The long term impact of planning decisions

NILGA Wednesday Webinar

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The Questions

• 1. What are the priorities for the future, particularly for Councils?

• 2. Is retrospective change to a built environment possible?

• 3. The early signs of change and what’s likely to come next?
1. What are the priorities for the future, particularly for Councils?

- **Climate change actions** - maximising the social and economic opportunities

- **Council’s own role as ...**
  - a builder of new things,
  - land owner,
  - owner of an estate of existing buildings,
  - AND the planning authority
1.1 Change required: Improve energy performance of existing buildings

**Action:** Publish 2019 energy performance of each Council building, publish plan to reduce and publish annual monitoring report.

**Action:** Publish plan to make each Council estate net zero by 2025? 2030?

**Action for others?**: Launch grant support scheme to incentivise private home owners to improve the energy performance of their homes. Grant to cover 75% of professional advice fees and 25% of works cost. Quality assured by grant release being dependent on the work being signed off by an architect (or other legally regulated building professional)

By January 2022 launch an initiative to facilitate a neighbourhood approach to improving energy performance of buildings in the area.

**Action:** Do we need a strong presumption in planning toward the re-use of existing buildings?
New Buildings

2.1 Change required: Reduce energy consumption of new buildings

**Action:** Equalise energy performance standards for new buildings across the island of Ireland by bringing Northern Ireland up to the same level as the Republic of Ireland. Apply new standards to all new building control applications from start of 2021.

*Councils can set higher standards? Do we want this? Also think about energy production*

2.2 Change required: New buildings to be built to last longer to reduce material consumption

**Action:** Announce new policy requiring all new Council funded buildings to be built to last as follows:

- Minimum 100 year lifespan
- Built with future unknown changes of use in mind
- Exceptions permitted only if detailed end of life plan published and approved at design stage, including a material re-use plan

**Action:** Introduce planning policy requiring buildings to be designed to last at least 100 years, to meet minimum standards for adaptability for change of use and to be adaptable to future changes in climate. Exceptions permitted in limited circumstances.
Travel

3.1 Change required: Reduce need for travel by traditional motor vehicles through health density

• **Action:** New area plans to facilitate development that enables a high proportion of daily journeys to be taken by foot or bike or equivalent. Focus on achieving health density which enables people to live within close proximity to everyday amenities.

• **Action:** Appoint a City or Council Architect in a cross-departmental role to assist the Council in delivering healthy density.

**NB.** Council planning policy on emissions generated by new planning applications? Need to understand the emissions implications of new large developments. E.g. out of town shopping.
2. Is retrospective change to a built environment possible?

Yes...

BUT

Best to factor this in at the outset
- Buildings tend to be around for a long time and building things costs a lot. But think about cost per year.
- Plan ahead for potential change to be easy

Let’s explore connectivity and buildings
Connectivity

Cul de sac housing estates example
• Compulsory purchase
• Wait for house to come up for sale?
• Strip of garden
• Needs long term plan

Reallocation of space
• Space for walking, wheeling, driving, resting, meeting
• Changing choices (make best option the easiest)
Buildings

Once something is built, can it be changed?
• Absolutely. Some things easier than others.

How to protect?

How to avoid the need for demolition
• Design in a way that future change of use is fairly easily achieved.

• Retrofit – we set the standards that buildings are to be built to (includes upgrades)
3. The early signs of change and what’s likely to come next?

Covid-19: the change accelerator

• OurChangedPlaceNI
• Ormeau projects
• Active school travel index

What next
Over the coming weeks and months the built environment must change extensively to enable a resumption of more social and economic activities whilst minimising the transmission of COVID-19.
Lasting legacy

The changes should also aim to leave a lasting legacy of:

- cleaner air
- reduced carbon emissions
- improved well-being
- economic resilience
COVID-19 is impacting on everyone in Northern Ireland.

The conversation on the changes to our physical environment is one that everyone in society should be involved in.
The #OurChangedPlaceNI initiative calls on residents, parents, children, business owners, workers and everyone who is interested, to post on social media your ideas of the changes you would like to see to your area during this COVID-19 period using the hashtag #OurChangedPlaceNI
Think about factors including:

- social distancing of pedestrians
- queues outside shops or for public transport
- food and beverage businesses seeking to place tables in the public realm
- safe space for everyday cycling/wheeling for people of all ages and particularly school children
- space for cycle parking
- space for motor vehicles
- access for all
Use your surroundings and your imagination

Make your post about a particular place – a street, area, village – that you know well or suggest an overarching solution to a number of challenges.

Present your idea any way you wish – words, drawings, photos, a quick sketch, scribbles on a map etc.

The people and the businesses of the area need to be engaged and help shape the changes.
Open Ormeau
Ormeau Parklet
Active School Travel Index
Measuring and enhancing school accessibility by walking, cycling and wheeling
Problem

Northern Ireland suffers from a range of issues stemming from heavy reliance on private motor vehicles as the primary mode of travel. These include:

- **Traffic congestion**
- Air quality and carbon emissions
- Road safety
- Physical and mental health
- Social deprivation

Belfast ranks second in the UK (behind only London) for traffic congestion.

Motorists each spent on avg. 112 hours stuck in traffic in 2019 – at £875 per driver.
Problem

Northern Ireland suffers from a range of issues stemming from heavy reliance on private motor vehicles as the primary mode of travel. These include:

• Traffic congestion
• **Air quality and carbon emissions**
• Road safety
• Physical and mental health
• Social deprivation

NO$_2$ emissions have been recorded over legal limits at over 30 sites across Belfast

Traffic air pollution is responsible for up to 33% of childhood asthma cases
**Problem**

Northern Ireland suffers from a range of issues stemming from heavy reliance on private motor vehicles as the primary mode of travel. These include:

- Traffic congestion
- Air quality and carbon emissions
- **Road safety**
- Physical and mental health
- Social deprivation

>50 fatalities and 600-700 serious injuries recorded each year in NI

Around 70 children are among those killed or seriously injured

Crashes are the 2nd largest cause of death for 5-19 year olds
Problem

Northern Ireland suffers from a range of issues stemming from heavy reliance on private motor vehicles as the primary mode of travel. These include:

- Traffic congestion
- Air quality and carbon emissions
- Road safety
- **Physical and mental health**
- Social deprivation

57% of primary school children in NI don’t meet physical activity guidelines, and 25% are overweight or obese

Around 1 in 4 adults and 1 in 5 children in NI are obese.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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Get enough daily activity.
Problem

Northern Ireland suffers from a range of issues stemming from heavy reliance on private motor vehicles as the primary mode of travel. These include:

- Traffic congestion
- Air quality and carbon emissions
- Road safety
- Physical and mental health
- Social deprivation

Deprived households have less access to cars and are hit the hardest by COVID restrictions.
A solution?

While car use is not the only cause of obesity or stress, it is part of the wider problem of increasingly sedentary lifestyles and lack of daily activity.

Few children walk to school and even fewer cycle, despite most students living within 3 miles of their school. Increasing these numbers will go a long way to boosting children’s daily physical activity, improving their health but also addressing some of the issues mentioned above.

### MAIN MODE OF TRAVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY SCHOOL</th>
<th>POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>67%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<td>9%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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### DISTANCE TO SCHOOL

- **Primary School**
  - 0-1 MILES: 50%
  - 2-3 MILES: 29%
  - 4+ MILES: 21%
- **Post-Primary School**
  - 0-1 MILES: 19%
  - 2-3 MILES: 27%
  - 4+ MILES: 53%
“INCREASING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO REGULARLY WALK, CYCLE OR SCOOT TO SCHOOL HAS NUMEROUS BENEFITS INCLUDING:

- increased physical activity levels resulting in improved health and wellbeing
- increased confidence, self-esteem, and independence for young people
- reduced congestion and pollution around schools
- improved academic performance and attendance rates
- increased road safety awareness”
The opportunity

- COVID had a silver lining: massive increases in people walking, cycling and wheeling, alongside fewer cars on roads. People have turned to active modes of travel, generating momentum in active travel-enabling policy and spending. There has been a global push for rapid roll out of new infrastructure to meet the increased demand.

- In NI, DfI announced a new ‘Walking and Cycling Champion’, introduced legislation enabling e-bike use, and began rolling out a new wave of green infrastructure, including 6 new greenway projects. These changes are a positive step, but not enough to embed more active and sustainable travel behaviours, particularly outside of city centres.

- The cycle network in NI is patchy, leading to less use than other cities with similar total length of routes, and the quality of paths is poor. Children require traffic-free, high quality routes; just 2 miles of cycle path in Belfast are physically separated from traffic and pedestrians.

Belfast needs a step change in active transport infrastructure to embed new travel behaviours and to connect all children with their schools.
only 17% of people think children's cycling safety in Belfast is good
Active School Travel Index

Increasing active school trips requires access to safe, high-quality active travel infrastructure - but this can only be achieved by understanding where the gaps in the current network lie, which means asking:

• Which areas need better access to high-quality active travel infrastructure?
• How do we better connect the existing network to make it feasible for children to commute actively?
• To what extent are individual schools and wider areas accessible by active travel?
• Where are the areas that most require infrastructure and spending?

We are creating a tool to answer these questions that maps and analyses active travel infrastructure and assesses the level of accessibility by active modes to each and every school.
ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL INDEX

Open Source Data → Analysis

Score each school across indicators → Weighting

Active Schools Index

Visualise in spatial dashboard
Active School Travel Index

The tool will:

• Measure each school’s accessibility using a range of indicators and allocate scores

• Generate a total score for each school based on the weighted indicator scores and rank them, allowing easy comparison

• Visualise all results in an online spatial dashboard, clearly showing each school’s performance and the gaps in the active travel network

• Allow areas/ schools of most need to be identified

• Cross-reference deprivation data to enhance access to cheap transport in underprivileged communities

• Enable interventions to be identified and their potential impacts measured.
INDICATORS

The main indicators will include:

ACTIVE TRAVEL CATCHMENTS
This indicator captures the number of people living close enough to access each school by active modes (active accessible catchment).

QUALITY
The types (e.g. footpath) and extent of existing infrastructure within catchments. Child-friendly (e.g. protected routes) will score better than on-road or poorly-lit, narrow routes. This indicator analyses the feasibility of the current network for school trips. It uses Arup’s uMove urban modelling toolkit, which accounts for distance, straightness, route quality and land use attractiveness.

GRADE
The steepness of active travel infrastructure within catchments. Could a child comfortably cycle up or down the hills leading to their school?

PUBLIC REALM
Public realm elements and the urban environment, e.g. street lighting, green space.
We are presented with a “once in a generation chance to accelerate active travel” and the opportunity to make a step change in the health and wellbeing of our children.

(Gear Change 2020)

The Active Schools Index is designed to help target investment in active travel to make best use of existing infrastructure and create lasting positive change.
What next?

1. Workplace
   • Where we work
   • The space we work in

2. Travel
   • Travel overall
   • Use of public transport
   • walking
   • Cycling
   • Travel for work (non-commute)
What next?

3. Outdoor space and density
   • Outdoor space
   • Density

4. Economic Change and Shopping
   • Economic change
   • Shopping