

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 7th November, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks, T. Brooks,
Brennan, Bunting, P. Doherty, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly,
S. Douglas, Flynn, Long, and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Ms. M. Quigley, Adaptation and Resilience Advisor; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were recorded.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st October.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Schedule of Meetings 2025

The Committee approved the following schedule of meetings for the Climate and City Resilience Committee in 2025 and agreed that all meetings would commence at 5.15 pm:

- Thursday 16th January at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 6th February at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 13th March at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 10th April at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 8th May at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 12th June at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 7th August at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 11th September at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 9th October at 5.15 pm

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- Thursday 6th November at 5.15 pm
- Thursday 11th December at 5.15 pm

Presentations

**Segregation and the Environment:
Breaking Down Barriers**

(Mr. D. Robinson, Good Relations Officer, attended in connection with the agenda item).

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. Osborne (Researcher) and the Good Relations Officer to the meeting.

The Good Relations Officer began by highlighting that according to the Council's 2020 Resilience Strategy "Belfast's resilience is weakened because, unlike other cities, it is not socially cohesive". He advised that the research was commissioned to seek to understand this further and seek ways to overcome what was termed in the research, the city's "segregation handicap" which would help to play a key role in helping Belfast to meet its ambitious targets to tackle climate change.

At this stage in proceedings Mr. P. Osborne thanked the Members for the opportunity to present the findings of the Segregation and the Environment; Breaking Down Barriers report which had identified strong links between a legacy of segregation and division in some parts of Belfast and the city's future ability to respond to the challenges posed by climate change. He commenced by providing an overview of the history of segregation in the city, which included information in respect of the following:

- Development in the city;
- Housing;
- Education;
- Impact of the Troubles;
- Peace Barriers; and
- The Design of the city.

He advised that the Belfast Climate Commission had set a target for net zero city by 2050, 42% by 2020, 66% by 2025 and 80% by 2030, and referenced where emissions arose from and noted that, whilst the conflict was no longer an over-riding risk factor, the legacy of division continued to undermine urban resilience and social cohesion.

He then referred to the various aspects of segregation within the city and provided a brief overview, citing the following examples:

- The Westlink, which was a barrier to access for many to the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH). The RVH car park accounted for 0.02% of the emission's target;

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- The continued presence of peace barriers/peace walls in many communities across the city, reducing connectivity, mobility and increasing reliance on the car;
- 94% Belfast social housing still segregated;
- 65% (primary) and 38% (post-primary) pupils go to school by car;
- 130m miles was expended bussing children to schools; and
- Duplication of emissions from public buildings, due to a legacy of duplicating services.

He also drew reference to the socio-economic linkages, including the location of the interfaces, hidden barriers, quality of life issues and the engagement of traditionally excluded groups and highlighted the four strategic priority areas that had been identified within the research, as follows:

- Segregation Handicap;
- Environmental Justice;
- Security Architecture; and
- Good Relations.

The Good Relations Officer referred to the findings of the UK Climate Change Predictions (UKCP18), including flood maps and the details of multi-level impacts. He stated that the poorest communities were those that continued to be most impacted by the segregation and division, those located in the closest proximity to peace barriers and in addition, according to the prediction maps, these areas would be those communities most impacted by climate change unless a concerted effort was made to dismantle segregation and division. He outlined that the report emphasised that if more was done to reduce the “segregation handicap”, it would have the added benefit of helping Belfast achieve its vision of creating a more sustainable and resilient city by 2050.

In conclusion Mr. Osborne referred to the following four strategic themes of the recommendations arising from the report:

- Recognise and reduce the Segregation Handicap caused by duplication by reducing the carbon footprint of the city, adapting the effects of climate change and increasing biodiversity;
- Identify where the Security Architecture still reflects the grimmest days of the conflict and work to remove or re-wild those locations;
- Identify issues of injustice in communities where the most disadvantaged across all faith backgrounds have less access to or engagement with, the environment, identify where communities are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and seek Environmental Justice remedies; and
- Acknowledge the role good relations plays in reducing division, encouraging an end to segregation and an increase in cohesion and resilience in the city, with impactful Good Relations projects on a theme of the environment, climate change, and biodiversity.

It was noted that whilst the Council did not have the powers of ownership over interfaces, it could provide leadership and support further gradual improvement through its good relations strategy and action plan, Peaceplus, and its other functions, particularly

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Community Planning. This would require further engagement with other public agencies and the community and voluntary sectors.

The Good Relations Officer highlighted that there were 19 recommendations within the research report. These were designed to be progressed as part of the current business and he noted that officers were seeking to embed the recommendations into existing strategies and plans.

Detailed discussion ensued regarding the barriers and walls that remained throughout the city. It was noted that some progress had been made in removing, reducing, or re-imaging peace or interface barriers, however, all present agreed that the removal of the barriers remained a complex challenge.

The Members discussed the flood risks, segregation in education, duplication in services, access to green space in which the success of the Forth Meadow Community Greenway and Access to the Hills Projects were noted.

Several of the Members expressed a desire to be further involved in the implementation of the recommendations arising from the report.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Good Relations Officer and Mr. Osborne for the informative presentation and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the research and the presentation and that officers would report on the implementation of the recommendations through the Corporate Management Team for its initial consideration as to how it could be progressed and that an update report would be submitted to the relevant Committee in due course.

Our Future of Urban Treescapes Programme

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. R. McCabe, Head of Northern Ireland – Involve, to the meeting.

The Adaptation and Resilience Advisor commenced by providing a brief overview of Belfast City Council's involvement with the Future of Urban Trees Programme.

Ms. McCabe advised that the programme aimed to understand the environmental and societal benefits of landscapes in which trees play a significant role. She advised that the UK Treescapes programme aimed to deliver new environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural understanding of the treescapes of the UK across three main themes and detailed that each of the funded projects addressed one or more of the themes. She advised that the locations of the projects were Belfast, Bannau Brycheiniog, Manchester and the Tweed Valley and provided an overview of the project objectives and details regarding the National Advisory Group.

The Committee noted that the Membership of Belfast's Local Stewarding Group was made up of the following organisations:

- Belfast City Council.

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- Belfast Hills Partnership;
- Eastside Greenways;
- QUB Centre for Public Health;
- Woodland Trust;
- DAERA; and
- Belfast Metropolitan Residents Association.

The Members noted the following emerging themes:

- Planning – Longer term thinking, the right tree in the right place, pockets of green and flood protection;
- Stewardship – Everyone is a custodian, trees for food, involving communities and protection trees;
- Education – an important role for schools;
- Wellbeing – Medical value of trees, clean air, beauty and spaces to ‘switch off’;
- Biodiversity – Habitat and shelter, variety of trees, complementary species and tree communities; and
- Decision Making – Accountability, equity of access and false dichotomy: trees v jobs.

The representative concluded by outlining that the next steps in progressing the programme, as follows:

- Second local dialogue event – Saturday, 16th November in the Girdwood Community Hub;
- Second national dialogue event – Saturday, 7th December – online;
- Report and infographic to be published February 2025; and
- Policy Workshop March 2025.

Following a query from a Member, it was agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting considering the potential of a ‘Tree Bank’. It was further agreed that the Programme and the Adaptation and Resilience Advisor would forward to the Members more detail regarding the different species of trees currently in the city.

The Committee noted the presentation on the UK Future of Urban Treescapes Programme and the representative left the meeting.

Restricted Items

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following two items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt

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information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Presentation - Update on Potential Delivery models for a Heat Network in Belfast

The Climate Commissioner provided the Members with an update on the market engagement to date on a potential heat network in Belfast. She referred to work undertaken with institutional investors, heat developers and other councils as part of that process and stated that this work was ongoing.

The Members were informed that Belfast, with its density of buildings, was ideally suited to the introduction of a heat network which formed a key part of the local energy plan, alongside the retro-fit of buildings, as part of the Council's net-zero carbon ambitions.

The Climate Commissioner reminded the Members that a Heat Network Working Group had been established to inform the development of the Council's approach to incentivising the development of a heat network in Belfast, this Group would be encouraging public sector bodies, which owned buildings in the city with a high heat demand, to engage in discussions and market engagement as potential heat off-takers.

The Committee was informed that, as previously agreed by the Council in March 2024, a commercial and legal advisor, Bird and Bird, had now been appointed to help support the market engagement process.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Rudd, Partner, and Mr XXXXX, both representing Bird and Bird, to the meeting.

Mr. Rudd commenced by providing an overview of Bird and Bird, an international firm employing more than 1,700 lawyers worldwide. He then provided detail regarding the delivery models used for Local Authorities, this included information regarding funding models, including the use of a private sector investor and specific detail regarding the capacity for the Council to procure renewable, low carbon and energy efficiency solutions which would be funded by the private sector.

He advised that early market engagement with heat developers had suggested that there was strong private sector interest to invest in heat networks with the provision of lands for the development of an energy centre, provision of grant finance and an available source of waste heat energy, as being strong support structures as part of the heat network development process. The representative provided an insight into both the technical and contractual frameworks available to secure the best value for money in terms of the operation of long-term district heating energy contracts.

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The presentation concluded with the representative providing comprehensive information on the principles that would influence the preferred delivery models and energy management strategies, these included details in respect of BCC resourcing, funding, asset ownership, control of the project (day to day or strategic), risk (and reward) in the project and the market appetite.

Following a query from a Member regarding the risk of private sector investment, the representative confirmed that contracts would be required to be agreed which would offer protection to both the Council and the investor.

The Committee noted the presentation from Bird and Bird on the Potential Delivery Models for a Heat Network in Belfast.

**Rooftop Solar PV potential in the
UP2030 area - emerging results**

The Climate Commissioner provided the Members with an update on Phase 2 of the Solar PV Project that had been exploring the solar PV potential of buildings within the UP2030 area.

She reminded the Members that the scale up of solar PV (particularly rooftop solar) was one of five priority projects that had been identified by the Belfast Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) as a cost-effective means of reaching the city's emission targets. The project was a partnership between Belfast City Council, the Department for the Economy and GIA. This project was the second phase of an earlier study, which had previously been presented to the Committee at its August 2023 meeting. The study used cutting-edge 3D modelling, bespoke spatial analysis tools, and expert daylight modelling techniques to assess the amount of power that could be generated by installing solar PV on 24 Council buildings. This second phase had expanded the work to include every rooftop in the UP2030 area of the city and she explained that the data would inform the development of a framework for creating a low carbon neighbourhood and future plans for the UP2030 area.

The Members noted that the Department for the Economy (DfE) was interested in applying the results from this area across other areas in the region, with the potential for spatial mapping and the creation of a publicly accessible interactive portal to catalyse the scale up of rooftop solar.

The Committee:

- noted the update and the potential to use the data to catalyse investment in rooftop solar PV, along with the ongoing work to use the data to create web based and interactive maps to enable users to select a building and view the solar PV potential with a total useable area, potential generation, and the number of panels; and
- agreed that once the full report had been published by DfE that a presentation would be made to a future meeting of the Committee.

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Chairperson