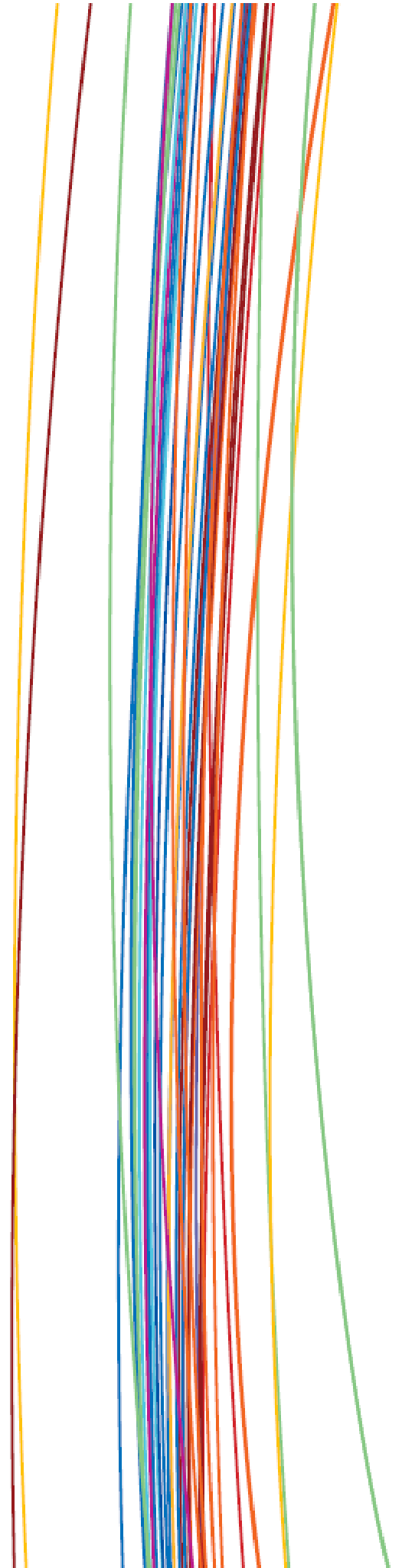




Renewing the Routes Programme



Introduction to Renewing the Routes

Belfast's arterial routes radiating from the city centre are key gateways and the lifeblood for the social and economic functioning of the city. Previously these once thriving locations supported their surrounding neighbourhoods but now require investment to tackle problems of economic, social, physical and environmental decline.

The Renewing the Routes Initiative represents an innovative approach developed locally to enhance the areas and the vitality of the routes. By developing and implementing local regeneration plans the actions or interventions have secured local ownership and helped link wider regeneration activity. The actions have been carried out under general themes of commercial improvements; developing gateway sites; celebrating diverse heritage and working towards cleaner, greener and safer neighbourhoods.

Background to Renewing the Routes Activity

The arterial routes should be seen as much more than playing a mere transportation role in connecting the many neighbourhoods and communities which comprise the social, economic and environmental fabric of Belfast. They are the catalyst and driver for future regeneration and prosperity within not only the neighbourhoods but the city as a whole. Without improvement along these roads the creation of a compact, sustainable city will become increasingly difficult. The city's suburbs will continue to expand covering more green fields and sucking the life and people from Belfast.

To bring about much needed sustainable improvement the Council, both as a key strategic body and as a landowner, has used its position to create a collaborative partnership with other lead agencies responsible for influencing urban development work. The partnership consists of the Belfast Area Partnership Boards, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Belfast Regeneration Office, the Department for Regional Development and Belfast City Council. The principles that underpin this partnership work which targets development and regeneration of the arterial routes include:

- **People first:** empowering people who work and live in neighbourhoods to ensure long term urban renewal
- **Collaboration:** the whole is greater than the sum of the parts
- **Holistic approach:** developing an integrated approach to addressing the problems faced
- **Connectivity:** connecting the arterial routes together and linking them to the city centre
- **Sustainable regeneration:** leaving a legacy within communities for future generations
- **Partnership:** accountability between organisations with the power and influence to affect change
- **Identity:** identifying the unique role for each arterial route and ensuring that each makes a contribution to the city as a whole.

Aims of Arterial Routes Programme

- To facilitate economic competitiveness
- To tackle social exclusion
- To promote physical and environmental development
- To promote creativity

It was recognised at an early stage that, due to the complexities and depth of problems faced by these areas and the level of regeneration required Renewing the Routes would be a long term programme.

The routes identified within the programme are: York Road, Antrim Road, Crumlin Road, Shankill Road, Falls Road, Springfield Road, Donegall Road, Ormeau Road, Albertbridge Road and the Newtownards Road.

These arterial routes were once the focus of thriving neighbourhoods in the city but have experienced serious decline over past decades. The routes (to varying degrees) have all been adversely affected by depopulation, economic and environmental decline and social segregation. Many of the remaining communities find themselves in areas of urban decay characterised by high rates of unemployment, poor environments and stretched social infrastructure which in itself leads to growing outward migration.

Project breakdown

Largely projects fall into six general categories:

- **Commercial Improvements**
- **Gateway sites**
- **Public Art**
- **Public Realm Improvements**
- **Heritage Preservation**
- **Environmental Management**

- **Commercial Improvements**

The need to consider enhancements of the commercial environments throughout the nodes emerged as a clear priority from the consultations and scoping work. Those consulted recognised the value of the existing commercial areas as important sources of employment and economic activity within their area.

The commercial nodes are important community gathering places, essential to the functioning of all the roads as their communities. An attractive well designed environment can help create a framework for promoting economic identity and growth. By providing the area with a mix of high quality commercial and cultural premises will help the routes provide vital community facilities, compete with other areas of Belfast, the city centre and ensure that the areas maximises the potential to attract foot fall.

The opportunity for a LOTS (Living Over the Shops) scheme was raised in the course of the consultation work. NIHE is actively promoting this scheme in town and city centres across Northern Ireland. Within Belfast, it was considered that there may be an opportunity to support LOTS scheme on a number of arterial routes, this is currently being progressed as a pilot scheme on the Shankill Road.

- **Gateway Sites**

On most routes the junction that connects the road into the city centre was considered a vital link. It was felt that a range of interventions could be focused on these areas, in recognition either of their importance as areas of high usage or their prominence as entry points onto the roads. In this context, they have the potential to establish an identity and help place-making for the area.

- **Public Art**

Public art plays a pivotal role in shaping and re-energising our urban environment. It is about engagement and discussion and about new ways of looking at who we are and where we live. Through the programme public art has brought into the main stream bringing community groups and artists together around the central theme –the aspiration to use art to add life and vitality to neighbourhoods. Projects range from temporary installations to landmark sculptures.

- **Public Realm Improvements**

The public realm encompasses the broad road corridor and the potential for improvements throughout the routes was evident. The network of public spaces provides a web of connections which is vital for connecting neighbourhoods that are sustainable. The consultations to date have clearly highlighted these issues and areas as a priority for ongoing and planned work. We have and continue to work in partnership with the Road Service to address the issues through a combined approach that involves the utilisation of statutory measures to supplement any investment in projects that would provide an enhanced road corridor.

- **Heritage Preservation**

While the number and range of buildings of architectural merit vary throughout each of the routes, each area has its own remainders of a distinct and rich heritage. Whether natural or man made it is recognised that they are often in key locations and offer the potential to have a greater positive impact on the environment of the area. Where places and properties have been identified a wide range of interventions have been used to highlight features or detailing and thereby contribute to the identity/legibility of the area. Activities or projects include signage, lighting, boundary treatment, landscape works or feature reinstatement.

- **Environmental Management**

It is important that a high quality environment is provided and maintained as public space and community space. It is recognised that the routes are targets for vandalism, graffiti; anti-social behaviour and that they have suffered from poor planning decisions, lack of maintenance and inward investment. Issues such as community safety, enhancement of lighting, vandalism and the aesthetics of the built environment need to be addressed comprehensively.

The short term nature of these, in essence complementary works, have required action and support through either statutory actions (internal and external to the Council) or private development proposals.

The Routes

- **Crumlin Road**
- **Falls Road**
- **Shankill Road**
- **Upper Springfield Road**
- **Albertbridge Road**
- **Antrim Road**
- **Lower Ormeau Road**
- **Newtownards Road**
- **York Road / North Queen Street**

Upper Springfield Road

Context

This route runs from Belfield Heights along Upper Springfield Road to West Circular Road where it meets the Falls Road IDF Area 1 route.

Springfield Road and Whiterock Road connect more suburban areas with the city centre. The physical environment has suffered from insensitive development, derelict or vacant areas and high levels of traffic. This in turn has had significant impacts on access, trade and the community.

The crossroads between the Springfield Road and Whiterock Road is the key hub of the area with shops, a school, transport and community services.

The area contains many residential properties which are set back off the Springfield Road. The road continues as a link to the Monagh by-pass which carries high volumes of traffic into Belfast and beyond.

Consultation and analysis resulted in the following masterplan priorities:

- improved shared space and community safety,
- traffic management, and
- commercial improvements.

Projects

- Top of the Rock Public Realm
- Commercial Improvements
- Whiterock Orange Hall
- Sliabh Dubh Artwork
- Springhill Park Garden
- Springfield Rd / Whiterock Rd Junction
- Car Park Area
- Panoramic Viewpoint
- Whiterock Road Public Realm
- New Barnsley Open Space

Commercial Improvements



In 2007 commercial improvements to main retail core on Upper Springfield Road were completed. Works included new signage, lighting, cedar wood cladding and painting.

Commercial Improvements Phase 2



Shop front improvements have been completed at units in the Upper Springfield arterial route at the top of Whiterock Road and Top of the Rock Complex. Works included new signs and lighting.

The Top of the Rock Complex comprises a key community building and commercial area. Improvements to this complex will enhance a significant meeting point for the community.

Panoramic Viewpoint



This innovative viewing area supported by Belfast City Council's Brighter Belfast initiative takes advantage of Upper Springfield's views over Belfast and beyond. The project was delivered in partnership with the citywide tourism scheme, Groundwork NI, Upper Springfield Arts Project, Forbairt Feirste and the Terry Enright Foundation. Members of the community also designed bronze plaques depicting local landmarks which were incorporated into the viewpoint.

Springfield Rd / Whiterock Rd Junction



Resurfacing of the junction and the public realm has now taken place, larger litter bins have been installed and emphasised pedestrian areas have been introduced. Planting has taken place and decorative street lighting embellishments have been introduced to complete the scheme.

Car Park Area



Redesign is complete of the existing car park to alleviate traffic and car parking pressures. This early win project was a result of work by the Arterial Routes subgroup including DRD Roads Service and Upper Springfield Neighbourhood Renewal.

Springhill Park Garden



Work is complete at this long-term project to transform the anti-social hotspot of Springhill Park 'funnel' into a new Community Garden. Partnership has been the critical factor in this project, with Renewing the Routes, Groundwork NI and Upper Springfield Arts Project contributing funds of over £100,000 in total, Springhill Residents leading the consultation and associated community projects linking in too where they can.

The Council and community have worked hard to make a strong visual statement against the repeated abuse of this public space, long blighted by underage drinking, criminal damage, graffiti and car burnouts.

Renewing the Routes work includes the new pathways for Sliabh Dubh and Springfield Park, railings and greenery. Arts Council funding allowed a local arts project to commission several art pieces including a major 'Reflection'

sculpture created by Raymond Watson with the West Belfast Suicide Awareness & Support Group. Photo courtesy of Groundwork NI.

Sliabh Dubh Artwork



This colourful new mosaic can be found on a previously unused wall owned by JP Corry Ltd. Young children from the Sliabh Dubh estate worked with artist Martin McClure on design ideas and also had fun helping to create the piece during workshops organised by the Council and the Residents Association. The piece is based on the local natural environment and the children's ideas.

Whiterock Orange Hall



The entrance of Whiterock Orange Hall is now more welcoming thanks to new tree lined paving.

Softening the fencing to the road side, Honeysuckle, Ivy and Lilac have been introduced, which will grow down to cover the wall over the summer months. This has improved the setting for the hall and the appearance of the area.

Top of the Rock Public Realm



An environmental scheme at Top of the Rock entrance to complement shop fronts is now underway and will enhance a well used space. The works will include decorative stonework, Birch trees and unique "Top of the Rock" bollards to make this community space facility more visible and accessible.

Whiterock Road Public Realm



An environmental scheme at Whiterock Road will enhance this shopping area which serves the Upper Springfield and Whiterock community. Improvements have made the area more open and welcome to shoppers, including new surfacing, Birch trees and bespoke bollards.

New Barnsley Open Space



Due to take place at a similar time to the previous two landscaping schemes, evergreen planting of mature trees around the pylon will aim to disguise this blight on the local environment.

A piece of land adjacent to this site has been earmarked for a new art piece. 12 local groups have taken the opportunity to work with an artist to create a piece unique to the Upper Springfield through Belfast City Council's Renewing the Routes Programme. The piece is currently taking shape in the artist's studio, reflecting the community's input at the workshops. The Black Mountain is one of the themes in the piece, which will be launched in Spring 2010.