



Subject:	City Centre Open Spaces & Connectivity
Date:	10 November 2021
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To update Members regarding ongoing work to develop a high quality open/green spaces and connection across and to/from the city centre.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the update on emerging open space and placemaking projects across the city centre, including the Belfast Harbour Commissioners City Quays Gardens, the City Quays North-South Spine, the Little York – Little Patrick Street scheme and the INW / Cathedral Gardens Open Space Framework;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve that Council-owned lands at Corporation St be considered for a temporary meanwhile use for the RSUA/JP Corry Open Belfast Design Competition, on the basis as set out below, with a future report to be brought to Committee prior to progressing with the winning design.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>A report was brought to CG&R Committee in August 2021 outlining some of the ongoing work across Council and other partners to enhance existing, and develop new, high quality open spaces across and connecting to/from the city centre, for the benefit of all users, including existing communities, and to support the growth of the resident population in the city centre. The paper also noted the importance of an integrated approach to connectivity and placemaking, and how this is central to work across individual projects that in turn link to the ongoing development of 'A Bolder Vision for Belfast'.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Detail</u></p> <p>Officers are undertaking a review of open space within the city centre, with a view to identifying potential interventions to improve existing spaces, as well as creating new spaces, with an emphasis on greening and softening otherwise hard urban environments. To note however that such interventions may not necessarily be Council led or delivered but could be by way of other partners, for example, BIDS, businesses developers, public sector bodies and anchor institutions – many of which are already considering such opportunities. An audit is underway which will enable the identification of priority sites or projects ranging from short term 'tactical regeneration' to permanent placemaking projects. In addition to continuing to influence major city placemaking projects such as Belfast Streets Ahead, officers will continue to explore other funding opportunities to support short to medium term delivery.</p>
3.3	<p>Members will be aware of a number of specific projects currently in development across the city that represent opportunities to deliver on these ambitions, with Council having a key role as delivery agent in some instances, as well as enabling and catalysing initiatives being brought forward by other agencies.</p>
3.4	<p>A brief update on these initiatives is outlined below and identified on the map as attached in Appendix 1:</p>

City Quays Gardens

3.5 Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) are continuing to develop design proposals for 'City Quays Gardens' in line with their recently published Placemaking Strategy. Officers have engaged with BHC regarding the design development process, with the scheme placing considerable emphasis on greening, sustainability, and enabling active travel. The current proposals are available to view at <https://www.cqgardens.co.uk/> with images provided as Appendix 2 of this report, and BHC plan to submit a planning application for a c£3m first phase with the aim of commencing work during 2022.

3.6 It should be noted that the proposed City Quays Gardens represents Phase 1 of a proposed four phase Masterplan for the public realm improvements as a part of the City Quays Masterplan. The wider masterplan also incorporates BCC owned lands as a potential Phase 4 element encompassing the Corporation Square Car Park under the M3 flyover and lands that officers are currently considering for the relocation of the operational Dunbar Depot. These proposals for the Phase 4 development are however very much at concept stage. Officers will continue to engage with BHC regarding the wider masterplan elements and will provide future reports to the CG&R and SP&R Committees as relevant as these discussions progress.

3.7 Connectivity: North South Spine Road & Little York St/ Little Patrick St Area

Officers are working to develop plans for a 'North-South Spine Road' in line with the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy and the Greater Clarendon and Sailortown Masterplan (and subsequent Public Realm & Accessibility Design Guide) which set out a number of placemaking priorities including the development of a 'North-South Spine', or neighbourhood connector, that would better link Greater Clarendon and Sailortown communities with the city centre. This concept includes enhancing the public realm along Tomb Street and Corporation Street, to Corporation Square, including lands under the M3 flyover. There is also potential to enhance east-west connections towards the University Quarter, including Little Patrick St, which would in turn connect to a separate scheme officers are developing that will aim to transform the streets between four Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation blocks at Little York St/Little Patrick St. Design team procurement is underway for the Little York St/ Little Patrick St scheme which will be funded by developer contributions, while a funding application has been submitted to the DfI Green & Blue Infrastructure fund to undertake the design work for the North South Spine up to RIBA Stage 3. Further detail on both these will be brought to a future meeting.

Cathedral Gardens / Inner NW Open Space Framework

- 3.8 Work is continuing on the Masterplan for Cathedral Gardens, with design concepts having been presented to Members in September 2021 and stakeholder engagement ongoing. Further detailed updates will be provided to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee via the 'Physical Programme Update'. During delivery of the project, a key consideration will be how to offset the temporary loss of open space at Cathedral Gardens and officers are exploring options which will be brought back to Committee.
- 3.9 Cathedral Gardens occupies a strategically significant location at the edge of the city centre and at the heart of the emerging university quarter and is also an important site relative to development objectives for the Inner North West area. In this context, there is an opportunity to maximise the value of the site from a connectivity perspective by supporting and enabling modal shift through provision of infrastructure on or close to the site, and by influencing projects that can transform the local active travel network. The principles of 'A Bolder Vision' will continue to inform input to Belfast Streets Ahead 3 and planned junction improvement schemes at Great Patrick Street/York St, Clifton Gateway and Shankill Gateway, ensuring that pedestrian and cycle movement is prioritised, including at key gateways for local communities. Work on this is ongoing through the Junctions Working Group although as previously reported to this Committee officers, in conjunction with other members of the Group, continue to press for a quick response from the DfI in terms of delivering effective designs based on a people priority perspective.
- 3.10 Officers are also working to deliver an Active Travel Hub within Cathedral Gardens, that will further support sustainable movement within the city. Co-funded by Council and DfI, the temporary hub (planned to be on site for c2yrs pending Cathedral Gardens Masterplan delivery) will house both a long-term bike leasing and repair service, and training and awareness programmes. It is considered this mix of support will complement existing infrastructure in the form of the Belfast Bikes docking station, while growing the role of the wider site as a key hub within an emerging active travel network. Procurement of the contractor for the Active Travel Hub is well advanced and work is expected to commence on site during November/December following grant of planning permission. Following pre-market engagement, an Expression of Interest process has also now been completed for an operator to run the hub, and further funding opportunities are being explored that could support additional programming. Members will also receive an update to this Committee Meeting on the opening of the Queens University Belfast Active Travel Hub, part funded through the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme. Officers are also undertaking further

	<p>work to develop a citywide Active Travel Hub Strategy and Implementation Plan in line with the Belfast Cycle Network.</p>
3.11	<p>Officers are also progressing work on the 'Inner North West Open Space Framework' that will consider wider connectivity and placemaking opportunities in this area, while also seeking to guide a collaborative and integrated approach among key stakeholders and delivery agencies including Council, DfC, St Anne's Cathedral, UU and DfI. This work is intended to provide a higher level vision of the wider area including common design principles, while also setting out specific recommendations regarding the future of, for example, Academy St and Donegall St. The consultant team has been appointed with draft outputs expected during December 2021.</p>
3.12	<p>RSUA Design Competition for Early Career Architects 2021</p> <p>Since 2016 the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) have run a design competition giving early career architects an opportunity to address real world urban situations. The first built project year was 2017 ('Built:East'), with the 2019 project 'Sound Yard' launched in October 2021. The RSUA/JP Corry Open Belfast Design Competition 2021 is seeking to generate ideas for the meanwhile use of key sites in Belfast City Centre to support the city's ambitions for increased activation and greening of open space in the city, address dereliction and seek meaningful uses for land that is vacant pending development. The aim of the competition is to instigate a project that can be delivered relatively quickly to help test concepts, get public feedback and inform longer-term plans for the city centre while not detracting from the longer term regeneration opportunities.</p>
3.13	<p>The competition aims to encapsulate the ambition set out in The Belfast Agenda, Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), A Bolder Vision and the Future City Centre Programme. The RSUA have approached Council to support the competition via a meanwhile use of a Council site, acting as a joint client and aligning the meanwhile use to Council's ambitions for a liveable and connected city centre as well as potential for funding. JP Corry are supporting the competition with £20,000 by way of materials and will also be represented with Council and RSUA on the competition judging panel. It is proposed that the panel will have representation from the neighbouring community via Sailortown and participation by a youth representative. The Competition is open to NI based young career architects, with the winning architects potentially having the opportunity to bring their concept through to delivery under the mentorship of an established architectural firm subject to final agreement by Legal Services and Committee (CG&R and SP&R). There is also a break</p>

clause in the competition whereby should it not be feasible to bring forward the winning design the winning architect receives a prize bursary from JP Corry.

3.14 Officers have proposed to RSUA (subject to Committee approval) that the Council-owned Corporation Street site is put forward. This site was acquired by Council as a vacant site in 2019 and is being brought forward as a housing led regeneration opportunity and work is progressing to attract investment to bring this site, along with other strategic city centre lands forward for development for housing led mixed use regeneration schemes. In the interim period pending development this site represents an excellent opportunity to bring forward a temporary meanwhile use to promote greening the city, improving liveability, providing spaces for active uses and/or play in all its guises and acting as an exemplar site for how the city can treat vacant sites pending development.

3.15 Officers will retain involvement throughout the process, including as a part of the final judging panel, ensuring that the competition outcomes align with Council strategic priorities, and ensure that the use does not impact on the permanent redevelopment of the site. A future report on the winning design will be brought to Committee for approval prior to proceeding with the successful architect. As below, it is also proposed to support the project with funding as part of wider funding package, to contribute to the delivery and maintenance of the successful design for a c2-year period. Further detail on this, including the specific contribution from Council, will however be brought to this Committee for approval prior to committing resources.

3.16 Additional considerations:

- The project will require planning, which will need to be included within the remit of the winner along with preparation of procurement documentation for the delivery and management of same;
- The proposal will need to ensure that the longer term use of the site is protected, with the temporary project clearly a meanwhile use pending longer term development;
- The delivery cost and revenue costs will need to be included within the brief for entrants and consideration through due Council process.
- Officers will progress further with RSUA in relation to key considerations, as well as detailing the Council's client role which will involve cross departmental working, as well as the role of the community and youth representative.

3.17	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Subject to Committee approval on the successful design, it is proposed to support the project with a maximum £100,000 funding which will be met from existing departmental budget, to contribute to the delivery and maintenance of the successful design for a 2-year period. This funding amount will form part of the design brief; however, officers have approached DfI and DfC to co-fund this £100k contribution and this is expected to reduce the contribution from Council.</p>
3.18	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with the report- EQIA Screening will be undertaken by Council as required.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Emerging Open & Civic Spaces Appendix 2 – BHC City Quays Gardens</p>