

# **Screening Report**

## **Strategic Environmental Assessment Determination**

### **Belfast Community Plan (Belfast Agenda)**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This document constitutes Belfast City Council's Screening Report for a determination as to whether its Community Plan (Belfast Agenda) needs to be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (NI) Regulations 2004.

#### **2.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment**

The European Union Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) requires an environmental assessment to be carried out for certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. The SEA Directive was transposed into Northern Ireland legislation through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004.

The Belfast Agenda falls within the scope of Article 2 of the EU Directive 2001/42/EC as it is a plan that is subject to adoption by the Council and is directed by the legislative and regulatory provisions of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Screening is a process for deciding whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and therefore require SEA.

The criteria for determining whether a particular plan is likely to have significant environmental impacts has been set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. These criteria are reproduced in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 (EAPP). Schedule 1 of the EAPP (NI) Regulations 2004 identifies two main sets of criteria for determining whether a plan would be likely to have significant environmental effects - (i) the characteristics of the plan and (ii) characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected. These criteria are tabulated and responded to in section 4.0 below.

### 3.0 Key Facts

<b>Responsible Authority</b>	Belfast City Council
<b>Title of Plan</b>	Belfast Agenda
<b>Purpose of Plan</b>	<p>The Community Plan will be the strategic long-term plan for Belfast City Council which will inform and guide delivery of services and functions by all partners. The plan aims to ensure inclusive growth for Belfast and its citizens, so that everyone both now and in the future can enjoy a better quality of life through improvements in economic, social and environmental wellbeing.</p> <p>The Local Development Plan for Belfast (separate) provides the spatial planning framework for Belfast. Its preparation will be guided by the vision, outcomes and priorities of the Community Plan (Belfast Agenda).</p>
<b>What Prompted the Plan</b>	The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.
<b>Subject</b>	Community Planning
<b>Period Covered by Plan</b>	2017-2021 (Plan contains a long term vision – to 2035, and is subject to a review of performance against outcomes published every 2 years and a review of the plan every 4 years.)
<b>Area Covered by the Plan</b>	Whole of Belfast City Council area
<b>Summary of Nature/Content</b>	<p>The purpose of the Belfast Agenda is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) To set out the shared vision and shared outcomes for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the Belfast City Council area in the long term.</li> <li>b) To identify strategic priorities in the short to medium term for collaborative working between city partners and for sustainable improvement of services and wellbeing (economic, social and environmental) in the city.</li> <li>c) To highlight the ambitions, goals and indicators against which progress in achieving the outcomes can be monitored.</li> <li>d) To provide an overarching framework and vehicle for partnership working in the city.</li> </ol>

#### 4.0 Screening Assessment Criteria

<p><b>Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment</b></p> <p><b>1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to -</b></p>	<p><b>Likely to have significant environmental effects (Yes/No)</b></p>	<p><b>Summary of significant environmental effects (negative and positive)</b></p>
<p>a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Whilst the Belfast Agenda will outline a strategic framework for improvement of economic, social and environmental wellbeing in the city, it will not explicitly set a planning consent framework and will have limited material weight, if any, in planning decisions on projects or programmes with regards to specific locations, nature or size of developments or their operating conditions. There are no planning consent provisions included within the 2014 Local Government legislation governing Community Planning.</p> <p>Applications for planning consent will continue to be determined by the existing planning framework. This includes planning legislation, a regional development strategy, the local development plan, planning policies and supplementary planning guidance. The new Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) currently being prepared will be a fundamental component of this framework.</p> <p>The LDP will provide the framework for projects in respect of location, nature or size of developments and operating conditions. It will be subject to a full SEA (as part of a Sustainability Appraisal).</p> <p>The Belfast Agenda framework, as the city's overarching strategic plan, is expected to exert a degree of influence in the allocation of resources.</p>
<p>b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes, including those in a hierarchy.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Belfast Agenda (Community Plan) will influence the corporate plans and other key city strategies of the Council and other partner agencies.</p> <p>The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provides a statutory link between the Community Plan and Local Development Plan. The Planning Act 2011 (as amended) states that Council's must take account of the Community Plan when preparing the Plan Strategy and Local</p>

		<p>Policies Plan within the LDP.</p> <p>The LDP will have to take into account the Community Plan's long term vision and outcomes, as well as its priorities in the short to medium term. The aspirations of the Community Plan, in terms of promoting population and economic growth, may also have implications for Local Plan Policies in the LDP.</p>
c) The relevance of the plan programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	Yes	<p>The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 states that community planning will identify long-term objectives for improving the environmental well-being of the district and for contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>These objectives relating to environmental wellbeing and sustainable development are integrated, both overtly and implicitly, throughout the Community Plan. For example, one of the priorities in the short to medium term is to seek to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill by over a third.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, it is considered that the LDP will serve as the principal plan for the promotion of sustainable development and that the related contents of the Community Plan will complement it.</p>
d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	Yes	<p>As a large urban centre the Community Plan is mindful that environmental issues, as exemplified by poor air quality associated with traffic, will feature in the Plan. For example, the Community Plan aspires to increase sustainable modes of travel in the short term in order to reduce emissions.</p>
e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	No	<p>The Belfast Agenda (Community Plan) will provide strategic direction for the delivery of services by all of its partners. However, legislative functions and responsibilities of each of the partners will remain the duty of the designated body.</p> <p>The Community Plan refers to a desire to improve waste recycling rates. However the Belfast Agenda does not contain any detailed actions that implement EU Directives on waste. This would be developed as part of a waste strategy for the city.</p>

<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to -</b>	<b>Likely to have significant environmental effects (Yes/No)</b>	<b>Summary of significant environmental effects (negative and positive)</b>
a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	Yes	<p>Given the high level, long term and visionary nature of the Community Plan it is difficult to identify and define the characteristics of the environmental effects.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, the desire of the Community Plan to grow the economy, to increase the residential population and to develop the city will have implications for the environment. Understandably, the potential for effects on the environment will be mainly addressed through the mechanism of the LDP (including its SEA) which the Community Plan will feed into. So too, the incorporation of outcomes and indicators in the Community Plan means that any relevant effects, in terms of their duration, frequency and reversibility, will be monitored.</p>
b) the cumulative nature of the effects	Yes	The holistic nature of Community Plan, comprising interrelated outcomes and involving multiple partners, implies that any environmental effects will be cumulative.
c) the transboundary nature of the effects	No	The Belfast City Council area does not have a border with the Republic of Ireland.
d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	No	No specific risks to human health or to the environment have been identified at this level of plan-making. On the contrary, a large part of the Community Plan focuses on improving the health of its citizens.
e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	Yes	Any environmental effects will affect the largest council in NI, in terms of its population. The Belfast area has a population of around 333,000 people.
f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to – i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or iii) intensive land-use;	Yes	While the Council area is mainly urban in character there are natural assets which it highly values such as its hills, lough, river, and parks. So too, it possesses many fine buildings and public spaces. Ascertaining just how vulnerable they are to potential environmental effects is difficult to estimate at the Community Plan level.

<p>g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international Protection status.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Council area encompasses the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lagan Valley Regional Park Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)</li> <li>• Belfast Lough Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site.</li> <li>• Belfast Lough Open Water SPA</li> <li>• 4 Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) – Inner Belfast Lough, Craigantlet Woods, Bellevue, Belvoir</li> <li>• 60 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI).</li> <li>• 4 Local Nature Reserves</li> <li>• 1 Area of Scientific Interest (ASI)</li> </ul> <p>Even though no significant negative environmental effects linked to the Community Plan are envisaged for these designations the Council is keen to protect them.</p>
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## 5.0 Summary of Screening Report

Due to the strategic, long term and largely non-spatial nature of the Community Plan it is difficult to conclude, as per the requirements of the SEA criteria above, that it is likely to have significant effects on the environment. Indeed, the response to some of the criteria above has been affirmative based purely on the fact that the Council values its natural and built assets, rather than on the basis of a determination that they are considered vulnerable to impact from the Community Plan's provisions.

The above notwithstanding, it must be remembered that the purpose of SEA legislation is to place environmental protection at the heart of the plan-making process from the outset. Within this context, and given the legislative linkage between the Community Plan and the Local Development Plan (LDP), the Council considers it prudent to carry out a high level Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Belfast Agenda document. This will test the Community Plan for likely significant environmental effects, the focused findings of which will complement, rather than duplicate, the comprehensive and detailed work of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) being prepared for the LDP.

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