

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 14th April, 2021

REMOTE MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson);
The High Sherriff, Councillor Long;
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and
Councillors Beattie, Donnelly, Gormley,
Harvey, Heading, Howard, T. Kelly, Lyons,
Maskey, McLaughlin, McMullan, Murphy,
O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Ms. E. Henry, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 3rd March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st April, subject to the amendment under the heading "Update on Tourism" to provide that the item be taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Matters Referred Back from Council

Update on Tourism

The Committee reconsidered the following report, together with associated appendices:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To further consider the report and appendices presented on the Update on Tourism that was considered by the Committee at its meeting held on 3rd March.**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider the report and recommendations.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

3.1 The Committee will recall that, at the Council meeting on 1st April, it was agreed that the minute of the meeting of 3rd March, under the heading 'Tourism Update', be taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

3.2 Accordingly, the report from last month and associated appendices, along with an extract of the minutes from the March Committee (below) has been re-circulated for further consideration.

Minutes of 3rd March City Growth and Regeneration Committee' Update on Tourism

The Committee considered the following report, together with associated appendices:

'1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the development of a new tourism plan and set out key actions for quarter 1 of the 2021/22 financial year.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report and progress made to date on the development of the new tourism plan with agreement to receive a full draft in June 2021.
- Agree to progress the key actions as set out in appendix 1 and supported by 2021/22 departmental budget for tourism development.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will be aware that at a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in August 2020, it was agreed that a new ten-year plan for tourism was to be developed. The purpose of this plan is to:

3.3

- Deliver on the tourism priorities set out the Belfast Agenda, recognising the importance of tourism to Growing the Economy and City Development.

3.4

- Align to the ten-year cultural strategy A City Imagining, in order to ensure that tourism development supports cultural development and is based on an authentic and sustainable Belfast offer.
- Support economic and social recovery in the context of Covid-19 including stabilisation, recovery and growth with the opportunity to build back better.
- Provide strategic context to the Belfast City Region Deal.

3.2 A further update was provided to Committee in December 2020 setting out findings of the initial research and development phase and the emerging four draft strategic themes:

- Grow Belfast
- Experience Belfast
- Position Belfast
- Sustainable Belfast

3.3 An initial timeframe had aimed to present a full draft plan to Committee in March 2021. However due to ongoing challenges facing the tourism and hospitality sectors it is proposed that this is now extended to June in order to facilitate sectoral engagement and to better understand the recovery trajectory. This report therefore provides an update on further progress made during the development phase of the plan and sets out key foundation actions to be taken forward in quarter one of the 2021/22 financial year.

3.4 Experience Belfast – developing neighbourhoods

The cultural strategy recognises the importance of cultural tourism and the role of Council in supporting the development of local destinations and quality products across the city. In particular the strategy commits to:

- Developing cultural tourism through building capacity and opportunity for citizen and culture led approaches to tourism development and infrastructure (e.g. local tourism programme).
- 3.5 This will be further expanded in the ten year tourism plan through one of the four draft themes, Experience Belfast. This will include experiences that can be brought to life through the development of an optimal mix of ‘anchor’ and ancillary products that get people into an area and keep them there. This also increases connectivity between all parts of the city raising the visibility and appeal of the breadth of the tourism offer with a focus on encouraging international visitors to immerse themselves actively in the locale, interacting with people and learning the history and stories of the places.
- 3.6 Further work will be undertaken to embed neighbourhood tourism into the overall experience plan with proposals for a competitive funding scheme to be developed in line with the investment approach to the cultural sector. Details will be included in future Committee reports for consideration from 2022/23 onwards. However to ensure continuity and to build on local tourism development provided to date it is proposed to provide interim support for key programmes such as the City Connections local tourism programme and other ongoing partnership agreements. In 2020/21 these local conduits have continued to deliver support programmes throughout COVID-19 including:
 - Insights and research into impact of the pandemic on tourism businesses at a localised level.
 - Public events and activities – adapting to restrictions including hybrid models of digital content and on the ground activity during summer months when permitted.
 - Developing linkages between heritage programmes and community tourism.
 - Connecting local regeneration to tourism development.

- 3.7 It is proposed that these ongoing partnerships can be utilised to ensure that recovery plans are pivoted to consider local needs and opportunities with the focus of activity for 2021-22 to include:
- Increase engagement and promote the benefits of participating in local networks including identifying new and emerging partners delivering local tourism experiences.
 - Investing in local programmes that engage directly with visitors including support to attract target markets during phase one of recovery such as domestic staycations as well as UK and Ireland.
 - Capacity building and development work on clustering approaches with involvement of industry experts and practitioners to develop geographic and thematic models.
 - Supporting and commissioning robust evidence base to increase understanding of the market including consumer testing of local products.

Programme Development supported by the Global Destination Sustainability Index

- 3.8 Members will be aware that Belfast has completed its year one benchmarking as a member of the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDSI). The Index is based on 69 Indicators broken down into four categories:
- Environmental Performance
 - Social Performance
 - Supplier Performance
 - Destination Management Performance
- 3.9 As previously reported to Committee in December 2020, a series of recommendations for action have been identified for Belfast to take forward to increase our ranking position in the Index in advance of the benchmarking review which is due for submission in August 2021. A number of these specifically relate to the Destination Management Organisation and will be taken forward as part of Visit Belfast's business plan for 2021-22. In addition to this, under Council's contract with the GDSI, they have been engaging with the ICC (as the City's Congress venue) to identify a suitable 3rd party accreditation scheme, likely to be the globally recognized Earthcheck scheme.

Environmental research

- 3.10 **Belfast's Resilience Strategy with its alignment to UN Sustainability targets was commended by the GDSI as exemplary. It was noted that although great progress has been made in terms of recycling over recent years, overall Northern Ireland has a relatively high landfill rate and export of waste remains high. Officers wish to understand the overall contribution of the tourism industry to this process in greater detail in order to make informed decisions on future plans. It is proposed that a piece of research is carried out to establish baselines and future areas of action specifically in relation to landfill and the export of waste.**

Social and cultural initiatives

- 3.11 **In 2020 Belfast City Council partnered with QUB to host a student placement from QUB's MSc Leadership for Sustainable Development programme to analyse sustainable practices currently used by festival and event organisers in Belfast, highlight best practice and identify areas for improvement. Officers facilitated engagement with events and festivals through BCC's Festivals Forum. The output of this project was a Sustainable Events Toolkit aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is hoped that once events and festivals re-open that this toolkit can be mobilised to enable both Council and our partners in the cultural sector to assess their accountability in the context of sustainability and begin to adapt.**
- 3.12 **This year, our delivery partner Visit Belfast are hosting a further student placement to develop a Sustainable Events Framework. Due to complete in April 2021, this project will map the current sustainable initiatives which are underway in Belfast and identify best practice in terms of sustainable destinations globally. The outcome of this project will be the creation of a Sustainable Events Framework which will be used to assist Visit Belfast, Council and clients to connect to, produce and promote events and cultural activities which have sustainable environmental, community, social and economic impacts.**

3.13 Working from this framework, we will identify and curate 'Green Stories' for businesses in the Belfast City Council area for promotion in a range of media to inspire, motivate and further incentivise engagement.

3.14 **Supporting Suppliers**

The GDSI benchmarking exercise identified a number of gaps in relation to the city's supply chain. Officers have been working in partnership with the GSDI, Visit Belfast and the Resilience Team to progress a third party accreditation strategy for the hospitality industry and events and festivals sector. This will involve a strategic partnership with Green Tourism and a scheme to incentivise 3rd party accreditation across the Visit Belfast partnership and Council client portfolio.

3.15 In addition to the accreditation strategy, officers have identified a lack of capacity building initiatives and programmes which assist and encourage the industry to commit to sustainability in the long-term. A number of initiatives will be developed to address this gap:

- Officers will establish a pilot scheme for the hospitality industry encouraging the reduction of food waste (aligning with the UN sustainability target of reducing food waste by 2030). Previous successful pilot schemes in other cities have involved initiatives such as training kitchen staff in food reduction techniques which also bring financial benefits to the business.
- Officers will work in partnership with key stakeholders to enhance reduce, reuse and recycling initiatives both internally (across our own tourism assets) and externally across the tourism and hospitality industries and related sectors.
- Early discussions have taken place with the Resilience team and other Council Departments to look at the potential for co-designed schemes with a specific focus on sustainable food.

- Officers are discussing the potential for a Belfast showcase at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) which will take place in November 2021 in Glasgow.

Creating new digital content to support the positioning of Belfast

- 3.16 As part of the development of the new tourism plan and in support of the concept development for the Belfast Destination Hub, research has been commissioned to:
- Better understand consumer attitudes and motivations to visiting Belfast
 - Establish a baseline for perceptions of the city as a cultural tourism destination
 - Receive feedback on the proposed cultural tourism narrative and themes included in the cultural strategy.
 - Test the Belfast Stories concept and the wider product in the Belfast Destination Hub
- 3.17 The final report identified an opportunity to strengthen and broaden the emotional connection of the market to Belfast beyond those that are seeking a niche experience. The key recommendation coming out of this research is the role that Council can play in transforming perceptions of Belfast by enabling the creation of much richer and diverse digital content that represents the breadth of the city's tourism experience and authentic Belfast offer.
- 3.18 **Summary of feedback**
- Unless people had some prior connection, the majority of participants did not know enough about Belfast to include it in their sub-list of choices for a city break destination. In particular there were limited emotional connotations required to make it a destination of choice.
 - Some of participants were aware of Belfast marketing most notably those from ROI – however this is not necessarily their preferred format for influencing where to go. Formal marketing is considered insufficient of itself to prompt action. Searching digital content does not provide the necessary supplementary information to set Belfast apart in a competitive marketplace or to challenge established perceptions of the city. Setting this in context against digital content of other cities such as Edinburgh, Galway, or further afield but of

similar population size to Belfast, Arhus (Denmark), or Varna (Bulgaria) presents a difficult first hurdle for potential tourists to overcome.

- In the absence of strong positive digital content, potential tourists must rely on formal communications, opinions of others and prior knowledge. This leaves Belfast open to generalisation.
- Internationally, people see Belfast as a potential destination, but not quite yet and this is in part based on a lack of curated digital content.

3.19 COVID-19 has amplified the importance of digital spaces. At the appropriate time consumers will return to making decisions of future destinations of preference. It is important that Belfast develops a digital strategy that can spark and sustain global dialogue about the city to create the connections that ultimately will move from a digital space to experiencing the place through city breaks. In turn the production of digital content supports of the positioning of the city internationally in all sectors including investment, events and education.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.20 The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2021/22 budget for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy Departmental budget.

3.21 All programmes will be subject to ongoing review with cost savings identified where projects cannot proceed due to Covid-19. The breakdown is detailed below with further detail provided at appendix 1.

GDSI Membership	£7,500
Capacity building including Green Tourism accreditation	£75,000
Research and development	£10,000
Local tourism support	£200,000
Digital content	£60,000

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.22 The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). The ten year tourism plan will include a further equality screening.’

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development provided further information on funding agreements and confirmed that further detail in relation to inclusivity and accessibility would be provided in the 10 year tourism plan being submitted to the Committee in June.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and progress made to date on the development of the new tourism plan with agreement to receive a full draft in June 2021; and
- Agreed to progress the key actions as set out in appendix 1 and supported by the 2021/22 departmental budget for tourism development.’

Financial and Resource Implications

As per original report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

None associated with this report.”

The Director of Economic Development explained the thematic approach of the proposed programme which supported initial quarter one actions alongside the priorities set out in the ten year cultural strategy. He summarised the intended projects, timelines and associated budgets as outlined in Appendix 1.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development provided further detail on building links between heritage and local tourism, together with capacity building. He advised that, once work had been undertaken, further information would be provided to the area working groups regarding local tourism assets and capacity building. He also advised that the Sustainable Event Toolkit, outlined in the report, would be shared with the Committee.

In response to a Members question in relation to further details of funding allocation, the Director of Economic Development explained that this would be provided in the detailed Annual Review Report which was submitted for Committee’s consideration following the completion of end of year monitoring and evaluation.

During further discussion, one Member raised concerns with the potential delay in receiving the International Framework update, as part of the wider economic development strategy report, previously anticipated to be considered by the Committee in June. She also requested if the jargon in the reports, such as this, could be simplified. The Strategic Director of Place and Economy explained that the work of the team had been impacted by the pandemic and staff had been redeployed to work on the critical recovery work such as administering of the revitalisation fund. He clarified that Members comments on simplifying terminology would be considered for future reports.

In relation to the potential for further Cluster Grant funding, the Strategic Director advised that the matter was being considered internally.

The Director of Economic Development also confirmed that, following the update in March regarding Belfast Bikes, a further update would be provided in June.

After discussion, the Committee agreed the following recommendations, as outlined in the original report and appendices:

- Noted the contents of the report and progress made to date on the development of the new tourism plan with agreement to receive a full draft in June, 2021; and
- Agreed to progress the key actions as set out in appendix 1 and supported by 2021/22 departmental budget for tourism development.

The Committee also noted that:

- the Area Working Groups would be provided with future updates on local tourism assets and capacity building; and
- the Sustainable Event Toolkit, outlined in 3.11 of the original report, would be shared with the Committee.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the report associated with the following item was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the item as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Culture Update - 2021/22 Priorities

The Committee was provided with an update on the current status of the ten-year cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, which included proposed key actions in 2021/22 aligned to the implementation of year 2 of the strategy.

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in August 2019, the final ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast *A City Imagining* had been agreed. This included draft implementation plans for a three-year period to be reviewed and finalised on an annual basis.

The Director of Economic Development and Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism explained the current status of the Cultural Strategy, research that had been undertaken and the delivery of funding and awards.

The Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism advised that, despite the challenges of Covid-19, significant progress had been made in delivery against strategic targets in 2020/21. She confirmed that a detailed annual report would be submitted to the Committee in due course following the completion of end of year monitoring and evaluation. She then provided a summary of work which had been undertaken to date under the following themes:

- Investing in cultural sector;
- Events;
- Sectoral Developments;
- Cultural Participation and Engagement; and
- Strategic Initiatives.

She provided also a summary of the key commitments and priorities of the Cultural Strategy for 2021/2022 and highlighted the process of the Pathfinder Scheme which was outlined in the report.

She clarified that the activities outlined in this report would be resourced from the 2021/22 budget for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy Departmental budget, in line with existing approvals, and a breakdown of specific areas of spend were included in Appendix 1.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development and Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism answered a range of questions in relation to the need for building capacity in the LGBTQ community, the options to progress the Gig Buddies scheme, social clauses and accessibility measures, and music trails.

The Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism advised that the draft application for the UNESCO City of Music status would be presented to the Committee in June 2021, and officers would investigate potential opportunities for social clauses and accessibility initiatives.

In response to a Members query regarding further changing places facilities in cultural venues to ensure accessible tourism, the Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism suggested that this could be examined as part of the work being undertaken with partners, the Department for Communities and its Access and Inclusion Fund.

After discussion, the Committee:

- I. Noted the contents of the report and progress against the delivery of the cultural strategy priorities;
- II. Agreed the actions for 2021/22 as set out in the report and in appendix 1, including the budget implications at 3.42 to be met from existing departmental budgets;
- III. Agreed the recommendations for Pathfinder awards as set out at 3.14, with further detail included in appendix 3;
- IV. Noted that the draft application for the for UNESCO City of Music status would be presented to Committee in June 2021, and officers would investigate potential opportunities for social clauses and accessibility initiatives; and
- V. Noted that changing places facilities in cultural venues could be examined as part of the Department for Communities access and inclusion fund.

Request to Present

Future Provision of Business Start-up Support in Northern Ireland

The Committee was reminded that the Council was committed to refreshing the range of business start-up support that was currently in place in order to help achieve the substantial shift that would be required in order to meet the targets set out in the Enterprise Framework. The actions of the framework focused on increasing the number of business start-ups in the city and making existing businesses more productive and competitive.

It was reported that, working with the 10 other councils, Invest NI and Department for the Economy, it had been agreed that the Council would take the lead in undertaking research to inform the future measure and model required to deliver business start-up support across the region. As the work was now complete, it was proposed that the findings be presented to the Members at the May meeting of the Committee by the Enterprise Research Centre, the consultancy team which had been working with officers on the development of the research.

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from the Enterprise Research Centre on their findings from the research on the Future Provision of Business Start-up Support in Northern Ireland at its monthly meeting in May.

The Committee also noted that the Enterprise Research Centre would be asked to provide Business Start-Up figures by location/quarters for the last 4 years, if possible.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

York Street Interchange

Following a request at its last meeting, the Committee was provided with an overview on decisions taken by the Committee and the Council since the inception of discussions on the York Street Interchange (YSI) that had informed the Council's position on the proposed scheme.

The Strategic Director provided a summary of the background and context of the Council's position on the York Street Interchange scheme, together with a timeline of events, key dates and reports that had been considered by the Council since 2005 to date.

He highlighted that in March 2021 the Infrastructure Minister had announced the outcome of the review of the YSI scheme and approved the six recommendations by the independent review panel and additional actions.

He pointed out that consultants had been retained by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to carry out further work particularly around place making and optimisation of scheme delivery for communities, connectivity and green recovery, the wider living places agenda, and future development of Belfast. He stated that a further update report from the consultants was anticipated in the autumn of 2021 and further details on this review process would be brought to the Committee in due course.

During discussion, Members raised concerns in relation to the lack of clarity in the Council's position and support of the scheme. The Strategic Director explained further the timeline of events and highlighted that the Department for Infrastructure's Assurance Review Report might assist to clarify the current status of the Scheme and DfI's future plans.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the background to, and context of, the Council's position on the York Street Interchange scheme;
- Noted the chronology of events in relation to the YSI, including the formal considerations by the Council; and
- Agreed that the Committee write to the Minister for Infrastructure to request a copy of the York Street Interchange Independent Assurance Review Report.

Future City Centre Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To update Members on various matters in relation to city centre development and in particular those linked to the Future City Centre (FCC) Programme of work.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to;

- **Note the ongoing challenges of the city centre and its criticality to the recovery of the wider city and region; and the need to adopt a multi-faceted approach to the re-imagination and recovery of the city centre.**
- **Note the ongoing Future City Centre Programme aimed at addressing the issues impacting upon the city centre and its alignment with the wider Belfast: Our Recovery framework priorities. A short presentation will also be provided at Committee.**
- **Note that a Members workshop on the Future of the City is proposed to take place on 25th May, which will provide the opportunity to discuss priorities and future areas of focus.**
- **Note the completion of the tender competition process to appoint a suitable consultant to deliver the next phases of the Bolder Vision City Centre Connectivity Study and the recommendation to move this piece of work to this next stage of delivery.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 It is recognised that in the current context of the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic the landscape of the city centre is undoubtedly challenged. As highlighted in a recent 'Centre for Cities' report, Covid-19 has struck at the very heart of what cities do best. Centre for Cities do however emphasise the importance of thriving city centres, particularly given their criticality in terms of jobs and economic recovery for the wider regions, and reiterate that the reopening of city centres, supporting their recovery and further growth and longer term economic performance will be critical for the delivery of the Government's 'Building Back Better' and 'levelling up' agendas. Despite the issues impacting on city centres as a result of Covid-19, predictions from various sources do however indicate that the long term trend towards urbanisation will continue over the next decade.

3.2 Belfast remains the economic driver for the region. The Regional Development Strategy 2035 specifically recognised the need to enhance the distinctive role of Belfast City Centre as the primary retail location in Northern Ireland. However even prior to the onset of Covid-19 pandemic the city centre and the retail sector in Belfast, like many other cities, suffered challenges from changes in consumer behaviours including trends towards more online

shopping and the desire for enhanced experiences on the high street. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated these changes, with a number of city centre retail closures, many of which were the result of closures of chains of national stores across the UK.

- 3.3 It is clear that Belfast, in line with other cities need to consider the purpose of the city centre and how it can adapt to becoming a multi-purpose location, combining retail and hospitality with business, residential, cultural, community and other facilities, alongside new ways of working and embracing innovation and digital technology.
- 3.4 Members will be aware of the Future City Centre (FCC) Programme which was initially developed around the key findings and recommendations outlined in the Pragma Consulting retail analysis report (reported to CGR Committee February 2020). However, given the significant challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and taking on board the views of a number of stakeholders, as well as recommendations from elsewhere (inc. the Institute of Place Management, High Street Task Force in England etc.) the FCC Programme is being recast to help address the issues impacting on the city centre.
- 3.5 In December 2020, CGR Committee agreed that a workshop would be held for Committee Members and Party Group leaders to consider the Future of the City in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated social, economic and environmental challenges. There is a proposed workshop date of 25th May (details to be confirmed with Members). In keeping with the commitment in the Belfast: Our Recovery plan to focus on a jobs-led recovery, the FCC approach acknowledges the importance of Belfast – and the city centre in particular – in creating new jobs across a range of sectoral areas.
- 3.6 The FCC Programme is linked to the longer term ambitions of the Belfast Agenda and Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy but is also integral to the delivery of the Council's Recovery Programme. It is charting a way forward for diversification of uses, enhanced connectivity, investment and inclusive economic and cultural growth but it is recognised that it needs to remain agile to deal with the ever changing challenges of the city centre. The FCC programme currently has six cross cutting pillars aimed at revitalising the city centre and creating a vibrant shared city centre where people will want to live, work and invest, but

also enhancing connectivity with surrounding communities. The overarching FCC Programme and key areas of focus is attached at Appendix 1, but with a recognition that further focus may be required on issues such as skills, transport, infrastructure and climate change.

- 3.7 There is a pressing need, now more than ever to plan ahead with our city partners and central government to ensure a joined up and collective approach to help facilitate the recovery of the city centre and it is also critical that we respond to opportunities for external funding with a focused vision and route-map as to priorities. Further discussion will take place on this at the Members Workshop.
- 3.8 The following provides an outline of some of the current areas of work within the overall Future City Centre Programme.

Regeneration and Connectivity

- 3.9 This priority is around creating the physical built environment from a place making perspective to help bring about vibrancy, diversification of use including increased city centre living, enhanced connectivity and sustainability, supporting innovation and jobs to sustain economic recovery and support an inclusive, accessible and connected city centre. Key areas of focus include:

City Centre Living

- 3.10 Members will be aware of the need to reimagine and inject new life into the city core – an issue that is more critical now than ever – a thriving residential population will be integral to a reimagined city centre. Reports have previously been brought into Committee on city centre living including the Council's ongoing Strategic Sites Assessment work as part of the housing the led regeneration programme incorporating Council and other public and private sector lands. As Members will be aware, there are a number of cluster sites that are being brought forward for development, some of which comprise the potential for additional public and/or private sector lands, and further reports will continue to be brought back to Committee on these. In addition, Members will be aware that work is underway in relation to a city-wide Strategic Site Assessment exercise. By way of a brief update, this has included work to map lands in the ownership of BCC, DfC, and NIHE together with a review of housing lands identified as part of the LDP Urban Capacity Study and Housing Monitor. There is ongoing liaison with other public sector bodies to coalesce on this work in a partnership approach which has also been identified as a key priority for the Community Planning Partnership City Development Board. LPS is also leading on compiling a register of government land and property and to date, DfC land is available on the LPS website with certain other government

land data to be published in April 2021. A further report will be brought back on the detail of this city wide work in the very near future and following the next meeting of the Community Planning Partnership City Development Board.

- 3.11 As an update in relation to the Inner North West cluster sites (comprising Little Donegall St, Library St, Kent St) which is in joint BCC/DfC ownership. Members will recall that this was being progressed by way of a two stage process with an Expression of Interest (EOI) issued to all Housing Associations on the basis of a mixed-tenure mixed-use scheme. This EOI sought confirmation from those Housing Associations who wished to go forward to the Development Brief stage and five Housing Associations responded confirming interest. The Development Brief, which has been progressed in partnership with DfC, is due to be issued to the five Housing Associations by mid-April with an expected return date by July 2021.
- 3.12 In addition there are a number of private sector led residential developments currently proposed for the city centre, either as part of major mixed use regeneration schemes (outlined below) or as stand-alone developments. Officers are working with the private and public sectors, alongside other stakeholders with a view to maximising the potential of such developments.
- 3.13 Members will also be aware of work underway on a City Centre Living Vision, which is aimed at providing an overview of a number of interrelated stands for successful city centre living. This includes:
- Quantifying the existing and latent demand of the Belfast city centre residential market including: demand across all housing tenures; existing communities and engagement; urban design & creating a quality environment.
 - Opportunities and challenges including: existing policy and plans; barriers to development; supporting social and physical infrastructure; repurposing existing buildings; existing planning consents
 - Deliverability including: investor and delivery models; funding; overcoming obstacles to delivery; cluster sites viability

City Centre Connectivity Study: Bolder Vision

- 3.14 Members are reminded of the previously agreed Council, DfC and DfI City Centre Connectivity Phase 1 Study - a 'Bolder Vision for Belfast' which was ratified by Council (March 2020) and endorsed by respective DfC and DfI Ministers. The Bolder Vision for Belfast involved a significant re-think of how the City's streets and places are used to make them attractive, healthy, vibrant and accessible places.
- 3.15 It was subsequently agreed to progress with the next phases of this City Centre Connectivity Study (CCCS) and commission a co-cliented BCC/DfI/DfC consultancy to bring it forward. The procurement process has just been completed, and it is now intended to proceed with the appointment of the preferred bidder.
- 3.16 These next phases will provide options and projects/scenarios to inform the future landscape and priority connectivity infrastructure required to support a resilient and sustainable city and ultimately completion of a final Bolder Vision Strategy and Delivery Plan. The work will involve the assessment of planned and proposed physical large scale infrastructure developments and gain an understanding of the changing land use within the city centre including emerging developments; support the increasing requirement for city centre living, sustainable transportation, re-imagined public realm and open spaces, enhanced connectivity and accessibility.
- 3.17 The CCCS is premised on the criticality of the city centre to drive forward economic growth, provide a social focus, foster vibrant city centre living and provide enhanced connectivity to communities. The recent pandemic has caused a re-evaluation of open spaces, streets, mobility and connections to services and each other.
- 3.18 It is intended that this work will help the prioritisation and acceleration of projects, aligned with the Bolder Vision principles and emerging infrastructure projects, including consideration of current pilot projects as well as short, medium and longer term projects. It is to include the approach to the development of preferred delivery options including packages of potential projects in the short term that will support longer-term changes. Stakeholder engagement and a public awareness communication plan will be an integral element.

Indicative timelines

- 3.19 Phase 2: April – September 21 – baseline and vision review; scenario development/options with potential interventions. Note - opportunity for pilot projects being brought forward in tandem with progression of final strategy and delivery plan. Thematic workshops and targeted stakeholder engagement and analysis, and draft strategy report for consultation in Phase 3.

Phase 3: September 21 – April 22 – 12 week public consultation on Draft Strategy report and Delivery Plan, Strategic Outline Business Case, and Monitoring Strategy.

Reimagining Public Realm / Connected Spaces and Places

- 3.20 Covid-19 has brought about an accelerated need to rethink how we use our city's spaces and places with a renewed focus on addressing the place-making potential and providing space for culture, leisure and people centric activities, as well as enhanced active travel options. This aligns with the themes for change within the previously agreed Bolder Vision approach which recognised a transformation of the city centre premised on active public realm and green spaces, vibrant and safe streets, prioritisation of walking, cycling and public transport and overcoming severance with surrounding communities.
- 3.21 As Members are aware, a number of projects have recently been brought forward or are in train, involving the reimagining of public space and providing a connected and people focused approach. These include:
- ***Entries and Lanes Programme*** – Transformation of a number of pedestrianisation links. Phase One is progressing towards completion, with a small number of remaining artworks due to commence shortly, alongside the installation of the schemes largest feature lighting installation in Winecellar Entry and Castle Arcade. A number of additional entries are now being taken forward as part of a Phase 2 programme, and design work has commenced on these. These include Sugarhouse Entry, High St Entry, Patterson's Place, and College St Mews. The Entries and Lanes initiative has been very much supported by adjoining businesses, particularly in a post-Covid environment where the enhanced utilisation of outdoor space is often critical for the resilience of many businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector. The physical enhancement of these entries forms part of an overall approach linked to a tourism and city animation programme, aligned with the Cultural Strategy. The Entries and Lanes programme will form part of a

wider tourism offering to explore the Belfast experiences as part of the culture, heritage and history of Belfast.

- ***Cathedral Gardens:*** Temporary Play Park in place, with proposals for a permanent park, taking into account the changing nature of the city centre and other pending developments in the area, with a focus on the use of public spaces via the Bolder Vision lens. Proposal also for a meanwhile Active Travel Hub to support increased levels of active travel and physical activity by encouraging modal shift, particularly given the pending opening of the UU campus in September. Discussions ongoing with stakeholders, with further detail to be brought back to Committee.
- ***Public Realm Catalyst Projects:*** 5 Cs Public Realm Scheme in core city centre, being progressed in conjunction with DfC and utilising developer contributions. Following an initial period of public consultation from September – December 2020, design development is continuing, and further targeted stakeholder engagement is ongoing with final designs to be agreed and brought forward for delivery. Further public realm catalyst projects utilising historic developer contributions are also being scoped out and reports will be brought back to Committee on the detail of these.
- ***Reimagining Public Realm /DfC Revitalisation Fund –*** Programme of streetscape / public realm projects underway to help to rebalance the use of public space, safely promote economic recovery and provide a people focused approach. Includes the delivery of parklet and street improvements/enhanced pedestrianisation schemes in Castle Place, Adelaide Street, Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter BID areas; as well as the delivery of city centre Business Cluster and Community grant projects. Indicative timeframes for the delivery of the city centre interventions were provided to CG&R Committee in March, with anticipated completion timelines of Spring/early Summer although some of the works remain contingent upon statutory processes and DfI undertaking certain civils works.
- ***Lighting Strategy –*** a coherent place making approach to lighting as agreed by Members in December 2020.

- *Tactical Regeneration* – creative, relatively quick and low cost place making interventions to address dereliction and animate and brighten areas, often acting as a catalyst to further regeneration.
- *Active Travel*: DfI have brought forward pop up cycle lanes in response to the Covid pandemic and officers are working closely with DfI to consider a range of future active travel interventions. Ongoing BCC led interventions are also incorporating active travel measures, including the Castle Place scheme and the 5 C's Public Realm. A report will also be brought back to Committee in the near future in relation to the active travel related element of the DfC Revitalisation Fund, as previously agreed by Members. Members will also recall the emerging proposals to bring forward a Belfast Urban Greenway concept, as reported to Committee in October 2020. This initiative is seen as an outworking of the Bolder Vision, and seeks to improve connectivity from neighbourhoods into and through the city centre. The development of this proposal is underway and will also be brought back to Members as it is further worked up – although the future delivery of this will depend on funding and partnership working with various stakeholders, including DfI.

Major Developments

- 3.22 The city centre has a number of major regeneration schemes at different stages of development which could significantly change the landscape of the city. There is an opportunity to maximise the collective potential of these large scale development and infrastructure projects as catalysts for city regeneration and inclusive economic growth and social well-being. During the last five years Belfast has seen over 2.5 million square feet of floor space of office accommodation completed or under construction, almost 5,000 purpose built student accommodation beds have been completed or under construction and to support the growing tourism market 1,500 hotel beds have been completed. There has however been limited residential development in the city centre, albeit that there are currently a large number of residential planning applications at various stages in the planning process, many of which also form part of the major regeneration schemes as below.
- 3.23 Currently there are a number of major mixed use regeneration schemes at differing stages in the development process. Examples include:

- **Belfast Transport Hub & Weavers Cross**: 1.3 million ft² mixed use regeneration scheme adjacent the new Belfast Transport Hub. Phase 1 enabling works underway.
- **Tribeca**: £500m+ 12 acre mixed use regeneration scheme in the city centre. Outline planning approved at Planning Committee Sept 20. There are various regeneration challenges, and in order to collectively work together to bring the scheme forward and unlock some of these challenges, there have been recent meetings with BCC, DfC and DfI. There are also discussions on potential meanwhile uses in the area. Currently economic activity in the area is low and is unlikely to improve until development comes forward. This is having a detrimental impact on key streets including Donegall Street, North Street and Royal Avenue.
- **Waterside (former Sirocco)**: £450m mixed used scheme on a 16 acre brownfield site with outline planning consent; including social and private housing.
- **Titanic Quarter**: one of Europe's largest urban waterfront regeneration projects with a significant focus on mixed tenure residential as part of future development phases.
- **City Quays**: £275m mixed use scheme with the fifth building (City Quays 3) currently under construction and extensive new areas of waterfront public realm completed.
- **Smithfield Yard**: £75m office/workspace/retail scheme adjacent Smithfield Market within the Inner North West masterplan area.
- **BCC Housing Led Regeneration** inc. the Strategic Site Assessments Programme involving BCC and wider public /private lands.
- **Belfast Destination Hub**: proposed new £100m visitor attraction under Belfast Region City Deal.

Addressing Vacancies

- 3.24 Given the increasing number of vacancies within the city centre, officers have been working up proposals to look at potential short and medium term interventions to help address the issue of vacant premises. There are a complex range of factors leading to vacancy, particularly in the context of COVID and the changing nature of the city centre, hence the need to ensure that any proposed interventions are deliverable and impactful in terms of outcomes. Further details will be brought back to Committee on proposed interventions.

Building Foundations & Supporting Longer Term Recovery

3.25 As highlighted in Belfast: Our Recovery Framework, there are a number of opportunities which will be key to supporting longer term recovery.

- **Delivering the £850m Belfast Region City Deal:** Investing in new physical and digital infrastructure, enhancing the city's tourism offer, providing significant skills, training and employment opportunities
- **Creating Innovation Districts, Smart Districts and Smart Ports** to act as catalysts for economic growth on a transformation scale
- **Improving our Connectivity:** working with partners to secure investment to enhance our sustainable transport infrastructure, including our green and blue infrastructure and strengthening links with other key economic locations including Dublin and London
- **Digital innovation:** advancing next generation digital infrastructure and skills
- **Levelling up investment in R&D:** driving innovation, business growth and creating more and better jobs
- **Addressing climate change:** maximising the potential availability of climate finance as a stimulus to invest in climate resilient infrastructure, supporting our green recovery, skills development and employment
- **Further regeneration:** in the city and neighbourhoods (including a re-imagined city centre) and investment in sustainable infrastructure, including community assets.

Business and Investments

3.26 This priority workstream is around supporting and sustaining existing and new businesses, and attracting new investment. While the economy as a whole has experienced a significant shock over the last twelve months, there are a number of sectors that have remained more resilient than others. This is particularly the case for tech-based sectors where recruitment is still ongoing at a pace. Other sectors such as logistics and warehousing and health and social care have also continued to recruit while sectors such as hospitality and tourism have been decimated. With around 8% of Belfast workers currently on furlough, it is essential that the council works closely both with private businesses and with government departments to ensure that residents are supported to move back into work at the appropriate time.

- 3.27 Prior to Covid, there was a positive real estate market, particularly for commercial property and office space. While the long-term effects of flexible working are yet to be determined, evidence suggests that, although the workplace will change, businesses will still largely want to establish and retain offices in vibrant locations that are attractive to their workforce. The holistic approach of the FCC work – not only looking at the city centre as a business location but also a tourism destination, a leisure space and a place where people live – will be critical for its long-term economic success. The Belfast Agenda’s commitment to creating 46,000 new jobs and attracting 66,000 new residents means that we need to think differently about where people work and what will attract them to this place so it is essential that our business and investment programme takes a place-based approach.
- 3.28 The unemployment rate in Belfast has doubled over the last year and the economic inactivity rate remains stubbornly high. While the tech and digital sectors are likely to drive the city’s economic growth in the coming years, it is essential that we retain a focus on inclusive economic growth in order to ensure that our residents can benefit from the developments in the city. Taking account of planned investments such as the Innovation District, we will work with employers to develop targeted interventions to support those furthest from the labour market or with specific challenges to access employment and skills development support and find a job.
- 3.29 Given the particular challenges impacting upon the retail, tourism and hospitality sectors, a key focus of our work will be to support the revival of tourism and hospitality in the city centre, as well as a restructured retail offer focused on the uniqueness of Belfast and building on the wider work to reimagine and reshape the city core. Alongside this, we will be working with businesses outside the city centre to support business recovery in a drive to enhance their future resilience and sustainability.

City Centre Vibrancy

- 3.30 This priority workstream is around encouraging vitality, vibrancy and increasing city centre footfall; and maximising our cultural and tourism offering. A number of strands of work are currently under development. These include examining the opportunities for culture and creativity to play an important role across the overall Future City Centre Programme and to fully integrate into recovery plans. This includes areas such as:
- Innovative approaches to addressing current short-term vacancies and the role of culture and leisure in the longer-term future uses within the city centre.

- Animation and city dressing projects to improve the look and feel of the city centre to support a more welcoming and vibrant place.
- Importance of shared cultural events to attract additional footfall and enhance the year-round offer. This will include programming in public and outdoor spaces.
- Seasonal programmes of activity to enhance the offer within the city centre to create more experience driven opportunities aligned to future marketing and communications campaigns.

3.31 The ten year cultural strategy, A City Imagining, also sets out a number of strategic projects that will help shape the future of the city centre. This includes:

- 2023 as a designated international year of culture. These plans are critical to city recovery with a number of large scale projects such as Urban Forest designed to capture the imagination of local audiences as well as attracting out of state visitors. These projects will also examine the role of cultural programming in improving connectivity between the city centre and neighbourhoods through extensive engagement programmes.
- UNESCO City of Music designation will enhance the night-time economy through a new and enhanced approach to music programming in venues and public spaces.
- A new 10 year tourism plan will also include the Belfast Visitor Experience Framework that will increase the coherence of the city's tourism offer through clustering of products and improvements to visitor servicing. This will give specific consideration to how visitors experience the city including the relationship between the city centre and other key attractions. This work will also support the development of the Belfast Destination Hub and how it will be a catalyst for local tourism.

Digital Innovation

- 3.32 This priority workstream is around maximising and deploying digital technology and innovation solutions to position the city as a key location for innovation and support indigenous and new businesses to thrive and grow. With the new UU campus as an ‘anchor’ for the Innovation District, there will be a focus on investment in technology infrastructure such as the development and deployment of smart technologies, and the development / roll out of 5G and wireless opportunities. This is intended to act as a beacon for talent and inward investment, provide the critical ‘density’ to sustain a world-class ecosystem for start-ups, SMEs, academia and multinationals and act as a driver to enhance the existing quality of life in the area - a ‘go to’ location for residents, workers and visitors.

Clean, Green & Safe (Multi-Agency)

- 3.33 This priority work stream is around enhancing the city centre experience through a clean, accessible, safe and pleasant environment. City and Neighbourhood Services Department are currently undertaking a Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Study and Action Plan for a Belfast City Centre Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe Initiative. The consultant appointed has been tasked to review the strategic and policy context, and examine research / statistics in terms of how Belfast is performing against key Clean, Green Inclusive and Safe indicators, and to benchmark best practice from elsewhere. The next steps include conducting an online survey that will offer the opportunity to feedback on their ideas and priorities to help enhance the city centre, with a framework developed to engage with a range of key stakeholders. It is intended that this work will inform the development of an action plan that will be embedded within an overall approach to the re-opening and future of the city centre and the longer-term priorities within the overall FCC programme.

- 4.0 Financial & Resource Implications
None directly associated with this report.

- 5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report.”

The Director of City Regeneration and Development and the Director of Economic Development provided a presentation to explain further the six key pillars of the Programme, as follows:

- Regeneration and Connectivity;
- Business and Investment;
- City Centre Vibrancy;
- Position of the City to Compete;
- Digital Innovation; and
- Clean, Green and Safe (Multi-agency).

This included further information on Housing Led Regeneration and inclusive city centre living work streams; the City Centre Connectivity/Bolder Vision work and the, indicative timelines for the next phases of Bolder Vision and a programme of interventions and projects involving reimagining public space. The Director of City Regeneration and Development summarised the internal City Centre Development Tracker which provided an overview of developments across office space, purpose built managed student accommodation, residential, leisure related and hotel units which had been completed or were under construction.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided a summary of Major Development Schemes across the city either in progress or planned and the opportunity to maximise the regeneration potential of these developments. She highlighted that vacancy levels remained an ongoing issue for the city centre, with further discussion proposed for the forthcoming Future City Workshop on 25th May.

The Director of Economic Development summarised the key priorities for business and investment to support and sustain existing and new businesses, and attracting new investment. He highlighted that, while the technology and digital sectors were likely to drive the city's economic growth in the coming years, it was essential that the Council retain a focus on inclusive economic growth in order to ensure that its residents could benefit from the developments in the city.

During discussion, the Directors answered a range of questions in relation to innovation and best practice, public realm schemes, support for leisure and retail, the future needs of office space, timelines for the proposed housing development in the inner north west area, children and play in the city; the city centre living vision including engagement with communities, and the impact of the purpose built managed student accommodation on existing student areas in the city.

In response to a Members query to expand the aforementioned internal Development Tracker, the Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that details of the use of Public Space and Built Heritage could be incorporated in the tracker.

Regarding a further question from a Member, she also advised that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on blue and green infrastructure / active travel related initiatives across the city and highlighted that Council Departments were working together in relation to ongoing initiatives and potential future proposals, subject to any future funding that might become available in this regard.

In response to Members concerns in relation to competing interests of being members of the Committee and also the Planning Committee, in relation to regeneration and development projects, the Strategic Director explained the alignment between the two Committee's and clarified that there was a clear set of checks and balances within the process and training for Members' to ensure the Planning Committee functioned appropriately.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. Noted the ongoing challenges of the city centre and it's criticality to the recovery of the wider city and region; and the need to adopt a multi-faceted approach to the re-imagination and recovery of the city centre;
- ii. Noted the ongoing Future City Centre Programme aimed at addressing the issues impacting upon the city centre and its alignment with the wider Belfast: Our Recovery framework priorities;
- iii. Noted that a Members workshop on the Future of the City was proposed to take place on 25th May, which would provide the opportunity to discuss priorities and future areas of focus;
- iv. Noted the completion of the tender competition process to appoint a suitable consultant to deliver the next phases of the Bolder Vision City Centre Connectivity Study and the recommendation to move this piece of work to this next stage of delivery;
- v. Following requests from Members, noted further information would be provided to the Committee on vacant office space; children and play in the city; an update on the city centre living vision including engagement with communities; and the impact of the purpose built managed student accommodation on existing student areas;
- vi. Noted that the Development Tracker could incorporate details of the use of Public Space and Built Heritage; and
- vii. Noted that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on blue and green infrastructure / active travel related initiatives across the city.

Union Connectivity Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 **The Union Connectivity Review aims to understand whether and how connectivity across the UK can support economic growth and quality of life, particularly in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.**

1.2 Following Council ratification, the Council's response to the Call for Evidence, as reported to the CG&R Committee on 13th January 2021, was submitted to the review team in February 2021. This report updates the Committee on the publication of the Interim Report for the Union Connectivity Review.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the receipt of the letter confirming the publication of the Interim Report, the next steps and that the Union Connectivity Review is due to complete in summer 2021.

3.0 Main report

3.1 As reported to CG&R Committee on 13th January 2021, an independent review for the UK Government (Department for Transport) led by Sir Peter Hendy was being undertaken to assess how the quality and availability of transport infrastructure connections across the UK can support economic growth and quality of life, with a specific focus on NI connections.

3.2 The Committee agreed to the response to the call for evidence, noting that the deadline for receipt of submissions was 14 January 2021. This was subsequently ratified by Council on 1 February 2021.

3.3 Subsequent to this, an Interim Report (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/union-connectivity-review-interim-report>) was published on 10 March 2021 and provides high level information on the preliminary transport and economic assessment across England, Scotland, Wales and NI along with a summary of the stakeholder views. It makes reference to the interdependencies that need to be factored in, including the New Decade New Approach commitments for NI. The report also outlines the proposed assessment methodology to be used by the review team to determine transport and economic baselines and how it will support the identification of future recommendations and highlights that the potential development of a pan-UK strategic transport network will be a key focus of the Review going forward.

3.4 The next stage of the review will take a future-focused view of transport in the next 20-30 years and how transportation

can contribute to the UK's target of becoming net zero carbon by 2050, with a particular reference to the extent, essential domestic air travel can be made carbon neutral. The Interim Report also highlights that a discrete piece of work will be carried out to assess the feasibility of a fixed link between NI and the British mainland, including an outline cost and timescale for the link and associated works needed.

- 3.5 While the focus is on connectivity links between England, Scotland, Wales and NI, it acknowledges the role of integrated transport at a local level in contributing to overall connectivity. The integration of land use and transport planning at key nodes is also noted as contributing to environmental benefits and improved quality of life by supporting healthier transport options such as walking and cycling.
- 3.6 Some of the key issues that will be subject to further review are highlighted in the Interim report on page 4. The following are of specific note for Belfast and the region:
- Higher capacity and faster connection on the A75 from the ferry port at Cairnryan to the M6 corridor for freight and passengers to and from NI
 - Faster and higher capacity connections from Belfast to North West, and to the Republic of Ireland (ROI), for passengers and freight, and to link with ROI plans for rail development
 - Improved port capacity, road and rail capacity and journey times East/West across the Midlands and the North, for passengers, and to enhance freight capacity and connections from Ireland, and onwards to the East Coast ports for exports, post Brexit.
 - Better air links to England to and from NI and Northern Scotland, including but not exclusively to and from London Heathrow, for worldwide connections for passengers and freight; including the appropriate rate of Air Passenger Duty for journeys not realistic by rail
 - Connections to freeports when those are announced by the government and the devolved administrations.
- 3.7 These issues, along with other connectivity issues that may be identified in the next stages of the work will be reviewed in the final report.
- 3.8 The next steps for the review, which is due to complete in summer 2021, are outlined as follows:
- Develop proposals for a UK Strategic Transport Network covering road, rail, air and maritime
 - Further analysis and review of the evidence collected to date and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders to better understand their views

- Transport connectivity appraisal, to include the links between transport connectivity and economic performance
- Commission social research to understand the perceived ease of travelling across the UK and associated barriers to travel. It will also assess the perceived impact of connectivity within England, Scotland, Wales and NI, and across the union on opportunities, access to services and quality of life,
- Further research and engagement with subject matter experts to better understand how better connectivity can support an improved quality of life, increased social cohesion and a reduction in inequality across the UK.

3.9 Financial & Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications associated with this report.

3.10 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications associated with this report.”

The Committee noted the receipt of the letter confirming the publication of the Interim Report, the next steps, and that the Union Connectivity Review was due to be completed in Summer 2021.

Growing Business and the Economy

Sunday Opening Hours for Large Retailers

The Strategic Director provided an update on feedback which had been received from the engagement which had taken place with Trades Unions, retail representatives and relevant stakeholders following the Committee’s decision, at its meeting in March, to support extended Sunday opening hours.

He reminded the Committee that its decision was subject to relevant Northern Ireland Executive guidance and would operate on a temporary basis, to be reviewed on 5th July, 2021, as part of the efforts to manage shopper volume and support social distancing.

He advised that each of the BID representatives welcomed the temporary extension of additional opening hours on a Sunday. He stated that the large retailers

and shopping centres, including CastleCourt, Victoria Square and the Kennedy Centre were also supportive of the decision, noting that the extension supported demand management and avoids any queuing at 1pm. They also offered customer feedback, suggesting that shoppers felt safe and comfortable to visit the retail outlets at a quieter time and that the extended trading hours on a Sunday made this possible.

He highlighted that the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium's view was that the extension was needed, while the lockdown and the effects of the pandemic continued, in order to enable social distancing and to keep shoppers and staff safe.

He pointed out that the response from Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers confirmed that, while they had been understanding and pragmatic around the decisions that local authorities had taken with regard to the enforcement of Sunday trading restrictions in their areas, their opposition to extended Sunday trading hours had not changed. They felt that it did not offer businesses any real benefits and that it had a detrimental impact on retail workers, their families and their local communities.

The Committee noted the feedback following the consultation which had taken place with Trades Unions, retail representatives and relevant stakeholders on the Council's decision to extend Sunday opening hours (in line with Northern Ireland Executive guidance) on a temporary basis, to the 5th July 2021.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Notice of Motions - Quarterly Update

The Committee was reminded that all Standing Committees would receive a quarterly update on the Notices of Motion that they were responsible for.

The Strategic Director advised that the first quarterly update for the Committee indicated that there were 21 active Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which it was responsible for (Appendix 1).

It was reported that, given the current pressures in responding to the pandemic, it had been difficult to afford the usual time towards progressing Notices of Motion. Nevertheless, there had been progress in a number of Motions and estimated completion dates and next steps, which required further updates, would be progressed and reported back at the next quarterly update.

The Committee was reminded that, at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th November, it was agreed that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons, as follows:

- **Category 1** - Notices of Motion which contained an action that had been completed. All Notices of Motion within this category contained a specific task that had since been completed. It was worth noting that, when Committee agreed to action a Notice of Motion, there were sometimes additional actions agreed alongside the Notice of Motion. As these were not technically part

of the Notice of Motion, they were taken forward through normal committee decision making processes. The Notice of Motion can therefore be closed, but additional actions related to it would continue to be progressed and reported to the committee. These additional actions were not contained in this report, but would be noted in the live database moving forward.

- **Category 2** - Notices of Motion had become Council policy or absorbed in to a strategic programme of work. These Notices of Motion did not contain a specific task that could be complete. Instead, they were more strategic in nature and required changes in Council policy and/ or strategy for long term outcomes. Those listed within this category had all been agreed by Committee and were now either Council policy or are currently being implemented through a Council strategy that was managed by a Standing Committee through the corporate planning process.

It was reported that the following ten motions had been highlighted for closure under category 1 and two motions for closure under category 2. It was suggested that the Committee agreed that the following 12 Notices of Motion were now closed:

Category 1 Recommended Closures:

- Citizens' Basic Income Scheme (Ref number 4);
- Funding of PLACE NI (Ref number 19);
- York Street Interchange Project (Ref number 39);
- Dogs on Public Transport - Response from Translink (Ref number 40);
- Sustainable Transport (Ref number 43);
- High Speed Rail Connection (Ref number 44);
- Update on Motion - EuroPride (Ref number 91);
- Installation of additional Parklets on arterial routes and in neighbourhood areas (Ref number 119);
- Alternatives to York Street Interchange (Ref number 150); and
- Fra McCann's (MLA) Proposals for Free Car Parking at Hospitals (Ref number 151).

Category 2 Recommended Closures:

- Supporting the Writers of Belfast (Ref number 20); and
- Supporting Artists of Belfast (Ref number 59).

During discussion, one member requested that the Motion on Sustainable Transport (Ref. number 43) remained open so that a further update could be submitted to Committee.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. Noted the process for reporting Notices of Motion through Standing Committees agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and outlined in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.3;

- ii. Noted the updates to all Notices of Motion that the Committee was responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1; and
- iii. Agreed to the closure of a number of Notices of Motion, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in paragraph 3.7 with the exception of number 43. Motion on Sustainable Transport, the Committee noted that the status of this motion would be examined further.

Chairperson