



<b>Subject:</b>	Dual Language Street Signs Gaeltacht Quarter Proposal
<b>Date:</b>	Friday 20 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Information relating to any individual</li><li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li><li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li><li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li><li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li><li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li><li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li></ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	On 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2023 the Council agreed, in principle, to progress with dual language street signage in the Gaeltacht Quarter en block as a cost saving measure, subject to equality screening and when finance becomes available, with a report to be submitted to Committee in due course.
1.2	This decision was called in and subject to a barrister's opinion which concluded that the call-in did not have merit. Party Group Leaders were advised of the barrister's opinion via email on 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2023 and were advised that officers would implement the decision and a report will be brought to a subsequent meeting of SP&R Committee in due course outlining the result of an equality screening, the financial implications and any other associated matters.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	Members are asked to consider the contents of the report and to: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">(a) Consider the option to proceed with the erection of Dual language Street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter in line with the process outlined in this report.</p> <p>If the Committee is minded to proceed with the process outlined in this report, then the Committee is asked to:</p>
2.2	(b) Confirm the threshold for objections to this process which triggers the requirement for an application and engagement of the current full process for a specific street within the Gaeltacht Quarter.
2.3	(c) To confirm if applications which are deemed subject to the full process due to the threshold of objections being met are dealt with after the existing applications received are processed.
2.4	(d) Agree that it is recommended to SP&R Committee that this is added to the Capital Programme as a capital project.
2.5	(e) Confirm if those streets which form the boundary of the Gaeltacht Quarter are also to be included as part of the area.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
3.1	In July 2022 SP&R Committee agreed to adopt a new policy position in relation to Dual Language Street Signs taking into account the European Charter for Regional or Minority

	<p>Languages. This provides for a single resident / elected Member / Developer being sufficient to trigger a street survey and the threshold for the percentage of residents required to respond positively being changed to 15%.</p>
3.2	<p>During SP&amp;R Committee consideration of the draft policy it was considered that separate arrangements would ultimately be developed with respect to streets within both the City Core and the Gaeltacht Quarter and that the Council would have the discretion to depart from the wider dual language street sign policy in respect of these two areas.</p>
3.3	<p>The Council agreed in principle on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023 how applications for a second name plate in the City Core would be processed. It also agreed in principle to progress with dual language signage in the Gaeltacht Quarter en bloc as a cost saving measure, subject to equality screening and when finance becomes available.</p>
	<p><b>The Gaeltacht Quarter</b></p>
3.4	<p>In 2010, Deloitte were commissioned by An Cheathru Ghealtachta Teo (ACGT) and the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to prepare several documents including a plan for the development of Belfast's Gaeltacht Quarter and to further progress recommendations made in the 2004 Dutton report. This report developed the vision, objectives and principles for the Gaeltacht Quarter which built on the 2002 West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force recommendations, the 2004 Dutton report and the consultation exercise undertaken by Deloitte for the 2010 report.</p>
3.5	<p>The vision for An Cheathru Ghealtachta is:</p> <p>The development and sustenance of a vibrant and compelling quarter of the city where the unique selling point and the economic potential of the Irish Language and culture are exploited, developed and maximized so as to realise profit and benefit for the people of the area, the city and the region.</p>
3.6	<p>A map of the Gaeltacht Quarter boundary has been included in Appendix 1. This boundary will be used to identify the streets that are to be included in this proposal. The boundary shown is based upon the definition of the greater Gaeltacht Quarter boundary as outlined in the 2010 Deloitte report.</p>

3.7	<p>There are circa 417 streets in the Gaeltacht Quarter as established from the map prepared and some 108 streets have already had dual language street signage installed. Of the remaining 309 streets, approx. 48 have live applications under the current policy. Members are also asked to consider those streets that form the boundary line of the Gaeltacht Quarter and determine if these streets are to be included as part of the area.</p> <p><b>The proposed approach</b></p>
3.8	<p>The Council has a discretionary power to erect dual language street signs under Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995 (“the 1995 Order”). Article 11(4) of the 1995 Order sets out the matters to which the Council should have regard in deciding whether to exercise that discretionary power. This includes a requirement “to have regard to any views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street”.</p>
3.9	<p>Whilst the views of the occupiers of the street must be taken into consideration, their views need not be determinative, and the Council may also take into account other considerations affecting its decision.</p> <p><u>Consultation letter</u></p>
3.10	<p>Under the current Policy, only those residents on the electoral register are surveyed. This involves officers attending the Electoral Office to identify those residents and then hand delivering surveys to their property. It is instead proposed that one letter per identified property, addressed to the ‘occupier’, will be posted out to all properties in the identified streets within the Gaeltacht Quarter. This will explain the en bloc approach and how residents can make their views known about their individual street and will give the opportunity generally to highlight any equality of opportunity and good relations issues as outlined in the equality and good relations section below. A newspaper advert will also be placed that will outline the approach and ways that objections can be registered to ensure coverage of the proposal.</p>
3.11	<p>If a resident is in favour of the proposal to erect the street signs en bloc, then there is no requirement for them to formally respond to the letter.</p>

3.12	<p>If a resident is not in favour of the proposal, they will be able to write / email / contact the Council to advise of this. Such an objection would be the trigger to require an application and engagement of the current full process for a specific street within the Gaeltacht Quarter. Members are asked to confirm the threshold for objections to this process which triggers the requirement. Members could determine a particular number of objections to the en bloc approach for a particular street would lead to the full process being followed. Alternatively, members could agree a percentage of objections required to trigger the full process.</p>
3.13	<p>Once the threshold is reached an application will be required under the current policy for their specific street and the application subject to the full process. The objector(s) would be required to confirm their name and address so these could be checked against the electoral office to confirm they are validated as occupiers of the street.</p>
3.14	<p>Where applications are required, these will be considered by the Building Control team, processed as normal and where appropriate residents will be issued with a street survey following the usual electoral register checks. Such applications will be dealt with in the normal way and will require support from 15% of residents in order to be successful. In accordance with the current policy for processing applications in the order received these applications will go to the end of the queue unless members agree an alternative method of dealing with or ordering them.</p>
3.15	<p>If the Council does not receive any objection to the en bloc approach for a particular street in the Gaeltacht Quarter within 30 calendar days of issuing the letter, the Council will move to erect the second name plate(s) on that street and will arrange for them to be installed as part of a planned schedule within a capital project.</p>
<p><u>Committee</u></p>	
3.16	<p>Once the timeframe for responses is reached, any correspondence received would be processed and a report brought to committee outlining:</p>
3.17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) those streets with no objections or below the objection threshold agreed from residents and where signage would be erected, and</li> <li>(b) those streets where objections have been received above the objection threshold agreed which requires the street to be subject to the full process</li> </ul>

3.18	<p>Committee agreement will be sought to undertake the resultant actions and agreed processes for streets identified in (a) and (b) above.</p>
<p><u>Potential Benefits and Costs of the proposed approach</u></p>	
3.19	<p>There are benefits that will likely be achieved by applying a blanket approach to erecting Dual Language street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter. This approach would be beneficial as the streets within the defined area of the Gaeltacht Quarter could proceed more efficiently by eliminating some of the stages of the established process. The scale of these benefits would be based upon the number of streets for which nameplates would be erected without having to progress through the full process i.e. without meeting the agreed threshold of objection.</p>
3.20	<p>For these streets, staff time and resources in Building Control would be less per street as there would be:</p>
3.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No carrying out of surveys and less administrative burden</li> </ul> <p>This activity includes the stationary costs and postage cost for surveys returned. Surveys are prepared in the office and hand delivered to ensure that all local situations are covered. Returns are then collated for each street and prepared for the next appropriate committee. Communications posted to residents will be one per household instead of one per resident on the electoral register. This will remove the requirement for unique identifiers and the overall administrative burden for issuing the communication will be reduced. Also, there will be fewer staffing resources required to track and record every decision through the standard process.</p>
3.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No requirement for checks at the Electoral Office.</li> </ul> <p>This involves visiting the Electoral Office in person and reviewing the register for specific streets to verify the applicant and document the numbers of all residents on the electoral register for each dwelling.</p>
3.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No requirement to respond if in favour</li> </ul> <p>This will reduce the amount of responses being returned and significantly less analysis which is required in standard surveys is anticipated.</p>

3.24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No initial assessment exercise.</li></ul> <p>Currently the initial assessments are carried out in a workshop format including staff from the Building Control, Good Relations, and Equality Teams.</p>
3.25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fewer committee reports:</li></ul> <p>For each street where the normal process is not required, no further staff time is required to create committee reports and going through the standard approval process for these to be submitted.</p>
3.26	<p>The revised approach will come with up-front costs, not contained in the current budgets. To use the blanket approach for GQ streets, rather than receiving applications through the normal process would involve erecting significantly more nameplates in a shorter space of time and would require additional up front financial resources.</p>
3.27	<p>With the current staffing resource within the Building Control Service, it would not be possible to facilitate both this project and the ongoing processing of live applications for dual language street signs at the same time. The Service would have to process any surveys for Gaeltacht Quarter streets, where objections that meet the threshold to trigger the full process have been received, as part of the existing workloads.</p>
3.28	<p>Therefore, if this approach is to be taken, it is proposed that the erection of the nameplates in the Gaeltacht Quarter (where the full dual language street sign process is not being followed) could be brought forward as part of the Capital Programme as a capital project.</p>
3.29	<p>The overall project would require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Final confirmation of the streets and properties to be written to, including commercial properties.</li><li>• Mail drop to all properties.</li><li>• Collation of feedback provided in responses from residents.</li><li>• Provision of Committee report to consider the actions discussed at paragraph 3.16 above.</li><li>• Identification of nameplates in the streets, engagement with homeowners where signs are on properties.</li><li>• provision of work requests to contractor; and</li></ul>

- Checks of nameplates once erected and payment of invoices.

*Mail drop*

3.30 Addresses within the Gaeltacht Quarter have been identified using the Local Development Plan map and data on the area as outlined above. This uses and is based upon the accuracy of the Pointer addressing database. It is estimated that there are in the region of 9600 properties to be included. Each property will receive one letter addressed to the 'occupier'. Officers have obtained an estimate for outsourcing this element of the work shown below.

*Signage costs*

3.31 The estimated cost of signage for the streets currently identified within the Gaeltacht Quarter is contained in the finance section below and in the region of **£135,000**. This is based on an analysis of applications received under the new policy, and the number and cost of signs erected. Costs will vary depending on the number of signs in a street, if those signs are on walls or posts, and the size of signs required for the specific street names. It should be noted that costs would still be incurred if applications for all streets within the GQ were received, processed and approved through the normal application process, but given the condensed nature of this proposal, this finance would be required over a shorter period of time as part of the defined project, spent in one project, rather than over a number of years. To date approximately 40 applications have been received for streets in the GQ.

3.32 Summary costs

Signage	£135,000
Mail drop	£7,500
Public adverts	£7,152
<b>TOTAL ESTIMATED COSTS</b>	<b>£149,652</b>

3.33 Note that these costs are estimated, based upon the average of 48 signs in 17 streets approved under the new policy.



Translations

3.34 Queens University have confirmed that they now have additional staffing resources to assist with translations of the current applications being processed. However, further discussions would be needed to confirm their ability to facilitate translations on the scale of this approach.

**Financial and Resource Implications**

3.35 Capital costs for the project to be refined through the Capital Programme.

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

3.36 A draft equality screening has been carried out on the decision to erect dual language street signs en bloc within the Gaeltacht Quarter. The decision has been screened out as having minor impacts, but with the additional consultation action as outlined below.

3.37 The screening finds that the measures proposed align closely with the Council's Language and Good Relations strategies. In general, this equality screening indicates that there are sufficient safeguards, within the new procedure, to ensure there are no adverse impacts in relation to equality of opportunity and good relations issues.

3.38 It is proposed as the next step in the development of the policy approach to dual language street signage in the Gaeltacht Quarter that there is targeted and focused consultation on the new procedure with those likely to be affected by the new procedure, i.e., the residents of the Gaeltacht Quarter. Households within the Gaeltacht Quarter will be written to, explaining the 'en bloc' approach and how each household can make their views known both about their individual street and given the opportunity generally to highlight any equality of opportunity and good relations issues.

3.39 Additionally, a public notice newspaper advert will be placed outlining the approach and ways that objections can be registered to ensure coverage of the proposal.

3.40 It is not considered that the initial Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs assessment normally carried out for each street would be required in most streets within the Gaeltacht Quarter given that the area has designated status. However, with regards to interface areas or specific streets, there will always be an opportunity for residents and/or Members to raise objections and to engage the wider policy. It is proposed that Elected Members

	would receive a notification of all streets within the GQ in advance of the letter being issued to residents, as is currently done in batches for standard applications.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 - Map of Gaeltacht Quarter