



<b>Subject:</b>	Response from the Minister for Infrastructure re Access to Belfast Hills
<b>Date:</b>	9th March, 2021
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Sara Steele, Democratic Services Officer
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sara Steele, Democratic Services Officer

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	To consider a response from the Minister for Infrastructure in relation to the motion passed by the Council to create better access to the Belfast Hills.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the response.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
	<b><u>Key Issues</u></b>
3.1	The Committee will recall that at its meeting on 12th January it was agreed that the Council write to the Department for Infrastructure regarding the motion passed by Council to create better access to the Belfast Hills which had been proposed by Councillor Donnelly and seconded by Councillor Garrett.

3.2 **Motion – Creating Better Access into the Hills**

3.3 *“As a City, one of Belfast’s best natural attributes is its surrounding hills and landscape. The Cavehill and Divis mountains offer spectacular views of the city that visitors and Belfast residents flock to all year around to enjoy.*

*More so now than ever before, locations like Divis mountain offers space for outdoor recreation and essential health and well-being. As a city council we must work with partners to develop a plan which is respectful of the natural environment and surrounding area but also supports the increased demand for parking and user facilities at Divis Mountain.*

*Therefore, we call on this Council, working alongside partners in the Department of Infrastructure, The National Trust and the Belfast Hills Partnership, to develop and implement a resourced plan for enhanced user facilities, including parking at the Divis Mountain walk site on Divis Road, Hannahstown, as well as cyclist parking and to explore the creation of further access points into the hills from different locations across the city which in itself will take pressure of the car park and allow residents to access the hills on foot from their neighbouring communities.”*

3.4 A response has now been received from Minister Mallon, a copy of which is attached.

3.5 The Minister makes it clear that she is keen on improving access for walking and cycling and encouraging people to move away from driving. She stated that she is aware of the popularity of The Belfast Hills for many but unfortunately most people arrive there by car. She would like to see better active travel access to this destination, particularly for the benefit of the 33% of Belfast residents who do not have access to a car.

3.6 The Minister believes that greenways and similar community paths will ultimately create public spaces that will enhance quality of life and leave an enduring legacy to be enjoyed by future generations. She notes that the actual development of greenway projects is, in general terms, the responsibility of local Councils rather than the Department but the Department is keen to work closely with local Councils and other stakeholders to support the development of active travel routes.

3.7 The Minister notes that her Department has committed £20 million for blue / green infrastructure and to working with Councils and other partners in identifying and delivering

	<p>active travel and greenway projects and advises that £750,000 from that fund has already been allocated for the development of the Forth Meadow Community greenway, which will provide part of an important active travel link to the Belfast hills.</p>
3.8	<p>She further advised that, in addition, in January, the Walking and Cycling Champion, Liz Loughran, had held initial discussions involving the National Trust and Belfast City Council regarding the potential for developing better walking and cycling access to this area, particularly for the benefit of the nearby communities of North and West Belfast.</p>
3.9	<p>She advised that the parking situation on the Divis Road highlights the importance of developing better ways of travelling to the Belfast Hills. In the meantime the Department would continue to work with the National Trust and other partners to try to address the congestion difficulties.</p>
3.10	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.11	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Copy of response from the Minister for Infrastructure.</p>