning Advisory Committee from 2010 to November 2020.

Professor Neil Gibson

Chief Economist for Ireland, EY

Neil Gibson is EY Chief Economist in Ireland providing economic advice, commentary and modelling input across service lines. Current areas of focus include supporting firms to prepare for Brexit, forecasting the Irish economy and working with Government clients to ensure a policy focus on long term competitiveness.

Neil is a visiting Professor of Economic Policy at Ulster University and a regular commentator in the media on economic matters in Ireland and prior to joining EY, was their senior economic advisor across the island.

Prof Ian Greer FMedSci President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast

Ian Greer has been President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast since August 2018. He has extensive experience of university innovation, driving regional economic growth, including cross-sector developments such as the Northern Health Science Alliance, a collaboration of eight universities and NHS partners, and is the co-founder of the Health Innovation Research Alliance for NI.

He is a strong advocate for university social responsibility including widening participation. He leads the innovation pillar of the Belfast Region City Deal, driving innovation in key sectors for the local economy - creative industries, health innovation, data science and analytics and advanced manufacturing. He is currently President of Universities Ireland, promoting collaboration across the island and a Council member of Research England.

By way of background, he is a medical graduate of the University of Glasgow, with his research and clinical career in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. He has held senior leadership positions in several UK universities and was Vice President of the University of Manchester, immediately before moving to Queen's.

Dame Rotha Johnston DBE

Rotha is currently is director of Wildflower Property and previously owned a food service business with her husband, that operated in Great Britain and across the island of Ireland.

Rotha is chair of Northern Ireland Screen. She is also chair of NIE Networks, the transmission and distribution operator for Northern Ireland. In addition, she is a member of KPMG's Northern Ireland Advisory Board, a director of QUBIS Ltd, where she chairs the Development Committee, and a director at the charity, Ulster Garden Villages Ltd.

In the past she has been a BBC Trustee for Northern Ireland, Pro-Chancellor at Queen's University Belfast, a member of the Industrial Strategy Council, an independent body assessing the progress of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy, a Belfast Harbour Commissioner, Deputy Chair of Invest Northern Ireland and a director of AIB UK.

Grainia Long Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Grainia Long is the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the housing authority for Northern Ireland and one of the largest publically owned social landlords in Europe.

Previously, Grainia was the Commissioner for Resilience for the city of Belfast, and co-Chaired the Belfast Climate Commission. Grainia was also the Chief Executive of the National Child Protection Charity in the Republic of Ireland, ISPC Childline. This position followed several years working in housing, including as Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), and previously National Director of the CIH in Northern Ireland. She has served two terms as a member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, was a member of the Lyons Commission on Housing Supply and Advisor to the Best Commission on the Future of Housing in Northern Ireland.

Grainia is currently Chair of Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Trust, a social housing provider in England, and Senior Independent Director on MTVH Group Board.

Members (continued)

Angela McGowan

Regional Director, CBI Northern Ireland

Angela joined the CBI in October 2017 as Director for Northern Ireland having previously worked for eight years as the Chief Economist for Danske Bank. She has enjoyed a varied career spanning 23 years as an economist in both the public and the private sector. Angela has experience sitting on several boards including Vice Chair of Enterprise NI and Non-Executive Director of Young Enterprise.. She currently sits on the Northern Ireland Audit Office's external review panel and is a member of the Employer's Forum at Queen's University in Belfast.

Ann McGregor-Sistern MBE

Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce

Ann McGregor is CEO of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry. She was formerly Chief Executive of Enterprise NI and a director with Business in the Community. She commenced her career in the private sector working in production/materials management with Roche Manufacturing, Schering Plough and Bird's General Foods before moving into local economic development.

Ann is a council member of Dublin Chamber of Commerce and a member of British Chambers of Commerce National Accreditation Committee. She is currently the Deputy Chair of the Grand Opera House and a member of the Senate at Queen's University, Belfast.

Joe O'Neill

Chief Executive, Belfast Harbour

Joe joined Belfast Harbour in 1997, holding a number of roles including Commercial Manager and Port Manager as well as Commercial Director until his appointment as CEO in 2018.

Prior to joining the Port, Joe held positions with Undus Ltd and Cantrell and Cochrane Ltd. Joe is currently a board member of Simon Community and a Council member of the Ireland US Council.

Matthew Taylor

Chief Executive, RSA (2006-2021)

Matthew Taylor was Chief Executive of the RSA from 2006 to summer 2021. He has recently moved to a new role but remains a Fellow of the RSA. Matthew has blogged over 1,200 times on topics ranging from policy, politics, public service reform and cultural theory to the RSA itself.

Prior to becoming Chief Executive of the RSA, Matthew was Chief Adviser on Political Strategy to the Prime Minister. He was the Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research between 1999 and 2003, has written numerous articles, and is a regular panellist on Radio 4's Moral Maze.

Judith Totten MBE **Non-Executive Board Member, Invest NI**

Judith Totten is the founder and Managing Director of 'Upstream,' an independent provider of working capital funding, trade and supply chain funding and credit management support to businesses across Northern Ireland.

She had a lengthy career in business banking, principally with Danske Bank (Northern Bank Ltd) before setting up her own business in 2011. A passionate advocate for business across NI, Judith is actively involved in funding, mentoring and advising business owners across a wide range of industry sectors. Judith is very well networked and aside from her own business is committed to supporting the key business bodies such as the CBI, IOD and Chamber of Commerce as well as sitting on the Prince's Trust Council.

Dr Ed Vernon OBE

Ed is a Strategic Advisor to BT Ireland, a Foundation Board Trustee of Queen's University and Chair of the Riddel Hall Founders' Club. Since 2007, he has been Chairman of Macildowie Ltd, a specialist recruitment agency in the East Midlands of England.

From 2011 until 2014 he was Asset Management Advisor to the NI Executive. Ed was awarded an OBE for services to economic development in 2012 and holds an honorary doctorate from Queen's University for exceptional services to business and commerce.

Suzanne Wylie **Chief Executive, Belfast City Council**

Suzanne Wylie took up the post of Chief Executive of Belfast City Council in 2014.

Through the Council's City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy which involves securing a City Growth Deal, Suzanne is positioning the Council as a key driver in the continued growth of Belfast as Northern Ireland's capital city. She has been leading the Council's ambitious city's community plan, the Belfast Agenda, aimed at delivering economic growth and connecting neighbourhoods and people to the opportunities it creates.

Senior Responsible Officer

John Greer **Director of Economic Development, Belfast City Council**

John Greer is the Director of Economic Development at Belfast City Council, and leads a division with responsibilities for economic development, tourism, and culture, aimed at developing the city's economy and vibrancy.

Prior to joining Belfast City Council John was a Director at the Special EU Programmes Body in Belfast, where he managed the PEACE IV and Interreg VA programmes. Before that, John spent more than a decade in North America. Initially working for Invest Northern Ireland, leading their trade and promotion activities on the US West Coast, before taking up a position at BDC in Vancouver, where he led a team delivering innovative debt and equity financing solutions for high growth technology, media and telecoms companies. Following this role John took up a position as a Director at the National Research Council of Canada, leading a team developing and delivering strategies to encourage the growth of the technology sector in Canada.

