

A Bolder Vision for Belfast

Response from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern
Ireland

January
2022

‘A Bolder Vision for Belfast’ sets out an ambitious set of actions and projects to drive economic growth, foster vibrant city centre living, create streets and spaces that will improve the health and wellbeing for all, and enhance our pride in Belfast City Centre.

This consultation survey will help to inform the next phase by identifying the key priorities of the people who live, work, visit or invest in our city centre. Your feedback will help inform Belfast City Council, the Department for Infrastructure, and the Department for Communities in taking forward this vital work whilst ensuring a joined-up approach across planning, transport, and regeneration.

ABOUT YOU

It is useful for us to understand who has taken part in the consultation. We would be grateful if you could please provide the following details.

1. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Individual | |
| Organisation | Yes |

2. Which of the following best describes you?

Please tick more than one if appropriate.

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Elected representative | |
| Commuter | |
| Visitor | |
| Belfast Resident | |
| Other (please specify) | Non-Departmental Government Body |

3. What is the main purpose of the trips you make most frequently to Belfast city centre? Please choose an option

| | |
|---|--|
| Work | |
| Education | |
| Shopping | |
| Visiting friends or family | |
| Hospitality e.g., restaurants, cafes, bars | |
| Tourism / visitor attractions | |
| Visiting other institutions (libraries, cultural venues etc.) | |
| Leisure / play | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Professional services (bank, accountant, solicitor etc.) | |
| Other (please specify) | NA- COPNI represents members of the public that will undertake all of the above. |

4. How frequently do you currently visit Belfast city centre?

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Daily | |
| At least once a week | |
| At least once a fortnight | |
| At least once a month | |
| At least once a year | |
| Less often | |
| Never | |

5. Thinking ahead, over the next 12 months, are you more or less likely to visit Belfast city centre?

| | |
|----------------|--|
| More likely | |
| Less likely | |
| About the same | |

6. How do you usually travel to Belfast City Centre?

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Walk | |
| Glider/ bus | |
| Cycle | |
| Car | |
| train | |
| Other (please specify) | |

Key Move 1: Create a Civic Spine with a Focus on People

We are proposing to establish a clearly defined and recognisable strategic north-south Civic Spine, connecting the Ulster University and York Street Interchange through the heart of the city to Queens University via Botanic Avenue.

The Civic Spine would be reconfigured to prioritise space for people and support effective access by public transport while enabling the introduction of green spaces for a diverse, inclusive, future-proofed, and vibrant city centre.

Strengthening existing projects:

- Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2
- York Street Interchange
- Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3 & 5
- Belfast Transport Hub
- Five Cs Project
- Belfast Destination Hub



7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Key Move 1?

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | X |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly disagree | |

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential short-term interventions which supports the key move? Please select from one of the options below.

Definitely agree | somewhat agree | neither agree nor disagree | somewhat disagree | definitely disagree

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. Redesign the Great Patrick Street junction with a people first approach, supporting improved safety, walking, wheeling, and cycling | Somewhat agree. |
| 2. Identify priority streets wherein standard on-street parking is removed and re-allocated for spaces for people, including linear pocket parks, public realm, retail, and pop-up events | Somewhat agree. |
| 3. Review location and provision of on-street parking for blue badge provision, coach parking and better streets and places for people | Strongly agree. |
| 4. Develop Franklin Street to Amelia Street as a people focused connection to a newly invigorated Blackstaff Square, with a focus on walking, wheeling, and cycling, supporting the Belfast Cycling Network 2021 desire line to Belfast Transport Hub. | Somewhat agree. |

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 1 (Create a Civic Spine with a focus on people)

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | X |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly disagree | |

10. If you disagree with our Key Move 1 proposals, please tell us why. Or, if you have any comments or suggestions, please add them below:

It is vitally important an age-friendly approach is adopted for the proposed developments. It is essential that in the context of NI being an ageing society that the needs of older people are core to the planning of any physical re-developments across the city. People over 60 already make up one-fifth of our population and this is forecast to increase dramatically to over one third by 2050¹.

The proposed developments must be undertaken in the context of an 'Age Friendly' as laid out by the Belfast Strategic Partnership, Belfast City Councils'

current policy. Developments should be accessible and inclusive, and designed to reflect the requirements of everyone including and older people and those with disabilities. It is suggested that these measures to need include but are not limited to the following:

- To ensure that all such developments achieve the Age-friendly 'Green Flag' status. The Green Flag criteria include access to toilets, seating, and many aspects that will make them more accessible to older people.
- Additional space for pedestrians and cyclists should be separate, preferably using physical separation such as a kerb.
- The measures should include shared usage between pedestrians and cyclists or shared space between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.
- Regularly placed seating and toilet provision for older and disabled users. According to the Councils most recent Age-Friendly report, older people in Belfast are consistently asking for more seating and toilets, and improvements to pavements².
- That care is taken with the provision of cycling infrastructure and footway extensions around pedestrian crossings. Crossings should remain free of obstacles and barriers. Pedestrians should always retain priority at crossings.
- Design should consider all existing provisions and use of parking. Areas, where significant numbers of accessible bays have been provided or where bays have existing high levels of use by Blue Badge holders, should not be considered for schemes. Removing accessible bays should only be considered where alternative bays can be provided close by.

1. <https://www.makinglifebettertogether.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/9598-Age-friendly-plan-2018-21-28SEPTWEB.pdf>

2. <https://www.makinglifebettertogether.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/9598-Age-friendly-plan-2018-21-28SEPTWEB.pdf>

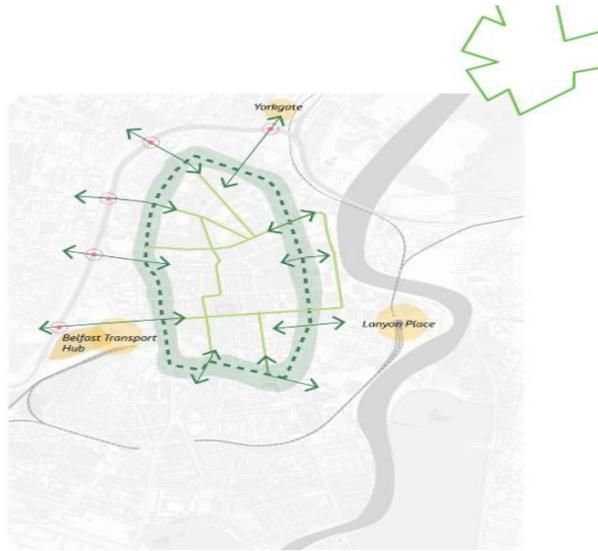
Key Move 2: Reimagine the Inner Ring Road and end Car Dominance

We are proposing to transform the Inner Ring Road to reduce physical severance for surrounding communities and become a sustainable mobility corridor. To do this, the Inner Ring should be reconfigured to accommodate high priority public transport services (such as Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2) as well as fully segregated and green infrastructure for walking, wheeling, and cycling.

Strengthening existing projects:

- Belfast Rapid Transit 2
- Belfast Cycling Strategy 2021
- York Street Interchange
- Belfast Transport Hub
- Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5

- One Million Trees commitment



11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Key Move 2?

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | X |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly disagree | |

12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential short-term interventions which supports the key move? Please select from one of the options below.

Definitely agree | somewhat agree | neither agree nor disagree | somewhat disagree | definitely disagree

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. Utilising the existing configuration, reallocate road space on the inner Ring to facilitate the delivery of an orbital cycle urban greenway, accessible from all sides of the city with effective signage, artwork, and wayfinding | Somewhat agree. |
| 2. Redesign the Shankill Gateway junctions with a people first approach, supporting improved safety, walking, wheeling, and cycling | Somewhat agree. |
| 3. Create green corridors along the Inner Ring, develop active travel hubs and city parks via temporary uses | Somewhat agree. |

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 2 (Reimagine the Inner Ring Road and end Car Dominance)

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | X |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly disagree | |

14. If you disagree with our Key Move 2 proposals, please tell us why. Or, if you have any comments or suggestions, please add them below:

COPNI agrees with the principles of the above proposal. However, it is vital that the needs of older people are considered. Some of these users will only be able to use private transport by virtue of their specific needs, such as those requiring specially adapted vehicles. It is also important that those residents in nearby areas who avail of home care services retain adequate access. Any measures taken should ensure that access for these users is still possible and as convenient as possible.

Key Move 3: Promote City Centre Living

We want to encourage city centre living by providing greater quality, choice, and affordability of accommodation, to create a shared and inclusive environment. Establish a city-wide network of people friendly routes, community focus streets, incorporating city parks and connections to opportunities for play, interaction, rest, and leisure.

Strengthening existing projects:

- Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3
- Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5
- Five Cs project
- Belfast Transport Hub
- One Million Trees commitment
- Belfast Cycling Strategy 2021



15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Key Move 3?

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | X |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly agree | |

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential short-term interventions which supports the key move? Please select from one of the options below.

Definitely agree | somewhat agree | neither agree nor disagree | somewhat disagree | definitely disagree

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Ensure all capital projects are designed to support city centre living and building sustainable communities | Definitely agree. |
| 2. Remove traffic access from Verner Street and utilise St George's market to activate the space for greening, parklets and retail | Somewhat agree. |
| 3. Introduce a linear park in the derelict car park south of Bruce St during construction phase of Belfast Transport Hub. Explore opportunities for additional city parks as temporary uses | Somewhat agree. |
| 4. Increase cycle parking and Belfast Bike docking stations along the river, around the inner ring road of the city centre to support the development of the Belfast Cycling Network 2021 and linking with the Connswater Greenway to the East | Somewhat agree. |

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| 5. Supporting the urban forest/ one million tree commitment which Belfast has signed up to with the introduction of temporary trees in moveable containers. These could be used to test out the introduction of more permanent boulevard planting | Somewhat agree. |
|---|-----------------|

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 3 (Promote City Centre Living))

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | X |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly disagree | |

18. If you disagree with our Key Move 3 proposals, please tell us why. Or, if you have any comments or suggestions, please add them below:

By 2041, a quarter of the Northern Ireland population is projected to be aged 65 and over. There is a rapid increase in households being of one or two adults, without children—by 2041, the figure will be 60.3% of all households³. It is important that any proposals to encourage city-centre living also looks at making the city an attractive and viable place for older persons to live.

Any such policy should also attempt to ensure that housing stock is age-friendly and energy efficient from design to construction. All housing should be age-friendly and easily adapted for reduced mobility, especially in our rapidly ageing society. There remains a misapprehension that only older people need age-friendly accommodation. As we all age, almost all of us will at some point require accessible housing and adaptations.

There is a high proportion of older people living in fuel poverty in NI and future housing stock should be developed in line with the newly launched green energy strategy and any newly developed fuel poverty strategy.

COPNI would welcome a commitment within the strategy that the considerable housing needs of older people and our ageing population in incorporated as a key element.

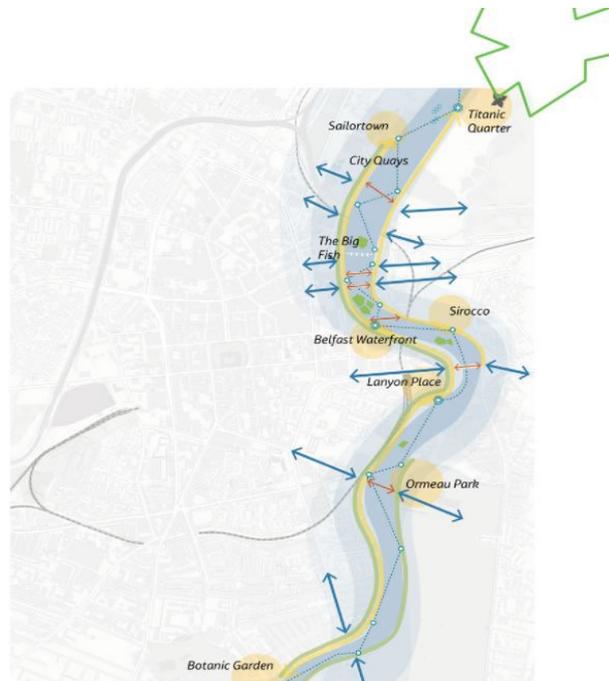
3. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/population/household-projections>

Key Move 4: Embrace the River Lagan and Waterfront

We want to capitalise on one of the city’s most defining, but underused assets, the River Lagan. Strengthen connections from the city centre to the east and its surrounding communities and enhance connectivity across and around the river.

Strengthening existing projects:

- One Million Trees Commitment
- Belfast Cycling Network 2021
- Belfast’s Maritime Mile
- Planned developments including Titanic Quarter, City Quays, Queens Quay and Waterside



19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Key Move 4?

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | X |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly agree | |

20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential short-term interventions which supports the key move? Please select from one of the options below.

Definitely agree | somewhat agree | neither agree nor disagree | somewhat disagree | definitely disagree

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. Improve existing waterfront active travel networks by connecting to the emerging Cycle urban Greenway on the Inner Ring, introducing appropriate signage and branding | Somewhat agree. |
| 2. Activate the River Lagan by introducing pop-up 'green island' parks and swimming pontoons along its length, coupled with a network of public spaces between the harbour area to Ormeau Park | Somewhat agree. |
| 3. Introduce new pedestrian and cycle bridge linking Titanic Quarter to City Quays | Somewhat agree. |

21. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 4 (Embrace the River Lagan and Waterfront)

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Strongly agree | |
| Agree somewhat | x |
| Neither agree nor disagree | |
| Disagree somewhat | |
| Strongly disagree | |

22. If you disagree with our Key Move 4 proposals, please tell us why. Or, if you have any comments or suggestions, please add them below:

COPNI would ask that as with the other proposals that the measures are undertaken are 'Age Friendly' as laid out by the Belfast Strategic Partnership, Belfast City Councils' current policy and are inclusive and designed to reflect the requirements of everyone including disabled people and older people.

23. How did you hear about this consultation?

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Regional/ newspaper | |
| Friends/ neighbours email | |
| Elected representative | |
| Social media post | |
| Local radio | |
| City matters magazine | |
| Other (please specify) | Direct invite. |

24. Do you have any further suggestions you would like to see taken forward or any other wider comments?

COPNI is disappointed that the consultation process undertaken has been exclusively digital and has not provided a direct opportunity for members of the public to respond in writing or via alternative formats.

Recent data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) showed that in Northern Ireland there were still 154,000 people who had never used the internet. For those who were living with a disability for the UK as a whole, 47% of those over 75 had never used the internet and 16% of those over 65⁴.

We would ask that any future consultations or engagement in this area be conscious of not excluding those who do not have or are unable to access the internet

4.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/datasets/internetusers>

25. We are in the process of carrying out a Bolder Vision equality screening. If you are aware of any equality considerations that we should take into account of, or if you have any comments or suggestions in relation to equality, please tell us here.

We would ask that any engagement is not restricted solely to the internet as with the current consultation. COPNI would ask that the needs of older persons and the principles of age-friendly cities be considered as a key component of all future work in this area.

Finally, please tell us where your favourite place in the city is

NA