



Subject:	Academy of Urbanism Congress
Date:	9 March 2022
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To make Members aware of the upcoming Academy of Urbanism Congress that is planned to be held in Belfast, 8-10 June 2022.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To note the proposal to host the annual Academy of Urbanism Congress in Belfast on 8th June 2022 and the opportunity for Council and its partners to shape and participate in the programme.• To note the emerging key themes that will shape the agenda and potential venues and agree to a Council contribution of £10,000 to be met from existing budgets.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Background: The Academy of Urbanism <p>The Academy of Urbanism (AoU) is, a not-for-profit, politically independent network of people and organisations devoted to creating and sustaining great places. Its mission is to understand, promote</p>

	<p>and celebrate what makes great places and practically apply these lessons to improve towns and cities across Europe and beyond.</p> <p>3.2 Membership to AoU is open to everyone involved in the design, development and management of great places, with specific membership opportunities for young urbanists, professional academicians and community leaders. Members span city management and policymaking, community leadership, town planning and urban design, academic research and teaching, arts and cultural development, infrastructure and engineering, property management, politics and media. The Academy supports the Urbanism Awards that celebrate excellent practical delivery and generate a continuing resource of best practice guidance. By way of local example, recently the Connswater Community Greenway was voted as the best place in the UK and Ireland at the 2020 Urbanism Awards. Additionally, there are specific knowledge-sharing programmes such as Place Diagnostics, which can help places to engage people in challenging urban issues and they also publish a monthly journal, 'Here and Now'.</p> <p>3.3 AoU Annual Congress, 8-10 June Belfast 2022 As part of the AoU delivery of programmes and events that support places and people to explore and share good placemaking practice, its major flagship event includes an annual Congress, showcasing a different European city each summer. The AoU are proposing to hold their 2022 AoU Congress in Belfast. Past host cities include Eindhoven, Cork, Copenhagen, Rotterdam, Dublin, Aarhus, Glasgow, and Bristol. The Annual Congress is an inspiring, thought-provoking and entertaining opportunity to exchange ideas and hear leading-edge thinking from urbanists around the globe. It is an opportunity to embed the Academy within a city and use the assembled expertise of attendees to tackle live local issues alongside local partners through hands-on workshops, walking tours, and discussions.</p> <p>3.4 The AoU are very much of the view that a successful Congress owes as much to the passions of local community participants as to the insights and inspiration of invited presenters. Based on previous years, there are usually 100-120 participants that attend Congress. It is anticipated that a number of these are drawn from the local area, but others will be visitors to Belfast and will have a chance to explore the city and hear how projects in Belfast are responding to our challenges as well as creating their own best practice.</p> <p>3.5 There has been recent engagement by AoU with Council, DfC and DfI in relation to the proposed Congress. It is recognised that cities across the world are facing many challenges. This is particularly so given rapid responses necessitated by COVID and the increasingly immediate impacts of a climate in crisis which are testing our urban centres like never before. These, and the acceleration of changed practices such as home working, online shopping, and the future of tourism, are issues facing cities around the globe. Combined with the ongoing work already</p>
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underway across the Council with central government agencies, communities and private sector, our opportunity is to use the MoU to help guide the long term, sustainable change needed in how our cities function, look, and feel for people.

3.6 Belfast has a history of resilience and overcoming challenges and this year the proposed title of the Congress is *Belfast: Cities Overcoming Challenges*. Change and challenges can inform cities in unexpected ways. As new energies combine in ways not seen in the city before there is an opportunity for Belfast to learn from others and build on their existing priorities and plans and reflect on what more needs to do to make the next three decades a success.

3.7 The AoU Congress in Belfast is an opportunity to explore current strategic issues such as A Bolder Vision, the work of the High Streets Task Force, climate and resilience priorities, citywide regeneration and significant place-focused cultural initiatives, including the UNESCO City of Music and the forthcoming Year of Culture to explore how Belfast can better engage people and communities in the city's authentic placemaking. It is an opportunity to explore and highlight Belfast projects and practice alongside international examples of urbanism.

3.8 A key strand for example will include showcasing some of Belfast's cultural, urban and community professionals to an international audience and embed cultural practice in the city's regeneration to emphasise the importance of place character to the Year of Culture. It offers both local participants and visitors a chance learn more about the themes from a Belfast perspective and draw upon local case studies that link local to wider global issues facing cities. The agenda is currently being developed but potential local case study projects could include Culture Night, housing-led regeneration, StreetSpace, Sailortown, Belfast Opera, Portview, community and resilience projects. There is growing interest in the conference locally and the AoU have already been contacted by local stakeholders who are seeking to highlight their projects.

3.9 Supporting these thematic sessions, the AoU Congress also provides that chance to host sessions in venues across the city that will show off the diverse and rich range of facilities. Discussions are underway with potential host organisations such as 2 Royal Avenue, St Mary's University College, Carlisle Methodist Church, Banana Block and Ulster Museum. In addition, there are a number of site visits proposed that will enable Congress delegates and communities to work together and explore issues around good urbanism through specific site visits and workshops. It is intended that these support local people to build confidence in city development issues and connect with local and international practitioners. Discussions are currently underway in relation to this and potential site visits may include Cathedral Quarter, Colin Neighbourhood Partnership, Eastside, Forward South and the Weaver's Cross/Belfast Transport Hub.

3.10	<p>It is proposed that there will be an opening evening session in the City Hall on 8th June 2022.</p> <p>Engagement to date</p> <p>To date meetings have been held with BCC, DfI and DfC and the Chair and Board members of AoU to discuss the theme, format and potential sponsorship. It is also proposed to engage with the Community Planning Partnership City Development Board in order to link in with key city stakeholders including partnership bodies, private sector and public sector agencies. These discussions are ongoing and will shape the agenda, venues and keynote speakers.</p>
3.11	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
	<p>The estimated cost of Congress is approximately £50,000 and the AoU is seeking a £10,000 contribution from Council, which can be met from existing CRD budget. AoU is in discussions with DfC, DfI, SIB and Arts and Business for additional financial support.</p>
3.12	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</p>
	<p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents attached</p>
	<p>None</p>