



Subject:	Castle Place and Pedestrianisation - Update and Next Steps
Date:	5th June, 2019
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ update Members on the removal of the Castle Place Pop Up Park;▪ update Members on the emerging debate around city centre pedestrianisation and proposed next steps; and▪ highlight Notices of Motions brought forward by Members in relation to pedestrianisation; problem parking and traffic calming.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• note the update on Castle Place pop up park, and the public response to its subsequent removal;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the ambition of the City, as set out in the Belfast Agenda, to promote sustainable forms of transport including walking and cycling; • note the ambition of the Council, as set out in the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), to create a green, walkable, cyclable city centre; • note that the Department for Infrastructure is currently drafting the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Strategy, which will set the direction for transportation policy for the city, and will be a key stakeholder in bringing forward any discussions regarding the future use of the city infrastructure; • agree that the Council commission research that examines models of pedestrianisation and other initiatives in a way which facilitates the development of the city centre enabling both pedestrian enjoyment and public transport access; • note the ongoing engagement with wider civic and statutory partners to explore the issues of accessibility and use of the city centre; • note that options are currently being considered for the provision of further temporary pop up parks in the city centre in the short-term and at the same time consideration of options for permanent green space, with a further report brought back to Committee in the near future; and • agree to invite relevant officials from DfI to discuss current Notices of Motion raised by Council.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>In the aftermath of the fire at the Bank Buildings, Castle Junction and the bottom of Castle Street were closed to both vehicular and pedestrian traffic and a number of interventions took place in the city centre to address the drop in footfall, support the economic recovery, animate spaces and create a buzz in the lead up to Christmas. This work was brought forward under the Revitalisation Programme as part of a multi-agency approach, led by Council but involved a number of stakeholders including retailers; BCCM, Chamber, DfC, DfI, Visit Belfast, the BIDS, Cathedral Quarter Trust and other cultural organisations. These temporary measures were approved in the October SP&R Committee meeting and updated and approved through CG&R committee in subsequent meetings on 7th November and 5th December 2018 and 9th January, 13th February, 6th March and 3rd April 2019.</p>
3.2	<p>The Department for Infrastructure is the statutory authority for the provision of road infrastructure and public transportation. In order to facilitate the Revitalisation Programme the department granted licences to the Council to occupy specific areas on Donegall Place,</p>

Castle Place and Royal Avenue to install temporary environmental improvements, street furniture and attractions and to utilise the space for animation purposes. The licence for these areas were granted for a period from November 2018 until end of May 2019, or until such time as the cordon was sufficiently reduced to enable the reintroduction of the public transportation network. Pre-Christmas these areas were used to facilitate environmental improvements and family fun attractions including astro-turf and landscaping, seating, food markets, a snow slide and children's funfair area.

Castle Place Pop Up Park

3.3 Post-Christmas, as part of the Phase 2 Revitalisation programme the space at Castle Place was re-designed as a children's pop up play area that utilised the existing seating and planters. As part of the Phase 2 works, the park was brought forward on the basis that it was a temporary feature, in line with the timeline for the work on the Bank Buildings.

3.4 The design introduced elements of urban play, i.e. colourful soft mounds, animal sculptures and topiary, and a pirate boat. A bespoke sculpture of the iconic Bank Buildings clock was created for the site to give a focal point. The park was officially launched open on the 22nd March with a focus on providing fun and friendly space within the city centre and to test concepts for green urban play spaces within the city centre environment.

3.5 A programme of events, developed and delivered by Cathedral Quarter Trust, animated the area and drew significant crowds to activities such as music events, Festival of Fools, specific activities aimed at children and families, and provided a location for the Chinese New Year parade and three decorated 'Love Benches' for Valentines week.

3.6 As a part of the Festival of Fools programme a survey was carried out of 265 attendees at the performances in Castle Place and 72% ranked the space as excellent and 25% as good. There were also numerous articles in newspapers and local media: Belfast Telegraph, Daily Mirror, 4ni.co.uk, The Nolan Show and the Irish News. A BBC Newslines feature on the 1st May 2019 outlined the positive effects of the park on the city centre users but also highlighted that some traders, businesses and services raised some concerns around access to the city centre.

3.7 Following confirmation of an accelerated programme from Primark on the removal of the Castle Place structural cordon the park was removed in the week commencing 6th May to

	<p>enable the opening of the Castle Place junction to traffic in accordance with the licence granted by Dfl. This was also in line with the updates provided to CG&R Committee on the temporary nature of the interventions.</p>
3.8	<p>The removal of the pop-up park was complete by 10th May to enable Dfl to install the civil engineering works to facilitate the new junction arrangement through Castle Place. The new junction arrangement is dictated by the working space required to allow for the structural retention system to the historic Bank Buildings façade and to provide adequate working space for the remedial works to restore this landmark building. The new, constrained junction alignment was opened on 23rd May and provides for southbound bus and delivery access from Royal Avenue into Donegall Place and Castle Place, and normal service through Castle Place and Donegall Place. This junction arrangement will be in place until such time as the permanent structural framework can support the existing façade and the temporary container based façade retention can be removed. It should be noted that northbound services will continue to operate out of temporary bus stop locations on North Street.</p>
3.9	<p>The fire and cordon had a significant impact on businesses in the area, with 22 businesses having to close or relocate and others, especially to the north and west of the cordon, resulting in reduced trade and footfall in certain areas. Although the walkway through the cordon was opened on 3 December 2018, there was significant support from many businesses/retailers that the cordon should be reduced as soon as possible and vehicular access and bus services resumed.</p>
3.10	<p>Members should note that options are currently being considered for the provision of further temporary pop up parks in the city centre in the short-term whilst, at the same time, exploring options for more permanent green space and play space. A further report will be brought back to Committee on this in the near future.</p>
3.11	<p>Prior to the removal of the park Council held Facebook and Twitter polls that asked, “Is this the type of project you’d like more of in #YourBelfast?” There were 1000 responses on to the Twitter poll, 91% in favour and 9% not in favour. Council’s initial Tweet reached over 23,000 people and engaged with 1,000 users. The Facebook poll had 846 votes with 90% support and 10% negative, reached almost 17,000 people, and engaged just over 1,700 people (reactions, comments, shares, post clicks).</p>

3.12	<p>NI Greenways has also petitioned Belfast City Council, DfI and Translink through the Change.org website on the basis that ‘Belfast loves its new pedestrian core and play streets—DON’T hand it all back to traffic’ and to date there are over 3,400 signatures in support of the petition.</p> <p><u>Pedestrianisation</u></p>
3.13	<p>A Notice of Motion was brought to the Full Council meeting on the 21st of May by Councillor Lyons and seconded by Councillor McKeown and was referred, without discussion, to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. The Notice of Motion stated that:</p> <p><i>“This Council notes the challenges created by the fire in Bank Buildings and the ongoing Council led effort to stimulate economic activity in the area using street animation, pop up play parks and other incentives. The Council also notes that the redevelopment of our city centre as a shared and mixed use space offers traders, residents and visitors a range of economic, social and cultural opportunities. Noting the Department for Infrastructure’s public consultation on the future use of the streets around Castle Place and Donegall Place, the Council calls for the pedestrianisation of this area”</i></p>
3.14	<p>In response to the reopening of Castle Junction DfI released a press statement on 10th May stating that <i>“While the plan is to restore access now, the re-opening of Castle Place has started a wider debate about how we use our City Centre and make it an attractive, safe and accessible environment as possible for everyone”</i>. This direction is reflected in the Departments proposed Belfast Metropolitan Transport Strategy (BMTS) which will be progressed when Ministers are back in place. The BMTS and the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan will form the policy that could enable the modal shift and rebalancing of road space in the city centre. DfI also pointed out that the rerouting of metro services away from Castle Place created difficulties for some groups using public transport to access the city centre and created congestion in other parts of the city.</p>
3.15	<p>In its press statement DfI also advised that <i>“the Department plans to open discussions with wider partners to explore how we should best proceed to ensure Belfast City Centre thrives through a greater focus on place and public transport accessibility.”</i></p>

3.16	<p>As the statutory authority DfI will be critical to all discussions going forward to ensure alignment with the emerging work on the BMTS, and there has been ongoing engagement between the Council, DfI and DfC on this issue and how the city centre can best function for all users. This engagement will continue and widen out over the coming months with updates to be provided to Members through subsequent committee meetings.</p>
3.17	<p>It should be noted that pedestrianisation proposals for the city centre would have an impact on proposed and planned infrastructure projects for the city, including Belfast Rapid Transport Phase 2, which currently forms a part of the Belfast Region City Deal, and Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3. This scheme currently has planning permission, and DfC, supported by Council, have advocated that this scheme be prioritised for capital investment. The approved Streets Ahead 3 scheme allows for the provision of public transportation, blue badge holders and business deliveries (within a permitted delivery period of 6pm – 11am) only to access Royal Avenue.</p>
3.18	<p>A change in approach would result in the need for a re-design of the Streets Ahead scheme and a delay in the implementation of Streets Ahead Phase 3. Any re-design would require further engagement and consultation, and a re-application for planning permission. This would require agreement on the role and route for public transportation through the city centre.</p>
3.19	<p>This would also require input from DfI, retailers /businesses and their representative bodies, Translink, Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce and people who live, work and use Belfast. There is a recognition that the temporary arrangements following the Bank Buildings fire were unsuitable for many and access to buses and future designs and changes must take in account people with different needs. This would involve engagement with people with disabilities, including but not limited to wheelchair users, people with visual impairments, blind and partially sighted people.</p>
3.20	<p>The Belfast Agenda outlines the City's ambition to promote the development of sustainable transport. This includes promoting walking and cycling. The support, and concept, of pedestrianising areas in the city reflects one of the key policies in the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), which seeks to create a green, walkable, cycle city centre. It specifically references the lack of green space and tree-lined streets,</p>

and identifies the need for rebalancing the scales between tarmac and soft landscaping and recognises that there is no provision for children in the city centre.

3.21 In considering the effects and impacts of how pedestrianisation works, and how Belfast city centre could provide a modern and sustainable approach to infrastructure provision and connectivity, it is worth looking at measures and initiatives that make successful city centres elsewhere in the context of all users. This would also inform the debate on how Belfast could address some of the current issues, including ensuring a balance between business requirements, transportation, pedestrianisation and high-quality public space and taking into account the specific needs of different users of the city centre.

3.22 Much work has been done in other cities on the options around the practice of pedestrianisation. This has focused on the needs of both the pedestrian and other potential road users. Successful examples of pedestrianised or part pedestrianised streets have allowed various road users to share the same space in differing configurations. The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation has suggested looking at shared space under the following headings:

- ‘Pedestrian prioritised streets’ – where those on foot *‘feel that they can move freely anywhere, and where drivers should feel they are a guest’*.
- ‘Informal streets’ – where formal traffic controls such as signs, markings and signals are either absent or reduced. There is a footway and carriageway, *‘but the differentiation between them is typically less than in a conventional street’*.
- ‘Enhanced streets’ – where the public realm has improved and where restrictions on pedestrian movement – such as guardrails – have been removed, but where conventional traffic controls largely remain.

3.23 It is recommended the Council commission research which examines models of pedestrianisation and other initiatives in a way that facilitates the development of the city centre enabling both pedestrian enjoyment and public transport access. This is particularly appropriate when considering the existing and developing Belfast Rapid Transit – Glider.

Notices of Motion

3.24 Dfl will be presenting the City Growth and Regeneration Committee with the Annual Spring Report (date to be confirmed) and it is proposed that Committee invite the relevant officials from Dfl to address the following issues raised through Council by Members:

3.25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Notice of Motion raised by Council Lyons on the 21st May (as outlined above) on the pedestrianisation of the city centre and the proposed consultation to address the recent debates; ▪ The Notice of Motion raised by Councillor Dorrian on 1st February, 2019 on Problem Parking: <i>“This Council recognises the concerns of many communities across Belfast in respect to ‘problem parking’ in their neighbourhoods, primarily during day time work hours, and recognises the need for further substantive engagement to address and resolve this issue. To date, strategies and campaigns have had minimal impact in solving these communities’ difficulties. In mind of ambitious investment and expansion plans contained in the Belfast Agenda, the Council calls for immediate, co-ordinated action to improve parking measures and notes the lack of enforcement action to date with respect to bus and cycle lanes. This motion also reaffirms the Council’s commitment to full implementation of its car parking strategy, delivering proper parking infrastructure and taking appropriate action against those who show daily disregard for local communities.”</i> <i>After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the motion; and agreed that there would be engagement with those communities which bounded the city centre, in conjunction with the Department for Infrastructure, to discuss the issues within the motion”</i>
3.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Notion of Motion raised by Councillor McAteer on 4th February 2019 on Traffic Calming: <i>“This Council recognises that many of Belfast’s citizens are having their health and wellbeing severely impacted by living in streets which are clearly used as short cuts by heavy volumes of traffic travelling at speed, including HGV vehicles and buses. Currently, the Department for Infrastructure will carry out speed and traffic volume tests to ascertain if traffic calming measures are required. However, it does not also take into consideration the qualitative evidence of local residents and families in making decisions about traffic management. This Council calls on the Department for Infrastructure to broaden its criterion in relation to traffic management decisions in highly congested streets, to include an assessment of both empirical and local qualitative research, and further calls on the Council to request a cross party meeting to discuss reviewing the criteria.”</i>

4.0	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	There are no negative Equality, Good Relation or Rural Needs implications at this point. The Council's Equality and Diversity Officer will be consulted during any future consultation process and any proposed approach will be subject to the Council's screening requirements to ensure that Equality and Good Relations implications and Rural Needs are fully considered.
5.0	Resource Implications
5.1	The costs for Phase 1 and Phase 2 interventions were met by the City Revitalisation budget. The proposed research up to £30k will be covered from within current department budgets.
6.0	Documents Attached
	None