

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 24th February, 2025

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McKeown (Chairperson);
Councillors T. Brooks, Brennan, Bunting,
Groogan, Kelly, Lyons and McKay.

In attendance: Ms. S. Murtagh, Property and Projects Portfolio
Manager;
Ms. S. Kalke, Client Manager (Property and Projects);
Ms. S. Rafter, Neighbourhood Services Integration
Manager; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th August, 2024 were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brennan declared an interest in the Physical Programme item, in that her employer was involved in projects which were in receipt of funding under the schemes. She left the meeting before the item was discussed.

Presentations

Sustrans re: Blackstaff Greenway Study

The Client Manager (Property and Projects) provided the Working Group with an overview of a Notice of Motion, which had been brought forward by Councillor T. Brooks, to consider the creation of a Greenway following the route of the Blackstaff River, from the Stockman's Way roundabout through Boucher Road Playing Fields and continuing through the Boucher Estate to the 'Rise' sculpture.

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. A. McBeth and Ms. C. Pollock (both Sustrans), who had been commissioned to prepare the study, to the meeting. They provided the Members with an overview of the various factors which they had taken into consideration and highlighted several options of potential routes. Ms. McBeth explained that the

proposal was to revitalise and regenerate the river, bring back native species and create permeable routes along it.

They outlined that they had engaged with DfI Active Travel on the development of a Blackstaff Greenway and that the project would ideally be cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary. A number of potential funding streams had also been identified to help deliver the project.

During discussion, a Member stated that Stockman's Lane was one of the most heavily polluted areas on the island of Ireland, largely due to the fact that there were a significant number of Heavy Goods Vehicles using the area to access the industrial estate. He stated that, having tried to cycle along the Boucher Road himself, it was an unpleasant experience. He suggested that perhaps the Greenway could use alternative access and egress points such as adjacent Council property. The Member also stated that flooding was prevalent in the area and that NI Water should be consulted on the plans.

In response a Member's question, the Client Manager advised the Working Group that there was not a specific masterplan for the Boucher area. The Boucher Estate was managed by the Estates Management Unit in the Property and Projects Department.

In response to further Members' comments, the Client Manager advised the Members that the greenway could perhaps link in with the Forth Meadow Community Greenway, the West Belfast Greenway as well as connecting into the Donegall Road.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for the informative presentation and they left the meeting.

Noted.

Developing the Belfast Sustainable Food Strategy

(Ms. M. Quigley, Adaptation and Resilience Advisor, attended in connection with this item.)

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. M. Turley, Community Garden Support NI, to the meeting.

The Adaptation and Resilience Advisor provided the Working Group with an overview of the work which was ongoing in developing a Sustainable Food Strategy for the City. She outlined that the Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership had been established in August 2023 and that it acted as a collective voice for the city on key challenges for the food system around climate change, biodiversity, food justice, a circular economy, urban farming, community growing, food waste and more.

She highlighted that they were mindful of Motions which had been passed by the Council, which covered issues such as the Right to Food, the Right to Grow and the Plant Based Treaty and would be progressing those as part of the work.

Ms. M. Turley outlined the extensive work which was being undertaken by several stakeholders, including Community Garden Support NI.

A Member stated that educating people should be central to the strategy, particularly with regards to food supply, seasonal produce and why sustainability was important.

A further Member added that making the climate relevant to the average person was important, particularly given the current cost of living. He stated that community wealth building would be crucial to its success.

During further discussion on community gardens and allotments, the Adaptation and Resilience Advisor confirmed that a paper would be submitted to the People and Communities Committee in March in relation to the provision and management of allotments across the City.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their presentation and they left the meeting.

Noted.

Linen Quarter BID re: Gasworks Improvement Proposal

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. C. McCracken, MD, Mr. C. Karelse, Regeneration Manager (both Linen Quarter BID) and Mr. A. Haley, Director at The Paul Hogarth Company (Design consultant), to the meeting.

Mr. McCracken provided the Working Group with an overview of the Linen Quarter BID's proposal for improvements to the Gasworks area of the city, which had been drawn up in conjunction with The Paul Hogarth Company as Design Consultant.

He outlined that Mr. A. Haley had extensive experience of transforming underused public realm into sustainable places that people enjoyed using.

The proposal for public realm improvement for the Gasworks included a transformation of the central green space with the aim of promoting it as a social focal point for both employees and visitors alike, with improved lighting throughout.

During discussion, some Members stated that it was important that local residents were consulted on the plans and that their opinions be treated as equally important as the local employees. A number of Members also stated that animation in the area was to be welcomed and that the transition from a business park to a mixed-use site was to be welcomed.

A Member requested that the Linen Quarter BID would engage further with different user groups who would use the open space, to ensure that it would be flexible enough to meet their needs for various events.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their presentation and they left the meeting.

Noted.

Physical Programme Update

The Property and Projects Portfolio Manager presented the undernoted report to the Working Group:

“1. Introduction

The Council’s Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the Physical Programme update for South Belfast including the recently completed project at Appendix 1 - Covered cycle stands,
- Note the announcement of Urban Villages Initiative capital funding from The Executive Office to projects in receipt of Council funding – BIF Market Arches £2m and NRF Former School of Music £2m, and;
- Note the status and next steps around the additional local capital schemes/ proposals as a consequence of the UKSPF funding.

3. Local Investment Fund (LIF)

Members are reminded that LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG area; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation. Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding spend to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 24 projects received ‘In Principle’ letters under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 23 have been completed and 1 project is still at initial stage. Further details are outlined below.

LIF breakdown – South	LIF 1		LIF 2	
<i>Stage/ Description:</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount (£)</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount/ (£)</i>
Number of Projects Completed	12 (92%)	£1,053,600	11 (100%)	£796,000
Number of Projects in Delivery				

Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects in Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	1 (8%)	£30,000		
Total Number of Approved Projects	13	£1,083,600	11	£796,000

The table below provides an overview of the remaining live project. Members are asked to note the status and ongoing actions.

LIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
SLIF017	Finaghy Bridge	£30,000	Design stage	Approved at SP&R Committee in May 2016 to undertake improvements to the bridge. DfI have advised that they do not have a scheme for Finaghy Bridge but that they are facilitating the Council's LIF scheme.	Continue engagement with DfI Roads.

4. Belfast Investment Fund (BIF)

Members are reminded that BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250k investment from Council. BIF – South Belfast was allocated £5.5m; with additional £500k ringfenced for new areas (outer South) that had joined the District area under Local Government Reform. In South Belfast, 6 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment, thereby fully allocating its £5.5m, and £500k pot of funding. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

Summary of BIF allocated projects.

South	Stage 3 - Lagan Gateway - £2.1m; Lanyon Tunnels - £1.3m; Bredagh GAC - £700k; Arts & Digital Hub - £584k; Coffee Culture - £286k Stage 1 - Sandy Row Open Space project- £479k
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Balmoral DEA	Stage 3 - Knockbreda Parish Church Hall - £250k Stage 2 - Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC - £250k
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Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
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BIF04	Lagan Gateway	£6,545,000 <i>BIF - £2.15m UGV- £950k DfC - £470k DfI- £2m DfI Rivers - £975k</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	A Planning application was submitted for Phase 2 in May 2024. Detailed designs are ongoing. External match funding is in place from DfI. The contractor procurement exercise has commenced.	Continue engagement with the public and key stakeholders.
BIF07	Market Arches	£3.3m <i>BIF -£1.3m UV – £2m</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Business case stage. TEO have confirmed £2m capital funding for this project under Urban Villages. Planning decision awaited.	Officer engagement with Executive Office and DfC as key funders, and stakeholders.
BIF48	Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub	£1,129,023 <i>BIF-£584,167 UV-£706,856</i>	Stage 3- Committed	On site. Progressing well. Awaiting written confirmation from NI Water on an outstanding issue for this project and Coffee Culture. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF46	Coffee Culture	£1,149,821 <i>BIF-£286,519 SOF-£100,000 UV- £463,302 DfC-£300,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Resolution of NIW and Environmental Health issues required before appointment of contractor. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF33	Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC	£250,000	Stage 3- Committed	The option for Belvoir FC to lease land from NIHE remains under discussion.	Continue engagement with the group and partners.
BIF47	Sandy Row Open Space project	£479,314*	Stage 1- Emerging <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Ongoing engagement between the Council and Translink in relation to the potential project site at Blythefield. Ongoing stakeholder meetings with officers as project progresses.	Continue engagement with the group.

				<i>*The remaining balance of the ringfenced allocation for the Sandy Row Area projects</i>	
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5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is a £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. 3 projects in South Belfast received an In-Principle funding commitment, and 2 have completed. Similar to LIF and BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. Members are asked to note the progress update of the remaining project in the table below.

SOF – South Belfast project overview

Project	Award	Status and update	Action/ Recommendation
SOF02 Coffee Culture	£1,149,821 <i>SOF-£100,000</i> <i>BIF-£286,519</i> <i>UV- £463,302</i> <i>DfC-£300,000</i>	Resolution of NIW and Environmental Health issues required before appointment of contractor.	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.

6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital fund with a current overall budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The overall NRF allocation for South was £1,978,637, and 5 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each NRF project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. Projects remaining at Stage 2 continue to have the support of a Client Manager for their proposals.

South Belfast – NRF overview

South	Stage 3 - Sólás New Build project, GVRT Branching Out project, Lagan Water Access Activity Hub, Redevelopment of former School of Music, Market Heritage Hub Stage 2 (Reserve) - Redevelopment of Riddel’s Warehouse Stage 1 (Reserve) - The Avenue Arts Centre, An Droichead Annex, Lagan Legacy
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South Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
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Sólás New Build project	£1,162,141 <i>NRF- £362,141 COF- £800,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Sólás have appointed a design team and Council staff continue to engage. Group have secured funding from Community Ownership Fund (COF) £800,000.	Continue engagement with the group.
GVRT- Branching Out project	£500,000	Stage 3- Committed	Planning application submitted and engagement with planners ongoing. Discussions continue with potential funders.	Continue engagement with the group.
Lagan Water Access Activity Hub	£308,248	Stage 3- Committed	Planning application for bridge submitted by DfC. Design of boat house element is underway in preparation for Planning.	Continue engagement with the group.
Redevelopment of former School of Music	£2,308,248 <i>NRF- £308,248 UV- £2m</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Business case stage. TEO have confirmed £2m capital funding for this project under Urban Villages.	Continue engagement with the group.
Market Heritage Hub	£800,000 <i>NRF- £500,000 COF- £300,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Purchase of the property, although advanced, is still subject to agreement with the vendor and remains a risk. Funding has recently been secured from COF of £300,000.	Continue engagement with the group.

7. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is a rolling programme to either enhance existing Council assets or build / buy new assets or facilities. Table below provides an update on current live projects South Belfast area. Members are asked to note status and update.

South Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
Playground Improvement Programme 24/25	<i>Stage 3 Committed.</i> City-wide playgrounds improvements. Works at three sites across the city including Balfour Avenue Playground. Progressing.
Sporting Pitches Investment 24/25	<i>Stage 3 Committed.</i> Agreed at P&C Committee in June 2024. Works at four sites across the city including Strangford Avenue Playing Fields. Progressing.

Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Works progressing. To be completed by end of March 2025.
City Hall – Installation of Stained Glass Windows – LGBT and NHS	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Agreed at SP&R in January 2025. LGBT – design complete - fabrication and installation ongoing.
City Hall External Christmas Tree provision	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Options are currently being explored via the outline business case process and updates taken to the City Hall Installations Working Group.
Waterfront Hall Chiller Units	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Project now progressing to detailed design stage.
Waterfront Hall Smoke Curtains	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Specialist support related to the auditorium is in place with work underway which will inform the scope of works.
Palm House, Botanic Gardens	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This early stage Council heritage asset project is being considered as a candidate for partnership working with the Heritage Fund. Updated feasibility study is being developed to support the application process.
Belfast Bikes Expansion	The tender for a new provider/ operator has been concluded and contract will be signed in February.

Additional small scale local capital schemes

Due to securing UKSPF monies for a range of existing capital schemes, this has allowed the Council to free up resources for other activity. Council capital funds are therefore being redirected towards a range of additional small scale local capital schemes that still align with the prioritised objectives of the UKSPF as expected by the funder. In January, Members at SP&R Committee noted this update and that a further update will be brought to the AWGs for consideration. This activity can begin in this financial year and extend into 2025/26 to allow for development and completion of the projects. The proposal for these recouped capital monies is to target a range of small scale capital schemes focusing on sporting provision and access and inclusion. Projects within South area are shown below along with the projects that have a citywide focus:

<i>Additional local capital schemes - South</i>	
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	This facility can be used across the city. Specification developed and initial quotation received - next step is procurement.
Inclusive Makaton communications boards in playgrounds	Communication boards across council playgrounds.
Ormeau Park – Basketball court upgrade	Next step is to appoint the design team to take the scheme forward.
Strangford Playing Fields Enabling Works	Designs already in place for these works and can be taken forward.
Musgrave Park Sensory Garden upgrade	Design team to be appointed.

Members will also be aware that party briefings were held late last year on the Capital Programme and that a number of

further Capital Thematic workshops/briefings are to be arranged with Members to inform the longer term Capital Programme. As part of this exercise, a series of further improvement projects will come forward in conjunction with City & Neighbourhoods Services Department. Further, the Property & Projects Department continues to actively scan for potential additional sources of external funding that can be secured for capital proposals.

8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for several government departments on key capital investment programmes, namely Urban Villages (UV) from the Executive Office as well as a number of schemes with DfC and DfI. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to South Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

The table below is the status update on UV projects in South Belfast – note the UV programme has a defined South Belfast geography (Sandy Row; Donegall Pass and Markets).

UV – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
The Lockhouse - Gateway to the River / Walkway	Stalled on site due to NI Water issue. It may be necessary to redesign the scheme and return to Planning.
Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub	As above at BIF48. On site. Progressing well. Awaiting written confirmation from NI Water on an outstanding issue for this project and Coffee Culture.
Coffee Culture	As above at BIF46 and SOF02. Resolution of NI Water and Environmental Health issues required before appointment of contractor.
Donegall Pass Good Relations Hub	Business case stage.
Market Arches	As above at BIF07. Business case stage. TEO have confirmed £2m capital funding for this project under Urban Villages. Planning application submitted.
Redevelopment of former School of Music	As above at NRF. Business case stage. TEO have confirmed £2m capital funding for this project under Urban Villages.

PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan - Capital Project

Members are asked to note the update on PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan capital project in South Belfast. The Letter of Offer has been accepted and returned to SEUPB.

Project	Status and update
Annadale Open Space	Part of the overall Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. The council has secured circa £500,000 via the PEACEPLUS Local Action plan funding, for the Annadale Open Space project. This funding under the Local Action Plan is primarily for the development of a playpark and a small men's shed. The overall concept plan including a proposed five-a-side pitch will be part of the forthcoming engagement and consultation process. The Council will continue to explore funding opportunities towards the overall plan. Any development of the entire proposed masterplan would be subject to obtaining a full funding package.

DfC funded projects

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Communities in South Belfast.

DfC – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Holylands Alleygating and Cleansing Project	Project progressing. Link to the citywide Alleygating Phase 5 project.

DfI funded projects

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Infrastructure in South Belfast.

DfI – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Lagan Gateway	As above as BIF04. A Planning application was submitted for Phase 2 in May 2024. Detailed designs are ongoing. External match funding is in place from DfI. The contractor procurement exercise has commenced.
Covered cycle stands	<i>Via DfI Active Travel Enablers Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund</i> Funding was received for Phase 3; locations comprise Lagan Towpath Lockkeeper's Cottage, Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park, Finaghy Community Centre and P&R Blacks Road. Work is complete."

A Member sought clarity in relation to the Annadale Open Space project. The Neighbourhood Integration Manager explained that officers had received communication that, if relevant signage could be erected on the site to notify residents that the project was commencing, it was indicated that the community would consider a beacon in July 2025.

A further Member stated that it was disappointing that no progress had been made with any improvements to Finaghy Bridge, which had been allocated £30,000 under the Local Investment Fund in 2016.

Moved by Councillor Lyons,
Seconded by Councillor McKeown and

Resolved – that a letter is sent to the Minister for Infrastructure outlining the Working Group’s disappointment at the lack of progress with improvements to Finaghy Bridge and asking her to reconsider moving it up her Department’s priority list.

Additionally, the Working Group also:

- noted the Physical Programme update for South Belfast including the recently completed covered cycle stands;
- noted the announcement of Urban Villages Initiative capital funding from The Executive Office to projects in receipt of Council funding – BIF Market Arches £2million and NRF Former School of Music £2million, and;
- noted the status and next steps around the additional local capital schemes/ proposals as a consequence of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Chairperson