



Subject:	Update on Future City Centre Programme
Date:	12 th August 2020
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development
Contact Officer:	Richard Griffin, Development Manager

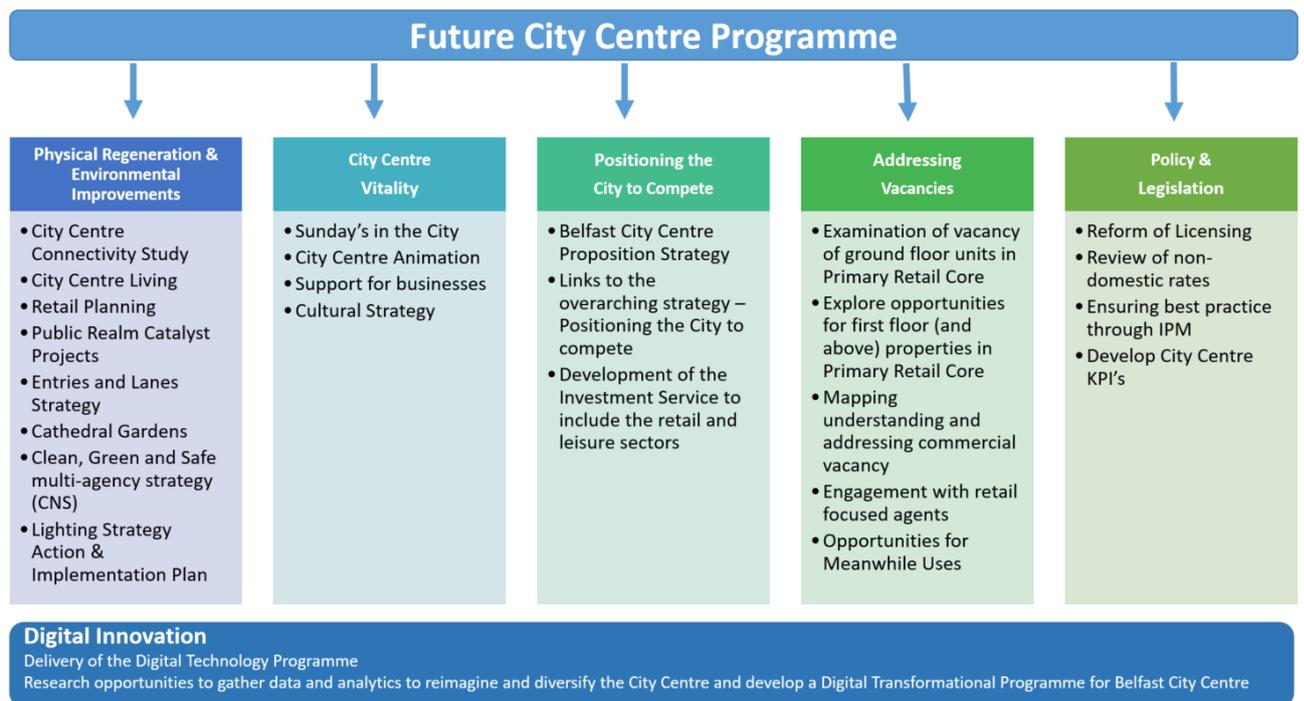
Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
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 or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of the report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Advise Members on the pending review of the Future City Centre Programme in light of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.- Update Members on the progression of a number of key projects within the 'Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements' work stream of the Future City Programme.- Note that scheme design options are being developed for the Frederick St /York St junction,- Update Members in relation to the adoption of the Inner North West Masterplan.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are requested to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Note that the Future City Centre Programme is being reviewed in light of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy, businesses and the City Centre, ii. Note the progress of key projects within the ‘Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements’ work stream of the Future City Centre Programme, notably the Entries and Lanes Initiative; the Public Realm Catalyst Projects; the pop-up park at Cathedral Gardens, and pilot lighting projects developed alongside the emerging Lighting Strategy for Belfast. iii. Note the development of design options, in collaboration with DfC and DfI, for the Frederick St /York St junction and adjacent streets, with proposals to be brought to a future meeting of this Committee. iv. Note that the DfC Minister has approved the adoption of the Inner North West Masterplan.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2020, Members received the Executive Summary of the Belfast City Centre Retail Analysis as developed by Pragma Consulting Limited. The Retail Analysis identified the challenges facing Belfast’s retail sector and provided recommendations on how best to address these challenges to ensure the City offers a dynamic and experiential destination.</p>
3.2	<p>At the same meeting, Members were also informed of the emerging ‘Future City Centre Programme’ (FCC), which builds on the key findings and recommendations outlined in the Pragma report. The FCC Programme has been developed in line with the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan, the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Cultural Strategy (A City Imagining), and has been informed by the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy.</p>
3.3	<p>While many of the priorities set out in the February report remain valid, there is a need to recast the focus of the Programme in the context of COVID-19 and the significant adverse impact on the City Centre. It is difficult to predict the future trends and challenges that will be faced as the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the City Centre emerges but it is critical that the FCC Programme remains agile in order to respond to rapidly shifting local, national and international factors that will continue to shape the role and performance of the City Centre.</p>

3.4 As previously reported to Committee, within the current FCC Programme, the key areas of work fall into five priority pillars and with a further cross-cutting theme of 'Digital Innovation' underpinning these pillars, as set out below. The project elements within each of the pillars are not exhaustive.



3.5 Members will be aware that the Council recently obtained partner membership with the Institute of Place Management (IPM). The IPM is an international professional body that supports those committed to developing, managing and making places better. IPM have been appointed by the UK Government to lead the High Streets Task Force in England and deliver support to local authorities and communities working to transform their high streets. They have also developed a COVID-19 Recovery Framework to guide recovery for town and city centres. Officers are currently working with IPM to arrange an independent review of the FCC Programme to ensure its focus is relevant, particularly during these challenging times, and to incorporate best practice and identify priority actions to help address the challenges of the City Centre.

3.6 'Addressing Vacancies' is one of the priority work streams within the FCC Programme and will be a key component of short and longer term recovery in light of growing pressures on numerous sectors occupying space within the City Centre. A number of recent high profile closure announcements including Easons and Tesco Metro highlight the challenges faced by city centre businesses including, but not limited to, the retail sector. In this context, the review of the FCC Programme will place particular emphasis on developing a range of options for intervention to tackle

the issue of vacant premises in the City Centre. Given the complex range of factors that can lead to vacancy ongoing engagement with a range of City Centre stakeholders will be particularly important.

3.7 **FCC Programme: Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements**

A number of physical projects are currently underway within the City Centre, and while delivery timescales have been impacted by Covid-19, significant progress has been made in recent months. Clearly these initiatives were developed pre-Covid, but are very much in line with short term reopening and longer term recovery measures aimed at improving sustainable movement and connectivity, enhancing streets and spaces, creating multi-functional places of interest, and growing the recreation function of the City Centre for residents and visitors. A brief progress update is noted below with images included at Appendix 1.

3.8 **Public Realm Catalyst Projects**

Historic developer contributions have been aligned with DfC funding to develop and deliver a programme of public realm improvements in 5 City Centre streets: Chichester St; Callendar St; College Ct; College St and College Avenue. The '5C's' scheme has an estimated value in the region of £2m, with c£750K from developer contributions and remainder DfC funding, and will include resurfacing, lighting, street furniture and soft landscaping. The design team have commenced engagement with key stakeholders, and will be facilitating further consultation with Elected Members in relation to emerging concept designs during August, prior to public consultation planned for September.

3.9 Other potential public realm catalyst projects are being developed in a number of locations, including the Fredrick Street /York Street Junction to address the lack of cycling and walking provision at this key node. Officers have met with DfC and DfI officials who have engaged consultants to develop high level design options for this junction. Further collaborative work between Belfast City Council, DfC and DfI will be required to fully develop design information for both the junction and adjacent streets, which will define the scope of improvements that can be delivered using historic developer contributions in this area, alongside potential DfC and DfI contributions. Details of this scheme will be brought to a future meeting of Committee.

3.10 **Belfast Entries & Lanes**

Work is continuing to transform a number of City Centre pedestrian links. Phase 1 of the Entries and Lanes scheme includes seven entries: Castle Arcade; Winecellar Entry; Crown Entry; Wilson's Court; Joy's Entry; Pottinger's Entry and Cole's Alley. The project involves general repair work, repainting, enhanced lighting, new signage, planting and bespoke artwork. Initial works commenced on-site in July (photographs attached at Appendix 1).

3.11	The scheme applies a bespoke place-making approach to transform each entry, making them more welcoming and vibrant as pedestrian links that provide enhanced permeability and connectivity, and act as places of interest and activity in their own right. There is also potential to accommodate the use of external space by businesses in line with wider recovery initiatives. Through increased footfall, a further aim is to reduce instances of anti-social behaviour.
3.12	Included at Appendix 1 are some of the painted murals installed to date. Also included is a visualisation of the scheme proposed in Castle Arcade. A hand painted mural will accompany a large lighting feature that is programmable with music for special events. Officers are working to secure permissions for these elements, with installation planned during early September. While the design response in each entry is bespoke and reflects unique spatial and historical characteristics, a consistent design ethos has been applied across the scheme as a whole, with unifying elements such as signage and interpretation.
3.13	Officers have received positive feedback in relation to Phase 1 and have received requests from property owners, business tenants and residents for similar work in additional entries and lanes. Early engagement has shown that there is significant potential to develop a further phase of work, and officers have developed design concepts and are exploring potential funding opportunities. A further report will be brought to Committee as the first phase of work concludes, setting out options for additional work pending any future funding opportunities.
3.14	<p><u>Cathedral Gardens Pop-Up Park</u></p> <p>Work commenced in March 2020 and while there have been programme delays due to Covid-19 restrictions, the expected completion date is now mid-August 2020. The project will deliver a multi-functional family-friendly space that is expected to be in place for approximately 2 years, while a permanent park and public realm scheme for Cathedral Gardens is developed.</p>
3.15	The scheme includes resurfacing and installation of play / parkour equipment, electricity points to facilitate events, and enhanced lighting. Fitting of artificial grass (at play equipment), painting of hard surfaces, additional street furniture installation and soft landscaping / planting will also be carried out during August. Appendix 1 includes photographs of work on site as of 27 th July.
3.16	<p><u>Lighting Strategy- Pilot Project</u></p> <p>Following on from earlier lighting pilot projects (a temporary neon artwork installation at Castle Arcade and a large scale Xmas 2019 animation (images at Appendix 1), a further lighting installation has been completed in Castle Street. This pilot consists of a series of interactive projector units, installed along a stretch of hoarding to create an image controlled and manipulated by pedestrian movement. The</p>

	<p>technology has been developed specifically for this project and is designed to provide reflected light while dealing with the issue of dead or closed frontages through visual and audio animation. The creative content for the projectors has been developed by a local visual artist and the two 'animations' are themed on the rivers that run beneath the city, and the starling murmurations that are seen over the River Lagan. Three units have been installed in Castle Street, with a further six to be located elsewhere in the city centre during September/October 2020. The units are a platform which can be used to upload new content in the future themed to city events, festivals etc. Images are included at Appendix 1.</p>
3.17	<p>The learnings from the pilot projects have shaped the considerations and guidance within 'Luminous City, A Lighting Strategy for Belfast', which is currently being drafted. An action plan detailing future short and longer term lighting projects is currently being developed and it is proposed that a full report, with presentation, will be brought to September's CGR Committee.</p>
3.18	<p><u>Masterplan Adoption</u></p> <p>Members will recall that the delivery of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy includes the development of a number of more detailed Masterplans to help support and shape city centre developments. The Inner North West (INW) Masterplan comprises a critical part of the city centre and is intended to guide the development of a mixed use, city centre neighbourhood including residential, commercial, retail and leisure functions, fully connected by high quality public realm. Following a 12 week public consultation the City Growth and Regeneration Committee approved the updated INW Masterplan in December 2018.</p>
3.19	<p>There is a significant amount of publicly owned land in the area which provides the opportunity for the public sector to influence and drive development in a co-ordinated manner. The Masterplan was produced in consultation with the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) with a view to close collaboration to support delivery. Council and DfC have subsequently worked jointly to develop the INW Action Plan which provides further detail on the initial proposals set out in the INW Masterplan, and identifies a number of short, medium and long term priorities and projects.</p>
3.20	<p>In June 2020, DfC confirmed Ministerial approval of the Inner Northwest Masterplan. This is a significant step in establishing a joint BCC/DfC delivery framework for the regeneration of this part of the City and provides certainty in terms of statutory commitment to the Masterplan, which supports associated work including the ongoing Strategic Site Assessments.</p>

3.21	<p><u>Finance & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Any costs associated with the development of the Future City Centre Programme and progression of design options for the Frederick St / York St junction will be brought forward within existing CRD budgets.</p>
3.22	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The Future City Centre Programme is a high level regeneration plan. The significant projects taken forward within the plan will be screened in their own right by the lead delivery division.</p> <p>All emerging work strands will be individually screened for Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents attached</p> <p>Appendix 1: FCC Programme: Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements - Progress Update Images</p>