

# Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 16th January, 2025

## HYBRID MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

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

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;  
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;  
Ms. C. Shortt, Monitoring, Learning and Reporting Officer;  
Ms. C. Persic, Development Manager; and  
Ms. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Alderman Copeland.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 5th December, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 9th January, 2025.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were recorded.

### **Presentation**

#### **Sustainable Tourism Initiatives in Belfast - Visit Belfast**

The Monitoring, Learning and Reporting Officer reminded the Members that, at its meeting on 5th December, 2024, the Committee had noted that Belfast was ranked 9th place in the 2024 Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index), the highest-ranking destination in the UK and Ireland, and agreed to invite Visit Belfast to attend a future meeting of the Committee to provide an overview of the measures and initiatives which had been undertaken to achieve the high ranking.

Accordingly, Mr G. Lennon, Chief Executive, Visit Belfast, and Ms. J. Callen, Sustainability and Impact Manger, Visit Belfast, were welcomed to the meeting.

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Mr. Lennon provided the Committee with background information on Visit Belfast and highlighted its core purpose, namely, “to create and service visitors for Belfast and Northern Ireland in order to generate economic benefit and inclusive growth, creating jobs and prosperity for the city region, enabling Belfast to become a more sustainable place to visit, meet and live in.”

He explained that, following the Council’s declaration of a climate emergency in 2019, the launch of its Belfast Resilience Strategy Climate Plan in 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic, Visit Belfast had committed to the development of a sustainable tourism plan. He highlighted the launch of Visit Belfast’s first Sustainability Policy and its commitment to embedding sustainability across the organisation.

Ms. Callen highlighted that, as Belfast’s Destination Management Organisation (DMO), Visit Belfast first participated in the GDS-Index in 2020, with Belfast ranking at 47th on the GDS-Index. She reported that, through improvements at pace, Belfast had made significant progress to achieve its current rank of 9th out of 100 global destinations.

She provided the Committee with a detailed overview of the actions Visit Belfast had taken in respect of sustainability, including:

- **Organisation** - launch of its three-year tourism strategy and business plan, Sustainability Policy, appointment of a dedicated Sustainability and Impact team, implementation of sustainability Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and an Annual Impact Report, and adopting a triple bottom line approach;
- **Industry** – collaboration with partners in the tourism industry that included cooperation with the Council to roll out an initiative to help tourism businesses gain independent sustainability accreditation;
- **City** – annual GDS assessment, working with the Council on the delivery of the Department for Communities Access and Inclusion Programme and the upcoming Inclusive Tourism Programme, focus on neighbourhood tourism, tourism carbon footprint measurement, and engagement with residents; and
- **Visitors and Clients** – green accommodation and active travel, cruise sustainability plan, cruise community fund, events sustainability framework, carbon measurement of business events, sustainable experiences and itineraries for tour operators and the launch of Visit Belfast’s Impact and Legacy guide.

She highlighted the following initiatives:

- **Change the Menu. For Good** – a project in collaboration with industry partners to raise funds and supplies for those experiencing food poverty in Belfast;

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- **Belfast Reusable Cup** – a 12-month pilot aimed at eliminating 2 million single use plastic cups in entertainment venues in Belfast; and
- **Educational Outreach** – an initiative in collaboration with the Education Authority to help students benefit from incoming conferences to Belfast.

In response to a Member's question regarding carbon offsetting initiatives, Ms. Callen informed the Committee that Visit Belfast, through its Impact and Legacy Guide, provided clients and tourists with offsetting options. She highlighted Visit Belfast's recent work with the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland (ASGBI) to calculate the carbon footprint of the ASGBI conference in Belfast.

Ms. Callen answered a range of questions from Members, including Visit Belfast's engagement with Belfast Harbour in relation to the reduction of cruise ship emissions, sustainability certified hotel bedrooms, energy reduction targets, the Reusable Cup pilot, and tour buses emissions.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Lennon and Ms. Callen for their attendance and the work that had been undertaken in respect of sustainable tourism.

The Committee noted the contents of the presentation.

**Business in the Community's 2024 Northern Ireland  
Environmental Benchmarking Survey Results**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues**

**1.1 To update members on the recent Gold award to Belfast City Council in the 2024 Business in the Community, Environmental Benchmarking Survey (up from Silver in 2023).**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is requested to note the 2024 award and agree to submission to the 2025 survey.**

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1 Background - 2024 Business in the Community, Environmental Benchmarking Survey**

**3.2 In July 2023, the Council made it's first annual submission to the Business in the Community, Environmental Benchmarking Survey. The submission was undertaken to support baselining of environmental activity in the organisation and to benchmark Belfast City Council to other organisations in the region. It also demonstrates publicly our commitments to being**

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environmentally responsible and transparent and helps us to track our progress over time and see how far we have come. Last year Council scored a silver award.

**3.3** The Survey is Northern Ireland’s leading environmental benchmarking exercise. It is a free, annual, self-disclosure exercise open to members and non-members of Business in the Community. There are five levels of awards ranging from Platinum at the top through Gold, Silver, Bronze and Green. The Survey is split into the following sections:

CORPORATE STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE & IMPROVEMENT	BONUS	
18	10	72	3	Scores available
	Environmental Management Systems	Climate Emergency	Bonus	
Strategic Decision Making	Policy	Circular Economy and Resource Use		
	Issues	Additional Impact		
Leadership	Legislation	Nature and Biodiversity		
	Objective	Environmental Performance & Improvement		
Stakeholder Engagement	Targets	Assurance		
17	10	35.5	3	Small Business Scores available

**3.4** 132 organisations took part in the survey this year, a 9% increase from 2023. Belfast City Council scored 79% against an average of 76%. The areas that received full marks this year and therefore helped achieve the gold award were around strategic decision making (for example the inclusion of a large programme of work on climate and environment under the ‘Our Planet’ section in the Belfast Agenda), leadership (the establishment of the Our Planet Board, City Resilience and Climate Committee, and Belfast Climate Commission) and publically reporting to the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP). The staff travel survey also demonstrated the Council’s commitment to measuring scope 3 emissions and the development of the council’s draft Climate Action Plan (CAP) helped move the organisation up a level in the results. Recycling of old laptops, participation in the All-Ireland

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**Pollinator Plan and the recent work around single use plastics also gained positive marks.**

- 3.5 Organisations also receive a Gap Analysis Report that provides feedback on its score in each section, enabling us to identify areas where action can be taken to improve environmental impacts and increase future scores in subsequent Surveys.**
- 3.6 One of the areas that the gap analysis highlighted for improvement was around the council's use of renewable energy. This year funding secured from the shared island fund will be used to install solar panels on the Donegal Pass community centre (plans for procurement in January 2025).**
- 3.7 There were several changes to the Survey questions this year, scored and unscored, to continue to challenge participants included an increased focus on commitments, policies or actions in place to maintain, enhance and conserve nature and biodiversity.**
- 3.8 There are three other councils that participate in the survey - Mid and East Antrim (platinum), Antrim and Newtownabbey (Gold) and Ards and North Down (Silver) and other organisations such as the Belfast Met (Gold), Ulster University (Platinum) and Visit Belfast (Bronze). Many organisations such as the Belfast Harbour Commission, International Airport and George Best City Airport have been participating in the survey for more than 20 years and are now in the platinum category.**
- 4.0 Financial & Resource Implications**
- 4.1 There are no financial and resource implications.**
- 5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications**
- 5.1 Any good relations or equality implications will be identified as part of the Council's screening process."**

In response to a Member's question in respect of energy reduction, the Monitoring, Learning and Reporting Officer advised the Committee that the feedback received from the Survey, through its Gap Analysis Report, enabled the Council to identify areas for improvement, including the use of renewable energy. She highlighted the current improvements being made through the Council's Net Zero Pathfinder Project and the Local Area Energy Plan.

The Monitoring, Learning and Reporting Officer informed the Members that the Council was in the process of completing energy audits of its highest energy consuming buildings, and that the results would be reported to the Committee.

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After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the Council's gold award in the Business in the Community 2024 Northern Ireland Environmental Benchmarking Survey Report; and
- ii. agreed that the Council submit to the Business in the Community 2025 Northern Ireland Environmental Benchmarking Survey.

**UP2030 Update - Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

**1.1 To provide an update on the UP2030 Net Zero (NZ) Neighbourhood Framework, including the work to date across the priority themes of active travel, greening and retrofit, stakeholder engagement, and key milestones for 2025, including holding a Members briefing workshop.**

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- I. To note the progress to date and future key milestones for the UP2030 Net Zero Neighbourhoods Horizon Europe funded project to develop a Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework.**
- II. To note that a Members' briefing workshop in early summer on the emerging draft Framework prior to taking the final draft Framework to Committee in the autumn.**
- III. To note the 3 main themes of the Framework around Greening, Retrofit and Active Travel, and how the UP2030 project can be upscaled to help build understanding and capacity for communities about NZ as well as integrate and inform both local community plans and Council workstreams such as the emerging area planning approach; climate-related work programmes; housing led regeneration programme and specifically how it will fit with the Belfast Agenda Community Planning Boards Action Plans.**
- IV. To note that an update report on UP2030 was brought to the City Growth & Regeneration Committee yesterday, 15 January 2025.**

### **3.0 Background**

Members will recall that Council is involved in a three-year Horizon Europe consortium programme called Urban Planning 2030 (UP2030) that aims to guide cities through the transitions required to meet their climate neutrality ambitions. The City Regeneration and Development and Climate teams were successful in joint bid of €204,250/£176,024 to further an integrated approach between urban planning, achieving net zero and aspects of resilience. At the most recent update to the City Regeneration & Development and Climate and City Resilience Committees in June 2024 Members were reminded that Belfast is one of 11 pilot cities, and the focus of the project is on the development of a net zero neighbourhood framework around three thematic areas: active travel, greening and retrofit. These themes link across to the UP2030 pillars of a fair and just transition, carbon neutrality and resilience. The Framework will be informed by data, stakeholder engagement and the use of climate tools to support analysis, mapping and engagement in the pilot area.

3.1 The geographic area of the UP2030 pilot was agreed at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in March 2023 and covers the Linen Quarter and surrounding city centre communities of Barrack Street, Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Market. Whilst this work was undertaken within a defined boundary the purpose was to produce a framework that could be adapted and used within all communities and districts to set forward net zero tailored approaches, attract funding and deliver climate adaption plans tailored for the uses of that specific district.

3.2 Over the past year and a half there has been engagement with communities and wider city partners at each key stage. Members received an update at the CG&R and Climate and City Resilience Committees in June 2024 that outlined the stakeholder engagement, workshops, key milestones and highlighted wider alignment of the UP2030 programme with other workstreams such as the Solar PV Study and the Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub.

### **4.0 Main Report**

#### **4.1 Progress to date**

##### **Cross-sector stakeholder engagement**

As reported in June 2024, stakeholder engagement has been a key feature of the programme, and the team continue to engage with the local areas as well as thematic, statutory, and citywide

partners that have broad experience or are prospective delivery partners. Between April and October 2024 significant engagement took place through workshops and interactive sessions with a range of cross-sector stakeholders including:

- **Belfast City Council officers across departments**
- **Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel (CAST) Belfast Agenda subgroup**
- **City Greening Group**
- **Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub**
- **Cross sector stakeholder Vision and Actions feedback workshop**
- **Youth session with South Belfast Alternatives Youth Group**
- **QUB StreetSpace engagement and research group**
- **Donegall Pass Seniors' Group**
- **Open Botanic Festival**
- **Retrofit workshop with elected Members**
- **World Cities Day Youth Event with BCC Youth Council**

**4.2** The purpose of these events was to encourage people to step into the future and consider what life might be like in a NZ Belfast of 2050 and gain agreement on the vision for the project across the three themes (greening, active travel and retrofit) as well as to engage in 'climate conversations' to build awareness and understanding of climate change. During the sessions, participants were presented with mapped geospatial analysis data and the insights gathered on the project to date and asked for feedback on the emerging Framework ideas, local priorities and build a shared understanding of NZ options. Through this we were able to sense check the emerging framework ideas, build a shared understanding of NZ options and agreed the adaptive pathways for the short/long term sequence of actions that would be required to support the transition as well as explore opportunities for pilot projects to help test concepts for the NZ Framework alongside continued stakeholder engagement.

**4.3** There have also been indirect engagement opportunities that have helped to build knowledge and expand networks which will also help to inform the Framework. For example, a session was held with the Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub with energy managers from public and private sector with large scale estates to share experience on retrofitting buildings to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions. Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub hosted a peer-to-peer exchange with the Galway City Council, the Warm Homes Hub community retrofit programme and a variety of interested stakeholders from Belfast to explore their One Stop Shop approach and retrofit methodology. This is part of the ongoing work of the Climate Team and demonstrates



the importance of linking the shared learning and feedback into the NZ Framework.

#### **4.4 Building out the Framework**

The UP2030 team have consolidated the feedback to date on the emerging vision and thematic adaptive pathways, data and worked with consortium partners on the format and content of the Framework. Sections one to three of the draft Framework are due for submission to the UP2030 Consortium in February 2025 and is based around the following chapter outline:

##### **Preface**

- 1. Introduction and Context**
- 2. Neighbourhood Assessment**
- 3. Vision and Adaptive Pathways**
- 4. Pilots and What We Tested**
- 5. Lessons Learned**
- 6. Net Zero Neighbourhood**
- 7. Implementation and Recommendations**
- 8. Outputs and Visual Aids**
  - **Report Document: Comprehensive overview**
  - **Visual Guides: Posters, infographics on achieving net-zero by 2050**
  - **Glossary**

**4.5** Pending feedback from the UP2030 Consortium on the draft Framework, the intention is to go back out to stakeholders in late Spring/early Summer to sense check the actions within the emerging final draft and explore dissemination. As part of this, it also proposed to hold a Members' briefing workshop in early summer that will provide an opportunity to input into the Framework and explore the themes prior to bringing this to Committee for approval in the autumn. It is proposed to invite Members from City Growth & Regeneration, Climate & City Resilience and Members who represent the UP2030 area. The final Framework must be submitted by November 2025.

**4.6** Primarily, the target audience for the Framework is decision makers and policy makers in local and central government, statutory partners, communities and urban practitioners. As part of the legacy of the project, officers are considering how it will be of use to key stakeholders and looking at this through 'personae' such as a community group, investors, senior public officials, or a thematic or special interest organisation. The value of taking this approach means that officers will be able to structure and tailor the content of the Framework, so that it is accessible and

relevant to the core audiences and assist in the dissemination of the material.

**4.7 Action Phase: Testing Net Zero options**

Alongside the drafting of the Framework, the UP2030 team is in the Action Phase of the programme, which focuses on testing options that could be included in the NZ Framework under the three themes, active travel, greening and retrofit. The exploration of solutions is central to the action phase of the programme wherein we need to trial approaches or actions that can help us achieve NZ whilst also providing an opportunity to engage with citizens on the key themes of the project. The piloting of these approaches helps us to capture lessons learned and recommendations that will form part of the final NZ Framework as well as gaining a better understanding of the capacity building and knowledge exchange required to help communities transition together. Through this period officers have continued to engage with stakeholders, delivery partners and tool providers to solidify partnerships that will help test some of the NZ approaches that are in the emerging draft Framework. Included in this action phase is a pilot Walking Bus project that will be funded and delivered by Belfast Healthy Cities by March 2025. A Walking Bus is a group of children walking to school together in the morning. They are supported by an adult at the front and at the back of the group, acting as the 'driver' and 'conductor' of the walking bus.

**4.8** Additionally, a Walking Bus is an action in the Belfast Agenda CAST Action Plan and is an approach that was suggested by communities during the UP2030 engagement period. This pilot draws upon the expertise of one of the consortium tool providers, Design Clips, who are an architectural practice specialising in participatory planning and placemaking with a focus on co-design with children, and Belfast Healthy Cities, who are currently working with schools to deliver walking buses. Adding to the Walking Bus concept, a toolkit and teacher training materials have been developed encouraging children to 'audit' their route to school and considering how their neighbourhood could be cleaner, greener and healthier, creating safe routes and healthy places. Further to the pilot, this toolkit (including a Walking Bus toolkit, teaching materials and activity materials) will be a free resource for any school or community in Belfast and is an example of how the UP2030 NZ approach can be scaled up in other areas.

**4.9** Similarly, it was agreed in the Climate and City Resilience Committee in June 2024 to support Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) with their Early Career Architects proposal to

run a Net-Zero Neighbourhood Ideas Competition as a partnership between the (RSUA) and JP Corry with support from the NIHE and the Northern Ireland Construction Group (NICG). This work is ongoing and intends to explore how a holistic neighbourhood approach to lowering carbon emissions compares to a more focused property-by-property approach and is an opportunity to build on the visioning outcomes of the retrofit work and importantly, engage with communities in the pilot area to codesign approaches for net zero delivery and contribute to the development of the NZ Framework and consider how it can be replicated in other areas.

- 4.10 Increasingly, new technology comes forward to help address carbon emissions and within the greening theme, we are completing a cost/benefit exercise on the planting and maintenance of 44 trees in the AQMA of Cromac Street in comparison to the installation of a technical solution, 'CityTree', which claims to achieve the benefit equivalent in cleansing the air. This exercise builds on the work of the 'Tree Establishment Strategy' survey completed by colleagues in City and Neighbourhood Services which has identified existing canopy cover across the city and highlighted much needed tree planting in areas that have the lowest tree canopy cover, and subsequent lowest tree equity scores and the UP2030 pilot area includes some of the highest priority areas of the city.

4.11 Key milestones for 2025

The final output of the UP2030 programme is a NZ Framework that will be an interactive pdf, supplemented by user-friendly information that can also be distributed to communities and other stakeholders. However, central to this project is how the learning is embedded and helps Council and partners adapt and prepare for climate change. The dissemination will take different forms and officers will the publish and promote the material in different formats, engage with communities and engage across Council teams and seek to influence wider city and regional stakeholders. The final output is being developed with target audiences in mind that includes decision makers, urban practitioners and community leaders. It is hoped that the Framework will help these audiences to understand what a transition to net zero could look like through the three themes, and the urgency of sequenced actions required.

- 4.12 The UP2030 programme concludes in December 2025. Below are the high-level milestones and deliverables for the year:

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- Ongoing roll out of demonstration projects as part of the Action Phase, i.e. Walking Bus, RSUA Early Career Architects NZ Neighbourhood Ideas Competition
- Submission of the draft Framework by February 2025
- Engage in consortium upscaling workshops and with tool providers, including utilisation of the financial and governance toolkit and peer-to-peer learning, and provision of material/content.
- Stakeholder and Member engagement to sense check and validate the NZ Framework, May-June
- Submission of final Framework and reporting to the UP2030 Consortium in November 2025
- Launch and dissemination December 2025 and ongoing into 2026.

**5.0 Financial and Resource Implications**

Members will be aware that given that the UK is no longer within the EU, the status of Council was changed from to being a Partner to that of an Associate which means that funding is underwritten by the UK government (UK Research & Innovation, UKRI) fund rather than the EU. The Horizon Europe UP2030 Project is 100% funded for revenue only. No additional funding is required from Council however a small team drawn from the Climate Unit and City Regeneration and Development work together to oversee development and support implementation. Officers continue to work with partners to identify potential capital or revenue funding in the future and align current and emerging workstreams that could support the transition to net zero.

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

Officers will carry on an Equality Screening on the final NZ Framework and will incorporate within the emerging proposals.”

The Development Manager answered a range of questions from Members in relation to tree equity and CityTrees, Belfast’s partnership with other UP2030 pilot cities, the use of artificial intelligence in relation to research, and commuter parking and its impact on air quality.

After discussion, the Committee noted:

- i. the progress to date and future key milestones for the UP2030 Net Zero Neighbourhoods Horizon Europe funded project to develop a Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework;

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- ii. that a Members' briefing workshop would be held in early summer on the emerging draft Framework prior to taking the final draft Framework to Committee in the autumn;
- iii. the three main themes of the Framework around Greening, Retrofit and Active Travel, and how the UP2030 project can be upscaled to help build understanding and capacity for communities about Net Zero as well as integrate and inform both local community plans and Council workstreams such as the emerging area planning approach; climate-related work programmes; housing led regeneration programme and specifically how it will fit with the Belfast Agenda Community Planning Boards Action Plans; and
- iv. that an update report on UP2030 was brought to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 15 January, 2025.

Chairperson