

# A BOLDER BELFAST IS THE CITY'S VISION TO TRANSFORM THE CENTRE OF BELFAST

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## Response to Consultation

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

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

**Key Move 3:** Promote City Centre Living

**Key Move 4:** Embrace the River Lagan and Waterfront

**23 December 2021**



## ABOUT NIFHA

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, formed in 1977, is the representative body for Northern Ireland's 20 registered housing associations.

Our members are all not-for-profit organisations. Together, supported by the Department for Communities and the Housing Executive, they provide just under 56,000 social and affordable homes.

Housing associations access private finance to effectively double the number of homes they could build with government housing association grant alone.

Housing associations also deliver high quality care and support to help people stay as independent as possible.

Working in partnership with other organisations, they also invest millions each year in community services and facilities.

Our sector employs more than 3,200 people and manages housing assets worth £4.5 bn.

NIFHA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the A Bolder Belfast is The City's Vision to Transform the Centre of Belfast Consultation.

## PART 1: SETTING THE CONTEXT

A Bolder Belfast is the City's Vision to Transform the Centre of Belfast it is an ambitious blueprint to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible, safe, and vibrant city.

Developed jointly by Belfast City Council, Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure, the vision is built on the principles of:

- promoting wellbeing for all
- prioritising walking, cycling and public transport
- creating lively, safe, and green streets
- removing barriers to movement between the city centre and surrounding communities

These Key Moves, are as follows:

- Create a Civic Spine – establish a clearly defined and recognisable north-south civic route to provide safe and accessible movement through the city centre, including car-free streets
- Reimagine the Inner Ring Road and End Car Dominance - transform the 'inner ring' to reduce physical severance for surrounding communities and become a sustainable mobility corridor
- Promote City Centre Living - Encourage city centre living by providing greater quality, choice, and affordability of accommodation. Establish a city-wide network of people friendly routes and city parks

- Embrace the River Lagan and Waterfront - Enhance existing, and create new, riverside attractions to encourage better use of the River Lagan. Strengthen connections between the river and the city centre

## PART 2: CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

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

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

#### Strengthening existing projects:

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

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

NIFHA strongly agrees with Key Move 1

#### 5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential short-term interventions which supports the key move?

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

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

NIFHA agrees with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 1

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

**KEY MOVE 2: REIMAGINE THE INNER RING ROAD AND END CAR DOMINANCE**

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

**Strengthening existing projects:**

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

**9 To what extent do you agree or disagree with Key Move 2? \***

NIFHA strongly agrees with Key Move 2

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

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

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

NIFHA agrees with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 1

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

N/A

### KEY MOVE 3: PROMOTE CITY CENTRE LIVING

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

#### Strengthening existing projects:

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

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

NIFHA strongly agrees with Key Move 3.

Belfast City Centre in terms of housing needs to be mixed income, mixed aged and must remain neutral. The provision of homes in the city centre must support a vibrant and mixed community. Therefore, new developments will be shared future and mixed tenure.

To support these key moves a housing strategy that ensures delivery of the types of homes and communities we want in the city centre. It is essential to balance the offering of private developers who presently see the commercial opportunities as student accommodation and build-to-rent for “young professionals” which leads to the exclusion of families or older people.

Master plans and development briefs to articulate the kinds of place that should be created have to be established.

Funding to make sites development ready and provide infrastructure and services will also be required as will engagement with those communities already living in the city centre.

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

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

<p><b>5. Supporting the urban forest/one million tree commitment which Belfast has signed up to with the introduction of temporary trees in movable containers. These could be used to test out the introduction of more permanent boulevard planting</b></p>	<p>Definitely agree</p>
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**15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 3 (Promote City Centre Living)?**

NIFHA agrees with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 3

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

The Belfast Draft Local Development Plan sets out an ambition of 20% affordable housing development within Belfast city centre. A city centre Common Landlord Area (CLA) needs to be established mirroring the red line boundary in which city centre living is encouraged so that social housing applicants can select that CLA as an option. This will better quantify the level of social housing need for the city centre by first choice applicants rather than relying on latent demand testing. This is important so that developments are delivered which properly respond to social housing demand (e.g., mix of unit types, no. of bedrooms).

We question the Belfast City Centre redline defined area for this consultation exercise (in the consultation documentation) and believe it should include the Titanic Quarter picking up within the key move to provide quality, choice and affordable accommodation incorporating city parks and connections to opportunities for play, interaction, rest and leisure.

Picking up on the choice and affordability aspect of the key move, in preparing planning conditions for city centre residential development, planners should be cognisant of the tenure options available for delivery.

We believe that to properly promote city centre living as a realistic option for families it will be fundamental to have easy access on foot, by cycling or using public transport to education and childcare facilities including youth community hubs, sports grounds, and play areas etc. The Vision should undertake an assessment of the current schools and children’s facilities available in and around the city centre and take account of what provisions can be made to access them safely within a reasonable travel time.

City centre schemes are typically more expensive to build (than greenfield) given the re-use of sites (e.g., demolition, clearance, remediation) and density (e.g., more likely to be high-rise given availability of space, competing land pricing). Therefore, the % of private and social housing required as a planning condition (or intermediate rent when available) should take development viability into account in the interests of successfully delivering mixed tenure schemes.

The research work carried out by CaCHE exploring the need for Intermediate Rent identified Belfast as one of seven areas where property is least affordable. DfC as a key party to the Bolder Vision for Belfast consultation can actively progress the creation of an Affordable Rent (Intermediate Rent) product to assist meeting the ‘affordability of accommodation’ aspect of the key move.

Clarity on timescales for reduction of car dominance as car reliance is prevalent in private and social housing sectors. We are in favour of encouraging and promoting green travel measures within our developments in conjunction with BCC, DfC, DfI and other HAs to encourage city centre living. We believe green travel measures will need to be positively promoted to reduce reliance on cars as the dominant mode of transport, such measures may include safe cycle storage, cycle repair facilities

on-site, cycle wash down facilities on-site, electric bike hire, electric vehicle charging points, car club membership, Belfast Bike membership, an active travel fund with cycle vouchers, subsidised/ free Travel Cards and taxi credits/ tokens.

## KEY MOVE 4: EMBRACE THE RIVER LAGAN AND WATERFRONT

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

### Strengthening existing projects:

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

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

NIFHA strongly agrees with Key Move 4

### 18. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the potential quick win which supports the key move?

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

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

NIFHA agrees with the potential long-term interventions to support Key Move 4

### 20. If you disagree with Key Move 4 proposals, please comment why. Or, if you have any comments or suggestions, please add them below:

N/A

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

### If you are aware of any equality considerations that should take account of, or if you have any comments or suggestions in relation to equality, please comment here:

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**Submitted on behalf of NIFHA by:**

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