



Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation Report and Summary

April 2026





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Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	8
Consultation	9
Purpose of this Report	10
Background	11
Summary of Responses	13
Other feedback and comments:	33
Key Findings	34
What Next?	39
Annex A – Stakeholder Engagement	42
Annex B – Focus Group Attendees	43
Annex C – List of Respondents	44
Annex D – Summary of Consultation Questions	46

Executive Summary

Purpose and Process

This summary presents the key findings from the public consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places, led by the Department for Communities (DfC) with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The consultation ran for 12 weeks (23 June–21 September 2025) and received 125 responses (63 individuals; 62 organisations).

Key Findings

- Direction of travel supported: 87% agreed or strongly agreed with the vision and 88% agreed or strongly agreed with the principles. Respondents asked that the vision explicitly reference positive outcomes and support for communities, and that the principles strengthen equity, inclusion and local distinctiveness.
- Long term approach welcomed: 79% supported a 10 year programme with a mid point review, while seeking clarity on funding scale, distribution, and the stewardship of delivered assets.
- Genuine placemaking expected: 90% supported a placemaking process. 68% supported the Living High Streets Craft Kit as one helpful option but urged flexibility and recognition of robust existing plans to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue.

What people want the programme to deliver

Place

- Public realm: 92% supported investment in clean, safe, accessible and green streets and spaces, with realistic maintenance plans and funding for ongoing upkeep.
- Vacancy and dereliction: 95% supported bringing vacant and derelict properties back into use (including upper floors), with meanwhile uses, incentives for landlords and enforcement alignment where appropriate. Heritage sensitive reuse was highlighted repeatedly.
- Productive local economies: 89% supported this objective, emphasising community wealth building, support for local entrepreneurs (especially in rural areas), and social value alongside economic metrics.

People

- Safety and inclusion: 95% supported improved safety in centres; lighting, active uses, inclusive design and attention to perceptions of safety (notably for women and girls and disabled people, including blind and partially sighted people).

- Active and sustainable infrastructure: 95% supported walking and cycling networks, greenways, seating and people-centred spaces, integrated with health and climate goals.
- Reducing car dominance: 72% supported the ambition overall, but with a clear urban-rural divergence. Rural respondents stressed limited public transport and transport poverty, calling for staged approaches, better connectivity and appropriate parking to be considered.

Planet

- Green and nature-based solutions: 93% supported creating or enhancing green spaces and 92% supported climate resilient infrastructure, with emphasis on long term stewardship. Respondents from rural areas noted safe access to green space as being just as important as new provision.
- Energy efficient reuse: 94% supported improving energy performance when bringing buildings back into use, while noting retrofit costs, technical constraints in traditional buildings, and the need for proportionate incentives.

What consultees want us to prioritise

Funding and financial planning

- Treat regeneration as a long term strategic priority with transparent, multi year funding and a published allocation approach.
- Build in revenue as well as capital: funded pre development (diagnostics, engagement, design, business planning)

and whole life stewardship (maintenance/ operations) alongside capital works.

- Ensure proportionate delivery: clearer roles across departments, streamlined reporting, flexibility across years, and clarity on in advance vs in arrears payments to manage cashflow.
- If using competitive pots, design them fairly: staged Expression of Interest before full bid processes and equity weighting to reflect need (e.g., deprivation, rural disadvantage, historic under investment).
- Rural respondents emphasised ring fencing or weighting for rural settlements, support for clustering of small settlements, and prioritisation of access to services which is viewed as a structural barrier. They asked that funding models reflect transport poverty, sparse geographies and smaller delivery capacity without making participation onerous.

Heritage and distinctiveness

- Embed distinctiveness and heritage in the vision/principles, selection criteria and delivery tools.
- Adopt a reuse first approach to vacancy and dereliction, including upper floor living and meanwhile uses, with heritage sensitive standards.
- Provide for conservation led regeneration and pre development activity (surveys, options, design, viability) and support skills in traditional construction and maintenance.

- Apply a practical “heritage lens” within placemaking so plans show how local character shapes design and delivery, while balancing energy performance with significance.

Partnerships and delivery

- Past cross departmental schemes were valued for tangible results, but respondents asked for clearer roles, consistent engagement across departments, and proportionate reporting.
- Stakeholders want participation from health bodies, utilities, housing partners, transport providers, education, business groups (including Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) / Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs)), and environmental and cultural organisations.

Centre First for public services

- 80% supported Centre First in principle, provided it has due regard to the needs of people living in rural areas, supported by transport/ digital/ housing, and framed within a broader regeneration strategy that reuses existing buildings and supports inclusive town centre living.

How we will respond

1. Refine Vision and Principles

We will reference positive outcomes and support for communities, and embed equity, inclusion and distinctiveness/ heritage alongside the existing strategic, sustainable, integrated and participative principles.

2. Flexible placemaking

We will adopt/ adapt existing place plans where appropriate and enable a choice of placemaking toolkits, with clear guidance and proportionate facilitation to support meaningful participation.

3. Funding and financial planning

We will publish the allocation approach, provide guidance on key aspects of the programme including project development and long-term costs, and design staged competitive funds with proportionate evidence requirements.

4. Vacancy, safety and social value

Guidance will detail tools to tackle vacancy and recognise social value and wellbeing alongside economic metrics in assessing impact.

5. Climate action and retrofit

We will support fabric first retrofit of existing buildings, balancing energy performance with refurbishment.

6. Strengthen partnerships and governance

We will clarify departmental roles, streamline reporting, and set out a practical model to coordinate delivery. We will consider the potential role of health, utilities, housing and transport partners in projects.

7. Mid point review and monitoring

A mid point review will assess delivery and impact. We will develop proportionate monitoring and public reporting to demonstrate outcomes over the ten year period.

Next steps

Consultation feedback will be integrated into the business case and programme design ahead of seeking Ministerial and Executive approval for launch in 2026/27. We will publish further detail on the funding model, prioritisation, and delivery arrangements, including the approach to heritage, pre development and guidance.

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the responses to the public consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places between 23 June 2025 and 21 September 2025. The consultation was jointly authorised by the Minister for Communities, the Minister for Infrastructure and the Minister for Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs. DfC led on the consultation exercise and stakeholder engagement events.

The public consultation invited insight and perspectives on the draft proposals and approach. The three departments are grateful to respondents for the time taken to reflect upon the questions and welcome

the contributions made. The results of the consultation have been analysed and collated in this document and will inform the final proposals for Shaping Sustainable Places. This summary report will be published on the DfC website.

It is intended to table a final set of proposals for Shaping Sustainable Places for Ministerial and Executive Committee consideration during spring 2026. For further enquiries on this report or Shaping Sustainable Places please contact: **ssp@communities-ni.gov.uk**

Consultation

Consultation Process and Methodology

The public consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places was launched on 23 June 2025. Initially open for comment for 8 weeks, it was requested that this be extended to 12 weeks, closing on the 21 September 2025. The consultation was hosted on the Citizen Space platform with access via the Department's website. Citizen Space is the Northern Ireland Civil Service's recommended online consultation and survey tool. Submissions were also sent by email.

The consultation consisted of a series of questions on the proposed vision, principles, aims, objectives, placemaking approach, funding and prioritisation for a Shaping Sustainable Places programme. It also asked questions about the potential for a centre-first approach to locating public sector services.

Engagement

The public consultation followed a pre-consultation stakeholder engagement period in winter 2024 and spring 2025. The perspectives from the pre-consultation process helped inform the content and shape of the proposals consulted upon. Organisations engaged with by the Shaping Sustainable Places team in the pre-consultation phase are listed at Annex A.

As part of the consultation process, engagement events were held including in-person and online focus groups. These were attended by a range of organisations and stakeholders which are outlined at Annex B. The information and feedback received at these sessions was very helpful in clarifying thinking about regeneration and will make a significant contribution to the shaping of the final programme.

Purpose of this Report

This report sets out summary findings for each of the 37 consultation questions. It does not list all comments received. Digital tools were used to support quality assurance during drafting and editing. All content has been reviewed, verified and approved by officials.

Officials have endeavoured to ensure contributions are summarised without judgement or interpretation. In preparing this report, we have identified common themes and issues raised in response to each question; considering those in support, as well as those that disagreed.

A total of 125 responses were received as part of the consultation. Of these, 96 were submitted through the online survey — 33 from organisations and 63 from private

individuals. An additional 29 responses were received via email, with all 29 submitted by organisations. A list of the 62 Organisations who formally responded to the consultation via citizen space or to the mailbox can be found at **Annex C**.

The full text of the consultation questionnaire is at Annex D.

This report was prepared by DfC officials as lead department for the SSP programme and shared with DfI and DAERA officials for consideration in advance of publication. It should be noted that the views expressed in this report are representative of the responses received and are not necessarily shared by the Departments.

Background

The existing DfC Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework defines regeneration as “activities that reverse economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do this without the support of government.” Shaping Sustainable Places proposes to build on this framework.

Placemaking is impacted both directly and incidentally by many policies and actions across government, the private sector, the community and voluntary sector and by individuals. Each place is different, has different characteristics, needs and strengths that are understood best by the people who live in and use that place.

Our approach in developing Shaping Sustainable Places has been to reflect and build on the three sponsoring departments’ organisational goals, existing arrangements and business needs, and to combine this with emerging best practice around the role of communities in placemaking and regeneration.

DfC’s current programme of urban regeneration interventions is delivered in the 41 urban towns and cities across Northern Ireland. Until 2020, the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, administered the European Union Rural Development Programme.

In leading the delivery of the Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme and the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme, DfC stepped outside of its core policy focus on urban settlements. This was enabled by working in partnership with the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for Infrastructure.

An additional 24 intermediate settlements and 69 villages, covering settlements with populations of over 1,000 and up to 4,999 people were eligible for funding through the two partnership programmes. The programmes also delivered active and sustainable travel interventions and enablers.

Policy Context

Shaping Sustainable Places will be delivered within the context of regional planning policy and local councils’ Local Development Plans, which councils are preparing for their areas. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas, and the Programme for Government commits to the continued implementation of a planning improvement programme.

Community Planning Partnerships set long-term objectives for social, economic, and environmental well-being through Community Plans. Plans outline shared visions and

collaborative actions across public services (education, health, housing, environment, arts, culture). Local council interventions under Shaping Sustainable Places will align with and complement Community Plans.

The Programme for Government Framework sets out three key missions related to People, the Planet and Prosperity. These missions are underpinned by a number of key priorities which Shaping Sustainable Places will support including growing a competitive and sustainable economy, providing social, affordable and sustainable housing, developing safer communities, and transformative approaches to delivering public services.

Although not formally adopted by the Executive Committee, Shaping Sustainable Places could deliver on elements of recommendations in the High Street Taskforce Report including the use of the Living High Streets Craft Kit (Recommendation 2) and the development of an investment programme for nature-based solutions and cleaner, greener public realm and sustainable transport (Recommendation 5).

Initial pilots have reported that the Living High Streets Craft Kit approach requires an intensive period of engagement, resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership. There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative **website**.

Other government policies that have impacted on the development of Shaping Sustainable Places, include Vital and Viable, Living Places Urban Stewardship and Design Guide, the Regional Development Strategy, Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2022, the Housing Supply Strategy and the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Framework.

We have also sought to incorporate Adapting to Climate Change – Progress in Northern Ireland (DAERA), the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework (TEO), Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation – A New Framework (DAERA), the draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland (DAERA), the Sub-Regional Economic Plan 2024 (DfE), Planning for the Future of Transport – Time for Change (DfI), Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns (DfC) and the emerging Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041 (DAERA).

Summary of Responses

Question 1: Who are you?

For this question, respondents were asked if they were answering as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. A full list of organisations who responded can be found at Annex B.

Individual	63
Organisation	62
Total	125

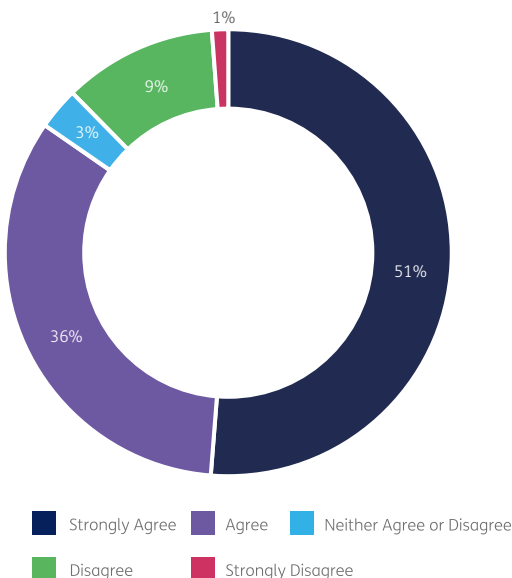
Vision

Our vision is:

To work with communities to address local challenges through funding projects that deliver sustainable, people-centred places providing economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?

There were 116 responses, of which 87% agreed or strongly agreed with the vision.



Question 3: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 26 organisations and 11 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

There is broad agreement with the vision’s intent to work with communities for sustainable, people-centred outcomes.

Some respondents suggested that the word “positive” should be included in the vision statement in reference to outcomes and that as well as “work with communities”, the words “and support” should be added.

Councils generally supported the vision but emphasised the need for early engagement, alignment with local plans, and recognition of councils’ delivery role.

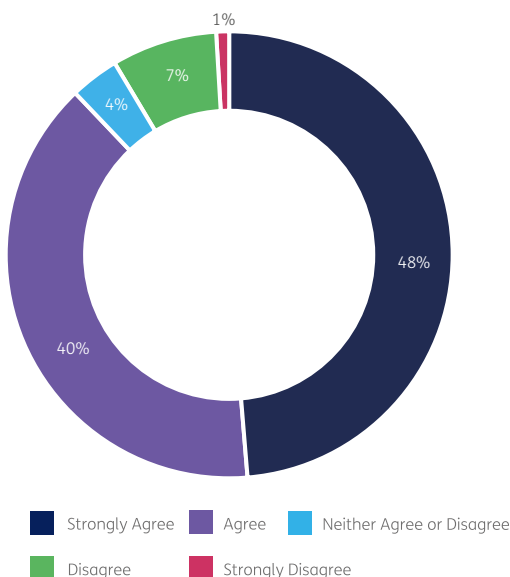
Individual respondents expressed skepticism about whether council/government departments fully engage with and listen to communities and wanted to highlight how important community engagement would be to the success of any project.

Principles

Strategic	Ensure interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places focus on long-term impact rather than short-term fixes.
Sustainable	Respond to the changing needs of places by delivering interventions that address the economic, social and environmental sustainability of a place.
Integrated	Building partnerships, collaboration across and outside government to deliver the best possible interventions.
Participative	Empowering people and communities to be part of the regeneration of their place.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?

There were 114 responses, of which 88% agreed or strongly agreed with the principles.



Question 5: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places.

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 27 organisations and 8 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Strategic – Respondents feel that core funding is essential for long term delivery, and there is support for long term outcomes over temporary fixes. Although, some responses add that there are times when short term interventions are necessary.

Sustainable – There is broad support that sustainability should be to the forefront of all projects. Recommendations include climate resilience and reuse of heritage assets. Some respondents feel that use of the word “interventions” might encourage ‘piecemeal’ projects rather than long-term change.

Integrated – Collaboration is seen as essential. There is a desire for clearer alignment with regional strategies like the ‘People and Place Review’ and ‘Community Planning’.

Participative – Suggestions include replacing “empowering” with “enabling” or “supporting” communities to lead regeneration. There is general support among

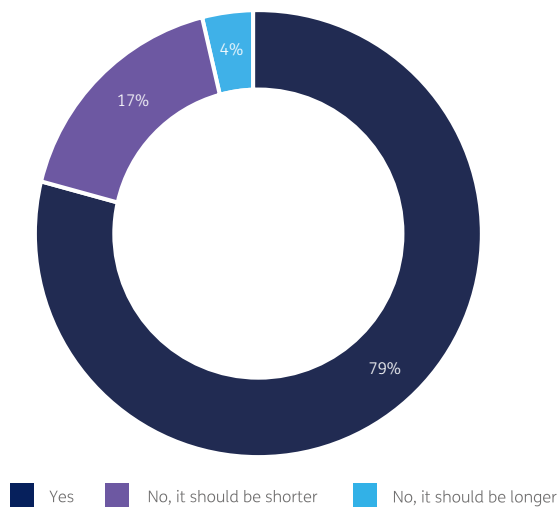
both community and voluntary sector organisations and individual respondents that direct community engagement is essential. Councils state, however, while they recognise that co-design is important, there can be difficulties with an overly participative model. Concerns are also raised about community capacity and whether they are sufficiently resourced to allow effective engagement in the process.

‘Heritage’ is another issue that is raised within the feedback on the vision and principles. Several respondents highlight that the importance of “distinctiveness” and heritage-led regeneration is not reflected in the vision or principles.

Timeframe

Question 6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?

There were 111 responses, with 79% agreeing with the proposed timeframe.



Question 7: If you did not select ‘yes’ above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?

There were 111 responses, with 79% agreeing with the proposed timeframe.

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 27 organisations and 18 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

The proposed timeframe of 10 years with a midpoint review is generally supported. The midpoint review is seen as essential to allow parties involved to respond to evolving needs and local contexts.

Although a number of regeneration programmes have been in operation over a significant timescale it is acknowledged that an advanced commitment to a long-term funding programme is a welcome addition to existing programmes. Respondents recognise that projects that have real long-term impacts take time to design and deliver.

It is also noted however, that there are “shovel-ready” projects that await funding to get started and that there should be flexibility to include these.

Heritage groups advise that long-term investment is particularly important to heritage-led regeneration.

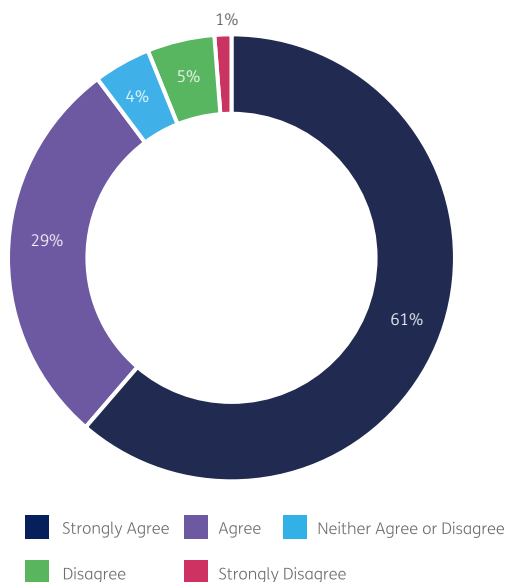
One organisation suggests that if the impact of the first 10-year period is viewed as positive, the programme should run for another 10 years, with the aim of reviewing the impact of the most beneficial local projects which could be replicated in other communities.

Other comments include some concerns about the funding over the 10-year timeframe being inadequate and concerns as to how the funding will be distributed across council areas.

Placemaking

Question 8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?

There were 111 responses, of which 90% agree or strongly agree.



Question 9: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 30 organisations and 11 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

There is strong support for using a placemaking process. Respondents recognise that if done right, it can foster community ownership, local pride and sustainable development. However, many stress that placemaking must be genuinely community-led, not just a top-down process driven by councils or government departments.

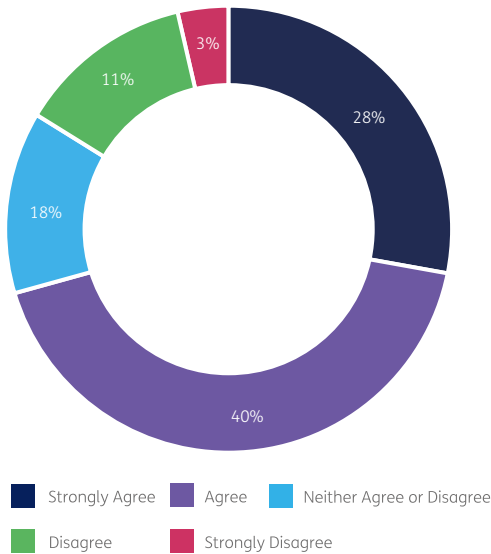
Among community and voluntary sector organisations there is widespread support that for placemaking to be effective, direct community engagement is vital but previous experience has demonstrated that this is not always done well. Respondents call for inclusive, meaningful engagement with diverse groups.

Many responses highlight the need for adequate funding and support for community and voluntary sector organisations to enable effective placemaking. Flexibility, long-term support and clear guidance from departments is seen as essential.

Councils acknowledge that placemaking can ensure community buy-in but have concerns with it being exclusively community led. This approach would be heavily dependent on continued community representation, resourcing capability, skills and experience.

Question 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?

There were 111 responses, of which 68% agree or strongly agree.



Question 11: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 32 organisations and 13 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

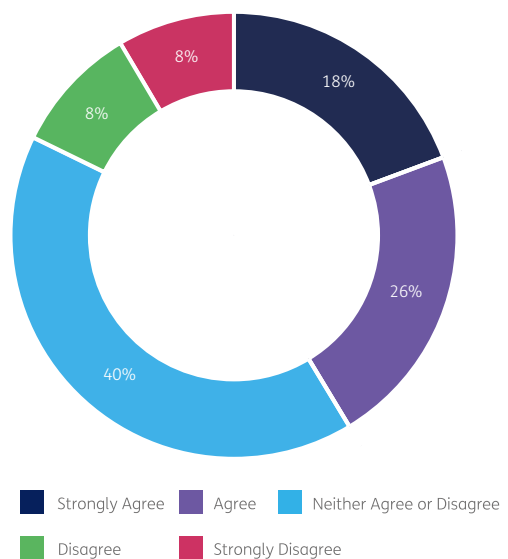
Feedback indicates that the Living High Streets Craft Kit is a good approach, but several councils and organisations argue that a one-size-fits-all approach like the Living High Streets Craft Kit may not suit all areas. It is seen as process-heavy, resource intensive and may not lead to community empowerment. Respondents commented that planning frameworks need to be flexible, not just box-ticking exercises to comply with procedural steps.

Some councils note that intensive placemaking work has already been undertaken and requiring local councils to use the Living High Streets Craft Kit for Shaping Sustainable Places would be a duplication, which they may not have capacity for.

A suggestion is made that it would be beneficial to hear from any stakeholders who have used the Craft Kit, on their experience and how effective it was in terms of engagement, preparation and delivery which will be considered.

Question 12: If your local council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?

There were 109 responses, of which 43% agree or strongly agree. 40% neither agreed nor disagreed.



Q12 Additional comments on plans and placemaking.

A free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 14 organisations gave input to this. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

There was a broad view that requiring new plans where robust ones already exist could lead to duplication, consultation fatigue and delays.

Councils advocate for a flexible approach that allows refinement of existing plans rather than replacement of current plans.

Further comments include the need for capacity and skills within local communities to be developed if there is to be true community involvement in placemaking. It is highlighted that the success of any placemaking project relies on communities feeling like they have been included, and this can only be achieved by providing further support for community and voluntary sector organisations.

Question 13: If your local council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or intervention for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.

Option	Total	Individual	Organisation
Online consultation and promotion	83	47	36
Townhall style meeting	75	46	29
Focus group of residents	68	36	32
Leaflet campaign to invite survey response	66	39	27
Drop-in clinic	66	37	29
Newspaper advertisement and promotion	52	29	23
Other	29	9	20
I would not want to be consulted	0	0	0

The most preferred method was online consultation and promotion, selected by 83 respondents suggesting that digital channels are seen as convenient and effective for reaching residents.

Traditional in-person engagement also scored strongly. Townhall style meetings were selected by 75 respondents, and focus groups of residents by 68 respondents, indicating that many people still value opportunities for face-to-face discussion and deliberation.

Methods involving direct outreach, such as leaflet campaigns and drop-in clinics, both received 66 selections, showing continued support for practical, easy-to-access formats.

Newspaper advertisements and promotion, while less popular, still received 52 selections, reflecting a continued, if reduced, role for print media.

0 respondents indicated that they would not want to be consulted, suggesting strong overall willingness among the community to engage with local decision-making.

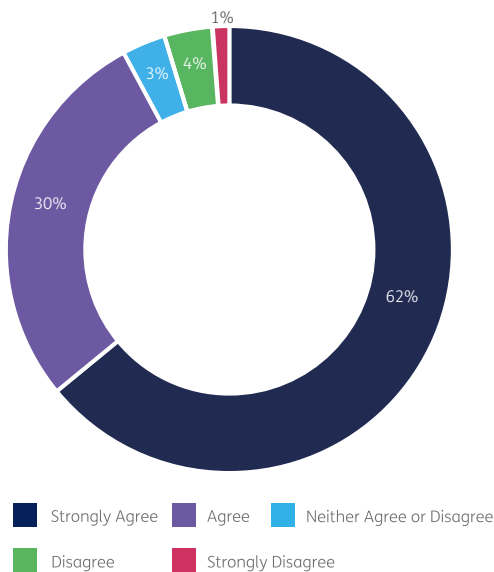
Ambitions and Objectives

Shaping Sustainable Places is focussed on Place, People, Planet and Partnership.

Place

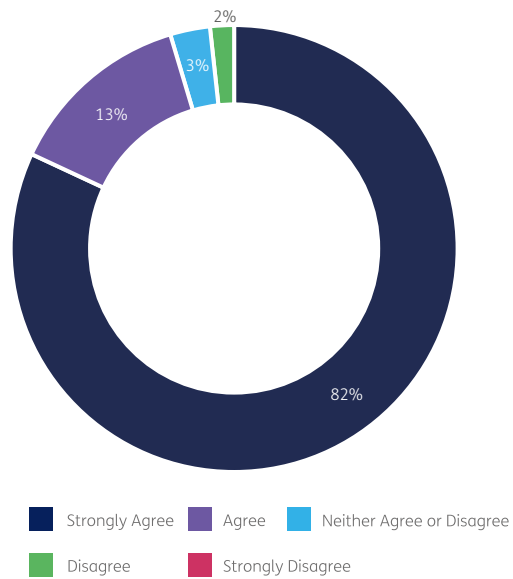
Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?

There were 112 responses to this question with 92% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



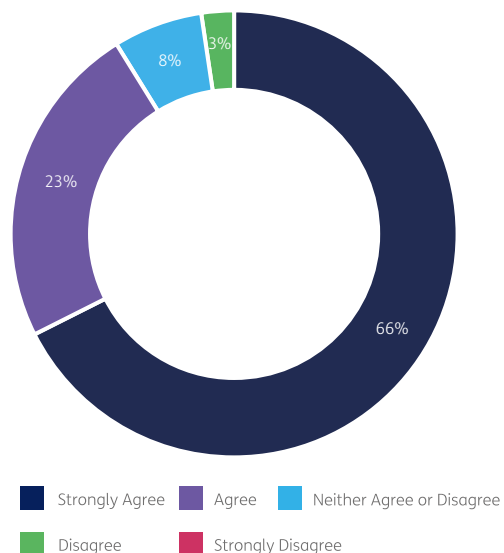
Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?

There were 111 responses to this question with 95% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?

There were 110 responses to this question with 89% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 33 organisations and 10 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Responses indicated widespread support for public realm investment which is viewed as essential for improving town and city centres. There was emphasis on clean, safe, accessible, and well-maintained spaces with greenery, seating, and activity areas. Several councils and forums stressed the need for long-term maintenance and inclusive design.

Respondents indicate that derelict buildings and vacant sites negatively impact perceptions of place, deter investment, and encourage antisocial behaviour. Reuse and refurbishment are viewed as vital for regeneration, housing supply, and heritage preservation. Some suggestions were made including incentivising landlords; meanwhile uses; aligning with the emerging Dilapidation Bill; and promoting schemes like Living Over the Shops and Village Catalyst.

Creating more productive local economies is generally supported but seen as dependent on progress in public realm and vacancy reduction. Positive views are expressed in respect of community-led regeneration (not council-led); support for local entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas; recognition of non-economic productivity (e.g., wellbeing, social

cohesion); and investment in infrastructure, education, and health.

There is general support for housing and town centre living, as benefits include reduced isolation, improved security, and reduced need for greenfield development. Many responses advocate for increasing housing supply via reuse of vacant buildings and also stress the need for supporting infrastructure and living standards.

Heritage-led regeneration is strongly supported in the responses by heritage groups who voice concerns about lack of funding and policy support for historic assets. There is also emphasis on preserving local character and distinctiveness in regeneration efforts.

Some groups indicate that safety is linked to design and surveillance of public spaces and advocate for accessible infrastructure and active travel. “Secured by Design” principles to promote crime prevention were mentioned as a potential focus.

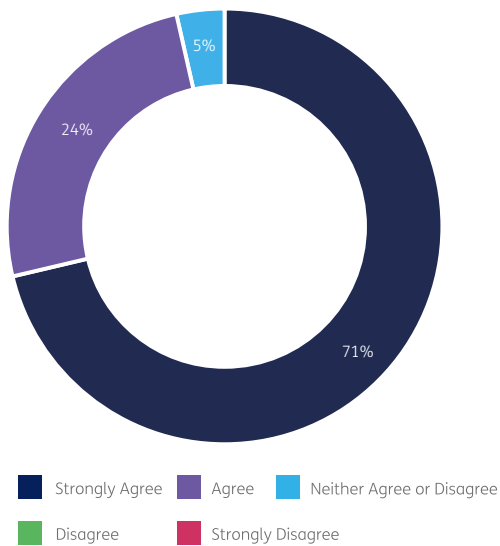
Several organisations argue for regeneration to be driven by communities rather than councils. There is an emphasis on localism, community wealth building, and inclusive planning.

Some individual respondents express concerns over commercialisation driving out small businesses. The responses indicate doubts about the effectiveness of public realm investment without broader systemic change. There has also been some criticism of council planning and rates policies.

People

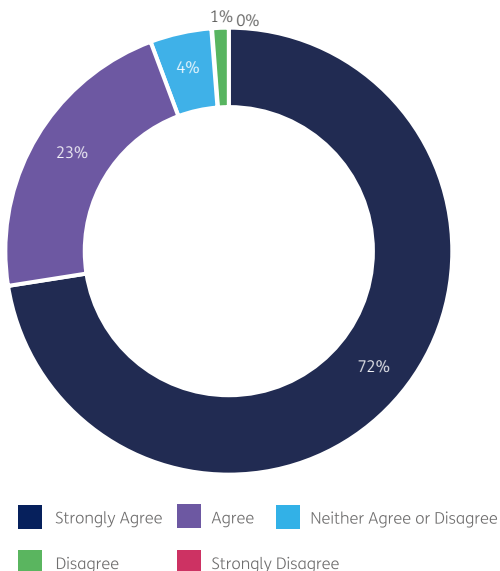
Question 18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?

There were 112 responses to this question with 95% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



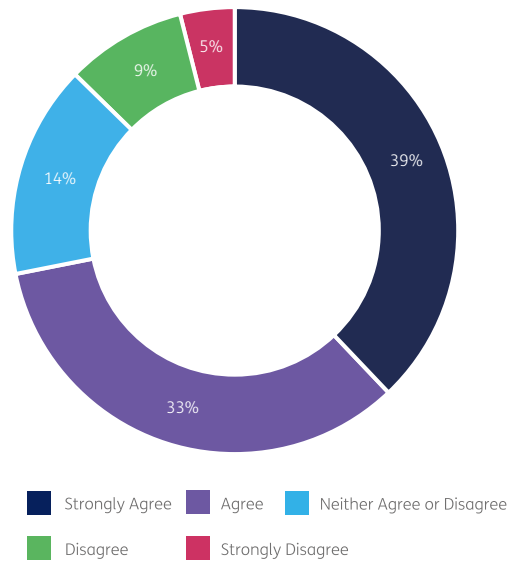
Question 19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focusing on People?

There were 114 responses to this question with 95% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



Question 20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focusing on People?

There were 105 responses to this question with 72% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



Question 21: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 29 organisations and 19 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Responses indicate that safety in public spaces is widely supported as a strategic objective. Respondents state that safety is linked to good lighting, CCTV, clean streets, and active public spaces. Inclusive design should be considered for mobility-impaired individuals and infrastructure must also support blind and partially sighted people.

Perception of safety needs to be factored in, especially for women and girls and night-time travel. Heritage and well-maintained buildings also contribute to a sense of safety. Some responses also highlight the need to address racism and promote inclusive communities.

There is strong support for active and sustainable infrastructure that promotes walking, cycling, green spaces, and public transport. Benefits cited include improved mental and physical health; social cohesion and community engagement; and climate resilience and reduced emissions. Specific suggestions include greenways, benches, public toilets, and flexible-use spaces; Integration with existing strategies (e.g., Belfast Agenda, Active Travel Plans); and the inclusion of low-carbon technologies in buildings (e.g., solar panels, heat pumps).

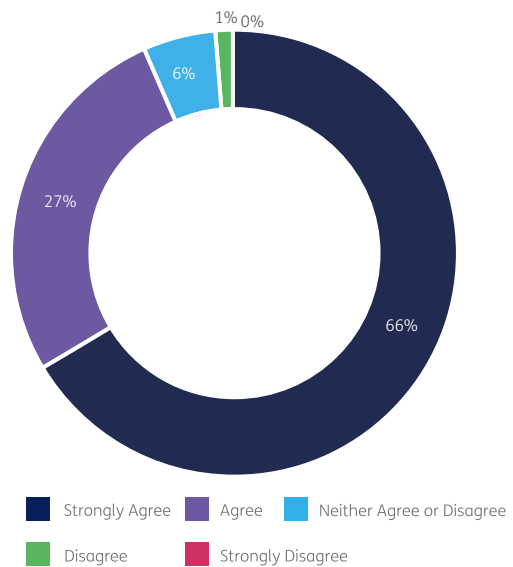
There are mixed views around reducing car dominance. Urban stakeholders generally support reducing car use to improve air quality, safety, and community interaction; meanwhile rural stakeholders express concern due to a number of factors including lack of public transport, long distances to services and high car dependency. Suggestions include out-of-town parking with shuttle services; improved public transport and electric vehicle infrastructure; and consideration for mobility needs and inclusive access.

Those from rural areas express concerns and challenges, emphasising - poor public transport infrastructure; transport poverty and limited accessibility; the need for investment in roads, footpaths, and lighting, and realistic expectations for rural areas where car use is essential.

Planet

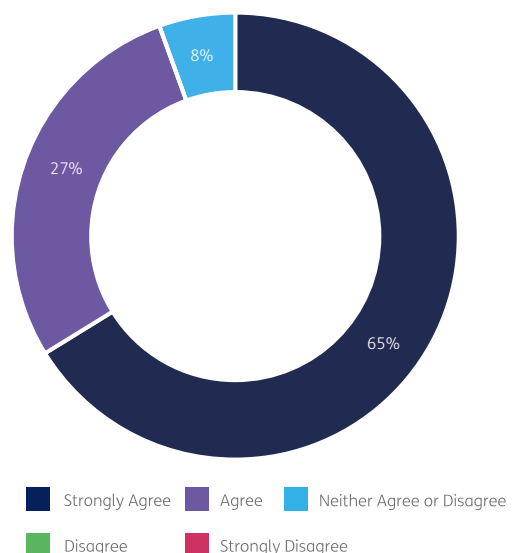
Question 22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focusing on Planet?

There were 112 responses to this question with 93% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



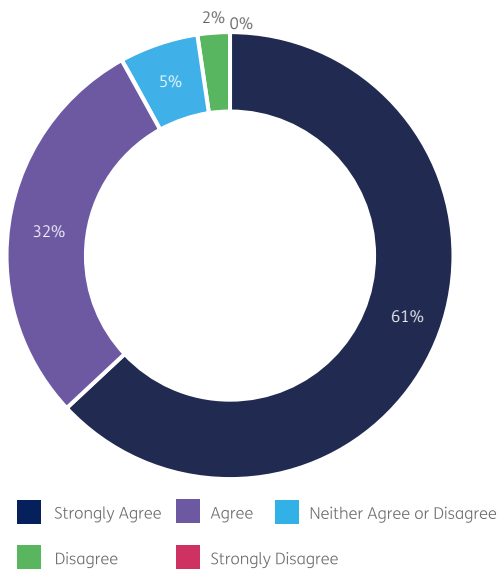
Question 23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focusing on Planet?

There were 113 responses to this question with 92% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



Question 24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focusing on Planet?

There were 111 responses to this question with 94% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



Question 25: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 32 organisations and 8 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Many responses strongly support the creation, enhancement, and expansion of green spaces as essential for climate adaptation, biodiversity, and public wellbeing. Some benefits were highlighted which included improved mental and physical health; managing climate impacts like flooding and heatwaves; promotion of active lifestyles and

social cohesion; and enhancement of urban attractiveness and regeneration.

Respondents noted that considerations should be made in the design and planning process such as, integration with infrastructure (e.g., Sustainable Urban Drainage, active travel routes); long-term funding and maintenance; and community co-design and stewardship. There were also specific rural concerns about access to green spaces rather than creation. Responses also portrayed that rural communities feel underserved in terms of access to green spaces and infrastructure resilience and that much of the planning and language is Urban-centric.

There is widespread agreement among responses that buildings brought back into use should be more energy efficient. Reusing existing buildings is seen as more sustainable due to the embodied energy already present. The prioritisation of retrofitting and refurbishment over new builds, is seen as essential – although with this approach challenges may arise such as, high costs which may deter investment; heritage restrictions limiting interventions; lack of incentives and funding support; technical difficulties in retrofitting historic buildings.

Respondents suggested the introduction of grants and incentives to support energy upgrades with potential to consider carbon benefits beyond energy efficiency and include climate assessments and action plans in regeneration projects. Several responses reference Storm Eowyn and its effects, especially in rural areas, highlighting the need for climate-resilient infrastructure and

emergency contingency planning. Active travel infrastructure is emphasised, but concerns are raised about public transport disruptions due to extreme weather.

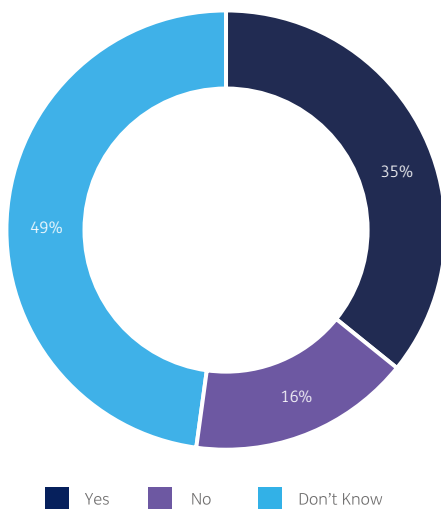
Some responses call for stronger integration of climate goals into council strategies and warn against “greenwashing” and superficial commitments.

Partnership

The public consultation Document highlighted the previous collaboration of the three departments along with councils, on the Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme and the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme.

Question 26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?

There were 110 responses to this question. 35% stated ‘yes’, 16% stated ‘no’ and almost half (49%) stated they ‘don’t know’.



Question 27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with local councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 39 organisations and 26 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

While many respondents acknowledged the benefits of cross-departmental collaboration (particularly between DfC, DfI, and DAERA), others expressed concerns about lack of engagement, slow processes, and unclear responsibilities.

The Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme and the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme are widely seen as successful in delivering regeneration projects, with the latter having specific focus on small towns and villages. Councils and departments working together led to efficient delivery, shared responsibilities, and tangible outcomes. Improvements such as streetscape enhancements, active travel infrastructure, and revitalised public spaces were appreciated. Some noted that while projects were delivered; there is a lack of ongoing funding for upkeep, leading to deterioration. Long-term funding and maintenance plans are needed to ensure lasting impact.

There were some noted challenges and criticism; several respondents noted that communities were often consulted too late or not at all. In relation to departmental

engagement – DfC was often the main point of contact, while DfI and DAERA were seen as less involved or inconsistent in participation.

Councils noted they faced heavy reporting and funding pressures, with some needing to front-load costs and feel there is a need for resources beyond funding to build capacity.

Smaller settlements (especially those with fewer than 1,000 residents) were often excluded due to rigid eligibility criteria and smaller rural groups struggled with bureaucratic processes and lacked resources for professional bid writing. There were some calls to consider clustering smaller areas to ensure they are not left behind.

The Village Catalyst grant scheme, a collaborative initiative between DfC, DAERA, NIHE and the Architectural Heritage fund, was praised for preserving historic buildings and repurposing them for community use.

Responses recommend early inclusive engagement take place with a range of stakeholders, including community and voluntary sector organisations and non-government organisations. Departments should define clear roles and responsibilities and maintain consistent engagement. Simplified reporting and funding mechanisms would reduce administrative strain.

Question 28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

There were 111 responses to this question. 67% selected yes whilst 33% selected no.

Question 29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 48 organisations and 33 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Government departments and agencies were mentioned multiple times in the response as were local government and councils. NI Water and NI Electricity / NIE Networks were also regularly mentioned. The Public Health Agency, various health trusts and Health and Social Care Organisations were also noted in the responses.

In relation to housing it was suggested the following should be involved - Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE); Housing Associations; Private Developers; and PropertyMark.

In relation to transport it was suggested the following should be involved – Translink; transport authorities; public transport providers; and active travel bodies.

There were numerous responses listed from the community and voluntary sector which include - Community Planning Partnerships; Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships; Peace Plus Partnerships; Area Integrated Partnership Boards; individual community and voluntary sector organisations; Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action; Rural Community Network; Rural Support Networks; faith groups; and local development groups.

Educational organisations were listed as important stakeholders, specifically - local schools (pre and post primary), further and higher education institutions and universities.

In relation to business and economic development sector, the following organisations were mentioned - Chambers of Commerce; local enterprise centres; Business Improvement Districts; Small and Medium Enterprises; Invest NI; and Tourism NI.

Many environmental and heritage organisations were listed including - environmental NGOs; nature-focused NGOs; heritage groups; Architectural Heritage Fund; Belfast Buildings Trust; Inner City Trust; Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust; Maritime Belfast Trust; and Landscape Institute.

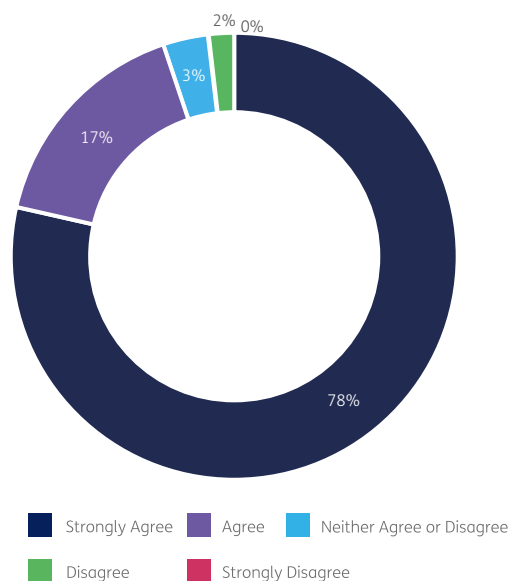
Youth and play organisations were noted including PlayBoard NI. Arts and culture groups were also mentioned, specifically local arts organisations; grass-roots collectives; Free the Night; and cultural organisations.

Some other named groups included the Consumer Council and the Royal Society of Ulster Architects.

Funding and Prioritisation

Question 30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and local councils?

There were 111 responses to this question with 95% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing.



Question 31: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q30 above, please tell us why and / or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 26 organisations and 2 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

There is strong support among most respondents that regeneration of villages, towns, and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, underpinned by secure, multi-year funding.

Responses identified need for legislative and structural reform, that regeneration should be protected by legislation to prevent disruption due to political instability at Stormont. It was suggested that funds should be ring-fenced with public audits and independent oversight to ensure equity and transparency.

Numerous councils and forums showed support for long-term funding, emphasising

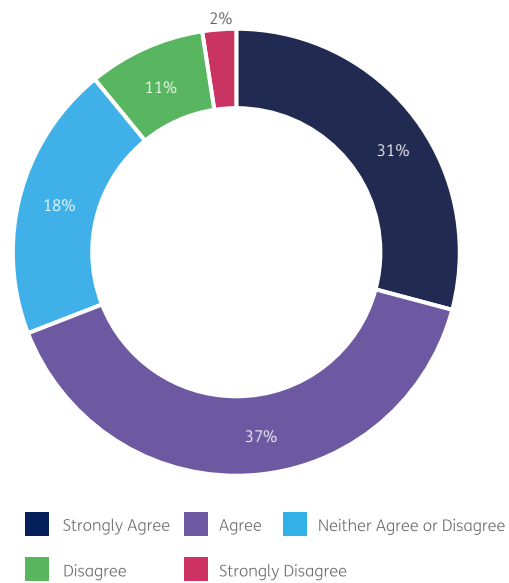
that it allows for proactive planning, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with council strategies. Some stressed that sustained funding is essential for strategic planning and transformative outcomes. Some councils also noted historic under-investment and socio-economic challenges in their regions.

There were some concerns expressed about funding allocation, namely about the lack of clarity on how the proposed £150 million will be distributed and the feasibility of councils meeting the 10% co-funding requirement, whilst some organisations argue that the proposed funding is insufficient to meet regeneration needs. There is a request for clarification on whether the funding is new or repurposed from existing budget. Individual respondents raise concerns about biased funding distribution and call for an unbiased central body to oversee allocations.

Some organisations highlight regeneration’s potential to address poverty, social disadvantage, and economic growth and advocate for regeneration to include green infrastructure, biodiversity, and climate resilience. There was a suggestion of implementing innovative approaches – proposing design competitions to demonstrate best practices in regeneration and attract further funding.

Question 32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?

There were 110 responses to this question with 68% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing.



Question 33: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q32 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 28 organisations and 8 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Many support complementary/competitive funding alongside core allocations, especially for specific challenges like heritage regeneration, climate resilience, or green infrastructure and state that funding should be rolling and flexible, allowing for pilot projects and emerging ideas.

Many respondents worry that competitive funding favours well-resourced councils or groups with strong bid-writing capabilities, potentially disadvantaging rural areas, smaller councils, and less experienced community and voluntary sector organisations. A transparent and proportionate application processes should be adopted, such as the initial completion of short expressions of interest followed by full bids

There is concern that funding may not be distributed based on actual need, with some suggesting that deprivation indices or population-based models should guide allocations. To tackle this, it is suggested that an equity-led design approach be adopted – using equity weighting in scoring (based on deprivation, rural disadvantage etc). Competitive models may entrench existing inequalities, especially if not designed with equity weighting or support mechanisms. Some fear that urban areas will dominate due to better infrastructure and capacity. Ring-fencing funds should be considered for areas with the greatest need or disadvantage

Several responses highlight that competition can undermine collaboration, especially among community and voluntary sector organisations, leading to a “race to the bottom.”

Doubts are raised about whether councils have the resources and expertise to manage competitive funding processes effectively and fairly. Support should be in place for less-resourced groups, such as providing capacity-building and technical assistance to help smaller or rural councils and community and voluntary sector organisations compete fairly.

Some suggestions include the emphasis on community co-design and participatory planning. Core funding should be tied to demonstrable community engagement and participatory standards; and reiterate that funding should align with local plans (e.g., Community Plans, Corporate Plans) and broader strategic goals (e.g., Place, People, Planet) - including metrics for accessibility and inclusive design, especially for disabled people

Other proposals encourage collaborative clusters of places to address shared challenges. Some suggest reforming the rates system to incentivise regeneration (e.g., penalising vacancy, rewarding maintenance). Others propose dedicated funds for cultural or nightlife regeneration.

Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 35 organisations and 27 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Vacancy and Dereliction: the responses indicate widespread concern about vacant buildings, underused upper floors, and derelict shopfronts. There are calls for reuse of heritage assets and Living Over The Shop (LOTS) type schemes with suggestions also including meanwhile use of vacant spaces and grants for pop-up shops.

Public Realm and Infrastructure: respondents advocate for cleaner streets, better maintenance, and improved public spaces. Suggestions include pedestrianisation, street art, lighting, and green infrastructure.

Transport and Connectivity: issues were identified with car dominance, lack of public transport, and unsafe streets. Responses propose active travel routes, cycle lanes, and better pedestrian access.

Youth and Community Facilities: stakeholders feel there is a lack of youth spaces, sports facilities, and inclusive play areas. There is emphasis on community hubs, multi-use spaces, and engagement with young people.

Built Heritage and Cultural Spaces: respondents expressed views supporting the need to protect and reuse listed buildings. Some responses voice their support for nightlife venues, arts and culture, and tourism development.

Digital and Economic Innovation: responses show an interest in digital hubs, remote working spaces, and support for small businesses with the mention of SMART interventions and technological innovation.

Environmental and Climate Resilience: proposals for tree planting, sustainable drainage, and biodiversity projects with a focus on climate adaptation and nature connection.

Some responses stressed that there must be considerations in the Competitive Funding design, in that it should be targeted strategically for high-impact projects; while others caution it may disadvantage weaker or rural areas who lack capacity to compete. There were concerns raised about over-consultation, under-delivery, and lack of trust in councils with a call for fair distribution, especially neglected or underfunded areas.

Respondents emphasise that funding should be aligned with local development plans, community needs, and existing masterplans with suggestions for flexibility to respond to emerging issues (e.g. post-Covid recovery).

Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criteria when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?

For this question, respondents could select up to 5 preferences ranking from 1-5 (1 being top preference) responses are shown in the table below:

Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criteria when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?	1st Pref	2nd Pref	3rd Pref	4th Pref	5th Pref	Total Selection
Access to services for residents of surrounding areas	11	29	9	16	9	74
Levels of vacancy	35	15	11	6	5	72
Potential for people to meet and spend time	13	10	18	11	13	65
Potential to attract visitors and tourism	3	11	9	15	15	53
Addressing economic market failure	5	7	12	8	18	50
Potential to leverage private sector investment	1	6	12	12	14	45
Length of time since previous capital investment in public space	20	3	6	5	6	40
Economic activity data	7	10	9	7	0	33
Other	11	1	2	4	8	26
Road Safety	5	8	3	4	5	25
Potential for increasing pedestrian areas	1	6	7	5	5	24
Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)	2	2	5	5	8	22
Population size	1	0	3	10	3	17
Air quality	2	2	4	2	1	11

Question 35 forms a key element of the consultation, as it invites respondents to set multiple preferences across a wide range of issues, enabling a detailed and nuanced understanding of which criteria stakeholders believe should guide the programme's focus. The question includes a selection of preferred criteria and an additional section to provide narrative information to support and explain preferences.

The most frequently chosen criteria relate strongly to community need, vacancy, and social use of space, with the top criteria selected (all selections):

- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas (74 selections). This was the most popular criterion overall, reflecting widespread concern that many communities lack sufficient access to basic services.
- Levels of vacancy (72 selections). Vacancy is seen as a visible indicator of decline and an early priority for regeneration investment. Many respondents pointed to dereliction as both a practical and symbolic barrier to renewal.
- Potential for people to meet and spend time (65 selections). Respondents

consistently emphasised the social value of towns and villages as places of interaction, community cohesion, and wellbeing.

- Potential to attract visitors and tourism (53 selections). This reflects recognition that distinctiveness and visitor appeal can support local economies when balanced with community needs.
- Addressing economic market failure (50 selections). This criterion was supported as a means of directing investment to areas the market alone will not reach.

Criteria such as population size (17) and air quality (11) were selected less frequently, suggesting that respondents view regeneration primarily through social and place-based lenses, not demographic or environmental metrics. A number of other criteria (26 submissions) stressed housing stress, heritage at risk, safety, climate resilience, and the importance of distinctiveness.

Other feedback demonstrates significant alignment between councils and other respondents regarding the key criteria. The groupings highlight the importance of addressing vacancy and dereliction, which they describe as a clear barrier to economic vitality, civic pride and perceptions of safety. This corresponds directly with the high ranking of vacancy in the preference data. They also share a belief that the programme should prioritise places with poor access to essential services, reflecting the top-ranked criterion in the quantitative results. Respondents across both groups also recognise the value of places where people can meet and spend time,

linking high-quality public spaces to wellbeing, community cohesion and increased footfall.

Councils and other respondents agree that prioritisation must be need-based and locally tailored, avoiding restrictions that might overlook smaller settlements. Both also highlight the role of local identity and heritage, although councils frame this within a strategic heritage-led regeneration approach, while other respondents discuss its role in local pride and sense of place.

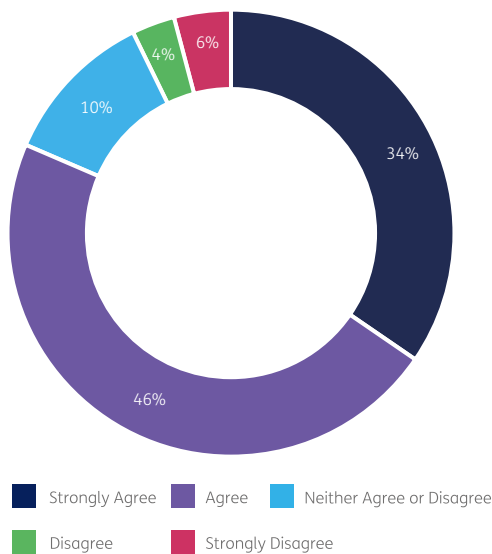
Points of difference relate mostly to emphasis rather than direction. Councils bring a stronger focus on housing stress, statutory responsibilities, and fairness in the distribution of capital investment, advocating for consideration of places that have waited longest for investment. Other respondents place more weight on lived experience, highlighting concerns about safety, night-time access, blue-green infrastructure, and the quality of past engagement processes. Environmental organisations in particular stress the importance of green space deficits and climate resilience, while some individuals express concerns about how consultation processes have operated historically.

Taken together, the insights from both groups complement the quantitative results and provide a fuller understanding of public expectations. They illustrate significant agreement on the core priorities—vacancy, service access and social interaction—while offering additional nuance on housing, heritage, environmental quality and governance.

Centre First for Public Services

Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?

There were 113 responses, of which 80% agreed or strongly agreed.



Q37: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q36 above, please tell us why

For this question, a free form box was provided whereby respondents could share their views. 23 organisations and 11 individuals gave input to this question. A summary analysis of the comments is as follows:

Many respondents endorsed the principle of Centre First, recognising its potential to revitalise urban cores, stimulate economic activity, and enhance accessibility. Locating public services centrally was seen as a way to increase footfall, support local businesses, and encourage investment in public realm

improvements, active travel networks, and nature-based solutions. This approach was also praised for its environmental benefits, such as reducing car dependency and promoting sustainable travel.

However, the enthusiasm was tempered by concerns about equity and access. Several respondents warned that centralisation could inadvertently create “service deserts” in rural or peripheral areas, deepening transport poverty and exacerbating health inequalities. There was a strong call for consideration of rural needs and health impact assessments to ensure that the programme does not disadvantage those living outside urban centres.

Respondents acknowledge that the success of Centre First depends on the availability of supporting infrastructure; highlighting the need for reliable public transport, digital connectivity, affordable housing, and wraparound services such as healthcare, childcare, and education. Without these, the programme risks being aspirational rather than actionable.

Importantly, many contributors urged that Centre First be framed not merely as a relocation strategy but as part of a broader regeneration vision. Suggestions included reusing historic buildings, supporting cultural and creative hubs, and enabling community-led development through asset transfer and flexible leasing. There was a desire to see town centres become vibrant, inclusive spaces that foster social cohesion and community identity.

Other feedback and comments:

Many organisations submitted a response to the consultation via email whereby individual answers to questions were not provided. Instead, a summary of their views and feedback on the proposed programme was provided. These have been collectively summarised below:

The responses in this section broadly welcome the ambition to create sustainable, people-focused places through collaboration and long-term regeneration. There is strong support for improving public spaces, including better footpaths, streetscapes, lighting, signage, and green areas, alongside infrastructure that is resilient to climate change. Many responses emphasise that regeneration should not be a top-down process but one that involves communities, builds trust, and prioritises equality, affordability, and inclusion. Concerns were raised about avoiding gentrification and ensuring legally enforceable commitments to protect vulnerable groups.

A recurring theme is the need to embed heritage, arts, culture, and skills at the heart of regeneration rather than treating them as optional extras. Heritage-led approaches are seen as vital for creating distinctive, meaningful places that foster identity,

confidence, and wellbeing. Several responses call for clear definitions of sustainable places, robust monitoring frameworks, and annual reporting to demonstrate impact. There is also a strong emphasis on aligning regeneration with environmental goals, particularly through energy efficiency, low-carbon heating, and nature-based solutions that enhance health, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

Flexibility in funding and long-term investment are highlighted as essential to avoid quick fixes and ensure councils can lead delivery effectively. Rural perspectives stress the importance of tailored models, ring-fenced funding, and support for weaker capacity groups, alongside transport and digital connectivity. Other priorities include supporting independent retail, incentivising tourism hubs, and fostering cross-departmental coordination to avoid duplication and maximise impact. Overall, respondents urge that regeneration must move beyond isolated projects to become a systemic approach that integrates heritage, sustainability, and community empowerment as core principles.

Key Findings

Support for the programme

There is strong, broad based support for Shaping Sustainable Places. A clear majority endorsed the programme's direction of travel, with 87% agreeing with the vision and 88% with the principles, while 90% supported developing plans through a placemaking process and 79% favoured a 10 year timeframe with a mid point review to sustain momentum and adapt to local context. Stakeholders welcomed the move toward long term, cross departmental, community centred regeneration, and 95% agreed that regeneration should be treated as a long term strategic priority with secure, multi year funding. They also supported the careful use of targeted competitive funds (68%) provided these are designed fairly and do not disadvantage smaller or rural places.

Feedback was constructive and practical. Respondents asked that the vision and principles be sharpened to explicitly reference support for communities and positive outcomes, and to embed equity, health (including health equity), play and cultural spaces, as well as local distinctiveness and heritage as core features rather than optional add ons. They stressed the need to adopt or adapt robust existing plans to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue, noting that while the Living High Streets Craft Kit has value, it should be one tool among several, applied flexibly.

Support spans urban and rural contexts, with a clear rural lens on funding and delivery, and decisions that are evidence-based: respondents called for equity weighting or ring fencing to reflect rural disadvantage and historic under investment, for clustering of small settlements to overcome scale and capacity constraints, and for prioritisation of access to services in funding decisions. They also highlighted that ambitions such as reducing car dominance must be staged realistically where public transport is limited and transport poverty is acute. Across all geographies, consultees consistently backed practical emphases on safe, inclusive public realm and tackling vacancy and dereliction, reflected in the top prioritisation of what people want from places: access to services (74 selections), levels of vacancy (72 selections), and potential for people to meet and spend time (65 selections).

Overall, the evidence points to confident endorsement of the programme's ambition: respondents believe that, if transparently funded, with appropriate consideration of rural needs, and delivered through genuine engagement with clear, proportionate mechanisms, Shaping Sustainable Places offers a strategic opportunity to create vibrant, resilient and people centred places across Northern Ireland.

Community focused regeneration

The Consultation feedback places strong emphasis on community focused regeneration as a core principle of success. Respondents want regeneration that serves people and places, and that enables every day, inclusive uses: such as non profit housing and services, community hubs, cultural spaces, libraries and play, to enable older residents, disabled people and families to remain rooted in their communities. They argue that credible plans should be grounded in authentic local insight, reflect a place's distinctiveness and heritage, and measure success in terms of social value and wellbeing, not just economic outputs.

There is a consistent push for frameworks that are built with communities rather than imposed on them. Respondents call for early engagement, co design and iterative placemaking, noting that trust and quality improve when processes allow time for discovery, testing and adaptation rather than short, deadline driven consultations. They also stress the importance of using or adapting robust existing plans to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue, and of applying flexible engagement (workshops, drop ins, on street and digital methods, targeted outreach in rural areas, and inclusive design for disabled participants) so a wider range of voices can shape priorities and design.

There is recognition of how Shaping Sustainable Places will operate. The programme aims to deliver community informed projects and initiatives through structured engagement and placemaking,

but it will not provide core funding to the community and voluntary sector. Shaping Sustainable Places' focus is on capital and regeneration interventions: for example, public realm, environmental improvements, and bringing buildings back into use, delivered principally by councils as delivery bodies under clear governance and assurance. Many consultees acknowledged that, while the community sector has a meaningful role in activation, meanwhile uses, asset reuse, cultural programming, stewardship and local services, it is difficult for community and voluntary sector organisations to deliver major public realm or other infrastructure schemes given the procurement, technical and statutory requirements.

Reflecting on what we heard, we will consider how the community sector can help shape two specific aspects of implementation:

Design of the Challenge Fund (e.g., informing themes, eligibility and assessment approaches, and ensuring proportionate, accessible processes that reflect local need and context, with the potential to partner with councils on specific projects).

Council guidance for partnering others when bringing buildings back into use (e.g., how to structure partnerships with community and voluntary sector organisations and other third parties for activation, meanwhile uses and heritage sensitive reuse, while maintaining council leadership and assurance for capital delivery).

This approach keeps communities at the centre of place-shaping, clarifies where

councils must lead to deliver complex capital works safely and efficiently, and creates clear roles for community partners where their strengths, local insight, activation and stewardship add value to sustainable, people centred regeneration.

Heritage

Responses indicate a strong and consistent view that heritage must be integral to regeneration, not an optional add on. Stakeholders emphasise that the historic environment gives places their distinctiveness and identity; it underpins civic pride, supports local enterprise and cultural activity, and attracts visitors. Heritage led reuse is also seen as an important climate action: prioritising adaptation over demolition helps to retain embodied carbon and reduce waste, aligning place based regeneration with environmental sustainability.

There is a clear call for practical measures to embed heritage throughout the programme. Consultees want distinctiveness explicitly reflected in the vision, principles, selection criteria and delivery guidance; they expect placemaking tools to include a structured heritage lens so that every plan demonstrates how local character informs design and use. They also highlight the importance of pre development support (surveys, condition assessments, options appraisal, design and viability work), skills development in traditional construction and maintenance, and clear standards for heritage sensitive retrofit that balance energy efficiency, accessibility and conservation.

At the same time, consultees acknowledge the financial constraints inherent in refurbishing heritage assets. Bringing listed or traditionally constructed buildings back into productive use often involves higher capital costs, more complex procurement, and longer lead in times. Technical requirements (fabric first retrofit, services upgrades, fire safety, accessibility, conservation standards) can create viability gaps that are not easily closed through commercial returns alone. Respondents therefore encourage the programme to consider targeted support where need and impact are clear, including proportionate grants, staged approvals, and blended solutions that combine capital with early stage development funding and advice. They also stress the importance of whole life stewardship, so projects are designed with maintenance and operational resilience in mind.

Consultees see strong linkages to DfC responsibilities on housing and heritage. Heritage led reuse offers a practical route to town centre living, particularly upper floor and mixed use housing, supporting housing supply, revitalising high streets, and improving safety and surveillance after hours. Closer alignment between regeneration, housing and the historic environment can help councils and partners shape viable schemes that deliver new homes alongside active ground floor uses, while safeguarding the character that makes centres attractive in the first place. This includes signposting housing partners at an early stage, coordinating pipeline development, and ensuring guidance to councils recognises how heritage outcomes

and housing objectives can be delivered together.

As the programme design develops, we will consider how the heritage sector can help shape the Challenge Fund and inform council guidance for partnering others when bringing buildings back into use, ensuring that partnerships are practical, risk aware and add value to sustainable, heritage led regeneration.

Centre First

There is clear support for the intent behind a Centre First approach—revitalising town and city centres, bringing services closer to where people already travel for work and daily needs, and encouraging active and sustainable travel. Respondents see potential benefits in increased footfall, stronger local economies, and better use of existing buildings, including upper floors, where co location of services can support evening vibrancy and improve perceptions of safety. They also identify environmental gains when services are accessible on foot, by cycle, or by reliable public transport.

At the same time, consultees are realistic about the risks of a rigid, one size fits all model. Centralising services without the right safeguards could disadvantage rural and peripheral communities, deepen transport poverty, and compound health inequalities. The message is that Centre First can succeed only where the supporting conditions are present: dependable public transport, safe walking and wheeling routes, accessible and affordable parking where necessary, good digital connectivity for hybrid service

models, and a housing offer that makes town centre living viable for a range of households. Respondents also ask that any move to centralise includes consideration of rural needs, is proportionate to local context, and underpinned by practical mitigations such as satellite or outreach provision, flexible opening hours, and digital/telephone options for those unable to travel.

On balance, the consultation points to a pragmatic route forward. Consideration will be given to decoupling Centre First from Shaping Sustainable Places and taking it forward as a separate, time bound initiative. This enables a bespoke policy framework, clearer accountability, and the flexibility to proceed at different speeds in different places. To shape that work, we will look at establishing a cross departmental group to consider next steps, bringing together the relevant policy, estate and delivery leads (for example, regeneration, infrastructure/transport, housing, health and education). The group's remit would be to define scope and principles; commission the necessary evidence and impact assessments (including rural, equality and health dimensions); identify early pilots; and recommend a staged plan for implementation and review.

If taken forward, the Centre First workstream could be expected to:

- Apply tests of practicality and equity: service access times, public transport availability, active travel readiness, digital alternatives, and the needs of disabled people and carers.

- Pilot, evaluate and scale: begin with a small number of locations that span urban and rural contexts, trial a mix of models (full co location, hub and spoke, mobile/ outreach), and publish learning before wider rollout.
- Integrate with housing and asset reuse: prioritise reuse of existing buildings—including heritage assets where appropriate—and support mixed use schemes that combine services at ground level with town centre homes above.

- Track outcomes, not only outputs: footfall and dwell time, changes in vacancy and upper floor occupancy, service access and satisfaction, mode share and emissions, and distributional effects across different groups and geographies.

This approach preserves the benefits that consultees associate with Centre First: vitality, accessibility and better stewardship of public assets, while addressing the risks they highlighted. Decoupling the initiative creates the space for a cross departmental, evidence led programme that is sensitive to local context, protects rural and peripheral communities, and is accountable through clear milestones and periodic public reporting.

What Next?

The consultation points to a clear mandate for a programme that is inclusive, locally driven and rooted in the identity of each place, backed by realistic resources, a long term perspective and joined up delivery. Building on that, we will take the following actions forward.

1) Finalise the programme design and business case

- Refine the Vision and Principles to reference positive outcomes and explicit support for communities, and to embed equity, health, play, culture and distinctiveness/heritage alongside the existing strategic, sustainable, integrated and participative framing.
- Confirm the delivery stance: Shaping Sustainable Places will deliver community informed projects and initiatives through structured engagement and placemaking; it will not provide core funding to the community and voluntary sector.
- Adopt/ adapt existing plans where desirable and enable flexible use of placemaking tools rather than mandating a single method, avoiding duplication and consultation fatigue.

2) Publish the funding and prioritisation approach

- Confirm the funding stance: Shaping Sustainable Places will treat regeneration as a long term strategic priority with multi year funding and publish the allocation

model (including the role of equity weighting and consideration of rural needs).

- Set out how pre development activity will be handled within programme rules.
- Design the Challenge Fund as a staged, proportionate process (considering an Expression of Interest before full bids) and consider how the community sector can help shape themes, eligibility and assessment while keeping deliverables aligned with programme objectives.
- Use the consultation's prioritisation signals to develop guidance; access to services, levels of vacancy/ dereliction, and potential for people to meet and spend time; translate to schemes that can tackle vacancy and deliver safe, inclusive public realm.

3) Provide practical delivery guidance to councils

- Issue placemaking and engagement standards and confirm how existing plans can be adopted or refreshed.
- Consider how to provide practical information to delivery partners in respect of the use of the Living High Streets Craft Kit.
- Publish guidance for partnering others when bringing buildings back into use, including how councils may partner with community and voluntary sector

organisations, co-funders or other third parties on activation and meanwhile uses, while maintaining clear governance and assurance for capital schemes.

4) Strengthen governance and collaboration

- Clarify departmental and council roles, streamline reporting and approvals, and consider the establishment of a coordinated, multi agency group to remove delivery blockers.
- Put in place proportionate monitoring, with annual reporting on outcomes and a mid point review to adjust course over the 10 year programme.

5) Consideration of Rural Needs

- Build rural realities into selection and delivery: consider inclusion of clustering of small settlements to overcome scale and capacity constraints, and pragmatic staging of objectives (e.g. car use reduction) where public transport is limited.
- Emphasise access to services and safe access to green space as core tests for rural places.

6) Heritage as a driver of distinctiveness and reuse

- Make distinctiveness/ heritage a visible thread through criteria, tools and guidance; prioritise a reuse first approach to vacancy and dereliction (including upper floors).
- Acknowledge the financial and technical constraints of refurbishing traditional buildings by setting out where targeted,

proportionate support (including early stage development work) may be available when need and impact are clear.

7) Centre First: a separate, cross departmental workstream

- In line with feedback, consideration will be given to decoupling Centre First from Shaping Sustainable Places and establishing a cross departmental group to scope, evidence and pilot next steps.
- The group would define principles, complete the necessary impact assessments (including rural, equality and environmental), identify pilots (urban and rural), and propose a staged implementation and review plan.
- This ensures vitality and accessibility benefits are captured, while protecting rural/ peripheral access through mitigations and supporting infrastructure (public transport, digital, town centre housing).

8) Timeline and next milestones

- Spring 2026: integrate consultation feedback into the business case; complete programme rules, guidance and the funding/ prioritisation approach; stand up delivery and governance arrangements.
- Spring–autumn 2026: seek approvals including Executive approval; publish the allocation model and delivery guidance; open initial funding windows; identify early projects focused on vacancy/dereliction and inclusive public realm; initiate the Centre First scoping group.

- 2026/27: launch and commence delivery; confirm the timing and scope of the five year mid point review.

This plan turns the consultation's priorities into tangible next steps: clearer rules and roles, transparent funding and selection, flexible, meaningful engagement, delivery that includes consideration of rural needs, and heritage and reuse led regeneration; all geared to creating vibrant, resilient and people centred places across Northern Ireland.

Annex A – Stakeholder Engagement

Organisations engaged during pre-consultation stakeholder engagement activities are listed below:

1. All Island Local Authority Forum
2. Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
3. Ards and North Down Borough Council
4. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
5. Belfast City Council
6. Belfast Healthy Cities
7. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
8. Community Places
9. Department for the Economy
10. Department of Finance
11. Department of Justice
12. Derry City and Strabane District Council
13. Development Trusts NI
14. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
15. Health and Social Care NI
16. Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee
17. Land and Property Services
18. Landscape Institute
19. Linen Quarter Business Improvement District
20. Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
21. Ministerial Advisory Group on Architecture and the Built Environment
22. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
23. Mid Ulster District Council
24. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
25. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
26. Queen's University Belfast
27. Scottish Towns Partnership
28. Solace NI
29. Strategic Investment Board
30. The Executive Office
31. Tourism NI
32. Ulster University

Annex B – Focus Group Attendees

Organisations engaged through a series of focus groups are listed below:

1. Belfast Buildings Trust
2. Built Environment Forum Scotland
3. Caring Coins
4. Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
5. Centre for Cross Border Cooperation
6. CDM Community Transport
7. Community and Residents Association
8. Community Organisations of South Tyrone and Areas
9. Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network
10. County Armagh Community Development
11. County Down Rural Community Network
12. Easilink Community Transport
13. Fermanagh Community Transport
14. Fermanagh Rural Community Network
15. First Housing Enniskillen
16. Forward South
17. Glasgowbury
18. Inner City Trust
19. Institute of Historic Building Conservation
20. Learmount Community Group
21. Maritime Belfast
22. Mid Ulster Community and Arts Heritage Trust
23. Mid Ulster Disability Forum
24. Moneydig Community Association
25. National Trust
26. Northern Ireland Housing Executive
27. Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
28. Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
29. Omagh Forum for Rural Organisations
30. Royal National Institute of Blind People
31. Royal Society of Ulster Architects
32. Rural Action
33. Rural Area Partnership in Derry
34. Rural Community Network
35. Shopmobility Mid-Ulster
36. South Antrim Community Transport
37. SOS Causeway Coast and Glens
38. STEP NI
39. Tearmann
40. Think 6
41. Tidy Warrenpoint
42. Ulster Architectural Heritage
43. Upperlands Community Development Limited
44. Volunteer Now
45. Women's Aid Armagh

Annex C – List of Respondents

Below is a table listing organisations who responded to the consultation either through the Citizen Space platform or by email response to the Shaping Sustainable Places mailbox.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council | 25. Landscape Institute |
| 2. Architectural Heritage Fund | 26. Linen Quarter Business Improvement District |
| 3. Ards and North Down Borough Council | 27. Limavady Town Centre Forum |
| 4. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council | 28. Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council |
| 5. Ballycastle Town Centre Forum | 29. Maritime Belfast Trust |
| 6. Ballymoney Town Centre Forum | 30. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council |
| 7. Belfast Buildings Trust | 31. Mid Ulster District Council |
| 8. Belfast City Council | 32. National Trust |
| 9. Belfast City Centre Chaplaincy | 33. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council |
| 10. Belfast Healthy Cities | 34. NI Historic Environment Stakeholder's Forum |
| 11. Belfast Unite the Union Retired Members | 35. NI Housing Executive |
| 12. BioClocks UK | 36. Northern Area Community Network |
| 13. Carryduff Regeneration Forum | 37. Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations |
| 14. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council | 38. Northern Ireland Local Government Association |
| 15. Causeway Rural and Urban Network | 39. Omagh Forum for Rural Associations |
| 16. Coleraine Town Team | 40. Outscape |
| 17. Community Places | 41. PlayBoard NI |
| 18. Consumer Council | 42. Portrush Town Centre Forum |
| 19. Construction Employers Federation | 43. Portstewart Town Centre Forum |
| 20. Derry City and Strabane District Council | 44. PropertyMark |
| 21. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council | 45. Retail NI |
| 22. Free the Night | 46. RNIB and Guide Dogs (joint response) |
| 23. Fuse Fm Ballymoney | |
| 24. Inner City Trust | |

47. Royal Society of Ulster Architects
48. Rural Community Network
49. Sinn Fein
50. STEP NI
51. St John Bosco Youth Centre
52. Supporting Communities
53. Translink
54. The Confederation of Community Groups
55. The Faughan Valley CIC
56. The Fermanagh Trust
57. The MCS Foundation
58. The National Lottery Heritage Fund
59. Tourism NI
60. Ulster Architectural Heritage
61. Upperlands Community Development Group

Annex D – Summary of Consultation Questions

Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.

- Individual
- Organisation

Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q3: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?

Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q5: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?

Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No, it should be shorter
- No, it should be longer

Q7: If you did not select ‘yes’ above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?

Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q9: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?

Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q11: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?

Q12: If your local council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q13: If your local council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or a project for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.

- Leaflet campaign to invite survey response
- Townhall style meeting
- Focus group of residents
- Online consultation and promotion
- Newspaper advertisement and promotion
- Drop-in clinic
- I would not want to be consulted
- Other

Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?

Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree

- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q21: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?

Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q25: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?

Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t Know

Q27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with local councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?

Q28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No

Q29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners do you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

Q30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and local councils?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q31: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q30 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?

Q32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q33: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q32 above, please tell us why and/or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?

Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?

Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criterion when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Length of time since previous capital investment in public space
- Levels of vacancy
- Road safety
- Economic activity data
- Addressing economic market failure
- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas
- Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- Potential to leverage private sector investment
- Potential for people to meet and spend time
- Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- Population size
- Air quality
- Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)
- Other

Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.



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