



2025 - 50 draft Masterplan

**Stakeholder Engagement &
Consultation Report**

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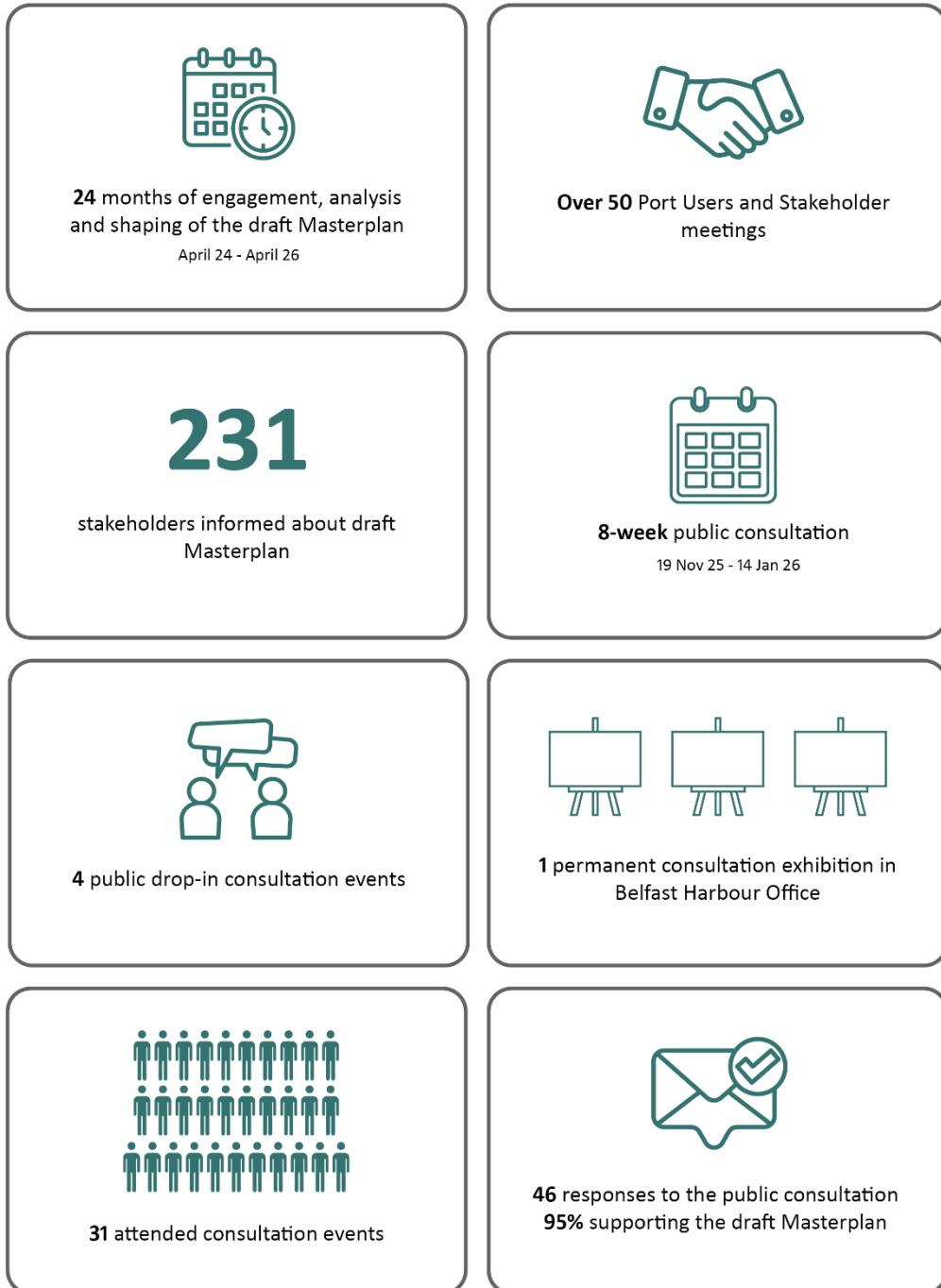


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CONSULTATION SUMMARY



1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from stakeholder engagement and public consultation on the Belfast Harbour draft Masterplan 2025–50, published on 19 November 2025. The draft Masterplan set out a 25-year framework to enhance port trade and logistics capacity, support regional economic growth, enable clean energy, and support the delivery of vibrant, inclusive waterfront communities.

The consultation sought to ensure that the final Masterplan reflects a broad range of perspectives and is responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.

It is important to be clear about what this Draft Masterplan is. It is not a planning application; we aren't required to consult, we do so because it is best practice. We believe progress improves with partnership, and that your views can make our draft plans stronger. This process will create a flexible Masterplan that will change through time. It will provide our stakeholders with insights to support their own decision-making. This draft has been developed in line with guidance from the Department for Infrastructure and Department for Transport (UK). Each development project within will still go through a formal planning process, with its own public engagement and statutory assessment.

Belfast Harbour has undertaken a comprehensive and accessible consultation approach, engaging stakeholders through pre-consultation meetings, targeted communications, public notices, four in-person drop-in events, a permanent exhibition, and an online consultation platform.

Engagement was structured across three groups: port users; statutory/public bodies; and wider stakeholders including business organisations, elected representatives, individuals, community groups, education institutions, and Section 75 consultees.

Feedback from both the public and stakeholders demonstrated strong and consistent support for the strategic direction and long-term vision of the draft Masterplan, with 95% of respondents expressing strong support. This included support from all the NI Executive political parties, main business representative groups, key community organisations, the two universities, tourism bodies, and other representative organisations.

Most comments were constructive, focusing on clarity, delivery mechanisms, and practical considerations, rather than challenging the underlying principles or scope.

Key themes raised included transport, access and connectivity; Trust Ports Legislation; utilities and energy infrastructure capacity; climate change and clean energy delivery; operational capacity and port competitiveness; phasing, and governance; land use and zoning; and regeneration and housing.

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of balancing long-term ambition with operational practicality, infrastructure planning alongside the need for regular review to ensure the Masterplan remains aligned with market conditions, policy developments, and partner organisations.

The insights gathered will directly shape the final Masterplan, due for publication in May 2026, ensuring it reflects stakeholder comments.

2. Testimonials



"This is a positive and ambitious plan that provides clarity on the strategic direction of Belfast Harbour for the next 25 years. Sharing this vision is essential because it allows stakeholders, partners, and users to understand future priorities and work collaboratively to deliver them. The Masterplan demonstrates leadership in planning for growth, regeneration, and sustainability while embracing innovation and partnership."

Amy Swash, UKPMG



"The current and growing crucial importance of Belfast Harbour to the Northern Ireland economy, including in terms of connectivity, the strategic use of land for economic and social purposes, including housing, and ongoing work on renewable energy including work on wind turbines is very clear."

Prof. Stephen Farry, Ulster University



"As a leading voice for business, Northern Ireland Chamber strongly endorses the ambitious vision for Belfast Harbour outlined in the draft Masterplan. This vision sets a benchmark for sustainable, innovative, and inclusive growth, positioning the Harbour as a strategic engine for regional competitiveness and prosperity."

Stuart Anderson, NI Chamber



"The Masterplan's focus on sustaining and expanding port capacity is vital to ensuring Belfast Harbour continues facilitating trade flows that underpin economic activity across Northern Ireland and the wider DBEC region."

Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor



"The overall vision set out in the draft Masterplan for Belfast Harbour is forward-looking and to be commended."

Belfast City Airport



"The Masterplan presents a clear, ambitious and balanced long-term framework that recognises Belfast Harbour's critical role as an economic driver, a working port, a landowner and a key player in the creation of a world class waterfront for Belfast."

Maritime Belfast Trust



"The Housing Executive supports the overall vision as set out in the draft Masterplan, which is a 25-year framework for Belfast Harbour's future, to help meet the future needs of port users, tenants, and the communities who live, work in and visit Belfast Harbour, including 900+ new homes. We particularly welcome the ambition to shape new places to work, live and invest in."

Northern Ireland Housing Executive



"The draft Masterplan sets out an ambitious and well-balanced vision, positioning Belfast Harbour as a competitive, clean, and connected hub by 2050. Translink welcomes its integration of economic growth, sustainability, and community benefit, alongside strong commitments to achieving net zero by 2030."

Translink



"The Belfast Harbour draft Masterplan sets out a positive vision for the development of the harbour from 2025 to 2050. The plans for offshore wind laid out in the three Horizons build logically on each other. It sets out a clear vision for Belfast Harbour to expand its role as a key hub for the offshore wind industry."

Renewable NI



“Continued investment in the port, alongside sustainable property development, with careful planning to ensure all uses can coexist together, will ensure a long-term positive impact on society. This balance is achieved within the draft masterplan.”

Retail NI



“Tourism NI strongly supports the Masterplan’s commitment to environmental stewardship and believes the areas of focus provide a solid foundation for achieving a long-term, positive impact on the environment.”

Tourism NI



“Queen’s University Belfast welcomes the publication of the Belfast Harbour Draft Masterplan 2025-2050. As Northern Ireland’s leading research-intensive university and a key anchor institution, Queen’s recognises the strategic importance of Belfast Harbour as a gateway for trade, innovation, and sustainable growth. The Harbour’s vision aligns closely with our own priorities in research, skills development, and climate action, and we look forward to working in partnership to deliver shared ambitions for the region.”

Queen’s University, Belfast

3. Background

Belfast Harbour is one of Northern Ireland's most important economic assets. With a history of over 400 years, it is now a modern, multi-purpose Trust Port handling more than 70% of Northern Ireland's seaborne trade.

Belfast Harbour covers more than 2,000 acres of land and 1,000 acres of water extending from the outer Port on Belfast Lough into the city centre. It includes one of the UK and Ireland's busiest ferry and roll-on/roll-off terminals, a leading cruise tourism offering, and major logistics operations handling container, bulk, and general cargo. It also offers the island of Ireland's only bespoke terminal to support offshore wind delivery.

Over the last two decades, Belfast Harbour has played a central role in the regeneration of Belfast's waterfront through developments such as City Quays, Titanic Quarter, and the Maritime Mile. It continues to evolve as a place that integrates trade, business, housing, leisure, and green space; delivering benefits for Belfast and region.

Belfast Harbour is developing its 2025-2050 Masterplan, a long-term strategic framework for the Port and Estate. Following consultation on the draft Masterplan which this report will outline, the final Masterplan will outline plans for infrastructure investment, sustainability, commercial growth, and Belfast Harbour's wider role in supporting regional prosperity over the next 25 years.

As a major driver of trade, innovation, tourism, and regeneration, Belfast Harbour's future plans have implications for a wide range of stakeholders, from operators to local communities, government and businesses.

4. Consultation Strategy

4.1 Overview

Belfast Harbour is committed to best practice in community consultation and stakeholder engagement.

Belfast Harbour recognises the value of meaningful and inclusive consultation with local communities and key stakeholders, and the benefits this can bring to the final Masterplan.

As this Consultation Report sets out, Belfast Harbour has engaged the local community, port users and stakeholders and given them the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Masterplan.

This section provides an overview of the stakeholder and community engagement strategy.

4.2 Inclusivity and Accessibility

Inclusivity and accessibility were central considerations in the development and delivery of the consultation strategy for the draft Masterplan. Belfast Harbour sought to ensure that the consultation was open, inclusive and accessible to all, in line with best practice, relevant policy, and public consultation guidance.

In accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Section 75 consultees were identified through a stakeholder mapping exercise and included within the Stakeholder Management Plan. These consultees were contacted, informed of the consultation, and encouraged to participate. Chapter 5 sets out details of consultation respondents, including responses from identified Section 75 consultees.

Physical consultation events were hosted at accessible venues to reduce barriers to participation for people with disabilities. All four venues selected for consultation events offered appropriate facilities, as outlined below:

The Agape Centre – street-level access with lift access to upper floors.

The Skainos Centre – fully wheelchair accessible, with lifts serving all floors and accessible toilet facilities.

The Girdwood Community Hub – fully wheelchair accessible, with accessible parking, entrances and lift access.

Black Mountain Shared Space – accessible parking and a Changing Places toilet facility.

The geographical spread of in-person consultation events across Belfast was designed to improve accessibility for communities in different parts of the city and reduce reliance on travel to a single central location. In addition, online consultation was provided to enable wider participation, particularly for those unable to attend events in person.

To further enhance accessibility, Belfast Harbour also facilitated remote participation. Members of the public were able to request hard copies of consultation materials, which were issued by post alongside a freepost feedback form to ensure that those without online access could still contribute. In addition,

a permanent exhibition was made available at Belfast Harbour Commissioners' Offices, providing an ongoing opportunity for engagement throughout the consultation period.

These measures ensured that the consultation process was inclusive, and accessible to enable meaningful participation from a broad and diverse range of stakeholders.

The draft Masterplan document also allowed for the use of screen readers and other assistive technologies.

4.3 Engagement and Consultation Strategy Objectives

The aims and objectives of the engagement and consultation programme have been to inform and engage with port users, local communities and key stakeholders surrounding the 2025-50 draft Masterplan.

The main objectives were to:

- Ensure full accountability, transparency, honesty, and integrity in all communications as the draft masterplan progresses.
- Keep all stakeholders informed with updates throughout the duration of the draft masterplan consultation.
- Foster widespread awareness and support by explaining the economic, environmental, and social benefits of the masterplan.
- Communicate the vital role of Belfast Harbour in driving sustainable growth and supporting innovation.
- Align communications with the strategic ambitions of the NI Executive, Belfast City Council and other key bodies.
- Ensure the masterplan communication and engagement approach aligns with Belfast Harbour's values – People Focused, Open, Responsible and Trustworthy.

Prior to the commencement of the consultation on the draft Masterplan, a Stakeholder Management Plan was developed, along with a Communications Strategy to ensure all communications, engagement and consultation was carried out comprehensively. Over 200 stakeholders were identified and made aware of the consultation.

A consultation checklist was also developed, to ensure that the consultation carried out aligned with guidance and policies, including, Guidance on the Preparation of Port Master Plans (UK DfT, 2008), Guidance on the Preparation of Port Master Plans (NI DRD, 2009), Ports Good Governance Guidance (UK DfT, 2018), Masterplans for the development of existing ports (PIANC, 2014), Masterplanning Approach for Major Development, (Belfast City Council 2023). This guidance was also supplemented by technical expertise from independent port masterplanning consultancy Haskoning, who were retained on the project by Belfast Harbour.

4.4 Overview of Consultation Groups

An extensive stakeholder mapping exercise was carried out and outlined below are the broad categories which made up the stakeholder audiences which were engaged with throughout the consultation process. Stakeholders were divided into three different groups.

The decision to divide stakeholder engagement into three groups was based on the need to ensure that all relevant audiences were consulted at the right time, with the appropriate level of detail, to support informed feedback. This tailored approach ensured that the process was structured to the needs and influence of each stakeholder group.

Group 1

- Port Users and Key Estate Stakeholders

Port users and key estate stakeholders are directly affected by the operational and infrastructure elements of the Masterplan. An initial phase of engagement was undertaken by Haskoning in 2024 to obtain early feedback from this group. This engagement, carried out independently by Haskoning at their request, without involvement of representatives Belfast Harbour Commissioners to enable open and frank discussion, represented the first stage of the Masterplan process, prior to any design work or proposals being developed. The feedback received was instrumental in informing the early direction of the draft Masterplan and highlighted the importance of Group 1 stakeholders in shaping its preparation.

Following this initial engagement, a second round of consultation was undertaken by Haskoning and Belfast Harbour with key port users between June and October 2025, in advance of the publication of the draft Masterplan.

In addition, a workshop with the Belfast Harbour Users' Group (BHUG), a representative forum for port users, was held on 12th November 2025, this supplemented a number of updates to the forum throughout the year.

Group 2

- Statutory and Public Bodies.

Engagement with Group 2 stakeholders was carried out in advance of the public consultation to identify any key regulatory considerations, ensure strategic alignment with government priorities, and coordination with existing local and regional plans.

A full list of Group 2 consultees who were engaged with is outlined at chapter 5.

Group 3

- Business Organisations
- Elected Representatives
- Education Institutions
- Community Groups
- Former Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Representative Organisations
- Section 75 Groups

Engagement with group 3 stakeholder was regarded as necessary to build understanding, political awareness, and broad-based support for the Masterplan.

Each of the Group 3 stakeholders were either consulted directly or informed about the consultation process.

5. Public Consultation

5.1 Methods for Notifying Local Community and Stakeholders

In addition to the focused stakeholder engagement, set out in chapter 4, an eight-week public consultation was carried out on the 2025-50 draft Masterplan from 19th November 2025 to 14th January 2026.

All consultation groups outlined above, together with all other stakeholders identified in the Stakeholder Management Plan, were notified of the methods for contributing to the public consultation.

All elected representatives in Belfast (MPs, MLAs and Councillors/Aldermen) were also contacted regarding the public consultation and invited along to the consultation events.

A public notice was posted in the three Northern Ireland regional newspapers, Belfast Telegraph, Belfast Newsletter and Irish News on 19th November 2025, with those notices appended to this report. These included information on the public consultation exercise.

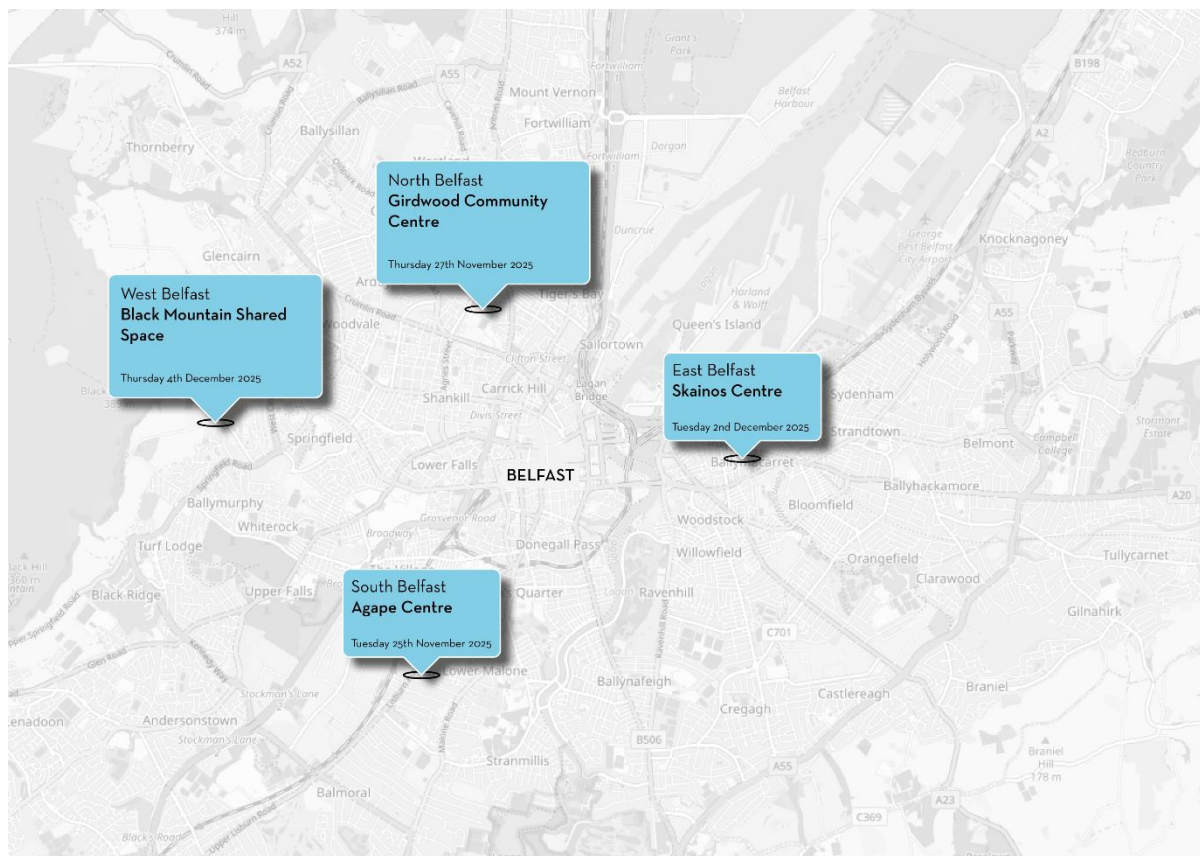
Belfast Harbour carried out an online advertising campaign to promote the launch of the draft Masterplan consultation, which included a standalone webpage where an e-version of the draft Masterplan was available to read with maps and an online feedback form. (<https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/masterplan/>)

To further advertise the consultation on the draft Masterplan, Belfast Harbour, in conjunction with Actor Dan Gordon produced a 2-minute video, which was uploaded to YouTube, social media and embedded on the Belfast Harbour website.

Moreover, Belfast Harbour carried out proactive social media posts in advance of and throughout the duration the public consultation process, providing information on the public consultation and methods to engage. Social media posts can be found in the appendices section.

5.2 In-Person Public Consultation Events & Exhibition

Four drop-in public consultation events were held in four separate locations across Belfast from 1pm to 7pm, as outlined below.



The events provided an opportunity for the public to view details, including a hard copy of the draft Masterplan, offer feedback and to raise any questions.

At the events, consultation boards were set up around the room to provide more information on the draft Masterplan, including background to Belfast Harbour, Area of Focus Map, horizon breakdown and enablers and dependencies. The full suite of exhibition boards on display at the public consultation events as well as photographs from the consultation events are appended.

Feedback forms were also provided for attendees to answer questions and note their comments down. Members of the project team were also available to speak to attendees and make note of these discussions. Attendees also had the opportunity to provide feedback via email and the online consultation.

Area	Location	Number of recorded attendees
South Belfast	Agape Centre	5
North Belfast	Girdwood Community Centre	5
East Belfast	Skainos Centre	11
West Belfast	Black Mountain Shared Space	10

A total of 31 individuals attended the in-person consultation events to view information on the draft Masterplan and speak to members of the project team.

These attendees at the various public consultation events included residents and business owners as well as representatives from the following organisations:

- NIE Networks
- Politics in Action
- Education Authority
- Community Workers
- Construction Employers Federation
- Ulster Wildlife
- Irish Biomethane NI LTD.
- Belfast Chamber
- Member of the Legislative Assembly
- Belfast City Airport
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
- Retail NI
- Ulster University
- Belfast City Council

In addition to the four advertised consultation events outlined above, Belfast Harbour hosted a permanent exhibition of the draft Masterplan in their offices which was open to the public between 9-5pm throughout the public consultation period. An image of this exhibition is appended to this report.

Feedback is detailed in Section 5 below.

5.3 Online Consultation

The consultation website for the project was set up at <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/masterplan/>. The online feedback form, enabling respondents to provide feedback was live from 19/11/2025 until 14/01/2026. Screenshots from the website are provided below.

The website provided background to Belfast Harbour, an online copy of the draft Masterplan, copy of the consultation boards and an online feedback form which could be completed and submitted through the website.

The draft Masterplan website has recorded 2,729 views demonstrating a strong level of interest in the online consultation platform.

The main landing page accounted for approximately 80% of total views (2,179 views), reflecting its role as the primary entry point. Importantly, 259 views were recorded on the feedback form page, demonstrating that users progressed beyond initial information to engage directly with the consultation process.

Supporting pages, including “Have Your Say”, “Our Horizons” and “Why a Masterplan”, also attracted consistent traffic, indicating that users explored a range of materials to inform their understanding.

Overall engagement across the website was strong, with an engagement rate of 65.07%, suggesting that the majority of users interacted meaningfully with the content.

DOWNLOAD THE DRAFT MASTERPLAN 2025-50

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Our *Draft Masterplan 2025-50* sets out a bold 25-year framework for Belfast Harbour's future, covering 2,000 acres of land and 1,000 acres of water. It focuses on developing this space to create an even more successful port and estate. We can sustain our role as a port that enables trade, tourism, clean growth and innovation. We can also shape new places to work, live and invest in.

Over the past 2 years, we have been consulting with port users, estate tenants, independent industry experts, statutory bodies and the public to shape our plans. Our consultation phases have now ended and we'd like to thank everyone who engaged with us and all who shared their views. We have listened, and are now in the process of analysing your feedback, as we further refine our plans. The final Masterplan 2025-50 will be published in May.

HOW BELFAST HARBOUR HELPS NI THRIVE

Trade & Growth

- 70%** of NI's container trade and a quarter of all total trade will be in trade
- £26.7 BILLION** worth of goods flow through Belfast Harbour each year
- 2,000** acres of land and 1,000 acres of water - needed to sustain regional growth

Riverways Impact

- £8.8 BILLION** in direct value added (GVA) created by trade on the river
- 15.7%** of NI's total annual output created by the river
- £374 MILLION** investment in riverway schemes with £200 million allocated by the end of 2025

Jobs & Opportunity

- 155,000** jobs supported across NI's region
- 20,000+** people employed throughout Belfast Harbour Estate
- 7,000** visitors daily to attractions like Titanic Quarter & the 1914 Centre

Regeneration & Investment


- Titanic Quarter** - protected to deliver the ongoing and new waterfront regeneration
- 900+** new homes planned at City Quay and Cleavehill Wharf
- City Quays Gardens** - opened in 2022 - NI's first One Planet Living accredited park

Sustainability & Innovation

- 71%** reduction in carbon emissions since 2015 - on track for net zero operations before 2030
- Zero** operational waste to landfill - 100% recycled, 99% recovered for energy
- 100%** of water for 100 recycled with reprocessed H2O fuel


Community & Inclusion

- £3.5 MILLION** invested to develop 40 communities in the port estate
- £500k+** Community Inclusion Fund has supported 360+ local groups since 2015
- £335k** invested in 2023 to support communities with employment, skills and entrepreneurship




Why a Masterplan?

This draft provides a coherent framework, giving partners, investors and communities a clear picture of our direction of travel for the future.



Our Horizons

We have structured our draft masterplan around three horizons which will provide the focus for what we are setting out to achieve over the next 25 years.



Having Your Say

From our online survey to our drop-in events, we have gathered a range of views and insights to help us shape the final version of our Masterplan 2025-2050.

Screenshot from draft Masterplan webpage



SHAPING THE FUTURE



A more detailed map can be downloaded at www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/detail-map/

Screenshot from draft Masterplan webpage



Masterplan » Feedback Form

This consultation gives everyone the opportunity to influence how Belfast Harbour grows over the next 25 years. Your feedback on the **Draft Masterplan 2025-50** will guide the choices we make and the priorities we set as we prepare the final Masterplan 2025-50 document for launch in May 2026. If you have any further questions, please contact Gravis Planning at, email 2050masterplan@gravisplanning.com or tel: 028 9042 5222

Deadline for submitting your feedback is **Wednesday, January 14th, 2026, by 5pm**

Belfast Harbour

* * indicates required fields

Full Name *

Email Address *

Which of the following best describes you:

Port User

Business

Resident

Community & Voluntary Sector

Other

Screenshot from draft Masterplan webpage Feedback form

Question 1: Overview/Vision
What are your views on the overall vision for the future of Belfast Harbour as set out in the draft Masterplan?

Question 2: Three-Horizons Approach
What are your views on the proposed Three-Horizons approach for planning Belfast Harbour's future?

Question 3: Areas of Focus and Positive Impact on the Economy
In what ways do you think the areas of focus in the draft Masterplan will enable Belfast Harbour to have a long-term, positive impact on the economy?

Question 4: Areas of Focus and Positive Impact on Society
How effectively do you think the areas of focus in the draft Masterplan will enable Belfast Harbour to have a long-term, positive impact on society?

Question 5: Areas of Focus and Positive Impact on the Environment
To what extent do you think the areas of focus in the draft Masterplan support Belfast Harbour's aim of achieving a long-term, positive impact on the environment?

Question 6: A Flexible and Responsive Plan for the Future
Do you consider the approach of maintaining the Masterplan as a flexible, 'living document' that is regularly reviewed, to be effective in responding to future change?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer

Submit

Save and Continue Later

Screenshot from draft Masterplan webpage Feedback form

Screenshot from draft Masterplan webpage Feedback form

5.4 Social Media

Social media activity supported the online consultation by raising awareness of the draft Masterplan and directing audiences to the consultation website.

Across the consultation period, a total of 37 posts were published on Belfast Harbour's social media platforms, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and X, generating 40,245 impressions.

To note, as of February 2026, Belfast Harbour no longer utilises its X account.

The campaign also generated 533 link clicks, demonstrating that social media was effective in directing users to consultation materials and the online feedback form.

The highest levels of engagement were achieved through posts aligned with key stages of the consultation, including:

- Publication of the draft Masterplan
- Promotion of consultation events
- Reminders of the consultation deadline

Video content, embedded via Belfast Harbour’s YouTube account, played an important role in extending reach, generating 19,524 views. On average, each post reached approximately 889 users, ensuring consistent visibility throughout the campaign.

Website



The draft Masterplan website has recorded **2,729** views



The main landing page accounted for approximately **80%** of total views (**2,179 views**). **259** views were recorded on the feedback form page



Overall engagement rate of **65.07%**

Social Media



Across the consultation period, a total of **37 posts** were published on Belfast Harbour’s social media platforms, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and X, generating **40,245 impressions**.

The campaign generated **533 link clicks**



Video content, embedded via Belfast Harbour’s YouTube account, played an important role in extending reach, generating **19,524 views**.



On average, each post reached approximately **889 users**

6. Stakeholder Feedback


6.1 Stakeholder meetings

Below is a list of Group 1 Port Users & Estate Tenants which were met in advance to the draft Masterplan being published. The feedback themes from these stakeholders are included below. These meetings were facilitated by Port Masterplanning experts, Haskoning, who were commissioned by Belfast Harbour.





	Stakeholder	Date of Meeting
	BG Freight Line	<i>15 May 2024</i>
	Conexpo	<i>16 May 2024</i>
	W&R Barnett	<i>17 May 2024</i>
	Belfast City Airport	<i>20 May 2024</i>
	Irish Continental Group	<i>21 May 2024</i>
	Harland and Wolff	<i>22 May 2024</i>

	LCC Group	<i>24 May 2024</i>
	Spirit AeroSystems	<i>29 May 2024</i>
	Valero	<i>30 May 2024</i>
	Scruttons	<i>30 May 2024</i>
	Arklow Shipping	<i>04 June 2024</i>
	Stena	<i>20 June 2024</i>
	Calor Gas	<i>26 July 2024</i>

	Titanic Quarter Ltd.	<i>30 July 2024</i>
Catalyst	Catalyst	<i>13 August 2024</i>
	Scruttons	<i>12 August 2025</i>
	Stena	<i>13 August 2025</i>
W&R BARNETT 	W&R Barnett	<i>13 August 2025</i>
BELFAST CITY AIRPORT	Belfast City Airport	<i>15 August 2025</i>
	Navantia	<i>19 September 2025</i>
	Titanic Quarter Ltd.	<i>08 October 2025</i>

<p>THE BELFAST HARBOUR USERS' GROUP</p>	<p>Belfast Harbour Users' Group <i>12 November 2025</i></p>
	<p>Mutual Energy <i>03 March 2026</i></p>

Below is a list of group 2 stakeholders which were met prior to the public consultation launch to take early feedback. The feedback themes from these stakeholders are included below.

	Stakeholder	Date of Meeting
	<p>NIE Networks</p>	<p><i>04 September 2025</i></p>
	<p>Translink</p>	<p><i>08 September 2025</i></p>
	<p>NI Water</p>	<p><i>30 September 2025</i></p>
	<p>Belfast City Council Senior Leadership Team</p>	<p><i>29 October 2025</i></p>

	<p>NI Housing Executive <i>29 October 2025</i></p>
	<p>SONI <i>30 October 2025</i></p>
<p>Representatives from DfE, DfC, DAERA, DfI, SIB</p>     	<p>Cross Departmental Civil Servants <i>07 November 2025</i></p>

	<p>Northern Ireland Environment Agency <i>11 November 2025</i></p>
	<p>RSPB <i>12 November 2025</i></p>
	<p>Northern Ireland Maritime and Offshore Network <i>07 January 2026</i></p>
	<p>Wind Energy Ireland <i>18 March 2026</i></p>
	<p>DfI Roads <i>31 March 2026</i></p>
	<p>Ards and North Down Borough Council <i>14 April 2026</i></p>

6.2 Ministerial and Political Meetings

Several additional briefings were held with a range of key Ministers and elected representatives to help inform them of the draft Masterplan and allow an opportunity to provide feedback prior to the publication of the Masterplan.

In addition, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Hilary Benn MP, hosted a business roundtable event with key stakeholders on 21st November 2025 at Belfast Harbour Offices.

A list of meetings as follows:

Name(s)	Position	Date
Hilary Benn MP	Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	21 st November 2025
Gordon Lyons MLA	Minister for Communities	15 th January 2026
Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee		22 nd January 2026
John Finucane MP	North Belfast MP	17 th February 2026
Andrew Muir MLA	Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	4 th March 2026
Liz Kimmins MLA	Minister for Infrastructure	18 th March 2026
Belfast City Council City Regeneration and Growth Committee		25 th March 2026

6.3 Summary of Feedback from Group 1 Stakeholders

At the request of Port Masterplanning experts Haskoning, the first round of engagement with group 1 stakeholders was carried out solely between Haskoning and port users to allow for open and frank discussions.

The second round of engagement was carried out between port users, Haskoning and representatives from Belfast Harbour.

It must be noted that the stakeholder comments are what Haskoning reflected in their meeting notes following their engagements with group 1 stakeholders.

Stakeholders highlighted considerations around port capacity, infrastructure constraints, operational efficiency, and future growth. Key issues included limited berth depth and length, congestion at key terminals (e.g. Stormont Wharf and VT3), insufficient storage and trailer capacity, and conflicts between different port uses such as cruise and cargo operations. Transport connectivity, utilities (power, water, digital), and the need to accommodate larger vessels and evolving trade patterns was also raised.

In response to the stakeholder responses Belfast Harbour acknowledged these challenges and, highlighted that the draft Masterplan, proposes a flexible, long-term approach to development. The Masterplan emphasises investment in critical infrastructure, improved land use efficiency, and

safeguarding core port operations while enabling future growth. It also recognises the importance of detailed technical assessments, stakeholder collaboration, and alignment with external infrastructure and regulatory frameworks to deliver sustainable and resilient port operations.

Most of the feedback received from group 1 stakeholders indicates strong and consistent support for the strategic direction of the draft Masterplan. Most of the feedback was constructive in nature, focusing on delivery rather than opposition to the principle or scope of the draft Masterplan. The feedback outlined below focuses primarily on how the Masterplan will be delivered, rather than questioning its underlying principles.

6.3 Summary of Feedback from Group 2 Stakeholders

Whilst further analysis of feedback is provided at chapter 6, it must be noted that most of the feedback from group 2 stakeholders was supportive of the general direction of the draft Masterplan, and key themes focused on delivery of the Masterplan.

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of enabling infrastructure, particularly transport, energy, and utilities, to support future growth at Belfast Harbour. Key issues included improved transport connectivity, limited public transport access, energy capacity constraints, and infrastructure funding challenges. Additional feedback highlighted the need for sustainable development, clean energy provision, environmental protection, and balanced integration of residential and community uses.

Belfast Harbour acknowledges these dependencies and outlines a collaborative, long-term approach within the draft Masterplan. This includes working with key stakeholders to enable the delivery of transport improvements, enabling clean energy infrastructure where viable and affordable, supporting mixed-use development, and ensuring environmental protection. The Masterplan also recognises the need for detailed assessment, regulatory alignment, and phased investment to support sustainable and resilient growth.

6.4 Feedback during the Public Consultation Process

The public consultation opened on 19th November for a period of 8 weeks, closing on 14th January 2026.

The public consultation process was designed so that feedback could be received from stakeholders in a variety of ways:

- Submissions made via Belfast Harbour online feedback form
- Submissions made via email to the project email address: (2050masterplan@gravisplanning.com)
- Submission of feedback forms and questions raised during the public events and permanent exhibition in Belfast Harbour offices.
- Free post return feedback forms.

The below table outlines a list of stakeholders who provided feedback during the public consultation period. Several group 2 stakeholders who were engaged with during pre-public consultation also provided feedback during the public consultation phase.

In total 46 individuals, businesses, organisations, elected representatives or other key stakeholders provided feedback during the public consultation. Of these 44 responses 95% indicated overall support for the strategic direction of the draft Masterplan.

Responses received during public consultation
Phillip Brett MLA (Democratic Unionist Party)
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
Cruise Britain
British Ports Association
Resident
Centre for Competitiveness
Resident
Retail Northern Ireland
Construction Employers Federation
Biomethane NI
Business person
Resident

Resident
Queens University Belfast
Diana Armstrong MLA (Ulster Unionist Party)
Renewable NI
Translink
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Wind Energy Ireland
Northern Ireland Water
Natural Heat NI
Resident
Institute of Directors
Royal National Institute of Blind People
Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor
System Operator Northern Ireland
Belfast Chamber
Ulster University
Maritime Belfast Trust
Sailortown Regeneration Group
Major UK Ports Group
Northern Ireland Chamber
Belfast City Airport
Peter McReynolds MLA (Alliance Party)
Cathal Boylan MLA (Sinn Fein)
Tourism Northern Ireland
Invest Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Maritime and Offshore Network
Confederation of British Industry
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Visit Belfast
Simon Community

Belfast Metropolitan College
Belfast Harbour Users' Group
SDLP
Belfast City Council

7. Analysis of Feedback

Overall, feedback from both the public consultation and stakeholder engagement indicates strong and consistent support for the strategic direction, long-term vision and ambition of the draft Masterplan. Respondents broadly recognised the importance of forward planning over a 25-year horizon to support future growth, changing market dynamics, decarbonisation and Belfast Harbour's evolving role within the economy.

Consultation responses demonstrated a high level of support, with 95% of respondents expressing general support for the draft Masterplan's strategic direction and long-term vision. Feedback was largely constructive in nature, focusing on delivery rather than opposition to the principle or scope of the draft Masterplan.

Across all stakeholder groups, feedback focused primarily on how the Masterplan will be delivered, rather than questioning its underlying principles. Comments centred on port and infrastructure capacity, phasing, governance, coordination with statutory providers and the practical implications of implementation.

Engagement with stakeholders generated a wide range of detailed feedback, which reinforced the importance of balancing long-term ambition with operational requirements and flexibility. This was reflected consistently across Groups 1, 2, and 3.

7.1 Key Themes

Port Operational Resilience and Capacity

Port operational resilience and capacity emerged as the highest-ranking priority. Respondents highlighted the need to safeguard and enhance operational capacity across key areas including berth depth, quay length, terminal layout, craneage, trailer storage, and hinterland connectivity.

Port users noted that vessel sizes and parcel volumes have steadily increased and are expected to continue growing, particularly in the bulk and Ro-Ro sectors. Ensuring deep-water access, operational flexibility, and resilience during infrastructure upgrades were considered critical to maintaining Belfast Harbour's competitiveness.

Net Zero and the Green Economic Engine

Net Zero and Green Economic Engine was the second most frequently cited theme. Feedback supported Belfast Harbour's net-zero ambitions, including offshore wind facilitation, alternative fuels, shore power, and the proposed Clean Energy Hub.

Some stakeholders requested further information on how carbon reduction will be delivered in practice, including mechanisms for monitoring progress. There was also emphasis on climate resilience and adaptation measures such as flood risk management, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), and nature-based solutions.

A number of respondents highlighted the importance of a balanced transition that achieves environmental objectives without compromising operational viability.

Estate, Placemaking and Regeneration

Placemaking and regeneration was the third most frequently raised theme. Strong support was expressed for regeneration ambitions, particularly at city-facing locations such as City Quays, Sailortown, Clarendon Dock, and Harbour Meadows.

Stakeholders welcomed mixed-use development, public realm improvements, and increased waterfront access, while requesting clarification on balancing development density with public realm quality, open space provision, and long-term liveability.

Feedback highlighted a strong demand for city-centre living, including social and affordable housing, emphasising the need for high-quality design and supporting social infrastructure.

7.2 Other Emerging Themes

Transport and Connectivity

Transport and connectivity emerged as a key consideration. Stakeholders highlighted constraints on road access, internal circulation, parking, and reliance on third-party infrastructure, including the York Street Interchange.

The importance of planning for workforce access as employment grows, including public transport, shuttle services, and sustainable travel options was identified. Several respondents suggested feasibility work to support long-term transport planning.

Utilities and Energy Infrastructure

Utilities and energy infrastructure were identified as essential enablers. Stakeholders noted existing and future constraints around electricity capacity, water & wastewater capacity.

The need for infrastructure to support electrified equipment, shore power provision and significant residential development was also highlighted. Delivery of upgrades was seen as dependent on early engagement with statutory providers and regulators, including SONI, NI Water, NIE Networks, and the Utility Regulator.

Governance and Trust Ports

Trust Port legislation was widely supported, particularly in enabling additional investment capacity. A small number of stakeholders requested clarification on the broader implications for accountability and continued stakeholder engagement.

There was an emphasis on ensuring that any financial flexibility is appropriately weighted between port and non-port development.

Long-Term Vision, Phasing, and Review

The three-horizon approach was broadly welcomed, recognising its value in providing clarity on long-term development while retaining flexibility to respond to changing market conditions, policy requirements, and technological advances.

Feedback emphasised the importance of regular review mechanisms to ensure the Masterplan remains responsive and aligned with partner organisations and infrastructure providers.

Land Use and Zoning

There was broad support for consolidating compatible operations to improve efficiency, while protecting heavy industrial and key port activities.

Stakeholders highlighted the need to carefully manage potential conflicts between cruise activity, residential development, and core port operations. There was a clear preference for minimising disruption, particularly at Stormont Wharf and Ro-Ro terminals.

7.3 Overall Observations

Feedback from all stakeholder groups reinforced the importance of flexibility, phasing, and long-term coordination. Responses tended to focus on delivery mechanisms, dependencies, and strengthening infrastructure planning, rather than challenging the fundamental vision or scope of the draft Masterplan.

Efficient land use, transport connectivity, utilities and energy provision, and climate resilience, were consistently highlighted as critical enablers of successful implementation of the Masterplan.

8. Concluding and Forward work

8.1 Concluding Remarks

A thorough process of stakeholder engagement and public consultation has been taken forward with key stakeholders, residents and other interested parties on the 2025-50 Belfast Harbour draft Masterplan, as outlined in this report.

Specific engagement with key Group 1 and 2 stakeholders was intentionally carried out prior to the launch of the public consultation to enable early feedback which would help to shape the draft Masterplan which was published for public consultation.

The public consultation process itself was designed to ensure the greatest possible reach, utilising a range of consultation methods, whilst ensuring consultation aligned with relevant guidance and policies.

A combination of in-person and online consultation methods has provided the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed plans prior to the finalisation of the Masterplan.

9. Appendices

10. Appendix 1 – Consultation Boards

Belfast Harbour
Draft Masterplan
2025-50

Help us Plan the Next 25 Years

The graphic features the Belfast Harbour logo on the left. To the right, the title 'Help us Plan the Next 25 Years' is displayed in a large, blue font against a background of a light blue and white wavy pattern. Below the title, there are three photographs: a man with a beard and glasses looking through binoculars, a woman smiling at a computer, and a man in a cap smiling. The bottom of the graphic has a decorative border of dark blue circles.

What does Belfast Harbour bring to the NI economy?

Scale & Reach

- 70% of NI's seaborne trade and a quarter of all island-wide seaborne trade
- £26.7 BILLION worth of goods move through Belfast Harbour each year
- 2,000 acres of land and 1,000 acres of water – room to power regional growth

Economic Impact

- £8.8 BILLION in Gross Value Added (GVA) created by trade we facilitate
- 15.7% of NI's total annual output enabled by this trade
- £374 MILLION invested in the past decade, with £313 million planned to the end of 2029

Jobs & Opportunity

- 155,000 jobs supported across the region
- 20,000+ people employed throughout Belfast Harbour Estate
- 7,000 visitors daily to attractions like Titanic Belfast & the SSE Arena

Regeneration & Investment

- Titanic Quarter partnered to deliver this ongoing and iconic waterfront regeneration
- 900+ new homes planned at City Quays 4 and Clarendon Wharf
- City Quays Gardens opened in 2025 – NI's first One Planet Living-accredited park

Sustainability & Innovation

- 71% reduction in carbon emissions since 2015 – on track for net zero operations before 2030
- Zero operational waste to landfill – 30% recycled, 70% recovered for energy
- 100% Marine Gas Oil replaced with renewable HVO fuel

Community & Inclusion

- £3.5 MILLION donated to charities and communities in the past decade
- £500k+ Community Awards fund has supported 150+ local groups since 2021
- £335k invested in 2025 to support communities, skills, employability, and the environment

The infographic is set against a dark blue background with a faint image of a harbor. It features various icons representing trade, economy, jobs, regeneration, sustainability, and community. The Belfast Harbour logo is in the top right corner.

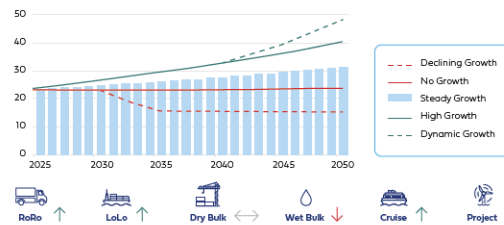
Why a 2050 Masterplan?



A 25-year framework for growth, shaped by independent and expert analysis and informed by the needs of port customers.

- Our Draft Masterplan supports the aims of the NI Executive and Belfast City Council. It also supports our ambition to become the leading port on the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC). We referred to the Programme for Government, the Draft Investment Strategy for NI, the Belfast Agenda and the Local Development Plan. We also talked to port users, estate tenants, government departments, city agencies and utility providers.
- We hired Haskoning, a ports expert, and Deloitte, a property analyst, to predict future trade and land needs. To do this, they looked at past performance and trade trends. They also considered the likely future needs for housing, logistics, and commercial space.
- The draft plans we present here today are based on expert knowledge, market data and input from port users. This makes for a strong, evidence-driven proposal. Your views will now shape our final plan.
- The independent experts modelled scenarios from steady to strong growth. In high-growth cases, trade through Belfast Harbour could rise from 24 million tonnes today to over 40 million tonnes by 2050.
- This presentation assumes we will be able to invest freely and wisely. That will need our accounting status to be reclassified, so our commercial borrowing does not impact public finances.
- Our main goal is to support a growing economy and the communities we serve. We aim to enable a prosperous and sustainable future for Northern Ireland.

2050 Port Trade Scenarios - Million Tonnes (mT)



Areas of Focus



This map shows the areas we've used to develop our long-term draft plans for Belfast Harbour. Each colour shows our current intentions for the areas covered – from enhancing our port facilities to creating new neighbourhoods. These draft aims will be rolled out up to 2050, grouped into three time-periods: Horizon 1, 2 and 3. The following areas of focus show where and how we propose to concentrate our efforts for the next 25 years:

- Sustain & Increase Port Capacity
- Embrace the Belfast Waterfront
- Enable Industry & Commerce
- Facilitate the Shift to Clean Energy
- Protect Nature for Community Benefit
- Redevelop the Inner Harbour
- Support Connectivity & Tourism

This is a simplified view designed to make our draft plans more accessible. A detailed source map can be downloaded at belfast-harbour.co.uk/detail-map. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, available under the Open Database Licence.

► Our Plans for Horizon 1: 2025–2029



Our five-year strategy covers Horizon 1 – so most of these projects are already funded and are now under way.

- “Advance Regional Prosperity” is the theme for this period, as set out in our strategy. Launched in January 2025, you can learn more about it at belfast-harbour.co.uk/strategy
- Over this period we will invest £313 million in the port and estate. This investment will be entirely self-funded. More than two-thirds of this spend will be invested in the port, reflecting the importance of this facility to the local economy.
- Work has begun on a new dual-purpose deepwater quay (D3). This will serve both cruise ships and the offshore-wind industry.
- Between 2025 and 2029, we will increase port capacity on land and at sea. This will see us upgrading port infrastructure, enhancing freight areas, and expanding land use for clean energy.
- A proposed new Maritime Skills Academy will train future seafarers and port workers.
- The next five years will also see major urban regeneration projects. These include City Quays 4 and 5, Clarendon Wharf, and the Loft Lines residential development with Titanic Quarter Ltd. Together, they will create new offices, public spaces and affordable housing.
- Many of the projects in Horizon 1 are already funded, have planning approval and are underway. Some of them – such as City Quays 4 – depend on our accounting status being reclassified so we can responsibly borrow without impacting public finances.



Artist's impression of a dual-purpose deepwater quay in use as a cruise terminal



Artist's impression of Maritime Skills Academy



Artist's impression of new logistics park

► Draft Plans for Horizon 2: 2030–2040



This timeframe looks ahead to the 2030s, when we will expand our capacity and support a wider shift to clean energy.

- During this time, we aim to boost trade capacity, support investment in clean energy and regenerate more of the Belfast Harbour Estate.
- We plan to extend and upgrade Victoria Terminal 3 and Stormont Wharf. This will improve efficiency, handle more freight, and support larger vessels.
- We will introduce shore power across key berths. This will allow ships to plug-in and use clean electricity while docked. Doing this will reduce emissions and help decarbonise operations in the Irish Sea.
- Phase 2 of the new dual purpose deepwater quay will support next generation offshore wind farms. This will further strengthen our role as a hub for offshore wind assembly and maintenance.
- We will create a new green corridor to connect existing nature areas. This will introduce new walkways, boardwalks, and viewing platforms, to benefit both the public and wildlife.
- We will continue to open up land for city-facing regeneration. This includes Albert Quay and further phases of Clarendon Wharf, helping to connect the port and the city through new public spaces.



Artist's impression of assembly of offshore wind turbines



Artist's impression of Clarendon Wharf



Artist's impression of logistics facilities

▶ Draft Plans for Horizon 3: 2040–2050



This period looks beyond the 2040s, to shape the long-term future of Belfast Harbour and the city around it.

- We are planning for a new terminal on the West Bank Road, to support forecasted long-term growth in container and trailer freight.
- This would involve reclaiming land to provide new berths, storage areas, and transport links to handle future trade.
- This horizon also looks at the wider use of land across Belfast Harbour Estate. Urban regeneration of land closest to the city could create new homes, offices, and green public spaces.
- We also aim to develop a dedicated Clean Energy Hub to handle new fuels such as hydrogen, ammonia, and advanced biofuels. This zone will also support offshore wind through storage, maintenance, and logistics space.
- Climate resilience will shape every major project. Future designs will include stronger quay structures, improved drainage, greener streets, and open spaces.
- These plans will prepare Belfast Harbour for the second half of the century. They will make us more competitive, capable, clean, and closely connected to the people we serve.



Artist's impression of regeneration at city's edge



Artist's impression of new cargo terminal on reclaimed land



Artist's impression of clean energy hub

What is Needed to Deliver our Masterplan?



Achieving these projects will require strong partnerships and cooperation. Many of the things that make it possible are outside our control.

- Growth in trade and regeneration will rely on improved transport links. This includes better road, rail, and active travel connections on both sides of Belfast Harbour.
- The Department for Infrastructure and its partners, like Translink, are responsible for these upgrades. We look forward to working with them to improve connectivity.
- Our plans also depend on strong utility networks being in place. This means having enough power, water, and wastewater capacity to support new port facilities and future neighbourhoods. We have talked to NI Water, SONI, and NIE Networks to help plan for these needs.
- Planning and environmental consents are another key factor. Each major project will require public consultation and planning approval before going ahead.
- The Draft Masterplan also depends on our ability to responsibly borrow more, so we can fund the key projects outlined in it. Like all NI Trust Ports, we need a change in our accounting classification. This is about removing barriers so we can invest more money into the NI economy.
- Finally, our plans are based on forecasts, not guaranteed outcomes. But our Draft Masterplan is flexible – and we can adjust it if demand, funding, or government policy changes over time.



Belfast Harbour Benefits Everyone – Help Shape Its Future



As a Trust Port, Belfast Harbour exists for the benefit of Northern Ireland – not shareholders. We reinvest every pound we earn into the port, the city, and the communities we serve.

This allows us to meet today's needs, and to plan for the needs of tomorrow. Your views can now play an important part in shaping our collective future. Tell us what you think.

- You can pick up a copy of our complete Draft Masterplan here. You can also visit belfast-harbour.co.uk/masterplan to read it online. You then have several ways to send us your views.
- Complete the feedback forms available here or talk to one of our team. If you want to see this display again, visit our masterplan website for details on when and where you can do this.
- You can also use our masterplan webpage to complete a short feedback form, or you can email your response to 2050masterplan@gravisplanning.com
- Finally, you can post us your comments to the Harbour Office, Corporation Square, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT1 3AL.
- We will review your feedback and summarise it in an introduction to our final Masterplan. We will publish this in May 2026.



Our Draft 2050 Masterplan is now ready for you to have your say. Find out more and take part at: belfast-harbour.co.uk/masterplan



11. Appendix 2 – Social Media Posts

Belfast Harbour 17,450 followers
2mo •

+ Follow ...

As part of ongoing Draft Masterplan 2025-50 consultation, we will be holding a series of engagement events across Belfast within the next two weeks.

Hosted at venues in north, west, east and south Belfast, these informal drop-in sessions will allow the public to find out more about the Draft Masterplan, and share their feedback with our team.

Dates and times for the sessions are:

- Tuesday, November 25th 1pm-7pm – The Agápē Centre, 238 Lisburn Road, Belfast, BT9 6GF
- Thursday, November 27th 1pm-7pm – Girdwood Community Hub, 10 Girdwood Avenue, Belfast, Antrim BT14 6EG
- Tuesday, December 2nd 1pm-7pm – The Skainos Centre, 239 Newtownards Rd, Belfast BT4 1AF
- Thursday, December 4th 1pm-7pm – Black Mountain Shared Space, 280 Ballygomartin Road, Belfast BT13 3NG

To find out more, visit <https://lnkd.in/eHGcfakj>

Drop In Events			
SOUTH BELFAST	NORTH BELFAST	EAST BELFAST	WEST BELFAST
Tuesday 25th November	Thursday 27th November	Tuesday 2nd December	Thursday 4th December
1pm - 7pm	1pm - 7pm	1pm - 7pm	1pm - 7pm
Agápē Centre	Girdwood Community Hub	Skainos Centre	Black Mountain Shared Space

belfast-harbour.co.uk/masterplan

LinkedIn Post advertising Consultation Events



Belfast Harbour

17,450 followers

1mo • 🌐

✓ Following



HAVE YOUR SAY - Belfast Harbour Draft Masterplan 2025-50

If you were unable to join us for our recent drop-in information sessions across Belfast, we are hosting an ongoing display of the Draft Masterplan 2025-50 at Harbour Office on Corporation Square for the duration of this consultation period, until January 14th.

You are welcome to call in anytime from 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday (subject to holidays) to view the plans, and leave your feedback with us. Comments can also be posted to us at:

Masterplan 2025-50 Consultation
Harbour Office,
Corporation Square,
Belfast,
BT1 3AL

You can also share your thoughts through our online feedback form at: <https://lnkd.in/eNBzKWif>

We look forward to hearing from you!



LinkedIn Post advertising Consultation Events and drop in event at Belfast Harbour

Plan to net £20m from commercial properties laid out

Finance Minister to axe rates relief on buildings that are lying vacant

MARGARET CANNING

Landlords of empty commercial buildings are to start paying full rates, generating £20m for Stormont and local government, the Finance Minister has announced.

At the moment, vacant commercial properties are liable for just 50% of their rates.

That has contributed to large banks of vacant properties, such as the derelict buildings which form part of the proposed Tribeca project in Belfast city centre.

But Finance Minister John O'Dowd has said the rates bill for vacant commercial properties will increase to 75% before the end of the current Assembly mandate in 2027.

Full rates would then be payable for non-domestic vacant properties during the next mandate.

The move follows a review of rates relief measures, with the minister also announcing a new business growth accelerator.

Mr O'Dowd told the Assembly on Tuesday: "What was clear from the review was the need to challenge the light of

vacant properties in our villages, towns and city centres.

"It is my view work now needs to begin to elevate non-domestic vacant rating liability from 50% to 75% and then to 100%.

"I have therefore instructed my officials to take forward the policy work required to implement these changes which have the potential to unlock a further £20m of revenue between central and local government."

He said that by the end of the 2027/28 rating year, every form of rates relief will have been reviewed.

Mr O'Dowd said that it was now his ambition to progress "enhanced support for small businesses, tackle the high level of vacancies in our towns and city centres, support businesses starting out and help accelerate business growth."

He said there would be enhancements of small business rate relief support.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. I want to see extra help going to those businesses that provide vital employment supporting workers, families, and communities.

"The small business rate relief currently provides vital support for operating costs for around 30,000 small businesses. The support delivered under that scheme has, however, remained unchanged since 2012.

"I want to create a fair environment for all businesses and plan to consult before the new year, giving businesses the chance to share final views before



Several properties on Belfast's North Street are uncoupled

changes are put to ministerial colleagues on enhancements to the support."

He added: "By taking the steps announced today, we continue to deliver a fairer, more progressive rating system – one that drives growth, supports new enterprises, and strengthens communities.

"We all know our finances are under significant pressure which is why I aim to deliver savings in parts of the

rating system and redirect resources to provide additional support to those businesses that need it most.

"Delivering positive change will require buy-in, partnership working and the backing of ministerial colleagues and the Assembly."

Glyn Roberts, chief executive of Retail NI, hailed the proposals as a "significant step" saying: "We welcome plans to improve small business rates relief,

phase out the vacant property rate, and introduce an accelerator scheme to support businesses seeking to scale up.

"However, our members continue to pay the highest business rates in the UK and a fundamental review of the entire rating system is urgently required."

Colin Neill, chief executive of Hospitality Ulster, added: "These are small but positive steps in the right direction that will provide some breathing room."

'Experimental' plan to pedestrianise city street

MICHAEL KENWOOD
Local Democracy Reporter

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has revealed plans regarding the upcoming pedestrianisation of one of Belfast city centre's most popular streets.

After years of pressure on Stormont, the department informed Belfast Council it will go ahead with "experimental" plans for the pedestrianisation of Hill Street, in the Cathedral Quarter, as well as the introduction of a one-way traffic system along Gordon Street.

Hill Street has become the cultural spine of Belfast's night life over the past 20 years, and concerns continue over the potential for accidents as revellers and vehicles side by side pass through the tight cobbled thoroughfare.

In September, the council's planning committee agreed to write to DfI to request information on how the pedestrianisation of Hill Street would be managed, what signage would be in place and why the proposed pedestrianisation was not running from Talbot Street.

DfI replied in a letter revealed at the November planning committee: "The management of the scheme, once implemented, will be a collective partnership between (the department and the PSNI) to ensure compliance with the pe-

destrianisation. There will be a variety of signs associated with the project. The signage and layout plans are available for viewing on the department's consultation website.

The section of Hill Street which runs from Talbot Street to Gordon Street is not part of the proposed pedestrianisation zone due to access requirements being needed for the car parks within this length of Hill Street and in Gordon Street."

On the department consultation webpage, it says the scheme will prohibit all vehicles from using Hill Street for a distance of 120 metres from its junction with Gordon Street to its junction with Waring Street.

Vehicles are exempted from this prohibition in certain circumstances, including to permit loading and unloading of goods between 6am and 12 noon to premises along the affected length of road.

It also introduces a one-way system on Gordon Street, from its junction with Hill Street to Dunbar Street in an easterly direction.

The prohibition will not apply to a disabled person's vehicle between the hours of 12 noon and 3pm, Monday to Friday, or a permitted taxi between those hours.

THE LATEST NEWS AND THE BEST ANALYSIS. SUBSCRIBE TO PRINT & ONLINE TO GET THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS.



Belfast Harbour

Help us Plan the Next 25 Years



Our Draft 2050 Masterplan is now ready for you to have your say. Find out more and take part at: belfast-harbour.co.uk/masterplan



EA hits out at union over 'factually incorrect' Access NI checks claim

Unite the Union claimed that hundreds of support staff had been employed at SEN schools without adequate safeguarding

CONOR COYLE
c.coyle@irishtnews.com

THE Education Authority has accused a trade union of risking the spread of "unfounded fear" among parents after releasing "factually inaccurate" information about the number of staff working in SEN schools without the required Access NI checks.

Unite the Union claimed on Monday that data from the EA had shown 353 school support staff had been employed at special needs schools without the background checks.

However, data from the Freedom of Information request it submitted referred to staff in all schools, rather than just those in the SEN sector.

The accurate number of staff employed by SEN schools without the required vetting checks is 14.

"The claims made by Unite the Union about temporary education workers and safeguarding checks are factually inaccurate," an EA

spokesperson said.

"The figures recently issued to the union in response to their FoI request related to temporary school support staff across the whole education system.

"Unite the Union wrongly claimed that the total relates solely to special school support staff. At best, this represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the information.

"Whatever the reason for this misinterpretation, it risks spreading unfounded fear among parents."

A Unite spokesperson acknowledged that it had mistaken figures for all schools with those in the SEN sector.

However, the union says the fact there are hundreds of support staff in schools without the required checks still "poses an obvious concern for child safety".

"Unite makes no apology for highlighting the continuing over-reliance on temporary engagement forms.

"This practice is undermining the status of school



Access NI checks for 353 support staff in special educational needs (SEN) schools remain "in progress"

support workers and poses an obvious concern for child safety." The union had expressed concern over potential child safety issues after the figures released by the EA showed more than 350 school support workers were employed without Access NI checks.

An FoI response said

checks for 353 support staff were "in progress" at schools in the north but not yet completed.

2,590 support staff at

schools have completed Access NI checks, according to the data from the department.

School support staff refers to those employed by schools outside of teaching positions, the majority of which according to the department are classroom assistants. The figures also include cleaners, administrative staff and catering staff.

Thousands of the jobs are filled via Temporary Engagement Forms, allowing the EA or individual schools to employ staff not on a long-term contract.

The Irish News reported earlier this year that a classroom assistant had been working in a school for two-and-a-half years without Access NI clearance, which provides a basic police background check and are required by all staff working in schools before they begin employment.

The EA says prime responsibility for safeguarding within a school sits with the school leader, while principals must carry out a risk assessment and ensure that non-vetted staff are supervised by someone who is in regulated activity.

Kieran Ellison, Unite Regional officer, said the use of temporary contracts warrants intervention from Education minister Paul Givan.

"Unite has written to the education minister demanding he immediately end this safety risk to children by halting the widespread abuse of temporary engagement forms," Mr Ellison said.

"Children are being left vulnerable while a workforce responsible for the well-being and safety of children is denied respect and not even properly employed."

Police increase patrols after park sexual assault

PAUL AINSWORTH
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POLICE patrols are set to increase in Lurgan after a woman was sexually assaulted while getting into her vehicle.

The incident was reported as occurring in the Windsor Avenue area of Lurgan yesterday morning, close to the gates of Lurgan Park.

A PSNI spokesperson said: "Police are investigating a report of a sexual assault in the Windsor Avenue area of Lurgan this morning, Tuesday 18th November.

"Shortly before 8am, it was reported that a woman was getting into her car when an unknown male assaulted her.

"The woman began to hit and kick the man, and he ran off in the direction of Castle Lane," a PSNI spokesperson said.

"He was described as being aged in his late 20s to early 30s, of slim build, with a mole on the side of his face.



Lurgan Park, where a woman was sexually assaulted yesterday

"He was dressed in a black puffer jacket, dark coloured bottoms, and black and red trainers."

The spokesperson added: "Enquiries are ongoing, and police would appeal to anyone who may be able to assist to contact them via 101, and quote reference number 178 of 18/11/25."

The victim's mother made a post on social media yesterday to serve as "a warning to all women and girls in Lurgan".

She said her daughter had

been returning from walking her dogs when the attack happened.

"She was getting in to her car at the Windsor Avenue gates when he got into the passenger side and assaulted her," the mother said.

She added: "We're worried that he might do this or something worse again. Please be careful this was in broad daylight when there were people about."

Lurgan DUP councillor Peter Haire said he was "relieved" the victim managed to get away from the man, but added: "It is worrying that there is no CCTV coverage in this area."

"Back in July, I raised an AOB calling for CCTV to be installed in Lurgan Park, and this incident highlights the need for serious consideration of enhanced safety measures.

"I have spoken with the PSNI, who have confirmed they are investigating the alleged incident and will be increasing patrols in the area."



Belfast Harbour

Help us Plan the Next 25 Years



Our Draft 2050 Masterplan is now ready for you to have your say. Find out more and take part at: belfast-harbour.co.uk/masterplan

13. Appendix 4 – Photos from exhibition & events



Permanent Exhibition hosted in Belfast Harbour Commissioner Offices



Black Mountain Shared Space - 4/12/25



Black Mountain Shared Space - 4/12/25



Skainos Centre - 2/12/25



Skainos Centre - 2/12/25



Girdwood Community Hub - 27/11/25



Girdwood Community Hub - 27/11/25



Agape Centre - 25/11/25



Agape Centre - 25/11/25



Members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee - 22/01/26



DAERA Minister Andrew Muir and Permanent Secretary, Katrina Godfrey – 04/03/26



John Finucane MP – 17/02/26

