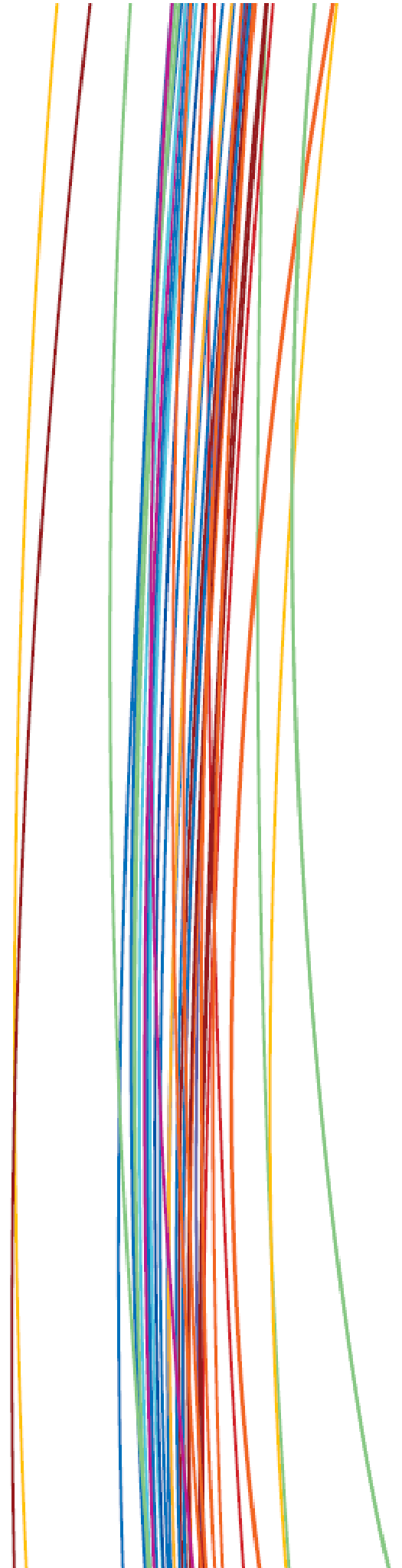




Renewing the Routes Programme



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**

York Road

Context

The arterial route stretches from where Whitla Street intersects with Lower York Street to where Fife Street intersects with York Road. The Lower Shore Road neighbourhood is located in the tip of the Duncairn Ward (with the rest of the ward being mostly industrial ground). The New Lodge, Water Works, Fort William and Chichester Park wards surround the Duncairn Ward. Much of the road frontage is taken up by industrial or large retail units there are relatively few developments taking place along this stretch of road. The joint development of the Grove Well-being centre by Belfast City Council and the North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust is adjacent to our area of study.

Projects

- Commercial Improvements
- Translink mural
- Castleton Playground
- Belfast In Bloom
- Tourism Signage
- Alexandra Presbyterian Church
- St Paul's Church of Ireland

Commercial Improvements



Commercial improvements to main retail core at York Road, including new signage, lighting, guttering and painting.

Environmental Improvement



Removal of mural, environmental cleaning of façade, repointing of brick work and temporary art to bring frontage back to traditional urban form.

Alexandra Presbyterian Church



Boundary repairs and planting carried out to Alexandra Presbyterian Church.

St Paul's Church of Ireland



Tree planting and boundary repairs to St Paul's Church of Ireland.

Environmental Improvement



Fencing, seating & tree planting at Castleton Playground.

Belfast in Bloom



Flower trees located at main junctions on York Rd and North Queen Street from Grove leisure centre junction to Limestone Road junctions.

Tourism Signage



Visitor signage blade at York Road / North Derby Street junction documents the rich industrial heritage of the area, especially the Jennymount flax mill.