



Subject:	Connectivity & Active Travel Update	
Date:	11 th August 2021	
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development	
Contact Officer:	Richard Griffin, Development Manager Callie Persic, Connectivity Programme Lead	

Restricted Reports		
Is this report restricted?	Yes No	\checkmark
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?		
After Committee Decision		
After Council Decision		
Some time in the future		
Never		

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes 🗹 No

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To update Members on work regarding connectivity and active travel, including the City
	Centre Connectivity Study, and a number of emerging public realm / infrastructure projects,
	the design and delivery of which will be informed by the principles established by 'A Bolder
	Vision'.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the
	Council decision of 4 th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note:

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	• The update on the Connectivity Study: A Bolder Vision, including the pending elected representatives' workshop on the 23 rd August and planned Public Consultation;		
	The updates on individual public realm projects including the 5Cs, and Belfast Streets		
	Ahead phases 3 and 5;		
	• The proposed amendments to the scope of the '5Cs' public realm scheme, including		
	the removal of College Avenue, which will now be delivered through Belfast Streets		
	Ahead Phase 5;		
	The update regarding DfC plans for carriageway resurfacing at Queens Square;		
	The update on the Junctions Working Group;		
	• The update on the Belfast THRIVES initiative, a pilot partnership to inform how		
	Belfast's public spaces can more effectively and inclusively contribute to the liveability		
	of the city and the wellbeing of its inhabitants;		
	The update regarding the BCC bid to the UK Community Renewal Fund.		
3.0	Main report		
	Background		
3.1	Connectivity is at the core of the Belfast Agenda. The Belfast Agenda seeks to develop a		
	city that is vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable.		
3.2	Sustainable connectivity and active travel requires a collaborative and holistic approach		
0.2	across a number of city stakeholders and partners to deliver strategic connections and		
	improved access between, and into local communities and areas. At the April meeting of		
	the CG&R Committee members requested a comprehensive report should be brought back		
	to the Committee on Green and Blue Infrastructure / Active Travel related initiatives across		
	the city along with Council proposals in relation to potential funding mechanisms. This is		
	reflected in the prioritisation of the CG&R Committee Plan as agreed on the 9th June 2021		
	where one of the key pillars includes 'Working with stakeholders to bring forward improved,		
	sustainable connectivity and active travel across the city'.		
3.3	The Community Planning Partnership Boards, as reported in May and June 2021, were		
	established to translate the Belfast Agenda into action and to mobilise city partners to		
	support the delivery and have clear synergies with the work of the CG&R Committee. The		
	recently re-configured City Development Board has agreed the establishment of Active		
	Travel and Connectivity as one of the four key pillars of work for the Board. The City		
	Development Board, and as agreed by this Committee, recognises there is a need to focus		
	on joint objectives and a targeted delivery approach across partners to accelerate		
	opportunities to enhance accessibility, connectivity and active travel across the city. This is		

not only important to connect people to employment opportunities and investment hubs, but is important from a climate resilience perspective and will also create healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environments that promote health and emotional wellbeing

- 3.4 The Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy identifies creating a green, walkable, cyclable centre and connecting to the city around as two of the eight key principles, recognising that active travel and connectivity are closely aligned to regeneration and development. In our ambition to attract 66,000 new residents to the city it is critical that connectivity considerations and alternative travel options can align with these growth ambitions. For example, the development of housing close to existing services may mean shorter, more localised journeys, allowing higher levels of cycling and walking or public transport, therefore reducing dependence upon the car and mitigating negative impacts such as traffic congestion and air pollution.
- 3.5 Officers across the Council departments are working at pace to bring forward projects and initiatives that will help to achieve these goals, as well as assisting our statutory and city partners to enhance and further develop our collective ambitions.
- While this report focuses on certain areas related to connectivity City Regeneration &
 Development Officers are working in conjunction with DfI, DfC, Physical Programmes,
 C&NS and Resilience to provide a strategic overview of our collective projects to focus the
 city's strategic priorities, opportunities, issues and funding options and an update will
 subsequently be provided to this Committee in the near future.

A Bolder Vision for Belfast

- 3.7 As reported previously, A Bolder Vison for Belfast was agreed by Council and endorsed by the DfC and DfI Ministers and is underpinned by four Visioning Principles:
 - Creating a healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environment that promotes well-being for all, inclusive growth and innovation;
 - Fundamentally changing the centre of Belfast to prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car;
 - Providing lively, safe, and green streets linking inclusive shared spaces to promote resilience and enhance our built heritage;
 - Removing **severance and barriers** to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.

- 3.8 The Bolder Vision represents the building blocks that to be considered within public realm, connectivity and open space investments within the city centre and key connectors to surrounding communities, influencing the development of public and private regeneration developments to ensure that the city centre is developed with people at the heart of design, that the city is attractive to investment, thrives economically, is fit to meet our climate agenda and is vibrant and welcoming to all.
- 3.9 To this end a number of public realm and junction improvement projects are currently progressing through design development within and at the edges of the city centre, and officers are working with DfC and Dfl to ensure the agreed principles of '*A Bolder Vision*' are directly influencing these schemes so they release maximum benefit for the city centre and surrounding communities. These principles have also informed the current place-shaping revitalisation work referred to in a separate report. Given the close alignment between the Bolder Vision and Connectivity and Active Travel update a detailed paper on the approach to the City Centre Open Spaces is included in a separate paper to this Committee meeting.

Detail

A Bolder Vision: City Centre Connectivity Study

- 3.10 As reported to this Committee on 9 June 2021, a multi-disciplinary team led by Jacobs has been appointed to progress with Phases 2 and 3 of the joint BCC/DfI/DfC Bolder Vision Connectivity Study for Belfast. Members were advised that this work would include codesign workshops, the development of scenarios and interventions and the completion of a draft Strategy for public consultation in the autumn of 2021. The Bolder Vision approach involves a fundamental rethink of how streets and places are used to make them attractive, inclusive, accessible, healthy, and vibrant places.
- 3.11 Phase 2 of the City Centre Connectivity Study will provide scenarios and projects to inform the future of the city centre by shaping large infrastructure projects and developing supporting or enabling schemes and initiatives. As part of a co-design approach, five workshops took place in June with a range of community, voluntary, statutory and private sector stakeholders.
- 3.12 A cross-sector Visioning Workshop was held on 25 June, which included Vienna's former Vice Mayor who successfully implemented a transformation agenda comprising numerous innovative projects, as a keynote speaker. The workshop also considered what had

changed since the completion of 'A Bolder Vision', and stimulated discussion on further "What Ifs", for the city centre.

- 3.13 Subsequently, four thematic workshops took place the following week covering Community, Heritage & Culture; Infrastructure, Energy and Environment; Economic Recovery, Development & Tourism, and Connectivity (Transport and Digital). This early engagement with a range of stakeholders provided a chance to explore opportunities and challenges and consider interventions to support positive transformation of the city centre.
- 3.14 As a continuation of the co-design process, a workshop with elected representatives including Councillors, MLAs and MPs is anticipated to take place on the 23rd August and will provide an opportunity to feed into the emerging scenarios, in advance of a 12 week public consultation that is due to commence on 27 September 2021 with a report to this Committee prior to launching the Consultation.
- 3.15 The public consultation document will include scenarios based on emerging infrastructure projects and development proposals and potential supporting or enabling projects to demonstrate concepts or test approaches that will enable the transformational changes required to create a connected and animated city core. Some of these could be delivered by partners such as the city stakeholders, for example the BIDs (subject to funding) whereas others may require a collaborative approach, particularly any significant proposals of a transformational nature and will be set out as short, medium and longer term projects and initiatives.
- 3.16 Following the public consultation, Phase 3 of the Connectivity Study will consist of the development of a Draft Strategy and Delivery Plan, Strategic Outline Business Case, and Monitoring Strategy. Critically, funding and commitment by central government agencies will be key to delivery going forward and through the City Development Board and other city fora we must ensure that these remain within the Programme for Government, Departmental and Council spending priorities. This includes the recent Reset for Growth Paper as published by the Belfast Innovation and Inclusive Growth recommendation inclusion of the Bolder Vision Strategy supported by a three year joint funding programme.

Public Realm Projects

3.17 A number of public realm projects are currently in development and officers have been working closely with Dfl, DfC and other stakeholders to embed the principles of 'A Bolder

Vision' during design development, so that these schemes can begin to effect positive change in a number of parts of the city.

The 5Cs

- 3.18 The CG&R and SP&R Committees approved the development of the 5Cs 'catalyst' Public Realm Project utilising existing developer contributions to support delivery of public realm improvements in Chichester Street, Callender Street, College Street, College Court and College Avenue. Delivered by DfC, the 5C's project was originally estimated to have a value in the region of £1.9m-£2m, with £765k provided through secured Developer Contributions and the remainder to be funded by DfC.
- 3.19 An integrated design team (IDT) has been leading the design development process, with a Council Stakeholder and Engagement Group providing cross-Departmental input to the project, while workshops have been facilitated for elected members. The IDT has also engaged with key stakeholders (including DfI, city centre business representatives and residents) in relation to emerging design concepts, before running a public consultation on initial concept designs from 30 September to 22 December 2020.
- 3.20 In response to feedback received during the public consultation period the IDT made a number of amendments to the design- including incorporating cycle infrastructure on Chichester Street, and rationalising parking / loading bays across the scheme to maximise pedestrian space.
- 3.21 Further stakeholder workshops were then undertaken which captured strong views regarding the potential to stop-up both Upper Arthur St and Montgomery St to create additional pedestrian and business spill-out space, while also enabling provision of a segregated cycle lane along Chichester St. The project area has been extended to include these areas which can bring significant value to the project, in line with '*A Bolder Vision*'.
- 3.22 The recently revised project cost based on revised concept designs is now c£3.5m, £1.5m over the original budget. This significant rise in costs prompted a Value Engineering exercise which identified a number of amendments, while seeking to retain an emphasis on design quality. The most significant amendment is the proposed removal of College Avenue from the scope, with DfC confirming this section would then be delivered as part of Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5.

3.23	Other amendments to the scheme include:
	Removal of Seymour Street from the project area- not originally included in the scope
	and minimal impact given very limited pedestrian usage.
	Increasing soft landscaping on Upper Arthur Street and Montgomery Street (from
	Chichester Street to Arthur Lane).
	Removal of Street lighting from the project scope- Dfl and DfC are working to agree
	separate delivery of upgraded street lighting (in line with Belfast Streets Ahead palette)
	throughout the 5Cs project area using alternative funding.
3.24	Officers have reviewed the proposed amendments to the scheme relative to the terms of
	the developer agreements that have been committed to the project and are content these
	are unaffected by the changes. As noted above, the removal of College Avenue is the most
	significant change to the scope, but BSA5 represents an opportunity to deliver this section
	out with the 5Cs scheme. Further detail on BSA5 is included below.
3.25	An initial assessment indicates these amendments would yield cost savings that bring the
	total budget down to £2.1m, with Council's financial contribution unchanged. The IDT are
	preparing a revised concept design on this basis, which will be shared with Members when
	available, and detailed drawings will also be shared in advance of a planning application
	being submitted.
3.26	Further stakeholder engagement is also planned in order to provide clarity regarding scope
	and design of the scheme.
	Belfast Streets Ahead 3
3.27	The Belfast Streets Ahead Board is overseen by the BSA Programme Board, a cross-
	department board consisting of DfI, DfC, DoF and Council Officers to ensure adequate
	governance and alignment across our collective objectives. BSA 3 focuses on the areas of
	Royal Avenue, York Street, Frederick Street and the area around St Anne's Cathedral. The
	current and anticipated development of the northern end of the city centre including the
	Ulster University development and other private sector development has made this a
	priority area for investment by the Department, to help to reverse economic, social and
	physical decline in this part of the city.
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3.28	BSA 3 had been on hold since August 2017 due to funding for the construction works not
	being available. The Project has now recommenced.

3.29 As the scheme designs were developed in 2014-2015 the Design Team are now carrying out a review of the project plans to take account of changes to policies, developments in the area, changes emerging as a result of the Belfast City Centre Connectivity Study (Bolder Vision), COVID 19 pandemic, etc. 3.30 DfC has advised that the following are indicative key milestones for the BSA 3 project: Start Date End Date Activity Design Revision (including stakeholder August 2021 December 2021 engagement, planning, consultation etc.) **Contractor Procurement & Pre-construction** December 2022 January 2022 Site works July 2025 January 2023 **Belfast Streets Ahead 5** 3.31 BSA 5 comprises Great Victoria Street, Shaftesbury Square, Dublin Road, Bedford Street, Blackstaff Square, and surrounding streets as well as the Thomas Thompson Memorial Fountain. The project has been accelerated to complement the planned Belfast Transport Hub and surrounding Weaver's Cross development. 3.32 McAdam Design were appointed to lead the Integrated Design Team for BSA 5 in February 2021, with OPEN Landscape Architects acting as Lead Designer. OPEN Landscape Architects are also part of the Jacobs team leading the second stage of the Bolder Vision Connectivity Study, and both teams have met with Council officers to ensure alignment of objectives and ambition, and will continue to work closely with both Dfl and the Council to ensure that the designs take account of the visioning principles from the shared Bolder Vision that is currently underway. The scheme designs will also take account of emerging proposals for the next phase of Dfl's Belfast Rapid Transit programme which is likely to include part of the BSA 5 area. 3.33 Initial work will involve producing a range of design options, which will be refined to identify a preferred option, for which the Department will seek planning approval. As affordability will be a key consideration, costs will be provided for the range of options developed and this will help inform the decision about which option is selected as the preferred one. 3.34 The design team will be engaging with stakeholders to ensure that the scheme designs create a healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environment that supports the local communities, inclusive economic growth and innovation.

3.35 DfC have provided the following indicative key milestor	ones for the BSA 5 project:
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Activity	Start Date	End Date
Design Development (including public	August 2021	October 2022
consultation)		
Planning	November 2022	May 2023
Contractor Procurement	June 2023	December 2023
Site works	March 2024	September 2026

3.36 There are a number of timebound 'historic' developer contributions within the BSA 5 area, including in the vicinity of Blackstaff Square, and officers are continuing to explore delivery options with DfC to satisfy the terms of the agreements and deliver on regeneration potential in the area. The commitment of contributions will be reported through Strategic Policy & Resources Committee, with detail on proposals also to be brought to CGR

Queens Square

- 3.37 At the 6th November 2019 meeting of City Growth & Regeneration Committee, Members agreed 'that officers raise with the Department for Communities the Committee's concerns around its proposal to replace the granite carriageway in Queen's Square with a standard road construction, in the context of the transfer of assets, pedestrianisation and the wider connectivity study'.
- 3.38 Officers have discussed the matter with DfC, and while minor revisions have been made, the most recent drawings submitted to Planning continue to propose the replacement of the existing granite carriageway with a standard road construction. Members may wish to note that Historic Environment Division had expressed concerns regarding the original proposal in terms of detrimental impact on listed buildings and the Conservation Area, but following engagement with the applicant, and subject to conditions, have latterly noted the proposal to be acceptable. The application has yet to be determined, with a number of consultation responses currently outstanding.

Junctions Working Group

3.39 In October 2020 a Junctions Working Group was established with a view to developing proposals for a number of key junctions that fully reflect the shared commitment set out in '*A Bolder Vision*'. This Group is chaired by DfC and comprises representatives from Dfl,

- 3.40 Belfast City Council, Ulster University, Clifton House (North Belfast Heritage Cluster) and more recently IMTAC, PSNI and Translink.
- 3.41 The work of the group has focused on:
 - <u>Clifton Gateway</u>- the group has reviewed the previously developed designs with comments focused on reducing severance, reallocating space for pedestrians and cyclists, and introducing soft landscaping. Proposed amendments currently under review include the reduction of traffic lanes along Carrick Hill, the introduction of cycle lanes along North Queen St, Frederick St and Donegall St, and the removal of the left turn from Donegall St to Carrick Hill, although these decisions will be heavily influenced by the outcome of the BRT2 design development which opened to consultation on the 26th July 2021.
 - <u>Shankill Gateway</u>- full planning approval was granted for the scheme in July 2020 although Members of the CG&R Committee subsequently expressed concern regarding the approved scheme in a letter to the DfC and DfI Minister. In response to this the Junctions Working Group is currently reviewing the designs and officers expect to bring the emerging designs into Committee in the near future.
 - Great Patrick Street / Frederick Street / York Street Junction- informed by the views of • the Group, Dfl have developed a number of options for this key junction within the University Quarter. With the pending relocation of the University of Ulster and the influx of students there is a criticality to ensuring improvements are made in this area. A number of options have been shortlisted that propose amendments including removal of left turn slips, introduction of dedicated cycle lanes, reduction in the number of traffic lanes and the introduction of single-phase pedestrian crossings. An example of one of the options is provided in Appendix 1 with Dfl undertaking to carry out modelling so as to identify a preferred option which can then be costed and a delivery route agreed, informed by the junction's location within the BSA 3 project area. Members will be aware that the programming and delivery of this scheme is critical to support the integration of the student population, facilitate safe pedestrian and cycle movement, and to capitalise on a generational opportunity to promote and enable modal shift. This has been conveyed to the Minister in letters from this Committee and in direct conversations with the Dfl Permanent Secretary. Updates will be provided to this Committee as designs and delivery mechanisms are developed.

3.42 Members will also be aware that Council agreed S76 contributions from developers of a number of student accommodation blocks adjacent to the junction, some of which could be

directed towards the junction improvement scheme. At the October 2019 meeting of this committee, approval was granted to allocate '£100k of funding towards design and development of public realm and environmental improvement works', in a number of areas of the city including Greater Clarendon. Officers are working to develop a public realm scheme within Little York St / Little Patrick St which will further utilise these contributions to deliver local placemaking benefit. City Regeneration & Development officers are working with Physical Programmes to develop designs for this scheme and will report back to this Committee at a future date.

Belfast THRIVES (Transformative Health & Regeneration Initiatives for Vibrancy, Equality and Sustainability)

- 3.43 Belfast THRI(VES) is a pilot partnership between Ulster University [Urban Research Lab] and Belfast City Council, to inform how Belfast's public spaces can more effectively and inclusively contribute to the liveability of the city and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. The project is funded through Belfast City Council via the Department for Communities Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme, and the Department for Infrastructure. This practical research project will support BCC and Dfl to develop new urban-health focused collaborative working practices across civic and private sectors, and with the public. The project will draw lessons from current processes to transform Belfast's public spaces in line with '*A Bolder Vision*', and in response to immediate health and socio-economic threats, and will evaluate public-private sector attitudes to the changing City Centre, including proposed building and infrastructure projects.
- 3.44 The project recognises that COVID recovery projects are emerging at pace with little to no time or resources put in place to evaluate their effectiveness against agreed criteria and datasets, or through user engagement to collect feedback and identify improvements for future schemes. In developing this partnership, the project will establish a base reference model that will reflect on how we have addressed the immediate needs of the pandemic, while also laying the groundwork from which to prepare for future environmental stressors. It is anticipated that this short-term project will lead to longer term benefits and potentially larger scale projects to monitor and evaluate interventions alongside socio-economic factors, capturing new primary data by implementing and testing new proposals.
- 3.45 As part of the project, a free online webinar took place on the 16th of June that featured four international speakers, and an online Symposium on 17th June with Belfast-focused panel discussions and next generation planning researchers. The events were very well

received and provided a platform for a range of Belfast views to come forward and included input from AGENI, Belfast Healthy Cities, Belfast Charitable Society, Clifton House, Bryson CARE, Migrant Help, Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee, NI Women's European Platform, Belfast Chamber, Linen Quarter BIDs, Ulster University Youth Forum, Belfast City Centre Management, among others, see <u>Belfast THRI(VES) | ND Events</u>

3.46 As part of the project, UU will conduct four semi-structured focus group sessions with city centre business reps and BIDs, NI-UK professional bodies and expert organisations, Government and Council officers, NI based community and voluntary organisations. They will also be launching a survey to capture public views on how Belfast's public spaces can more effectively and inclusively contribute to the liveability of the city and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. There are a number of emerging opportunities for international dissemination of the findings and the final report will be available late 2021.

UK Community Renewal Funding

- 3.47 In terms of the wider connectivity context, a bid for revenue funding under the UK Community Renewal Fund has been made to carry out a city-wide feasibility study that would examine gaps in the provision active travel infrastructure including greenway and urban active connectivity routes and enabling infrastructure; explore opportunities to maximise social, economic and environmental outcomes from the range of connectivity and active travel ideas; assess proposals and options that would then form an overarching delivery plan that is feasible, deliverable and supported by partners. The plan would also inform key criteria for phasing delivery options for the emerging proposals to inform our capital requirements.
- 3.48 This work could provide an opportunity for Belfast to be a unique exemplar in terms of accessibility and connectivity, with the ability to access all areas of the city in an active and sustainable way. This links with aspirations which have already been put forward by Members including access to the hills, active travel and biodiversity gain, and links with other initiatives underway including Belfast Urban Greenway (BUG), BOSS (Belfast Open Spaces Strategy). An update on this bid was also reported to SPR 18 June as part of Physical Programmes Report.
- 3.49 The output of the study would also help prepare for and inform future capital funding bids and influence partnership delivery. At the time of writing this report, the outcome of the bid is expected to be communicated from late July onwards. In addition, as agreed in the

	recently approved CGR Committee Plan for 2021/22 and as a priority pillar of the City	
	Development Board, a report will be brought to Committee on the overall Connectivity and	
	Active Travel related projects/initiatives that Council is involved in. Furthermore, we will	
	consider and identify key areas of collaboration with external partners to support effective	
	delivery and maximise outcomes, particularly via the Community Planning Partnership City	
	Development Board.	
3.50	0 Financial & Resource Implications	
	None associated with this report.	
3.51	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment	
	None associated with the report- EQIA Screening has been undertaken by DfC for the 5Cs	
	project which Council are part funding. Project specific assessments will be undertaken by	
	the relevant lead delivery body at the appropriate stage of the development process.	
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached	
	Appendix 1- Great Patrick Street Junction Redesign Option	