

Learning from a Collaborative Placemaking Project: Better Bedford Street



What is the purpose of this report?

This report sets out the background to a pilot placemaking project on Bedford Street, Belfast. It assesses the outcomes from the project and identifies the lessons learned along the way, as well as making some recommendations for Bedford Street and other future placemaking projects.



Table of Contents

1. BACKGROUND	5
• The Strategic Design Group (SDG)	5
• Living Places – An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide	6
2. THE PILOT PROJECT	8
• Why Bedford Street?	8
• Aims and Objectives	9
• Scope of Pilot	11
• Approach to Risks	12
• Steering Group and Structure	13
• Project Management	15
• Learning Work Strand	15
3. DESIGN AND ENGINEERING	17
• Process and Design Solution	17
• Learning	19
• Next Steps	21
4. DESIGN WORKSHOP – EMERGING IDEAS & PROPOSALS	23
5. IMPLEMENTATION OF IDEAS AND LEARNING	25
• Walk this Way – Street Art	25
• BBC Corner Garden – A New Social Space & Greening the Street	27
• The Scaffolding Experience – Transitory Spaces	30
• Heritage Posters	31
• Clutter Busters – Removing Pavement Obstructions	33
• LED Lighting Upgrade	35
• Events & Activities – On-street Games & Music	36

Table of Contents

6. IDEAS & PROPOSALS NOT ACHIEVED THIS TIME	38
• Ulster Hall – Lights Across the Street	38
• Bedford Square – A Space to Play and ‘Chill-out’	39
• Seats and Cycles	40
• Wonderful Windows – Activating Frontages	41
• BBS Box – On Street Venue & Meeting Point	41
7. QUB STUDENT OBSERVATIONS	42
8. CONCLUSIONS	43
9. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	45
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	48

1. Background

The Strategic Design Group

The Strategic Design Group (SDG) represents a wide spectrum of individuals and organisations from across central and local government, professional bodies, and the business, community and voluntary sectors, all with the common goal of raising standards in our urban areas by advocating and delivering good placemaking.

The SDG was originally formed to assist in steering the development of Northern Ireland's 'Living Places: An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide' through a process of engagement and collaboration, and is jointly chaired by Angus Kerr (Chief Planner & Director of Regional Planning, DfI) and Andrew Haley (Chair of Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture & the Built Environment (MAG) supported by DfC).

The group continues to advocate quality in placemaking by *'working together to promote successful, inclusive, well-designed places which inspire civic stewardship and have an enduring positive impact on people's lives.'*

A desire to find new and engaging ways of promoting excellence in our urban areas sparked the idea of an innovative, yet time-bound pilot project to demonstrate the qualities of Living Places in a real life situation, which could also test collaborative working, trial new ideas and provide valuable lessons that could be transferred to other future placemaking projects. The group therefore agreed to develop a pilot scheme focusing on Bedford Street in Belfast city centre – known as 'Better Bedford Street'.

The content and recommendations contained within this report are the findings of the project steering group, and not the agreed positions of the wider Department for Infrastructure, Department for Communities or Belfast City Council. The recommendations are for the consideration of those involved in future urban placemaking projects, where appropriate. The report does not in any way suggest that there will be the required budgetary cover to take forward any of the recommendations contained within the report.

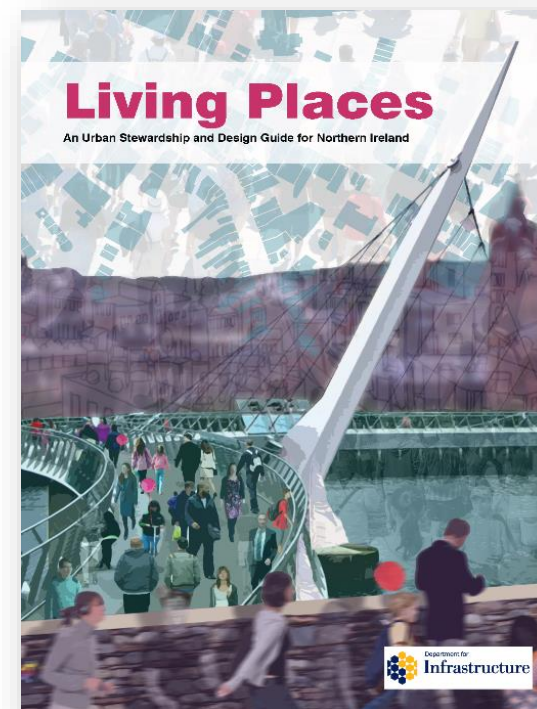
1. Background

Living Places – An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide

The Living Places guide was published by DfI in 2014 to inform and inspire all those involved in the management (stewardship) and design (making) of our urban places, with a view to raising standards across Northern Ireland. Living Places aims to provide strategic guidance on how our places should develop and change to make them more successful for everyone who uses them. It recognises the contribution that good quality design can make to our health and well-being, and signals a fresh approach to the planning of our villages, towns and cities.

Good places are important to all of us. They are a focal point of social and economic activity, and help to define our collective sense of identity. A key ingredient of most successful urban places are good streets. Quite different from ‘roads’ – ‘streets’ not only act as important thoroughfares for traffic and people, they also serve as vital public spaces used by us all. Good street design is therefore crucial.

Living Places is different from other guides in that it is not structured by familiar design guidance themes, but instead advocates ‘Ten Qualities of Urban Stewardship and Design’. These qualities, illustrated through local examples, are considered to be the critical ingredients of successful places and should be pursued by all those involved in placemaking. Applying these qualities can help to raise the standard of placemaking so that our urban areas are more resilient to the economic and social challenges they face. Importantly, the guide promotes a more collaborative approach between different groups and stakeholders to overcome the difficulties associated with creating good urban spaces – something the group was determined to apply to the pilot.



Ten Qualities of Urban Stewardship & Design

1. Background

Collaborative

Cooperation & Coordination,
The Value of Working Together,
Active Participation, Communication

Visionary

Recognising Potential, Leadership, Skills

Contextual

Understanding Place, Natural Systems,
Harnessing Heritage, Contextual Design,
Appropriate Scale, Edges, Boundaries &
Transitions

Accessible

Inclusivity, Sustainable Transport
Hierarchy, Connectivity, Legibility,
Car Parking

Responsible

Conserving Limited Resources,
Maximising the Impact of Limited
Resources, Working with Nature, Going
Local, Shared Space

Crafted

Clarity of Concept, Aesthetic Principles,
Peer Review, Commitment to Quality,
Place Specific Design

Vibrant & Diverse

Centralised Services & Facilities,
Sustainable Urban Densities,
Mixed Use, Type & Tenure, Active
Frontages

Hospitable

Climatic Considerations, Healthy,
Safety through Urban Design,
Sense of Arrival, Animation, Partnerships

Viable

Flexibility of Use & Management,
Temporary Uses & Interventions,
Serviceability, Diversity of Provision,
Deliverability, Testing

Enduring

Self-Sustaining, Adaptive Re-use,
Communicating Heritage,
Passage of Skills and Knowledge



2. The Pilot Project

Why Bedford Street?

There were a number of reasons why Bedford Street was chosen for the pilot, including:

- It is a key gateway to the city centre and forms part of the main walking corridor from the Queen's University area and beyond;
- It is heavily dominated by the car and therefore competing priorities between pedestrians, parking and moving vehicles need to be rebalanced;
- It is a wide street which can be challenging to cross, and navigate, as street clutter can create obstacles for pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities;
- It can feel like a thoroughfare and people don't appear to dwell or spend time there;
- It is typical of many other streets with similar issues and challenges, therefore learning should be transferable; and,
- It is included within DfC's Streets Ahead 5 project and could potentially help inform decisions about this long-term public realm scheme.

The SDG was also cognisant of Belfast City Council's Linen Quarter Vision and Guidance document which sets out a blueprint to improve the quality of public realm, streetscape and architecture within the area. In addition, a 2017 Business survey of the area found that the number one issue to address was to improve access to the area and permeability of the streets, with 91% of those referencing this, highlighting a need for improved pedestrian access.

2. The Pilot Project

Aims and Objectives

The pilot sought to try something new to demonstrate, in a practical way, the outworking of the ten qualities of Living Places. It was also a unique opportunity to test how collaborative working between project partners from across government, together with those outside government, could result in better places for us all.

Walking

Cycling

Destination

Inviting

Heritage

Vibrant

Collaborative

Temporary

Inclusive

Quickly

Engaging

Communicate

2. The Pilot Project

Aims and Objectives

The group wanted to make Bedford Street more attractive, hospitable and inviting to the people who use it, by trialling innovative ideas and making small, temporary interventions, in a relatively quick timeframe.

The pilot also aimed to stimulate other positive outcomes such as:

- a more safe and accessible environment for all users;
- less street clutter and obstacles;
- an upturn in walking and active lifestyles;
- enhanced heritage awareness;
- greater vitality and viability;
- increased footfall and business opportunities; and,
- a more usable, vibrant and healthier street where people would want to dwell and spend time.

From a central government perspective it was important that the pilot would assist in delivering some of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) outcome-based indicators such as *‘a healthier and more equal society’* and *‘a society where people are connected with opportunities through infrastructure’*. The draft PfG recognises the importance of collaborative and imaginative working between central government departments, local government and all other stakeholders in achieving its objectives.

Click for link to [Project Overview](#).

2. The Pilot Project

Scope of the Pilot

The most significant physical element of the pilot was the removal of nine parking spaces and widening of the footway along the eastern side of Bedford Street (in front of Bedford House, Ulster Hall & Harlem café/Deane's deli) to increase pedestrian provision by reducing the overall proportion of the street given over to vehicles. This new physical infrastructure was augmented with other small scale interventions such as new lighting, planting, street furniture, games and artwork to animate this additional space and to enliven the street in general.

A series of complimentary events and activities were organised including 'Linenopolis' a pop-up linen heritage and retail experience; daily walking tours of the Linen Quarter; lunchtime street music and hospitality; Mela performers; and participation in Culture Night and the 'Ciclovía' urban cycling event.

The implementation of the project was originally intended to be completed within a 100 day timeframe, however this was not achievable for reasons highlighted later in the report. The temporary interventions were planned to be in place for a 3 month period, after which this would be reviewed and potentially extended. Additional street events and activities were planned for the week of Monday 17th September to Sunday 23rd September 2018, with further activity to take place during the weekend of Ciclovía on the 7th October 2018.

2. The Pilot Project

Approach to Risks

As with any pilot project there are risks associated with testing ideas and trialling new and innovative ways of working. The pilot was deliberately collaborative in nature and a break from the norm for some participants, so invariably there was the potential for things to go wrong.

Given the relatively small budget and temporary, interventionist nature of the project, there was a risk of generating negative perceptions and opinions amongst local businesses and people using the street. There was also a risk of an adverse reaction to the reduction in parking provision and loss of revenue, as well as the associated construction works and costs. Negative publicity on social media was a further risk, particularly if the aims and objectives of the project were not communicated effectively.

However, the group considered that the risks could be managed by extensive stakeholder engagement, highlighting that the purpose of the pilot was to 'try things out' for a limited period of time only, in order to improve the street for all those who use it. The risks could also be mitigated by gathering evidence and using any learning to potentially help inform future decisions on permanent projects and address some of the issues and challenges identified along the street.

2. The Pilot Project

Steering Group & Structure

The Chairs of the SDG approached individuals based on experience, expertise and influence to form a project steering group (also led by Angus Kerr and Andrew Haley).

Sub-groups were then set up to focus on four main work strands identified as key elements of the pilot:

1. **Design and Engineering:** Richard Kirk (then NI Regional Director – Institution of Civil Engineers)
2. **Engagement & Activities:** Chris McCracken (Managing Director – Linen Quarter Business Improvement District)
3. **Communication:** Ciarán Fox (Director – Royal Society of Ulster Architects)
4. **Learning:** Amberlea Neely (Director – PLACE NI)

Steering group meetings were held regularly and individual work strand meetings and workshops took place, in a more ad hoc manner, to explore options, research, networks and communication, whilst capitalising on the goodwill and experience of shared contacts.

Other key partners assisted in the delivery of the pilot, including representatives from wider business areas within DfI (inc. Roads and Walking & Cycling Unit) and DfC (inc. Architecture & Built Environment and City Centre Regeneration); Belfast City Council; The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC); Sustrans; Justine Daly (MAG); private sector organisations in the Linen Quarter including AECOM and ARUP; Queens University Belfast and Ulster University, Barrie Todd, Consarc Design Group, McCadden Design, The Paul Hogarth Company, OGU Architects, RE Architects and Seedhead Arts.

2. The Pilot Project

Project Steering Group



Design & Engineering



Communication



Engagement & Activities



Learning



2. The Pilot Project

Project Management

The group noted that whilst a more formal, traditional project management approach may have had benefits in terms of programming the various work strands and interventions, such an approach could have prevented the organic nature of the project or the broad range of participants and contributions.

This informal approach was helpful and broadly welcomed by the group, however, it also added a degree of risk, where outcomes were focused largely on the learning from the process rather than the 'end product'. Had the project been designed as a standard delivery model, some of the best outcomes may not have materialised, such as the design workshop or the scaffolding intervention, taken forward by QUB staff and students. On reflection the success of the group was largely dependent on the goodwill of those involved and their willingness to take risks.

Learning Work Strand

Learning was central to the project and a key objective was to take the lessons and identify how they could be used elsewhere. The goal was not necessarily about delivering a 'polished scheme' but more about implementing a temporary, experimental pilot, trialing new ideas, designs and approaches and learning from that; accepting that there would be as much to be gained and learned from things that did not work so well, as from the 'successes' of the project. This report focuses on the lessons learned from the 'implementation' of the different elements of the pilot.

A separate report 'Approach for Future Pilot Projects' has been produced which focuses on the 'process' aspect of the project and the lessons that can be used in similar, future projects elsewhere.

Click for link to ['Approach for Future Pilot Projects'](#)

2. The Pilot Project



Data and information gathered before and during the pilot, in conjunction with participating businesses in the area, such as AECOM, as well as students from Queen's University Planning Department, provided an evidential context which helped evaluate the success (or otherwise) of the project, and frame the key learning outcomes.

This included:

- Surveys of people using the street before and during the project;
- Surveys with businesses on the street and surrounding area;
- Vehicular traffic and pedestrian counts (including movement patterns) taken from temporary fixed cameras positions on the street; and
- Steering group analysis and post project evaluation to fully consider how the pilot, met (or didn't meet), the stated aims and objectives, and what learning is transferrable to other future projects.

3. Design and Engineering

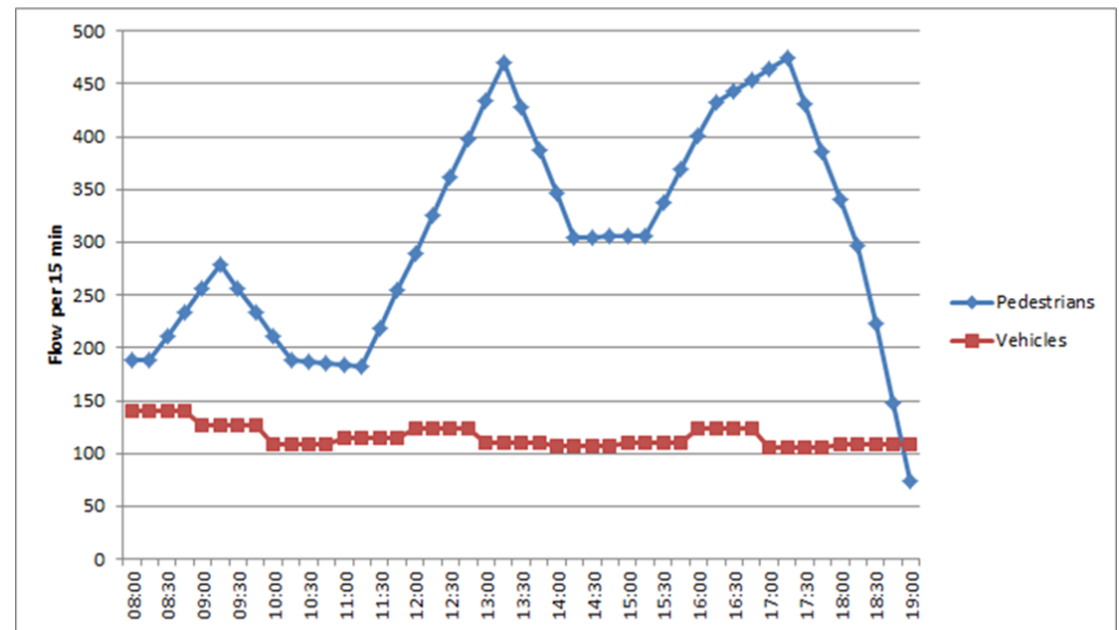
Process and Design Solution

One of the key objectives of the pilot was to provide additional space for people using the street. Evidence gathered, as the graph indicates, clearly demonstrates that a much larger proportion of those using Bedford Street are pedestrians compared to vehicles i.e. 13,700 pedestrian movements compared to 5,200 vehicular movements during the same period. It was therefore considered that pavement provision should better reflect this ratio.

The most effective way of doing this was by removing nine parking spaces along the eastern side of the street and giving the additional space over to pedestrians. This tied in with the design workshop objective *‘encourage lingering, social interaction and provide for a safer, more inviting pedestrian environment’*. It is noted that there are over 350 on-street parking spaces in the Linen Quarter area.

From an early stage of the project a range of design ideas were considered to replace the parking bays including timber parklets, similar to the ‘FitzPark’ project in Windmill Street, Central London.

Analysis helped develop a profile of the street and identify who used it and when.



The results from this study suggested that pedestrians in the main, preferred to walk on the eastern footpath, both in north-south and south-north. This preferential walking pattern may have been a result of the significant works taking place to the Ewart’s Linen Warehouse. The results also indicated higher south-north movements in the morning period and higher north-south movements in the afternoon periods. This is reflective of wider pedestrian movements going north into the city centre for the working day.

3. Design and Engineering

However, after careful consideration several options were ruled out, and the final design was reached, based on a number of factors including budget, timing, resources, health and safety as well as roads regulatory requirements. Adapting the design to reflect these matters meant that the expectations and scope of the project changed considerably. The parking bays were temporarily removed and the footway was extended using reclaimed granite kerbs and asphalt. One of DfI's fixed term contractors was appointed to carry out the construction works.

Consideration was also given to differentiating the extended footway from the existing footway as new pedestrian space using luminous chippings, which would absorb and reflect light. However, it was agreed that given the budget and temporary nature of the project, this was not justifiable.



Bedford Street, before and after engineering works

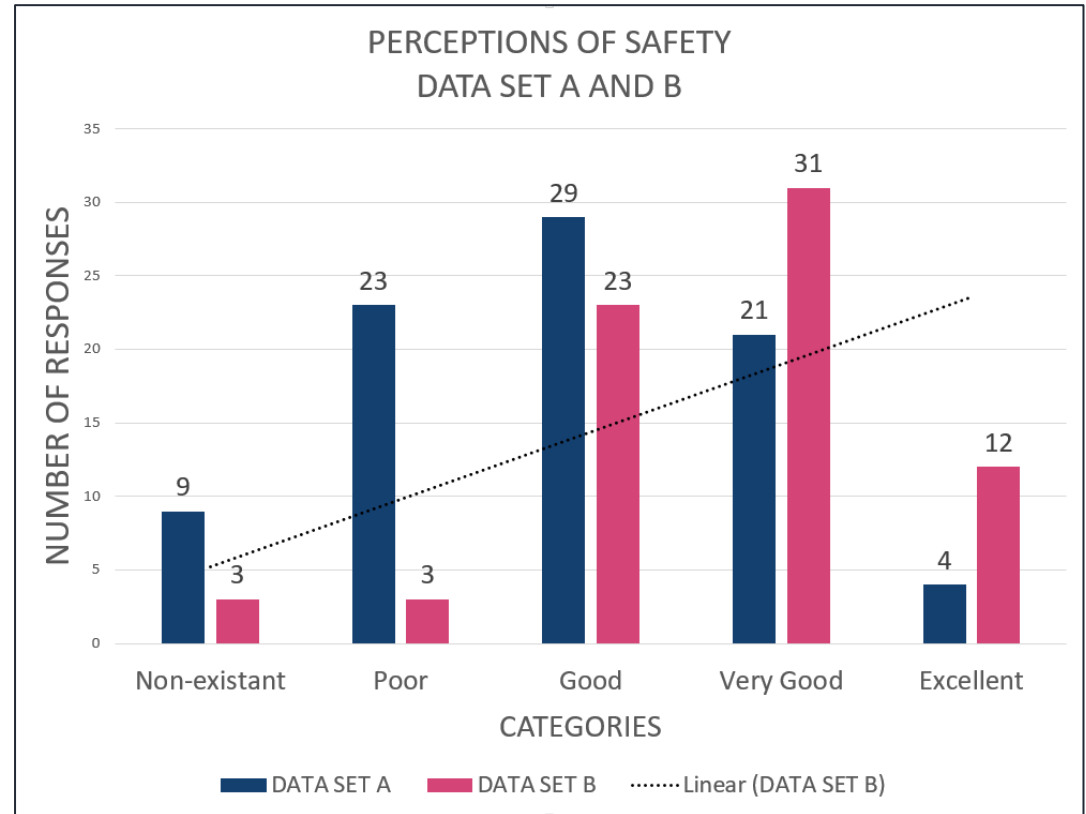
3. Design and Engineering

Learning

An IMTAC report indicated overall support for extending the footway and reducing on-street clutter, and feedback from local businesses, through the Linen Quarter Business Improvement District has been positive. The bar chart illustrates that people’s perceptions of safety on the street were more positive *after* the project interventions.

The extended footway has undoubtedly provided more space for pedestrians and those visiting buildings along the street. It is acknowledged that although it took some time for pedestrians to become accustomed to using the newly extended footway, as time passed it became much more widely used.

The setting of the listed Ulster Hall has also been improved as a result of the pavement extension, with its attractive façade becoming more prominent in the streetscape due to the absence of parked cars at the front of the building.



Data Set A: Before the project – Data Set B: After the project

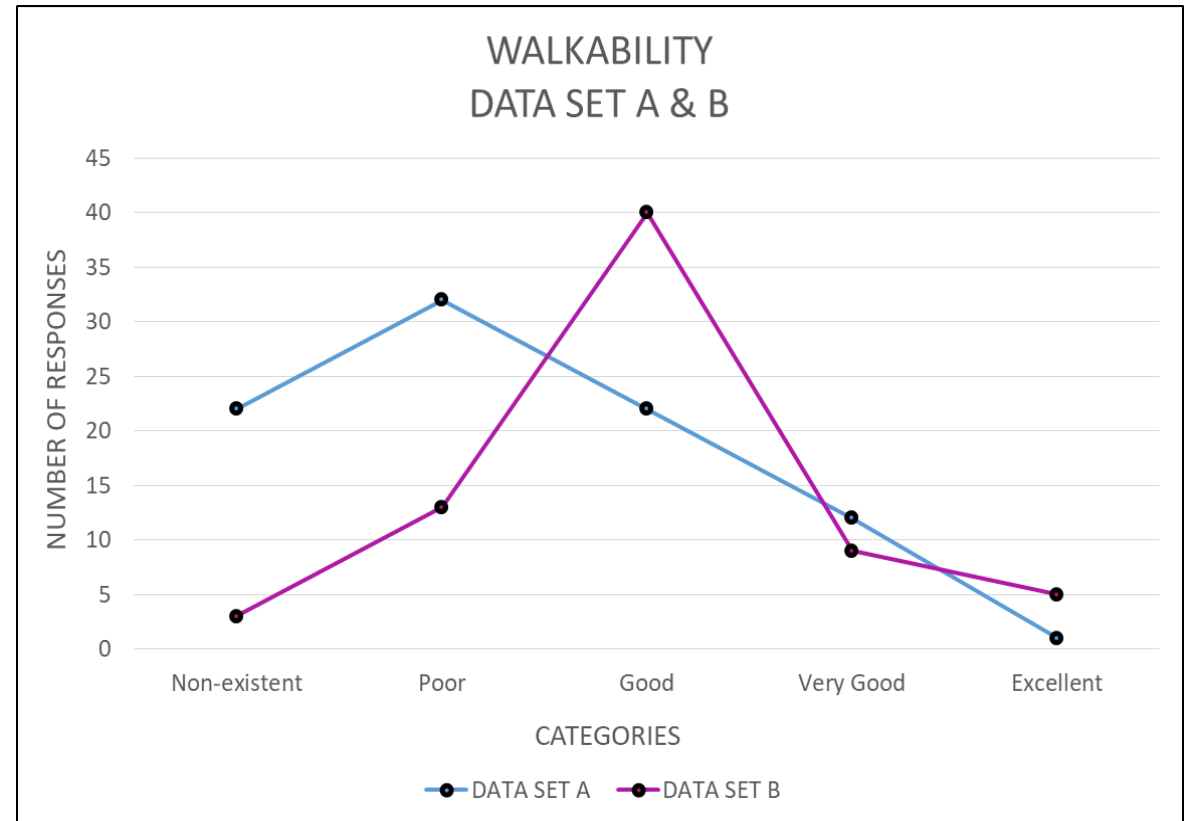
The overall trend line for Data Set B suggested a more positive response to pedestrian safety after the project interventions.

3. Design and Engineering

Once the pavement extension had been constructed, DfI Roads quickly installed new double yellow lines along this section of the street. However, in the absence of the required legislation it was acknowledged that waiting restrictions could not be enforced straight away.

An important learning outcome from this element of the pilot is an increased understanding of the constraints that government departments are bound by in relation to processing legislation which can take up to a year to process.

The yellow lines and associated waiting restrictions only became legally enforceable when the direction order for the ‘Experimental Traffic Control Scheme’ came into effect on the 1st August 2019. This will continue for a 6 month period, following which it will be reviewed.



Data Set A: Before the project – Data Set B: After the project

The results highlight a significant rise in the number of respondents rating walkability as “good” in the area and a significant decrease in the number of respondents rating walkability as “non-existent” or “poor”, with more responses indicating walkability as “excellent”.

3. Design and Engineering

Next Steps

Recognising that there is an Experimental Traffic Control Scheme in place, which will be subject to review in due course, there are a number of options for this key intervention moving forward:

1. Remove the extended footway;
2. Upgrade the extension to match the existing higher grade finish of the adjacent, original footway; or
3. Retain the temporary footway as is, with a view to it being incorporated into the future plans for Streets Ahead 5, including improved finishes.

Consideration

This consideration is given without prejudice to the outcome of the review of the Experimental Traffic Control Scheme. Whilst acknowledging the loss of a small number of parking spaces and therefore reduced revenue, option one is considered to be less preferable given the benefits the additional footway has brought to the street. Whilst desirable, option two would not be financially justified at this time, particularly given that Bedford Street is included in the forthcoming Streets Ahead 5 project.

As evidence clearly demonstrates that a larger proportion of those using Bedford Street are pedestrians, there is a demonstrable need to rebalance the space in favour of people. The extended footway has undoubtedly increased provision for pedestrians and improved safety and pedestrian flow along the eastern side of the street, therefore the group recommends that Option 3, the retention of the extended footway, is the preferred option.

Consideration should be given to extending the footway further, along both sides of the street in order to maximise pedestrian provision, whilst maintaining a good environment for businesses in terms of deliveries, coach drop off points etc.

3. Design and Engineering

This could also make crossing the street easier by removing the need for pedestrian islands. Furthermore, in recognition of the forthcoming Weavers Cross Transport Hub project, the crossing around Franklin Street in particular, should be improved to enhance connectivity to and from this key infrastructure project and new destination at the heart of the city.

As part of the Streets Ahead 5 project and other relevant plans and proposals for the area, consideration should be given to whether there is scope to further increase provision for cyclists along Bedford Street, and other streets within the wider Linen Quarter area.

In undertaking the pilot it was evident that much of the traffic in the area is generated by vehicles circling the Linen Quarter, searching for on-street parking, rather than from through traffic. On this basis it would be beneficial to build upon Belfast City Council’s ‘Car Parking Strategy & Action Plan’ in the context of a city wide approach to ease these pressures. Furthermore, analysis of pedestrian-to-vehicle ratios should be carried out in advance of all future environmental improvement schemes.



4. Design Workshop – Emerging Ideas & Proposals

An on-street design workshop took place on the 17th August 2018 to stimulate discussion and inspire ideas around how best to animate and dress the new and existing space along the street.

A wide range of participants from accessibility groups, local universities, cycling enthusiasts, Belfast City Council and the general public interacted through lively discussions, sketching designs and proposals on street maps and generating a range of recommendations on an 'ideas wall'.



BORING
MODERN
UNFINISHED
LONG GREY
THOROUGHFARE
BUSY
HISTORIC
LOUDCENTRAL
FUNCTIONAL PLEASANT
CONGESTED INTERRUPTED
DEVELOPED UNATTRACTIVE
PROFESSIONAL

*Public perceptions
of Bedford Street
from
questionnaire
before project*

4. Design Workshop – Emerging Ideas & Proposals



A call for designers was subsequently issued, utilising contacts from the group to develop ideas and proposals from the workshop, whilst working with a spirit of generosity in the collaborative, innovative and creative ethos of Living Places.

What resulted were the physical outputs from the pilot i.e. the ‘mini-projects’, interventions and activities that augmented the newly extended footway and wider street. These outputs, along with ideas and proposals that were not achievable this time, are discussed further in the following sections of the report, along with the key learning from both.

Click for link to [‘On-street Design Workshop Report’](#)



5. Implementation of Ideas

The following ‘mini-projects’, interventions and on-street events and activities were delivered as part of the pilot. *Learning* and *Next Steps* are identified for each.

Walk this Way – Street Art

Workshop Objective: *‘Provide a safer more inviting pedestrian environment’.*

Initially, the idea of creating a continuous, priority pedestrian corridor along the eastern side of the street and across side street junctions, using thermoplastic paint, was explored. However, this was ruled out due to cost, roads regulatory requirements and concerns around the permanence of the thermoplastic material. As an alternative the group decided upon a short-term street art installation using semi-permanent aerosol paint, which would also differentiate the extended footway as new and additional walking space.

Street artist Eoin McGinn, commissioned by Seedhead Arts on behalf of the group, designed a piece that represented the city as a social space and reflected the linen heritage of the area. The resultant artwork ‘Weaving Lines’ with interlocked hands repeated in a textile like pattern, on a distinctive blue background, is a nod to the flax plant and linen industry, which was prevalent in this part of Belfast.

Learning

The street art provided some of the most interesting learning from the pilot. As outlined previously it took time before pedestrians became accustomed to the extended footway, and a reluctance to walk on the artwork may have added to this.

Weaving Lines 

Bedford Street is one of the busiest pedestrian routes into the city centre from south Belfast. The street has a rich heritage with Ulster hall, the BBC, and the Ewart building; three of the cities most important cultural landmarks.

As an artist my practice involves making public murals. My artwork represents people and place; and our connections to the world around us. For this artwork, I designed a piece that represents the city as a social space, and reflects the linen heritage of the area.

There are two different elements to the design, the first design features two hands interlocked and repeated like a textile pattern. This pattern along with the blue background is a nod to the linen heritage of the area and the flax plant itself. The hands are in an embracing position to represent our connection as city dweller, some of the forms are marks and organic shapes of different colours, while some are straight lines. These represent the natural and man-made structures in the city.

With this in mind and wanting to again reflect the linen quarter, I decided to make the second design a pattern of weaving lines, leading up to May Street and down to the BBC building. The colours of the lines mirror with the colours on the artwork for the extended footpath, tying the two aesthetic styles together.

– Eoin McGinn, Artist
emcgartist.com

#LinenQuarter
#BetterBedfordStreet




5. Implementation of Ideas

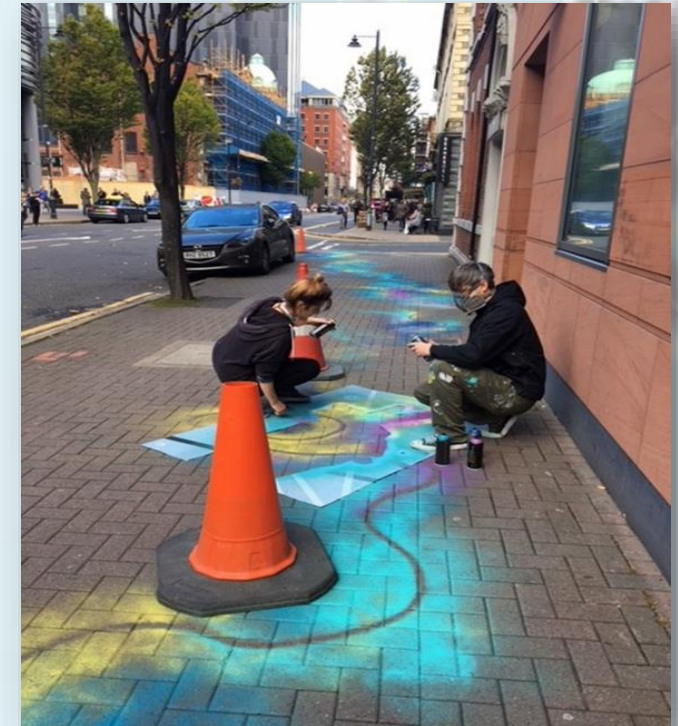
Pedestrians appeared to favour walking on the 'looser' sections of the weave design, whilst avoiding the 'denser' pattern and colour. As a result, the artist amended the approach and adapted the design accordingly. It was noted that children appeared to interact well with the artwork through play, whilst others liked that it was 'something more normally seen in other countries'. Other important learning was gained from IMTAC which reported that the pattern and colour could possibly be confusing for those living with dementia. Whilst worth trialing, the group felt that given some of the public perceptions of the artwork, the intervention was perhaps not as successful as originally hoped.

The design workshop identified an issue around the timing of pedestrian crossings between Bedford Street and City Hall. Whilst this intervention could not address the issue directly, the phasing of lights has now been amended, making crossing this busy junction much easier for pedestrians.

Moving Forward

This colourful and creative intervention appeared to appeal to children most, however Bedford Street is not necessarily an area where high numbers of this age group are normally found. Nevertheless, this form of artistic intervention should still be considered in future urban design schemes at appropriate locations.

There are numerous side street junctions along Bedford Street and the group suggests that consideration should be given to whether greater priority, or a sense of priority, can be given to pedestrians and what measures can be introduced to manage traffic at these junctions.



5. Implementation of Ideas

BBC Corner Garden – A New Social Space & Greening the Street

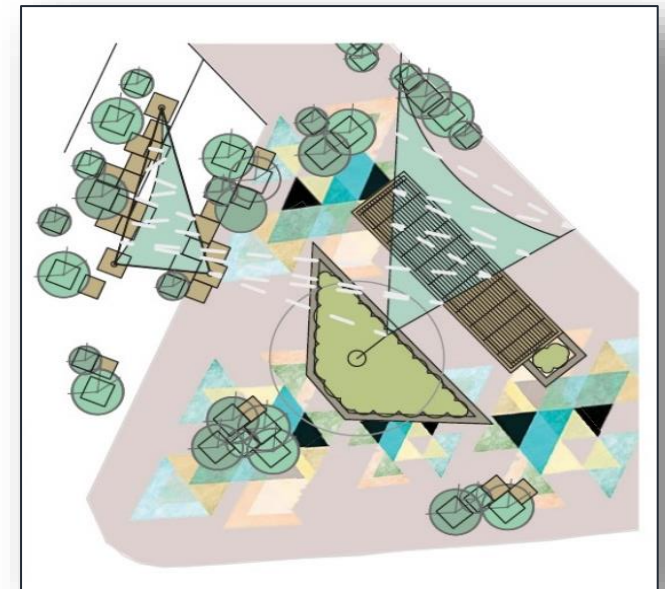
Workshop Objective: *‘Soften space, provide for nature, encourage lingering & social interaction’.*

The group identified a need for a useable and inviting social space for pedestrians to stop and linger and for the many office workers in the area to have lunch or take a break. This was also highlighted in the Linen Quarter Business Improvement District Regeneration Vision. A location was identified at Bedford Street and Linenhall Street West, close to the BBC building, which provided an excellent opportunity to create an eye-catching ‘garden area’ by utilising and adapting two brick planters and linking with existing cycle parking.

Designed by Aecom, the first element of the scheme aimed at making this a more comfortable social space by modifying one planter to create new seating and small performance stage. The mature tree in the other planter was retained and augmented with new low level planting. Both planters were also painted to add colour and vibrancy to the area.

The second element attempted to address the lack of greenery in the area. The aim was to create an attractive treed environment in what can be a fairly sterile place by introducing a number of trees in portable timber planters. String lighting was incorporated to add interest during the initial period of leaf loss. Two standard council planters were also used further along the street for additional greenery.

Other design ideas for this area, including the installation of an illuminated canopy or sail feature, were considered but not taken forward due to budgetary and time constraints.

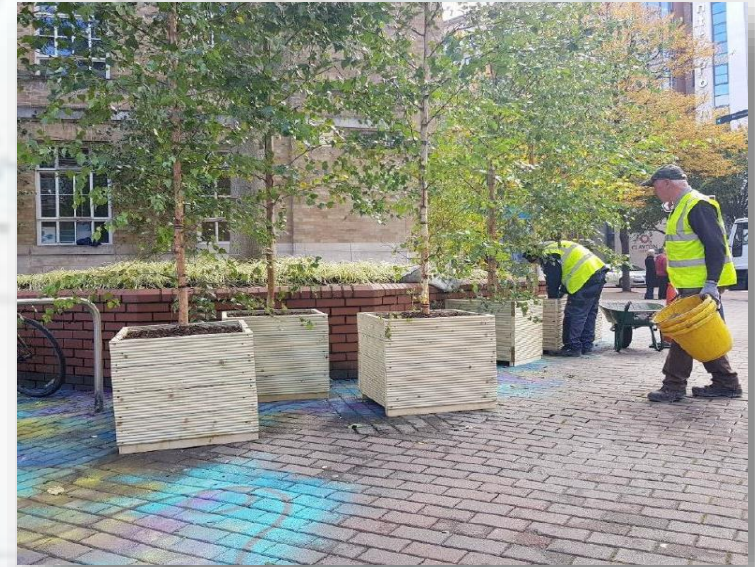


5. Implementation of Ideas

Learning

The group considers that the intervention has helped make the area more attractive and useable, and provides an important place for pedestrians to stop and rest. An IMTAC report supported the introduction of additional seating and it has been well used.

It is acknowledged that greening our city has a positive impact on our health and wellbeing, and whilst this aspect of the intervention was relatively successful, the group recognises that it did generate some negative feedback in relation to the new trees which were perceived by some to be an obstruction and risk of injury to passersby. However, these issues were quickly remedied by relocation and secateurs.



The introduction of simple interventions such as the timber tree planters and seating can be quickly and easily replicated elsewhere and at relatively low cost. This was demonstrated by Belfast City Council's response to the Bank Buildings fire, whereby the learning and experience from the pilot were used to good effect.

This intervention highlighted the challenges in relation to the provision of insurance and public liability cover when working collaboratively. To resolve this, one of the organisations within the group assumed responsibility for sourcing and managing insurance for the project.

5. Implementation of Ideas

A greater awareness of insurance requirements for this type of initiative will be of great benefit in addressing these issues more effectively. Future projects should consider liability issues from the outset and aim to include details in the project business case.

Moving Forward

Given that the BBC Corner Garden intervention was generally well received, it would be desirable to retain this concept in the longer term, somewhere within the Linen Quarter area. The lack of greenery and seating in general, along this key route in and out of the city centre, and the wider area should be addressed.

It took time to ensure an ongoing maintenance plan was in place and functioning well. The need for clear stewardship measures should be considered and agreed early on in the project planning. Any future projects should also carefully consider the installation, design, scale and nature of planting and seating, as well as the time of year and suitability of the location.

In planning for further greening of the city consideration should also be given to the wider benefits of introducing sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs), where possible.



The addition of seating at the BBC corner

5. Implementation of Ideas

The Scaffolding Experience – Transitory Spaces



Workshop Objective: *‘Creating dynamic temporary spaces and experiences’.*

Streets are often changing, and development, while it is a sign of investment and progress, can nevertheless look unsightly and create unwelcoming dark tunnels underneath scaffolding at pavement level. The owner and contractor of the proposed George Best Hotel were fully supportive of the proposal to illuminate the scaffolding tunnels with coloured translucent panels to lighten the environment and make it more inviting for pedestrians. The group also intended to replicate this intervention at the Ewart’s Linen Warehouse but it was not possible due to changes to the contractor’s programme.

Learning

This intervention was very well received, particularly its impact at night, as it improved an unsightly, dark corner of Bedford Street, and made the environment feel safer. It was designed and taken forward by QUB planning staff and students, whose enthusiasm was welcomed by the group.

Moving Forward

Scaffolding is a common feature in our urban areas and this low cost intervention had a very positive impact which could be easily replicated elsewhere. To encourage this, consideration should be given to developing a plan for enhancement of development which requires scaffolding which could include policies and/or delivery mechanisms through conditions, grants, licenses etc.



5. Implementation of Ideas

Heritage Posters

Workshop Objective: *'Creating dynamic temporary spaces and experiences – making small changes to the street to make a more attractive environment'*.



The group felt it was important to promote the heritage and history of Bedford Street and the Linen Quarter, which boast some important listed buildings. Historical images of the street provided by National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) were displayed on the hoarding at Ewart's Linen Warehouse construction site.

It was also proposed to install larger prints illustrating the musical heritage of the Ulster Hall, however, despite being well advanced, this was cancelled due to changes in the contractor's work programme. Another project to paint silhouettes of mill workers onto the gable windows of the Ewart's building was also proposed, however, this was also cancelled due to health and safety concerns with the point of the construction work.

Learning

This intervention was considered to be successful as it added interest and heritage value. It is important to consider the history and uniqueness of a place in proposals for change. In this case, the impact could have been even greater if larger images and explanatory text had been used.

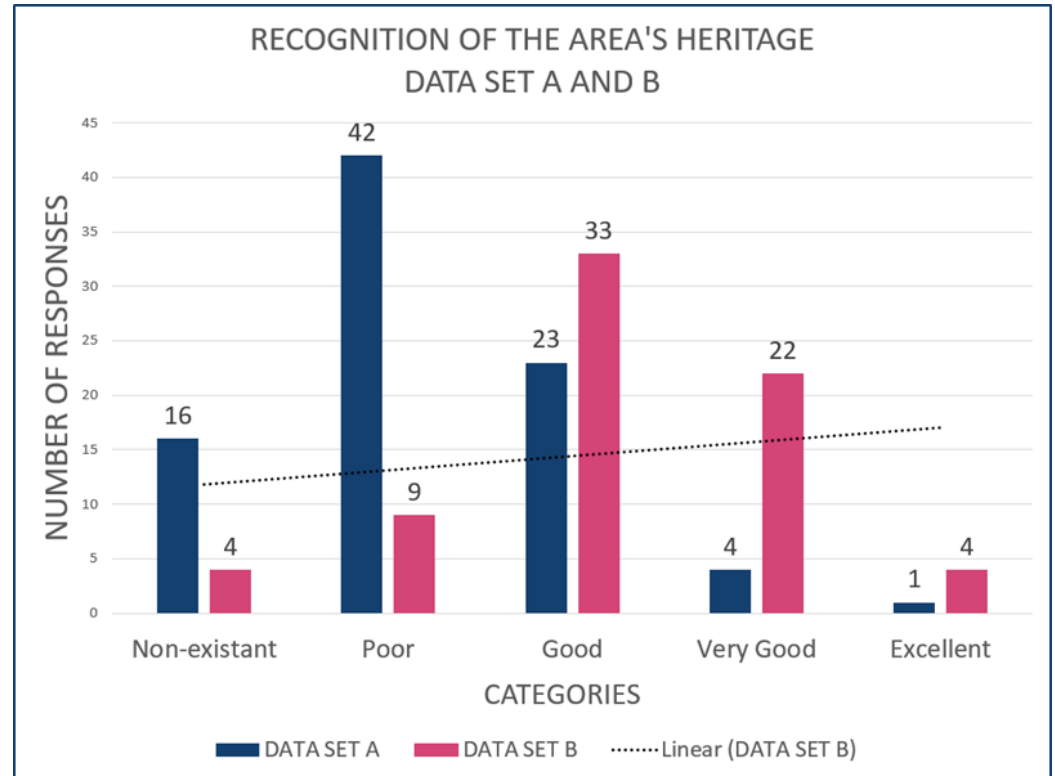


5. Implementation of Ideas

Moving Forward

Historical images located at appropriate locations can add interest and information; enliven derelict and unused buildings; and, dress streets impacted by large scale construction projects.

Although not a new idea, this intervention proved successful on Bedford Street, and could be easily replicated elsewhere. Future placemaking or public realm schemes in the area should take similar measures to recognise the unique history and heritage of the Linen Quarter.



Data Set A: Before the project – Data Set B: After the project

Data Set B shows a marked rise in 'very good' recognition of the area's heritage.

5. Implementation of Ideas

Clutter Busters – Provide a Safer, More Inviting Pedestrian Environment

Workshop Objective: *‘Provide for a safer, more inviting pedestrian environment’.*

Discussions took place with the owners of a BT Kiosk outside Harlem Café, to communicate the aims and objectives of the pilot, and to explore the idea of relocating the kiosk, which has been a significant long term obstruction for pedestrians, to a more appropriate location on the opposite side of the street. However, after lengthy negotiations the owner decided not to relocate the apparatus due to cost implications but they did replace the kiosk with a narrower InLink Smart Hub which has now been installed.



5. Implementation of Ideas



Learning

The kiosk was subsequently upgraded to a taller, slimmer model with a smaller footprint, and therefore, coupled with the adjacent pavement extension, it became less of an obstruction and a clearer walking route now exists at this location.

Moving Forward

On street furniture and utilities apparatus need to be rationalised to ensure they maintain a logical and navigable line, and therefore do not contribute to street clutter or create obstructions. This is also important in protecting the setting of listed buildings.

The group recognises that it is current practice to set a clear street furniture line during the planning of a major public realm scheme. However, it is more difficult to ensure that developers and operators respect this going forward, locating future furniture and apparatus appropriately and removing defunct furniture/equipment/signage as soon as possible.

5. Implementation of Ideas

LED Street Lighting Upgrade

Engagement and collaboration within DfI raised awareness of the pilot and resulted in a programme of planned LED street lighting upgrades for Bedford Street being planned to coincide with the commencement of the pilot.

Learning

This is considered to be a good example of effective collaboration working to align timeframes and prioritise planned street improvements in a logical way.

5. Implementation of Ideas

Events & Activities – On-street Games & Music

Workshop Objective: *'Encourage lingering and social interaction'*.

To help animate and dress the street, QUB staff and students installed folding tables and chairs in front of Bedford House, the Ulster Hall, and Pug Ugly's bar, which would be stored away each evening with the co-operation of businesses along the street.

Complementary events organised by the Linen Quarter Business Improvement District also made a positive contribution to the pilot, including:

- **Linenopolis – a pop-up linen heritage and retail experience at Bedford House;**
- **Daily walking tours of the Linen Quarter between 17th and 23rd September 2018;**
- **Free lunchtime street music between 17th and 23rd September;**
- **Culture night which was extended to Bedford Street for the first time with a music event on 21st September; and**
- **Participation in the Ciclovía urban cycling event which passed along Bedford Street on Sunday 23rd September**



5. Implementation of Ideas

Learning

This aspect of the project was a qualified success, and it is acknowledged that it could have had more impact overall. There was some very positive feedback on certain activities such as the street busking, in that it brought more vitality to what can be a fairly corporate environment.

Planning and implementing these events and activities demonstrated the difficulties in creating a destination where people want to dwell and spend time. More realistic expectations of what was achievable in a challenging street environment (e.g. a busy thoroughfare; notorious 'wind tunnel', poor weather) and within the limited budget would have resulted in a different approach. Given the unpredictability of our weather it is difficult to plan outdoor events, and therefore contingencies should always be put in place for similar future projects.

Although it is debatable whether picnic tables and board games were the right choice to animate the street, it may have simply been the wrong time of year to trial this type of idea given the weather. More robust seating with protection from the elements could have made for a more pleasant environment to dwell and spend time.

Moving Forward

The Linen Quarter Business Improvement District has continued to seek opportunities to animate Bedford Street and the wider area, such as during the 2019 Belfast City Blues Festival. Also, as a result of the positive feedback to the lunchtime music sessions during the pilot, similar events took place from July through to September 2019; and, Culture Night once again featured in the area, building on the success of the previous year's programme. It is hoped that such events and activities will continue well into the future.

6. Ideas Not Achievable This Time

Other ideas and proposals coming from the design workshop were considered, and in some cases brought to a relatively advanced level of readiness. However, the group was unable to proceed with these for various reasons including regulatory requirements, as well as time, resource and budgetary restrictions. Nonetheless, valuable learning was also taken from developing the following proposed 'mini-projects' despite them not being delivered by this pilot.



Ulster Hall – Lights across the street

Workshop Objective: *'Celebrate Arts and Culture'*.

Highlighting built heritage can help improve the attractiveness of any street, and the removal of the parking bays from the front of the Ulster Hall has undoubtedly improved its setting and prominence. The design workshop considered the addition of decorative lighting from the Ulster Hall across to Ewart's Linen Warehouse to help focus on these two key listed buildings, something that has also been explored by Belfast City Council and Belfast City Centre Management. It is noted that the Council's lighting strategy could include additional Christmas lighting on Bedford Street and the illumination of the Ulster Hall and other historic buildings in the area which would contribute to creating the feeling of a destination.

6. Ideas Not Achievable This Time

Bedford Square – A space to play and ‘chill-out’

Workshop Objective: *‘Soften space, provide for children, encourage lingering & social interaction’.*

The creation of a useable and comfortable family space where children can play, and a place where office workers or people passing through the area can stop and ‘chill-out’ was a popular idea. A potential location was identified at Bedford Square adjacent to the Invest NI building. Unfortunately, despite engagement with the landowner, an acceptable proposal could not be agreed within the time limits of the pilot.



Overcoming issues around insurance and public liability, and better public-private co-operation and engagement could improve outcomes for similar proposals in the future. The identification of Bedford Square as an under-utilised space inspired a subsequent intervention by the Linen Quarter Business Improvement District, and further greening of the street through its ‘Flax Field’ project in April 2019, new urban planting in the heart of the Linen Quarter.

Flax Field Project, April 2019

6. Ideas Not Achievable This Time

Seats and Cycles

Workshop Objective: *'Encourage lingering, social interaction and cycling'*.

The installation of new seating and cycle stands along Bedford Street was considered, and the group engaged with Sustrans in relation to using its distinctive 'Street Kit', which is portable and adaptable, and includes benches, bicycle locks and planters. Whilst both parties were keen to trial the kit on the street, challenges around insurance and liability meant that it could not be introduced in time for the launch of the pilot.



Moving Forward

The opportunity to test the Sustrans Street Kit as part of a wider event in the area, possibly in spring or summer, and subject to insurance and funding, would be useful for future learning and could therefore be explored further.

During the initial discussions around the parameters of the pilot, consideration was given to the possibility of using any new space to introduce a cycle lane along Bedford Street. However, given the limited budget, time and scope of this pilot as well as, the difficulties in linking into the existing cycle network, it was not considered feasible at this time.

Whilst additional cycling provision from the pilot was limited, there have been some benefits, such as a reduction in hazards as a result of the removal of parked cars. Increased cycling provision (including parking and repair facilities) should be considered in the round as part of the wider future placemaking agenda and any roads programming or travel plans for the area, such as around the next phase of the Belfast Rapid Transit – 'Glider' project.

6. Ideas Not Achievable This Time



Wonderful Windows – Activating Frontages

Workshop Objective: *'Improving the interaction of buildings with the street'*.

A proposal to animate and improve ground floor frontages and windows was explored in some detail, however, issues around advertising consent requirements (e.g. at Causeway Exchange, located within a conservation area), meant that it was not expedient to pursue the concept further. However, this engagement prompted changes at Causeway Exchange to reuse an existing doorway onto Bedford Street, which goes some way to make the frontage active again.

BBS Box – On Street Venue & Meeting Point

Workshop Objective: *'Raise awareness of the project, promote key messages & stimulate debate'*.

Another workshop proposal recommended some form of temporary 'open/covered' structure to create a meeting place, information point or venue for talks, tours and workshops. Whilst recognising the merits of the idea and the need for such a facility in the area, it was considered that the required budget and timeframe was not within the scope of the pilot.

7. QUB Student Observations

Emma Moore, a postgraduate Urban Planning student from Queen's University considered the pilot from a placemaking perspective in her thesis. Emma offered the following conclusions in relation to the pilot's contribution to placemaking pilots, and these are endorsed by the group.

The study focused on enhancing knowledge of sustainable and livable public spaces in urban environments. Studying the Better Bedford Street pilot offered three key contributions to planning knowledge in Northern Ireland:

- 1) It is possible for departments to co-exist, collaborate and learn from one another through placemaking projects. High levels of civic stewardship amongst public bodies, private companies and local business owners can help them operate in conjunction with one another for the betterment of the urban environment.
- 2) Active placemaking can be possible in areas previously thought to offer nothing more than singular or linear functions. In Bedford Street, a key pedestrian commuter route was transformed to offer areas of passive recreation and entertainment for pedestrians. The project supports key concepts of diversifying urban space to offer multi-functional purposes, thus supporting social sustainability.
- 3) Tactical Urbanism interventions operating at the small-scale can have a significant impact on the everyday experiences of the urban pedestrian. Utilising temporary design solutions as part of a pilot study can contribute to key policy developments in Northern Ireland, including the formation of the proposals for forthcoming plans and projects, such as 'Streets Ahead 5'.

With Belfast City Council's desire to increase the city centre's residential population, such placemaking interventions, which ensure socially sustainable city spaces, will become more relevant and necessary as planning considerations for the future of the city.

8. Conclusions

In summary, the purpose of the pilot was to demonstrate the qualities of Living Places through a placemaking project; by introducing small, low-cost interventions quickly to make Bedford Street better for the people who use it; and, to rebalance the provision of street space between pedestrians and vehicles. The pilot also aimed to test if collaborative working can result in better places for all, and use the learning to inform future placemaking projects.

- In planning and implementing the pilot the group worked together effectively, dedicating time and energy in 'good will' whilst balancing professional responsibilities. The collaborative nature of the project was successful in bringing other stakeholders on board, utilising experience, knowledge and contacts, with much being gained and learned from this collective approach.
- The project was delivered as quickly as circumstances, often beyond the control of the group, allowed. Factors such as adverse weather conditions and the transfer of finances had significant time implications. Some elements such as greenery were requested to be retained on site until autumn 2019 to gain maximum benefit from the intervention.
- Communicating the aims and objectives of the pilot with different stakeholders was carried out to varying degrees of success, and managing expectations was perhaps impacted by the absence of an agreed communications strategy early in the project.
- Promoting active lifestyles and a healthier environment was challenging. The extended footway played a small part in improving active lifestyles through walking, and the removal of parking resulted in less traffic. The introduction of trees was also effective in contributing to 'greening the city' and creating a healthier and more pleasant environment.
- Creating a destination and place to dwell was challenging within the scope and budget of the project. Greater resources would be required to significantly improve the vitality of the street. However, interventions such as the new seating, greenery and scaffolding experience did have a positive impact on improving the local environment.

8. Conclusions

- Enhancements reflecting the heritage of the area, such as the historical images posters, were successful and could have been even more effective if circumstances had allowed. These were effectively complemented by programmed activity such as 'Linenopolis' and the 'Flax Field' project.
- A number of other interventions were considered but not pursued, in part, due to operational concerns around roads regulatory requirements. However, other successful elements of the pilot were only made possible through positive and constructive engagement with DfI Roads. The nature of the pilot has helpfully increased the understanding of the constraints government departments are bound by in relation to processing legislation. The pilot provided a valuable context in which to learn lessons and trial ideas that are not directly aligned with normal practice.
- The temporary footway extension has provided additional space for people, and the street has, to some extent, been rebalanced in favour of pedestrians. This key element of the pilot is considered to have been a success.

On balance, the pilot was successful in demonstrating the principles and qualities of urban design and stewardship set out in Living Places, and was worthwhile in challenging current structures and 'norms'. It is the group's desire that the learning gained will benefit others in considering how future placemaking projects can improve many more of our urban places.

As we endeavour to continue to create more culturally vibrant places in the future, greater flexibility within the statutory processes will be a key aspect in testing and trialling concepts and ideas. The steering group recognises that the responsibility for better placemaking does not sit with any one group or organisation, rather successful placemaking will only be achieved if all relevant parties and users of the place, willingly collaborate and play their part for the best outcomes for all.

9. Summary of Recommendations

	Theme	Recommendations	Organisation
1	Promote the use of pilot projects.	Strive for better design and stewardship standards, and test ideas through collaborative working.	DfI, DfC (inc. MAG) and Councils
		Trialling ideas and concepts should be promoted at early stages of option development for schemes, whether streetscapes, development or regeneration proposals. The pilot process could inform business cases and Green Book Appraisals ¹ .	Strategic Design Group
2	Change conversations: engagement, policies, strategies and implementation, to influence the future of places.	Empower people to discuss what is important to them and consider how we change things through the collaborative pilot project process.	Strategic Design Group
		When developing future strategies and policies consider how they could be tested as part of pilot projects that may enable long term benefits. For example parking provision versus more pedestrian space and testing seating areas and attractive spaces to linger.	DfI, DfC (inc MAG) and Councils
		Consider how NI could benefit from further guidance such as Manual for Streets 1 and 2 and the benefits realised from other public realm/placemaking schemes.	DfI Planning and Roads
		Ensure stewardship plans and responsibilities are clearly set out prior to the delivery of interventions.	DfI, DfC and Councils
		For future collaborative projects consider liability issues from the outset and aim to include details in the project business case. For example, consider grant funding 3 rd party partners to purchase necessary assets in order that they can take out insurance directly.	Participating collaborative partners
		Require analysis of pedestrian-to-vehicle ratios and expected future trends in advance of environmental improvement schemes.	DfI, DfC and Councils
		Artistic interventions should be considered in child/youth friendly locations as part of future environmental improvement schemes.	DfI, DfC and Councils
		Consider the development of a scaffolding enhancement strategy, to potentially include policies and/or delivery mechanisms through conditions, grants, licenses etc.	Councils and DfI Roads
		Deliver more flexibility in the statutory providers to enable innovation, collaboration and effective testing of pilots, concepts and meanwhile use.	DfI, DfC and Councils
		In planning for further greening of the city consideration should be given to the benefits of introducing Sustainable Urban Drainage systems (SuDs), where possible.	DfI, DfC and Councils

¹ The Green Book Central Government Guidance on Appraisal and Evaluation

9. Summary of Recommendations

	Theme	Recommendations	Organisation
3	Influence strategic street improvements in Bedford Street and the wider Linen Quarter area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider rebalancing provision for pedestrians, cyclists and car users along Bedford Street, in light of project findings which demonstrate that a higher proportion of those using Bedford Street are pedestrians compared to vehicles; • Given the high number of pedestrians compared to vehicles, consider current level of provision for road users including traffic flows and vehicle movement patterns in the wider Linen Quarter area and consider rebalancing for the pedestrian; • Consider if adequate provision is made for cyclists along Bedford Street and in the Linen Quarter area, in the context of a wider city centre cycling plan; and the feasibility of specific measures such as dedicated cycle lanes, and the provision of parking/repair facilities; • Build upon Belfast City Council's 'Car Parking Strategy & Action Plan' in the context of a city centre wide approach, to reduce traffic circulating the Linen Quarter seeking on-street parking spaces, to rebalance the street for pedestrians; • Introduce more permanent solutions to greening the city streets generally, to create a more attractive and healthier environment; and, • Consider the potential for a 'covered/open' structure to create a public venue or meeting point within the wider Linen Quarter area (for example at Bedford Square, BBC Corner or Blackstaff Square). 	DfI, DfC, Belfast City Council and other relevant stakeholders

9. Summary of Recommendations

	Theme	Recommendations	Organisation
4	Influence potential street improvements with specific focus on Bedford Street as part of BSA5 and other relevant plans and proposals for the area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the needs of all street users including local businesses are taken into account; • Consider making permanent the temporary footway extension along the eastern side of Bedford Street, constructed in August 2018. Consider widening the footways along both sides of the street to increase provision for pedestrians further. This would have the added benefit of making the crossing easier by reducing the width of the street; • Consider potential to improve street crossing in the vicinity of Franklin Street to enhance connectivity to the forthcoming Weavers Cross Transport Hub, including improvements to the route through Franklin Street, Blackstaff Square and Amelia Street; • Consider potential to make it priority for pedestrians to cross at side street junctions; • Consider design and installation of seating/planting in appropriate locations with new trees/shrubs of an appropriate size/nature; • Street furniture and utilities need to be rationalised to ensure they do not contribute to street clutter and become obstacles for pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities; • Ensure environmental factors are taken into account in the design (e.g. wind tunnel effects, shadow from tall buildings etc.) when seeking to create a street which is comfortable and where people want to dwell; • Give recognition to the history of Linen Quarter and how this can be reflected in any new design and materials used; • Consider additional seasonal lighting schemes and the illumination of historic buildings; and • Ensure alignment with the emerging Cultural Strategy to ensure development of a vibrant and culturally enhanced place. 	DfC, DfI and Belfast City Council

Acknowledgements

Project Steering Group Members

Andrew Haley	Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture & Built Environment
Angus Kerr	Chief Planner and Director of DfI Regional Planning Division
Richard Kirk	Formerly Regional Director Institution of Civil Engineers
Ciarán Fox	Director of Royal Society of Ulster Architects
Chris McCracken	Managing Director of Linen Quarter Business Improvement District
Amberlea Neely	Formerly Director of PLACE NI
Sean Dolan	Acting Director of City Regeneration and Development, Belfast City Council
Philip Robinson	DfI Roads, Network Services - Eastern Division
Gary Hammond	DfC Belfast Regeneration
Eileen McCallion	DfC Architecture & Built Environment, MAG Secretariat
Joy Hargie	DfI Regional Planning Division
Adrian Gribben	DfI Regional Planning Division
David Cheddy	DfI Regional Planning Division

The steering group wishes to thank Emma Moore (QUB) for her contribution to the learning reflected in this report. In addition, the group would also thank the wider network of people who contributed to the pilot by attending sub-group meetings and participating in the design workshop, as well as in the successful planning and delivery of the interventions and activities.

