

MAKING BELFAST MOVE BETTER

BELFAST CHAMBER'S BLUEPRINT FOR A MORE VIBRANT, ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE CITY



As the voice of business in Belfast, Belfast Chamber has an ambitious vision for our city. We want to see Belfast continue with the transformation it has undergone in recent years.

- We want to see more jobs, more investment, more growth and improved wellbeing for all of the citizens of our city and the region it serves
- We want to see a more vibrant Belfast with an attractive public realm and mixed-use city centre in which increasing numbers of people choose to live, work, study, visit and socialise.
- We want to see a Belfast that grows sustainably and become a place where we can enhance everyone's quality of life.
- We want to see more people living in central Belfast, enjoying more open and green space and vibrant and active public spaces
- We want to see Belfast become a city where public transport is prevalent, pedestrians and cyclists have more and better space to move around and where we are less reliant on private cars.

Improving connectivity and accessibility and enhancing how people move around our city is key to achieving all of those ambitions.

There is virtually no aspect of the life of a successful city that isn't impacted positively by a first-class connectivity and transportation network.

- An efficient transportation system is essential for getting workers to and from their place of work;
- An attractive public transport network improves our sustainability and encourages healthier lifestyles;
- Good transports links can enable the realisation of urban redevelopment schemes;
- Effective connections are part of what attracts businesses to invest in cities and act as a magnet for talent; and
- Streets that are vibrant, safe and attractive are the foundation of urban life, encouraging people to visit and stay, enabling businesses to flourish and creating a liveable environment.

Business is a crucial stakeholder in our city – creating jobs, investing in the future and as guardians of central Belfast. Belfast needs a thriving business community and an understanding of how the city's economy functions should underpin any policy decisions in this important area.



Belfast – like cities everywhere – faces accessibility and connectivity challenges. Belfast has just 18% of NI’s population but 30% of the region’s jobs. How do we get that increasing volume of people in and out of the city efficiently each day? Our public transport system is greatly improved but still falls far short of where a city of our scale should be. How do we persuade more people to get out of their cars and on to public transport and what investments does that require? The city is undergoing an unprecedented period of regeneration. How do we ensure that new developments are connected to the city centre, to each other and to surrounding communities?

Belfast Chamber understands the role of streets as the primary building block of cities. Streets pre-date the buildings that define them and streets will outlive them. Urbanists understand that streets deliver the movement that is the lifeblood of cities. Specifically, through movement is the essential characteristic of cities; through movement by people walking, on bicycles, on public transport and even, within limits, in cars. Evidence shows that the diverse mix of uses we value in our urban environment is supported where streets support a mix of transport types, i.e. mixed-use streets support mixed use development.

Belfast Chamber has developed a blueprint for a more accessible city that is underpinned by a set of common-sense principles including:

- **Working towards a central Belfast that is less dependent on private cars and where access by pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and necessary vehicles is prioritised**
- **Making public transport an affordable, attractive and a viable alternative to the private car**
- **Adopting a gradual, investment-first approach to major changes in connectivity in central Belfast, recognising that a half-century of poor planning decisions that have led to a dispersed pattern of housing and retail can’t be corrected overnight.**
- **Supporting the use of new technology to promote zero emission public transport and cars.**
- **Growing the amount of residential space in central Belfast will address many accessibility issues and is also good for re-energising the city.**

Making Belfast Move Better is Belfast Chamber’s contribution to the debate and discussion about how, through improvements in accessibility and connectivity, our city can continue to grow and do so in a way that balances the need for further growth and investment in Belfast as the driver of the whole region’s economy with the desire for such growth to be environmentally sustainable.



A STEP CHANGE IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The advantages of a well-functioning public transport system in a city are multiple. Recent research by Grant Thornton on behalf of Translink found that not only did buses and trains in Northern Ireland help to reduce traffic congestion, drive economic growth and protect the environment, they also support social inclusion, help create a healthier population and connect communities.

Translink’s own Glider service proves how investment in high quality public transport can really work. In its first year of operation, it attracted over 2 million additional journeys along the route over and above the previous bus only service. This represented an increase of more than 30% and 1.7 million fewer cars on the road and helped Translink to achieve its highest passenger journey numbers across its network in over 20 years.

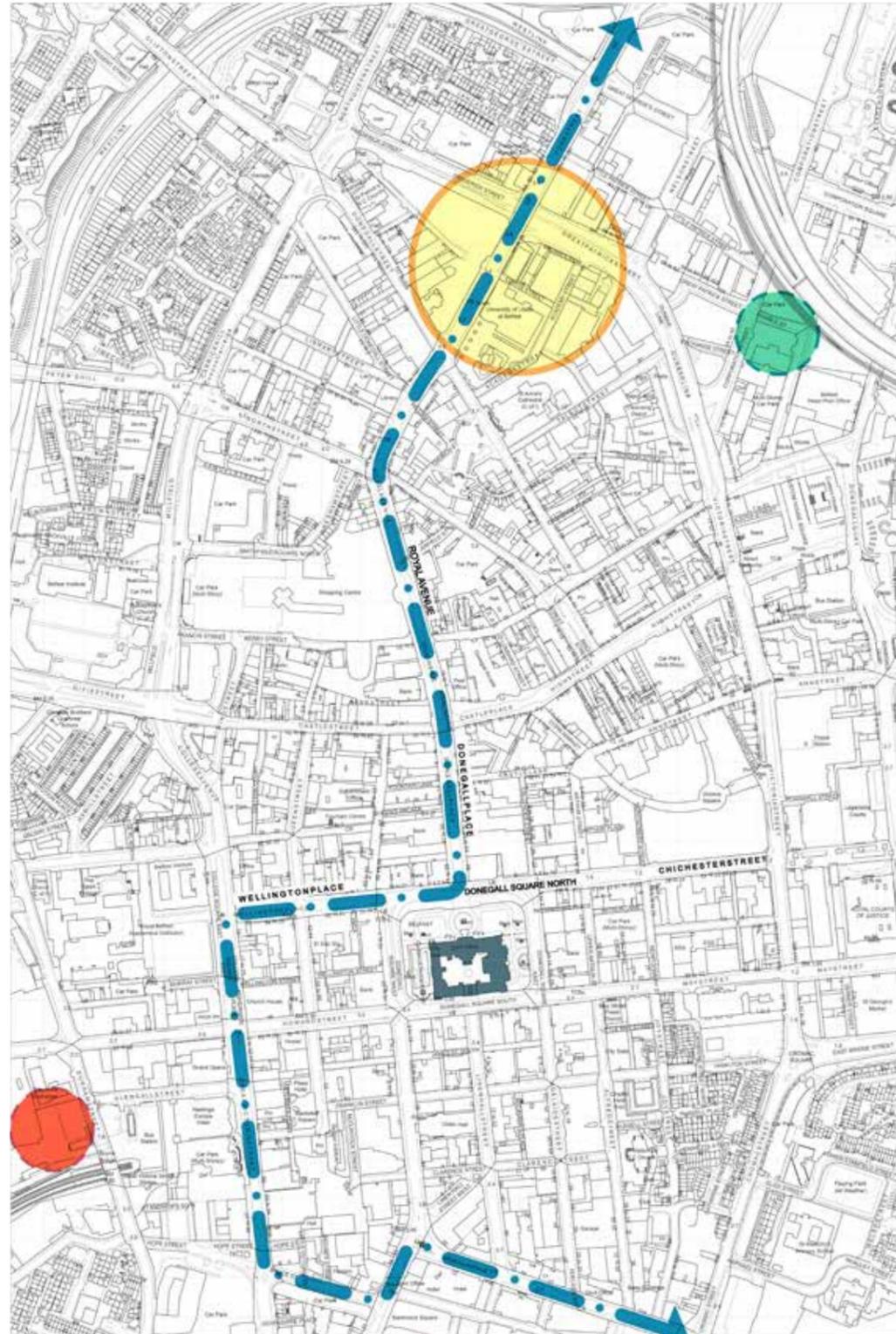
Belfast Chamber also believes that investment in public transportation is essential if we are to fully realise the maximum benefits from our many urban regeneration schemes. Evidence from the opening of a new metro line in Lyon, France, shows that it helped quadruple the rate of regeneration along the corridor it served.

It is clear that many, indeed most, of the bus lanes in our city do not operate efficiently because they are not continuous. The gaps in bus lanes cause bottle-necks that constrain the movement of buses as well as other road users. For bus lanes to be effective they must be as continuous as possible to make public transport free moving and, essentially, to give it priority over the car. Continuous bus lanes will also greatly help cyclists. At the same time, Belfast Chamber believes that it is not necessary to provide bus lanes on every arterial route. Effective and frequent public transport can be provided on some roads without bus lanes.

Belfast badly needs more investment in public transport on the scale of the first phase of the Glider to persuade more people to make the shift away from cars and allow the city to reap the environmental sustainability and economic competitiveness advantages that it brings.

Belfast Chamber supports a step change in public transport in our city with a long-term funding plan put in place to deliver much needed interventions such as:

- **The development of the new Belfast Transport Hub at the earliest possible date to provide a state of the art, integrated public transport gateway into the city;**
- **The roll out of an integrated ticketing system for public transport in Belfast and across the region;**
- **Rapid deployment of Glider Phase 2 to provide mass transit connecting the North and South of our city and connecting to the Transport Hub;**
- **Upgrade of existing bus lanes to provide proper continuous routes, giving buses priority over cars, while reducing the number of bus lanes on less congested arterial routes that are close to existing major bus corridors;**
- **Investment in zero emission, zero carbon, prioritised public transport across the city;**
- **Additional park and ride facilities at key locations around the edge of the city and in surrounding towns, and the expansion of existing popular park and rides at places like Dundonald and Cairnshill;**
- **The examination of the possibility of a new rail station and public transport interchange at Gamble Street to service the new Ulster University campus and growing City Quays development;**
- **An hourly Enterprise service connecting Belfast to Dublin initially at peak times, then throughout the day; and**
- **A feasibility study into the development of a high-speed rail connection between Belfast and Dublin.**



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MAP 1: PROPOSED PUBLIC TRANSPORT IMPROVEMENTS

KEY	
	Transport interchange at Belfast Hub with hourly Enterprise service
	Glider phase 2 to connect Hub and Ulster University
	Ulster University
	Potential for rail station and interchange at Gamble Street

BUILDING A VIBRANT CENTRAL BELFAST

Central Belfast is the engine room of the entire city's economy. Stretching north to south between our two university campuses, and from east to west between the Titanic Quarter and the Westlink, the city centre is host to the vast majority of Belfast's retail, office, tourism and leisure offer. But, like many city centres, Belfast faces unparalleled challenges.

Belfast, was not built and developed with the car in mind but now accommodates a considerable numbers of cars. Belfast Chamber believes that, over time, Belfast city centre needs to become much more accessible by

sustainable modes of transport than it currently is. But achieving that aim will take time and requires considerable upfront investment.

A PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY CITY

Belfast Chamber believes that our city centre needs more high-quality streets which prioritise pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and taxis. Shared streets where pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and necessary vehicles mix safely together like Mariahilferstrasse in Vienna, Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich and St Peter's Square in Manchester, make walking and cycling safe, bring people into the commercial heart of the city via buses and trams and encourage a more diverse mix of businesses including pavement cafes.



Above from left to right: New Street Birmingham and Bahnhofstrasse, Zurich



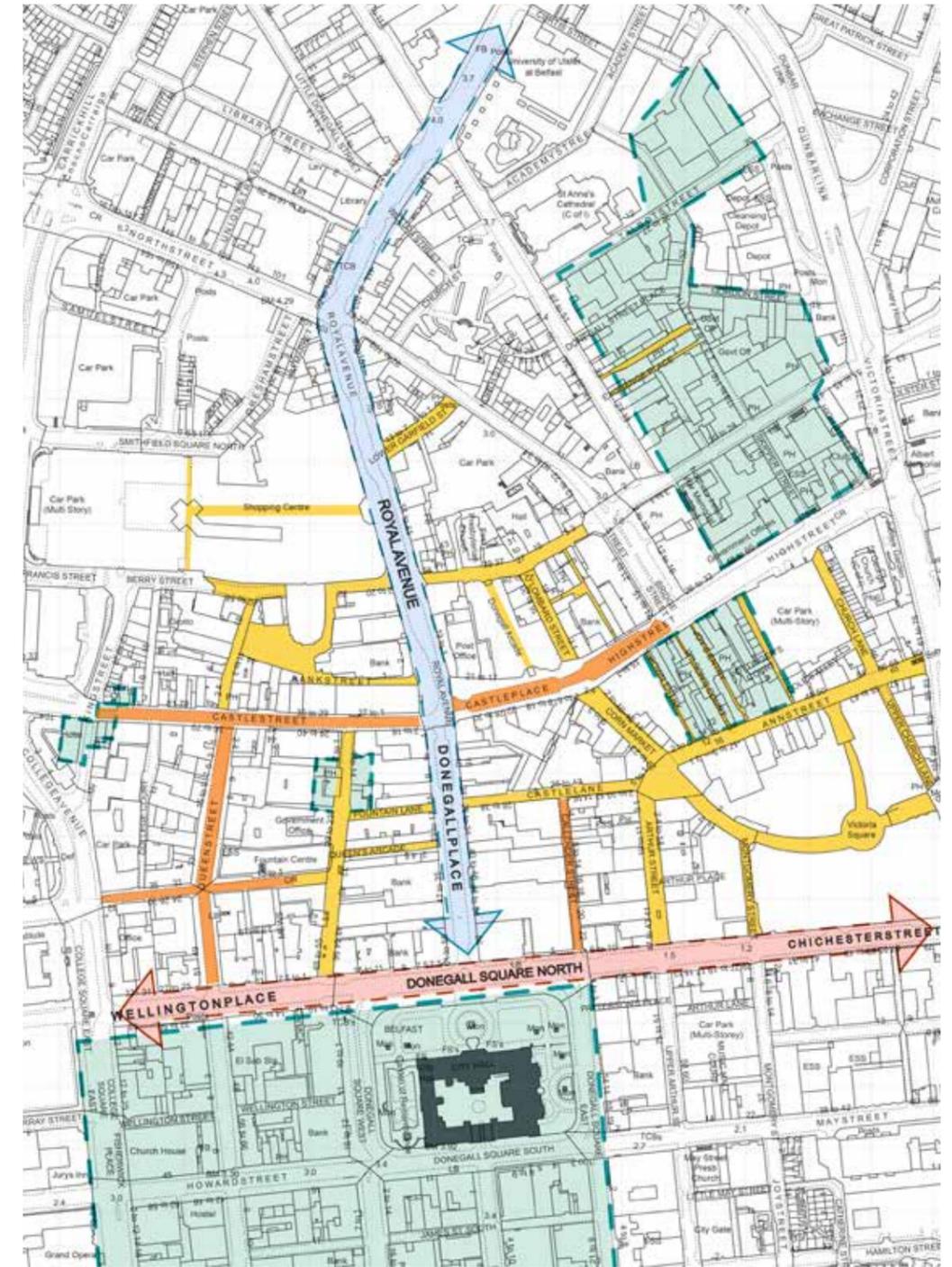
Belfast Chamber aspires to creating similarly vibrant 'Great Streets' in places like Great Victoria Street, Wellington Place/Chichester Street and Victoria Street, with car traffic calmed, mixed-use streets providing the lifeblood of through movement that our city needs to thrive.

Investment in superior streetscapes bring benefits in terms of increased footfall and improved trading for local businesses. UK walking Charity Living Streets found that in Piccadilly in Stoke-on-Trent, a £10 million investment to make the area more pedestrian-friendly led to 30% more footfall, while a traffic management and public realm improvement scheme in Kelso in the Scottish Borders increased town centre footfall by 28%. Belfast needs more investment in high quality, mixed use streets in the city centre.

Belfast City Centre was largely pedestrianised in the 1970s as a result of the security cordon that was erected around the city. It can be argued that Belfast is actually over-pedestrianised in comparison to many other European cities. The evidence shows that the parts of the city that are thriving, particularly in the night-time economy such as the Cathedral Quarter, the Linen Quarter and Donegall Square, are where streets are pedestrian friendly but not pedestrianised. These locations are witnessing new developments in hospitality and tourism, offices and banks, bespoke retail and convenience shops, and, importantly, residential in the form of student housing. This is not a coincidence. It is a fact that fully pedestrianised streets generally support only one use class namely comparison retail.

Belfast Chamber supports:

- The urgent progress on the next phases of the Streets Ahead project;
- The extension of phase 2 of the Glider and Metro services running dual directions along Royal Avenue and Donegall Place to connect Ulster University, TriBeCa and other developments directly to the city core;
- The provision of pedestrian-friendly streets, such as by the removal of parking bays along Belfast's 'Great Streets' such as Donegall Place, Wellington Place and Chichester Street to allow for increased space for pedestrians and cyclists, but a halt on further pedestrianisation;
- Maintaining Wellington Place, Donegall Square North and Chichester Street as mixed use streets for all types of vehicular movement in order to support a vibrant mixed use city core;
- A recognition that taxis are a necessary element of the city's transportation system and are especially important to the night-time economy and in providing door-to-door transport for people with a mobility impairment, and ought to be allowed to access bus lanes.



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MAP 2: A MORE PEDSTRIAN FRIENDLY CITY CENTRE

KEY	
	Donegall Place and Royal Avenue to be remodeled as a 'Great Street' with landscaping and Glider phase 2 and metro services in dual directions
	Wellington Place to Chichester Street to be remodeled as a 'Great Street' with pavements widened while allowing access by all vehicle types
	Existing pedestrianised street
	Existing streets with limited access by cars
	Existing areas of evening economy

IMPROVED CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Whilst there has been an increase in recreational cycling in Northern Ireland over recent years, Department for Infrastructure figures show that only 2% of people normally cycle to or from work. Innovations like the Belfast Bike system have been a welcome addition to the city but, overall, Belfast's cycling infrastructure lags far behind that of other cities and is doing little to help increase the percentage of workers cycling to work.

Belfast Chamber calls for:

- The construction of more safe and separated cycle lanes across the city;
- The enhancement of bus lanes to become more continuous, which will benefit cyclists;
- The expansion of the Belfast Bikes scheme;
- The continued development of greenways into and through the city centre, building on the success of the Comber and Connswater Greenways; and
- The introduction of new state of the art 'cycle parks' similar to those in European cities such as Utrecht at locations like the new Transport Hub.



Pic: Belfast Bikes

CAR PARKING

Even though Belfast Chamber aspires to a more car free central Belfast, the right amount of car parking in the correct locations will remain important. Belfast Chamber agrees with the vision set out in Belfast City Council's Car Parking Strategy that Belfast becomes "a city offering sufficient, high quality and appropriately located parking which supports economic development and regeneration within the city by balancing the requirements of residents, businesses, commuters and visitors" and it's stated aim of maintaining the current level of car parking.

Whilst Belfast Chamber understands the desire of many to radically and rapidly reduce the number of car parking spaces in our city centre, it must be borne in mind that car parking is often an essential element to many new developments and is especially important to the retail sector who are competing with out of town shopping centres who usually offer free parking.

Belfast Chamber calls for:

- Maintenance of the current level of car parking through the development of more multi storey car parks in key gateway location on the edge of central Belfast and the reduction in the number of surface car parks to be replaced with new developments or open/green spaces;
- Provision of a city-centre wide network of electric car charging points;
- A digital information system to inform drivers which car parks have available spaces as they approach the city; and
- A time bound commitment to reduce the number of parking spaces in the city centre that are owned and used by the public sector.

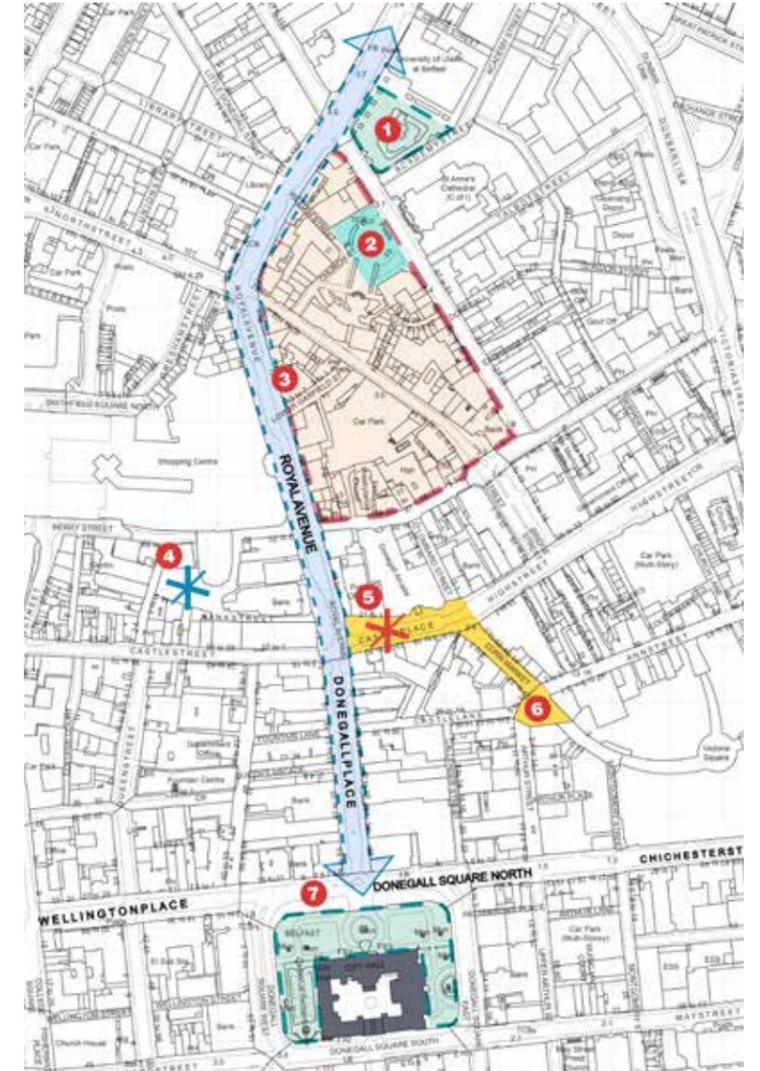
CREATING MORE GREEN AND OPEN SPACE

Central Belfast severely lacks the amount of open and green public space that a city of its size needs. Green and open space should almost be considered as the Belfast's 'living rooms'. As well as being places for citizens of all ages, tourists and workers to come together to enjoy life in the city, they can greatly assist connectivity and accessibility.

Belfast Chamber believes that, as Belfast grows, serious consideration needs to be given to the location and quality of the green and open space within the city.

Belfast Chamber supports:

- The creation of a new greened public square at Castle Place connecting to Corn Market and Arthur Square and incorporating a play park and space for events;
- An examination of how to make better use of the grounds around the City Hall to create a more open and appealing Donegall Square;
- The development of Cathedral Gardens as a new urban park;
- Improvement schemes for places like Blackstaff Square, Bank Square and Bankmore Square including provision for children's active play;
- Consideration of the creation of a new waterfront park; and
- The animation of new and existing green and open spaces with activities such as markets, music events and coffee docks.



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MAP 3: PROPOSED PUBLIC SPACE ENHANCEMENTS

KEY

- 1 Cathedral Gardens as a new urban park with play facilities
- 2 Writers Square to be remodeled as part of proposed Tribeca development
- 3 Proposed Tribeca development
- 4 Bank Square to include children's play area
- Donegall Place and Royal Avenue to be remodeled as a 'Great Street' with hard and soft landscaping and public transport areas
- 5 Major new green public space and Castle Place with space for events and children play connecting to Corn Market and Upper Arthur Street
- 6 Arthur Square to be reimagined as an event space
- 7 Examine how to make City Hall grounds more useable, permeable and open to Donegall Square

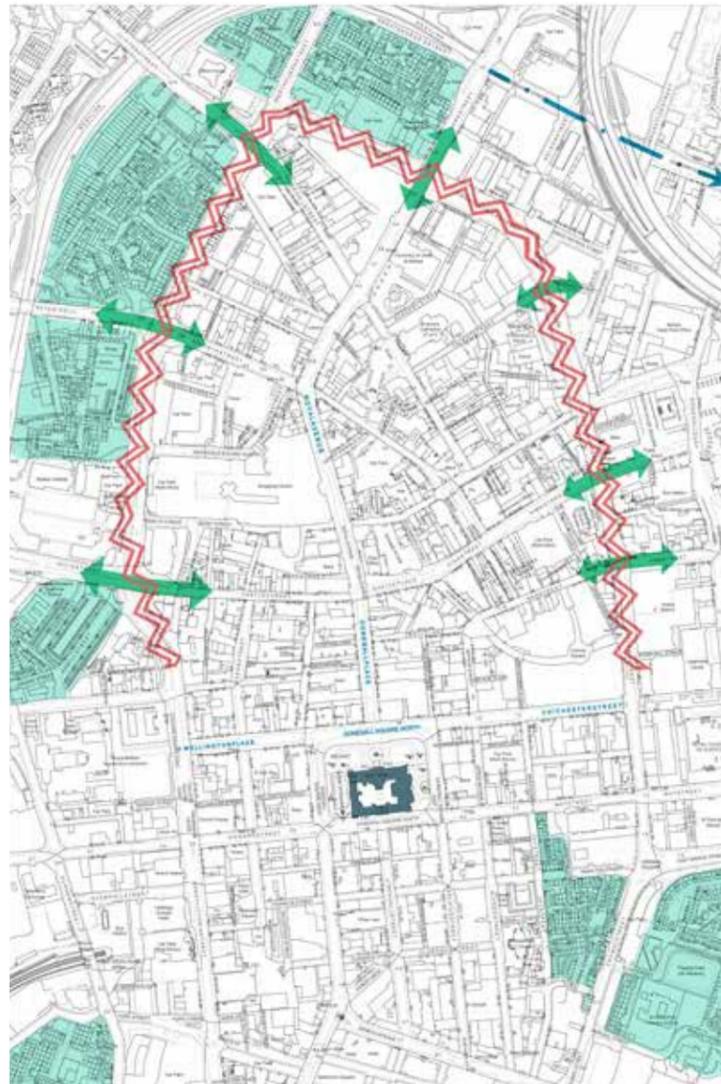
CONNECTING NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES TO THE CITY CENTRE

Central Belfast is growing. Developments like Titanic Quarter, Waterside, City Quays and the Transport Hub are redefining what we traditionally would consider as Belfast city centre. At the same time, existing residential communities are becoming cut-off by road infrastructure. It is imperative that, as central Belfast grows, these areas don't become isolated 'islands' and are well connected to each other and the existing central core.

Belfast has, in the shape of Victoria Street, Dunbar Link and Millfield, a ring of heavy roads around the east, north and west of the city centre which are major barriers to pedestrian movement. These roads need to be 'softened' to provide a more accessible environment to pedestrians and cyclists.

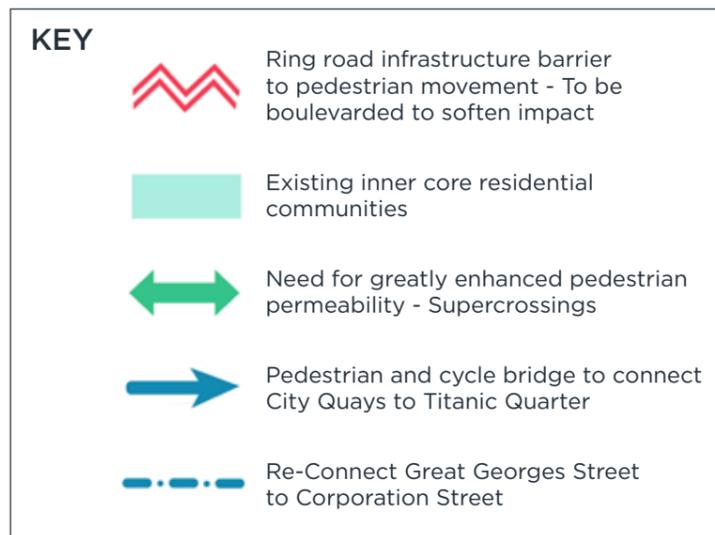
Belfast Chamber calls for:

- The 'Boulevarding' of roads like Dunbar Link, Millfield and Oxford Street to make them more attractive, tree lined thoroughfares with 'supercrossings' to ease pedestrian and cyclist connections across them to the neighbouring new developments and consideration given to make Victoria Street and Oxford Street two-way to calm the flow of traffic and make them operate as Great Streets and not traffic channels;
- Provide public transport connections to link the new developments and residential communities into the city core; and
- Pedestrian and cycling bridges from City Quays to the Odyssey and Titanic Quarter, from Waterside to the Waterfront Hall and from Ormeau to the Gasworks.



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MAP 4: CREATING BETTER CONNECTIONS



INVESTING IN OUR ROADS INFRASTRUCTURE

Although much of our focus has been on shifting people away from cars and towards alternatives like walking, cycling and public transport, it has to be recognised that some continued investment in the roads network in and around Belfast is required.

Belfast Chamber supports:

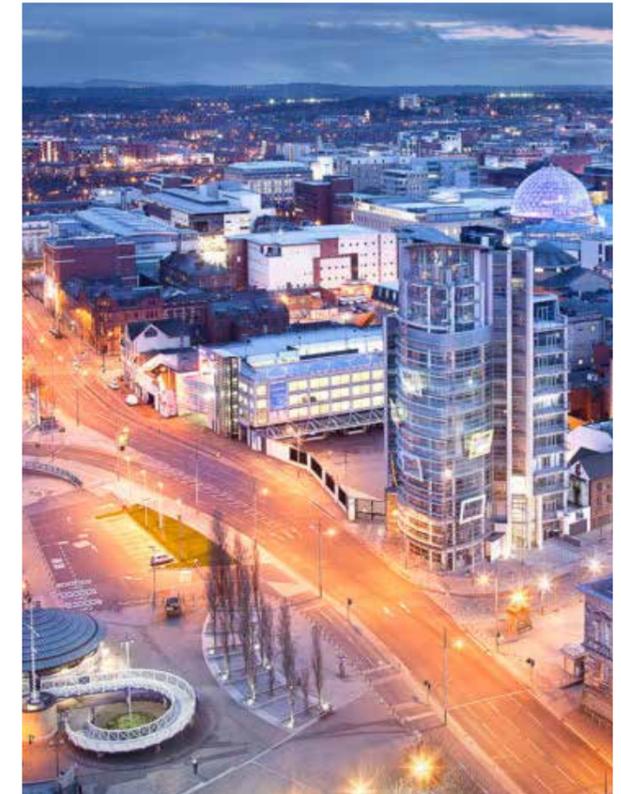
- The redevelopment of the York Street Interchange which will help relieve pressure on parts of the city centre and provide a sizeable boost to the entire region's economy;
- and
- The construction of a new grade-separated junction on the Sydenham Bypass to help unlock the full economic potential of Titanic Quarter.

STIMULATING CITY LIVING

Belfast has a very underpopulated city centre in comparison to other cities across the UK and Ireland. The Council's Belfast Agenda contains the ambition that, by 2035 "our city is home to an additional 66,000 people". Belfast Chamber wholeheartedly supports this goal.

There is a trend across the UK for growth in city centre living. Belfast has been no exception. Although its 31% in city centre population between 2001 and 2011 does not compare favourably to those in Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester who saw the number of people living in the heart of their cities increase by 181%, 163%, 150% and 149% respectively between 2002 and 2015. With around 5,000 people living in central Belfast, our city centre has approximately 7 times fewer inhabitants than Manchester.

The development of purpose built student accommodation has been a welcome addition to the city but there is capacity for more and a virtual absence of private rented sector/'buy to rent' properties. More of this type of accommodation is essential if Belfast is to retain and attract the kind of our young talent that our economy needs to succeed and which is driving the growth in city living in Great Britain. Surveys have shown that renting a home close to their work or university - usually in prime city centre locations - is important to an overwhelming majority of millennials.



As well as being crucial to transforming Belfast into a vibrant 24/7 city, increasing the number of residents in central Belfast is every bit as important to dealing with connectivity issues as, for example, investing in public transport as it will, for a large number of people, eliminate or at least considerably minimise the need to commute. Indeed, having more people living in the heart of the city may reduce the requirement for investments in some infrastructure and will have the added benefits of being more sustainable.

Attaining the Council's target - which will require in excess of 30,000 new homes across the city - but reaching it will not be achieved by following the same policies that presently exist.

Belfast Chamber believes that a more populated city centre should be stimulated by:

- Rates exemptions for private sector built student accommodation and 'buy to rent' properties in the city;
- Reduced car parking requirements for city centre housing;
- Schemes to help convert empty retail space and space above retail premises to housing; and
- More open and green spaces to encourage people to live in the city



ABOUT BELFAST CHAMBER

Since its inception in 1912, Belfast Chamber has been the voice for business in the city. Belfast Chamber represents over 500 businesses of all sizes, in all sectors and in all parts of Belfast. Our growing membership employs thousands of people and contribute hundreds of millions of pounds to the local economy annually.

Businesses join Belfast Chamber because they recognise that we are the only business organisation that is focussed on lobbying for and supporting all businesses within the entire city of Belfast. We put Belfast First.

We passionately believe that the voice of business in Belfast must be listened to by policy makers and politicians in order to build the strongest possible framework for investment and business growth. We want those policymakers to also put Belfast First.

Membership of Belfast Chamber gives companies access to a full range of services to enhance business success and establish stronger relationships within the wider Belfast business community.

To find out how to join us or for further information, visit www.belfastchamber.com



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