

Urban Village Initiative in EastSide

EAST BELFAST



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



August 2016

URBAN VILLAGES INITIATIVE

EASTSID

 **EastSide**
Urban Village Initiative



The
Executive Office

www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

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Welcome





01

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

1

PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This Strategic Framework is intended to provide a reference point for anyone involved in shaping investment decisions or identifying collaborative opportunities in the Urban Villages Initiative area in EastSide. The Framework presents findings from a creative process of analysis and reflection which involved individual members of the community, as well as representatives from local and central government. It provides an analysis of place and is a tool for informing action and investment.

The Framework is intended to be used as a working document - so that emerging opportunities can be identified and changing circumstances acknowledged.

It begins by presenting information on what the Urban Villages Initiative is, what it is trying to achieve and how it will work.

Section 2 then sets out the local context and presents key findings under three headings - strengths, symptoms and causes.

Section 3 looks towards the future and sets out Strategic Actions which emerged through the process of engagement, evidence gathering and analysis. These can help to inform future investment plans as well as identifying opportunities for alignment of effort and collaboration around shared outcomes.

Section 4 focuses on delivery. The Executive Office will take forward projects and programmes within its remit, and work with others to progress opportunities for shared delivery of outcomes, in keeping with the approach articulated in the draft Programme for Government Framework.



WHAT IS THE URBAN VILLAGES INITIATIVE?

1

The Urban Villages Initiative is a key action within the Northern Ireland Executive's 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy. It is designed to improve good relations outcomes and to help develop thriving places where there has previously been a history of deprivation and community tension.



Improve the physical environment

Build community capacity

There are three inter-connecting aims:

- to foster positive community identities
- to build community capacity
- to improve the physical environment.

In working towards these aims, a key delivery mechanism will be aligning and influencing investment and finding better ways of 'doing more with what we've got'. The goal is to enable current and future investment to be targeted and delivered in more effective and sustainable ways. In practice this will mean:

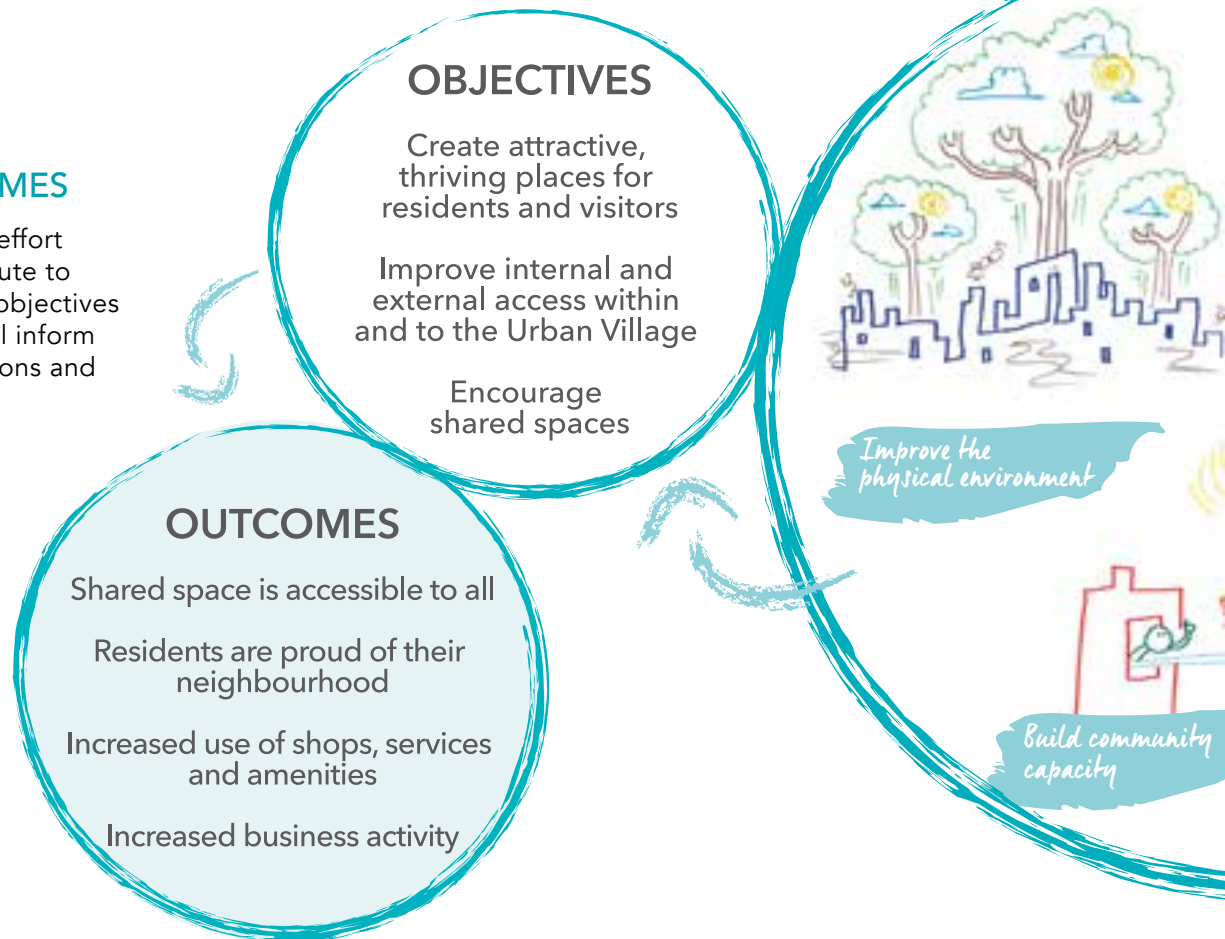
- co-ordinating and aligning effort across Government Departments, local Councils and community organisations to deliver good relations outcomes
- identifying and building on what is working because sustainable change requires investment in social (people and communities) and in physical assets
- exploring ways of investing and trying new approaches which stimulate private investment and economic activity.



*Foster positive
community identities*

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

In order to focus effort and set a clear route to delivery, a set of objectives and outcomes will inform investment decisions and actions.



OBJECTIVES

Build trust and relationships

Enhance pride and confidence in Urban Village areas

Create welcoming places where people feel safe and connected, regardless of religious or ethnic background

OUTCOMES

Improved relationships between and within communities

Cultural diversity is celebrated

A community where places and spaces are safe for all

Increased sense of community belonging

OBJECTIVES

Encourage and support communities to express their views and influence what happens in their areas

Enhance the capacity and confidence of communities to work and socialise within and outside their immediate neighbourhoods

Enhance community capacity to participate in local and regional networks and recognise shared needs and priorities

OUTCOMES

Increased use of shared spaces and services

Greater voice and influence

Confident and enterprising community



Foster positive community identities

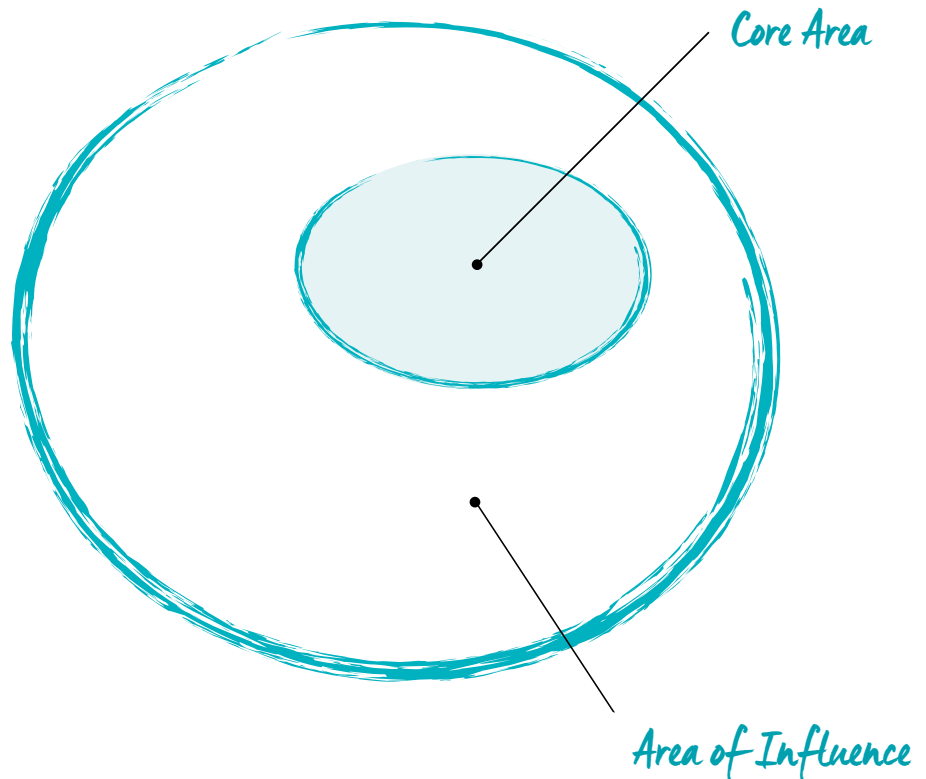


PLACES

Delivery will be focussed on five 'core' areas in:

- Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan (North Belfast)
- Bogside, Fountain and Bishop Street (Derry~Londonderry)
- Colin (West Belfast)
- EastSide (East Belfast)
- Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Markets (South Belfast)

The core area provides a focal point for action and investment. The concept of a wider area of influence, that is not sharply defined, acknowledges that thriving places require wider connection to both physical and social assets. Investment decisions and actions will be informed by the likely impact on core areas.



STRATEGIC ACTIONS

The Strategic Actions in this Framework document are intended to inform discussion about how to best deliver positive outcomes in each place. In order to ensure that expertise is harnessed at a neighbourhood level, local Reference Groups are being developed - to provide a first point of contact and sense-check for project ideas, to build civic stewardship and sustainability around specific interventions and to ensure that delivery is built from shared priorities.

Healthy Lifestyles & Wellbeing

- Nurture community growing
- Plant Newtownards Road
- Encourage healthy and resilient communities
- Optimise the local green spaces including the Connswater Community Greenway

Transformation of Places & Spaces

- Transform vacant and derelict spaces
- Revitalise existing and introduce new civic spaces
- Continue public realm enhancements
- Refurbish and light key buildings and spaces
- Live and work above the shops
- Improve all frontages
- Redevelop low density areas

Community Cohesion & Understanding

- Develop and promote positive cultural identities
- Sustain generational cross and intra community programmes
- Address the challenges of interfaces

Arts, Creativity and Learning

- Instigate positive arts and murals programmes
- Growth strategy for arts and proactive management
- Raise aspirations through enhanced learning opportunities

Economic Development

- Support local tourism opportunities
- Relocate activating uses to Newtownards Road
- Develop, support and promote local business and facilities
- Promote place identity brand
- Meet employer needs with skills
- Modernise commercial units

Connectivity

- Increase mobility
- Connect north, west, rail and air

INTRODUCING THE URBAN VILLAGE AREA IN EASTSIDE

1

TITANIC
QUARTER
RAILWAY
STATION

BRIDGE
END

Newtownards Road

The core area of the Urban Villages Initiative in EastSide is a one mile stretch of the Newtownards Road, between Bridge End and Grampian Avenue.

To those who know the Newtownards Road, it is a special place. It is a lifeblood for the

communities who live along its length and an artery for the city, linking Belfast deep into Ards and Down. It is a symbol of identity, home to landmark buildings and streets. It provides a link to the past, steeped in over 200 years of history, but is also a link to the future, as a focus of new investment and a connector to opportunities beyond.



**HOLLYWOOD
ARCHES**

METHODOLOGY

1

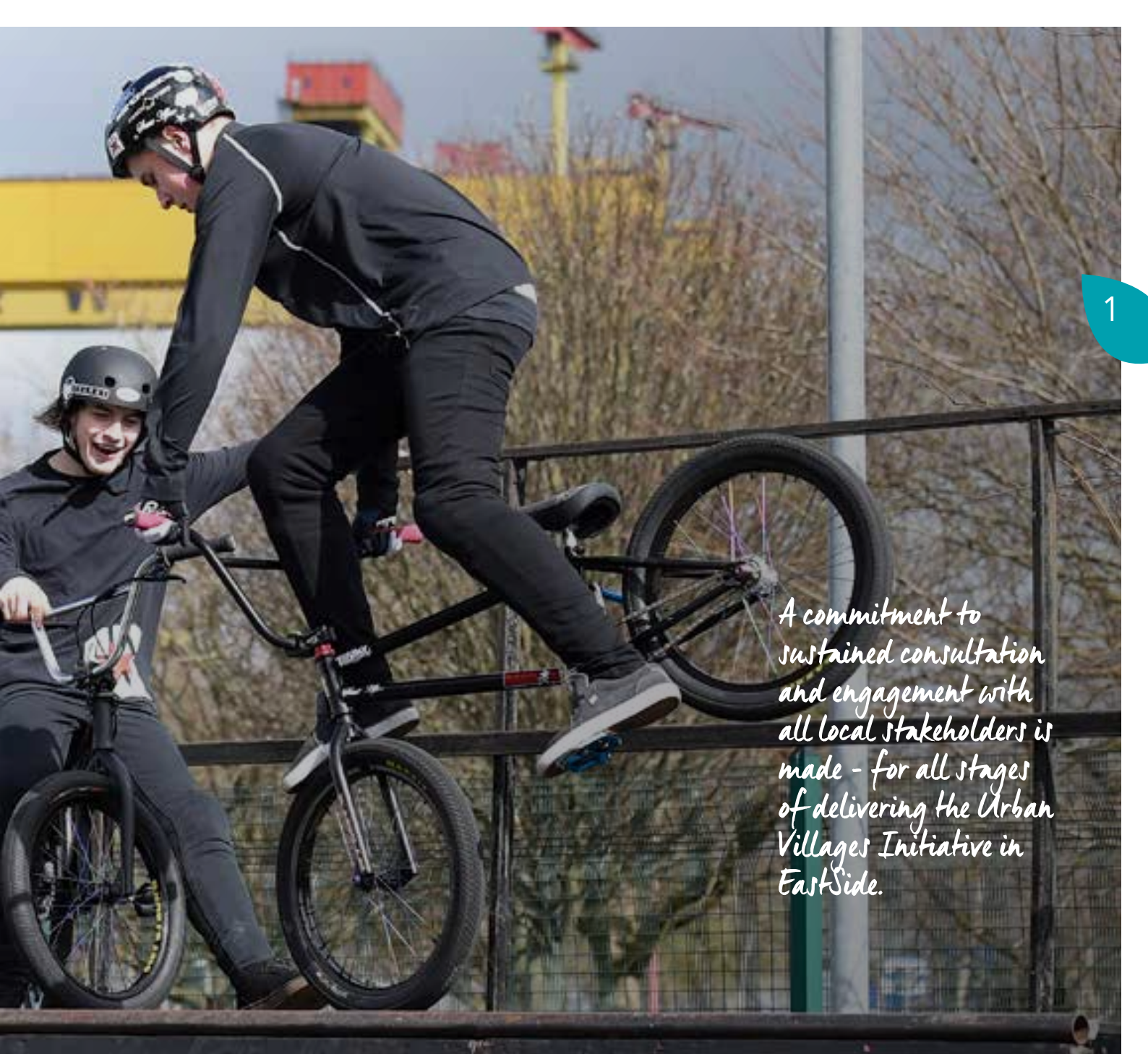
PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The process that informed this Strategic Framework began with an in-depth analysis involving desktop research, site appraisal and stakeholder consultation. Ongoing one to one meetings, workshops, surveys and public events with people who live, work and spend time in the area have been central to the task and ensure that the findings are specific and relevant to the people and the place.

It seeks to build on what is working and will continue to progress positive change to bring about real transformation, whilst significantly improving the living environment and area.

A range of issues were explored in more depth. These included, for example, the role of illumination and lighting in regeneration; children's play spaces; community gardens and allotments; and the role of business associations. This informed the findings and Strategic Actions in parallel with the valuable contributions and participation throughout the process.

An Urban Village Reference Group comprised of key community organisations and businesses has been established. This provides a central point of contact for gathering and disseminating information in the wider community on the Urban Villages Initiative in EastSide.



A commitment to sustained consultation and engagement with all local stakeholders is made - for all stages of delivering the Urban Villages Initiative in EastSide.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Key to the project methodology was engagement with the people who live, work and spend time in the area.

Over 60 meetings were held with stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors in the initial phase. The purpose of these meetings was to understand the issues, understand ongoing projects and to jointly identify opportunities to be considered for the future.

5 youth workshops were coordinated which provided invaluable information in determining what local young people like and dislike about the area and the type of place they would like in the future.

39 local businesses were surveyed, which provided an understanding of the current trading environment and identified ways in which the business community could be strengthened and supported. A further study was undertaken that updated and refined the findings and identified opportunities.

The EastSide Urban Village Festival, held on Saturday 28th March 2015, presented an excellent opportunity to test some of the emerging ideas from the strategy and gather further feedback.

The festival was positively received, reinforcing the contribution that the arts can make to this area of the city and demonstrating its potential for the future.

'Street Society' programmes have been conducted in 2015 and 2016. The first year involved architecture students from Queen's University Belfast developing ideas for community organisations throughout the study area. The second year was expanded and sound/music students also participated in the intense one week programme. Emerging proposals helped inform the final Strategic Actions, as well as ideas for deliverable projects, some of which have been progressed through further design and engagement.

The various engagement and consultation approaches produced information, recommendations and opportunities which will inform the continued development and delivery of the Strategic Actions within this Development Framework.



STREET SOCIETY



FESTIVALS AND
COMMUNITY LED EVENTS



YOUTH WORKSHOPS



CONSULTATION
MEETINGS



BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY
SURVEY RETURNS



REFERENCE GROUP
WORKSHOPS



**URBAN
VILLAGES**
Thriving Places



EastSide
Urban Village Initiative



02

THE URBAN VILLAGE AREA TODAY

NEWTOWNARDS ROAD

2



2015



While not as bustling as it once was, historic buildings, stretches of retail activity and recent investment are clear strengths of the Newtownards Road today.

However, there are still a number of negative attributes which undermine the quality and potential of this area, such as vacant and derelict properties, under-developed buildings, paramilitary themed murals and razed sites.

1944



1834

With early Belfast concentrated on the western shores of the Lagan, East Belfast comprised of small rural settlements along the main road to Newtownards.

A detailed historical map of Belfast, Ireland, from 1858. The map shows the city's layout, including the River Liffey and the Lough Swilly. A prominent teal line is drawn across the map, highlighting a specific area of industrial development in the north. The map is rendered in black and white with fine lines and text labels.

1858

The advent of industrialisation and construction of shipyards, factories and warehouses on newly reclaimed land to the north stimulated the rapid growth of East Belfast.



1920

By the early 20th Century, the area had grown considerably. Dense urban street patterns are evident with rows of terraced houses positioned alongside industrial buildings, such as ropeworks, glassworks and foundries.



2015

Today, while the physical extent of East Belfast has further expanded, its historic urban pattern remains in evidence. Yet the decline of heavy industries, construction of transport infrastructure and less visible impacts of the 'Troubles' have all changed the context of the Urban Village area in EastSide.

STRENGTHS

The engagement process and analysis identifies many positive aspects and strengths that include people, activities and places which are summarised over the following pages.

2

STRATEGIC LOCATION



CULTURAL HERITAGE



ARCHITECTURAL
HERITAGE



CREATIVITY



RECENT
INVESTMENT





2



STRATEGIC LOCATION

Situated on the eastern bank of the River Lagan and a short walk from Belfast city centre, the Urban Village area occupies a strategic location at both the city and regional scale.

To the north lies Queen's Island, comprising the industrial lands of Harland and Wolff, the Odyssey Leisure Complex and Titanic Quarter development area. To the east and south lie residential neighbourhoods, including Sydenham, Bloomfield, Woodstock and Ravenhill. The Newtownards Road forms a central

spine through the area and acts as a key arterial route linking the City with North Down and the Ards Peninsula.

The area is served well by regional transport links with Belfast City Airport close by and the Bangor to Belfast Railway, M2 motorway and Sydenham Bypass located along its northern fringe. Moreover, delivery of Belfast Rapid Transit and Connswater Community Greenway over the coming years will further strengthen transport links in the area.



CULTURAL HERITAGE

The level of industrial and commercial activity in East Belfast from the early 19th century to the late 20th century cannot be understated.

Companies such as Harland and Wolff, Belfast Ropeworks, the Lagan Foundry of Victor Coates and Sirocco Works were not merely major employers in Belfast but the largest and most technically advanced of their kind, both in the UK and the world.

Many of the workers settled in the densely populated redbrick terraces either side of the Newtownards Road, while busy rail and tram lines carried enormous quantities of materials, goods and passengers. It is noted that more than one and a half million

passengers passed through the Hollywood Arches junction annually.

Numerous reminders of this rich industrial and cultural heritage still exist today, not least the giant cranes of Harland and Wolff shipyard, Samson and Goliath, listed as historic monuments and still operational.

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The EastSide Urban Village area possesses a rich architectural heritage, influenced significantly by the manufacturing industry that once dominated this part of the city.

While many of the brick built mill and factory structures have vanished, several fine examples still remain, such as the Jaffe Mill, now the Portview Trading Centre and the Corporation Baths on Templemore Avenue.



This architectural heritage is also demonstrated by the tightly packed brick terraced houses built by mill and factory owners, such as McMaster Street (pictured), in addition to the many fine churches, punctuating the skyline throughout the area.

Collectively, these notable buildings contribute to both the cultural and architectural quality of the area and provide a valuable insight into the lives of the people who contributed to Belfast's industrial wealth.



CREATIVITY

Design, creativity and the arts have a long and rich association with EastSide.

This is demonstrated by the innovative businesses and the world renowned musicians, poets, authors and sportspersons connected to this area. Today, arts and creativity continue to be at the very heart of the community and in recent years there has been a considerable increase in the number

of independent artists and public art installations throughout the area.

Moreover, the growing success of events such as the EastSide Arts Festival and major music concerts further demonstrate the strength of this growing industry.





RECENT INVESTMENT

Despite this area having witnessed decline since the days of the booming shipyards, extensive recent investment has contributed positively to the quality of community service provision and the physical environment.

As indicated on the Plan across the page, major capital schemes

include Hollywood Arches Health Centre, Connswater Community Greenway, Skainos, Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) as well as a shopfront and public realm improvement scheme. The opportunity is to maximise the benefit of these investments and sustain their impact.



City East

Bryson Street Surgery

Pitt Park

Public Realm

Skainos

Shop Fronts

Visitor Centre

Connswater Community
Greenway (CS Lewis SQ)

Hollywood Arches
Health Centre

SYMPTOMS

2

VACANCY, DERELICTION
AND RAZED SITES



UNDERDEVELOPED
SITES



LACK OF
ANIMATION



CONGESTION AND PARKING



IMAGE



VACANCY, DERELICTION AND RAZED SITES

A worrying characteristic of EastSide Urban Village area is the number of vacant or derelict buildings and razed sites.

Much of this can be attributed to the industrial decline and depopulation and more recently the economic recession and changes in the retail environment.

These development opportunity sites vary from small, vacant units

to larger areas of under-utilised open space and therefore offer considerable development potential for this area. Redeveloping these buildings and spaces is a priority given their prominence along a key arterial route into the city centre.



UNDERDEVELOPED SITES

As highlighted previously, the redevelopment of vacant and derelict buildings and underutilised space, offers enormous development potential for the EastSide Urban Village area.

Analysis has also identified other areas of development potential. These include existing buildings of a low density such as one and two storey properties, which are not of a character and scale befitting a main arterial route. Similarly, properties with vacant upper storeys should be retrofitted, to accommodate living and working over the shops.

LACK OF ANIMATION

As part of the analysis process, a review of frontages along the Newtownards Road was conducted.

While this identified a concentration of activity along the eastern portion of the arterial route, particularly around Hollywood Arches and Dee Street, the level of animation and activity dissipates considerably as you move westwards towards the city centre.

In the main, this is related to the number of vacant, derelict and underdeveloped properties and sites. However, the interface barriers around St. Matthew's Church and adjacent residential properties and the prevalence of visually obtrusive



window security shutters, many of which are opened for only a few hours each day, further compound this lack of animation.



CONGESTION AND PARKING

An examination of transport and movement throughout the EastSide Urban Village area highlighted two major areas of concern.

Firstly, there are significant traffic congestion issues, particularly during morning and evening peak times, not only on the main arterial route, but also on secondary routes such as Dee Street and Templemore Avenue. This congestion is caused by high volumes of through traffic; a direct result of the

area's strategic location connecting Belfast City Centre with the rest of East Belfast and the wider North Down area. Secondly, vehicular parking emerged as an area of concern.

While there is a substantial quantity of parking around Holywood arches,



there is a lack of parking provision further along Newtownards Road towards the City Centre. Moreover, the Urban Clearway restrictions which are operational during morning and evening peak times substantially limit on street parking.

2







2

IMAGE

As identified previously, the area's rich cultural and architectural heritage, demonstrated by fine buildings and colourful murals, along with recent investment into community facilities and an enhanced public realm, have successfully contributed to the attractiveness and vibrancy of EastSide Urban Village area.

The opportunity is for the EastSide Urban Village area initiative to help

build a contemporary identity from this rich heritage.

However, this improving image is undermined by vacant and derelict buildings, razed and underdeveloped sites. Furthermore, murals depicting paramilitary activity can be intimidating and make the Newtownards Road feel unwelcoming to visitors.

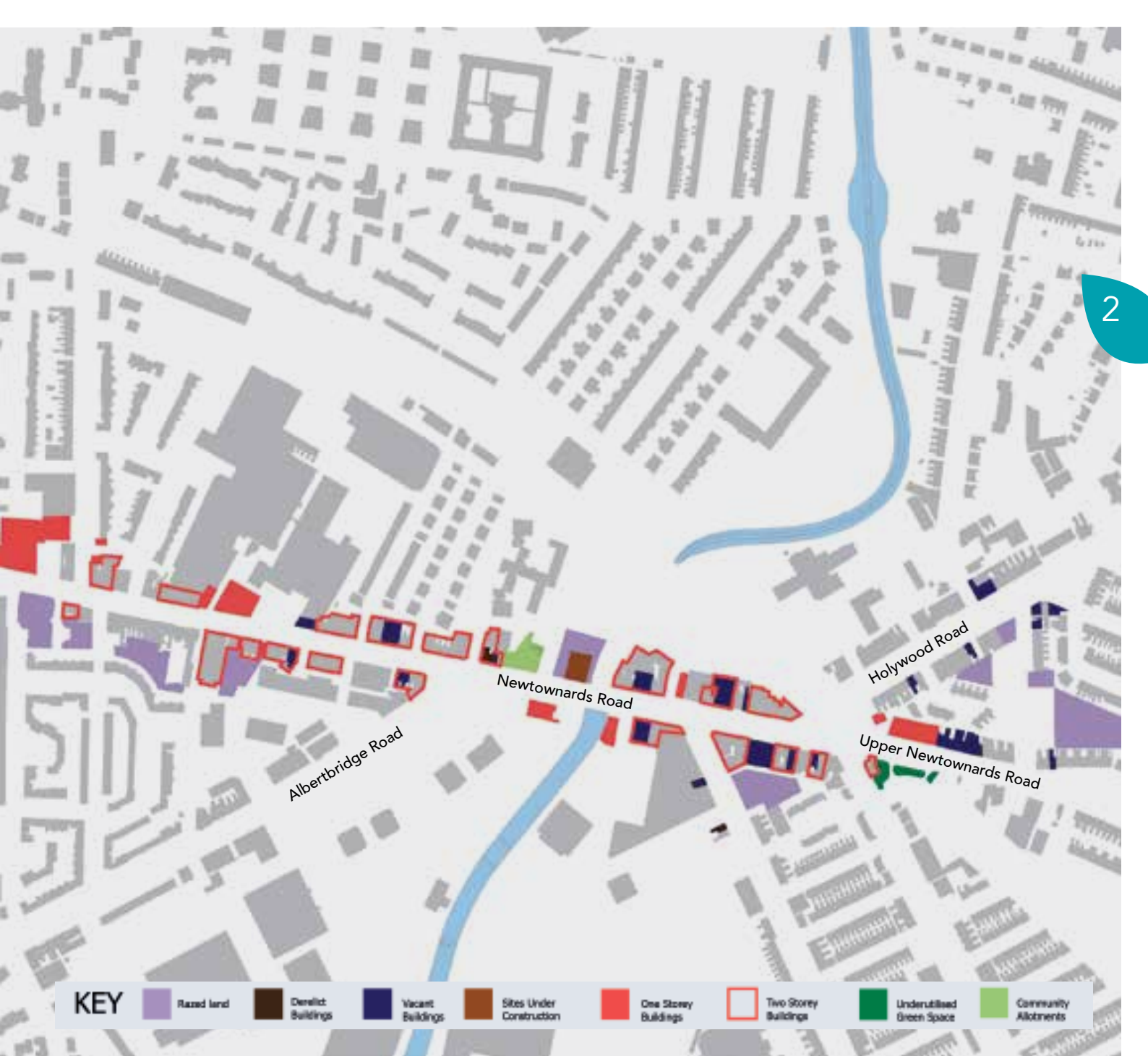


SYMPTOMS

This plan highlights vacant and derelict properties, razed sites, underdeveloped buildings and underutilised green spaces.

As can be seen this is a significant proportion of the area and highlights the level of underdeveloped and underutilised areas, along a key arterial route into the City Centre.

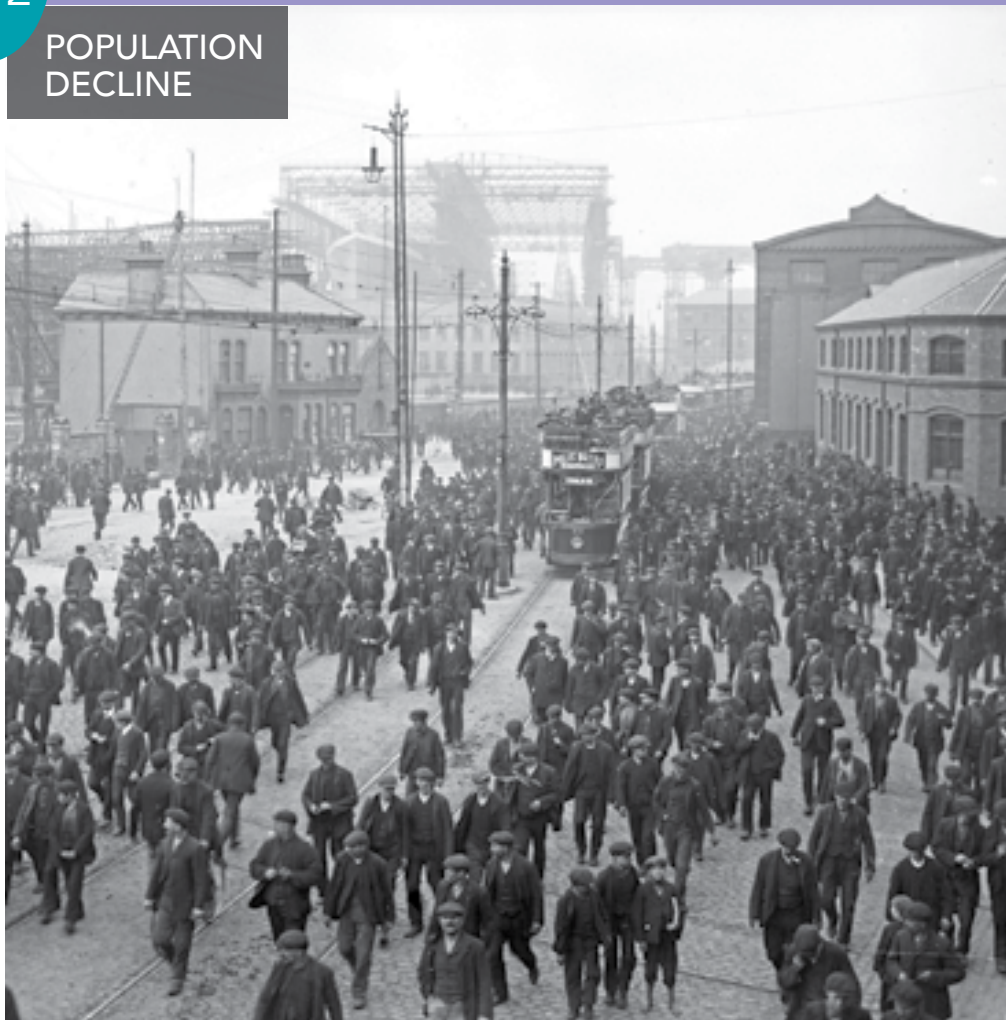
Moreover, the 'Shatterzone' area, dominated by transport infrastructure, large surface level car parks and buildings relating poorly to the street, further compound the sense of separation between EastSide and the City Centre.



CAUSES

2

POPULATION
DECLINE



RETAIL CHANGE AND
CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE





ATE

PHYSICAL CONSTRAINTS



FRACTURED COMMUNITIES



POPULATION DECLINE

The decline of heavy industries, to which EastSide was intrinsically linked, has had an undoubted impact on this area.

This, compounded by the 'Troubles', resulted in many of the area's population leaving, while those that remained experienced challenges such as unemployment and related problems.

While this is true for EastSide Urban Village area, the diagram across the page illustrates that this is a common issue across Belfast. The area in purple, which includes EastSide Urban Village area highlights inner city neighbourhoods

witnessing similar issues such as depopulation and retail decline.

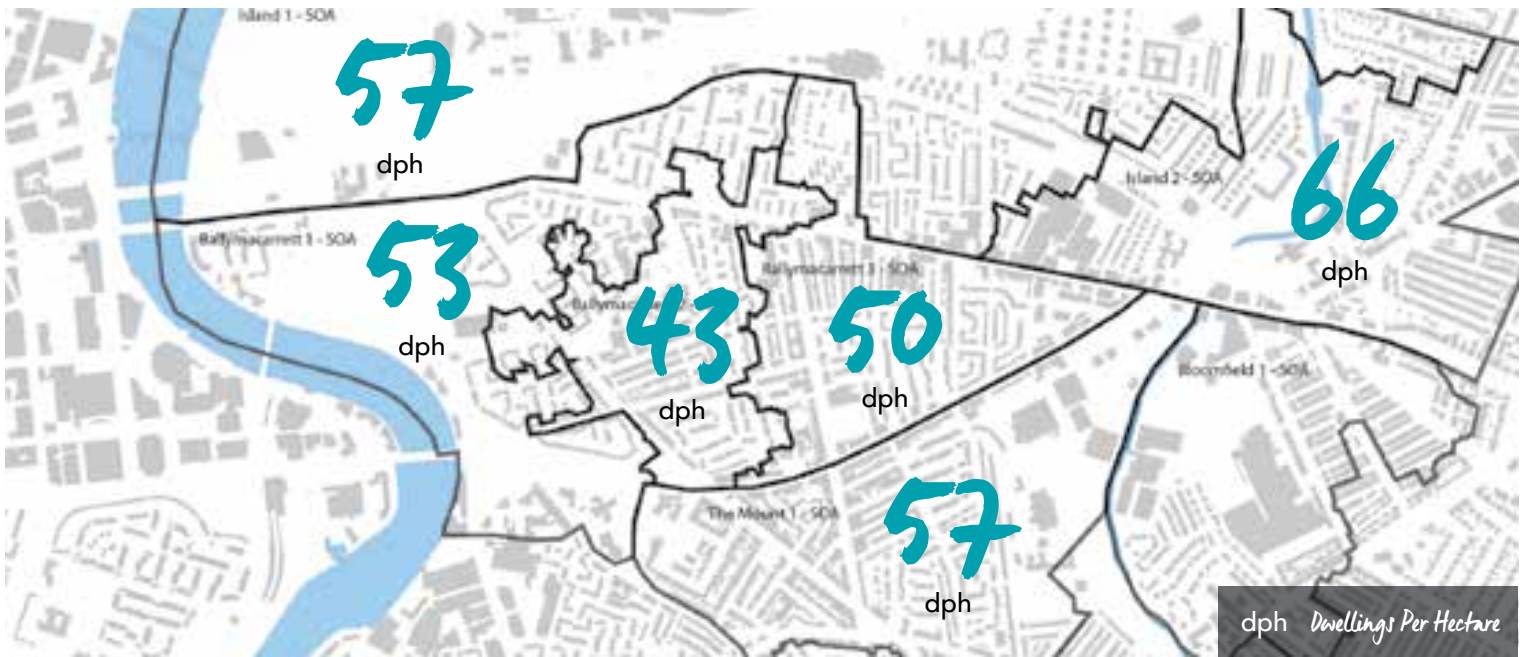
In addition to statistical data, evidence of this depopulation can be seen by studying urban densities. CABE (Conservation Architecture and Built Environment) recommends a best practice target density of 70-90 dwellings per hectare (dph) for inner city neighbourhoods. However, the map across the page demonstrates that current densities are much lower than this target.

This low density has particular implications on the ability to sustain crucial health, education and leisure services, in addition to shops and local businesses.





2



RETAIL CHANGE AND CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE

Retail in this area has changed considerably over the years. During the early to mid-20th century, shops lined the entire length of Newtownards Road, reflecting the booming industrial era. However, as a result of industrial decline, depopulation and the development of large shopping

centre complexes, many local retailers relocated elsewhere or ceased trading.

In more recent years, the retail pattern has evolved further with the growing reliance on online shopping and the economic downturn,



contributing to an even more challenging trading environment for local businesses.

As part of the analysis process a business survey was conducted which revealed that 75% of local businesses described trading over the past year as

either average, poor or very poor, while 15% of businesses were considering relocation, reduction or closure over the next five years.

The Plan below illustrates the concentration of retail and commercial activity at the eastern end of the study

area, with only scattered retail units present across the rest of the route.



PHYSICAL CONSTRAINTS

A number of major physical barriers exist throughout the study area, which restrict connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists, contribute to vehicular congestion and undermine the quality of the environment.

Physical barriers to the north include the Sydenham Bypass and the Belfast to Bangor railway line, and these deter movement to the Odyssey Leisure Complex and Titanic Quarter.

To the west, the River Lagan restricts connections between EastSide and the City Centre and this coupled with the Shatterzone area, further accentuate a sense of disjointedness and isolation. While there are several existing bridge connections, connectivity could be improved considerably, particularly at the site of the former Sirocco Works.

Finally, to the west, the line of the Connswater River acts as another physical barrier restricting movement throughout the study area.

As identified in the diagram below, collectively these physical barriers contribute to the sense that EastSide Urban Village area is an 'island', disjointed from surrounding areas.





FRACTURED COMMUNITIES

Inter-community tension is evidenced by the continued existence of interface barriers at Bryson Street. While these substantial physical barriers proved necessary during periods of violence, a focus on progress towards a more peaceful society should mean that the requirement for these barriers is kept under constant

review, with the overarching aim to remove them completely when communities are ready.

Intra-community tensions exist within the loyalist community. While this does not result in physical divisions, the consequential territorial and internal divisions that ensue can create “invisible” barriers that hinder community cohesion and stifle the capacity to achieve socially sustainable places.



2



**URBAN
VILLAGES**
Thriving Places



EastSide
Urban Village Initiative



03

THE FUTURE

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

The Strategic Actions have been developed through a comprehensive process of information gathering, analysis and extensive engagement with a wide and diverse audience. They seek to build on what is working, highlighting opportunities for sustaining positive change.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES & WELLBEING

- *Nurture community growing*
- *Plant Newtownards Road*
- *Encourage healthy and resilient communities*
- *Optimise the local green spaces including the Connswater Community Greenway*

TRANSFORMATION OF PLACES & SPACES

- *Transform vacant and derelict spaces*
- *Revitalise existing and introduce new civic spaces*
- *Continue public realm enhancements*
- *Refurbish and light key buildings and spaces*
- *Live and work above the shops*
- *Improve all frontages*
- *Redevelop low density areas*



COMMUNITY COHESION & UNDERSTANDING

- *Develop and promote positive cultural identities*
- *Sustain generational cross and intra community programmes*
- *Address the challenges of interfaces*



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- *Support local tourism opportunities*
- *Relocate activating uses to Newtownards Road*
- *Develop, support and promote local business and facilities*
- *Promote place identity brand*
- *Meet employer needs with skills*
- *Modernise commercial units*

3



ARTS, CREATIVITY AND LEARNING

- *Instigate positive arts and murals programmes*
- *Growth strategy for arts and proactive management*
- *Raise aspirations through enhanced learning opportunities*



CONNECTIVITY

- *Increase mobility*
- *Connect north, west, rail and air*

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES & WELLBEING

3

NURTURE COMMUNITY
GROWING



PLANT NEWTOWNARDS
ROAD



ENCOURAGE HEALTHY AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



OPTIMISE THE CONNSWATER COMMUNITY GREENWAY AND GREEN SPACES







NURTURE COMMUNITY GROWING

Inner city allotments and community gardens are a precious resource, providing local people with the space to grow, eat and learn about freshly grown produce.

They can also present a good venue for groups to come together and socialise.

It is therefore important that EastSide's two recently installed community

gardens are supported and their potential benefits maximised for the wider population.

Opportunities for other gardens in key locations around EastSide should also be explored with local residents, thereby presenting an opportunity for the gardens to work together and explore initiatives, such as selling of produce.

PLANT NEWTOWNARDS ROAD

Urban trees and other plantings have many benefits including air quality and wildlife habitat, not to mention their impact on softening the visual landscape and contributing to the wellbeing of local residents.

Semi-mature trees planted recently have made a significant impact on the road, which if cared for properly, will further contribute as they are allowed to grow. However, some older areas of shrub planting do little to brighten the area and could be improved.

3



Considerable opportunity exists to further transform the Newtownards Road, particularly along its lower stretches. Additional tree planting should be complemented by floral displays in bed, window boxes and hanging baskets. Such a project would be well suited to a social enterprise

model, with plants being grown and cared for locally by people who benefit from the skills they acquire.



ENCOURAGE HEALTHY AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

The Newtownards Road has many neighbouring people and communities, whose lifestyle choices, wellbeing and confidence impact on its social and economic vibrancy. Local communities in the Eastside area are also affected by a conflict legacy which has had, and continues to have, profound effects on health, wellbeing and emotional resilience.

The physical and mental health and wellbeing of local communities impacts on their ability to participate in civic and community life, access

services and facilities, and make positive, confident lifestyle choices. This as a result affects the vibrancy, animation and sustainability of the Urban Village area.

Social and capital assets should be used within the Urban Villages Initiative in Eastside to reduce health inequalities, address mental health issues, increase life expectancy, develop and sustain support, and increase the positive outcomes for both the people and place.



OPTIMISE THE CONNSWATER COMMUNITY GREENWAY AND LOCAL GREEN SPACE

EastSide is very fortunate to have on its doorstep one of the most exciting regeneration projects on the island. Once complete, the Connswater Community Greenway will provide 16km of foot and cycle path along the Loop, Knock and Connswater Rivers, providing expansive new recreational space and wildlife habitat for East Belfast.

The Connswater Community Greenway project has been developed by the EastSide Partnership and is being delivered with Belfast City Council.

The Connswater Community Greenway will be a tremendous asset for EastSide as a whole. Opportunities for people living and working in the Urban Village area to connect with it should be maximised to benefit from this major piece of green infrastructure. New physical linkages with the greenway (green spaces, foot and cycle paths) should be considered, along with social and economic linkage through events, educational activities, training and the hospitality sector.

Find out more at:
www.connswatergreenway.co.uk



TRANSFORMATION OF PLACES & SPACES

3

TRANSFORM
VACANT AND
DERELICT SPACES



REVITALISE EXISTING
AND INTRODUCE NEW
CIVIC SPACES



CONTINUE
PUBLIC REALM
ENHANCEMENTS



REFURBISH AND
LIGHT KEY BUILDINGS
AND SPACES



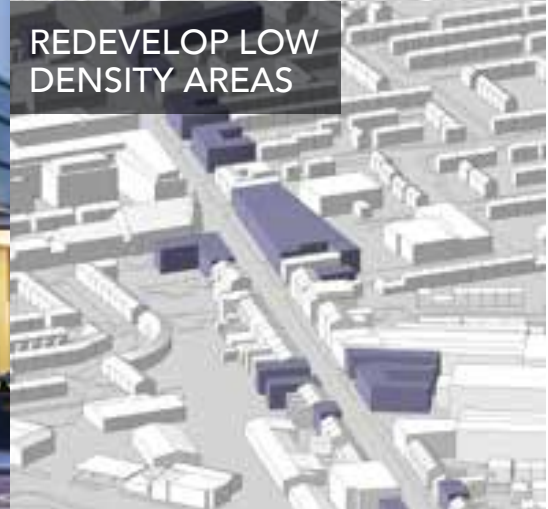
LIVE AND WORK
ABOVE THE SHOPS



IMPROVE ALL
FRONTAGES



REDEVELOP LOW
DENSITY AREAS



TRANSFORM VACANT AND DERELICT SPACES

Much has been achieved in reducing the impact of dereliction and vacancy along the Newtownards Road.

Yet more remains to be done, especially at prominent locations near the junctions of the Albertbridge Road and Templemore Avenue.

'Meanwhile use' is a term to describe temporary interventions of value to an area and its people. Great potential exists to transform the remaining vacant spaces in EastSide through the innovative

application of meanwhile use. Community gardens, performance spaces, outdoor galleries, wildlife gardens and many other imaginative proposals should be considered and developed with local residents, organisations, schools and landowners. A commitment to supporting the management of these spaces should be made from the outset, on the clear understanding that ultimately they will be redeveloped.





REVITALISE EXISTING AND INTRODUCE NEW CIVIC SPACES

There are a number of existing civic spaces, C.S. Lewis Square at the Hollywood Arches, the junction of Newtownards Road and Hollywood Road, Portview Trade Centre, Skainos and Pitt Park. New life and vitality along the Newtownards Road could be injected by greater use and activation of existing civic spaces combined with the creation of new ones that allow for recreation and events to take place there.

Whilst permanent improvements are needed to the existing spaces, such as surfacing,

lighting, street furniture and shelter, temporary interventions could succeed in energising such spaces with much less cost. Art installations, market stalls and regular small events and performances should all be explored.

Potential new spaces could be created at the junctions with Templemore Avenue and St Martin's Church. These should be designed to a high standard, respecting the urban form of Newtownards Road and using good quality hard and soft landscape materials.







CONTINUE PUBLIC REALM ENHANCEMENTS

Complementing recent investment in the public realm of the Newtownards Road will help to ensure that its overall benefits can be spread across EastSide.

Potential exists to further improve the experience of pedestrians along certain stretches and the thresholds to key side streets, thereby enhancing its attractiveness as a destination benefitting local businesses as well as positively influencing perceptions of its many passers by.

Enhancing the pedestrian level lighting would help to create a brighter, friendlier atmosphere after dark, be it on an evening or a winter afternoon.

Design and specification of materials should be of a high quality, meeting the standards established by the recent implemented scheme.

REFURBISH AND LIGHT KEY BUILDINGS AND SPACES

The physical character of EastSide is largely formed by its landmark buildings and spaces, including churches, halls and former industrial buildings. New buildings too, like the Skainos Centre and Hollywood Arches Health Centre are of influence, as are the unmistakable twin cranes of Harland & Wolff.

A lighting strategy should ensure that the benefits for pedestrian safety, aesthetic appeal and entertainment are fully realised. New street lighting with good colour rendering and vertical illumination would greatly assist with facial recognition and improve safety for pedestrians.

3



To safeguard the important landmarks and further strengthen the visual character and identity of EastSide, projects are required to refurbish and sympathetically light these and other landmark features. These could be entirely colour lit or have their architectural details revealed in an innovative way.

Murals and public art in spaces could be celebrated further with the use of coloured flood lighting. This technique could be applied to the Titanic mural, Flora mural and Connswater Pocket Park to ensure this urban gallery is viewable at night.



LIVE AND WORK ABOVE THE SHOPS

Like many urban centres, Newtownards Road has lost the once common sight of people living or working above shops and public houses.

Some recent developments such as City East and Avalon House have sought to reverse this trend.

It is important that development of upper storeys is proactively encouraged through the Urban Villages Initiative in EastSide. By creating new space for apartments of different sizes and small offices,

the social and economic vitality of the Newtownards Road will be greatly enriched. Vacant spaces and underdeveloped one-storey buildings should be especially targeted for such development, with an emphasis on first rate architecture and quality internal spaces.



3

IMPROVE ALL FRONTAGES

Building upon recent shop frontage improvement works, opportunities exist to revitalise the frontages of other buildings, including churches, halls, social clubs, offices and houses.

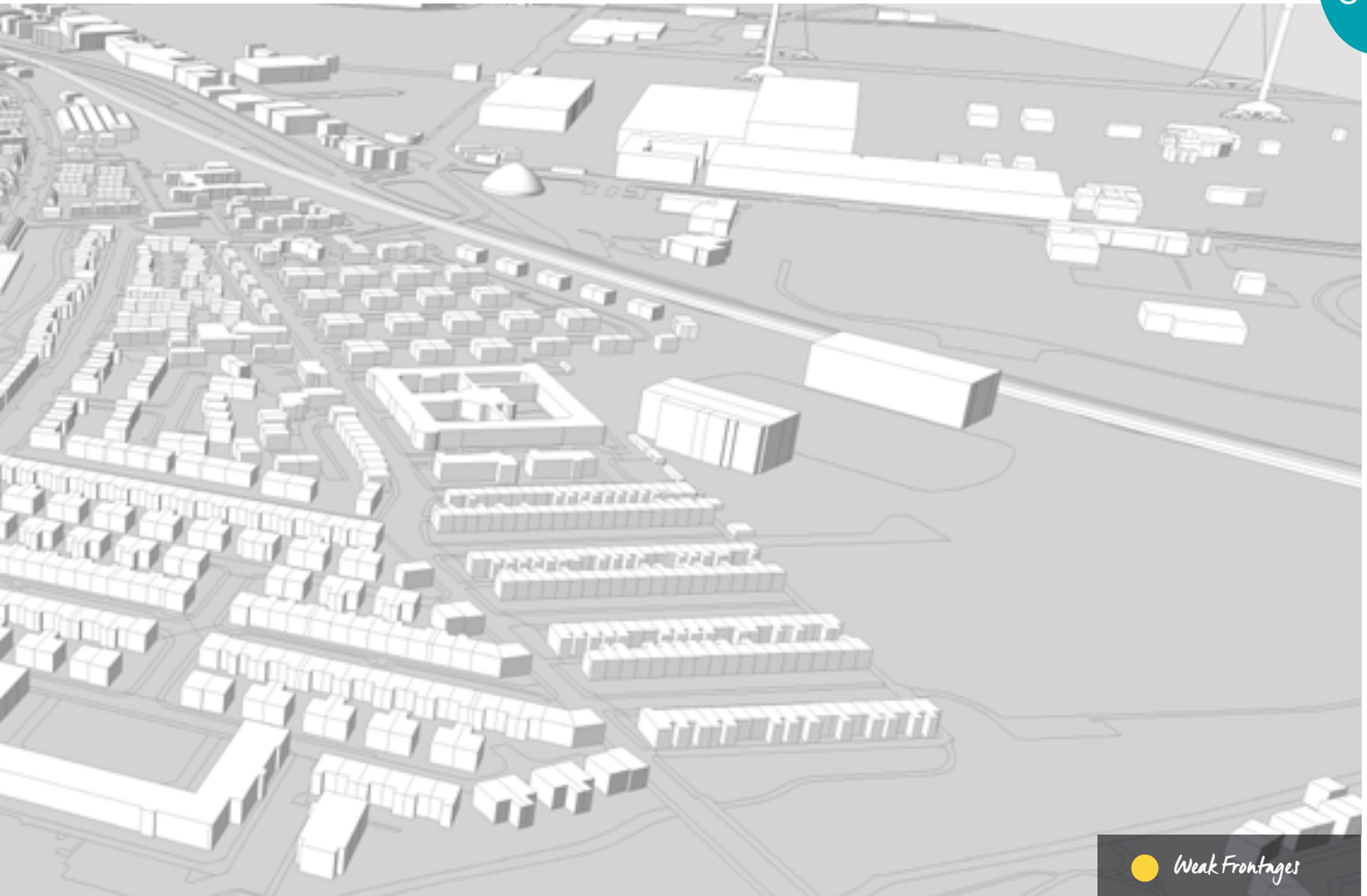
Each frontage should be carefully studied for its underlying architectural components so that interventions are

in scale and keeping with the building and its immediate context. The specification and detailing of materials, paintwork and signage should be given particular consideration.

Replacing solid metal shutters with permeable alternatives or reinforced glass would also greatly improve the



character of the street. Also lighting frontages, signage and awnings, either attached to individual shops or as part of wider street canopy, could help to sustain footfall during periods of rain or snow whilst providing shade in summer months.



● *Weak Frontages*



3



REDEVELOP LOW DENSITY AREAS

A long term objective for the Urban Villages Initiative in EastSide should be to increase its population, thereby sustaining services and facilities and generally creating more animation in its streets and spaces.

New housing should be appropriate in scale and character to the area. That is to say that high rise apartment blocks are not necessary to achieve this

objective. Rather town houses and modest apartment blocks (3 – 5 storeys), set within a network of well designed streets and public spaces.

Importantly all such developments should be of mixed building size (bedroom numbers) and tenure (social, affordable and private housing).

3

 *Proposed Development*

COMMUNITY COHESION & UNDERSTANDING

3

DEVELOP AND PROMOTE
POSITIVE CULTURAL IDENTITIES



ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES
OF INTERFACES



SUSTAIN GENERATIONAL CROSS AND INTRA COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES



DEVELOP AND PROMOTE POSITIVE CULTURAL IDENTITIES

EastSide is home to people with strong and proud cultural identities.

Yet over the years perceptions of these have at times been negatively influenced by the 'Troubles' and their legacy.

Further support is needed to ensure that all cultural traditions, including those of newer communities in EastSide are developed and promoted in a positive manner. Communication and education about the history, ethos and practices of cultural traditions should be encouraged to aid wider understanding and participation, whilst also instilling greater pride locally.



ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF INTERFACES

In the 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy, the Northern Ireland Executive made a commitment to remove interface barriers by 2023.

As a headline action in that Strategy, we will work with local people and other stakeholders to address the challenges of interface walls in Urban Village areas as appropriate in each place.

Clearly this is not a simple task and fulfilling such an objective must be carefully undertaken.

In each Urban Village area it is proposed that local people and those with responsibility for taking

action on issues around interfaces are involved in shaping delivery of any capital or other schemes. There is no prescribed approach to this task.

Delivery may include increasing levels of communication and positive interaction, protecting original and potential points of connection, maximising opportunities for regular communication and shared programmes and activities and introducing flexibility to physical barriers where there is community support to do so.

Work could also be undertaken to address non-physical barriers that exist between neighbourhoods, in keeping with Urban Village's three aims of fostering positive identities, building community capacity and improving the physical environment.



SUSTAIN GENERATIONAL CROSS AND INTRA COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES

Over the years many different programmes and initiatives have sought to bring people in EastSide neighbourhoods closer together, particularly across the political divide. Stories of success are evident, yet tensions do still arise.

A long term commitment to sustained cross and intra community programmes is needed.

This recognises the need for positive engagement between people living in neighbourhoods on and around the Newtownards Road over longer periods of time. The involvement of all people in the community should emphasise fun, all round positivity and a place to be proud of.

3





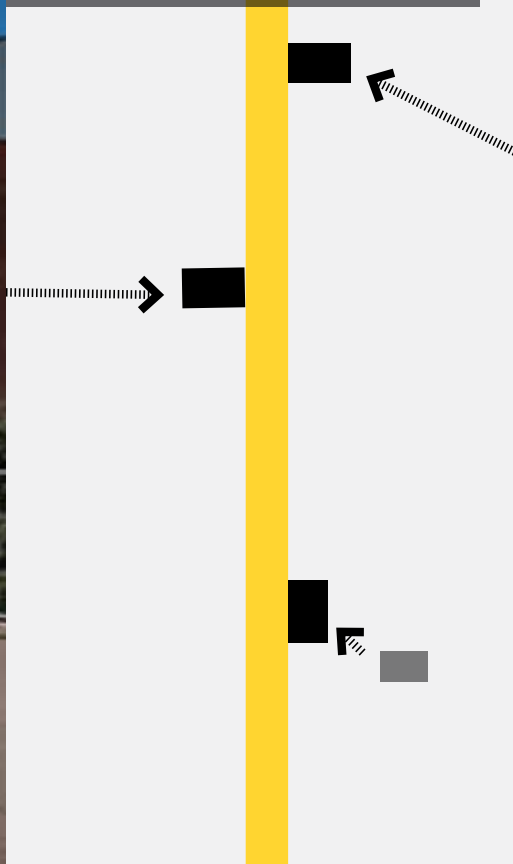
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

3

SUPPORT LOCAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES



RELOCATE ACTIVATING USES TO NEWTOWARDS ROAD



DEVELOP, SUPPORT AND PROMOTE LOCAL BUSINESS AND FACILITIES



PROMOTE PLACE
IDENTITY BRAND



MEET EMPLOYER
NEEDS WITH SKILLS



MODERNISE
COMMERCIAL UNITS



SUPPORT LOCAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

3

Tourism is a growing sector of the Northern Ireland and Belfast economy. In EastSide, the establishment of a new visitor centre will be a critical step in linking the area to opportunities associated with this trend.

The next challenge will be linking the visitor centre with other smaller attractions, places of interest and local businesses, thereby spreading

economic benefit and establishing EastSide as a visitor destination in its own right. Thematic trails, interpretive panels, marketing and events should all be coordinated to help achieve this outcome. Linkages should also be made with other visitor destinations across the city (e.g. Titanic Belfast, Stormont, Linenhall Library).



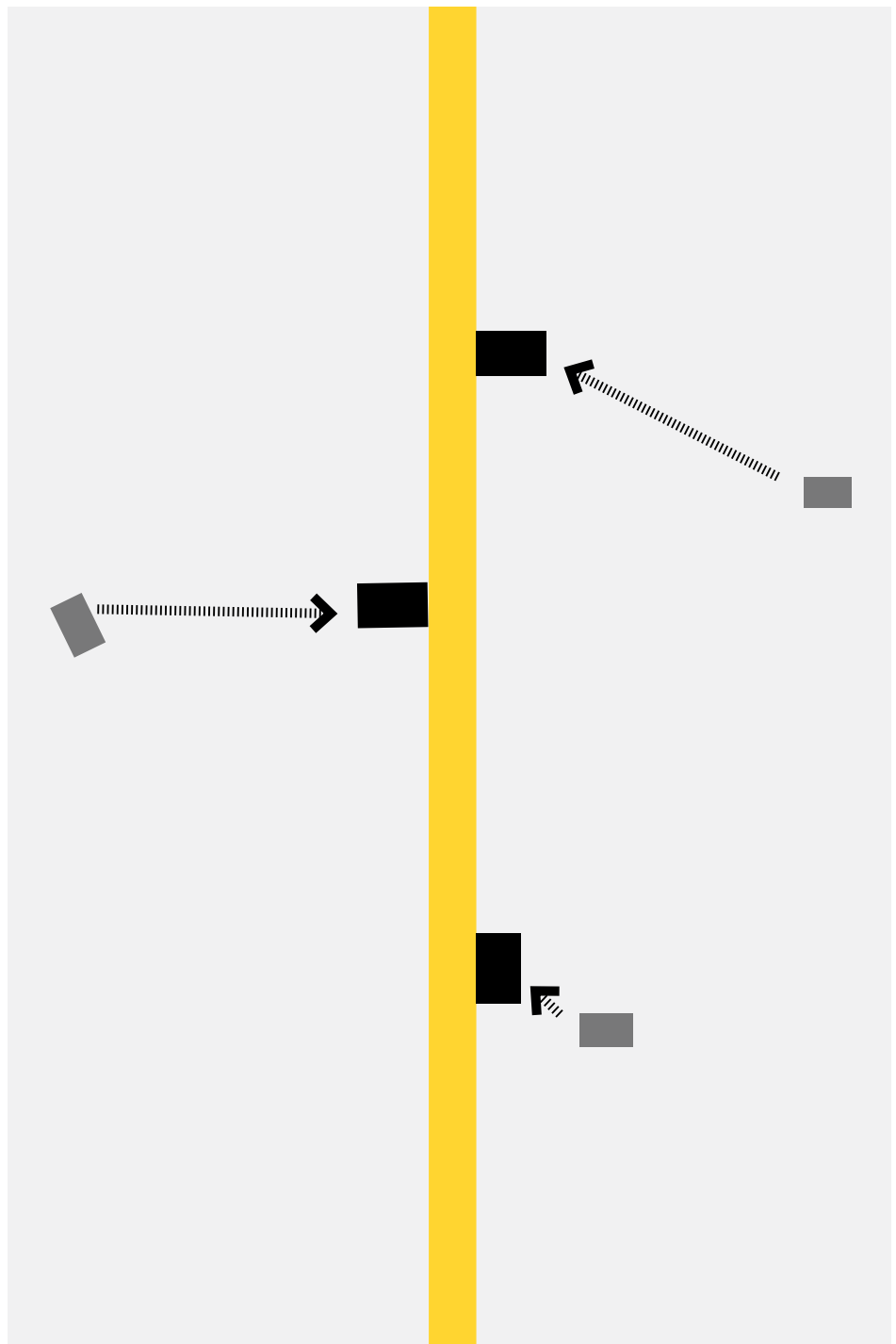


RELOCATE ACTIVATING USES TO NEWTOWNARDS ROAD

As the principal thoroughfare of EastSide, it is important that every opportunity is taken to maximise levels of animation along the Newtownards Road.

This is made even more pressing by changes to retail patterns that have resulted in the closure of many shops.

A process of 'matchmaking' is needed between vacant spaces, development opportunities and those local individuals and organisations who have the ability to animate them on a permanent basis. In particular, ground floor units should be prioritised for those who can positively contribute to the road at different times of the day and night, be they footfall related businesses, arts or community organisations.





DEVELOP, SUPPORT AND PROMOTE LOCAL BUSINESS AND FACILITIES

A healthy functioning business environment in EastSide will be an essential component of its long term sustainability. Efforts are required to support the needs of local businesses, whilst also working to attract new investment to the area.

Through a close working relationship with businesses and their representative organisations, a series of practical measures should be identified. These may include business incentives, marketing and customer loyalty programmes, digital connectivity and targeting training support. The promotion of EastSide as a place for investment should also be proactively pursued.

PROMOTE PLACE IDENTITY BRAND

It is important that EastSide and its Urban Village conveys a clear and positive message about itself to everyone, be they existing or future residents, businesses or visitors.

This necessitates the development of a strong place identity which is conveyed through different forms of media from literature, billboards and online presence.





MEET EMPLOYER NEEDS WITH SKILLS

A challenge for EastSide, like many areas, is matching the skills of its population with the employment opportunities available.

This important project will require the business community, local community groups and the education sector to work together in identifying training needs and overseeing their delivery. This should build on work undertaken already and must attract resources for appropriate investment and enhance collaboration.



MODERNISE COMMERCIAL UNITS

Retail patterns have changed greatly over the past 30 years and continue to rapidly evolve with the rise of online sales. As a result, many shop units have been 'left behind', no longer suitable for the needs of today's retailers.

To attract new investment to the Newtownards Road, work is required to modernise shop units in various locations. Some are too small, requiring extension by joining two or more units together. Others are too large to attract small businesses, leading to scope to reduce floor space on a temporary basis to attract operators.



B iv

3

● Existing Retail

ARTS, CREATIVITY AND LEARNING

3

INSTIGATE POSITIVE ARTS AND MURALS PROGRAMMES



GROWTH STRATEGY FOR ARTS AND PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT





RAISE ASPIRATIONS THROUGH ENHANCED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



INSTIGATE POSITIVE ARTS AND MURALS PROGRAMMES

Murals adorn many gable ends along the Newtownards Road and EastSide generally, representing a long and colourful tradition for which the city is well known.

A number of other pieces of public art have also been positioned along the road, such as the popular Ross Wilson 'Yardmen' sculpture at Pitt Park.

Yet amongst these works remain some symbols of paramilitary organisations, with masked gunmen and other threatening imagery. Work should be continued to support art installations that contribute to the feeling of safety, welcome and inclusion, all of which are important to the area's future.





GROWTH STRATEGY FOR ARTS AND PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT

East Belfast has long had a reputation for creativity and craftsmanship. Over recent years the arts, from visual to music to drama, have become more visible across EastSide through the work of local artists, galleries, public art installations and major events like the EastSide Arts Festival.

A bespoke strategy for the development of the arts in EastSide should now be developed. This should seek to complement the objectives of the Urban Villages Initiative and explore how it can contribute to the way in which streets, spaces and buildings are proactively managed to increase levels of physical, social and economic animation.





RAISE ASPIRATIONS THROUGH ENHANCED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Children and young people in areas of social need often have their potential limited by their learning experiences and networks of support. This has an impact on their attitudes and aspirations which are key influencers on behaviours and future outcomes.

Access to learning opportunities which enhance, complement and support the work of schools is not only key to developing skilled, confident and resilient children and young people, but promotes a positive learning ethos in the wider EastSide community.



There already is a strong relationship in EastSide between schools and local community organisations. Provision and support of enhanced learning opportunities may include local community based initiatives, after school support, creative learning engagement.

These should complement and build on the partnerships already working to improve education and learning outcomes for children and young people in the area.



CONNECTIVITY

3

CONNECT NORTH,
WEST, RAIL AND AIR



INCREASE MOBILITY



CONNECT NORTH, WEST, RAIL AND AIR

*Connecting EastSide with
the surrounding city must
be a priority.*

A number of initiatives should be strongly supported, including the appropriate redevelopment of Bridge End and Sirocco to re-establish street frontages between EastSide and the city centre. New bridges to the north should also be explored, including a long term plan to extend Templemore Avenue across the by-pass to Sydenham Road.

A new entrance to Titanic Station should also be created, giving it better civic presence and linking it to the Newtownards Road via a greatly improved Fraser Pass.

Belfast Rapid Transit represents a major step in the enhancement of public transport and the priority bus system will penetrate EastSide Urban Village area via Hollywood Arches and the Albertbridge on its way from Dundonald to the city centre. This improvement in connectivity will benefit EastSide by encouraging further investment in the area. Implementation should therefore be supported where possible and complemented by further improvements to the vicinity of its stops, including public realm, lighting and signage.

And finally, a new cycle greenway or 'superhighway' should be created to connect the city centre (via the Lagan Weir and Middlepath Street), through EastSide along Ballymacarrett Road and Island Street to Hollywood Arches, from where it would meet the Connswater and Comber Greenways.



TITANIC

3



INCREASE MOBILITY

An effective way to contribute to levels of health and fitness, as well as tackling EastSide's traffic congestion problem, is to provide more opportunity for mobility by foot, cycle and public transport. Furthermore, it is important that the area is fully accessible for those with mobility impairments.

A range of measures should be explored to enhance mobility. Developed in consultation with local groups, these may include adaption of building entrances, provision of cycle storage and travel planning with employees. Also embracing future phases of the Belfast Bikes hire programme with three new docking stations proposed to increase mobility and connect various modes of travel.







**URBAN
VILLAGES**
Thriving Places



EastSide
Urban Village Initiative



04

SUPPORTING DELIVERY

SUPPORTING DELIVERY

4

STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS

The Urban Villages Initiative is a headline action within the Executive's 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy. It is led by the Executive Office with the support of senior representatives from other government departments alongside Belfast City Council.

This Strategic Framework is intended to be a useful point of reference for anyone with an interest in the Urban Village areas and a means for identifying opportunities to collaborate around shared Programme for Government outcomes and indicators.

ROUTES TO DELIVERY

Although coordinated by the Executive Office, and overseen by Junior Ministers, capital and revenue investments made directly through the Urban Villages Initiative will be led and managed by organisations that best suit the particular project or programme. This means that work on parks, public realm projects and other physical interventions is likely to be led by the Council, the Department for Communities, NI Housing Executive or the Department for Infrastructure.

Support will be provided to projects and programmes in keeping with the good relations outcomes of the Urban Villages Initiative. We will draw from the most appropriate delivery partners including central and local government and community and voluntary groups.

Activity more focussed on community capacity building, cultural innovation and positive identities will be delivered by community and voluntary groups to maximise local networks and connections or through central or local government.





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