BELFAST STORIES

FINDINGS FROM THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

JANUARY 2023

Smith and Kent Consulting

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Belfast Stories,[1] **a new world-class visitor attraction** planned for the city centre in 2028, will be a success if the people of Belfast love it, are proud of it and feel that it is truly theirs.

In February 2022, Belfast City Council appointed **Smith and Kent Consulting** to develop a consultation and engagement plan for the next stage of the project and provide specific equality, diversity and inclusion expertise.[2]

BACKGROUND

The Belfast Stories Engagement Plan brings together a range of consultation, engagement and involvement approaches built on best practice, statutory requirements and stakeholder expectations.

Engagement around the concept of Belfast Stories (previously known as Belfast Destination Hub) has been ongoing since 2014 when the need for a new major visitor attraction in the city was identified. It has subsequently been formally consulted on during public consultations on the council's Belfast Agenda, Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy and the A City Imagining and Make Yourself at Home culture and tourism strategies.[3] Belfast's residents and stakeholders have a **legitimate expectation** of continuing to be consulted about Belfast Stories.

Belfast City Council's **Consultation and Engagement Framework** describes a broad spectrum of two-way communication (from consultation to engagement to involvement) between the council and its residents and stakeholders. It recognises that effective dialogue helps make decisions, policies and services that are better suited to the people they are intended to benefit.

Belfast Stories' **Equality Framework** recognises that the Belfast Stories vision can only be achieved if equality, diversity and inclusion are at its core, supported by a co-designed and inclusive process throughout all aspects of the project. It recommends equality screening and public consultation at key milestones, supported by ongoing engagement throughout.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires Belfast City Council to actively seek ways to encourage:

- greater **equality of opportunity** between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without, and

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[1] This is the working title and may change.
[2] Including equality impact and rural needs assessments, which are the subject of separate publications.
[3] Variously referred to as a destination or creative hub

- **good relations** between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

The **Disability Discrimination Act 1995** and **Disability Discriminations Order 2006** require the council to protect disabled people from discrimination, promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation of disabled people in public life.

One of the key tools for doing this is an equality impact assessment (EQIA) as set down in the council's **Equality Scheme**. An EQIA can help determine the extent and nature of any impact upon the Section 75 categories and find ways to promote equality of opportunity and good relations more effectively. An EQIA should be carried out in line with Equality Commission guidance, which requires a 12-week public consultation period.

THE BELFAST STORIES ENGAGEMENT PLAN

In May 2022, the draft Belfast Stories engagement plan was approved by Belfast City Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

The engagement plan covers Royal Institute of British Architects **(RIBA) stage 2.** During this stage, concept designs and plans will be produced for:

- the layout of the building
- the design of the exhibition space
- the framework for gathering stories

The planned engagement falls into two broad strands:

1. **Public consultation**, which took place between 10 August and 20 November 2022, focused on:
    i. **raising awareness** of Belfast Stories so that people are excited and want to continue to be engaged in its development
    ii. making sure that Belfast Stories can be a **positive experience for everyone**, including consultation on the EQIA and framework for gathering stories
    iii. asking people how they would like to **continue to be involved** in the ongoing engagement.
2. **Ongoing engagement**, June 2022 to August 2023, which is structured around four work strands:
    i. Equity
    ii. Sustainability
    iii. Partnership
    iv. Experiences

A copy of the engagement plan approved by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in May 2022 is included at appendix 1.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report gathers together the findings from the public consultation, which took place between 10 August and 20 November 2022. It considers in particular what the public consultation says in relation to:

1. awareness and excitement,
2. making sure Belfast Stories is for everyone and
3. ongoing engagement.

Quotes have been reproduced word for word as provided by consultees.

A separate report has been prepared on the findings relating to the EQIA.

WHAT WE DID

This section describes the activity carried out during Belfast City Council's public consultation on Belfast Stories, which took place over 14 weeks from 10 August to 20 November.

CORE QUESTIONS

Reflecting the focus of the public consultation, Smith and Kent devised a core set of questions (below), that was published in consultation documents.

Building excitement

1. Are you excited about Belfast Stories?
2. Why do you feel that way?

Making sure Belfast Stories is for everyone

3. What might prevent you from enjoying Belfast Stories?
4. Have we identified the right people for the equity steering group?
5. Are there any other groups of people at risk of missing out?
6. How else can we engage with people at risk of missing out?
7. Is the story collection framework a good foundation for gathering stories?
8. What might stop you telling your story?
9. What support might people in your community or organisation need to share their stories?

Continuing the conversation

10. What stories, experience, knowledge and networks can you share to help us develop Belfast Stories?

CONSULTATION TOOLS AND TACTICS

The core questions were then adapted to be used in different tools, different settings and with different audiences and interest groups, ensuring that all stakeholders were asked for information that was relevant and useful to the decision-making process. This included adaption for:

- online survey
- easy read consultation document
- focus group script, which was used by Smith and Kent, Belfast City Council and the equity steering group
- semi-structured interview script, used by Smith and Kent, Belfast City Council and the equity steering group
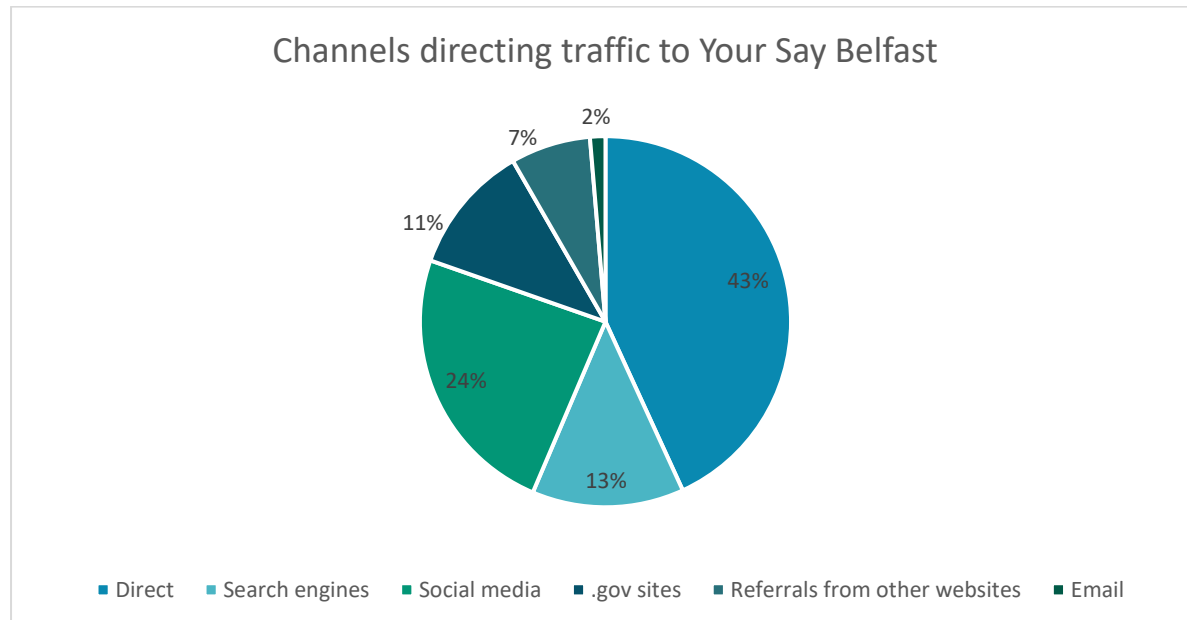- toolkits for partners, community groups and the equity steering group

- postcards for use at workshops and at consultation hubs

YOUR SAY BELFAST

An online consultation hub was built on Belfast City Council's Your Say Belfast web platform.[4] It comprised:

- an overview of the project
- a video overview in Irish sign language (ISL) and British sign language (BSL)
- downloadable copies of the consultation document including versions in easy read[5] and HTML[6]
- an online survey
- a video version of the survey in ISL and BSL
- two online polls
- dates and booking forms for workshops and public meetings

Overall, the online consultation hub welcomed 2,755 visits and 2,495 unique visitors. 43 per cent of visits accessed the hub direct, and 13 per cent used a search engine. 24 per cent were referred from social media. 18 per cent were from other websites, of which 7 per cent came from a .gov site (presumed to be www.belfastcity.gov.uk). Other website referrals included from Craft NI, Community Arts Partnership and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce.

Channels directing traffic to Your Say Belfast

Legend: Direct, Search engines, Social media, .gov sites, Referrals from other websites, Email

The documents and videos were downloaded or viewed 234 times, and 149 responses were received to the online survey and two online polls.

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[4] https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk
[5] A format originally created to help people with learning disabilities understand information easily
[6] For screen readers

SURVEY

One hundred and 27 responses were received to the online survey.

Most respondents were from the south and east of the city. Those who described where they lived as "other" included people who lived outside Belfast but within NI and people who described themselves as "from" Belfast but currently had an address elsewhere.
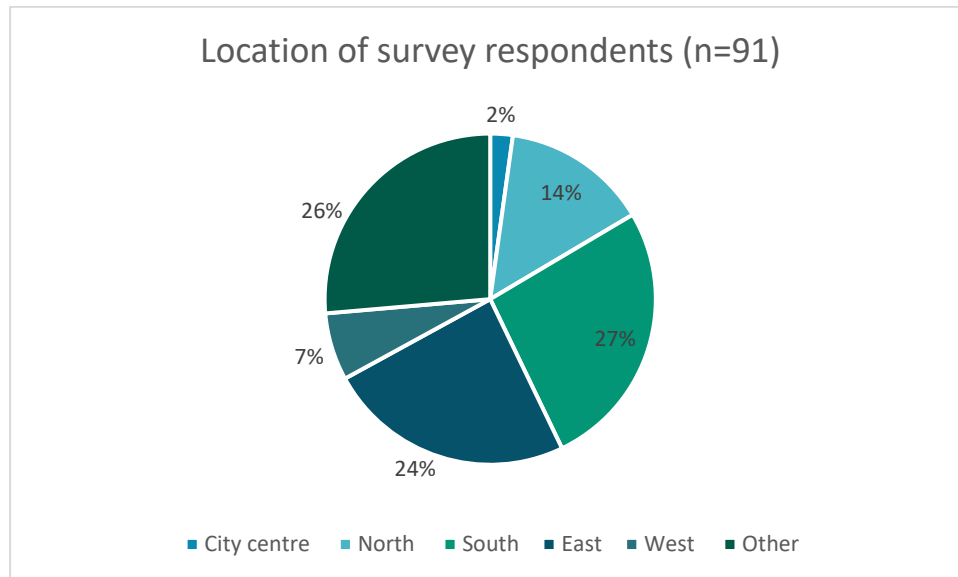
The survey was particularly effective at engaging 25- to 64-year-olds, who made up 86 per cent of respondents.
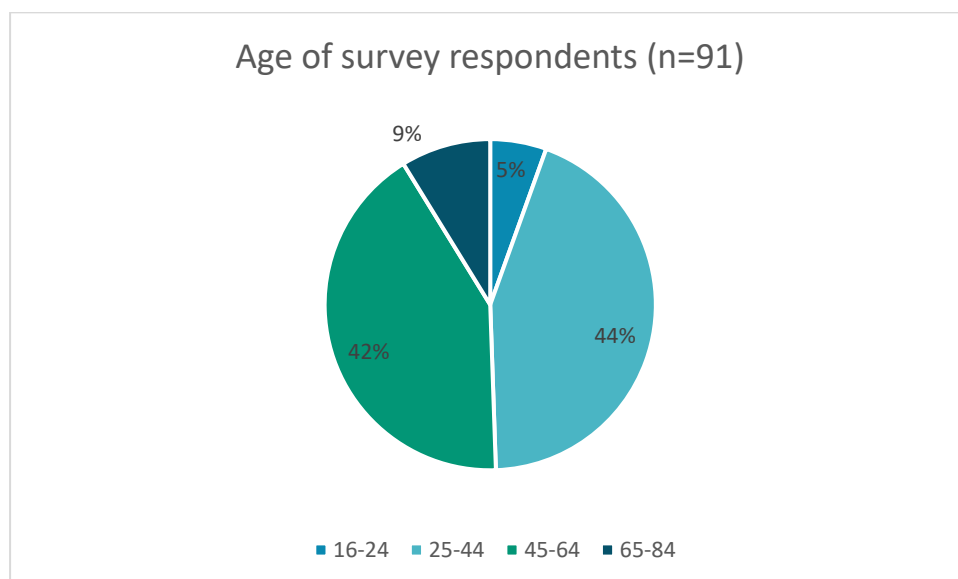
60 per cent of respondents were female and 39 per cent male.

Gender identity (n=90)
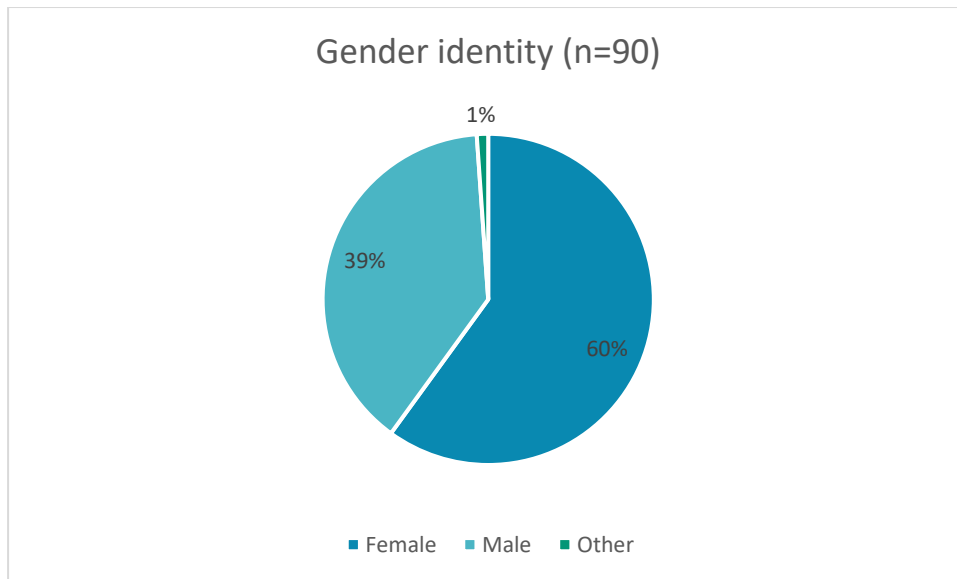
34 per cent of respondents reported that they had caring responsibilities, and the survey was particularly good at engaging carers with responsibility for an older person or disabled person (20 per cent).

Respondents with caring responsibilities (n=85)
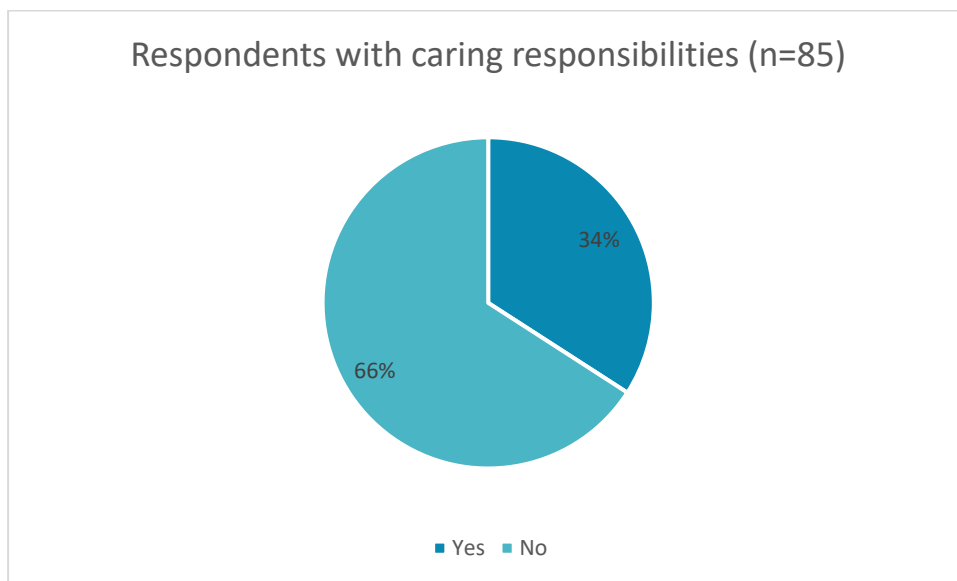
79 per cent of respondents identified as straight (heterosexual) and 21 per cent identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or other ("queer").

Sexuality of respondents (n=84)

Legend: ■ Straight ■ Gay or lesbian ■ Bisexual ■ Other
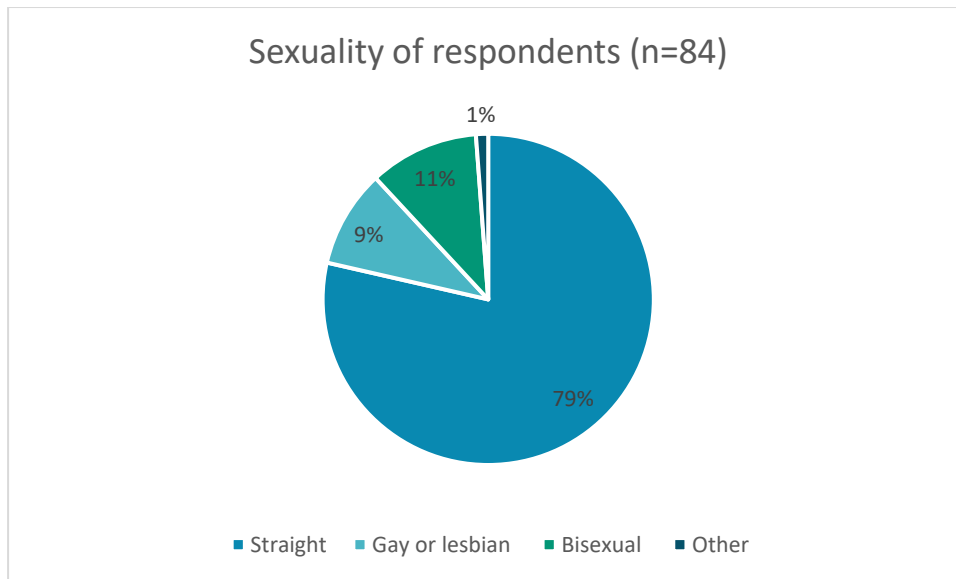
13 per cent of respondents indicated that they had a long-term health condition or disability that limits their day-to-day activity.

Respondents with a long-term health condition or disability (n=86)

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No
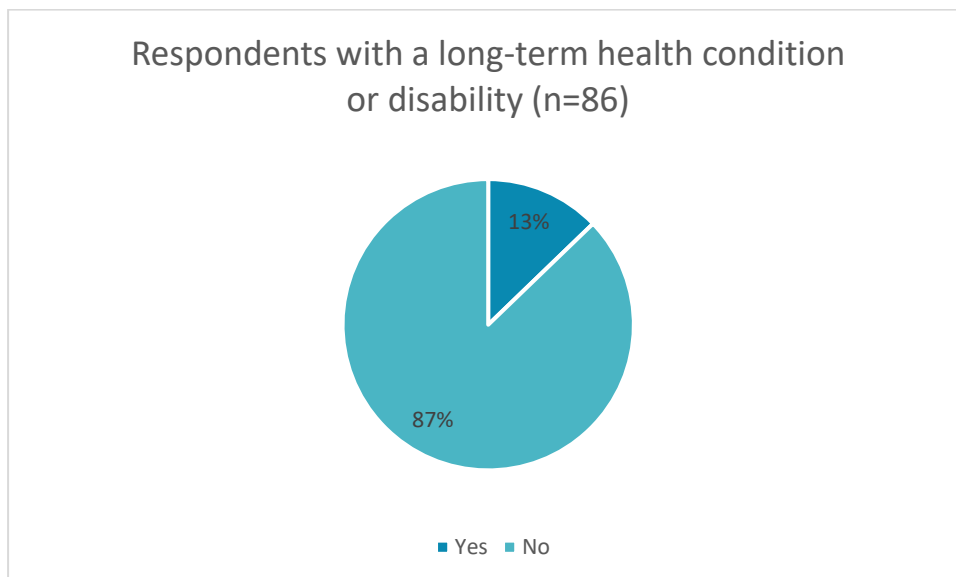
The survey was particularly good at engaging people from outside the two main religions (43 per cent). 30 per cent of survey respondents identified as belonging to the Catholic community, and 27 per cent identified as from the Protestant community.

Community survey respondents belong to (n=81)

30%

27%

43%

■ Catholic   ■ Protestant   ■ Neither
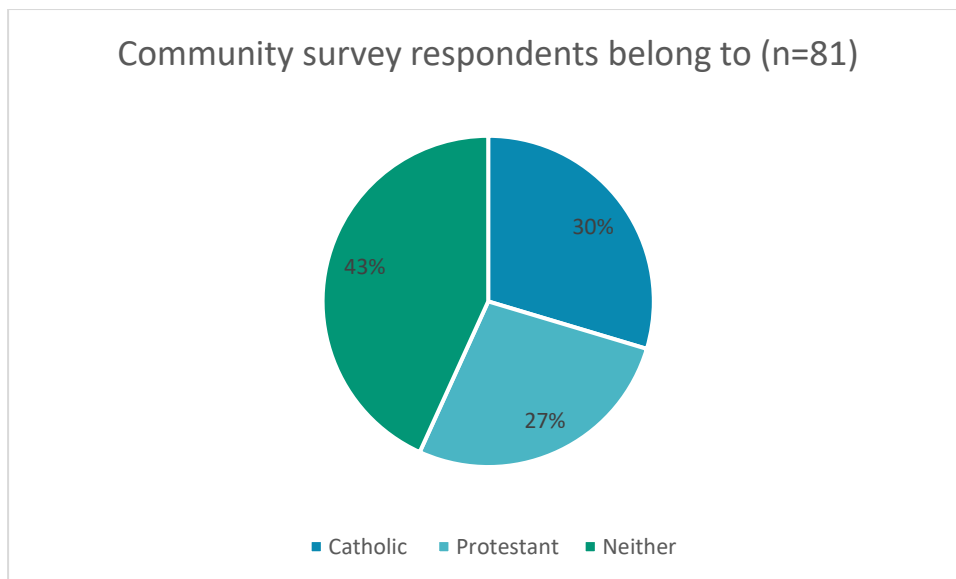
98 per cent of respondents identified as white, and 2 per cent identified as other.

Respondents' ethnic origin (n=86)

2%

98%

■ White   ■ Other
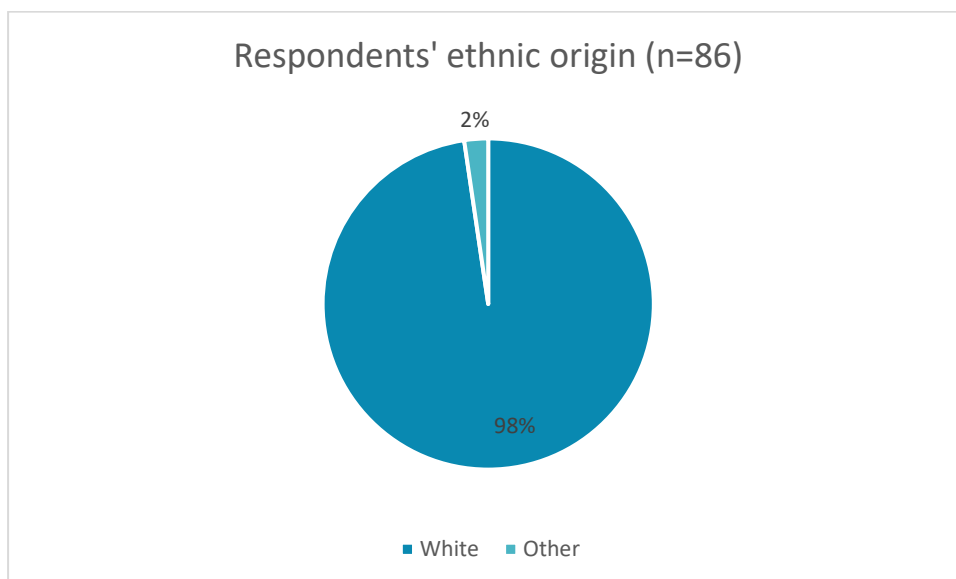
EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In August 2022, Smith and Kent Consulting set up the equity steering group comprising 10 experts by experience including people from Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, inner city, working class and LGBTQ+ backgrounds; older and younger people; disabled and neurodiverse people; and people with caring responsibilities. Two representatives from Belfast City Council's Belfast Stories and Good Relations teams also joined.

There were 4 equity steering group meetings during the public consultation stage, which were attended by an average of 8 people (31 in total).

Working through the equity steering group, Belfast City Council and other networks, Smith and Kent facilitated 16 workshops with people and groups who are generally more at risk of missing out. These were attended by 136 people (9 on average).

Smith and Kent also carried out 10 one-to-one meetings with organisations representing or advocating for people and groups at risk of missing out.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SECTORAL STAKEHOLDERS

Belfast City Council ran 31 workshops with the film, tourism, arts, heritage, the voluntary and community, Irish language and public sectors, engaging 238 representatives, including consultees previously engaged by Lord Cultural Resources in the development of the framework for gathering stories.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Belfast City Council also organised five public meetings. These took place geographically across the city and were attended by 15 participants.

Information boards were also displayed at Clifton House, Girdwood Community Hub, Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre, Crescent Arts Centre, Ulster University, Spectrum Centre, EastSide Visitor Centre and the James Connolly Visitor Centre.

THRIVE AND DAISY CHAIN INC.

In August 2022, Belfast City Council appointed thrive, the audience development agency for NI, and Daisy Chain Inc., a creative consultancy, to help raise awareness and build excitement using an innovative and participatory approach to engagement.

Between September and November, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. engaged a total of 683 participants through a range of creative tools including on-street interviews, street portraits, events and workshops and physical and pop-up consultation hubs in the city centre and surrounding locations. Engagement also took place online.

Question used by thrive and Daisy Chain included:

- If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why?
- What is the most Belfast thing you've ever seen or heard?
- What is your first memory of Belfast?
- Why are you here?
- What is your favourite place in Belfast?

Using people's responses, thrive and Daisy Chain were also able to test the framework for gathering stories developed by Lord Cultural Resources.

This approach was particularly good at engaging younger people with over a third of participants (36 per cent) aged under 35.

A copy of thrive and Daisy Chain Inc.'s report is included at appendix 2.

MCE COMMUNICATIONS

MCE is a strategic communications and brand marketing agency. They were appointed by Belfast City Council to develop Belfast Stories' key messages and social media, and they designed material for the public consultation, including the consultation document, easy read format, postcards, exhibition boards and leaflets.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CONSULTATION

Participants were asked to complete short evaluation postcards at the end of workshops. Twenty-seven postcards were completed by participants at three workshops. All participants enjoyed taking part in the consultation ("Lots of thoughts and opinions", "Very informative and open to ideas"), and 26 participants (96.3 per cent) felt listened to ("Yes all comments noted. Great facilitator", "Yes everyone had their views heard").

As the public consultation progressed, it generated a positive feedback loop. Increasingly consultees came to meetings and workshops with awareness of the project, generally through word of mouth, and Belfast City Council received increasing numbers of phone calls from people wanting to share their story.

Nevertheless, there is agreement among the extended Belfast Stories team (that is the council, Smith and Kent, MCE, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc) that the raising awareness strand should be strengthened in future engagement. The planned central consultation hub in 2 Royal Avenue could not go ahead when the building closed for refurbishment; thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. found that reference to Belfast City Council inhibited responses to their research and so limited opportunities for awareness raising; and there were inconsistencies in branding and key messages, including across the Your Say platform, Belfast Stories website[7] and social media, which was confusing for the public and stakeholders.

The survey responses show higher than average responses from people from the LGBTQ+ community and people with caring responsibilities. This may reflect the work done through the equity steering group to reach those who may otherwise be less heard. While this did not buoy survey responses across all groups (for example, only 2 per cent of respondents identified as other than white), the equity steering group worked hard to effectively engage people through other means, including Autistic and neurodiverse people, blind people, the d/Deaf and sign language communities, the Roma and Traveller communities, people from other minoritised ethnic groups, women, young women, young men, older men, older people, carers and the LGBTQ+ community.

Some geographic communities proved difficult to engage, and while there was spread across the city, areas closest to the site (and so most likely to be interested and affected) and those furthest away (least likely to be interested or benefit) require further effort as the project develops.

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[7] www.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfaststories

While the main consultation document was most often viewed or downloaded from Your Say, feedback from in-person engagement was that the easy read format was particularly welcomed, the first choice of many consultees, particularly (but by no means exclusively) among younger and older people, the d/Deaf community and others with different language abilities.

There was some criticism that the language (presumably in the main consultation document) was too corporate and "government speak". A small number of respondents did not understand all the survey questions or understand why they were being asked particular questions, which may reflect on the public's expectation of consultations (at or after decision-making, rather than concept stage), rather than the questions themselves.

Other consultation tools, such as guidance to help partners, community groups and equity steering group members carry out their own consultations were not well used, probably reflecting a lack of knowledge, interest or confidence this early in the project.

Nevertheless, the public consultation produced a wealth of useful information that the council will now carefully consider to inform the development of Belfast Stories and the next stages of consultation and engagement.

SUMMARY OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

What we did	How well we did it
2,755 visits and 2,495 unique visitors to Belfast Stories online consultation hub	100% of workshop participants surveyed enjoyed the consultation
234 unique visitors viewed or downloaded the consultation documents and videos	96% of workshop participants felt listened to
149 responses to online survey and polls	60% of survey respondents were female
65 consultation workshops	21% of survey responses from LGBTQ+ community
1,148 participants engaged through consultation workshops and events	20% of survey respondents had caring responsibilities for an older person or disabled person

What difference it made
82 per cent of those completing the survey or responding at consultation and engagement events are now excited by the concept of Belfast Stories
In the survey, 58 per cent of respondents offered stories, experiences, knowledge and networks they could share to help develop Belfast Stories

WHAT WE HEARD

BUILDING THE EXCITEMENT

Across all engagement strands, there was remarkable excitement about the concept of Belfast Stories. For example, in survey responses, 81.6 per cent of survey respondents said they were excited about Belfast Stories, with 43.2 per cent saying they felt "very" excited.

Are you excited about Belfast Stories? (n=125)

- 3.2%
- 15.2%
- 43.2%
- 38.4%

■ Very ■ A bit ■ Not a lot ■ Not at all
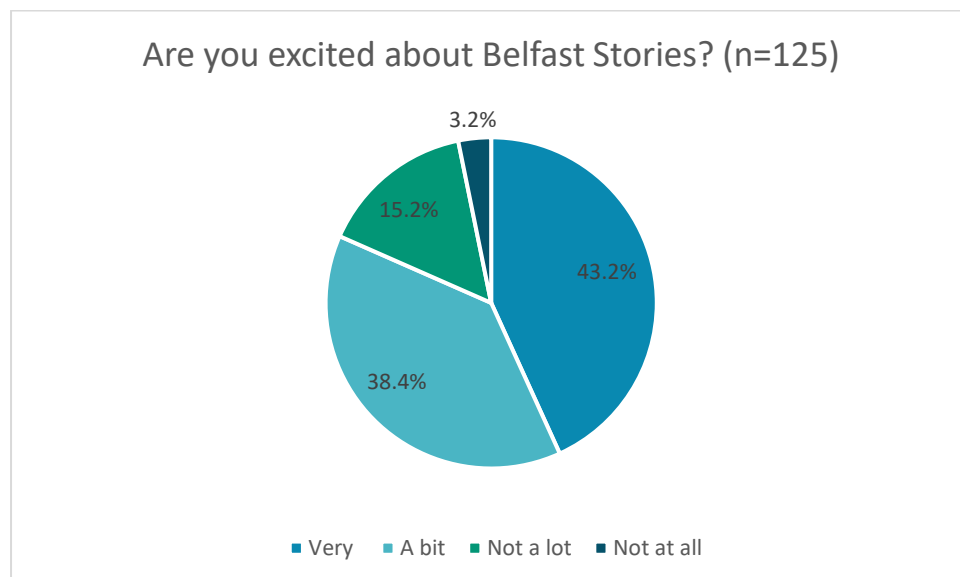
Most participants were simply intrigued by concept and were keen to share their story or learn about stories relevant to them. Indeed, on several occasions, workshop facilitators struggled to get through a presentation for participants eagerly telling stories.

> *"So important to capture the stories of our city by the people who make it, particularly those of senior citizens whose views are often seen as irrelevant."*

> *"I love Belfast – I think it's beautiful and unique and resilient and a bit battered but hopeful and determined. I think what makes it special is the fact that so many different stories co-exist within it. We're also great at telling them – it's part of our culture and heritage, and part of our personality. […]Stories bring the colour. They bring the nuance and the feelings that make things real and true, without making it about competition or right or wrong. They honour what's been difficult, and they highlight what's wonderful. They are what we need to remember the past, and to look to the future!"*

Other main reasons people felt excited included:

- regeneration of the area, which many felt was run down, unwelcoming or even unsafe ("the area is a mess a disgrace so it will be a shot in the arm for the area")
- regeneration of a key heritage building. Many consultees regard the Bank of Ireland building as iconic and were pleased with the proposal to preserve and repurpose it.

For older consultees in particular, who frequently referred to it as the "White Bank", it represented a period of time when the bottom of Royal Avenue and inner north Belfast was a vibrant social and commercial hub, and they were hopeful that Belfast Stories could be a catalyst for rejuvenation.

- attracting tourists, creating new jobs, boosting local business and the wider economy

    "I'd love Belfast people and visitors to get a feeling of what all parts of the city is like and leave with a feeling of shared history and future"

- opportunity to change the usual negative, narrow or "us and them" narrative of Belfast.

    "Think it's a great opportunity to tell stories of the city and its people that transcend tired and unrepresentative binary views."

    "Belfast's past is overshadowed by the news stories of the Troubles. We need to hear more real life stories about our past about people like my mum born in the 50s in Andersonstown when it was countryside and seeing so much change in her lifetime. If the stories aren't told and heard, they will be lost."

- potential boost to pride, both at a civic ("It's an exciting way to change some of the less positive narratives around Belfast") and individual ("The idea excites us. The Roma have never been included in anything like this") level.

    "So important to capture the stories of our city by the people who make it, particularly those of senior citizens whose views are often seen as irrelevant."

Among participants who were unsure about the concept, the main concerns were:

- Not knowing enough about it. Some struggled with being consulted on a concept, rather than on set plans or physical designs.
- Time scales. As the building is not due to open until 2028, some participants were not sure how it was relevant to them currently or felt that it was too far in the future to be of interest. Similar to the above, this may reflect civic participation in current consultation practice whereby participants expect to be asked for their opinion on fixed options at a fixed point in time.
- Suspicion about the political narrative, specifically that Belfast Stories would "just" tell the usual "us and them" narrative or, for some people, concerns that it would just tell the story of "them".
- Authenticity, which qualified a lot of opinions, including those who were otherwise excited for Belfast Stories. For example, "I am excited if it is not watered down" or "Disne[y]fied" or is if it is "true to me".
- Displacement, raised by stakeholders in the tourism, community and voluntary and cultural sectors, as well as by the general public. Overall, at this point in time,

tourism sector stakeholders may be least likely to have unqualified support for Belfast Stories.

Opinions were also frequently qualified with the need to support existing infrastructure, particularly the existing tourism offer, for example, by signposting the Belfast Stories visitors to other attractions, experiences, restaurants and bars in the city centre and surrounding neighbourhoods. There was also concern from one large cinema operator that Belfast Stories would displace customers from other cinemas in the city.

Among those who were not excited or disagreed strongly with the concept, the main concern was that the investment would be better spent elsewhere and is diverting funding from other priorities, such as preserving other heritage buildings or investment in existing arts and cultural infrastructure.

> *"I don't see the point to be honest […] It would be better to better staff and fund the museums we already have."*

> *"I feel it's somewhat ironic to have a building celebrating the history of Belfast, built on the rubble of historical Belfast."*

There were also some concerns that the content would not be interesting, particularly for tourists.

> *"The concept it is very vague. I imagine it'll be so safe, for fear of offending one community or other, that it'll be utterly bland and meaningless"*

MAKING SURE BELFAST STORIES IS FOR EVERYONE

BARRIERS THAT WOULD STOP PEOPLE ENJOYING BELFAST STORIES

What might stop you taking part in Belfast Stories? (n=87)

Category	Number of responses
Lack of trust	8
Unconvinced by concept	12
Partisan	8
Lack of authenticity	11
Lack of information	6
Not inclusive	18
Not accessible	12
Time	8
Nothing	14
Not sure	2
Other	9
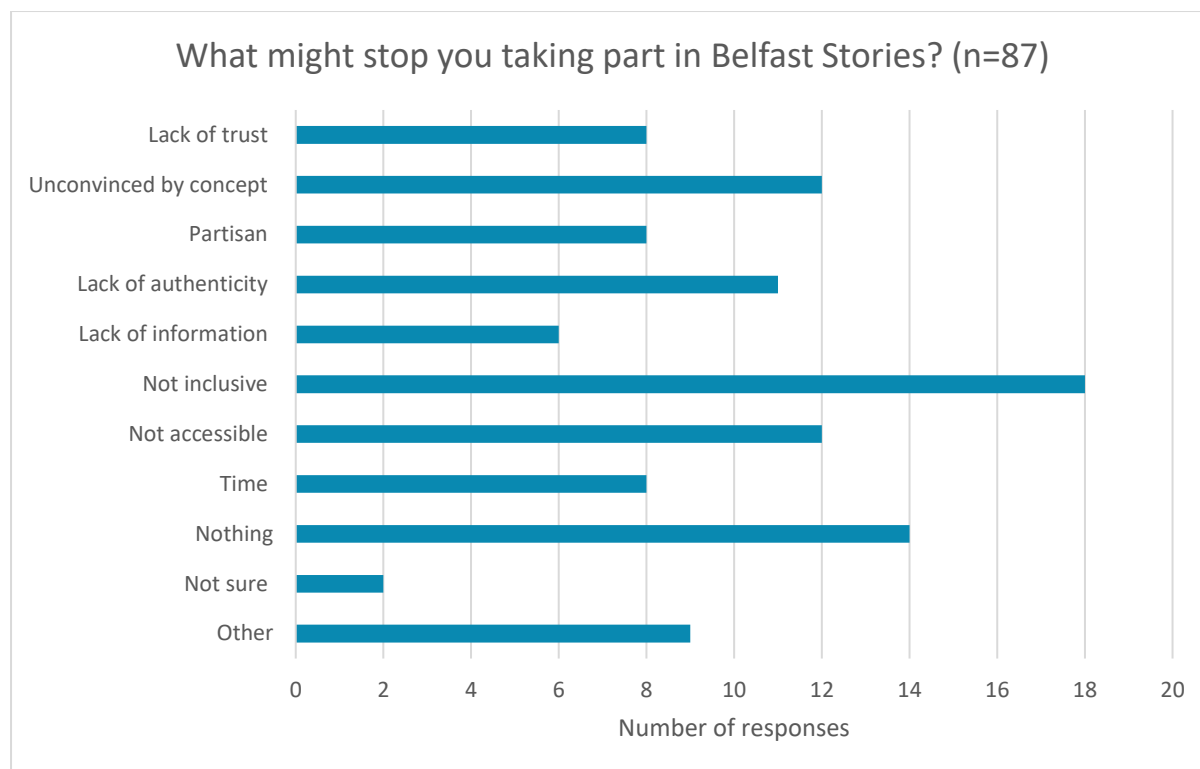
The survey asked "What might stop you taking part in Belfast Stories?". Eighty-seven responses were received. Most related to the participation in the story collection process, rather than visiting the physical building.

Eighteen responses related to a perceived or potential lack of inclusivity. This included people who felt that their culture would not be welcome ("one sided narratives", "if it is classist or erases minorities", "because I know my faith and culture is not wanted") and people living outside Belfast (26 per cent of respondents (24 people) were from outside Belfast), who were unsure whether they were included in Belfast Stories.

Twelve responses related to access including the location of the building (getting there and perceptions of safety), cost and lack of adjustments.

Among the 12 responses that were unconvinced by the concept of Belfast Stories, there were concerns that it is a waste of money, that the content is unappealing and that there is too much virtue signalling.

> *"Woke-ism gone mad."*
>
> *"If I felt like the focus was so far onto marginalised groups that ordinary, educated, white middle-class people aren't encouraged to also apply and feel like we have a chance too."*

Eight responses also indicated concern that the content would be politically partisan.

Lack of confidence included not having a story to tell or an interesting story and that the process might be too difficult.

Lack of trust included in the process and the presentation, including that anonymity would not be protected.

> *"I have concerns that edited versions of what I say will be used insensitively or unsympathetically – or dismissed!"*

THE BUILDING

Across all engagement strands, barriers identified that would stop people access the building included:

- Cost. It was automatically assumed there would be an entrance fee to access the whole building. Many consultees also assumed that the fee would be prohibitive. It was felt that at least some of Belfast Stories (such as social spaces, retail, restaurants and bars) should be free to enter and that different pricing models for locals and tourists should be explored.

- Not feeling welcome. Some consultees felt that the building might not be "for the likes of us". Consultees reinforced the importance of staff training and skills to create a warm welcome.

  > *"A clear welcome to immigrant and newcomer communities would be important for me: people who chose (or had to accept) this place as their home, despite where they were born. We have adopted Belfast as our home, so these "outside/inside" perspectives feel important to invite and include"*

  > *"there will be people who would not enter the museum, out of fear of being treated badly. The Roma are badly treated in many places in Belfast: shops, cinemas or other public places."*

  > *"It does not matter what goes into it – if it is old or new or falling down – if you do not feel welcome. If you feel welcome the roughest place can feel good. A good welcome and being treated well is most important."*

  > *"if there were good people working there, people with a heart, not racists."*

- Lack of activity for children. Consultees wanted family friendly activity and a play area.
- Young people not welcome. It was felt that there is a lack of space in Belfast where young people can just "hang out" safely, particularly away from alcohol.
- Whole family appeal. Consultees indicated a lack of activities in Belfast that would appeal to different generations, from toddlers to grandparents.
- Safety and fear of anti-social behaviour. The area around the Belfast Stories site was described by various consultees as "run down", "collapsed", a "desert" and "husks". Consultees reported concerns about litter, street cleanliness, broken pavers, poor lighting, rowdy nightlife, drug use and rough sleepers. This was a greater issue for

older people and disabled people, particularly when combined with lack of transport which increases the risk of people being left alone and at night. People from minoritised ethnic communities and the LGBTQ+ community also described being subject to racist and homophobic abuse – for example, "The current approach along Royal Avenue involves being shouted at by preachers declaiming the LGBTQIA+.".

- Transport. This was a major concern, particularly among older people, disabled people, minoritised ethnic communities, carers and people living in working class areas. Concerns included lack of parking spaces and accessible parking and cost of parking. There was also felt to be poor public transport links and a scarcity of taxis, both of which are worse at night, further hindering the evening economy. Consultees would welcome a free shuttle bus down Royal Avenue and better transport links, particularly at night and to rural areas.

- Building design. This was of particular concern to older people, neurodiverse people and disabled people. It was also recognised that inclusive design would benefit the rest of the population, in particular children and parents. The new wing of the Ulster Hospital was cited as an example of good, inclusive design. Other ideas included:
    - Architects, designers, restaurant tenants, Belfast Stories staff and so on all to benefit from dementia-friendly training
    - Carers, people with dementia and older people to work with the building design team
    - Colour-coded floors
    - Laminate floor should run the length of the grain (otherwise creates perception barriers)
    - Clear signage
    - Way out signs *inside* toilets
    - Quiet areas throughout the building (not just one for whole attraction or exhibition, but in the lobby, restaurants and social spaces as well)
    - Red and blue plates for people with dementia so they can see pale food
    - Assisted or lightweight doors
    - No or dropped kerbs and level access from parking areas and in to the building
    - Access for mobility scooters
    - Plenty of toilets including changing places
    - Accessible toilets (not "disabled" toilets)
    - Gender neutral facilities and spaces
    - Plenty of seating
    - Wide lifts
    - Firefighting or evacuation lifts
    - Good lighting
    - Good acoustics
    - Soft surfaces to absorb sound
    - Vertigo warnings on the roof garden and viewing platform

- Unilingual signage. This was felt to be a particular barrier for the Irish language community.

For carers and disabled people, a good practice buddy ticketing system was essential. It was also felt that older people may need more encouragement to go out after the pandemic and that the centre should facilitate group visits.

THE EXHIBITION

Barriers identified across all engagement strands that might stop people enjoying the exhibition included:

- Cost. This was the main issue raised in relation to the exhibition for local people. It was felt that Belfast Stories should explore different pricing models for locals and tourists.

- Static exhibition. This was raised almost as frequently as cost. Consultees presumed that the exhibition would not change and so would not appeal for repeat visits.

- Duplication of other stories and experiences. Consultees did not want a new experience and were concerned that Belfast Stories could displace footfall other attractions (see also Maximising the handprint).

- Lack of interest or relevance. This barrier was identified most frequently in the survey. As ensuring relevance was the part of the main purpose for many workshops, this barrier came up less frequently in person. Suggestions to help mitigate these barriers included engagement with minoritised groups and combining visual and audio archive footage with first-person stories for older people and people with dementia.

- Different language and literacy abilities (such as children and newcomer, Roma and d/Deaf communities). Generally, people preferred the exhibition to be "not too wordy", favouring "more powerful" visuals. A mix of media was also felt to better "help get someone's identity". Suggestions included changing colours, lighting or music to reflect the stories or how people are supposed to feel in response.

- Too much digital content and film too dominant. Again, it was felt that mixed media would be most appealing.

- Lack of animation. Some consultees felt that there should be less static, more programmed activity, such as workshops.

- Triggering content, including "Dark stories" that could traumatise or retraumatise, flashing images and loud noises

- Lack of outreach. Outreach would extend the engagement approach after the building has opened to ensure people and groups more at risk of missing out have the opportunity to take part.

- Marketing that is not inclusive of diverse communities ("Not just white princesses from Frozen")

Suggestions to help mitigate these barriers included:

- Simultaneous translation
- Phone or digital apps to engage with the exhibition in own language

- o Interactive activities, games and augmented reality
- o Workshops, performances and animation
- o Programmable community performance space
- o Programmable community exhibition space
- o Community spaces (for example, for a monthly d/Deaf community meet-up)
- o A changing programme marking civic or cultural events (such as Christmas and Chinese New Year)
- o A changing programme to attract local visitors back for repeat visits
- o Parental guidance-type warnings
- o Quiet spaces
- o Use of images showing diverse communities (including but not limited to LGBTQ+ people and people from minoritised ethnic communities)
- o Price promotions
- o English and Irish signage, exhibition text, marketing and other materials

PEOPLE AT PARTICULAR RISK OF MISSING OUT

The role of the community and voluntary sector as trusted intermediaries to engage people, was emphasised throughout the consultation. This included the sector in its widest sense including community centres, residents associations, sports clubs, historical societies, interest groups and arts organisations. Consultees also emphasised a need to go to where people and communities are, rather than expect them to come to a consultation or event, and several organisations volunteered their service.

There was also concern that this should not be an additional burden for the community sector in lieu of a well-resourced Belfast Stories team.

> *"Connecting with organisations who work with these communities already – but also having a robust outreach team of your own: making it welcoming and straightforward for the staff and volunteers of existing organisations to help people in their communities get involved at their own pace. Reaching out to people without adding to the work of under-resourced people and groups"*

Other suggestions for engagement people at particular risk of missing out included:

- o press
- o social media
- o print, radio and TV advertisement
- o leaflets
- o information available in a range of formats including visuals and video
- o events targeted at particular minority groups
- o engagement with the Education Authority and schools
- o engagement with large employers and their employees
- o engagement via libraries

- o arts and storytelling events
- o pop-up "audience by surprise" events
- o sensory and relaxed events
- o events in other community settings (such as job centres, hairdressers, bowling greens, play parks, supermarkets, pubs and bookies)
- o drop-in hubs
- o Zoom consultation sessions
- o community ambassadors
- o celebrity ambassadors
- o word of mouth

> *"You need ambassadors in the communities to tell their story to their community so that people can feel safe about coming to the centre to share their story without being marginalised."*

THE EQUITY STEERING GROUP

Over two thirds of survey respondents (68 per cent) agreed that we had identified the right people to be part of the equity steering group.
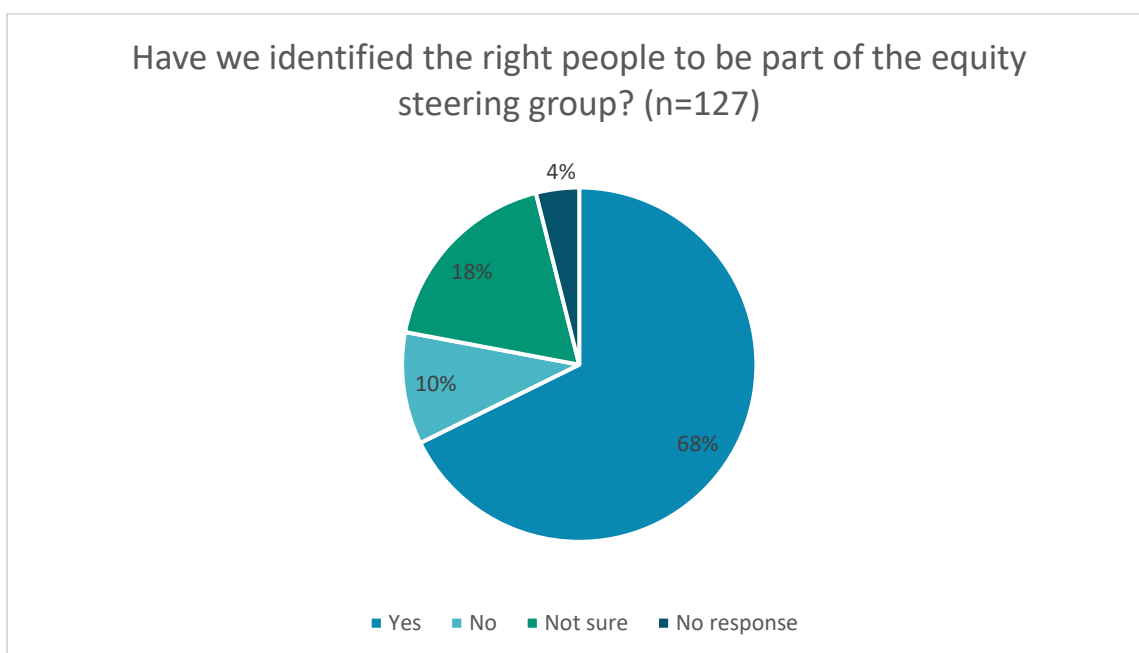
Other suggestions for the equity steering group included:

- Migrant communities
- People with refugee status or seeking asylum
- Men
- Middle-aged men
- The very elderly
- Students
- People of no faith
- Integrated education alumni

- Irish speakers
- Those who no longer live in Belfast or NI
- Parents
- Foster carers and guardians
- Younger children
- People with care experience
- Underprivileged children
- Long-term unemployed
- Different socio-economic classes, in particular people living in poverty
- "Normal working every day people"
- "Less educated people who struggle to read large blocks of text"
- Blind people
- People with dementia
- People from geographic communities
- People living at interfaces
- Homeless people
- Drug addicts
- Tourists
- People who are not affiliated to groups

One person suggested:

> *"Be flexible in the make up of the steering group so that it rotates and members can join and leave without it becoming a burden or precious to just a chosen few."*

Some respondents considered more "professional expertise" would be advantageous.

> *"Experts! How are individual people within this massive group of "diverse identities" going to interact with each other? You can't just pooled such diverse people together and expect to get good quality data"*

> *"Museums professionals need to be involved otherwise it won't be a proper museum"*

> *"Industry professionals and their businesses that could also become anchor tenants within this development"*

> *"Storytellers already working in and around the city"*

Others were concerned that the equality focus was misguided or that the steering group was just "box ticking" or "woke".

> *"While the need for equality and diversity is necessary – any focus groups should also be representative of Belfast. Ethnic minorities represent approx 5% of the population, LGBT approx 6–8%. How about underprivileged white children from Ballymurphy or inner East Belfast. Someone's who is long term unemployed from Whiterock – they're the "real" people of Belfast."*

> *"If everyone has an equal voice then the result is not proportionate."*

> *"disagree with some of the political agenda behind some of the 'causes'*
> *above. The group needs to be narrower and just focus on real physical*
> *accessibility issues rather than perceived cultural and social ones. This*
> *project is at risk of a backlash from council ratepayers who object to large*
> *amounts of money going into the wrong type of consultation."*

IRISH LANGUAGE

Belfast City Council hosted an Irish language consultation session, which was attended by 19 representatives. There were also three written submissions on behalf of the Irish language sector.

Consultees "warmly welcome[d]" Belfast Stories and were "hugely encouraged by the commitment to include diverse stories representing the different identities and people that make up our wonderful city". However, there were concerns that "the Irish language community have been, so far, completely omitted from the Belfast Stories concept". Rather,

> *"it is incumbent upon Belfast City Council to ensure that these rights are*
> *catered for in council projects through language visibility. To overlook the*
> *language rights of this growing and vibrant community, who have long*
> *campaigned for equality and respect, to access such an innovative and*
> *important resource through their native tongue would be doing a huge*
> *disservice to them, in breach of international and domestic treaty rights*
> *and would be contradicting the council's own Language Strategy"*

As well as welcoming the Irish language community, such an approach could also help good relations by "normalising the language [as] research has consistently shown increased visibility leads to increased tolerance and understanding".

While there was recognition of Irish as a native minority language that should not be categorised with other minority groups, it was also suggested that "members of the Irish language community [should be] on the project's equity steering group, given that all other minority groups across the city are represented."

> *"The impact of being unable to access such a magnificent resource in*
> *one's own language is something which should certainly be taken into*
> *consideration when evaluating those who may be at risk of missing out.*
> *This would ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are truly at the*
> *heart of the Belfast Stories project."*

Consultees also suggested that the council develop and implement a language screening assessment for all new council policies, practices and projects.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR GATHERING STORIES

The framework for gathering stories sets out the approach to how stories will be gathered. Stories will be told in the first person (that is, using words like "I" and "my"). They can be about past, present or future, and there are seven overarching themes.

1. Home: A sense of belonging and connection

2. Resilient: Strong and spirited

3. Place: Relating to spaces

4. Authentic: Embracing all identities

5. Innovative: Entrepreneurial zeal

6. Change: A city transforming

7. Creative: Inspiring expressions in many forms

FEEDBACK ON THE FRAMEWORK

Consultees were asked to consider if the framework for gathering stories was a good foundation for gathering stories.

The majority agreed that it is a good foundation. For example, 7 out of 10 (70 per cent) survey respondents agreed it is a good foundation.

Is this a good foundation for gathering stories?
(n=125)

24%

6%

70%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Not sure
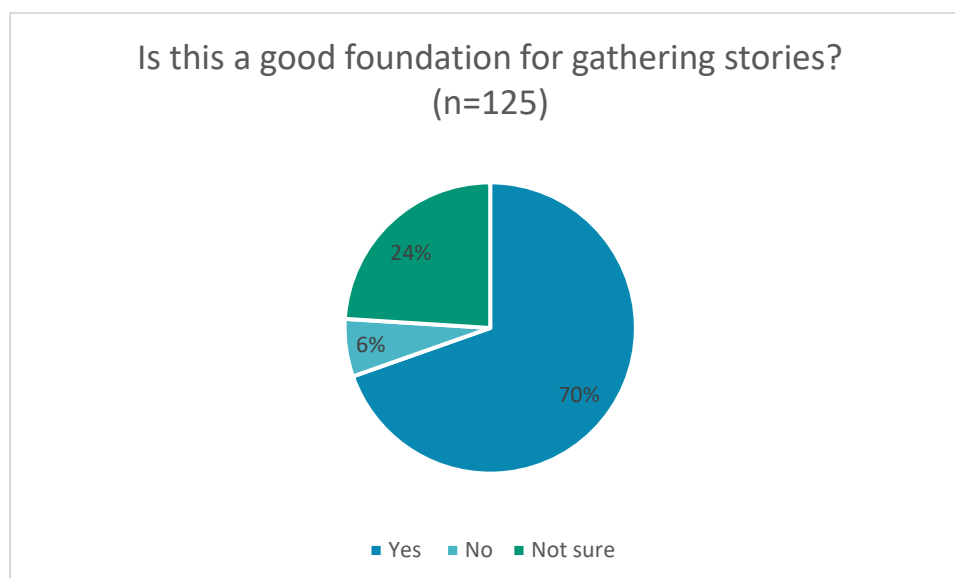
Consultees wanted stories that are entertaining, educational – "I want stories I can relate to and make me think – that stay with me" – and leave them feeling inspired by others and for the future – "People from Belfast don't think they can be successful".

However, nearly 1 in 4 (24 per cent) were unsure, and 6 per cent disagreed. The main concern among those who disagreed with the framework for gathering stories was that it had been "highjacked" by "causes" and that the focus on equality, diversity and inclusion would tell the stories of "a small minority of people rather than mass majority [...] to the detriment of others".

Similarly, concerns about authenticity were again raised: that in trying to be all things to all people, Belfast Stories would be "wishy-washy", "hijacked by generalities", "a jumble" no more than a sum of its parts.

> *"it suggests that Belfast is trying to be something that it is not (i.e. a multi-cultural, diverse city like Bristol, Manchester etc)[…] Be true to ourselves, we've differences but deep down we're genuine people, we're friendly – we're different, we're us. Don't be pretentious and pretend we're something we're not. Celebrate who we are and be proud of it."*

> *"Are we going to have something that reflects Belfast or is it just a collection of Belfast Stories where somebody is going to tell the tale of Buck Alec going up the back of his garden with a tiger and knocked over a bin, or somebody is going to tell the story that my granny met the queen, which are all perfectly good stories, but are they the Belfast story."*

There were also concerns that the stories would come from a "self-selecting group of contributors" or "the same old, same old people".

There were also objections to the first-person approach: that it is "far too contrived"; that it could promote narratives that are misleading, partisan or unverified; that individuals could be unduly venerated; and that it misses rich oral, collective, community and folkloric traditions.

> *"Oral histories, stories of Belfast, are often those that already come through several layers of cultural and spoken perception. The proposal attempts to void this natural way of storytelling and would simply cause interviewees to focus on their use of the first person and not the story."*

Indeed, during workshops, participants frequently signposted to history books, fiction, existing museum collections and archives that do not present a first-person viewpoint. Consultees were also interested in eras of history that would be difficult, if not impossible (for example, the Bronze Age in Belfast) to hear about first hand.

Existing story collections, whether in museums and official archives or gathered through community and cultural projects, were consistently identified as a rich seam for Belfast Stories, particularly for people and groups that may be less willing or able to tell their stories anew (for example, due to trust, culture, confidence, language, literacy, age or disability; see also Barriers that would stop people telling their stories).

Others sought further detail on the story gathering process, in particular, how the framework and the story gathering process would safeguard stories and storytellers, which is covered in more detail in the Ethics section below.

STORY GATHERING THEMES

thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. used short, fun questions to further test the story gathering themes at special events, during on-street interviews and pop-up engagement sessions (for

example, in pubs, taxis, shopping centres, St George's Market and takeaways) and on social media.

The questions were:

- If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why?
- What is the most Belfast thing you've ever seen or heard?
- What is your first memory of Belfast?
- Why are you here?
- What is your favourite place in Belfast?

They received 1,096 answers from 683 participants. They then mapped responses back to the story gathering themes.[8]

Themes from the Framework for Gathering Stories(n=1,096)
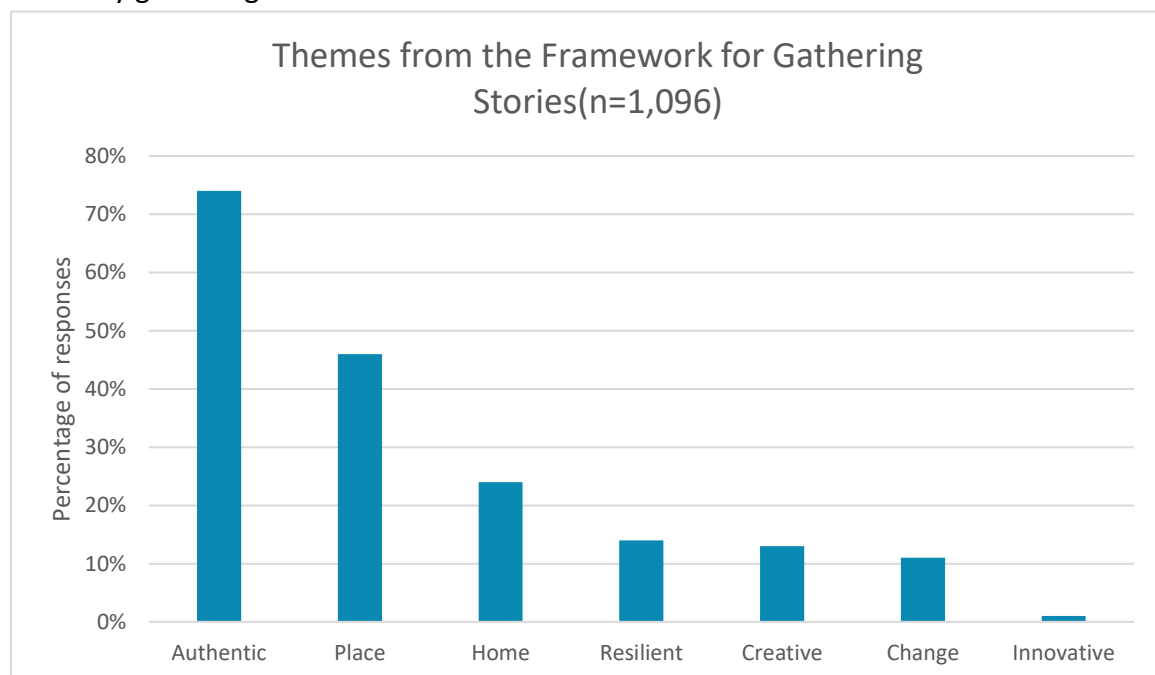
Authentic

thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. found that Authentic was the most common theme, accounting for nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of all responses. Under this theme they catalogued references to language, food, humour, situations or behaviours characteristic to Belfast.

In the general consultation, participants particularly welcomed the focus on people, blending well-known faces and voices from the past and contemporary culture with "extraordinary ordinary" and just plain "ordinary" people like "the milk man, bread man, lemonade man".

> "Seek out 'emotive' stories of all sorts – it'd be like knowing real people
> who you could be telling you their story at the bus stop."

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[8] thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. have prepared a separate detailed report on their findings.

There was also an interest in the ordinary lives of well-known people, for example, politicians' wedding days or what they ate for breakfast.

Humour came up frequently in the wider consultation as well. People perceive that Belfast has a unique, dark humour. This also came through in many of the stories told and the way they were told – even sad stories tended to be told in a wry style, and funny stories often evoked pathos. However, there was some concern that these could be lost in translation. On a practical level, would tourists be able to understand Belfast accents, banter and colloquialisms ("Are youse getting?", "wee", "smick", "youse uns", "peelers", "Yer da sells Avon" and so on)? And if there had to be translation or paraphrase, would the stories still be authentically funny or poignant?

On an emotional level, could someone's sad story be incorrectly presented or interpreted as funny? As one consultee put it, "Not all stories are for consumption."

> *"Over-exposure, glamorisation […] People's histories are unique they can all too easily be exaggerated to turn them into 'legends' as a marketing angle. When they become tea-towels and calendars they stop being 'real people'."*

Some people expected that stories would be illustrated with artefacts and that there was an opportunity to display objects otherwise hidden, for example, in Ulster Museum stores or even in people's homes (a people's museum model).

There was also concern for the loss of built heritage and that Belfast Stories would mainly reference and signpost to buildings that have already been lost or are at risk (and "A lot can be lost between now and 2028.").

> *"Stories need to have a root in history, like a building or an artefact, otherwise they just float away like hot air."*

Sometimes stories are artefacts; one consultee suggested that there is a wealth of media (slides, cassette tapes, home videos and so on) lurking in attics and garages that individuals can no longer access and that these would make a good addition to the stories collection.

There was also some scepticism about the term or concept of authenticity: that to make Belfast Stories attractive to tourists or palatable to all political persuasions, it would become "Disne[y]fied", glamorised or "wishy-washy".

> *"There is authentic and then there is authentic authentic."*

Irish language

Belfast City Council hosted an Irish language consultation session, which was attended by 19 representatives. There were also three written submissions on behalf of the Irish language sector. Consultees "warmly welcome[d]" Belfast Stories and were "hugely encouraged by the commitment to include diverse stories representing the different identities and people that make up our wonderful city". They underlined that:

> *"this project must not ignore the rich and indeed, diverse history of the
> Irish language in the city, nor should it ignore the growing community
> who are choosing to live their lives through the medium of Irish."*

Requests included that:

1. the Irish language is woven throughout the Belfast Stories themes, including celebration, diversity, education and the story of the language itself.

   > *"Stories from and about Irish speakers must be fully integrated through
   > all thematic aspects of the project in addition to specific focus on the
   > growth of the Irish language community as a particular phenomenon
   > within the city"*
   >
   > *"everyday lives are lived through the medium of Irish and therefore if the
   > themes are deemed suitable for the non-Irish speakers there is no reason
   > why they wouldn't pertain to Irish speakers too."*

2. there should be bilingual resources throughout Belfast Stories including external and internal signage, exhibitions, marketing and other materials.

Ulster Scots

A meeting was held with the Ulster Scots Agency, and other interest groups also participated in workshops.

The opportunity to foster further understanding the cultural identity of Ulster Scots was broadly welcomed. It was felt that this should include stories of the language, of "celebrated" and "lesser known" individuals, of industrial heritage and diaspora and international connections.

In general throughout the public consultation, there was concern that there could be an imbalance or bias in content and presentation. One consultee also welcomed further reflection of other Ulster identities and ancestries (for example, Anglo-Ulster, Franco and Italianate).

Place

Place was the second most common theme identified by thrive and Daisy Chain Inc., accounting for nearly half of responses (46 per cent). Responses categorised under Place referred to spaces around the city, such as pubs, shops, buildings, streets, parks, arts and cultural venues.

In the wider consultation, there was particular interest in stories about the Bank of Ireland building itself (for example, stories of the bank staff, and the bank itself is built over castle ramparts and a graveyard; it was suggested an archaeologist should be part of the design and build teams) and about the surrounding area (for example, Castle Court traders, the "Gay Quarter", residents of the Half Bap and Sailortown, the fadgies of Millfield/Smithfield, dance halls, commerce and business, as a "gateway to the north" and so on).

There was also an interest in architecture, from the vernacular, such as redbrick terraces, to the monumental, such as, again, the White Bank.

> *"I'd tell the story of my first memory of Belfast. I remember coming in in a pram and Belfast was red – all red brick and brown shiny terracotta tiles"*

However, this was tempered with concern for the loss of built heritage and that Belfast Stories could reference and signpost to buildings that have already been lost or are at risk.

thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. considered that responses also reflected the different "personalities" of the four quadrants of the city. However, when tested on the equity steering group (which includes representatives from across the city), they contested that any variances in responses simply reflect the location of the engagement and cannot be considered representative of larger populations, particularly in a city of complex geographies where identities can change from one end of the street to another.

Home

Home accounted for almost a quarter (24 per cent) of responses to thrive and Daisy Chain Inc's questions. Under Home they catalogued responses mentioning family, friends or the idea of making Belfast a new home.

In the wider consultation, people were particularly interested in learning about:

- social history
- migration, including why people come or chose to live in Belfast (generally, from other countries, but in one case, from Armagh); diaspora stories; and the stories of people returning to the city. The history of Jewish people in the city came up frequently in the wider consultation. One consultee was keen to see Anglo-Ulster, Franco- and Italianate influences on ancestry and culture explored alongside Ulster Scots.
- what people from other countries thought about Belfast
- particular neighbourhoods or communities, right down to how people lived their lives on particular streets ("History of smaller parts") over particular periods of time (including streets that no longer exist, such as Pound Loney and Gaffikin Street)
- the expansion of the city, and how suburbs and even inner-city areas were once rural

Consultees also reinforced the importance of seeing different cultures reflected in Belfast Stories. This would help minoritised groups feel "at home", while challenging stereotypes would benefit others by enhancing understanding and empathy.

> *"Any sort of representation will unlock hope" (a consultee from the d/Deaf community)*

> *"Tell stories of the connections between ourselves that bind us together."*

"Say there was a story of some office worker over the moon about getting a job – and then the picture with it looks nothing like a typical office worker. A surprising element to teach you not to judge."

"They see us not as themselves they see us as wrongdoers but they have not met us so they think this through stories they hear. They could see through our stories we are like them."

"It may help other people become more familiar with us, the Roma, and they may look at us differently, with better eyes."

"You look at people in a different way because of the story behind them."

This could be further enhanced by providing

"A place to start conversations and carry them on. There needs to be space in the building to talk – to own party and to new people"

Consultees saw an opportunity to change the exhibition programme to reflect key festivals, events and celebrations, from Easter, Christmas, Chinese New Year to Belfast Pride.

"We tell, they tell – everyone could tell stories about Christmas and family and food – it is the same for us all but we do it differently."

Some consultees felt that their identity or community should have its own theme within the framework or section within an exhibition. This included stories relating to women, the LGBTQ+ community and Irish language.[9]

Others felt that their stories would be a particular driver for tourists from within their community, offering interest and relevance missed elsewhere alongside a strong sense of welcome. This included d/Deaf and LGBTQ+ tourists.

"a visitor from USA asked why would I go see Titanic – were there any black people like me on it?"

Notably, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. found that love was one of the main reasons people moved to or lived in Belfast. However, few stories told during the wider consultation were about love.

Resilient

Troubles

thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. categorised stories or mentions of the Troubles as Resilient, which accounted for 14 per cent of responses. They found that people over the age of 40 were most likely to talk about the Troubles. In their report, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. also reflected that stories about the Troubles "were rarely about resilience and more about trauma. When respondents spoke of the Troubles, it was about how vivid those memories

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[9] Irish language consultees also felt that Irish language should be integrated throughout the themes and building.

were and the impact the Troubles had on their mental health and on their relationship with Belfast".

Examples from consultees included:

> *"I remember the barricades, in the 70s, you'd come up shopping when you felt safe enough."*

> *"I hate to be grim but standing on the roadside on Ligoniel Hill on a dark evening in 1969 and watching the glow of fires burning across the city. Aged 5."*

Wider engagement, however, indicates that the Troubles should not be categorised within one theme. Rather, for many, it was a backdrop against which Home, Place, Creativity, Innovation and more continued. There are particular sensitivities about defining people, such as victims and survivors, in relation to the Troubles, and we heard repeatedly that people may want to share stories that reflect other aspects of their identities. People were particularly interested in hearing more oblique Troubles stories, for example, of how certain people or communities (such as the d/Deaf, minoritised ethnic and interface communities) continued to live their lives.

Overall, unsurprisingly, there was little consensus as to how the Troubles should be told. Some felt that Belfast Stories should avoid the Troubles (and politics) altogether; others cautioned that it is part of our brand, identity or unique selling point ("Violence is what people think about Belfast and why they come here"). There were also concerns that Belfast Stories should "add value" to existing Troubles narratives, but the first-person perspective was inherently problematic as it could not be "navigated by starting with facts" (a principle of the Decade of Centenaries, for example). In general, an approach that told "the Troubles without the Troubles" or "Belfast beyond the violence" appears more welcome.

> *"How do we ensure that we don't have a repeat of the Troubles archive at the Ulster museum. We all know how many iterations of that archive were rejected before it was so anodyne that it offended nobody, and excited nobody."*

Communities

The equity steering group reflected that the Resilient theme may work better at a community, rather than an individual level, whereby areas of and communities within Belfast had endured significant stresses and strains over eras, bouncing back or adapting to survive or thrive.

Individuals also expressed interest in learning about how other communities survived and thrived. For example, young people on one side of an interface would welcome further insight in to stories from the other side.

Resilience was also identified by communities of interest as the collective story they would like to tell – for example, the development of Belfast's gay scene and LGBTQ+ rights.

> *"We need to tell the story of community as well as individuals. Stories of kindness and empathy."*

This theme in particular was felt to be an opportunity to show tourists our "best side".

> *"My Belfast story would be that it is full of kind people. Lost purses are returned. We say thank you – a lot!"*

> *"Be a beacon for kindness."*

Creative

thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. included references to culture and arts under the theme of Creative, which accounted for 13 per cent of responses.

In the wider consultation, there was frequent reference to sport, particularly sporting figures (leaning towards "unsung heroes", "not just George Best") and sports that were felt to transcend traditional religious or political boundaries, such as cycling.

Arts were identified as a tool to help people tell their stories – from creative writing, drama, music and photography to quilt making, art "allows them to share without looking like they are sharing", and it can also transform stories so "what is sad becomes powerful".

There was also interest in stories about music, stories set to music, music that is story and well-known literary and artistic figures.

A number of consultees were also concerned that the emphasis on first-person accounts excluded fiction and folklore.

> *"folklore is very important and endangered if not already gone."*

> *"Stories in the third person are equally valid and can add a breadth of knowledge that writing in the first person doesn't allow."*

Change

thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. found that Change referred mostly to places that did not exist anymore, accounting for 11 per cent of responses.

During the wider consultation, when asked what stories they would expect to see or experience, consultees generally referred to stories in the past including the Bronze Age, Vikings, "golden age" of industry and architecture, two world wars, the Blitz and the Troubles.

When asked about the stories they would tell, consultees generally told stories relating to family or social history from the last three generations to the near present. (However, there were very few, if any stories of the pandemic.)

Consultees were particularly interested in hearing older people's stories, and, indeed, capturing them (in the words of an older consultee) "before they are lost for good".

While no one explicitly offered a story of the "future", a number of consultees did ask that these are included.

Consultees appear to expect or desire that stories are told chronologically. This would help them understand their own story within the wider context of history and time. It also provided for intergenerational stories that illuminate change such as "mother, daughters, granddaughters – going to dances over the years, Flora[l] hall and so on". There was also reference to first-, second- and third-generation immigrant stories.

> *"Could have stories with time lapse videos showing how places have changed from the past to today – show how things have improved – been redeveloped – to inspire hope."*

Similarly, there was an interest in different versions of the same story or different perspectives on the same event or subject matter.

Of course, people, stories and how they relate to each other change over time, and what was present or future inevitably becomes past. This was of particular concern for some consultees during the public consultation, which was six years in advance of the building opening. Young people and people with refugee status or seeking asylum status in particular may not want to be identified by those labels or by a story told by their past self caught perpetually in time. Others still were concerned that they should have ongoing control over the storage, presentation and of their story (see also the section on Ethics).

And the city itself is constantly changing. Consultees felt that the stories and exhibition should also change, not least to ensure repeat visits from local people. Several suggested that visitors (local and international) should become part of the Belfast story, for example, by leaving their reflections or stories for posterity. In such a way, Belfast Stories can validate Belfast's sense of itself as a place worth showing, visiting and telling.

Innovative

thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. included trade, such as the Belfast shipyards, under the theme of Innovative. However, this amounted to only seven responses (1 per cent) to thrive and Daisy Chain's questions.

Consultees talked more frequently about trade and industry during the wider consultation. Older people in particular were more likely to talk about the industries of the "golden age" of Belfast, such as rope, linen, ships and tobacco.

There were also frequent references to Belfast food.

There were fewer references to contemporary industry, although younger people were slightly more likely to talk about film and animation.

Other

13 per cent of thrive and Daisy Chain Inc's responses were not categorized. Integrated education was twice identified as a gap by consultees during the wider consultation, although depending on the tenet of the story, this could also be classified as Innovative, Resilient, Change or Authentic.

One surprising category that came up again and again was animals, from elephants at the zoo to Buck Alec's lion and pet ferrets walked around on leads. Mostly these were humorous (or incredulous) and could be classed as Authentic or Home.

In their report, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. considered that "themes and subthemes within the Framework all have a positive connotation. During the engagement, it was noted that people's opinions of Belfast and their stories are often more nuanced, sharing the 'good' as much as the 'bad'."

Overall, most stories, like people, tended to speak across several story collection themes (and much of the categorisation above is arbitrary).

BARRIERS THAT WOULD STOP PEOPLE TELLING THEIR STORIES
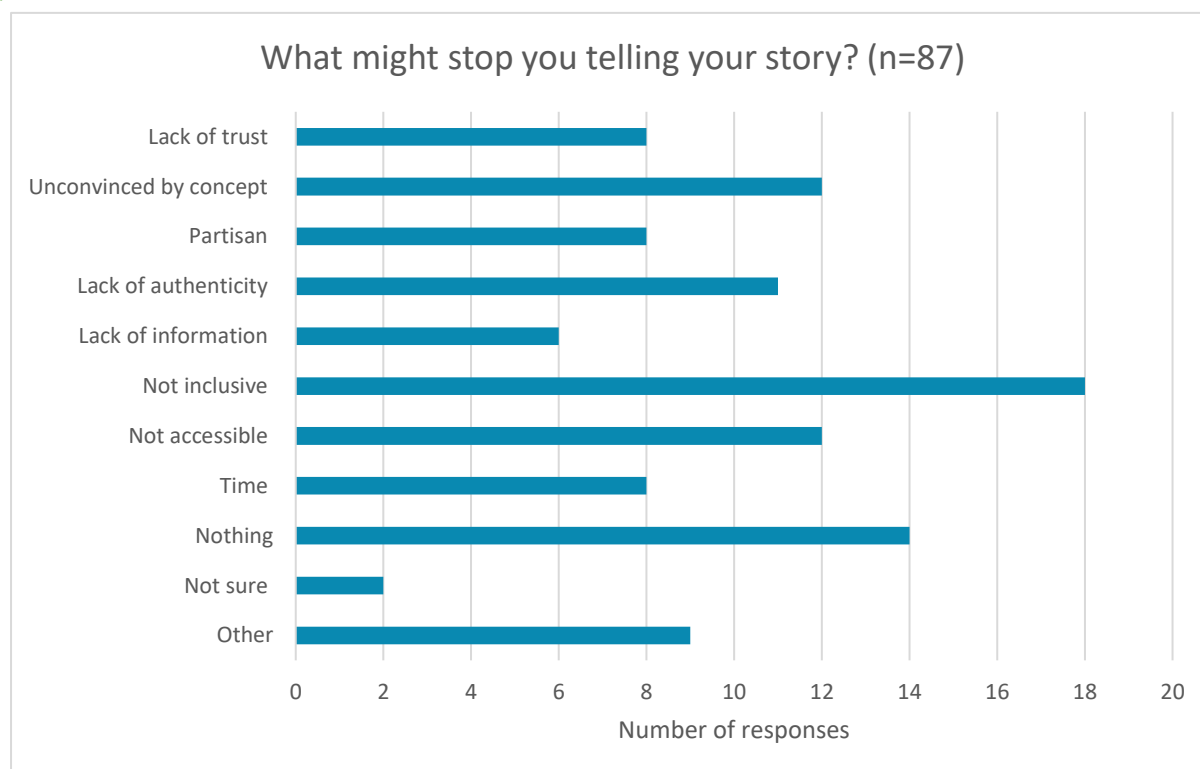
The survey asked "What might stop you telling your story?". Responses broadly mirrored the responses to the "What would stop you participating in Belfast Stories?" question. However, there was deeper reflection on the personal impact of storytelling including relating to lack of confidence ("Fear of being laughed at, not clever enough or my story not being important."); privacy including concerns about "being misquoted or only parts told that show inaccuracies"; "fear of reprisals" and "illegal activities in the past"; and the need for trauma-informed practice.

There was a desire to tell authentic stories married with concern that this would not fit in to a received narrative.

> *"Belfast is often as a city very pessimistic of itself. It's important to reflect the past but […] the concentration should be on embracing the future."*
>
> *"Feeling that my story whatever that might be isn't representative of the Belfast being presented through the building. We need the world to see the real Belfast. Why residents have stayed in the city and love it. Why they have built their lives instead of leaving despite the political upheaval and civil unrest we have experienced in the past."*

In practice, during workshops and other in-person engagement, the vast majority of people were very willing to tell their stories. Indeed, many shared or offered to share their story during workshops, and most groups asked that the Belfast Stories team returns at a later date when the process for story gathering is more fully developed and ready to be tested or rolled out.

Some people indicated that they would be more comfortable telling their story to another person. This would be more conversational, prompting them to open up or dive deeper. It would also help overcome barriers around literacy and language abilities, from dyslexia, other first languages or simply embarrassment at poor spelling.

Others would prefer to write or record their story direct, whether finding this approach more creative or less exposing.

During in-person consultation, only a very few felt that they had no story to tell ("Who would be interested in my story?"; "Other people have told stories better"). Generally, young women appeared more reticent than young men, and women more reticent than men in general. Young people were also very concerned with their public profile and would only tell their story (in 2028) "if they were successful".

Group dynamics helped people overcome initial reticence. For example, at the carers workshop, those who felt their stories were not interesting enough were chivvied along by peers who championed carers as "unsung heroes" who are "not recognised enough". They were quickly boosted, and stories were shared.

In other group settings where it might be perceived that there could be a lack of trust, for example, with minoritised ethnic groups, they were again happy to open up within their peer group. It may be less likely that they would have told their stories individually.

Still, others may prefer the privacy of individual story gathering, particularly those who have sensitive or traumatic stories to tell. There was concern about the potential for storytelling to retraumatise. Organisations such as the Victims and Survivors Service have excellent, tried-and-tested policies and practices co-designed with the intended beneficiaries. This includes having counsellors on hand before, during and after story gathering and giving

participants full control of the use and assignment of their stories. (This is also discussed in the Ethics section.)

Another barrier that emerged through in-person engagement is storytelling fatigue. This may particularly affect people whose stories are of academic interest; victims, survivors, older LGBTQ+ people (particularly men), ex-combatants and -prisoners, for example, may already have told their stories, sometimes more than once, to researchers. There were additional frustrations when the stories were perceived to have become shelfware and not made a material difference in policy or practice.

Many "ordinary" people's stories have also already been collected through community groups, reminiscence projects, local history associations and so on. In general, participants indicated they would prefer that this activity is shared or showcased, rather than stories recorded anew.

This also points again to the need for a foundation of trust. While the majority of participants in the consultation had little reticence sharing their stories with the facilitators, who were generally unknown to the participants, many of the workshops were organised or supported by trusted intermediaries, whether a local community group or respected individual "of" that community, which helped reassure participants. Survey responses explicitly referenced Belfast City Council as a barrier to sharing their story, and thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. researchers reported interviewees walking away when the council was mentioned.

One person felt that people collecting the stories should be local people. Another felt that collectors should be "of" the community stories are being collected from (so, for example, someone with Irish language should collect stories from the Irish language community). Another felt that the stories should be interpreted by Belfast people. Overall, "It shouldn't be two white men".

The use of trusted intermediaries is likely to be particularly important for vulnerable or marginalized groups. Consultees suggested that where stories had not already been collected, tools that could be used included training and resourcing (for example, with interview scripts, facilitators, digital recording devices and so on) community groups to collect stories, training peer facilitators and using arts to help people open up and approach stories more obliquely.

Where an unknown facilitator is used, there was caution that it takes time to build relationships and trust. Consultees were also alert to bias. Some storytellers may be more likely to self-censor if talking to someone they don't know for shame or fear of exposure; equally, others may be less open when talking to someone they do know, for example, due to embarrassment or fear of causing offense.

In the survey, a number of respondents also identified the risk of literally incriminating themselves as a barrier to telling their story. Others may be limited in what they can say because of repercussions for their wellbeing, safety or security (for example, in the case of

someone seeking asylum, it might be retraumatising or jeopardise their application for asylum). This needs further careful consideration in relation to ethics.

Some would be happy to have their words used, but not their voice (because they dislike the sound of their voice on recordings); others would be happy to have their voice used, but not their face. Several consultees, particularly among minoritised ethnic groups and young people, wondered whether they could use an avatar instead.

There was concern that the collection process could be difficult or cumbersome, particularly for those with different literacy or memory loss.

Other suggested tools and techniques that might help different people and groups share their story include:

- "story stations" or booths distributed throughout the city
- storytelling hubs in libraries
- storytelling booths in Belfast Stories (including onsite during the build)
- provision of example stories
- reminiscence workshops ("Best asset is the film archive – use this to generate stories; let people remember, then tell stories.")
- walking/talking tours and consultations
- poetry and creative writing workshops
- other arts and crafts including drama, photography, music and quilt making
- "living libraries"[10]
- community ambassadors
- use of technology to mitigate barriers such as physical access for disabled people and people living in poverty (for example, an online forum to record or submit a story)
- provision of transport to Belfast Stories or for story collectors to go to storytellers
- provision of resources to communities, such as recording devices, guidance and facilitators
- community outreach, for example, through story collection days or hubs in community or public spaces
- an ethics advisor
- assurance as to how stories will be used, safely and with respect
- trauma-informed practice and processes
- trained, skilled and properly resourced story collectors and facilitators. Consultees stressed the need for excellent people skills to put people at ease and listening skills to tease out and collect stories accurately
- clear messaging assuring people their stories are valuable and welcome
- clear messaging welcoming the stories of minority communities
- provision of collateral in a range of languages and formats including Braille, large print, audio-visual, BSL, ISL and Irish

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[10] See, for example, www.community-relations.org.uk/news-centre/living-library-where-people-are-books

Two respondents suggested that story tellers should be paid for their stories or profits from the centre invested back in their communities.

Others felt that "A relaxed atmosphere – a cup of tea and a chat" or "a warm space" would be sufficient. One person said they would "Be glad [to] give stories back to the bank".

Generally, it was felt that Belfast Stories would need to have a broad spectrum of safe, robust and engaging story collection approaches.

ETHICS

A substantial number of consultees raised questions relating to the ethics of story gathering, preservation and presentation. This is an important area of work that Belfast City Council is already considering.

Key points raised by consultees include:

- The council should consider how it safeguards stories and storytellers at every point in the process from collection to storage, curation and presentation.
- People should understand the purpose of their telling, and it should not just be to be put on a shelf: "Move along the agenda to inclusion and belonging".
- It is important that storytellers also understand what won't happen to their stories, for example, if it is to be stored or added to an archive, and that they get something in return for giving their story, whether it is enjoyment, pride, a cup of tea and a chat, the feeling of belonging or being part of something bigger.
- Storytellers may want to decide how their story is aligned to the "curatorial wheel" and what key words, for example, are used to catalogue it. There were concerns about stories being misclassified, "used insensitively or unsympathetically". People may want to say why their story is meaningful in their eyes, rather than important to a curator, historian, academic or viewer.
- Not all stories can be "consumed [You] need to think about this and be honest when gathering stories."
- At some point in the future, storytellers may want to withdraw permission for their stories to be stored or used, for example, if their circumstances or opinions change.
- Some storytellers may not want their stories shared until some point in the future (for example, after their death).
- Belfast Stories should periodically check that they still have permission to store and use stories.
- Belfast Stories must consider how it would handle any information disclosed about serious offences.
- Caution should be exercised about venerating living people or contemporary figures.
- Counselling should be available where there is risk of harm to storytellers, audiences and even staff.

- Academics and archives have extensive experience in the collection, use and retention of primary research and can provide support and advice.
- The Victims and Survivors Service has a detailed guide, Recording Lived Experience: A Toolkit for Victims and Survivors, that was co-designed by victims and survivors
- Belfast Stories should allow storytellers to describe themselves, for example, person seeking asylum rather than an asylum seeker ("How they are named informs their dignity.")
- People have multiple identities and can choose to tell different stories. For example, a disabled person does not just want to share their story of being disabled; they could also be a runner, an artist, a knitter, a mother and so on.

> *"Guard against boxing people in to telling the stories you expect of them – LGBTQIA+ have stories other than about misery – happy, love, fun, and also stories that are not about being gay."*

- The council should consider appointing an ethics advisor.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

> *"The idea excites us. The Roma have never been included in anything like this, and we hope it is going to happen and that we won`t be left with just promises."*

While some people struggled with consultation on a liminal concept, the information published about the consultation emphasised that this was only the first step in six years of planned engagement.

The final question of the public consultation survey asked, "What stories, experiences, knowledge and networks can you share to help us develop Belfast Stories?" Seventy-three substantive responses were received, equating to nearly three in five respondents who offered a suggestion for the next stage.

The following section briefly considers some of the findings from the survey and the wider consultation as they relate to the strands of ongoing engagement as set down in the engagement plan.

MAXIMISING THE HANDPRINT

TOURISM

The tourism sector perhaps least receptive of the concept of Belfast Stories. This may be because Belfast Stories could be considered competition if it is not properly integrated with the current tourism offer. Others were concerned that the market proposition was not fully thought out and the visitor experience was "oblique": "It can mean everything or nothing."

There was concern about displacing business from existing cinemas, bars and restaurants in particular. However, consultees felt strongly that Belfast Stories "should be the city's shopfront", providing tourism information and signposting to attractions and offers elsewhere in the city, including other heritage buildings, food and drink and city centre and neighbourhood offerings.

Other suggestions included:

- "Storycations" could be packaged and branded to encourage people to stay longer in the city
- Links from the new Transport Hub, including storyboards
- Belfast Stories "modules" in other key venues around the city
- Walking and cycling tours from the building
- Space for small businesses to advertise
- Signposting to other parks, the Belfast Hills and their stories from the roof garden and other green spaces within Belfast Stories

Overall, consultees were keen for Belfast Stories to positively influence Sunday openings, the night-time economy, the number of tourists coming in to the city centre and duration of overnight stays. There was also recognition that these are issues that need further strategic intervention (for example, lack of public transport in the evenings and taxis in general).

> *"We are all fully aware of the amount of tourists that come and they tend to stop around the Titanic. Is this going to be an opportunity for ourselves to get those cultural tourists back into us, to be able to be signposted to us, to help us to thrive into the future."*

HERITAGE

> *"There are parts of the city (and it does seem like these parts are growing) which feel like husks. The dilapidated infrastructure, collapsing, often historic buildings, propped up by scaffolding and sometimes whole streets in decay. From Great Victoria Street through Castle Court to North Street, there is, by many accounts, a sense of decline."*

Many consultees were supportive of the concept hoping that it would help regenerate the local area ("it is a social desert, run down needs doing up"), but there was also a small, but strong voice of scepticism.

> *"How about conservation instead of conversation"*

> *"A lot can be lost between now and 2028."*

> *"The redevelopment of the whole block is an exciting, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Belfast City Council to ensure that the level and standard of beauty that once existed on this site over 100 years ago is at the very least equalled. It is our view that there is no reason why the beauty of the original streetscapes cannot be bettered. This will be the test."*

Consultees emphasised the need to preserve existing built heritage to ensure that there is relevance between stories and the world around them ("Stories need to have a root in history, like a building or an artefact, otherwise they just float away like hot air.")

Others were concerned that Belfast Stories would lead to gentrification of the area, which would push out artists and businesses that occupy the "Gay Quarter" and Cathedral Quarter in particular.

> *"I'm just thinking with the burning down of the Cathedral buildings recently, the arts in Belfast, the vibrancy which brings the city to life, are being priced out of the area, and this brand new space, as lovely as it's going to look, and it is probably going to be beautiful, but it's not for the people of Belfast, it's not for the arts in Belfast, it's for people, tourists coming in."*

Organisations in the heritage sector specifically asked Belfast City Council for support to help develop curatorial skills so they, in turn, could help the story collection and presentation process.

ARTS

Many arts organisations are receptive to Belfast Stories. They already tell stories through an array of artforms and are excited for further opportunities for collecting and creating. Further suggestions for Belfast Stories include artist residencies, office space, exhibition space and programmable space.

There are, however, some concerns including the risk that they may be pushed out of a gentrified Cathedral Quarter (see the Heritage section above).

Others noted that the investment in Belfast Stories dwarfs the funding they receive from Belfast City Council in particular and the government in general. The sector feels particularly precarious as it emerges out of the pandemic to be met with escalating operating costs.

Community Arts Partnership organised a focus group with the community arts sector, which felt the concept reneges on previous policy decisions published in Belfast City Council's A City Imagining strategy.[11] Discussion included:

> *"The very simple message seems to be that the arts has disappeared and the whole direction over the past number of years has been towards tourism. Clearly this is entirely a tourism project and leaves the question, 'Where is the support for arts, arts infrastructure, arts capacity building, arts delivery doesn't seem to be there.' The original talk of the Tourism levy supporting arts and so on. I don't see it."*

> *"Where is any commitment to arts, never mind Community Arts as a subset within arts? I have no hope at all that there's a place for us."*

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[11] No representatives of Belfast City Council or Belfast Stories attended.

> *"I think the space for organisations like everybody here, who are used to working in a collaborative, cooperative manner, in community, through community, by community, has been sidetracked. That then calls into question this notion of cultural democracy and equality of representation."*

> *"I am a bit disappointed to learn that all these tenders have already gone out as that undermines the consultation process."*

Among more positive voices at the focus group ("I am positive, I think it is a wonderful idea"; "I think I would go with the positive route"), there was an interest in helping to further shape the contents of Belfast Stories and how it connects to communities and community arts.

> *"We can spend our time banging our head against this monolith which is unstoppable, or we can put our heads together and start looking at a proposal of what we would like to see."*

MINIMISING THE FOOTPRINT

In relation to environment impact, tourism consultees in particular encouraged Belfast Stories to "aim high on sustainability" as this is the standard demanded by many tourists and conference and business tourists in particular.

SCREEN

There was general enthusiasm for the screen element of Belfast Stories. Some people were less interested when they learned that the screens would not show "blockbusters", and others suggested a middle-ground of locally filmed mainstream productions (such as Star Wars 7 and 8 and Game of Thrones).

Young people were particularly interested in career and skills development opportunities in film, animation and gaming.

People from minoritised ethnic communities in particular felt that films need to reflect the different cultures in Belfast – their culture represented on screen is an important part in seeing themselves as part of the Belfast story.

The screen sector was particularly enthusiastic about opportunities to train young creatives, support early career filmmakers and for the centre to function as a meeting place or hub for the sector.

Other suggestions included having a life-long learning centre.

SOCIAL

The general public was very interested in Belfast Stories' proposed social spaces, perhaps reflecting a deficit of free, safe, welcoming and attractive space in the city centre where people (particularly younger and older people) can just "hang out".

There was also demand for programmable space, community space, exhibition space, community exhibition space and networking space.

There was concern that the viewing platform and rooftop garden would be overshadowed by other buildings.

> *"In this regard the planners need to implement a policy of 'protected views'. This should include views from the city to the Belfast Hills but also views of certain buildings and the streetscape. (e.g. the view up Donegall Place to the City Hall)."*

FOOD AND DRINK STORIES

Similar to feedback relevant to Maximising the handprint, consultees felt that Belfast Stories could have an important role signposting visitors to other food and drink around the city. Rather than compete, it could also address gaps in the current offer, which were identified as street food and brunch.

Consultees were also enthusiastic about using food and drink to animate the space, for example, with demonstrations, workshops and experiences changing according to the seasons or the wider Belfast Stories programme.

It was also considered important to tell the stories of local food and local food producers. This includes different world cuisines and the stories of the people – first, second and third generations – who brought their food to Belfast. Recipes are often passed down through generations and can also be stories.

An incubation space for new food businesses would be welcome. Pop-ups, markets and a regularly changing offer would also attract locals back for repeat visits.

Mixing recognisable brands (such as Coca Cola and Guinness) with local products was particularly important for younger people, who also look for Instagrammable experiences.

RETAIL

Consultees wanted local products in Belfast Stories retail spaces. They would also be interested in a market.

ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

> *"The people at most risk of missing out are people who aren't in any of the circles that are likely to hear about this project. Or people who, even if they hear about it and are part of these groups may feel like they have*

> *nothing to contribute or are too scared to take part. There is an element*
> *of privilege in having the drive and ability to participate."*

Other ideas relevant to the next stage of consultation include:

- Using networks trusted by consultees such as community groups, churches and schools (particularly for minoritised groups)
- Have Belfast Stories ambassadors such as "ordinary people" and key people within the sector who can then communicate key messages
- Further engagement with young people
- Engagement through schools, universities and colleges including Irish medium
- Children and young people design the building and exhibition space (for example, using Lego)
- Further engagement around the Irish language
- Further engagement in the medium of Irish language
- Irish language representation on the equity steering group
- Further engagement with older people
- Older people, carers and people with dementia to work with the design team to make the building and exhibition space age- and dementia-friendly
- Prioritisation of older people's stories
- Have a sign language users working group
- Work with victims and survivors and advocacy organisations to co-design best practice, ethical guidance
- Arrange go-sees to other cities and attractions with key stakeholders
- Support artists and arts organisations to start building relationships and developing story collection practice and processes with people and communities
- Engage with existing creative writing groups
- Engage with existing historical societies
- Work with the community and voluntary and culture and heritage sectors to uncover existing story collections
- Joint working and partnership projects with the cultural sector
- Use the NI Screen Film Archive to prompt story collection
- Have an open consultative forum, always asking, "Are we getting to the right people?" and "Who else do we need to involve?"
- Storyboards and exhibitions placed strategically around the city
- Clear, consistent communications for the general public
- Promotion through City Matters
- Programme consultation and events as part of the city's annual cultural calendar and 2024 City of Culture

There was recognition that good engagement needs investment ("Deaf people are expensive") and that the Belfast Stories team needs resourced with people who have good people and professional skills.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT

There were exceptionally high levels of support for the concept of Belfast Stories during the public consultation. The next stage of engagement is an opportunity to continue to raise awareness and build on excitement and goodwill to start to shape a building and an experience that the people of Belfast can feel proud of and feel is truly theirs.

THE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The approach to engagement was generally very well received, and feedback validates the planned next steps. For example, planned work strands themed around sustainability, partnership and experiences will harness the "professional expertise" suggested as lacking by consultees during the 14-week public consultation.

Nevertheless, the engagement plan and stakeholder mapping should be revised in light of lessons learned during the public consultation and new stakeholders that have emerged, engaged or showed themselves to be champions.

STAKEHOLDERS

At a community level, ongoing engagement should continue to focus on those most at risk of missing out. It can take time to form relationships and build trust, often more than is practical within a fixed-term public consultation. This should include focus on communities on the outskirts of the city who may not feel or be as connected to the centre. There should also be focus on communities in the immediate vicinity of the Belfast Stories site who will be most affected by its construction and operation. The public consultation has also shown that Belfast residents are also very interested in hearing very local stories.

During the public consultation, engagement happened in sectors. The ongoing engagement may be an opportunity to bring different sectors together in terms of what expertise they can bring to Belfast Stories, for example, as makers, narrators or curators, rather than film, arts or heritage organisations.

There should also be focus on the tourism sector.

LANGUAGE

The Belfast Stories concept was broadly welcomed by the Irish language community as an opportunity to explore and celebrate the history of the language and the city's Irish language community. This may in turn enhance good relations by affording respect and recognition to a native minority language in keeping with local and international policy and best practice.

Belfast Stories should continue to consult closely with Irish language and Ulster Scots stakeholders, including in relation to the development of the building, story collection,

exhibition and overall experience. Resulting language policy or practice should be subject to an equality screening and (if required) a full equality impact assessment.

LAUNCH THE FINDINGS AND NEXT STAGE OF ENGAGEMENT

The council should organise a story-themed event to share the findings of the public consultation, continue to raise awareness of Belfast Stories and highlight the ongoing engagement.

GENERAL PUBLIC

Not all planned activity to raise awareness went ahead during the public consultation. A communications plan should be developed and integrated with the engagement plan. This should include key messages and a consistent identity with signposting to an updated Belfast Stories website and lively social media.

CHAMPIONS

The Belfast Stories engagement plan recommends that the city stakeholders network is open to all interested organisations. The council should consider developing a platform that similarly empowers interested individuals. Initially, this should include an ezine where individuals can sign up for updates and behind-the-scenes or insider information and opportunities (such as site tours, walking consultations or peer research training).

AMBASSADORS

The city stakeholders network is to be open to all interested organisations. But different organisations will want to be involved in the development of Belfast Stories at different levels. There are already a number of organisations that have emerged strongly as supporters or storytellers.

The council should consider how they further harness this goodwill and empower such organisations to become ambassadors. Initially, it is recommended that relationships with such organisations are managed by the Belfast Stories team on a one-to-one basis. The partners' toolkit can also be refreshed. A more formal programme, similar to champions, could be developed at a later stage.

EQUITY STEERING GROUP

The equity steering group has provided vital insight in to equality, diversity and inclusion including facilitating conversations with individuals and groups that would otherwise not be known to the Belfast Stories team.

The membership of the equity steering group should be reviewed and refreshed to ensure that we are hearing from voices that may otherwise go unheard.

RESOURCES

Belfast Stories engagement should be adequately resourced. Good engagement costs money and takes time (one reason why some groups are sometimes found to be hard to reach). Consultees also cautioned that the development of Belfast Stories should add to, not further burden the community and cultural sectors, which could also be resourced through collaborative, action-learning projects (for example, to test story collection processes or tools).

STORY COLLECTION

Belfast City Council plans to start gathering stories in spring 2023. The engagement plan includes recommendations for engaging around story gathering. This should focus on action learning by testing processes and tools with groups that are less likely to share stories (because of their culture, identity or circumstances), in particular older people and the very elderly (no one aged over 85 responded to the survey), whose stories are otherwise at risk of being lost.

It should also:

- build on best practice that currently exists, in particular in relation to safeguarding and ethics
- uncover the stories and archives that already exist, including at community level
- bring different sectors and stakeholders together to share knowledge and experience and build a community of practice through a conference or event.

INTERGRATED DESIGN STEERING GROUP

The Belfast Stories engagement plan includes an outline for an integrated design steering group. This group should have a crucial role in ensuring that Belfast Stories reflects the needs and wants of its many stakeholders, while it remains authentic, relevant, inclusive and accessible for the people of Belfast.

ETHICS

The council should integrate an ethics function in to the story gathering processes and tools.

EVALUATION

The Belfast Stories team should ensure that it continues to evaluate the effectiveness of its ongoing engagement by adhering to the evaluation framework and using tools such as the evaluation postcards.

ETHICS

THANKS

The following organisations gave generously of their time expertise during the public consultation.

Thanks also to other individuals, groups and organisations who took part but cannot be named below.

Aisling Productions Ltd

AMMA Creative Learning Centre

An Droichead

Arts and Business NI

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Aura Digital Studios Ltd

BBC NI

BBC Rewind

Belfast Buildings Trust

Belfast City Council ABLE Forum

Belfast City Council Disability Advisory Panel

Belfast City Council Equality Consultative Forum

Belfast City Council PROUD Network

Belfast City Council Women's Network

Belfast Exposed

Belfast Festivals Forum

Belfast Film Institute

Belfast Harbour

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Carers Network

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Physical and Sensory Disability Services

Belfast International Airport

Belfast Media Festival

Belfast Migrants Forum

Belfast One BID Ltd

Belfast Stories Equity Steering Group

Belfast Toastmasters

Bigg Life Arts

Blackstaff Residents Associates

British Council NI

Cara Friend

Cathedral Quarter arts Festival

Causeway Pictures

Cinemagic

Circusful/Festival of Fools

Clifton House

Coiste na nlarchimi

Colin Glen Trust

Conway Mill Preservation Trust

CQ Trust

Creative Schools EANI

Creative Tours Belfast

Crescent Arts Centre

DAERA

Destination CQ Bid

Digital Arts Studios

DOCS Ireland

Doubleband films

DU Dance (NI)

East Belfast Community Development Association

Eastside Partnership

EastSide Visitor Centre

Equity Steering Group

Excalibur Press Ltd

Failte Feirste Thiar

Feile an Phobail

Fighting Words NI

Film HUB NI

Food NI

G6 Older Peoples Forum

Gallaghers Films Ltd

General Public attendees

Grand Opera House

Greater Shankill Partnership

Greater Village Regeneration Trust

Green Shoot Productions

Harriott Communications

Hastings Hotel

Heart Project

ICC Belfast

Indian Women's Association

Innate Films Ltd

INTO Film

Italic Pig

James Connolly Visitor Centre

KarmaDinosaur Media

Kippie CIC

Libraries NI

Linenhall Library

Maiden Voyage Dance

Makematic Ltd

Maritime Belfast Trust

National Autistic Society NI

National Lottery Heritage Fund

National Trust

NI Environment Link

NI Opera

NI Science Festival

NI Screen

NI Screen – Digital Film Archive

Oh Yeah Music Centre

On the Square Emporium

PaperxClips

Portview Trade Centre

PRONI

Queen's Film Theatre

Queen's University Belfast

Ramada by Wyndham Belfast

RNIB

RSUA

Sailortown Regeneration

Screen Skills

Shared City Partnership

Sign Language Users Forum

Sonic Arts Research Centre

Source Photographic Review

Spectrum Centre

Strand Arts Centre

Sustrans

The Beannchor Group

The Clover Group

The Horatio Group

The MAC

The Nerve Centre

Titanic Belfast

Tourism NI

Townsend Enterprise Park

U3A

Ulster Architectural Heritage

Ulster Orchestra

Ulster Scots Agency

Ulster Tatler

Ulster Touring Opera

Ulster University

University of Atypical

Victims and Survivors Service

Visit Belfast

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Advisory Panel

Volunteer Now

Walking Tours Belfast

West Belfast Heritage Community Initiative

White Pot Studios

YEHA

Young at Art

APPENDIX 1: BELFAST STORIES ENGAGEMENT PLAN SUMMARY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

WHY WE ARE ENGAGING

Belfast City Council's **Consultation and Engagement Framework** describes a broad spectrum of two-way communication (from consultation to engagement to involvement) between the council and its residents and stakeholders. It recognises that effective dialogue helps make decisions, policies and services that are better suited to the people they are intended to benefit.

Belfast Stories **Equality Framework** recognises that the Belfast Stories vision can only be achieved if equality, diversity and inclusion are at its core, supported by a co-designed and inclusive process throughout all aspects of the project. This should seek to build long-term relationships while using a variety of tactics to engage people on the terms they want to be engaged.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires Belfast City Council to actively seek ways to encourage:

- greater equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without, and
- good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group

The **Disability Discrimination Act 1995** and **Disability Discriminations Order 2006** require the council to protect disabled people from discrimination, promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation of disabled people in public life.

One of the key tools for doing this is an equality impact assessment (EQIA) as set down in the council's **Equality Scheme.** An EQIA can help determine the extent and nature of any impact upon the Section 75 categories and find ways to promote equality of opportunity and good relations more effectively. An EQIA should be carried out in line with **Equality Commission** guidance, which requires a 12-week public consultation period.

Rural Needs Act 2016 requires Belfast City Council to have due regard to rural needs when developing policies and initiatives. One of the key tools for doing this is a rural needs impact assessment (RNIA). An RNIA can help determine the extent and nature of any impact on a policy or initiative on rural needs and find ways to support the social and economic needs of people more effectively in rural areas.

Belfast's residents and stakeholders have been consulted on a wide range of council policies and initiatives and likely will also have **legitimate expectation** of being consulted about Belfast Stories.

Belfast City Council appointed Smith and Kent Consulting to provide specialist guidance and support to plan and assist with Belfast Stories consultation.

This Belfast Stories **Engagement Plan** brings together a range of consultation, engagement and involvement approaches to build on best practice, statutory requirement and stakeholder expectation.

VISION AND MISSION

The purpose of the engagement plan is

> *To help make Belfast Stories a destination that resonates with local people, captivates visitors and is welcoming of all*

Our mission is

> *To bring Belfast Stories to life through the knowledge, insight and ideas of its people and stakeholders*

WHAT IS COVERED IN THE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

This engagement plan covers RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) stage II, which runs from May 2022 and June 2023. During this stage, concept designs and plans are produced in line with the requirements of the project brief. This will include plans for:

- the layout of the building
- the design of the exhibition space
- the story collection framework

There will be two broad parts to our engagement between June 2022 and June 2023.

1. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The public consultation will run for 14 weeks. The public consultation will focus on:

i.   raising awareness of Belfast Stories so that people are excited and want to continue to be engaged in its development

ii. making sure that Belfast Stories can be a positive experience for everyone, including consultation on the EQIA, RNIA and story collection framework

iii. asking people how they would like to continue to be involved in the ongoing engagement (below)

2. ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

Ongoing engagement will be structured around four work strands**:**

    i.   Equity
   ii.   Sustainability
  iii.   Partnership
  iv.   Experiences

These will set the foundations, building relationships and shaping further ongoing engagement up until (and possibly after) Belfast Stories opens in 2028.

THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION
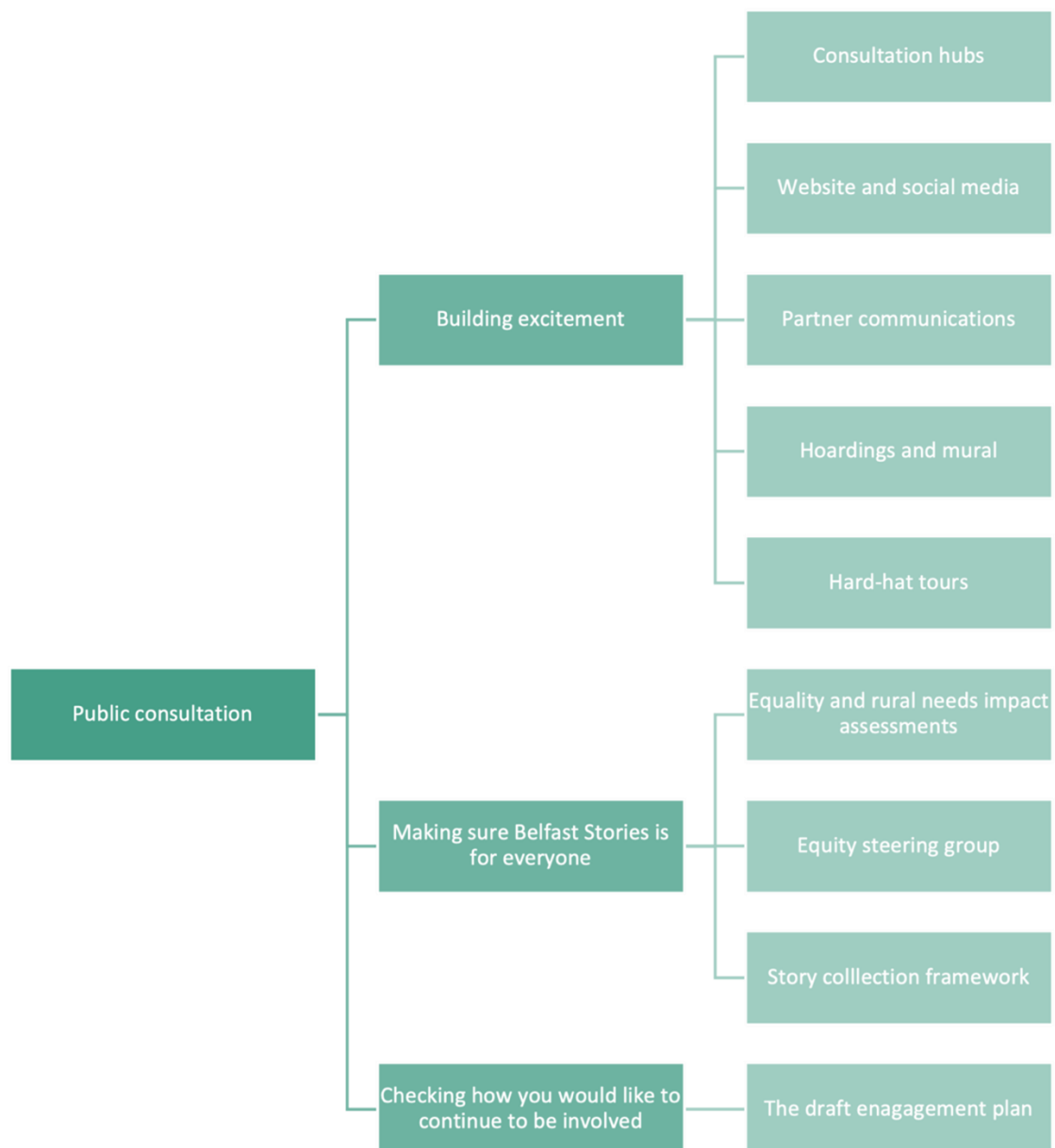
BUILDING EXCITEMENT

If people are excited by Belfast Stories, then they will want to help shape it, including by sharing their stories.

To do this, we will:

- **Launch** the public consultation with a story-themed event
- Develop an **online consultation hub**
- Develop a **physical consultation hub** in a central location
- Create **pop-up consultation hubs** throughout the city, particularly in areas that might be most affected by the development (neighbouring businesses and communities) or are furthest away and less likely to see the city centre hoardings and consultation hub
- Keep the **Belfast Stories website** up to date with what is happening and ways to get involved
- Use Belfast City Council **social media channels** to keep people up to date with what is happening and ways to get involved
- Publish key information and ways to get involved in **City Matters** magazine
- Encourage **partner organisations** to promote what is happening and ways to get involved through their websites, social media and other communications channels
- Put **information boards** up around the building with key information, key dates and ways to find out more
- Partner with **Hit the North Arts Festival** to create a new mural at the site
- Offer **hard-hat tours** to potential partners and people and groups who may be less likely to be engaged through other methods

MAKING SURE BELFAST STORIES IS FOR EVERYONE

We want the building to be **welcoming and accessible** for everyone and for everyone to **see themselves reflected** in its stories. There are three main ways we will do this.

1. EQUALITY IMPACT AND RURAL NEEDS IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

We will let people know how they can read the draft impact assessments and respond to questions about them through the methods listed above. We will also test our findings through **group and one-to-one meetings**, including with:

- Belfast City Council's **Equality Consultative Forum**
- the Belfast Stories **equity steering group**
- any other **key organisations** representing protected groups of people not engaged through any other method

2. THE EQUITY STEERING GROUP

We will set up an equity steering group. The equity steering group exists to make sure that equality, inclusion and diversity is at the heart of Belfast Stories.

The steering group will be made up of staff from **Belfast City Council's Belfast Stories and equality teams** working alongside **people who are experts by experience** of being less heard or listened to due to their identity or circumstance.

During the public consultation, the steering group will help us **consult with a people and groups within their networks** including through **meetings, focus groups, surveys and other engagement tools** that we come up with together. This will include:

- People from different faith, political and cultural backgrounds
- People from minoritised ethnic communities
- Deaf/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse people
- Older people
- Children and young people
- Women
- Carers and people with dependents
- LGBTQ+ people

3. TESTING THE DRAFT STORY COLLECTION PRINCIPLES AND THEMES

The **story collection framework** was developed by Lord Cultural Resources in consultation with over 50 stakeholders. It is essential that the framework is meaningful to the people and groups we want to share their stories. We will test the story collection principles and themes through:

- **Creative workshops** in consultation hubs and with community partners
- Other engagement opportunities designed with the **equity steering group** targeting missing voices
- **Workshops** with:
  - **stakeholders involved in the development** of the draft story collection framework
  - **existing story collections and collectors** (museums, archives, libraries, local history groups and so on)
  - **storytellers** (such as writers, photographers, artists, producers and so on)
- Online **quizzes and polls** targeted at the general public The equity storyline

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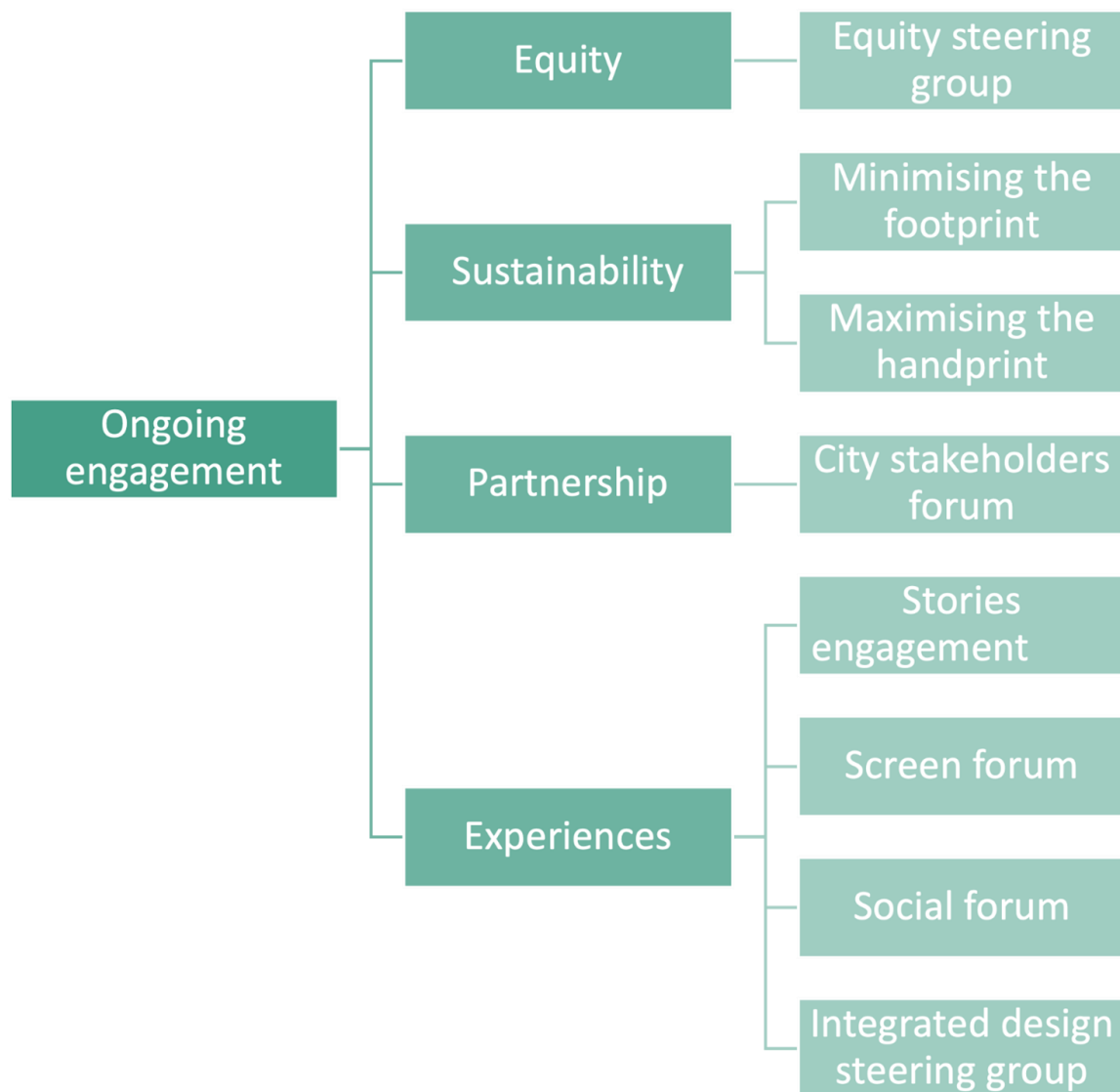
The following section outlines the how the ongoing engagement will be structured – we will structure it around four work strands: Equity; Sustainability; Partnership; and Experiences.

THE EQUITY STEERING GROUP

During the ongoing engagement phase, the **equity steering group** will:

- **identify and connect** to "missing voices" and groups of people most at risk of missing out
- co-design an **engagement programme** that will help ensure that everyone can have their stories heard and can access the building
- co-produce **engagement opportunities** throughout the public consultation and ongoing engagement, for example, by hosting or facilitating meetings or carrying out peer research

- check the **accessibility** of consultation materials
- act as a **critical friend**, helping to equity-proof and shape the design of the building and its experiences

THE SUSTAINABILITY STORYLINE

The purpose of this storyline is to make sure that Belfast Stories is green and sustainable. Being truly sustainable means thinking about the triple-bottom-line of planet, people and prosperity.

REDUCING THE FOOTPRINT

This is about caring for the environment, valuing precious resources and reducing the carbon footprint of Belfast Stories during its construction and operation.

Belfast City Council's climate team will facilitate a **working group** in partnership with key environmental stakeholders.

MAXIMISING THE HANDPRINT

This is about how **responsible tourism** can **regenerate communities** through investment in local people. For Belfast Stories this means looking at how to add value through

- **volunteering, job skills, employment and career development** for local people
- use of **social clauses** and **social value procurement**
- supporting **local suppliers** (food, craft, artists and so on) so visitors can have memorable, **meaningful cultural experiences**
- **signposting** visitors to other places where people can continue their experience

Belfast City Council's tourism, culture and economic development teams will develop **networks and programmes** to help local businesses and cultural and community organisations and local and regional tourist providers build on the Belfast Stories opportunity.

THE PARTNERSHIP STORYLINE

Belfast Stories is not Belfast City Council's story. There are already many organisations across the city collecting, storing, interpreting and celebrating the city's stories.

The **city stakeholders network** will be open to any organisation with an interest in Belfast Stories. It will **meet quarterly** to share key information, discuss emerging issues and opportunities and encourage collaboration. Partners will also be asked to share information and engagement opportunities with **their members, communities and networks**.

THE EXPERIENCES STORYLINE

1. STORIES

Our plans may change depending on the feedback we get on the story collection framework during the public consultation, but these are the types of tactics we might use to **gather, record, store, select and share stories.**

- A **social media campaign** encouraging people to share micro-stories in words, photographs or videos
- **Storytelling ambassadors**, including well-known and "ordinary" people from different backgrounds
- Support (such as training, toolkits, equipment, expertise or funding) for **community networks**, such as community organisations, schools, libraries and other public-facing services across the city, to test the story collection process, identifying barriers that might stop people from telling their story and coming up with ideas to overcome them
- Pop-up workshops during **festivals and events**
- An **onsite drop-in consultation hub**
- A **graffiti wall** coinciding with the 2023 Hit the North Festival

2. SCREEN

Made up of representatives of the film sector alongside Belfast City Council's arts and creative industries teams, this **forum will be led by NI Screen**. It will work together to start to scope the broad parameters of the film and skills programmes.

3. SOCIAL

Made up of representatives of the arts, culture, events, festivals, food and retails sectors, this **forum will be led by Belfast City Council's tourism and culture teams**. It will work together to scope the social offering and creative use of public space in the Belfast Stories building.

4. INTEGRATED DESIGN STEERING GROUP

The integrated design steering group will comprise:

- representatives from **the equity, sustainability and experience storylines**
- **key partners such as NI Screen** and
- **contractors appointed to design the exhibition space and the overall building**

It will be responsible for ensuring that the design of the building and exhibition reflects the needs and wants of its many stakeholders, while it remains authentic, relevant, inclusive and accessible for the people of Belfast.

WHAT WE WILL DO WITH THE RESULTS

Because people are sharing their time, expertise and ideas, we want them to know that they have been heard.

We will summarise what we have heard and learned and what we plan to do about it at key points during the engagement. These findings will then be published in the consultation hub and shared through our groups, forums and networks.

No individuals will be named or identifiable in what we make public.

The findings will then be used to inform next steps including in relation to the Belfast Stories concept, design and engagement programme.

APPENDIX 2: DAISY CHAIN INC. AND THRIVE REPORT ON ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The data collection phase began on 25th September 2022 and lasted for almost 2 months until 20th November.

Together, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. interviewed 683 people, collecting 1,096 responses. Responses were higher than the number of people interviewed because one same person was asked more than one question at once and responses were analysed by question.

If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why? and *What is the most Belfast thing you've ever heard or seen?* were asked in the four different areas of Belfast, in north, south, east and west and in shopping centres. *What is your first memory?* and *Why are you here?* were asked in existing events happening in the city. Finally, *What is your favourite place?* was asked during a series of events designed and hosted by Daisy Chain Inc.

In total, 50% females and 42% males. For 8% of the responses, gender was not recorded. Age groups ranged from 18 to 75+. 15% of responses were not allocated to an age group. Belfast story collection framework

Throughout their research, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. were keen to compare their findings with the Story Collection Framework completed by Lord Cultural Resources for Belfast City Council. Indeed, they believed there was an opportunity to test the framework's accuracy and relevancy if it was to be used in the future to support any collection or use of stories at a city-wide level.

The Story Collection Framework features 7 overarching themes:

- Home: A sense of belonging and connection
- Resilient: Strong and spirited
- Place: Relating to spaces
- Authentic: Embracing all identities
- Innovative: Entrepreneurial zeal
- Change: A city transforming
- Creative: Inspiring expressions in many forms

Each of these themes also comprises a variety of subthemes, 93 in total, which offer different examples of how the main themes could be interpreted.

When analysing their own data, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. organised each response by theme from the existing framework.

Some responses overlapped with more than one theme. Overall, *Authentic* was the most common theme across the total of answers at 74%. It most typically included references to language, food, humour, situations, or behaviours characteristic to Belfast. It was followed by *Place* (46%) and *Home* (24%). Responses categorised under *Place* referred to spaces around the city such as pubs, shops, buildings, streets, parks, arts and culture venues, etc. *Home* was mostly attributed to responses mentioning family, friends or the idea of making Belfast a new home.

Other themes were assigned as follows:

- Stories or mentions of the Troubles were labelled as *Resilient*
- Any mention of the arts and culture scene as *Creative*
- *Change* referred mostly to places that did not exist anymore but were still remembered
- *Innovative* related to trade or the Belfast shipyard

Although most responses fitted within at least one of the themes, there were still 13% of responses that could not be assigned and were therefore categorised as *Other*.

Some of the themes were at times relevant but often too general. Mentions of the Troubles, for instance, were categorised as *Resilient*, but were rarely about resilience and more about trauma. When respondents spoke of the Troubles, it was about how vivid those memories

Themes from the Story Collection Framework
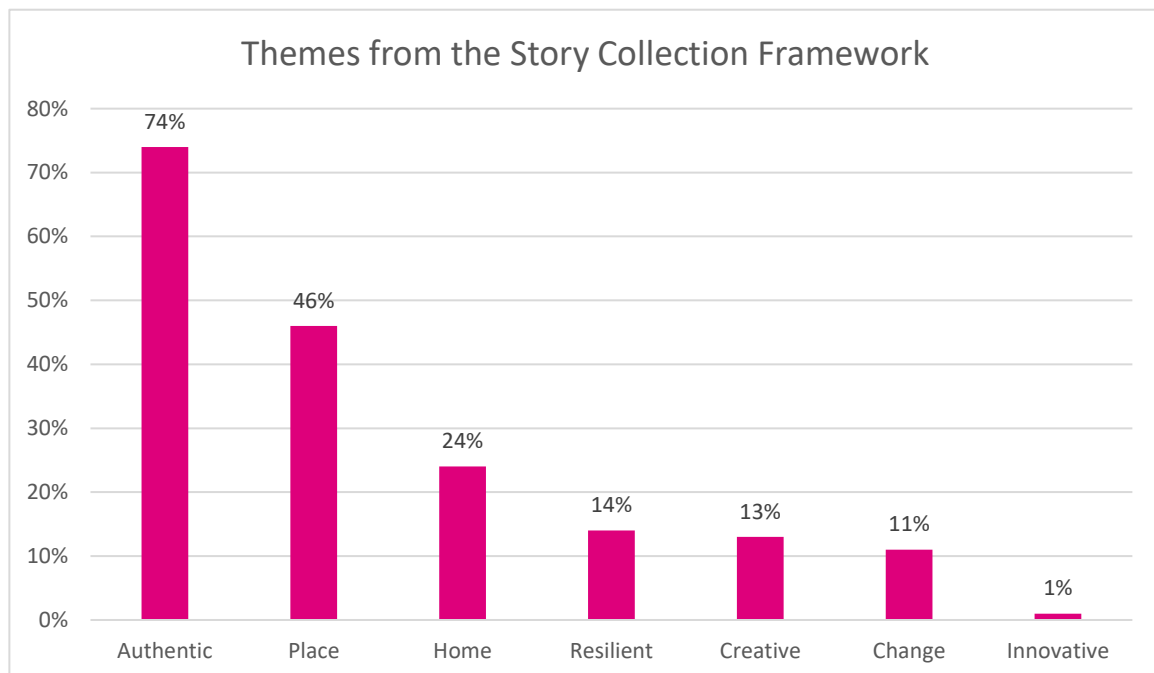
were and the impact the Troubles had on their mental health and on their relationship with Belfast:

"I remember the barricades, in the 70s, you'd come up shopping when you felt safe enough."

"I hate to be grim but standing on the roadside on Ligoniel Hill on a dark evening in 1969 and watching the glow of fires burning across the city. Aged 5."
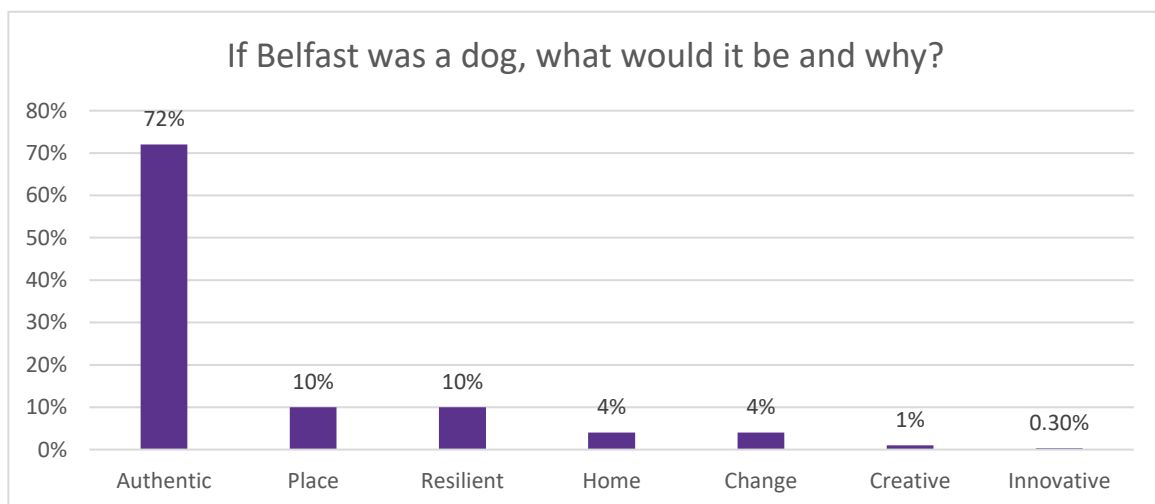
The theme *Innovative* was rarely referenced with only 7 responses being classified here. Of those 7 responses, most referred to Belfast as a port city, where people remembered what it felt like to arrive in Belfast for the first time via a ferry:

"Coming off the ferry, in the 70s. The sun was just coming out as we got off from England. I remember feeling like the docks were gigantic. I couldn't believe how big the ships and things were."

"Coming off the ferry for the first time, seeing the huge boats and shipping containers! It made me feel small in the grand scheme of all the operations which link us in the world."

Other themes, although relevant to a degree, could not accurately represent every aspect of each answer and overlooked details that could be of importance to determine how Belfast Stories should be curated.

On a similar note, the themes and subthemes within the Framework all have a positive connotation. During the engagement, it was noted that people's opinions of Belfast and their stories are often more nuanced, sharing the 'good' as much as the 'bad'. For this nuance to be reflected in the stories that will be celebrated and shared in the Belfast Stories building, consideration could be given as to how the Framework could be adapted to

If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why?

Theme	Percentage
Authentic	72%
Place	10%
Resilient	10%
Home	4%
Change	4%
Creative	1%
Innovative	0.30%

capture this.

RESPONSES TO INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why?

This question was designed to explore how people in Belfast collectively perceive the city, to learn about its identity. As the research progressed, this question was identified as a helpful

icebreaker, bringing an element of fun to relax participants and incite them to respond. This question performed well on social media too with 42 responses. *If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why?* was asked the most often amongst all 5 questions and gathered a total of 286 responses.

When compared with the Story Collection Framework, a majority of responses (72%) fitted the theme *Authentic*, especially the subthemes *Distinctly Belfast* and *Identity and belonging*.

Regardless of the dog breeds respondents chose, the answers to the second half of the question gave valuable insight into which characteristics they associated with a Belfast identity.

This set of data told a really clear story about Belfast. Overall, respondents think that Belfast is a city with **a strong personality with distinct qualities that the majority value**.

97 responses for this question focused on the different characteristics of the city. Many described it as **energetic and fast** (25 responses):

"A Spaniel because they're fun and have a lot of energy."

"A Pitbull because it's busy and fast."

"A Collie because it's energetic and doesn't stop."

Other qualities included diverse (12), strong (10), independent (8), loyal (6), smart (6) and protective (5).

There were also differences of opinion – while 14 respondents perceived Belfast as small, 11 thought of it as big.

Respondents (88) often talked about how **welcoming, friendly and warm** people in Belfast are. It will be seen later in this report that this theme was prevalent across all questions. Indeed, the word **friendly** was used by participants more than any other qualifying term, 37 times for this specific question.

Loveable, loving and cute were together mentioned 31 times. Other accounts comprised beautiful (8), warm (6) and the best (6).

"A Border Collie because they're the best dogs and Belfast is the best city. It's the best because of the music scene and there are always small bands from both sides of the border that play in Belfast."

"It would be a loveable mutt because there are so many different backgrounds and communities within Belfast, to describe it as one breed would be highly inaccurate. When people aren't thinking about their differences, they come together, it's a lovely place to be."

"A Golden Retriever because it's so nice and friendly. You want to cuddle it all the time and it's also very smart."

Although a majority described the city as friendly, there was almost an equal number of respondents (87) who talked about its **hostility**. Many (23) described it as fierce or feisty, while others used words such as aggressive or edgy (17), scary or rough (17), unpredictable (17) and barky or loud (13).

"A Rottweiler because people here can be a bit aggressive."

"A Bulldog because it's rough when you don't know it, but loyal and strong when you do."

"An Alsatian because it's aggressive, strong, with a pack mentality."

Only a minority of respondents (14) were downright negative about the city and used words such as ugly, unloved and dead to depict Belfast:

"A scabby dead dog left on the side of the road because there's nothing here and it's a dead city."

"Walking about the city centre and seeing all the crumbling empty buildings, I think it might be a chihuahua or Jack Russell in need of medical treatment from an owner that hasn't given it enough attention over the last few years."

Ultimately, people's opinions of Belfast often express both these positive and negative sentiments, acknowledging all the facets that the city can have.

"A hot dog because they are little bit greasy but they absolutely serve a purpose and everyone secretly does love it. If you really wanna be gourmet about a hot dog I guess you can be but I think it's kind of more a food of the people."
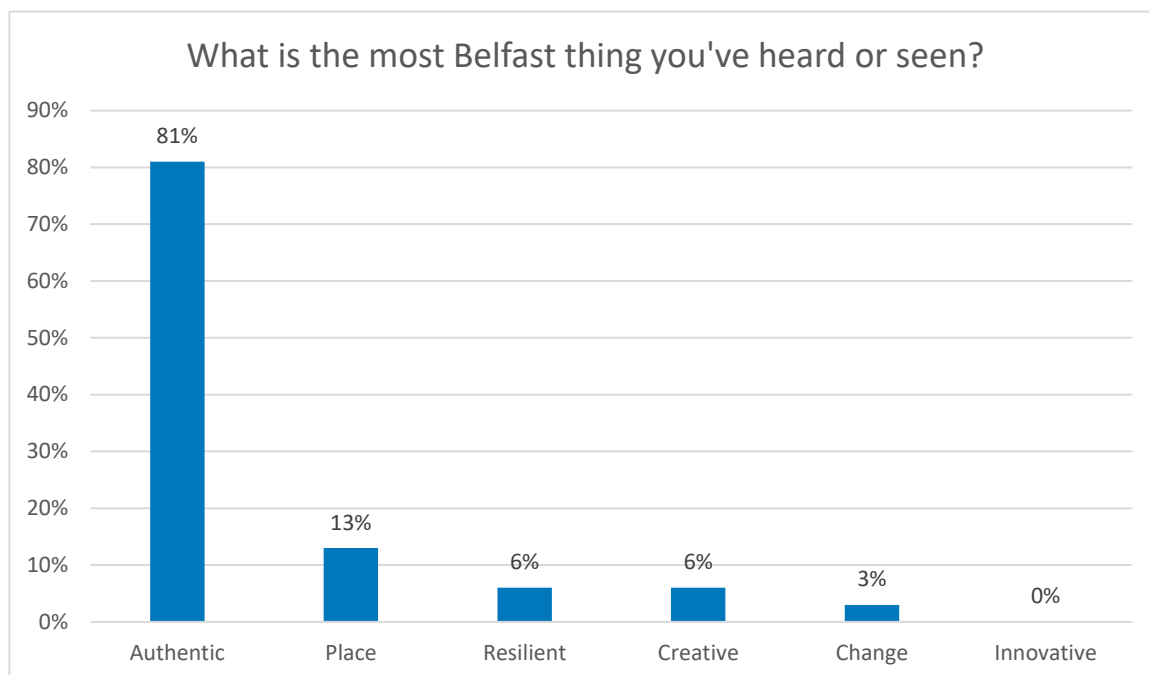
"The first one that springs to mind is a Jack Russell. Classic design in parts, real character, cheeky when it wants to be but snuggles up when it's feeling cozy."

"A Rottweiler because they're mistaken as hostile and aggressive with sinister undertones but actually good-natured, placid and very devoted deep down. Show some love and we're ready to give you a cuddle."

WHAT IS THE MOST BELFAST THING YOU'VE EVER HEARD OR SEEN?

This question was worded to investigate the city's identity. It was also anticipated that this question would spark longer conversations, where potential stories for Belfast Stories could develop. Throughout their research, they noticed that it was difficult for participants to answer this question instantly. Respondents often needed time to think about a story that was "worth telling" or opted for an easier response that did not need as much thought – something about food (e.g. Belfast bap) or language (e.g. What's the craic?). This was also observed online, and as a result, did not generate many engagements (4). In total, this question generated 280 responses.

What is the most Belfast thing you've heard or seen?

Authentic	Place	Resilient	Creative	Change	Innovative
81%	13%	6%	6%	3%	0%

When set side by side with the Story Collection Framework themes, responses to this question were in majority labelled as *Authentic* at 81%. This was not surprising as this question is, in itself, about authenticity. As mentioned above, references to food and language were found amongst responses, but also humour, people and funny situations that typically happen in Belfast and nowhere else. 4% of responses could not be categorised in any of the themes.

Humour was an overarching theme that could be observed in all responses for this question, regardless of the type of story told. Answers always included banter, wit, and jokes, which could be identified as a core aspect of the Belfast identity.

"I was sitting with my partner and her son and friends. They were sharing stories about the Troubles when they all grew up on the Falls Road. I was quiet for the whole hour and then said the worst thing that happened to me in Glengormley was waiting for the bus for 30 minutes. That sums up Belfast for me. Two completely different experiences for people who live in the same place."

"Belfast people are always a bit cheeky but in a nice way. You always hear people slagging each other off. There is a great sense of humour."

"The jokes, the craic, the every day. Belfast people get on with life. You laugh at yourself and your situation."

88 responses to this question referenced **language and swearing** and shows how important language is in the character of Belfast. There is a Belfast way of saying things and swearing is often part of it. As mentioned previously when analysing responses to *If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why?* Belfast can be intimidating at first. For people in Belfast, swearing is a type of banter, used in ways that are not meant to offend or intimidate, but could initially be misunderstood by outsiders.

"The language. The colloquialisms Belfast Bap, Face like a melted welly, Meet yourself coming backwards."

"I think we are really good with insults. Somebody outside the shops last night called someone a shitey shite bag."

"Everything is 'wee'. It doesn't matter if it's good or bad or big or small. I recently heard 'she had a wee pregnancy scare'. People are casual about things, they don't take it too seriously."

Funny or unusual situations typical to Belfast came second with 70 responses. As one respondent put it, *"there is a lot of randomness here"* and this clearly appeared in the answers researchers were given. Stories often included alcohol or fights.

"Sitting in Mike's Deli and a slightly sozzled guy beside me trying to fit a whole sandwich in his mouth at once spots Roy Walker standing outside. Most of sandwich still in his mouth, he howls "SAY WAT YA SEE!" through window. Tomato, lettuce, cheese sprays everywhere."

"Seen a couple kissing one night- she stopped and threw up the very last contents of her stomach and then proceeded to keep kissing him!"

"Going for a kebab one night from Spuds which used to be on Shaftesbury Square. A completely pissed guy was walking out as we were coming in and he trips, and drops a burger which completely opens up and spills on the floor. He scoops it back up, smiles at us and says "fuck it, he'll never know!"

Next, there were 37 mentions of **what makes people of Belfast unique** and other specific characters who can be found around the city. This echoed what had already been said in previous responses about people's qualities: their friendliness and openness. There are also people who regularly walk around the city and do not go unnoticed. Some of them were mentioned on many occasions by a variety of respondents.

"There's a woman with a pet ferret on a lead who walks around the city, a guy with a pet rat on his shoulder, another one who cycles in pink underwear."
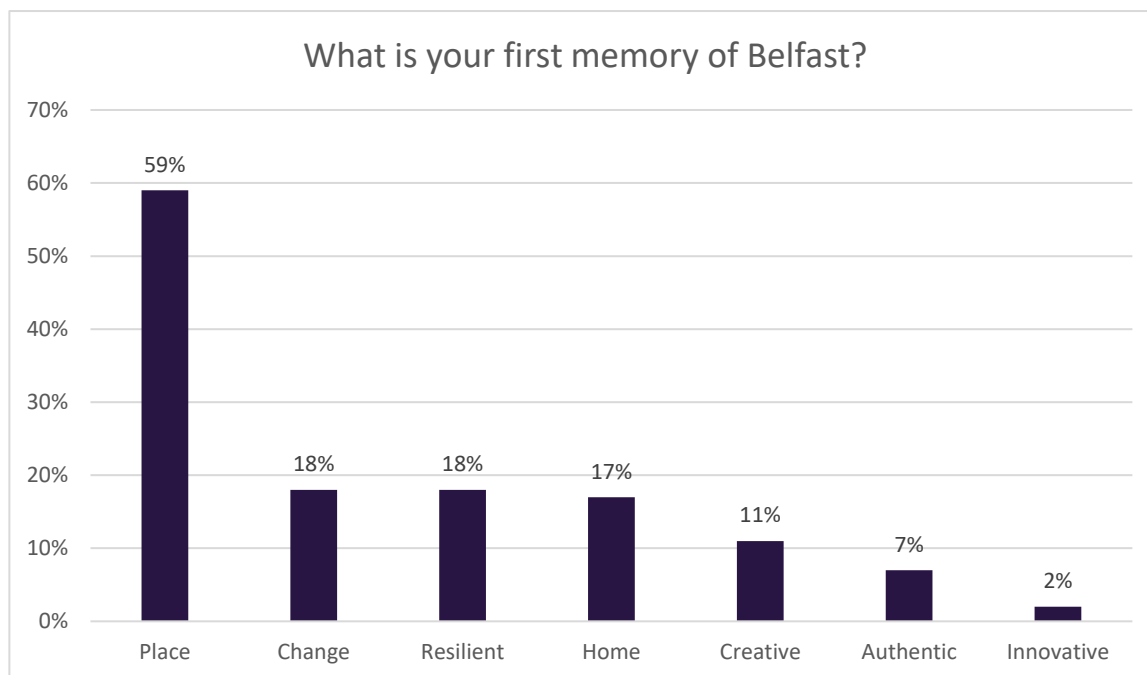
"Jelvis Pelvis in Victoria Square performing in front of the preachers."

"Jelvis, the Elvis impersonator, being threatened by someone with a bottle of Buckfast."

"Just the friendliness of the people, very welcoming and always ready to chat."

People 40 years old and older remembered **the Troubles**. Although we now think of this period as being from the past, the conflict still impacts on people today. The normalisation of violence and trauma has been baked into the Belfast spirit – the "just get on with it" attitude and the use of black humour was present in many stories.

"I remember the Ring of Steel. You used to have to get searched going into Royal Avenue. We had travelled down from Coleraine and it was all very strange and scary."

What is your first memory of Belfast?

Chart showing responses:
- Place: 59%
- Change: 18%
- Resilient: 18%
- Home: 17%
- Creative: 11%
- Authentic: 7%
- Innovative: 2%

"I remember growing up as a kid and having guns pointed at you. Not normal! The soldiers would train their sights on you. I must have been 10 or 11. Then after the ceasefire there were a lot less soldiers about, and to start with, I felt less safe."

"Bus stations blowing up because the Troubles epitomises our past and present still."

A few respondents (24) thought of **specific landmarks and buildings in Belfast**, unique to the city. City Hall, the Titanic Museum, Cathedral Quarters or the Harland and Wolff cranes were some of the places people acknowledged. Finally, some people (17) talked about the **food** that is typical to Belfast. This often included the Ulster fry, Belfast bap, sausage roll baps or crisps sandwiches.

WHAT IS YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF BELFAST?

This question had been trialled in previous thrive research and was an effective trigger for encouraging people to share personal stories and anecdotes.

Again, it proved effective in this engagement and the most likely question to trigger a response, both in person and online.

The quality of the responses was also high as respondents usually started by sharing one memory, which then led to another memory and another, until their response became a full, cohesive story. When asked to a group of people rather than one individual, this question engendered longer conversations between participants. In total, 261 responses were collected for this question, including 64 online.

Whereas responses to the first two questions were in majority *Authentic*, themes from the Story Collection Framework were slightly different for this question. Indeed, responses referring to *Place* were the most common at 59%. People spoke fondly of shops, restaurants, buildings or particular areas in the city centre they used to visit in the past.

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Many of the places they mentioned were places that do not exist anymore – hence *Change* being 18% - like Leisureworld, Skandia or Anderson McAuley. A lot of the responses showed nostalgia. 7% of responses did not correspond to any of the themes.

Regardless of the themes that emerged on the back of this question, responses as a whole told a story about people's relationship with the city centre:

- People are drawn to Belfast for work or study.
- People who live outside of Belfast come to the city for special occasions like arts and culture, Christmas or to a restaurant. These people are usually more fearful of Belfast and talk about apprehension or past negative experiences.
- Belfast residents speak of the city centre being used for everyday activity such as shopping or going out for food.
- For those living in Belfast, family memories are strong, and they often talk about places they visited with parents, grandparents, or uncles.

Besides spaces in the city centre people went to, **the Troubles** had a significant place amongst responses. Bomb scares, the Ring of Steel, security checks and the likes of barricades were mentioned 47 times. For people from outside Belfast, they often talked about the fear they would feel when coming into the city. On the other hand, when people from Belfast talked about the Troubles, there was a sense of normalised violence.

"I'm from Portrush and I would've come into the city a lot for work, and I remember that fear during the Troubles, you would've been worried about coming in. It's changed a lot since then."

"The bombs. I'm from Sandy Row and the windows in our house were always open to prevent them from shattering from the bombs. I also remember being on the rooftop of a building on Dublin Road, near the old Cinema site, and I saw 6 explosions in a row. I remember the smoke and the ambulance sirens the most."

People also remembered **arts and culture venues** (29) they attended in Belfast when they were younger, whether it was their first gig, a school trip to the Ulster Museum or going to a pantomime for Christmas.

"Going to see my first ever live gig in the Ulster Hall in 1999. It was Stereophonics. There were friendly goths in the queue using pages of the Bible as smoking utensils. The band attracted a different crowd at the time and my first impression of Belfast was very cool indeed."

"Going to see The Sound of Music with my mum at the Odeon on Great Victoria Street in 1965. Magical movie memories in the city."

There was another theme that was particularly important for those who moved to Belfast from abroad and it was **transport and traveling**. They remembered their journey or the first thing they saw when they arrived in the city. They often talked about how they felt as they were about to start a new life in a new place.

"Coming off the ferry for the first time, seeing the huge boats and shipping containers! It made me feel small in the grand scheme of all the operations which link us in the world."

"Last year when I moved over, getting off the plane at International and hopping on the bus to the Europa Bus Station and seeing it was grey and rainy but I'm used to that because I'm from Scotland, then the sun came out that day and it was lovely."

"I came in here without thinking too much about it. I'd never been to Ireland or the UK and I had no English so when I first arrived of the bus, the first thing I saw was The Crown the pub, that was the moment it hit me "Oh shit I'm here". The first thing I saw was a pub—of course!"

Finally, and reflecting themes for *If Belfast was a dog, what would it be and why?* and *What is the most Belfast thing you've ever heard or seen?*, the **friendliness of people from Belfast** was also something that left its mark on respondents' minds.
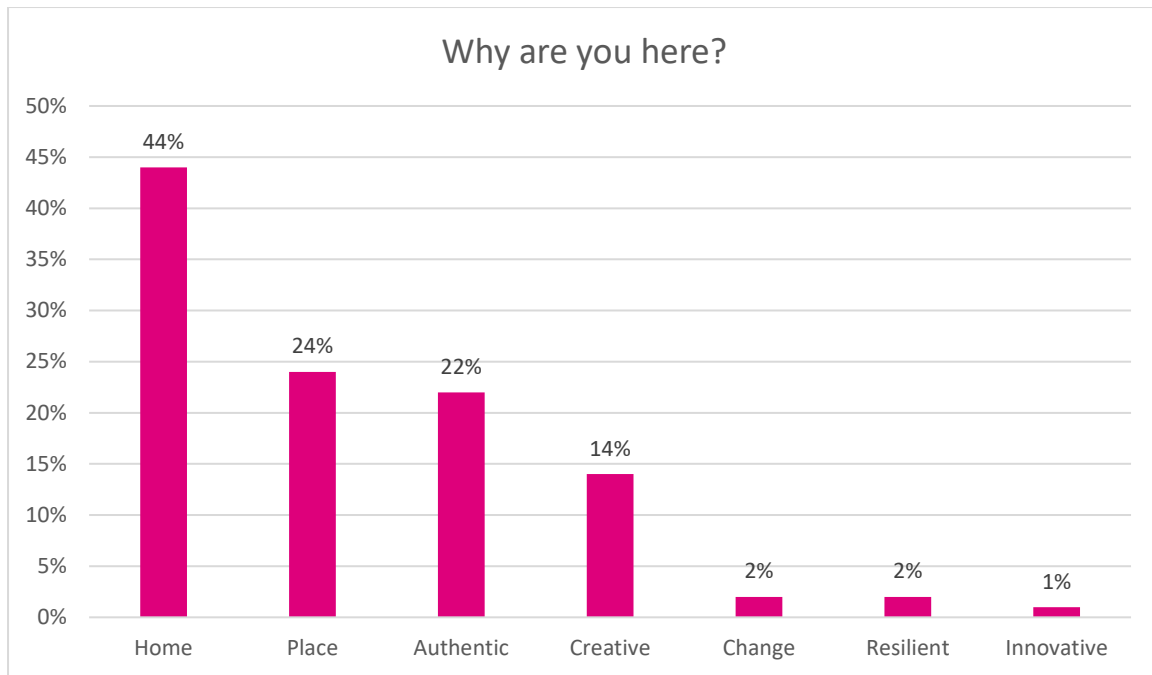
WHY ARE YOU HERE?

This question was asked to find out what it is about Belfast that people love and by extension, why they decide to live and stay here. It was also motivated by the fact that people who are not from here are always being asked this question by locals. This time, researchers wanted to ask locals themselves. Responses to this question often stayed superficial and at times, it was difficult to get respondents to offer deeper assessments. Overall, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. felt *Why are you here?* was not suited for short conversations if the aim was to generate thoughtful insights about what Belfast meant to people who live here. However, if there was an opportunity to prompt respondents to share more details during longer conversations, *Why are you here?* has the potential to act as a trigger for people to share stories. This question collected 225 responses. It was not asked online.

Home was the most prominent theme from the Story Collection Framework for this set of responses at 44%, especially the subthemes *New beginnings* and *Family ties*. Respondents talked about moving to Belfast for something specific, like a new job or to study, and ended up staying. Many participants also mentioned friends and family. 10% of responses could not be identified with a theme. Other themes were as follows:

Why are you here?

A bar chart titled "Why are you here?" with the following values:

- Home: 44%
- Place: 24%
- Authentic: 22%
- Creative: 14%
- Change: 2%
- Resilient: 2%
- Innovative: 1%

On the whole, the answers to this question told a straightforward story. There were three main reasons for people to move to Belfast and live here: work, study, or love. Those who stayed to make Belfast their home cited people's friendliness, a busy city life, arts and culture, and affordability, as the principal incentives that encouraged them to settle down here. People born and bred in Belfast usually stayed for similar reasons, but it is their family and friends who were the most important. Many respondents originally from Belfast, left and came back at a later stage of their life, always for the same reasons stated above.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE IN BELFAST?

Last, the final question *What is your favourite place in Belfast?* was asked during a series of five events, especially designed by the team for the purpose of this research. Each event was held in a different setting to test how environments impact on people sharing stories. Events were:

- A cruise tour of the river Lagan with Taste and Tour NI
- A foraging walk on Cave Hill with forager Clare McQuillan
- A breakfast in the Observatory of the Grand Central Hotel
- A lunch in the Black Box with food provided by Anaka Women's Collective
- A game show in Castlecourt Shopping Centre, the Dirty Onion and the American Bar

All events were free to attend, although participants had to register in advance to attend so demographics and capacity could be monitored.

Drop out was high, which might be because the events were free. The motivation for attendance was the type of event rather than the opportunity to engage in research or consultation. The nature of the events also impacted the type of people who attended. For

example, the event in the Grand Central Hotel attracted architects who were intrigued on viewing the built landscape for a different perspective. Surroundings and activities influenced the way participants answered the question. An unusual view that could be explored, as well as food, offered a more relaxed atmosphere, which encouraged people to share longer stories and add some depth to their response. Because of the format in which this question was asked, the total of responses was significantly lower than for previous questions at 44 responses.

When compared to the themes in the Story Collection Framework, responses for *What is your favourite place in Belfast?* were unsurprisingly all labelled as *Place*, with a few responses that could be categorised under other themes. *Creative* came second at 27% and mostly referred to arts and culture venues around the city. None of the responses were tagged as *Resilient* nor *Innovative*.
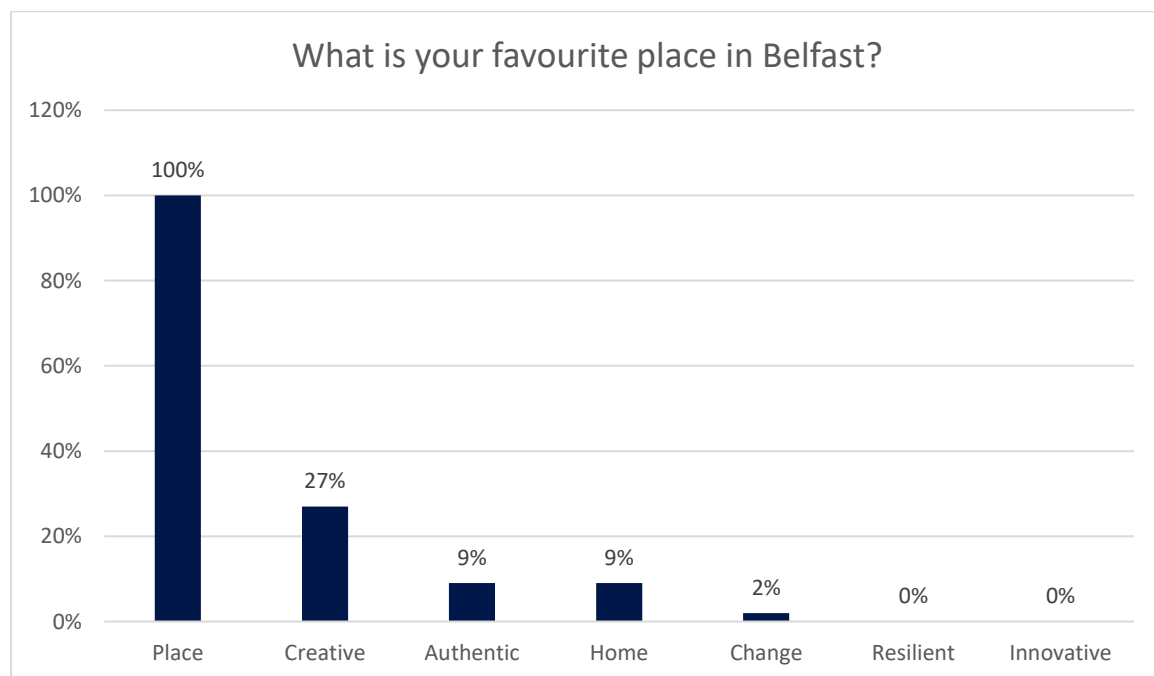
Place is a word that could have several meanings and researchers thought it was important to break it down into smaller themes that came up in conversations with participants.

Outdoor spaces and nature came overwhelmingly first for this question, with 29 responses mentioning parks, views of the hills or the sea, Maritime Mile and outdoor areas not too far from the city. Across all 5 events, everyone liked how small and familiar Belfast is compared with other cities. Many respondents mentioned how easy it is to access open green spaces and the sea from the city.

"When you're driving on the M3 and when you're peeling off a bit towards the Odyssey, that view across the docks, that very small point, and wherever you're driving you just have to look at it. I drove that road quite a lot in the past. At night-time when all the lights were there and you could see the water it was very, very beautiful."

"That park has just been an absolute God-send for everything, it's where we can socialise, it's where we can get exercise, it's right there. It's such a valuable resource. And Belfast doesn't have that much public green spaces in the city centre. […] If Ormeau Park was four times as big this would be the greatest thing ever, but beggars can't be choosers, and I love it. Every year they do a litter picking day, so I feel like it's my duty, because I love it so much, to go out with a couple of friends and help. I love the fact that they do that kind of stuff, every community-minded, it's fun."

Arts and culture venues were next with 9 responses. Respondents did not only say what their favourite venue was but also shared what such a space meant for them in their life. Most of the time, it was a place where they could engage with arts and culture, but also socialise or relax.

"The Limelight is where I became a woman! It's where I grew up, and I still love it now. It's so different now, but the Katy's bit is still the same. The big room isn't right. But that's when I started being a grown up and being aware."

"The Linenhall Library is a haven for me, it is so gorgeous and peaceful, right in the middle of a bustling city centre. I use it as a retreat when I am feeling stressed, it gives me a bit of perspective. Sometimes I just sit and watch the city from the window. Sometimes I read or meet a friend for coffee. It is important to have places like that in the city centre."

Other places that participants mentioned included areas, streets or neighbourhoods in the city that they enjoyed, pubs and shops.

APPENDIX 3: ORGANISATIONS THAT RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY

Twenty-one organisations responded to the survey. The following organisation gave permission to be named as participating in the public consultation. Names of individuals responding to the survey were not requested.

City of Belfast Youth Orchestra

Fighting Words NI

Coiste na nIarchimí

Armstrong Storytelling Trust

Tread the Boards

Omniplex Cinemas

Sustrans

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

Belfast Celtic Society

Translink

Victoria Square

Ulster Architectural Heritage

Northern Visions Media Centre

APPENDIX 4: WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Blackstaff Community Development Association

Belfast Civic Trust

INTBAU Ireland (the all-island chapter of the International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism).

Community Arts Partnership

Conradh na Gaeilge

Forbairt Feirste