



Subject:	Update on DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund
Date:	8 th March 2023
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager

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	The purpose of this report is to update Members on elements of the Council's capital funding applications via the DfI Green & Blue Infrastructure Fund and DfC Revitalisation Scheme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the response from the DfI Permanent Secretary in relation to the Green & Blue Infrastructure Fund and longer-term strategic fundingNote the update on the DfI 2022/23 Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund, DfC Revitalisation Fund and the South-West Quarter / Shaftsbury Square project.

3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>In June 2022, Council submitted proposals to the DfI for greenway and active travel projects that could potentially receive capital grant funding this financial year under the DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund 2022/23 and Active Travel Projects. Subsequent to this a Letter of Intent to fund was received from the DfI Minister in September 2022 and the CG&R Committee provided approval for the business case applications to the 2022/23 DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund (BGIF), and the DfC Revitalisation fund. The projects approved at the October CG&R Committee included Active Travel Enablers, Grey to Green and the South-West Quarter/Shaftsbury Square projects under the DfI BGIF, and the South-West Qtr / Shaftsbury Square project under the DfC Revitalisation Fund.</p>
3.2	<p>At the October meeting the Committee agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure to outline concerns in relation to the short timeframe for the delivery of the greenway and active travel projects under the DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund 2022/23 and suggest the potential for multi - year funding in the future, so that opportunities for strategic alignment of such projects could be achieved. A copy of the letter issued to DfI is attached in Appendix A of this report, and the subsequent response from DfI Permanent secretary attached in Appendix B of this report. The response outlines the intention to issue Letters of Offer shortly subject to final approval of business cases, and a willingness to further discuss potential longer term funding opportunities subject to compliance with the parameters of public expenditure.</p> <p>Capital Funding Application Updates</p>
3.3	<p>Further to this Officers have had ongoing engagement with DfI officials to proceed with these applications, and while a Letter of Offer is still pending it is expected to close these out prior to the middle of March. DfI officials have also conveyed that the funding will be required to be committed by the end of March 2023, however, spend will be carried over until March 2024. These Letters of Offer will be subject to review on receipt and subsequent SP&R approval. As outlined to the CG&R Committee in October 2022 Expressions of Interest for the Active Travel Enablers and Grey to Green projects were completed to establish deliver partners in advance of the Letter of Offer, however given the time lapse between that exercise and potential Letter of Offer it is intended to recommence these Expressions of Interest following approval of the Letters of Offer. A summary of these projects as below;</p>

Active Travel Enablers;

3.4 It is understood that a Letter of Offer from the BGIF will be issued shortly for this element of the application. This element will include covered cycle stands and secure cycle units as reported to the CG&R meeting in October 2022

Grey to Green;

3.5 It is understood that a Letter of Offer from the BGIF will be issued shortly for this element of the application.

Great Victoria St / Shaftsbury Sq;

3.6 This project was to bring together a number of funding opportunities to deliver on wider benefits in terms of addressing dereliction along this key connectivity and economic corridor. To this end a summary update on the various funding streams is included below;

- A Letter of Offer (£250k) has been received from DfC for the Revitalisation fund for this project and subject to final approval works will commence shortly.
- Under the Belfast City Council Business Cluster & Community Grant Programme three grant applications have been approved to undertake localised environmental improvement works and shop frontage improvements and work will commence shortly.
- Developer Contributions secured in the area were approved at the SP&R Committee in January 2023 to bring forward Public Realm Improvement Works and are currently under procurement.
- A number of land and building owners have reacted positively to the funding coming forward and have commenced, or committed to undertaking works to address issues within their frontages. This includes power washing, graffiti removal, and repairs to hoarding. In addition to this NIHE have commenced a project to replace the existing chain link boundary fence to the Hope St Car Park with a planted hedge to improve the visual impact of this key gateway site in the immediate term.
- The Linen Quarter have successfully completed their ballot for a second 5-year term and have gained support to increase their district area to include up to and including Shaftsbury Sq. Within their 5-year manifesto the BID have committed to undertaking enhanced cleansing and community safety within the area, and to work with BCC and other agencies to bring forward environmental improvement and public realm capital projects.

3.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Officers have also brought forward proposals for the Dfl BGIF element of the Victoria St / Shaftsbury Sq however it has become evident that this work will require a substantial level of design and statutory approval work that will substantially increase the risk of delivery of the project within the permitted timeframes. In addition to this the works will require an increased level of liability for the Council to undertake on the public highway that outweighs the benefit that the scheme would bring forward. This liability would include an undertaking by Council to sign a License from Dfl undertaking all liability for the areas involved until the subsequent removal and reinstatement of the pavements to the original surface treatment. To this end Officers are recommending to withdraw from this element of the 2022/23 BGIF fund application and to focus instead on the deliverable works and funding coming forward from other sources. <p>Further updates on the delivery of these proposals will be brought to this Committee as works progress.</p>
4.0	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
4.1	All costs associated with this paper are covered from within external funding applications or previously agreed and committed BCC programmes.
5.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
5.1	Officers are currently developing the Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Screening and will incorporate within the emerging proposals.
6.0	Appendices
6.1	Appendix A – Dfl BGIF Update – Committee letter to Dfl
	Appendix B – Dfl BGIF Update – Dfl Response to Committee