

# Legal and Civic Services Department

## Democratic Services Section

Your reference:

Being dealt with by: Ms. E. McGoldrick

Our reference: EMCGDFC121020

Ext. 6307

Date: 12th October, 2020

Minister Ní Chuilín  
Minister for Communities  
Causeway Exchange  
1-7 Bedford Street  
BELFAST  
BT2 7EG  
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Dear Minister Ní Chuilín & Minister Mallon,

At its meeting in August, the Belfast City Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee agreed that the Council would write to you regarding emerging proposals within the Shankill Gateway Public Realm Scheme.

While Council is supportive of the investment to enhance this location and to improve connections to the City Centre for local communities, it is considered that there is an opportunity to bring greater benefit than the current scheme design proposes, particularly in terms of safe pedestrian and cycle movements, and reducing severance through this key junction.

The original designs as submitted for planning approval, following extensive community and statutory engagement, detailed alterations to the junction by removing unnecessary road infrastructure and removing additional pedestrian crossing locations while increasing pavement space and introducing additional green landscaping. This proposal would minimise the number of pedestrian crossings required to traverse the junction, and in doing so encourage safe and active travel, and reducing severance between local communities and the city centre.

This design was however superseded immediately prior to the granting of planning approval and without wider consultation, with a design that maintained the layout of the current junction, and in the view of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, does not address the issues presented by the hard infrastructure layout of the inner ring. We also fear that the approved design does not take into account our collective 'Bolder Vision for Belfast' which states that we should prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car, that Belfast should be providing lively, safe and

green streets, and that we should collectively be removing severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.

You will also be aware of ongoing discussions in respect of proposed improvements to the Great Patrick Street / Frederick St Junction. Council officers have engaged with Departmental officials from DfI and DfC in relation to this location in light of growing concerns regarding the adequacy of the junction to safely meet the active and sustainable travel needs of the existing communities and the growing student population in this area. Council remains concerned that the most recently shared layout proposal for this junction also falls short of the 'Bolder Vision' principles, and includes a number of engineering solutions that are considered inconsistent with modern urban design and road infrastructure provision, and the changing nature of this part of the City Centre. Given the pending opening date of the University of Ulster we believe that improvement works at this location, along with enhanced active travel provision to key public transport nodes, are critical to the successful migration of the Universities campus into the city centre, and importantly are critical to the successful implementation of the Universities transport and travel plans, designed to effect modal change and minimise the impact on local communities.

Similar to the situation at the Shankill Gateway location we believe that if we do not make the right choices now at these key locations then we will be missing a critical opportunity to address the imbalance and negative consequences of our road dominated landscape. We believe that improvements can be made to both of these schemes that will greatly contribute to reducing the impact of the hard infrastructure of the Inner Ring by providing improved key connectors to local communities and prioritising active and sustainable travel, and, in addition, providing a much greater contribution to the place-making potential of the local area, while providing adequate provision for the transportation network.

We also believe that the co-client and co-design work carried out by officials from the DfI and the DfC, and officers from Belfast City Council provided an exemplar of how our agencies can collectively work together to effect positive change for the future landscape of our city, for our residents and for our economy.

In this context the City Growth and Regeneration Committee asks the Minister for Infrastructure and the Minister for Communities to review the emerging designs at these two locations through the lens of our shared Bolder Vision for Belfast, and to consider how the York Street / Fredrick St Junction can be delivered at pace to meet the needs of the new University campus and surrounding communities. We would also ask the Ministers to consider how the co-design collaboration of the Bolder Vision can be embedded into our collective organisations to enable a holistic and effective delivery of all of our infrastructure and environmental projects going forward.

I look forward to receiving your comments on the issues which I have raised.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eilish McGoldrick', written in a cursive style.

Eilish McGoldrick  
Democratic Services Officer

*Cc: Minister N. Mallon*

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