

Appendix I

City and Neighbourhood Services Department

Your Ref: TJR/VR

Our Ref: <>

Date:

Tim Robinson
Regional Director
AECOM
9th Floor, The Clarence West Building
2 Clarence St West
Belfast
BT2 7GP

Dear Mr Robinson

Ref: Strategic Plan for Greenways in Northern Ireland

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the process for the development of a Strategic Plan for Greenways with the aim of developing an integrated system of greenways for the benefit of future generations.

We would draw your attention to the following documents which provide context as to why we believe the introduction of Greenways across the City should be supported.

Belfast City Council Draft Corporate Plan 16-17

One of the Council's key priorities is to 'Improve the experience of living here [Belfast]'. Residents and stakeholders have told us that they want a Belfast were:

'People are physically active and have healthy, responsible attitudes and behaviours; and

People benefit from living in healthy neighbourhoods with access to open and green spaces and a range of leisure opportunities.'

Open Spaces Strategy

Our open spaces strategy 'Your City, Your Space' was published in 2005 and we will be updating it as part of the LDP process. The current strategy highlights the importance of Greenways and their benefits as access to walking, cycling and horse riding and opportunities for wildlife. It highlights that we will work with our partners to develop a network of community greenways and wildlife corridors across the city, linking existing areas of open space, landscape features and other public amenities where there is an identified benefit for local communities. As part of the development of the strategy a range of potential greenways across the Belfast Metropolitan Area was identified and these are attached as an appendix to this letter.

Belfast Active Travel Action Plan

The Belfast Strategic Partnership of which the Council is a member, published the Belfast Active Travel Action Plan 2014-2020. The action plan states 'Our vision is of a shared, connected city where people want to live, work and visit, a city for learning and commerce, a green, clean and healthy city. We want to see a city where walking and cycling are part of everyday living because they are convenient, attractive, enjoyable and safe, and are seen as fundamental to the development and success of the city and region.'

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To achieve the cultural shift required to increase cycling and walking the Partnership says it will ‘Develop a high quality network of dedicated walking and cycling routes, which connect people to places and services’.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

It should be noted that local planning powers were transferred to Council from the Department of Environment in April 2015. This means that Council have responsibility for reviewing the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and have commenced work on a new local development plan (LDP) for Belfast. The current plan BMAP designates community greenways “which seek to re-establish corridor links between the countryside and urban areas of open space such as parks, playing fields and natural areas to create a network of urban open spaces”. BMAP outlines the purpose of the community greenways is to “enable easy pedestrian and cycle movement between a network of outdoor recreational and amenity areas for the purpose of recreation, exercise and the enhancement of biodiversity”.

BMAP Designation BT 147 identifies the following Community Greenways in Belfast:

- BT 147/01 Carr’s Glen / Waterworks
- BT 147/02 Forth River / Glencairn / Ligoniel
- BT 147/03 Shore Road / Belfast Hills
- BT 147/04 LVRP / Bog Meadows / Whiterock Route
- BT 147/05 Ballymurphy Route
- BT 147/06 Comber Greenway (Belfast)
- BT 147/07 Odyssey / Tullycarnet Park / Ormeau Park
- BT 147/08 Odyssey / Stormont
- BT 147/09 North Belfast / South Belfast / LVRP

The community greenway polices and designations will be reviewed under the new local development plan process.

In addition the Council have undertaken the following activities in relation to the development of Greenways across the city.

Connswater Community Greenway

A key project under the Council’s Investment Programme is the £40 million Connswater Community Greenway. The greenway will reconnect the existing Connswater, Knock and Loop Rivers to create a 9km linear park, running from Belfast Lough to the Castlereagh Hills. It will bring a range of benefits to local residents, including:

- new leisure and recreation areas with more health and wellbeing options
- physical improvements, including 16km of new walking and cycling routes, 30 new or improved bridges, 5km of restored water courses, six tourism and heritage trails, several landmark public art pieces and a new civic square, located near the Holywood Arches
- better economic prospects, with the potential for creating jobs, tourism opportunities and other investment in the surrounding area.

Potential Greenway Projects

In early 2012 the Council submitted 2 bids for active travel projects to the Department for Regional Development. One of these bids was Community Active Travel Green Routes which sought to develop further the cycle and walking infrastructure in North and West Belfast utilising the Council’s parks, existing cycle infrastructure and residential streets. The aim of the project was to focus on the areas of the City where cycling provision was considered to be poor and to develop new and continuous routes linking such areas with the city centre.

The first route was to link the Falls Park to the Bog Meadows, then utilise the existing cycle path along the Westlink to the city centre using the proposed dedicated cycleway on the Grosvenor Road. The second route proposed was in North Belfast and would link the Waterworks Park to Alexandra Park and

then onwards through inner north Belfast to the National Cycle Network at Clarendon Dock through the city centre to the Lagan Towpath.

Although this bid was unsuccessful at that time, Council Officers have had initial discussions with representatives from Transport NI on how these proposals could be brought forward and the options for developing other routes across the City and we would be keen to continue these discussions.

Response to the NI Bicycle Strategy August 2014

Within our response to the NI Bicycle Strategy the Council highlighted the following in relation to the Greenways and we would ask that these comments are taken on board in the development of this plan.

- On the greenway routes, the Council recommends that consideration is given to the management of different user requirements from the commuter to leisure cyclist. The issue of user security on greenways routes should also be considered.
- Education and a code of conduct for users on greenways to ensure users respect each other would be beneficial.

Cycling Tourism

There is a growing interest in cycling tourism which has increased in profile since the Giro event in 2014. Consideration needs to be given to linking any Greenways outside Belfast with those in the city to provide an integrated network that encourages visitors to explore both the city and the surrounding region.

Concluding remarks

As the popularity of the Public Bike Hire scheme has demonstrated there is a growing interest in cycling and an ever increasing number of people using cycling as a means of transport. The 2011 Census also shows that Belfast has a higher level of walking journeys to work than other comparable cities across the UK. The creation of Greenways also helps the Council achieve some of our objectives around active living and health and wellbeing and for all these reasons we would support the creation of Greenways across the city.

I trust that this will assist you in the development of the Strategic Plan for Greenways and if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Rose Crozier
Assistant Director

Enc: List of potential greenways