

Belfast THRI(VES)

Transformative Health and Regeneration Initiatives for enhancing Liveability and Well-being: Reflections from Belfast THRI[VES]



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- A pilot urban-health focused partnership between Ulster University (Urban Research Lab), Belfast City Council, and NI's Department for Infrastructure with funding from the NI Department for Communities
- Aim to critically reflect on place-based initiatives and draw lessons for advancing liveability and wellbeing in Belfast

Project Team:

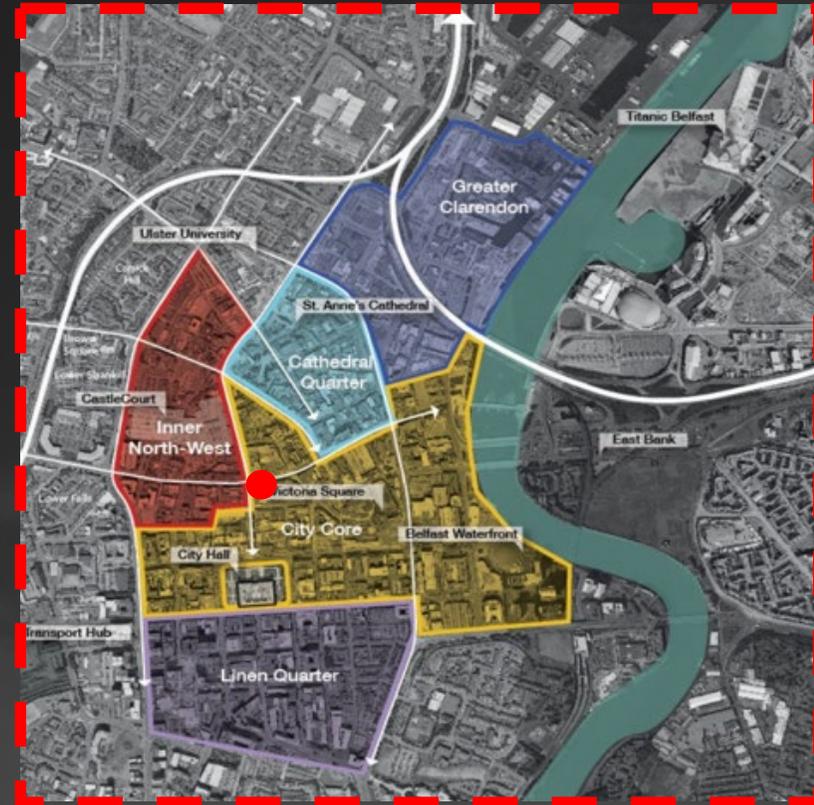
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Collaborative cross-sector working across academia and government to:

- Examine international lessons on place-based urban regeneration, community engagement, and data sharing practices particularly focused on health, wellbeing and responses to Covid-19
- Ascertain public perceptions on the extent to which Belfast supports liveability and wellbeing
- Identify areas for improved cross-sector data-sharing on wellbeing, sustainability, and resilience to better address future local-regional health, climate and socio-economic stresses



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- Action research examining:
 - Stakeholder perspectives on the liveability of Belfast
 - International precedents on public-private development
 - Three Belfast city centre transformation projects
- Mixed methods:
 - Desk-based (literature review)
 - International and local case-studies (Symposium, June 2021)
 - Qualitative research (Summer/Autumn 2021)
 - Online survey
 - Stakeholder Workshops



- *Public and community, especially those who live, work and visit Belfast:* Reviewing and promoting inclusive engagement on diverse health-focused needs and decisions impacting on the public realm.
- *Policy-makers:* Objective evaluation of decision-making processes and pilot interventions.
- *Project Partners, Contributors and Advisors:* Cross-sector working and data sharing, disseminating expertise together with on-the-ground evidence to inform policy, practice, and further research.
- *Students:* Experience and learning from research-led teaching addressing real-world issues.



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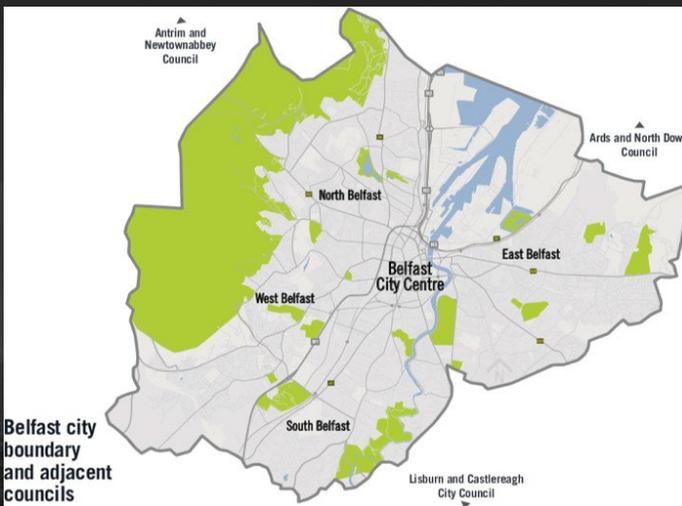
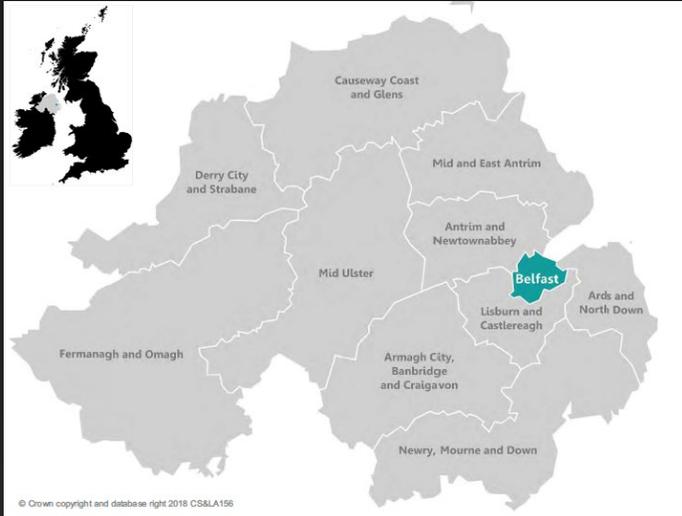
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- Belfast - NI capital: 339, 579 pop
- Depopulation of inner-city (1971-2011) in favour of suburbs



One of the **youngest cities** in Europe

with nearly a third of the population under 21 years old and a fifth of the city under 15 years old

Growing older

15% of the population was 65 and older in 2017

By 2035 this is expected to grow to nearly a fifth **20%**

In 2011

25% of houses were socially rented

In 2017

7,300 people were in housing stress

5 of the 10 most deprived Super Output Areas in NI are in Belfast

52% were owner-occupied

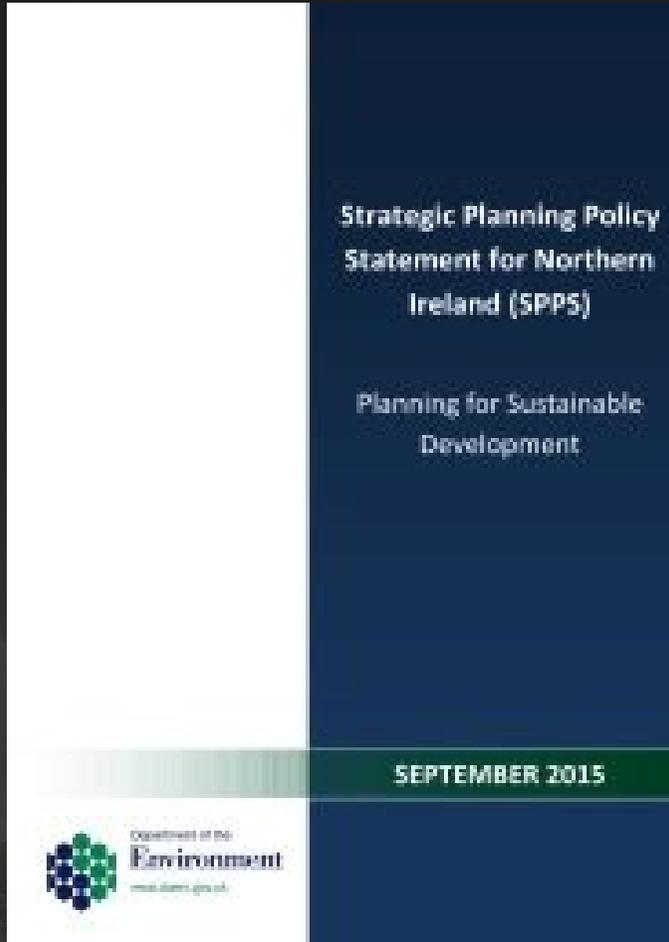
Despite good progress in community relations, the city still has a significant number of physical barriers at interface sites

The city's three universities have over **50,000** students

Belfast Metropolitan College serves 37,000 students each year



Core Planning Principles



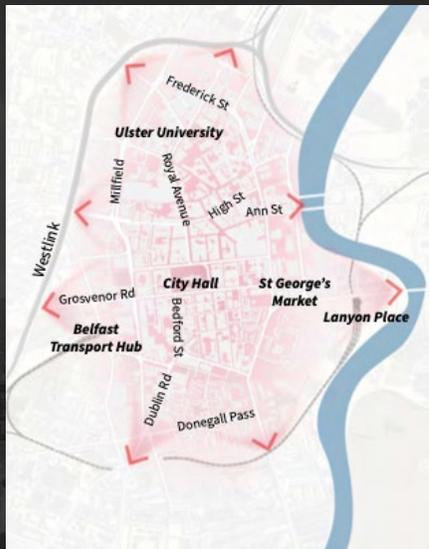
- Improving Health and Well-being
- Creating and Enhancing Shared Space
- Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth
- Supporting Good Design and Positive Place Making
- Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment





Developed jointly by Belfast City Council, the Department for Communities and the 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



Themes for change	Visioning Principles
City Centre as an Inclusive Place to Live, Work and Visit Community Focused Regeneration	1 Creating a healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environment that promotes wellbeing for all, inclusive growth and innovation.
Prioritise Walking, Cycling & Public Transport Remove Reliance on Car Travel	
Active and Inclusive Public Realm and Green Spaces Vibrant and Safe Streets	2 Fundamentally changing the centre of Belfast to prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car.
Embracing our Rivers Overcoming Severance with Surrounding Communities	
	3 Providing lively, safe and green streets linking inclusive shared spaces to promote resilience and enhance our built heritage .
	4 Removing severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.

A liveable community has been defined as one that is:

“safe, attractive, socially cohesive and inclusive, and environmentally sustainable; with affordable and diverse housing linked by convenient public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure to employment, education, public open space, local shops, health and community services, and leisure and cultural opportunities.”

(Lowe et al., 2015, p.138)

And Antonescu (2017, p3) notes is
“...dependent on two other interlinked concepts: quality of life and wellbeing.”

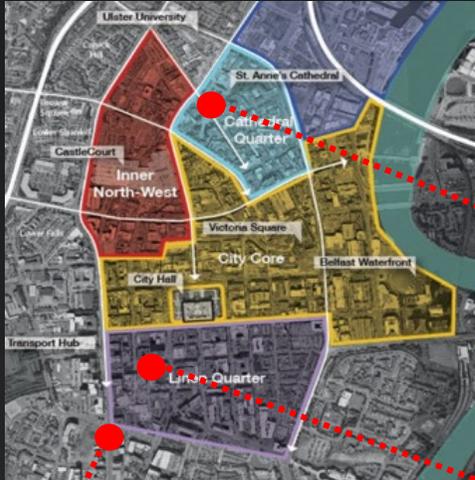


- Health and well-being have been increasingly prioritised in planning (policy) in recent years (TCPA, 2016) – rhetoric or reality?
- Urban environment is a key determinant of human health (Rydin, et al., 2012; Barton and Grant, 2006) via its direct (e.g., air pollution, noise) and indirect impacts (e.g., social, and behavioural effects) (Barton, 2009)
- Role of urban form and service provision in supporting health and wellbeing is gaining attention in urban policy discourse, with liveability going beyond the physical setting, extending to social interactions and is closely aligned with the social determinants of health (Badland, et al., 2014)
- COVID-19 pandemic and its associated infection-control restrictions led to an increased uptake of active travel modes (De Vos, 2020) as these minimised COVID-19 infection risk (Grudgings, et al., 2021)
- COVID crisis has highlighted the interconnected nature of society's vulnerabilities while also demonstrating that transformational change is possible (Doyle, et al., 2021)



City Centre Projects: Study Areas

1. BCC: Cathedral Gardens, City Plaza Meanwhile Uses
2. BID (Linen Quarter): Brunswick Street Social
3. DfI: Cycle-lanes & Parking Uses Pop-up



- Analytical framework consisted of:
- Applying (modified) Place Standard
 - Participant observation
 - Extent of health-wellbeing outcomes
 - Degree of stakeholder engagement



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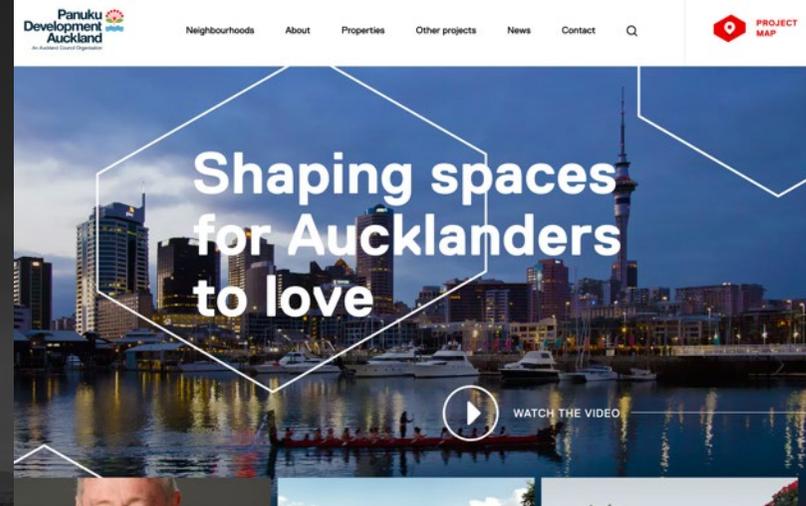
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Rick Mohler

*Micro-Macro Interventions
Seattle Healthy Streets +
Seattle Street Sink*



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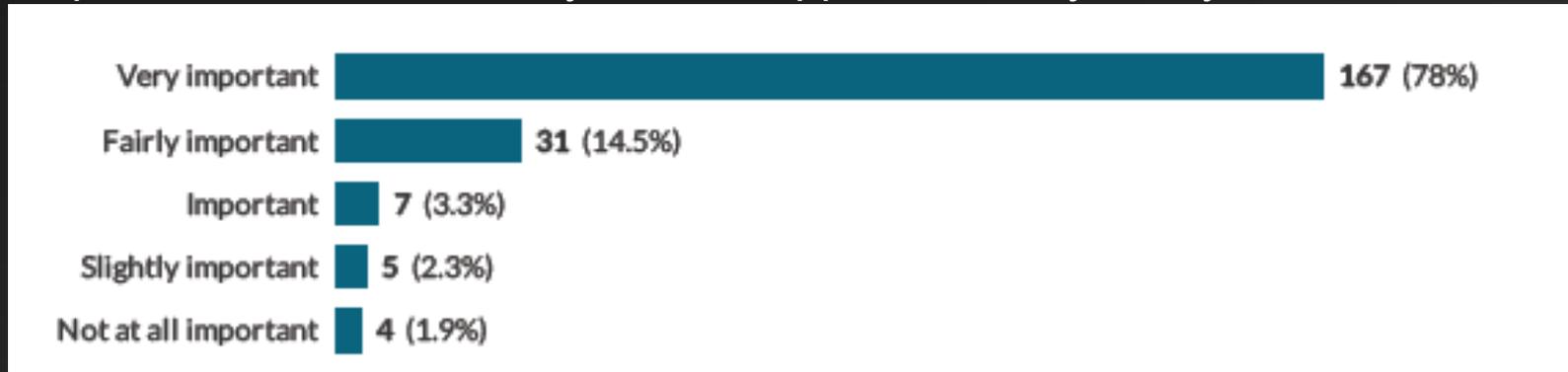
- Capture views on:
 - Liveability of Belfast
 - How the city is currently performing for users across a range of liveability themes, through a health lens
 - Recent (temporary) changes in the city centre
- The survey contains two sections:
 1. Belfast city centre in general
 2. Specific areas of the city, including three specific projects:
 - Cathedral Gardens
 - Dublin Road Pop-up Cycle Lane
 - Brunswick Street Social



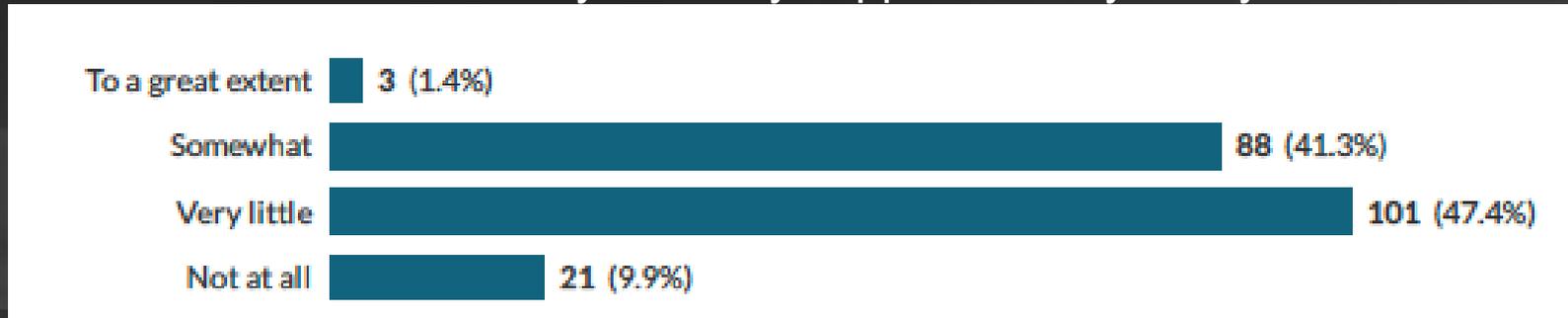
- 216 responses - Strong response from the general public
 - 194 (89.8%) members of the public
 - 9 (4.2%) business community
 - 7 (3.2%) academic community
 - 5 (2.3%) community/voluntary sector
 - 1 (0.5%) statutory organisation
- Balanced gender:
 - 99 (46.5%) Male; 105 (49.3%) Female
 - 8 (3.8%) Prefer not to say; 1 (0.5%) Non-binary
- Age profile: Still missing more of the Teen-Young Adult & Older voices
 - 1 (0.5%) 15-19; 40 (18.7%) 20-29; 46 (21.5%) 30-39; 69 (32.2%) 40-49; 41 (19.2%) 50-59; 16 (7.5%) 60-69; 1 (0.5%) 70-79

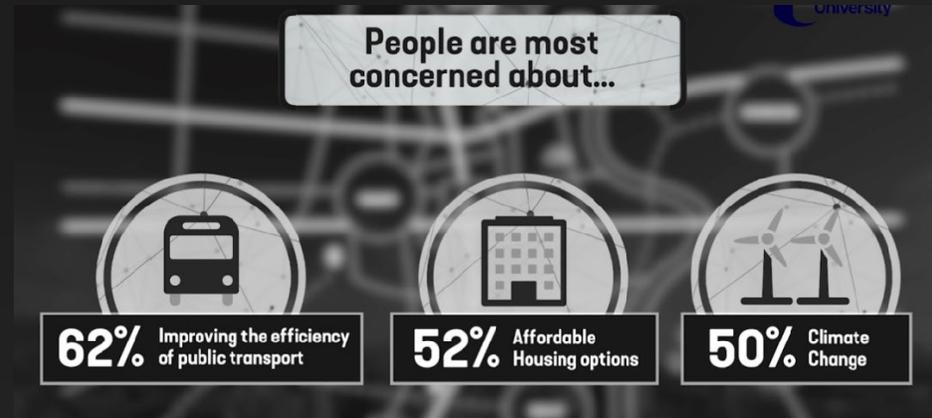


Importance that Belfast city centre supports healthy lifestyles for its citizens



The extent to which the city currently support healthy lifestyles





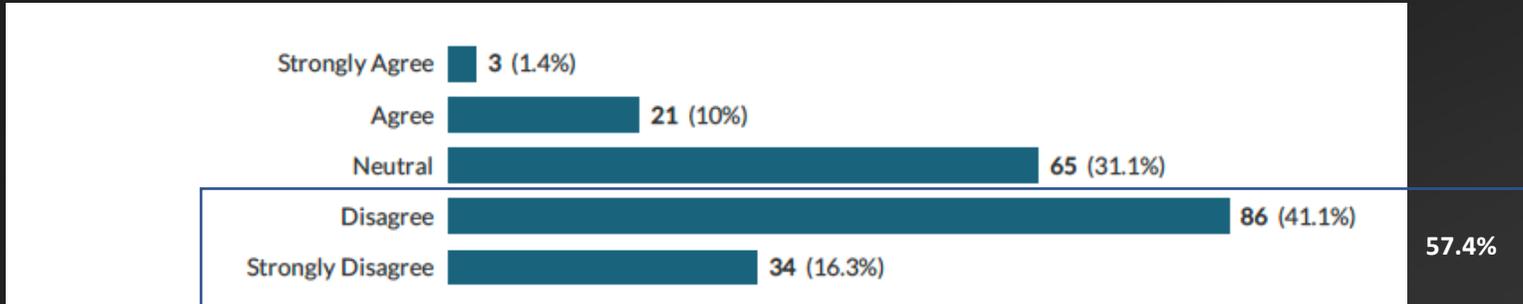
'Transport and Connectivity'

- While 63% respondents perceive the city as safe to walk, 63% also feel the city does not provide an environment that encourages or supports walking and cycling

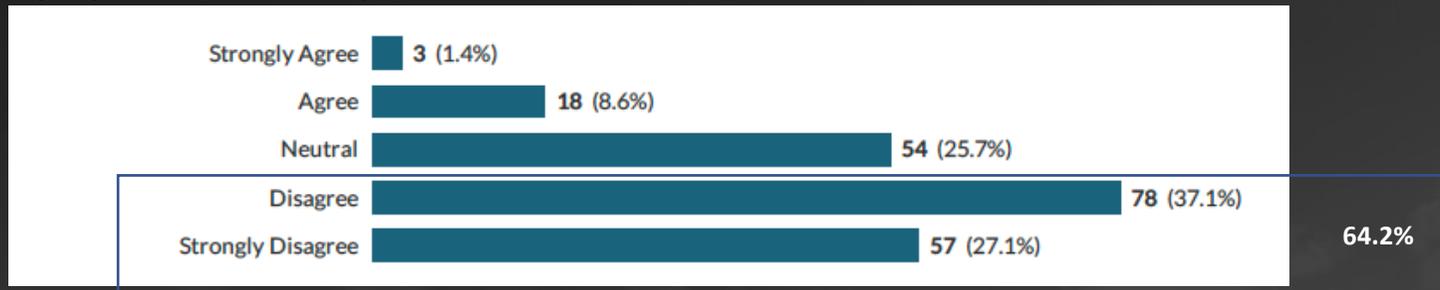
'Housing and Services'

- Strong majority (69%) responded that the city centre is not an attractive place to live
- City centre lacks basic amenities to encourage urban living, particularly for families

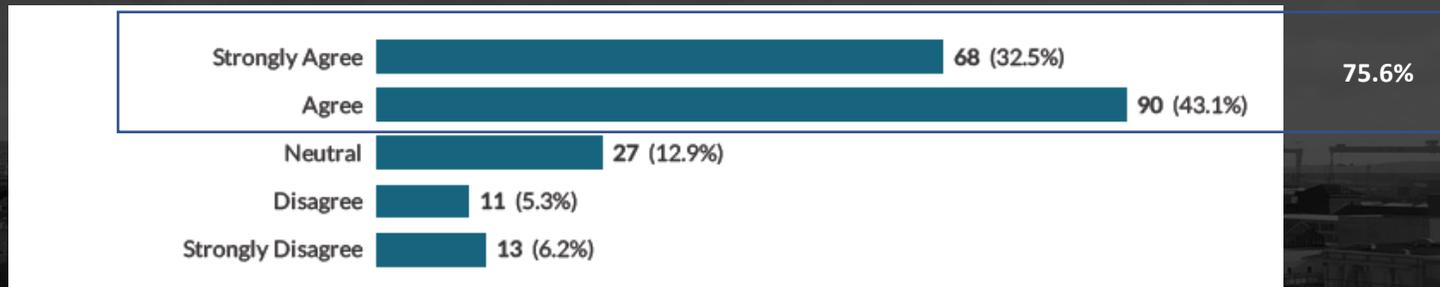
Citizens are able to contribute to decisions that affect them



Citizens can engage in planning processes easily



Feel that citizens want greater say in how the city develops



1. Business representatives and related not-for-profit groups:

Those likely to be lobbying for and/or delivering key projects through private means

2. Professional bodies representing architecture, planning, and urban design:

Organisations, professional charities, etc. who help shape the public and private realm

3. City Council, Stormont Executive and Public Health Departments:

Organisations with key roles delivering urban change, and who inform environmental/public health policy;

4. Third-sector-Voluntary/Community Groups and NGOs:

Organisations with access to data and representing the issues of various communities of interest:

E.g., Young people; Older persons; Person of varying mobility/ability; Women's safety in public space; Gender equality; and community engagement/capacity-building.



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- Recognition that the complexity – and competing variables – of liveability presents a key challenge to define what areas of government – departments, committees, policies – are best place (or exist) to holistically address health and wellbeing factors.
- Recognition needed for a more intersectional approach to planning and gathering information about how people use/do not use the city and how this impacts people's health and wellbeing.
- Despite wide-spread evidence of changes to strategic and community planning policy and practices over the past 5-7 years, including more explicit efforts from Belfast City Council to increase its own capacity/profile to engage with the public, the core views on planning and managing Belfast are that it remains a technocratic exercise, dominated by economic and managerial sensibilities.
- Challenge in collating a lot of the evidence in relation to Belfast being a healthy city or to it being a thriving city, pointing to a need for more systematic ways to evaluate issues including environmental health, environmental justice, and the quality of the built environment across the city, the relationship between environment and equity, especially for vulnerable communities.



- Complex and competing variables of liveability: Deprivation, equality, health, and environment
- Limited datasets in NI that have been made available (to academics and other interest groups) to effectively analyse linkages to health-wellbeing factors
- Stronger policy alignment across sectors – exploring complementary, sharing data/knowledge, nurturing shared responsibilities and linking budgets
- A lack of awareness of – and meaningful public engagement in – city centre development; Greater experimentation with meaningful and inclusive community engagement that embeds co-production practices
- Need for elevating health and well-being outcomes, on a par with, or prioritised over, economic outcomes
- Explicit well-being outcomes framework for spatial planning/regeneration that connects more effectively to community planning (outcomes based accountability) and values the measurement of meaningful public engagement
- Raises question whether the assumptions about urban development and planning are sufficiently accurate to inform and guide positive urban change and liveability

