



UPPER DONEGALL STREET PLACE SHAPING PLAN 2026



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UPPER DONEGALL STREET

Place Shaping Plan / 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

● Introduction

The North Belfast Heritage Cluster (NBHC) is a partnership of fourteen heritage organisations across North Belfast, united by a shared commitment to heritage-led regeneration that draws on the area's authentic buildings and character.

Led and facilitated by Belfast Charitable Society, the NBHC received support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for its four and a half-year Re-creating a *Great Place North Belfast* project. The project promotes heritage as a catalyst for growth and works towards a shared vision for North Belfast.

NBHC commissioned Community Places, an award winning charitable social enterprise, to carry out a dedicated place shaping process, bringing fresh thinking to one of North Belfast's most historic streetscapes. The process explored community, social, economic, heritage and environmental potential of Upper Donegall Street. The study area extends north from York Street to the historic Clifton House at the Clifton Street junction, encompassing Donegall Lane, York Lane, Union Street and Frederick Street. This work is envisaged as a pilot project with an intention to roll this out across the wider cluster.

Between September 2025 and January 2026, the process engaged key stakeholders in structured and meaningful dialogue, identifying existing assets and emerging opportunities, and exploring how these might deliver lasting benefits to the wider community by 2036. Two cross-cutting themes shaped the process from the outset: the integration of Community Wealth Building principles and the imperative of climate resilience. Central to the approach was a commitment to early, substantive engagement with local stakeholders and service providers, ensuring that strategic development opportunities were identified in genuine partnership with those who know the area best.

● Vision



The Upper Donegall Street area is a key gateway to the City Centre and North Belfast; it will be a thriving and sustainable commercial thoroughfare embracing its uniqueness and celebrating its history and heritage buildings. It will provide homes along with dedicated community and green spaces.



Map showing Upper Donegall Street Study Area

Strengthening the Highstreet

The strengthening the High Street Star model was used to provide a framework for structure and thoughtful discussion on Upper Donegall Street. The Star model provides a graphical representation of how the community views the Upper Donegall Street Area, the closer the theme lies to the centre of the Star the greater the need for improvement.



Key findings

The key messages and consistent themes that emerged from the extensive engagement process are grouped below according to three Place Shaping Priorities.

Destination Donegall Street

- There are few permanent residents, minimal community infrastructure and limited services; this sits alongside a strong sense of loyalty and affiliation from those connected to the area.
- Significant strategic investment in and adjacent to the area — including Belfast Stories, housing-led regeneration, Ulster University and BRT Phase 2 North-South Glider presents opportunities to maximise wider regeneration outcomes.
- There is potential to grow the relationship with Ulster University and its students, whilst recognising that student accommodation in the area is already oversaturated.
- The area's diverse nightlife, including nightclubs and bars, is widely recognised and valued.
- There are notable safety concerns, particularly for women at night, with poor street lighting identified as a key issue.

A Historic Place with Unique Heritage

- The historic character of Upper Donegall Street and its wider area is central to its development and regeneration potential.
- There is strong potential for a distinct district identity through the branding of historic buildings and the provision of greater information about the area and its built heritage.
- The general care and maintenance of buildings is poor, with widespread dereliction and vacancy.
- Congestion is a recurring concern, including rush-hour traffic, weekend taxi activity and pavement parking — all of which detract from the quality of the historic streetscape.

A Climate Resilient Place

- Public realm is characterised by a notable absence of green space and a lack of meaningful consideration of climate action.
- Congestion issues — including pavement parking and high vehicle volumes — present an opportunity to promote sustainable transport and active travel alternatives.

There was a clear desire to ensure meaningful connection between this Place Shaping Plan and any broader Place Shaping Plan and any broader Place Shaping agenda for North Belfast. This cross-cutting aspiration applies to all three priorities.

Place Shaping Priorities

Three Place Shaping Priorities have been identified; each priority has been agreed by the Project Steering Group and is accompanied by Strategic Outcomes and associated Place Shaping Objectives. The objectives identify key partners and are organised according to short (0-2 Years), medium (3-5 Years) and long-term (6+ Years) timeframes that will allow the Upper Donegall Street area to achieve its wider vision.

Destination Donegall Street

Donegall Street will be a thriving, well maintained and inclusive neighbourhood, where residents and visitors live, work and play. It will be a key gateway strengthening connections between City Centre investment and North Belfast. Centre investment and North Belfast.



A Historic Place with Unique Heritage

Donegall Street will celebrate and maximise its rich and unique heritage and role in the formation and growth of Belfast as a city.



A Climate Resilient Place

Donegall Street will be a climate resilient commercial thoroughfare which values the planet.



Next Steps

Over the next eighteen months, the North Belfast Heritage Cluster and Project Steering Group will work with partners and stakeholders to deliver and lobby for the priorities and actions identified in the plan. These will include:

- Liaise with the relevant partners to develop a day and night-time economy strategy and enhance the public realm.
- Develop new heritage building signage and improve access to existing heritage assets in collaboration with partner organisations.
- Work with partners to introduce green infrastructure, discourage pavement parking, and promote sustainable transport options.



A full version of Upper Donegall Street Place Shaping Plan can be found by scanning the QR code



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INTRODUCTION

The North Belfast Heritage Cluster (NBHC) is a partnership of 14 member heritage organisations based across North Belfast:

- Belfast Cathedral Church of St Anne, Donegall Street
- Redeemer Central, Donegall Street
- St Patrick's School/ Belfast Jesuit Centre, Donegall Street
- St Patrick's Church, Donegall Street
- The Society of Friends Meeting House, Frederick Street
- Clifton House, North Queen Street
- Clifton Street Cemetery, Henry Place
- Belfast Orange Hall, Clifton Street
- Indian Community Centre, Clifton Street
- Annesley Street Synagogue, Annesley Street
- St Malachy's College, Antrim Road
- 174 Trust/Duncairn Arts and Culture Centre
- Carnegie Oldpark Library, Oldpark Road
- The North Club/North Belfast Working Men's Club, Danube Street



The NBHC received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the 4.5-year delivery of their Re-creating a Great Place North Belfast Project. It is part funded by the Belfast Charitable Society. This project is aimed at promoting heritage-led regeneration and a shared concept of North Belfast in which individual communities, organisations and assets combine. The project promotes shared working, community confidence, development of social capital and community wealth building with members of the Cluster working together to promote sustainable regeneration.

The Re-creating a Great Place North Belfast Project has three key Strategic Outcomes:

- Heritage will be in better condition.
- Heritage will be better identified and explained.
- Heritage will involve a wider range of people.

NBHC commissioned Community Places, an award winning charitable social enterprise to carry out a place shaping process for Upper Donegall Street, to explore the social, economic, community, heritage and environmental regeneration potential of the area. The Place Shaping Plan will provide a framework to meet the Re-creating a Great Place North Belfast Project's strategic outcomes, while aligning to existing and future strategic policies and developments in the wider study area.

The process took place between September 2025 and January 2026 and brought together key stakeholders to identify and explore existing assets and opportunities within the area and how these could be maximised to bring wider benefits up until 2036. A key driver of the place shaping process was the potential to integrate Community Wealth Building into the process and to ensure that there was an understanding of climate resilience throughout. The place shaping process also considered key challenges, areas for improvement and strategic development opportunities. Early and meaningful engagement with local stakeholders and service providers was central to the process. This was embedded from the outset to ensure the Place Shaping Plan reflected local views, bolstered ownership of the place shaping process and maintained a focus on implementation.

This Place Shaping Plan is a pilot initiative situated within the wider North Belfast Heritage Cluster area. If successful, and subject to funding available, the approach is expected to scale along Clifton Street, connecting to the Antrim and Crumlin Roads, and establishing neighbourhood clusters anchored by North Belfast Heritage Cluster buildings.

A Project Steering Group was established who informed and shaped the process throughout. It consisted of representatives from the North Belfast Heritage Cluster (NBHC); Housing Executive (HE); Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Roads; Belfast City Council (BCC); Department for Communities (DfC); Cathedral Quarter BID (CQB); and Cathedral Quarter Trust (CQT). Local residents' groups were invited to participate in the Steering Group and took an active role in the engagement.

The project team, led by Community Places, took account of existing strategic plans and strategies including the North Belfast Community Partnership, Belfast Agenda Community Plan and the Local Development Plan.

¹Irish Planning Institute Planning Awards 2025 – Winner Plan Making: Tullycarnet Place Shaping Plan 2025-2035

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PLACE SHAPING PROCESS



At the outset of the Place Shaping Plan process an area profile and spatial analysis was undertaken. The spatial audit mapped the physical infrastructure, asset base, vacant plots and services and facilities currently available. A detailed socio-economic profile was also developed with engaging infographics. Stakeholder engagement was undertaken with landowners, business operators, service providers, the Heritage Cluster, elected representatives, council officers and, most importantly, the local community.

A range of approaches was used to encourage participation in the Place Shaping Plan and to explore assets, aspirations, challenges and priorities of key stakeholders, groups and the local community. This included: workshops with the Project Steering Group; one-to-one meetings with key community representatives, stakeholders, organisations and statutory service providers. Open business and community engagement sessions were also held in Redeemer Central and The Reporter bar, the engagement process was complemented by a short online survey capturing input from those who were unable to attend in person.



Leaflets were distributed to every business in the study area, and the two adjacent residential areas and similar information was shared on social media to raise awareness of the process and the opportunities to get involved in helping to shape the future of Upper Donegall Street. Members of the Project Steering Group played a key role in sharing information and encouraging participation in the open engagement sessions.

Engagement events were scheduled throughout the day to maximise participation from the surrounding community, with local faith providers reaching out to their large congregations, student workshops and over 90 members of the public participating in the Place Shaping process. Engagement findings were discussed with the Project Steering Group to identify the Place Shaping Plan priorities and develop a regeneration action plan for the area which set out priorities and short-, medium- and long-term objectives to be undertaken over the next ten years, until 2036. A draft Place Shaping Plan was presented to the Project Steering Group in early January 2026 and the final Place Shaping Plan completed in February 2026.

UPPER DONEGALL STREET

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VISION FOR UPPER DONEGALL STREET

A number of key messages were highlighted by participants during the engagement process in relation to the future vision for Upper Donegall Street area. These centred on reinvigorating and rejuvenating this commercial area, making the most of its culture and heritage and incorporating community and inclusive spaces. This vision was then presented to the Project Steering Group for its comments and consideration. The agreed vision is presented below:



The Upper Donegall Street area is a key gateway to the City Centre and North Belfast; it will be a thriving and sustainable commercial thoroughfare embracing its uniqueness and celebrating its history and heritage buildings. It will provide homes along with dedicated community and green spaces.

UPPER DONEGALL STREET

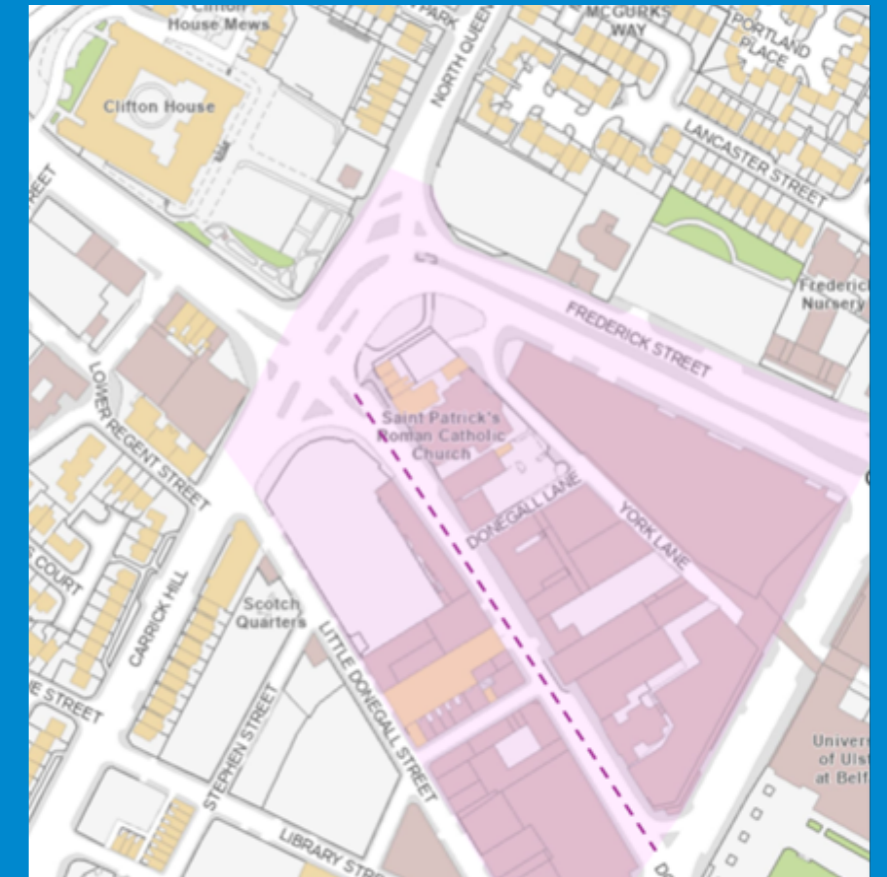
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AREA PROFILE

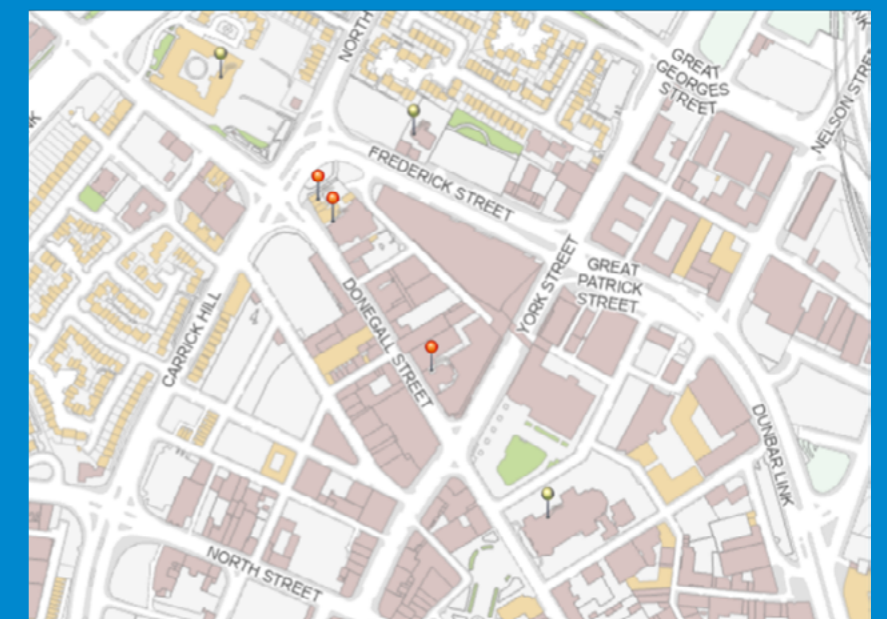
The area of study, the northern portion of Donegall Street is situated at the entrance to Belfast City Centre, located in the Oldpark District Electoral Area (DEA) of Belfast City Council (see Map 1), the southern portion of Donegall Street is located in Castle DEA. The entirety of Donegall Street falls within the UK Parliamentary Constituency of Belfast North and the Northern Ireland Assembly Constituency of Belfast North.

Upper Donegall Street and its wider environs are home to six key heritage buildings, within the North Belfast Heritage Cluster: Clifton House; St Patrick's Church and Parochial House; Belfast Jesuit Centre; Redeemer Central/ Donegall Street Congregational Church; Frederick Street Quaker Meeting House and Belfast Cathedral (see Map 2)

Donegall Street runs from Waring Street in the south to North Queen Street/Carrick Hill in the north, it is transected by Royal Avenue/York Street at its midway point. The study area was agreed at the first meeting of the Steering Group. Due to time and resource constraints this Place Shaping Plan focuses the northern section of Donegall Street, but consideration is given to the wider environs. The study area is bounded to the east by York Lane and west by Little Donegall Street.



Map 1 - Upper Donegall Street Study Area



Map 2- Heritage Cluster Buildings (red are located within the study area, green lie just beyond the study area).

● A Short History of the Study Area

In the late 18th and 19th Centuries, the massive growth of Belfast's Linen industry gave rise to the birth of the city as we know it today. There was significant urban development and expansion north beyond what is considered as the city centre today.

The construction of linen mills, warehouses, homes for the mill workers and churches for employees to worship in, were built forming a community. The companies driving this urban development included Brookfield Linen Co Ltd, who had their selling and distribution centre on Donegall Street. This would later become the North Street Arcade. Churches and religious buildings were, and still are, a significant feature of Donegall Street with St Patrick's Church, Donegall Street Congregational Church, Belfast Cathedral and the Belfast Jesuit centre (once home to St Patrick's Christian Brothers School and St Patrick's Male and Female National School) all located along this 600 metre stretch.

When first constructed Donegall Street led out to the open countryside (see Maps 3, 4 and 5), with Clifton House, the city's poor house located to the north. Donegall Street provided a gateway into the Belfast City Centre and still does to this day. Donegall Street was also known as Belfast's Fleet Street, as it was home to the city's four major newspaper companies (the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, News Letter and Northern Whig). All newspaper companies have since moved premises away from Donegall Street, with the Irish News the final company to re-locate in 2023.



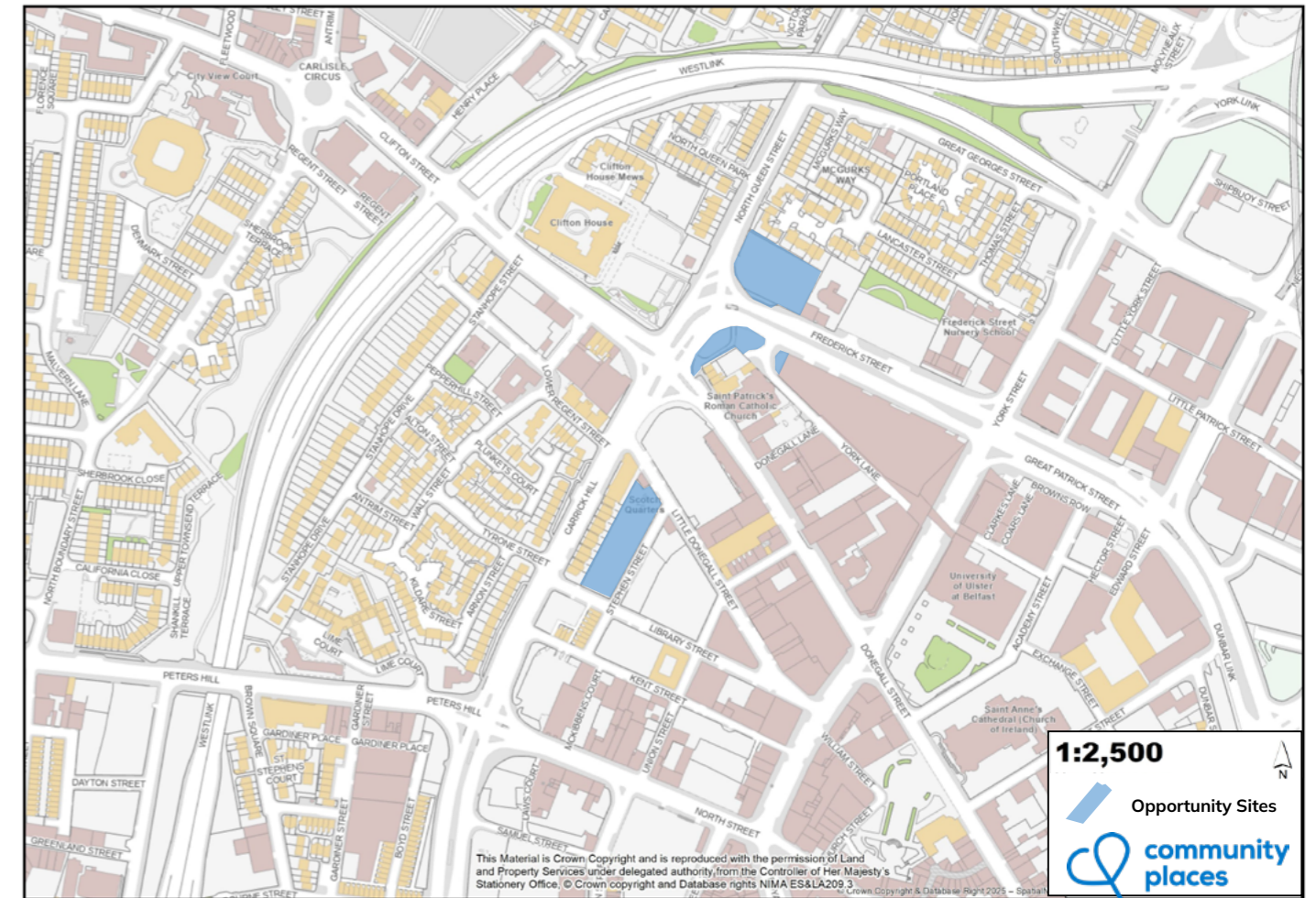
Map 3 - Historic Mapping of Belfast dated 1832-1833



Map 4 - Historic Mapping of Belfast dated 1846-1862

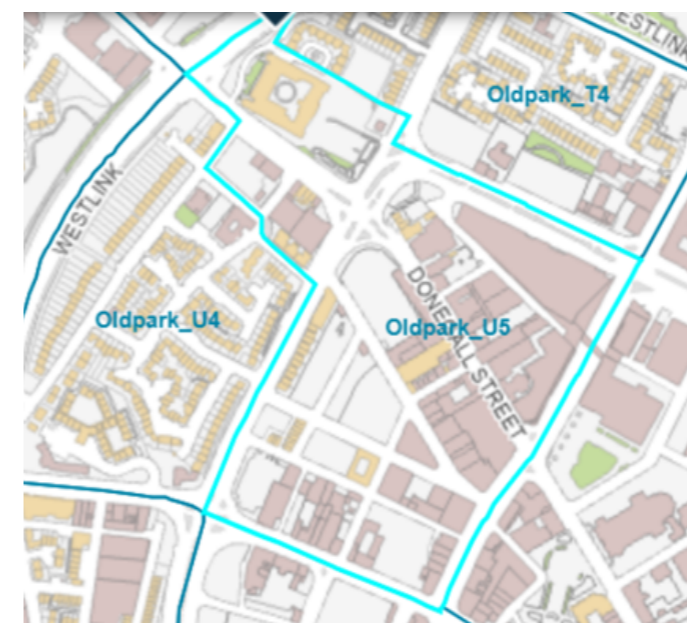


Map 5 - Historic Mapping of Belfast dated 1900-1907

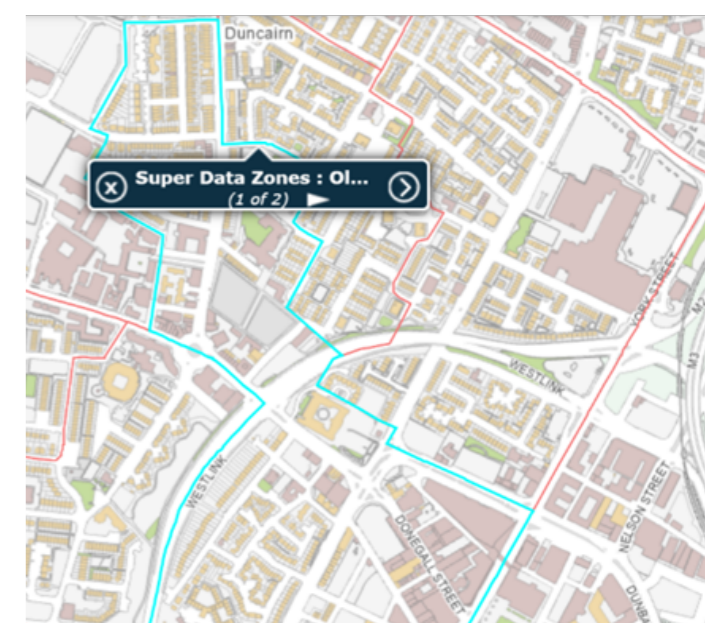


● Statistical Analysis

The study area is located within the wider Oldpark Super Data Zone (SDZ) and the Oldpark_U5 Data Zone (DZ) (see Maps 7 and 8 below);



Map 7 - NISRA Oldpark_U5 Data Zone



Map 8 - Super Data Zone: Oldpark_U

<https://explore.nisra.gov.uk/local-stats/N21000178/>



Population

NISRA data estimates there is a population of just 339 people living within the study area and its wider environs. The Oldpark_U5 has unique characteristics in terms of its demography, within 42% of the population aged 15-39 years, this is likely due to the increase in student housing in the area. Interestingly 26% of the population are aged 65+ years, this is likely due to the assisted living facility at Clifton House. This is also reflected in the household size, with almost two thirds of the population (59%) being made up of single person households.

There is a small population of children, with just 14% and a similar proportion of those aged 40-64 years (17%) both below the regional average.

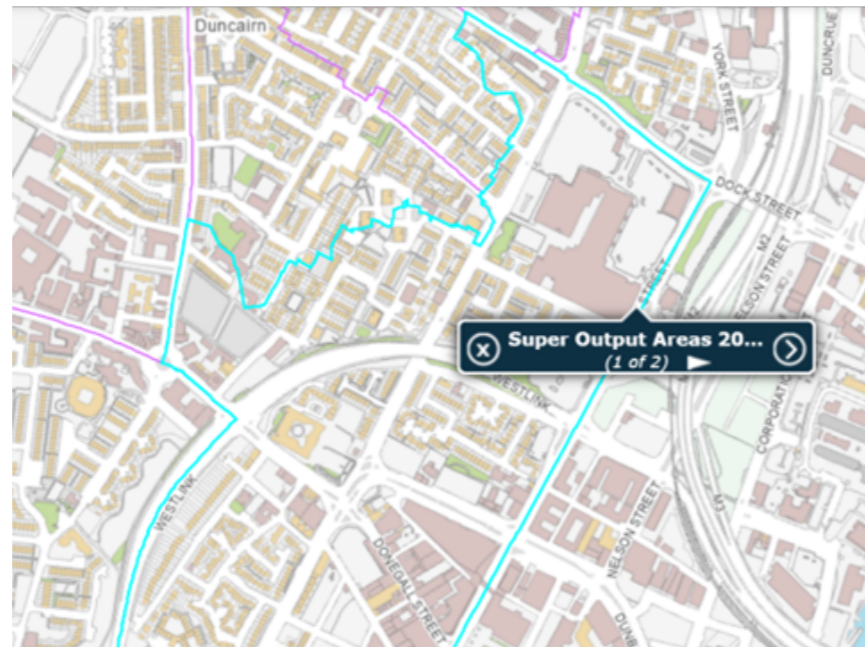
In terms of religious groupings, 64% of the population belong to the Catholic faith, and 18% belong to the Protestant and other Christian Religions. 10% of the population have no current religion and 7% follow another religious faith.

English is the predominate language with 88% of those surveyed on census day stating English is their main language, below the regional average of 95%.



MDM (2017)

The Multiple Deprivation Measures (MDM) provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency provide data on seven different deprivation measures and an overall deprivation measure for what were termed Super Output Areas (SOA), these SOAs are geographically similar to the SDZs outlined above. Each area is then ranked in order of most deprived (1) to least deprived (890). The study area lies within New Lodge 1 SOA (see Map 9 below). The New Lodge 1 SOA takes in a much larger area than the Oldpark_U5 DZ, with the area of Carrick Hill, Lancaster Street, the southwestern area of the New Lodge and City Side Retail Park.



Map 9 - New Lodge 1 Super Output Area

The overall MDM for the New Lodge 1 SOA is 25 out of 890 placing it in the top 3% of most deprived areas within the region. The area ranks worst for Employment Deprivation with a rank of 9 out of 890 (top 1% most deprived) and it ranks 10 in Health and Disability Deprivation, again in the top 1% most deprived.

In contrast the New Lodge 1 SOA is ranked among the least deprived in terms of Income affecting Older People with a rank of 731 of 890, a similar ranking (707) is provided for the Access to Services Deprivation Domain. This is likely due to the SOA's close proximity to the city centre, City Side Retail Park and the Mater Hospital.



Health

According to the 2021 census 60% of the population of Oldpark_U5 described their health as good or very good. By contrast 15% of the population described their health as bad or very bad, above the regional average of 8%.



Educational Attainment

In terms of educational attainment there is an above regional average of number of residents with no qualifications (39%), Northern Ireland average is 24%. With regard to differing levels of qualifications, there is a similar percentage of people with a level 4 (Degree) and above qualification, 31%. 30% of people within the area have another form of qualification ranging from Level 1, 2, 3, apprenticeships or other.



Housing and Accommodation

The majority of the population in Oldpark_U5 reside in a flat, maisonette or apartment, 177 individuals or 52% of the population. Only three individuals, less than 1%, live in a detached dwelling, 20 individuals (6%) in a semi-detached house and 50 individuals (15%) in a terraced house.

15% of homes within Oldpark_U5 DZ are owner-occupied, 55% are socially rented from the Housing Executive or a Housing Association, 30% are privately rented.



Access to Private Transport

Almost 70% (68.8%) of the population of Oldpark_U5 do not have access to a car or van. This is over three times the region's average of 20% of the population.

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POLICY FRAMEWORK

North Belfast is the second most deprived constituency in Northern Ireland, and the NBHC buildings are in some of the most deprived wards in all of Northern Ireland. This is an area scarred by the Troubles and severed from the city's core by busy carriageways and motorways. North Belfast has not benefited from investment and regeneration in the same way as other parts of the city have since 1998.

This Place Shaping Plan is complementary to several key strategic drivers for local and regional government. This work aligns with funding priorities for charitable trusts, statutory organisations and government.

The section below outlines the strategic framework for this project and highlights relevant wider priorities across Belfast and the region where appropriate. This list is not exhaustive.



The Belfast Agenda

The Belfast Agenda is Belfast's Community Plan, published and led by the City Council. It was first published in November 2017 and was updated in 2024. The Belfast Agenda sets out the vision and the long-term ambitions for Belfast's future, and outlines key priorities for the life of the Community Plan to 2028.

The Community Plan's vision is "Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone."

The inclusive growth plan for the city includes 5 strategic themes:

1. Our people and communities.
2. Our economy.
3. Our place.
4. Our planet.
5. Compassionate city.

The Belfast Agenda notes the long-term ambitions for the city such as the economy supporting 46,000 additional jobs, the city being home to an additional 66,000 people, a 33% reduction in the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods, every young person leaving school has a destination that fulfils their potential and a reduction in carbon emissions by 80%.

The Belfast Agenda is linked to and reflects other key strategies and plans. This includes the new Belfast Plan Strategy 2035 (see overleaf) which will provide the spatial framework for the city and will consider any land use planning aspects which emerge through the Belfast Agenda such as housing, employment, open spaces and connectivity.

Planning Framework

Donegall Street lies within the Belfast City Council area. The planning framework for Belfast City Council is complex and comprises of a number of Local Development Plans including Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001, the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (dBMAP 2015), the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP 2015) and the Belfast Plan Strategy 2035. For the purposes of the Place Shaping Plan, the most relevant planning documents are:

Belfast Plan Strategy 2035 - The Belfast Local Development Plan, Plan Strategy 2035 was adopted in May 2023 and shapes the future development of the city. The Local Development Plan is vital to the delivery of the outcomes in the Belfast Agenda as it provides the planning framework and acts as the spatial expression to support the delivery of economic and social outcomes for the city, while delivering sustainable development. The Belfast Plan Strategy is the relevant Local Development Plan for the study area. As Belfast City Council is in the process of drafting its Local Plan Policies with associated land use zonings and maps, the mapping set out in the plans below is most current.

A key policy in the BPS is Policy CC1 - Development Opportunity Sites which states that:

"Development opportunity sites enables the council to target a series of Development Opportunity Areas (DOAs) across the city centre which are sizeable enough to provide opportunities for mixed use development including the provision of new city centre homes, job creation, commercial investment and public realm interventions."

The policy goes further to state that new developments shall be directed towards sites within the development opportunities areas of inter alia Inner North West.

Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 - The study area lies within the settlement limit of Belfast City and within the City Centre as defined by dBMAP 2015 which was first published in 2004. Within the study area dBMAP includes land zoned for housing, protected City Centre Housing, City Centre Gateway, Development Opportunity sites and a Local Landscape Policy Area.



Figure 1 - Map No 02/001 Belfast City from Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015



Since dBMAP's publication the Development Opportunity sites, the southern gateway site, the area zoned for housing adjacent to Clifton House have been developed or are in the process of being developed out (see Figure 1).

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP 2015) - The study area lies within the settlement limit of Belfast City and within the City Centre as defined by BMAP 2015. Within the study area BMAP includes land zoned for housing, protected City Centre Housing, City Centre Gateway, and Local Landscape Policy Areas. The Study area is also designated as the Scotch and Cathedral Quarters Character Areas; it faces into the Primary Retail Core and Conservation Area and is home to several designations.

There are a number of housing sites designated within the vicinity of the study area which have now been developed or are in the process of being developed out. The study area is home to Clifton House Historic Park and Demesne (CC 027) and the Clifton 1 Local Landscape Policy Area (CC 030 0) due to its listed buildings (Clifton House and Gate Lodge) and the mature deciduous trees within the gardens. The study area is also located within an area of parking restraint (CC 025) and area of archaeological potential . (see Figure 2).



BMAP 2015 provides a City Centre Conceptual Framework and City Centre Strategy (see Figure 3), with Donegall Street lying within the proposed Orbital Boulevard and accessing the Belfast Cross at Royal Avenue. The proposed Orbital Boulevard makes use of the existing road infrastructure in an effort to aid traffic circulation around, and access to, the City Centre and to provide an alternative through-centre traffic aimed at encouraging use of non-car transport modes by reducing city centre traffic.

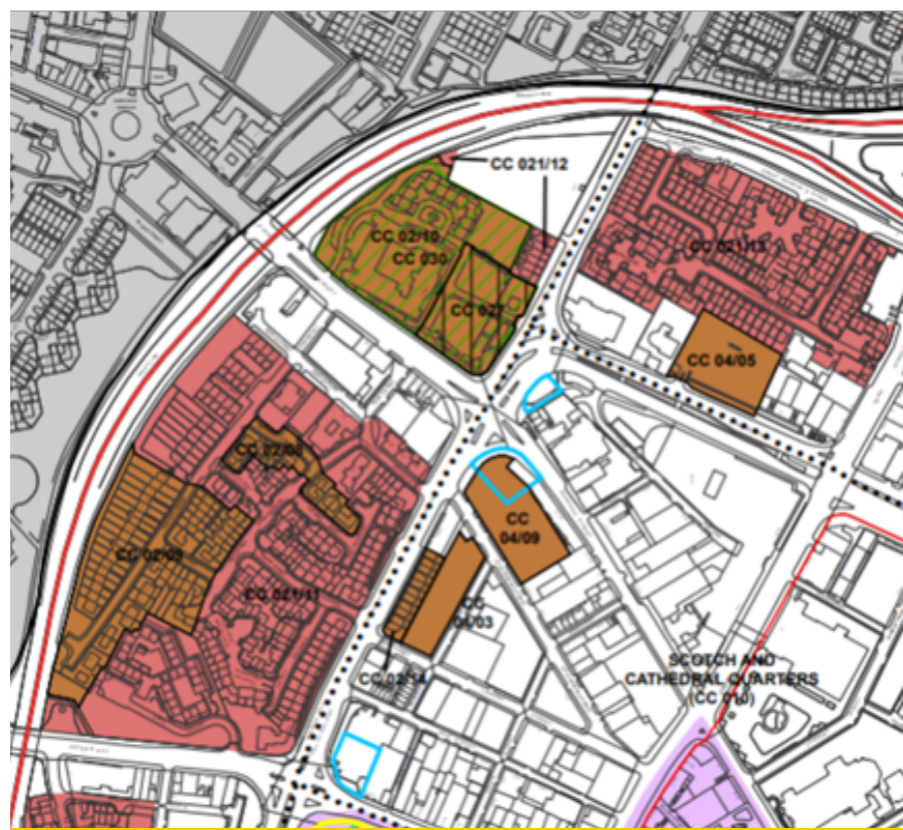


Figure 2 - Map No 02/001 Belfast City from Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015

The junction of Donegall Street, Clifton Street, Carrick Hill and North Queen Street is designated as a Gateway. City Centre Gateways have been so designated due to their location at entrance points to the City Centre where they often present the visitor with an initial impression that can influence their overall perception of the city. Many of the Gateways into Belfast City Centre can be characterless places dominated by road infrastructure. The westerly site is currently being developed out. There are a number of key site requirements for these Gateway sites including a minimum building height of four storeys and maximum of seven storeys.

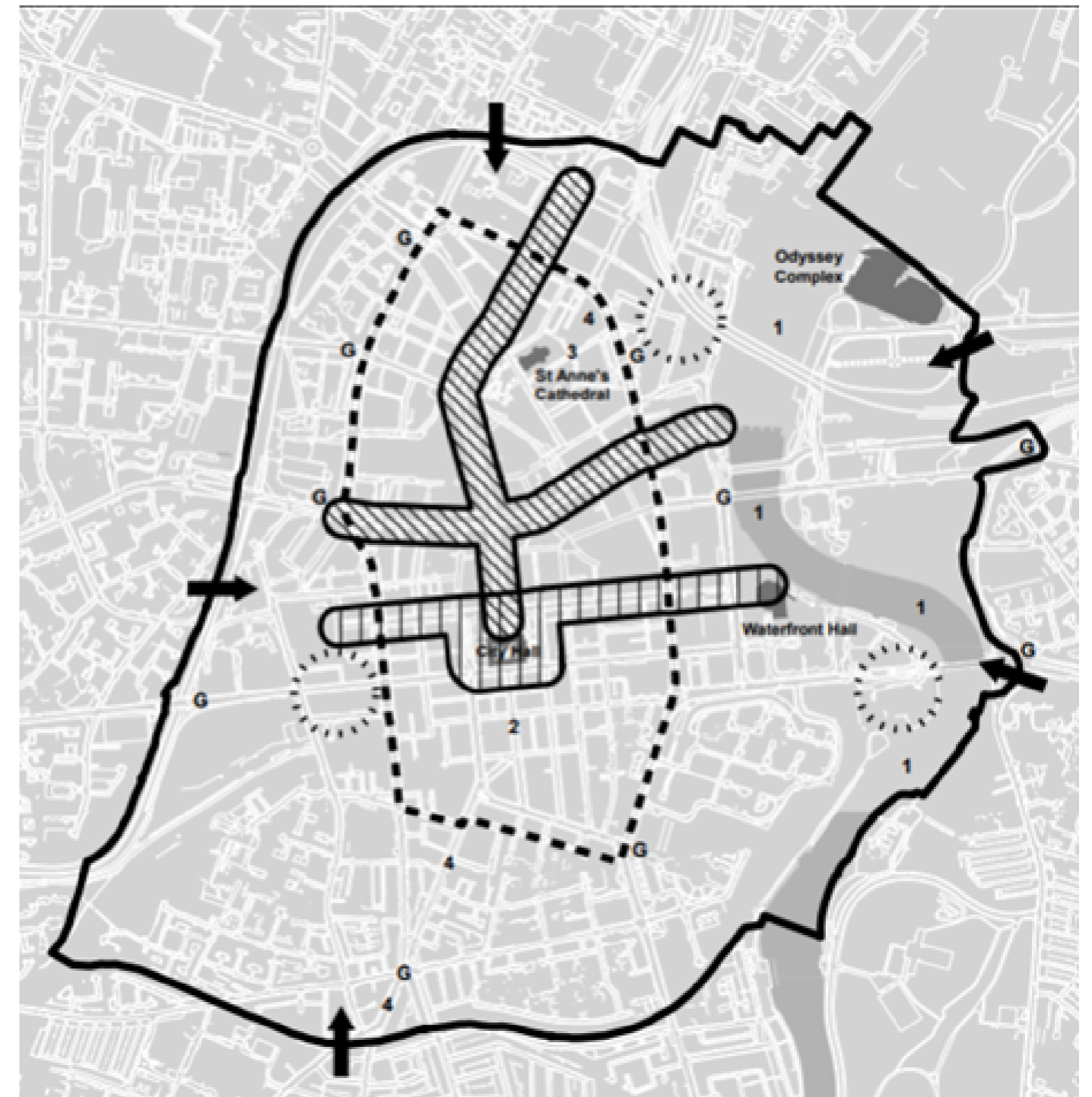


Figure 3 - diagram 1- Belfast City Centre Conceptual Spatial Framework from Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015

Diagram 1 - Belfast City Centre Conceptual Spatial Framework

- | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--|----------------------|--|-------------------|
| | City Centre | | 3 Cathedral Quarter | | Key Linkage |
| | Civic Spine & Square | | 4 Entertainment Area | | Landmark Building |
| | Belfast Cross | | G Gateway | | |
| | 1 River Lagan | | Accessibility Node | | |
| | 2 Office Area | | Orbital Boulevard | | |



Housing Investment Plan 2023-2026 (2024 Update) - The provision of social and affordable housing is a key concern of many of the stakeholders involved in the Place Shaping Process. The Housing Executive is both a statutory Community Planning and Local Development Plan partner. The Housing Investment Plan (HIP) for Belfast 2023-2026: 2024 Update reports on progress made over the past 12 months and sets out the Housing Executive's ambitions for the coming year. The HIP recognises the role housing can contribute to achieving community planning objectives. It is important to note that the objectives within the 2023 HIP relate to objectives set out in the first publication of the Belfast Agenda in 2017 (the Belfast Agenda was updated in 2024). The HIP advises in March 2024 there were 12,726 applicants on the waiting list for Belfast City Council area with 10,307 in housing stress. The HIP also notes that there is a new build social housing need 2022-2027 for Belfast City of 8,551 homes.



Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy 2015 - The Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) sets out the collective ambition for the continued growth and regeneration of the city core and its surrounding areas to 2030. The BCCRIS sets out eight key principles:

- Increase the Employment Population.
- Increase the Residential Population.
- Manage the Retail Offer.
- Maximise the Tourism Opportunity.
- Create Regional Learning and Innovation Centres.
- Create a Green, Walkable, Cyclable Centre.
- Connect to the City Around.
- Shared space and social impact.



Five Special Action Areas (SAAs) were identified as parts of the centre where a phased approach could be taken to preparing more intensive local plans to forward their regeneration in line with the larger ambitions of the Strategy. The study area lies within one of the Special Action Areas: North Centre.

Inner North West Masterplan 2018 - The study area is located within the 'Inner West' Special Action Area as identified in the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy, the Inner North West Masterplan (INW) examines the study area along with parts of the Inner North. The Inner North area encompasses a section of Belfast's retail core and sits adjacent to Ulster University, the Cathedral Quarter, and residential neighbourhoods to the north and west. The INW Masterplan proposes a new city centre neighbourhood that incorporates a mix of uses, including residential, commercial, retail and leisure all integrated through a strong and cohesive public realm. The INW Masterplan provides a vision for the area:

"The INW will be transformed to create a vibrant place to live, work, shop and relax across a series of mixed-use, shared neighbourhoods. The existing heritage and community assets alongside new investment including commercial, residential and higher education developments will produce a welcoming quarter embodied by creativity, innovation, quality design, culture and well-being in the heart of the city centre".

The INW Masterplan specifically references the area Study Area and notes that Donegall Street is rich in history and diversity and proposes concept ideas including:

- Strengthen East West Connections along Donegall Street.
- Improved junctions and crossings at Donegall Street and North Queen Street.
- Upgrading high streets.
- The Belfast Telegraph building as an opportunity site.

The INW Masterplan identified a number of opportunity sites within the study area. The Belfast Telegraph building and Little Donegall Street Public Car Park are the only remaining sites that have not been developed. The INW Masterplan considers the release of surface level car parking for the successful regeneration of the area.

Streets Ahead Phase III 2015 - The Belfast Streets Ahead Phase III (BSA Phase 3) project aims to push the regeneration of the streetscape towards the north, extending the perceived retail core and engaging with an area of the city that is seeing great change. While the concepts were approved in 2015, the project has not commenced due to funding shortages. Elements of the project are in the process of being brought forward by Belfast City Council under its physical investment programme. With work underway for the development of Cathedral Gardens (Buoy's Park) to provide a world-class public space for people to gather, relax and play.



Figure 4 - Cathedral Gardens image credit: Belfast City Council

Cathedral Gardens sits on the periphery of the Study Area and will provide a much needed green space within the City Centre, complementary to the Vision to include community and green spaces.

Made in North Belfast: North Belfast Community Partnership 2025

- The North Belfast Community Partnership published Phase One of its inclusive strategy development plan. This collaborative plan seeks to transform North Belfast into a thriving, cohesive and opportunity-rich community. The Plan identifies four strategic priorities:

- People and Communities - Supporting and nurturing the potential of North Belfast residents.
- Place - Promoting North Belfast as a safe, thriving and expressive community.
- Pride - Developing a connected, engaged and vibrant community.
- Prosperity - Supporting sustainable and inclusive growth, learning and opportunity.



The Plan includes a Strategic Development Framework, based on 11 themes including:

- Early Intervention.
- Poverty and Destitution.
- Inclusive Communities.
- Safer Communities.
- Culture, Art, Sport and Faith.
- Regeneration.
- Health and Wellbeing.
- Economic Prosperity.
- Education.
- Youth.
- Environment.

Belfast Open Spaces Strategy - Open space enhances the quality of the local environment and contributes to each area's identity. The Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS) sets out an ambitious vision that by 2035:

'Belfast will have a well-connected, accessible network of high quality, sustainable open spaces recognised for the value and benefits they provide to everyone who live in, work in and visits our city'.

The Strategy is supported by seven guiding principles, that Belfast's open spaces will:

- SP1: Provide welcoming shared spaces
- SP2: Improve connectivity
- SP3: Improve health and well-being
- SP4: Support place-making and enhance the built environment
- SP5: Increase resilience to climate change
- SP6: Protect and enhance the natural environment



SP7: Be celebrated and support learning.

These guiding principles support the ambitions and the visions of both the community plan, the Belfast Agenda and the Local Development Plan, Belfast Plan Strategy.

Supplementary Planning Guidance: Masterplans - At the time of writing Belfast City Council published a consultation on two masterplans, the Sailortown, Greater Clarendon and City Quays Masterplan and the Cathedral and North Eastern Quarter Masterplan. The study area does not lie within either masterplan area, it should be noted that both masterplans refer to strengthening connections in the city.

The Cathedral and North Eastern Quarter lies directly adjacent to the study area and seeks to provide public realm improvements along the lower end of Donegall Street and Great Patrick Street to their junctions at York Road/Royal Avenue, which lead directly into the study area.

The Sailortown, Greater Clarendon and City Quays Masterplan adopts a similar approach, with the transformation of Dunbar Link and Corporation Street into urban boulevards, forming the main N-S spine route connecting Belfast Harbour to the Cathedral Quarter and into North Belfast, again leading directly into the study area.

This Place Shaping Plan sits within a wider strategic framework aimed at supporting new and sustainable development in an area of the city that has experienced neglect.

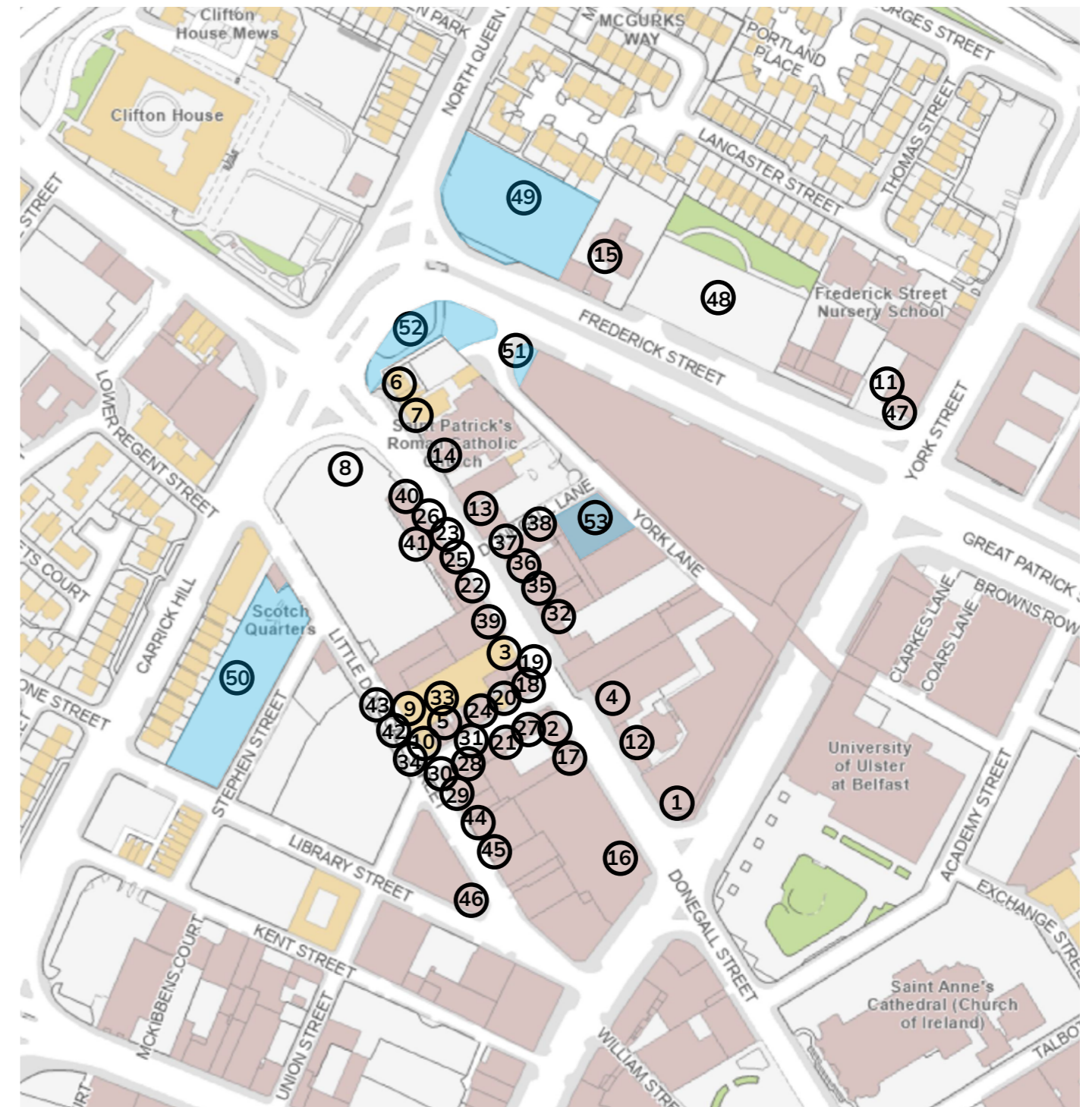
Ongoing investment in the Ulster University campus, Belfast Stories and Cathedral Gardens, all located on the edge of the study area, will help generate investment and opportunities for the wider area.

This Place Shaping Plan aims to channel these opportunities into the study area and further into North Belfast, strengthening connections between the North of the city and contributing to the ongoing regeneration of the city centre. In doing so, it supports the strategic objectives of local policies, including increasing employment opportunities, providing housing for the residential population, maximising tourism potential through heritage-led initiatives, and enabling sustainable development within the northern city centre.

However, several key infrastructure projects in North Belfast, including the York Street Interchange, Streets Ahead, and Belfast Rapid Transit 2, have been paused due to funding constraints. There is concern that reduced government investment may limit levels of private investment in the area. In response, the Place Shaping Plan seeks to encourage development within the study area and bring together key stakeholders to promote a more co-ordinated and collaborative approach to regeneration.



Spatial Analysis Audit



Upper Donegall Street Key Services and Facilities		Baseline Map Number
Ulster University/The Academy	1	
Skilled NI	2	
Springboard Opportunities	3	
Youth Justice Agency Headquarters	4	
The Rainbow Project	5	
Redidential		
201-205 Donegall Street	6	
St Patrick's Presbytery	7	
Biscuit Factory PBMSA (available 26/27 academic year)	8	
The Factory 41 - 45 Little Donegall Street	9	
39 Little Donegall Street	10	
The Edge (PBMSA)	11	
Heritage Cluster Buildings		
Redeemer Central	12	
Belfast Jesuit Centre	13	
St Patrick's Church	14	
Religious Society of Friends	15	
Businesses		
The Telegraph Building	16	
The Kremlin	17	
The Maverick	18	
Boom Box Nightclub	19	
The Reporter	20	
Kearney & Co Accountants	21	
Vintage Kolektym café/shop	22	
Hair by Essie	23	
Norman Shannon & Co Solicitors	24	
Michael's Shop	25	

Businesses	
Good Luck Tattoo	26
New Ground Jiu Jitsu Academy	27
Spaghetti Arms	28
The Shoe Factory	29
Union Street Bar	30
GNI Mag	31
Clarke's Dance Studio	32
Beauty and Nail Shack	33
Union Vapes and treats	34
Polercise NI	35
Upper Donegall Street Key Services and Facilities	
The Big Breakfast	36
Toal's Bookmakers	37
Outside	38
Hugh O'Kane & Co Ltd Funeral Directors	39
James T Johnston & Co Solicitors	40
Unicabz Ltd	41
Mike's Fancy Cheese	42
Tanya Khan Aesthetics	43
Boyle Sports	44
City Hibernian Club	45
The Watson	46
Greggs	47
UU Car Parking	48
Opportunity Sites	
Former St Kevin's Hall site	49
Little Donegall Street Car Park	50
Lands adjoining Ulster University on York Lane	51
Lands bordering York Lane entrance and junction of North Queen Street	52
13 Donegall Lane	53

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rich heritage buildings Strong LGBTQ + community Main gateway route into city centre from North Belfast Strong faith-based community Active evening and night-time economy Regeneration of adjacent areas Good transport links Historical significance – Newspaper industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited range of retail specifically independent and affordable offerings Limited meeting and dwell spaces Poor positioning of public transport infrastructure Perceived negative image of area due to antisocial behaviour Lack of housing Upkeep and appearance of buildings and public spaces Current retail offering provides no potential to retain customers/service users on the street. General feeling of dereliction including empty shop frontages at ground level. Lack of knowledge of the historic buildings and branding (Great Place North Belfast) Lack of green space Lighting in disrepair Minimal community infrastructure Junction at Clifton Street/North Queen Street/ Carrick Hill/Donegall Street
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and employment opportunities Potential for regeneration in area Connectivity to surrounding North Belfast neighbourhoods and with city centre Upkeep and appearance of public spaces within the area Use of additional pavement space for community use Main gateway route into city centre from North Belfast Potential for branding the USP of the area Strong potential for growth and relationship development with the Ulster University Re-use derelict buildings for meanwhile uses (development potential of pop-up enterprises) Development potential of land at old St Kevin's Hall site Development potential of the land at Little Donegall Street surface level carpark Development potential of the lands at the junction of York Lane and North Queen Street Development of BRT2 attracting people into the area Occupation of the biscuit Factory drawing people onto Donegall Street Expanding on the regeneration investment of Belfast Stories to ripple into the study area Build on the newspaper heritage of the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly transient residential community (student accommodation) that forms no connection to the area Traffic congestion Parking congestion Derelict buildings and dead frontages Oversaturation of student accommodation Regeneration of adjacent areas- potential for the area to be left behind Climate change and limited climate actions Lack of joined up working around the development of BRT2 and Streets Ahead 3

UPPER DONEGALL STREET

Place Shaping Plan / 2026

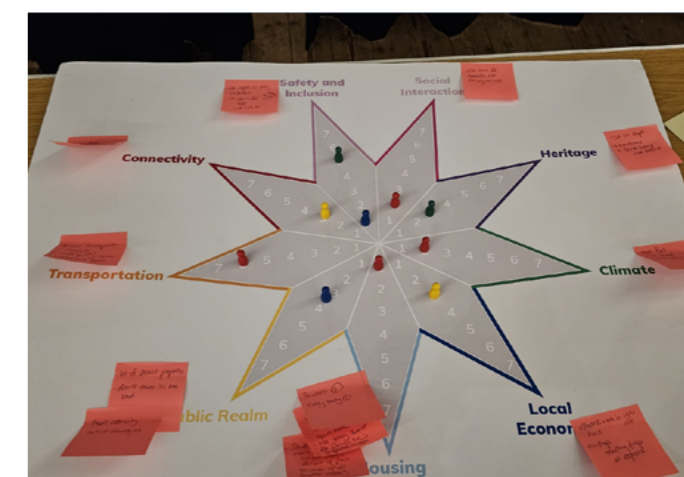
INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

The project team, in conjunction with the Project Steering Group developed an engagement plan along with core engagement questions. Community Places' Strengthening the Highstreet Star model was used to provide a framework for structure and thoughtful discussion on Upper Donegall Street and to inform the place shaping priorities, strategic outcomes and objectives.

A key challenge identified within the engagement methodology was the low permanent resident population alongside a high transient student population. To ensure inclusive engagement with both residents and users of the Upper Donegall Street area, the project team engaged with local faith organisations, which represent substantial congregations of people who both live in the area and regularly visit it for worship. Targeted, student-focused workshops were also delivered, involving individuals currently living in the area as well as those who had recently moved away from Upper Donegall Street. Given the difficulties in directly capturing the perspectives of the night-time economy users, a representative sample was gathered through discussions with local hospitality staff.

Nine consistent questions were asked of participants during all engagement sessions and the complementary online survey. These included:

1. What do you like about the Donegall Street area?
2. What could be improved about Donegall Street?
3. How and why do you use Donegall Street?
4. Are you aware of the Heritage Buildings in Donegall Street?
5. What climate actions could be developed in Donegall Street?
6. How would you like to see Donegall Street area develop over the next ten years?
7. In one word describe Donegall Street today and one word to describe your vision for Donegall Street over the next ten years.
8. How do you get to Donegall Street?
9. Is there one key focus/area/project you would like to see developed in the near future?



Summary of Engagement Findings

Through one-to-one meetings, focus groups, open engagement sessions and an online survey, participants were asked consistent questions exploring what they liked about Donegall Street, how to identify and build upon the area's assets, potential improvements, climate and heritage-related considerations, and longer-term development opportunities.

What do you like about the Donegall Street area?

The beauty and historical significance of the area's heritage buildings was consistently highlighted as Donegall Street's greatest asset. Participants also praised the mural street art and the street's function as a gateway to Belfast City Centre. A strong sense of community was noted as a distinctive characteristic. The close location to Ulster University was also emphasized. The area's diverse nightlife, including nightclubs and bars, was widely recognised and valued.

What could be improved about Donegall Street?

- Preservation of Heritage Buildings - Multiple respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining heritage building quality. There is an urgent need to rejuvenate historic structures to preserve their value as heritage assets.
- Additional Lighting - Enhanced street lighting was identified as improving the area visually and providing better access to historical buildings, whilst creating a safer environment for those passing through, particularly during evening hours. Remove On-Street Parking.
- Traffic congestion and excessive pavement parking- throughout the day were highlighted as significant issues, blocking pedestrian access and compromising safety whilst navigating the street. Removing parking spaces and partially pedestrianising the street - allowing public transport access only - was suggested to address congestion and improve safety and accessibility for street users.
- Public Realm Enhancements - Improvements to the public realm such as upgraded paving, signage, seating, and more colourful planting would help create a more welcoming, garden-like streetscape.
- Respondents stressed that regular maintenance and street cleaning would help create a safer, healthier and more welcoming community. This was identified as essential to improving Upper Donegall Street's overall appearance.
- Better Public Transport and Active Travel - Respondents remarked Upper Donegall Street could be improved by enhancing public transport links and strengthening active travel infrastructure, making it easier and safer for people to walk, cycle, and access the area.
- Occupy Vacant Units and Derelict Buildings - It was noted the row of vacant or derelict shop units between St Patrick's Church and Redeemer Central presents an opportunity for improvement; encouraging small local businesses to occupy these spaces or repurposing them would significantly enhance the area.
- Nighttime Safety - Improving nighttime safety, particularly for women, should be prioritised through high-quality lighting, clearer sightlines, active ground-floor uses, and an overall environment that feels safe and well-used in the evenings.

How and why do you use Donegall Street?

Respondents primarily use Upper Donegall Street as both a functional and social destination. Many travel through the area for commuting, university attendance or to access nearby workplaces, businesses and gym facilities. The street also functions as a hub for religious and community activities, with several people attending St Patrick's Church or volunteering at Redeemer Central.

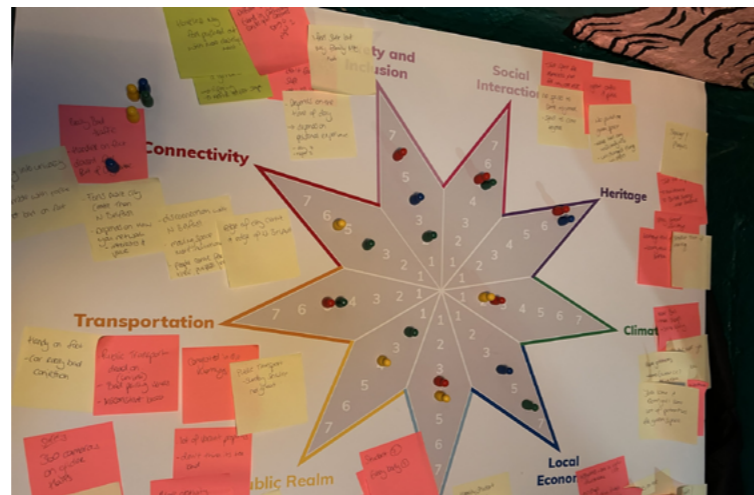
Socially, the street accommodates nightlife, music venues, coffee shops and general socialising, including venue hire. For many respondents, Upper Donegall Street functions more as a thoroughfare than a lived-in space, with people predominantly passing through rather than residing in the area.

Awareness of Heritage Buildings in Donegall Street



Strengthening the Highstreet

The Community Places Strengthening the Highstreet Star was drawn upon to frame conversations at each of the community engagement sessions. It provided a structured approach to explore the key issues and priorities impacting on Upper Donegall Street and its wider environs. The Star encouraged participants to consider the physical, spatial and social aspects of the area. It also helped to pinpoint the strengths and assets of the area, as well as identifying areas for improvement. Participants were invited to comment on each the nine points of the Star.



The process offers a visual representation of where an area is performing well and where there is scope for improvement. It also serves as an at-a-glance view of how the community perceives the area's performance. A score of 1 indicates significant room for improvement, while a score of 7 indicates very little need for improvement.

Connectivity – 4

Participants expressed differing views regarding Upper Donegall Street's connectivity and identity. Some perceived the area as occupying a marginal space, belonging neither to Belfast City Centre nor to North Belfast. Others situated it firmly within North Belfast, arguing it lacks meaningful connection to the city centre. Conversely, some participants maintained it was fundamentally a city centre location with limited ties to North Belfast, suggesting these perceptions depend largely on individual usage patterns and networks.



An emerging theme identified the area's evolution into a university quarter, driven by the expansion of Ulster University's Belfast Campus and associated purpose-built student accommodation.

Pedestrian connectivity was generally considered good, with participants noting that walking from A to B was straightforward. The Star model revealed near-total concern regarding traffic congestion, particularly during rush hour and weekend evenings, when substantial numbers of taxis generate both congestion and noise pollution. Accessibility challenges were highlighted for people with reduced mobility, citing uneven pavements and complex pedestrian arrangements at the Clifton Street–North Queen Street and York Street–Westlink junctions.

Participants identified Upper Donegall Street as potentially one of Belfast's key connective routes from North Belfast yet acknowledged it fails to fulfil this function. Contributing factors include the hostile public realm along Clifton Street and the fragmented nature of North Belfast itself. Suggested improvements included pedestrianising Donegall Lane and reducing through-traffic on Upper Donegall Street.

The absence of BCC Christmas lighting extending to Upper Donegall Street was noted as a clear visual disconnect from the wider city centre during the Christmas period.

Transport – 4

Congestion emerged as the primary transport concern, with participants reporting significant traffic volumes during morning and evening rush hours, as well as weekend evenings when taxi numbers substantially increase.

Public transport provision heading north was considered excellent, with convenient Metro bus services and proximity to Yorkgate train station. Train users reported difficulties navigating multiple traffic lanes at the Westlink junction and highlighted persistent drainage issues along York Street. Students praised the well-utilised Uni-link service but criticised limited Sunday provision and poor bus stop visibility. One participant noted that accessing the bus stop outside the Maverick Bar required walking through bins and uncollected rubbish.

Opinions on parking were divided. Some found parking readily available, whilst others raised concerns about pavement parking impacting pedestrian movement and contributing to the area's degraded appearance and maintenance standards.

Public Realm – 2.5

Participants assessed the area's streetscape and building stock as poor and neglected, though they recognised considerable potential for improvement. Significant maintenance and upkeep work was deemed necessary, with participants citing vacant and derelict properties, vandalism, and graffiti as key concerns.

Positive interventions were acknowledged, including artwork on the Belfast Telegraph and Irish News buildings, and evening illumination of St Patrick's Church and Redeemer Central, which have enhanced the area's visual appeal.



The absence of places to dwell and enjoy street life was highlighted as a deficiency. Participants advocated for increased active ground-floor frontages to draw people to the area, wider pavements to accommodate café seating, and improved lighting to enhance perceived safety, particularly after dark.

Pavement parking was repeatedly criticised, with participants calling for alternative parking provision, improved footpath maintenance, and better integration of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Housing – 3

Participants emphasised the need for different sizes/types of houses, including accommodation suitable for families, older people, students, and single-person households. Concerns were raised regarding over-proliferation of Purpose-Built Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA), with existing stock reportedly under-occupied whilst further developments receive approval.

Strong support was expressed for alternative housing provision, including residential conversion of upper floors in commercial properties and development of affordable and social housing on key sites adjacent to the study area, such as St Kevin's Hall and the Little Donegall Street carpark.

Participants who rated housing separately gave student accommodation an average score of 6, reflecting availability despite high costs, whilst assigning a score of 1 to all other housing types, indicating severe deficiency.

Local Economy – 3.5

Participants recognised the Cathedral Quarter Business Improvement District's effective support for local businesses through free training and value-adding initiatives that strengthen the local economy. Those not actively engaged with the business community identified a lack of diverse uses, with education and training facilities concentrated in the lower section of the street and bars clustered on Union Street, leaving the wider Upper Donegall Street area underserved.

A broader mix of uses was proposed to encourage footfall, including a newsagent, chemist, and gym. Participants advocated for incentivising social enterprises and small independent grassroots businesses into vacant buildings or purpose-designed spaces similar to the Banana Block at Portview Trade Centre.

Some participants considered Upper Donegall Street a street in transition, with much regeneration going on around it, but little occurring on Upper Donegall Street itself. The opening of the new Biscuit Factory Student housing may have a significant role in the economic regeneration of the upper end of Donegall Street.

Climate – 2

Participants noted that while there were minimal climate interventions ongoing at present, there was a lot of potential in the area to incorporate climate interventions including the introduction of the BRT2 (Glider), the provision of more bins and recycling bins to encourage the hospitality industry to compost and recycle waste. Other interventions put forward included more green space, including parklets and green roofs on bus stops.

Participants felt that Donegall Lane should be pedestrianised and this would provide more scope for green spaces in the study area. Solar lighting provisions was also put forward as a means to ensure safety while helping to achieve climate targets.

One participant suggested a scheme similar to that run by Dublin City Council, where trees are planted in containers and when they grow too large for the space are replanted elsewhere and replaced with smaller trees.

Participants agreed that the historic building stock should be maintained but retrofitted to provide a more climate friendly update to the buildings.

Heritage – 5

Participants regarded the Upper Donegall Street area as possessing exceptional heritage value, though poorly recognised and undermined by vacant sites.

Several approaches to maximising heritage assets were proposed, including a walking trail modelled on Boston's Freedom Trail, interpretive plaques, improved signage, and development and promotion of a distinctive area brand identity.

Improved building maintenance was identified as necessary, with participants emphasising the area's considerable unrealised potential.

Social Interaction – 3

Whilst acknowledging that there is some café and bar provision, participants identified an absence of genuine community space within the area.

The lack of green space for recreation and socialising, combined with vacancy and dereliction limits natural surveillance potential and was seen as discouraging social interaction and community mixing. Participants called for increased café, bar, and retail provision to create places for people to meet following religious services. Seating installations were proposed to enable people to gather and spend time in the area, citing the Duke of York's outdoor seating as a successful precedent that transforms the street into a destination. Pedestrianising Donegall Lane and Union Street was suggested as extending dwell time.

Collaborative programming and animation of the space by Belfast City Council and the Heritage Cluster was also recommended.

Safety and Inclusion – 4.5 day and 2.5 night

Discussions revealed a marked disparity in perceived safety between daytime and night-time, with many participants feeling considerably less comfortable during night-time hours.

Gender significantly influenced safety perceptions, with female participants reporting feeling substantially less safe than their male counterparts. Women specifically identified inadequate lighting as a concern, suggesting improvements would enhance night-time security.

A notable increase in intravenous drug use was reported, potentially linked to vulnerable individuals traversing the Upper Donegall Street area between service organisations.

Regarding inclusion, Heritage Cluster members described services they provide to enhance the area's inclusivity. Some concerns were raised that regeneration might result in displacement of the existing homeless population without addressing any of the issues.



● Key messages from Engagement

- The historic nature of Upper Donegall Street, and its wider area, is crucial to the potential development and regeneration.
- There could be a strong district identity created through the branding of the historic buildings and provision of more information about the area and the buildings. The introduction of the Glider and Belfast Stories is hoped to bring new life to the area and street.
- There are few permanent residents, minimal community infrastructure and a lack of services, but there is a strong loyalty and affiliation to the area.
- Potential growth in the relationship with Ulster University and its students while recognising there is an over saturation of student accommodation.
- Concerns around congestion: rush hour, taxis at the weekend and car parking on pavements.
- In terms of public realm there was a notable lack of green space, lack of and consideration of climate actions.
- The general care and maintenance of the buildings is poor (general dereliction and vacancies).
- There were notable safety concerns – especially for women at night with the poor street lighting noted.
- Members of the North Belfast Heritage Cluster wanted to ensure the project ripples out to include Place Shaping in their areas.
- There was a desire to ensure there is a connection between this Place Shaping Plan and any wider Place Shaping for North Belfast.



UPPER DONEGALL STREET

Place Shaping Plan / 2026

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Community Wealth Building

The Upper Donegall Street Place Shaping Plan demonstrates strong alignment with Community Wealth Building principles, particularly through its emphasis on inclusive ownership and progressive procurement. The Place Shaping Plan focuses on bringing in start-ups, independent shops, co-operatives and social enterprises, backed by schemes like Small Business Rate Relief and 'Back in Business' that help fill empty units. There is a commitment to working with social enterprises on key sites, like expanding the Redeemer Central's Barista Academy for refugees, which creates businesses that benefit the community rather than sending profits elsewhere.

Finding social enterprise partners to develop the community gateway sites means these key spaces will be owned and run by organisations that put community benefit first, rather than maximising profit for external investors. As social enterprises, any surplus generated gets reinvested back into the local area and community services, whilst also creating local jobs and training opportunities that connect residents, particularly those furthest from employment, to the University and city centre opportunities right on their doorstep. By encouraging independent businesses instead of big chains, the Place Shaping Plan helps keep money circulating locally rather than leaving the area.

The Place Shaping Plan also tackles fair work and training through projects like the Barista Academy, which gives refugees and others proper training and job opportunities. Building up the day and night-time economy means more varied jobs for local people. The push for different types of housing, social, affordable, and private, makes sure Upper Donegall Street stays accessible to people on different incomes, keeping it a mixed community rather than pricing everyone out.

Finally, the Place Shaping Plan shows how land and buildings can work for the community by pushing for community spaces in empty buildings and on vacant sites and looking at temporary uses like low-cost gyms. The plans to pedestrianise streets and improve public spaces turn neglected assets into places that actually benefit local people. Working with big local organisations like Ulster University, Belfast City Council, and the health trusts means these anchor institutions can use their budgets and buildings to support local jobs and businesses, showing how regeneration can build wealth that stays in and benefits the community.

Climate Action

In October 2019, Belfast City Council declared a climate emergency and recognised the need for urgent action to prepare for the impacts of climate change. Climate change and climate resilience have been embedded as cross-cutting themes throughout the Place Shaping Plan. During the inclusive engagement process, climate-related actions consistently received the lowest scores within the Strengthening the Highstreet Star assessment. In response, the Place Shaping Plan proposes a range of everyday interventions aimed at reducing the effects of climate change in Belfast and restoring biodiversity. These include measures such as the introduction of cycle lanes and green roofs, alongside smaller-scale initiatives like increasing the number of recycling bins on Upper Donegall Street. Larger climate-focused interventions, including the creation of new green spaces along Upper Donegall Street and the introduction of parklets in areas currently used for pavement parking, will collectively contribute to helping the city meet its climate targets.

UPPER DONEGALL STREET

Place Shaping Plan / 2026

PLACE SHAPING PRIORITIES

Place Shaping Priorities have been identified using Community Places' Strengthening the Highstreet Star model and the agreed engagement questions. Each Place Shaping Priority has been agreed by the Project Steering Group and is accompanied by Strategic Outcomes and associated Place Shaping Objectives. These objectives are a road map to deliver on their associated priorities, they also identify key partners and provide short (0-2 years), medium (3-5 years) and long-term (6+ years) timeframes that will allow Donegall Street to achieve its wider vision.



Destination Donegall Street

Donegall Street will be a thriving, well maintained and inclusive neighbourhood, where residents and visitors live, work and play. It will be a key gateway strengthening connections between City Centre investment and North Belfast.



A Historic Place with Unique Heritage

Donegall Street will celebrate and maximise its rich and unique heritage and role in the formation and growth of Belfast as a city.



A Climate Resilient Place

Donegall Street will be a climate resilient commercial thoroughfare which values the planet.

Destination Donegall Street

The agreed priority is:

"Donegall Street will be a thriving, well maintained and inclusive neighbourhood, where residents and visitors live, work and play. It will be a key gateway strengthening connections between City Centre investment and North Belfast".

Strategic Outcomes

- Donegall Street will evolve into a vibrant, inclusive, and distinctive urban destination where residents, businesses, students, and visitors feel welcome and connected.
- Donegall Street will be a liveable place, with a diverse range of housing types and tenures to support a thriving and diverse local community.
- Donegall Street will provide a diverse mix of activities and uses that contribute to economic vitality and community wellbeing . It will have an enhanced public realm, with active frontages, and a high-quality management of place.

- Donegall Street is key gateway between North Belfast and the City Centre, which will deliver safe, attractive, and walkable connections that unlock regeneration, attract sustained investment, and drive positive change.
- Upper Donegall Street will be a distinct and unique offering for heritage.

Throughout the inclusive engagement process the economic social and environmental offering of Upper Donegall Street was identified as a key priority for improvement, with comparisons drawn to the successful Commercial Court area of the Cathedral Quarter. Revitalisation should focus on supporting independent businesses and social enterprises, alongside meanwhile uses and pop-ups in vacant properties. These initiatives should build on existing communities, attract new users, and be supported by quarterly markets on Donegall Lane and York Lane. A broader mix of shops, particularly a pharmacy, restaurants, and food outlets, was suggested. Building on the Cathedral Quarter BID, "Destination Donegall Street" was identified as a potential branding opportunity with a focus on the heritage assets and history of the locale.

The heritage of the area was recognised as a key element of its identity, with proposals to enhance existing NBHC buildings and promote collaborative working to support future development and partnership opportunities.

Social interaction and safety, particularly for women and during evening and night-time hours, were also key priorities. Creating a safe, vibrant, and inclusive place with active frontages, good lighting, accessible pavements, and natural surveillance was seen as essential. Examples of areas where this had worked well included the area around the Duke of York bar (Commercial Court) and Temple Bar in Dublin.

Seating, parklets, and spaces to linger would support social life, while public art and improved maintenance could enhance the streetscape and reflect the area's print heritage.

Upper Donegall Street serves a diverse user base, including students, LGBTQ+ communities, migrants, people who worship in nearby churches, and vulnerable groups. Vacant and derelict buildings were viewed as both a challenge and a major opportunity, with support for community facilities such as a low-cost gym and potential for housing, including living over the shops.

As a key gateway between the City Centre and North Belfast, Upper Donegall Street plays an important connecting role. Positioned between major regeneration projects, the Cathedral Quarter, and Ulster University's Belfast campus, it is well placed to benefit from ongoing investment while strengthening links to North Belfast's heritage, communities, and businesses. Developing Upper Donegall Street as a connected, welcoming place can help ensure regeneration benefits both the city centre and North Belfast.

Place Shaping Objectives

Objective	S/M/L	Partners
Meet with BCC and CQ BID to discuss business incentives (SBRR, 'Back in Business', Vacant to Vibrant schemes), investment opportunities.	S	BCC/CQB
Work with BCC, CQBID DfC, and DfI to provide enhanced public realm including, climate actions, street furniture, improved lighting, along Donegall Street and lanes.	S/M/L	BCC/CQB/DfI/DfC
Find a social enterprise partner/s to develop key community gateway sites.	S	NBHC/DfC/CHCS

Objective	S/M/L	Partners
Meet with BCC, DfI and UU to explore the potential of having a seasonal/quarterly market and play street on Donegall Street, Donegall Lane and York Lane, including market stalls and animation of the space.	S	BCC/CQB/DfI/UU
Redeemer Central to connect with a partner (e.g. Extern) and expand upon the existing Refugee Employability Group's Barista Academy following the development of its courtyard coffee shop.	S	RDC/EX
Liaise with BCC, CQBID, UU and Belfast Night Czar to develop a strategy to encourage development of the day and night-time economy, specifically extending the night-time economy north on into North Belfast.	S	BCC/CQB/UU
Lobby elected representatives, HE and landowners regarding the provision of both social, affordable and private housing on key gateway, vacant sites and over the shops.	S	BCC/CQB/DfI/DfC/UU/HE/NIFHA
Work with partners such as BCC, CQBID, DfI, DfC and local businesses to ensure the general upkeep and maintenance of the area and extend the City Centre Community Safety Partnership to the area.	S	BCC/CQB/DfI
Lobby elected representatives, HE, BCC and DfC regarding the provision of community spaces and meanwhile uses (including low-cost gym) on vacant sites and buildings.	S	BCC/HE/DfI/UU
Lobby DfI and BCC to pedestrianise Donegall Lane and Union Street and improve connectivity along York Street and Clifton Street towards Donegall Street.	S	BCC/CQB/DfI/UU
Engage with the existing neighbourhood Forum that includes statutory bodies, the University, local businesses and community to strengthen existing relationships.	S	BCC/DfC/DfI/UU
Liaise with DfI and BCC Planning to develop key site requirements for the previously identified gateway sites in the forthcoming Local Development Plan.	S	BCC/DfI/NBCP
Lobby elected representatives, to ensure the development of the Sixth as business and/or residential facilities.	S/M	BCC/ER
Lobby elected representatives and BCC to develop an affordable housing strategy for the Donegall Street Area.	S	BCC/HE/NIFHA
Liaise with the owner/developer of the St Kevin's Hall site to lobby for quality housing and open space provision.	S/M	HE/NIFHA
Liaise with DfI and DfC regarding junction and road realignment at the Donegall Street, Carrick Hill, Clifton Street and North Queen Street junction.	S/M	DfI/DfC

● A Historic Place with Unique Heritage

The agreed priority is:

"Donegall Street will celebrate and maximise its rich and unique heritage and role in the formation and growth of Belfast as a city"

● Strategic Outcomes

- Donegall Street and its heritage buildings will be a recognised historic area.
- The area will celebrate its key role in the print industry, education and faith.
- The Donegall Street area will have a strong brand recognition.
- Placemaking features such as public art and signage will be prominent and reflect the area's cultural and historical character.

During the course of the inclusive engagement Upper Donegall Street's heritage was the highest scoring point on the Star model with participants noting the area's exceptional heritage assets, though the area's wider heritage was poorly recognised. The online survey provided an alternative perspective with respondents largely unaware of the heritage sites within the Upper Donegall Street area and even fewer using the heritage buildings.

Those participants that did recognise the heritage potential of the area, note the North Belfast Heritage Cluster buildings and the past newspaper and print industry were the key assets in the Upper Donegall Street area that should be built upon.

The North Belfast Heritage Cluster along with statutory bodies such as the Department for Communities, the Department for Infrastructure and Belfast City Council can work in partnership to improve the knowledge and appeal of the historical fabric of the area. This can be achieved through infrastructure projects such as new vibrant signage detailing the history of key sites and buildings, the incorporation of a physical trail into public realm works directing visitors through the area and developing and nurturing relationships with ongoing regeneration in adjacent areas.

Objective	S/M/L	Partners
Liaise with BCC to ensure that Belfast Stories investment provides benefits and opportunities for the Donegall Street area.	M	BCC/DfC/DfI
NBHC to meet with Translink, DfI and DfC regarding the provision of an on the ground heritage trail and recognised BRT 2 stops, similar to best practice examples such as Boston's Freedom Trail.	S	NBHC/DfC/DfI
Develop new plaques and branded signage for heritage buildings in collaboration with the North Belfast Heritage Cluster, Tourism NI, Visit Belfast, Belfast Stories and DfC.	S	NBHC/DfC
Work with NBHC to develop a narrative and visitor offering around the history of the print industry.	S	NBHC
Liaise with BCC: Belfast Stories team to provide an exhibition showcasing the history of the Donegall Street Area in relation to the print industry	M	NBHC/BCC
Develop an on-street art programme showcasing the historical significance of the area, hold a Belfast In Bloom-style competition for shop frontages, and use trompe-l'œil on vacant buildings.	S/M	BCC/CQB/DfC/UU
Liaise with Seedhead Arts to extend the Hit the North Street Art Festival along Donegall Street, Donegall Lane and York Lane.	S	SHA
Liaise with North Belfast Heritage Cluster, UU and DfC to enhance access to existing heritage assets.	S	NBHC/DfC/UU

Objective	S/M/L	Partners
Liaise with DfC and North Belfast Cluster to promote open buildings during the European Heritage Weekend.	S	DfC/NBHC
Work with BCC, BID DfC, and Dfl to provide enhanced public realm including, climate actions, street furniture, improved lighting, along Donegall Street and lanes	S/M/L	BCC/CQB/Dfl/DfC
Work with NBHC, DfC and BCC to ensure the restoration and regeneration of existing heritage assets.	S	NBHC/DfC/BCC

● A Climate Resilient Place

The agreed priority is:

“Donegall Street will be a climate resilient commercial thoroughfare which values the planet”.

● Strategic Outcomes

- Donegall Street will be an exemplar of climate-led place making.
- Buildings on Donegall Street will be retrofitted to achieve carbon neutrality.
- There will be improved green open spaces, linking to existing and proposed green and blue infrastructure in the city, with enhanced biodiversity.
- There will be easy access to recycling facilities for all residents/users.
- Businesses will be committed to recycling and composting.
- Users of Donegall Street are committed to sustainable transport modes.

Climate change and climate resilience were both identified as key concerns during the community and stakeholder engagement, with a strong desire for a greener, more walkable and climate resilient place.

Participants noted that there were limited climate adaptations and strategies visible within the Upper Donegall Street area and much more could be implemented to help achieve the City's Net Zero targets. The provision of green infrastructure developments including tree planting, greening bus shelter roofs and the provision of recycling bins, will only assist in the meeting of climate change targets, but also create a space that is more appealing for users to visit.

Working directly with bar and restaurant owners to develop a recycling and composting scheme, will not only provide a more appropriate means of dealing with recyclable and food waste, but it will also help shift mindsets to encourage more sustainable ways of dealing with waste.

The introduction of BRT 2 along Upper Donegall Street provides a key opportunity to enhance the transport network in the area. The addition of cycle lanes and Glider priority lanes will deter single car usage in the area and encourage the use of more sustainable and climate resilient means of transport.

● Place Shaping Objectives

Objective	S/M/L	Partners
Meet with the BID, BCC and Refuse Collectors to discuss the provision and promotion of waste recycling and composting with the areas business operators.	S	BCC/BID
Meet with the Dfl, Ulster University and BCC regarding the provision of outdoor seating or a parklet on Donegall Lane to the rear of the Irish News Building.	S	BCC/UU/Dfl
Meet with BID, BCC and Belfast Charitable Society about the provision of planters and hanging baskets along Donegall Street, Donegall Lane, York Lane and Union Street.	S	BCC/BID/BCS/Dfl
Meet with Translink to discuss the potential for green roofs on existing bus shelters and any proposed BRT 2 Glider Halts.	S	Dfl/TL
Explore grant funding options available to retrofit existing building stock, such as the Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund/National Lottery Community Fund Sustainable Community Buildings fund to ensure buildings are energy efficient.	S	BCC/DfC/Dfl/NBHC
Liaise with the BID, BCC Planning, Belfast Stories and City Regeneration teams, Dfl and DfC to lobby for the introduction of green spaces as part of any new public realm works.	S	BCC/BID/Dfl/DfC
Liaise with BCC, Dfl and DfC to provide additional bins and recycling bins on Donegall Street, Donegall Lane, York Lane and Union Street.	S	BCC/BID/Dfl/DfC
Meet with local landowners, Dfl, DfC and BCC to discuss the provision of outdoor seating or a small parklet in the area in front of Clarke's Dance Studios	S	BCC/BID/Dfl/DfC
Meet with UU and Student housing providers to facilitate end of year clothing bank recycling banks.	S	UU/PBMSA
Meet with UU and Student Housing providers to facilitate a community kitchen for incoming students which would be stocked by departing students at the end of term – this would include canned food, kitchen goods, cutlery, crockery, utensils, food etc.	S	UU/PBMSA
Continue to engage with Dfl: BRT2 team regarding the location of Glider Halts, along Donegall Street.	S	Dfl
Engage with Dfl: Active Travel Unit regarding the potential for cycle lanes and green banks along Donegall Street.	S	Dfl
Meet with Dfl and BCC: Parks Team to discuss the provision of tree planting.	S	Dfl/BCC
Lobby Dfl and landowners to actively discourage pavement parking in Donegall Street, York Lane and Donegall Lane.	S	Dfl/PSNI/BID
Liaise with BCC and Dfl regarding potential linkages to the Under the Bridges proposal and the Masterplans for Sailortown, Greater Clarendon and City Quays, and Cathedral and North East Quarter.	S	BCC

UPPER DONEGALL STREET

Place Shaping Plan / 2026

IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

Many of the place-shaping priorities, outcomes, and objectives are interconnected and complement each other. The successful regeneration of Upper Donegall Street and its wider environs will therefore require progress across all areas.

Delivering the Place Shaping Plan's priority objectives will require a partnership approach, combining effort and investment from statutory partners, the local council, and community and social infrastructure, to deliver the strategic outcomes and ultimately achieve the Place Shaping Plan's vision of a key gateway to the City Centre and North Belfast; a thriving and sustainable commercial thoroughfare embracing its uniqueness and celebrating its history and heritage buildings; providing homes and dedicated community and green spaces.

Members of the Project Steering Group have agreed to continue supporting and guiding the implementation of the Place Shaping Plan. The Place Shaping Plan sets out an agreed framework of priorities, strategic outcomes, and place-shaping objectives, which can be used by the Steering Group and wider community as a lobbying tool and to secure funding for delivery.



The Steering Group, alongside the North Belfast Heritage Cluster, will play a central role in driving the Place Shaping Plan forward over the next ten years, working collaboratively with key service providers and the community to ensure successful implementation. They will:

- Provide MPs, MLAs and Elected Representatives with copies of the Place Shaping Plan and seek their support.
- Develop an Implementation Plan to monitor and review progress.
- Support and encourage joined-up partnership working to progress the Place Shaping Plan.
- Provide a welcoming environment which encourages all stakeholders to get involved.
- Review progress in taking forward the Place Shaping Objectives including an annual review of the Strategic Outcomes and Place Shaping Objectives with key stakeholders.
- Communicate the progress of the Place Shaping Plan with the wider community.
- From the outset of the Place Shaping Process, it was agreed that the Upper Donegall Street area would serve as a proof of concept for wider Place Shaping activity across the North Belfast Heritage Cluster area. The outcomes of the process including particularly the strong levels of engagement from members of the public, key stakeholders, and both statutory bodies and local service providers, have clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of this Place Shaping Process.

During the engagement phase, members of the North Belfast Heritage Cluster expressed a strong desire to extend the Place Shaping Process into their local areas beyond the Upper Donegall Street focus, providing a clear indication of the project's success.

The Steering Group, working in partnership with the North Belfast Heritage Cluster, will play a pivotal role in securing funding to support the expansion of the Place Shaping Process across North Belfast Heritage Cluster area.

This Place Shaping process has brought together a diverse range of stakeholders to uncover the area's existing strengths and future opportunities, and to consider how these can be harnessed to deliver meaningful, long-term benefits through to 2036. It has provided a platform for shared understanding and collective ambition, ensuring that the voices shaping the future of the area are both informed and inclusive.

At its core, the process has been driven by a commitment to embed the principles of Community Wealth Building and to place climate resilience at the forefront of decision-making. In doing so, it not only addresses immediate challenges and areas for improvement but also sets a clear direction for sustainable and inclusive growth. Strategic development opportunities have been carefully considered to ensure they respond to both local needs and wider city ambitions.

The final Place Shaping Plan establishes a clear and deliverable route map, one that recognises the area's pivotal role as a gateway between Belfast City Centre and North Belfast. It sets out how investment can be better connected, ensuring that the benefits of growth in the city centre extend outward, unlocking opportunities, strengthening communities, and creating lasting value. Through coordinated action and shared purpose, this plan positions the area to thrive as a vibrant, resilient, and inclusive place well into the future.

UPPER DONEGALL STREET

Place Shaping Plan / 2026

GLOSSARY

BCC	Belfast City Council
BCCRIS	Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy
BCS	Belfast Charitable Society
BMAP	Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan
BOSS	Belfast Open Space Strategy
BSA	Belfast Streets Ahead
CQB	Cathedral Quarter Business Improvement District
CQT	Cathedral Quarter Trust
dBMAP	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan
DEA	District Electoral Area
DfC	Department for Communities
DfI	Department for Infrastructure
DZ	Data Zone
EX	Extern
HE	Housing Executive
HIP	Housing Investment Plan
INW	Inner North West (Masterplan)
LDP	Local Development Plan
MDM	Multiple Deprivation Measure
NBCP	North Belfast Community Partnership
NHBC	North Belfast Heritage Cluster
NIFHA	Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
PS	Plan Strategy
PSG	Project Steering Group
RDC	Redeemer Central
SAA	Special Action Area
SDZ	Super Data Zone
SOA	Super Output Area
UU	Ulster University

Project Steering Group

Belfast City Council
Belfast Charitable Society
Cathedral Quarter Business Improvement District
Cathedral Quarter Trust
Department for Communities
Department for Infrastructure
Housing Executive
North Belfast Heritage Cluster
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
Ulster University



