Belfast
A World Health Organization
Healthy City

A Plan Fit for Children:

Health at the heart of the Local Development Plan

June 2017

MAKING LIFE BETTER

Queen's University Belfast

Ulster University

Healthy Cities 21st Century

Belfast Healthy Cities

Belfast Healthy Cities is a leading member of the World Health Organization Healthy Cities Network. Our aim is to make Belfast a more healthy, equitable and sustainable city. We promote innovation, collaborative action and policies for better health and well-being for everyone.

A healthier Belfast means a better Belfast for all, and we work with central government & local councils, elected representatives & community leaders, local stakeholders & organisations from across the city and beyond. We also share learning and best practice with other Healthy Cities around the world as we seek to achieve our goals. Belfast Healthy Cities office serves as WHO Secretariat to the WHO European Healthy Cities Networks.

Executive summary

This publication aims to provide a response to the Preferred Options Paper (POP) of the Local Development Plan from the perspective of children. It builds on evidence from over 5,000 children and families in Belfast, gathered by Belfast Healthy Cities through direct engagement with children to underpin the intersectoral action plan *Taking action on child friendly places: First steps*. Belfast Healthy Cities is the partnership organisation providing a platform for intersectoral collaboration to improve health and improve well-being, and a key role for Belfast Healthy Cities in the city is to support partners with evidence, capacity building and piloting new approaches and ways of working

Belfast is one of the pioneers of child friendly places across the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, and this publication is intended to support further development, delivery and monitoring of the LDP. It proposes taking a more inclusive design and planning approach, putting child friendly places at the heart of the LDP, to create people oriented places that support people of all ages and leaves no one behind, now or beyond 2035. Acknowledging diversity, in respecting and valuing difference, and promoting equality, in recognising that people have different needs, are underpinning principles of inclusive planning and design.

Engagement with children in Belfast shows there are three key elements to child friendly places in Belfast: better access to parks, more local open spaces children feel welcome to play in, and safer streets. In addition to these priorities, the core principles framing this response document are promoting well-being and furthering sustainable development, or "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This principle is also reinforced in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the recently agreed United Nations New Urban Agenda, which seek to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in order to bring transformative change that will 'leave no one behind'.

The POP provides a long term and strategic approach to developing Belfast, and its comprehensive approach is particularly refreshing. It offers a basis for integrating children's needs and ideas in delivery of the Plan as well as in its development. Many of the policies proposed directly support the priorities identified by children in Belfast and support the principles of the Healthy Cities approach.

The key issues that require attention and are highlighted throughout this publication are:

- Emphasis should be on mixed development, including mixed tenure housing, in all neighbourhoods as well as the city centre
- Standards for access to open space should be introduced and implemented; informal space should be available within 250m or 2-3 minute walk from homes
- New development should integrate walking and cycling infrastructure and access to public transport within 400 metres
- The city centre should be developed for all ages, to enable families to choose city centre living
- Children should be engaged as a population group with specific knowledge and potential to support delivery of the vision that will enhance their well-being

1. Introduction

A Children's Vision for Belfast

The vision of children in Belfast today is clear: they want a city that is inclusive, connected, green, clean and safe. They want to protect the environment, create good living conditions for everyone, and they value cultural diversity. They prioritise people of all ages equally: *"I think we need to stop cars parking on pavements, so my granny can get safely to the shops, and my mum can push the pram on the path while we walk to school*' [i].

The children of 2035 will have their own vision. It will be shaped by the places and conditions they experience. The Local Development Plan can play a central role in creating the conditions that allow children of 2035, the children of today's young people and grandchildren of today's adults, to have an ambitious vision of their own.

Source: A Children's Charter for Belfast, Belfast Healthy Cities 2014

Child friendly places are those that consider and meet children's needs in the planning and design of the city. A central element of child friendly places is that decision makers engage with children to listen to their experience and ideas on how the built environment can work for them and their community. This can help inform and strengthen decision making at all stages of the process, from the early stages of the Local Development Plan to delivering individual schemes.

The Local Development Plan offers a major opportunity to view the development of the city in terms of long term goals, integrated across social, economic and environmental issues. The 15 year perspective of the Plan is particularly welcome, as this is a sufficient timescale to begin delivering an ambitious vision for the city.

The Preferred Options Paper (POP) outlines a range of options that in broad terms support the principles of child friendly places. Critical to implementing child friendly places is building on these options. It will also be essential to ensure provisions and standards included within policies are implemented in development management as the Plan is delivered.

In this publication we aim to provide an overview of the policies, standards and approaches that can be integrated into the Plan to ensure it improves the lives of children in Belfast, now and in the future. We review the Preferred Options Paper against the key principles of child friendly places outlined below and outline the existing evidence base of how the built environment shapes children's lives and health. Finally, the paper gives examples of how these approaches and principles have been implemented in other WHO Healthy Cities.

Why child friendly places?

- Population aged 13 or under in Belfast[1]:
    - 2011: 16% [ii]
    - 2039: 15% [iii]

These figures demonstrate that children are a significant population group in society. However, they are often marginalised in decision making, despite being identified as one of the Section 75 groups. There are few references to children's needs, and even fewer to children's views and priorities in public policy, in Northern Ireland or elsewhere in the UK. This is primarily because there are limited models and mechanisms for engaging primary school age children. New approaches to engage children encourage them to become active and responsible citizens and also support equality and inclusive decision making. [vi] Engagement of children in decision making is also a requirement within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which applies to all the administrations across the UK.[vii]

[1] Local Government Act 2014 boundaries

2. Creating liveable cities: Developing child friendly places

Children's lives are primarily local. Children need good access to play opportunities, above all green and open spaces of different types and sizes, from very informal local public space to city parks and nature reserves. They also need access to core facilities and services, such as schools, sports and other clubs, leisure centres and libraries. [viii] Child friendly places also prioritise walking and cycling infrastructure and public transport routes, to improve children's access to services and their opportunities for independent mobility. A degree of independence is important for children's confidence and also their healthy development. Accessible, walkable environments that support children's everyday lives also recognise children as a major population group in society, and enable and encourage them to contribute positively to their local environment and community. [ix,x]

While policies at strategic levels are important for promoting sustainable development and well-being, individual well-being, particularly of children, is strongly shaped at a very localised level. The living conditions in and around homes have a significant impact on the well-being not only of children, but also their families and indeed the community as a whole. Therefore, giving greater consideration to promoting child friendly places can not only inform spatial decisions to ensure that core services are within accessible distance from homes, but can achieve wider social policy goals of enhancing a child's well-being, through building cohesive communities, creating shared space and promoting 'active living'.

Children are vulnerable due to their age and immature physical and mental systems. This makes children a key population group who need a supportive environment, and also has unique insight into what such an environment looks like. Utilising this insight will help reduce environmental and place inequalities not only for children, but also other vulnerable groups.

Every citizen benefits from compact, walkable and mixed urban form with good connections between local, district and city centres. Everyone also benefits from a more effective transport system focused on public transport; children can gain more independence, which also allows families to plan their schedules differently. Older people can particularly benefit from safe and walkable environments, as they enable and encourage older people to remain physically and socially active in their communities. This is vital for older people's well-being, and can also help reduce social isolation, which is a key risk factor for ill health among older age groups.[xi]

More life on the street strengthens social networks within neighbourhoods, contributing to more vibrant, cohesive and safer communities that support everyone's well-being and quality of life. Street based urban design also supports new business opportunities particularly in the service sector, but also the arts and leisure sectors.[xii] In addition, this approach supports sustainable lifestyles and contributes to mitigating and adapting to climate change, which will become increasingly important in future decades.[xiii]

More generally, cities with good access to amenities from green space to jobs, services and leisure opportunities tend to report greater prosperity, better health and higher levels of social cohesion.[xiv] For example, green spaces provide meeting places for people of all backgrounds as well as important opportunities for stress relief and relaxation.[xv]

Green space can also make an important contribution to children's health and well-being. Proximity to well maintained green space has been shown to increase children's active outdoor play, which supports all aspects of children's healthy development. Easy access to green space also encourages families to be active, while investors value attractive living and working environments. [xvi]

Similarly, child friendly places are attractive to families, which is critical to encourage young, skilled people to stay and settle in Belfast. A child friendly Belfast can significantly strengthen the appeal of Belfast to new residents and investors. It can also help position Belfast as an international leader in liveability.

3. Children's priorities for Belfast and the health impacts of the built environment: the current picture

In Belfast, there are over 50,000 children aged 13 years or under. The high proportion of children and young people makes Belfast a young city, in comparison to much of the western world. [xvii] This is one of the reasons why child friendly places was identified as a priority for Belfast as a WHO Healthy City by the key agencies in the partnership.

Children in Belfast report largely good health. In the Census 2011, 15% of children aged under 16 years reported a long term condition or disability. Educational attainment is also good overall; over half of school leavers in the final year of compulsory education achieve at least five good qualifications (General Certificate of Secondary Education passes at grades A*-C). [xviii]

However, Belfast is also affected by significant levels of deprivation. Around a third of children live in low income families (defined as households with an income less than 60% of the median income, or in receipt of key benefits). Seven per cent of children live in households with no one in employment. Children entitled to Free School Meals are also more likely to leave school with limited qualifications and more likely to be not in employment, education or training. [xix]

The built environment influences the health and well-being of people by shaping their wider living conditions, including opportunities to be physically active, play, socialise and access services. Its impact on children is particularly important in that childhood habits tend to shape lifestyles throughout life. Therefore, creating places that support children and young people also encourages children to adopt lifelong sustainable, active lifestyles. This contributes to a healthier future city and can also play a key role in responding to environmental challenges, including mitigating and adapting to climate change. [xx]

Belfast Healthy Cities has engaged with over 5,000 children and families to explore their views, ideas and priorities for their local environments since 2011. A number of engagement models were developed to support this process, which was designed to create a local evidence base to underpin an action plan on child friendly places. [xxi]

The evidence gathered through this process highlights a number of key issues outlined below, including access to green space; independent mobility and a connected urban structure. The same issues and priorities were identified across the city, although different areas put a slightly different emphasis on each.
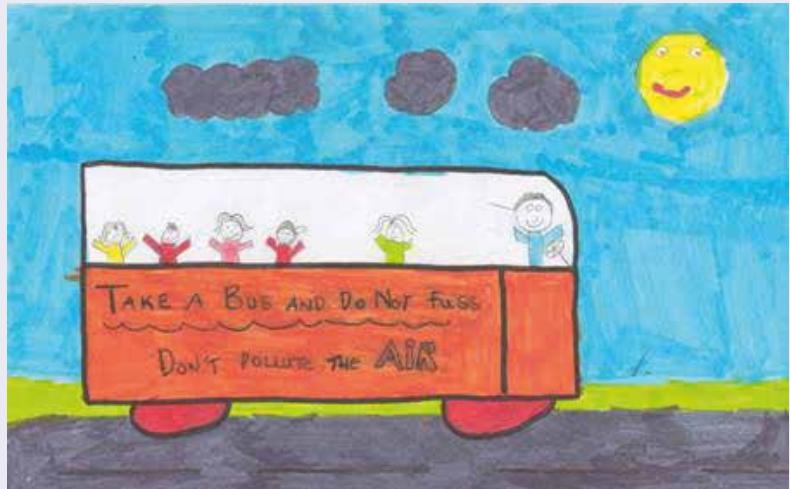
3.1 Access to green space and play opportunities: A priority but limited opportunities

Children across Belfast express a wish to play more outdoors, and associate green space with freedom to relax; to be noisy, to play and spend time with family and friends. They are limited by a lack of or poor access to facilities, particularly in more disadvantaged areas. This tends to confine children's play opportunities to private gardens or indoors, with trips to the park an occasional treat. Lack of facilities can increase children's sense of marginalisation. When coupled with social disadvantage, this can contribute to anti social behaviour and other risky activities.

Evidence demonstrates that regular access to natural environment has been shown to have a number of positive benefits amongst children:
- Reduced symptoms among children with ADHD and increased concentration and self-discipline among inner city girls [xxii]
- Enhanced emotional and values-related development in schoolchildren [xxiii]
- Reduced stress in children in rural areas [xxiv]
- Children's perception of their neighbourhoods in terms of the trustworthiness or honesty of the people who live there or feeling safe walking alone has a strong association with childhood mental health [xxv]

3.2   Independent mobility: Restricted by parental concerns

Children aged 8 and above want to have a degree of independent mobility, to go to key local places such as friends' houses, local shops and services, and parks where they are accessible. Parents' concerns about road safety limit their opportunities to do this, and most children report being restricted to their own street or immediate neighbourhood. Similar concerns also stop many older people from walking in their local neighbourhood.

A supportive environment can also help reduce obesity. Almost one in five children in Northern Ireland is now overweight by the time they start primary school. British Heart Foundation figures show nearly 20% of children are now overweight, or even obese, before they reach just five years of age[xxvi] rising to 29% of children in Year 8 (aged 11-12).[xxvii]

Obesity can affect a child's growth and development. Children and young people who are overweight or obese are also at increased risk of developing negative health factors that contribute to heart disease and include raised blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood sugar. Obesity in childhood can also be linked to many other factors including social and psychological bullying, low self-esteem, and depression. In fact, the immediate consequence of being overweight, as perceived by children themselves, is social discrimination and low self-esteem. These can have a significant impact upon their future health and well-being, especially in relation to mental health. [xxviii]

3.3   Urban structure: Call for new options to reduce vulnerabilities

A better connected, more legible and permeable urban structure is important to children in Belfast. Their everyday life is restricted by the existing, car oriented urban structure, which means that many key destinations are not accessible locally. Children also experience the impacts of car dominated urban structure: they report having to walk on the road, because there is no footpath or cars block it, and in some areas many children have been hit by a car or experienced a near miss situation. This makes them feel unsafe and discourages them from active outdoor play. It is also noted that children with additional needs are further restricted from engaging with their environment, and often have a limited sense of place as they are transported to all activities by car.

Children are also more vulnerable than adults to many environmental factors, in particular pollution, as their lungs are still developing. World Health Organization research shows that worldwide, air pollution is linked to the death of half a million children under five every year, particularly through increasing the risk of respiratory infections.[xxix] The location of homes is key in determining exposure, but the location of other key facilities also matters. Recent research covering England and Wales also indicates that substantial numbers of children are exposed to air pollution in their nursery and primary schools, as these are located close to roads where nitrogen dioxide levels exceed the European Union set limit of 40 micrograms per cubic metre of air.[xxx]

In Northern Ireland 182,000 people (1 in 10) are currently receiving treatment for asthma. This includes 36,000 children and 146,000 adults.[xxxi] Research also indicates that traffic has a negative impact on children's learning. In relation to academic learning and performance older primary school children around 11 years of age, appear to be more affected by noise than the younger children.[xxxii] A study carried out in Munich[xxxiii] also indicated that children's exposure to road traffic noise at home may be related to increased hyperactivity.

Traffic is the biggest non-medical cause of death for UK children and the leading cause of death in children aged 5 to 14[xxxiv]. Each week on Northern Ireland roads, 4 children are involved in traffic incidents and hurt while on foot.[xxxv] Children in the most disadvantaged areas are most at risk: children in the lowest socio-economic group are more than four times more likely to be killed on foot than those in the highest group.[xxxvi]

4. Planning for a child friendly Belfast: How the Local Development Plan can contribute

A child friendly Belfast places a strong emphasis on putting people first. It is a city where inclusive urban design and planning supports and encourages active living on living streets, where the structure of the city enables people of all ages to access facilities and services, and where people and communities can actively engage in society.

The Local Development Plan offers a major opportunity to view the development of the city in terms of long term goals, integrated across social, economic and environmental issues. The 15 year perspective of the Plan is particularly welcome, as this is a sufficient timescale to begin delivering an ambitious vision for the city.

The Preferred Options Paper presents a vision and a range of policies that broadly support the principles of child friendly places. It will, however, be essential to build on these initial options with relevant policies, and ensure provisions and standards included within policies are implemented in development management.

This section provides an overview of how the Preferred Options align with principles of child friendly places. It also provides examples of relevant standards that should be considered for inclusion in policies.

4.1   Strengthening the vision and growing the city

The vision of the Preferred Options Paper broadly supports child friendly places, although it is not always obvious because of the strong emphasis on the economy. In other words, Policy GR1 on growing the city will be relevant to today's children, in particular in relation to enabling and encouraging them to stay and build their lives in Belfast. A more balanced emphasis on supportive and connected communities, as an important aim in its own right as well as a key economic driver, would further strengthen the opportunities to develop Belfast as a city young people want to stay in, and indeed move to.

Child friendly places could offer an organising framework for ensuring that policy GR1 contributes to supportive and liveable neighbourhoods for all ages. Support for children, particularly in relation to play and green space provision, should be integrated into all developments, while engaging children, families and communities is an essential element of effective delivery.

The vision would be strengthened by:
•   Identifying children and young people explicitly as a key population and stakeholder group that can shape their local environment and enhance their well-being
•   Identifying child friendly places as an aim of the Plan
•   Describing specific characteristics of communities and neighbourhoods the Plan will seek to develop and support

4.2   Shaping liveable places

This strategic aim is welcome as a cornerstone of child friendly places. Key elements that support child friendly places include:

Policy LP1: offers an important basis for developing communities and improving accessibility.
Policies LP2, LP3 and LP6: Mixed tenure strengthens the potential for diverse and thriving communities, and a mix of housing types and sizes in all developments supports social cohesion and local services
Policy LP7: Quality design is vital to provide supportive environments for children, and other vulnerable groups
Policy LP8: Child friendly places are healthy places, and integrating a health perspective will increase the potential to create active, vibrant and cohesive communities
Policy LP9: Access to local services is vital for children and families

Policy LP10: This is a critical policy; permeability of street layouts and accessibility to local facilities, which this option emphasises, are vital to creating safer and more welcoming environments for children.

Policy LP11: Urban design is critical to ensure child friendly places, and this policy will play a vital role in shaping the liveability of Belfast

Policy LP13 and LP14: Connected and legible urban form is essential to support children's sense of place; the needs of children and families should be considered in a tall buildings policy to ensure it considers the specific needs of vulnerable groups

The aim would be strengthened by:
• Setting minimum standards for accessibility and density to provide certainty for children and families, as well as older people
• A greater focus on local streets and routes in LP12 and LP13, to ensure locally based people enjoy the same quality of environment and accessibility
• Engaging children and young people in developing urban design policies and supplementary guidance

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Summary: How the Local Development Plan can promote child friendly places

• **All developments should provide access to informal green space within 250m and access to formal green space, public transport and core local services within 400m**
• **Urban design should focus on streets and create permeable, active and welcoming environments**

Standards and criteria to support decision making

Setting Standards for Active and Inclusive Communities

Standards provide criteria and guidance that can help ensure policy provisions are implemented in the delivery phase of the plan. The examples here are intended to illustrate standards that will contribute to delivering child friendly places through the Plan. Belfast may, however, wish to develop its own standards, based on its own evidence, existing urban structure and culture. Engagement with stakeholders, including children and young people, will assist in gathering the widest possible evidence base to underpin Belfast based standards.

Useful resources for framing engagement standards include Roger Hart's ladder of participation[xxxvii] and also guidance issued by CABE[xxxviii], which is now integrated into the UK Design Council. Belfast Healthy Cities has developed local models for engaging children and young people, and also a model for engaging older people. These are outlined below in the section Process: Engaging the future decision makers of Belfast.

Density standards to support compact urban form and vibrant communities

A minimum of 55 dwellings per hectare is considered necessary to sustain local services and enable sufficiently compact urban form for walkability.[xxxix] Density should be linked to public transport access, so that greater densities are concentrated close to public transport interchanges and nodes. Policies should also defined minimum acceptable density and minimum acceptable access to public transport to reduce car reliance and urban sprawl.

Amenity should be taken into account alongside density, particularly to ensure children and young people and older people can engage with the neighbourhood. For example tall buildings are unsuitable for children and families, as there is typically insufficient natural surveillance and space to allow children to safely use outdoor space near them independently.[xl]

Examples of existing practice

Improving accessibility to build communities: Kuopio, Finland

Kuopio, a small city in eastern Finland, has over the last 20 years developed a model for city development and regeneration that is now providing a guiding star throughout the country. This city model emphasises easy access to the city centre by all transport modes – a 1,300 space underground car park was recently built under the central market square - but prioritises walking and cycling within a two kilometre radius from the city centre. The model also centres on a 'transit city' surrounding the city centre, and the city development plan has prioritised residential development on corridors well served by public transport; there has also been investment in public transport including a bus only bridge connecting an outlying neighbourhood to the city centre. One specific investment has been the development of a bus priority road connecting a suburb to the city, reducing travel distance from 12 to four kilometres.

A key driver for the Kuopio model was the growth of out of town retail, which was reducing the viability of the city centre. This trend has now reversed, while city centre property has risen in value as a result of a renewed demand for city centre living. The population of the city is growing at least in part due to the city's reputation for high quality living environments, and active travel is accounting for a growing proportion of travel.[xli]

© Photo by Leo Kosonen

Planning a city around children: Ghent, Belgium

Ghent is aiming to become the most child friendly city in Belgium, in terms of physical environment and accessibility, as well as in terms of social inclusion and enabling children's participation. The key principle for the city is that this does not involve developing a separate 'children's city', but it can be achieved by engaging children and young people in decision making that improves the city for everyone. Reducing inequalities is another key principle, which emphasises that the city needs to be accessible to children from all backgrounds and areas.

The key elements of the Child friendly Ghent plan, which aims to reverse a trend of families moving out of the city, include investment in green space and walking and cycling infrastructure. Creating playable walking routes is one specific initiative intended to encourage children and families to spend more time in the city centre, while a child friendly check list for new residential development will be developed to ensure access to family friendly housing options across the city.

https://stad.gent/ghent-international/city-policy-and-structure/ghent-child-and-youth-friendly-city

4.3   Creating a vibrant economy

A vibrant economy is essential to support communities and ensure families can provide for children in a stable and sustainable way. Ensuring a range of employment sites located across the city will most effectively support children, by increasing access to employment for families. Policies VE5 and VE6 are particularly important in relation to supporting the viability of local services. Policy VE7 with its emphasis on retail use can also contribute to this; however, flexibility will be essential to ensure underused retail space can be brought back into use in ways that support communities.

The aim would be strengthened by:
- Policies supporting access to employment sites from surrounding areas, in particular to augment policy VE2
- Strengthening policy VE3 in relation to supporting mixed development and distribution of economic opportunities across the city
- Identifying and building on the assets within neighbourhoods that can support locally appropriate economic development (policy VE5)
- Integrating engagement with local communities as a central element of decision making under policies VE5 and VE6
- Providing further clarity on criteria to be used under policy VE7 and considering flexibility to enable eg. communities to take over surplus retail space

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Summary: How the Local Development Plan can promote child friendly places

From the perspective of children, the focus on the city centre must be balanced with aims to revitalise neighbourhoods. It is also essential that the needs of children and families, in particular in relation to green and play space and housing types, are taken into account in new city centre housing development. Ensuring a range of housing sizes and supportive public realm now is essential to ensure that families can choose city centre living when available.

- **A network approach to green and playable space is helpful: small, informal spaces close to homes are essential and a network approach will widen access while encouraging usage**

4.4   Smart, connected, resilient place

Walking and cycling infrastructure, along with public transport routes, is critical to support child friendly places and strengthen accessibility to citywide services. Policies SCR4 and SCR5 are critical for developing Belfast as a child friendly place, and can also contribute significantly to subsequent policies on environmental change.

The aim would be strengthened by:
- A clear mobility hierarchy giving priority to walking and cycling
- Development of orbital public transport links, exploring a range of delivery options including community transport
- Clearly expressing parking restraint, including integrating policies limiting parking in new development with good access to public transport
- Highlighting the negative impact of air pollution on children in policies on environmental change

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Summary: How the Local Development Plan can promote child friendly places

- **Public transport access within 400m should be a key criterion for new development**
- **Accessibility criteria for all services should be established as a basis for decision making**
- **Policies on street based urban design should be developed to support children and encourage a move to walking and cycling**

Standards and criteria to support decision making

Accessibility criteria

Local accessibility to amenities, facilities and services is central to child friendly places. The Local Development Plan can enshrine these principles by identifying maximum distances for every citizen to a range of key neighbourhood services. Figure 1 below identifies recommended distances based on both the scale of a development, and the ability and willingness of people in different age groups to walk to a certain service. Walking distance is emphasised to support equitable access for everyone and sustainability.[xliii] These accessibility criteria are relevant to a number of sections within the Preferred Options Paper, including policies within the Shaping Liveable Places section and policies within the Green and Active Place section.

Figure 1: Suggested accessibility criteria

Facility	Illustrative catchment populations (to be adapted to local conditions and policies)	Minimum reasonable accessibility standards at different gross densities (assuming bendy routes)			
		40 ppha	60 ppha	80 pphs	100 ppha
Nursery/first school	2,000	600 m	500 m	400 m	400 m
Primary/middle school	4,000	800 m	700 m	600 m	500 m
Secondary school	8,000	1,200 m	1,000 m	700 m	700 m
Secondary school (large)	16,000	1,500 m	1,200 m	1,000 m	1,000 m
Health centre (4 doctors)	10,000	1,200 m	1,000 m	900 m	800 m
Local shop	1,500	500 m	400 m	400 m	300 m
hub	6,000	1,000 m	800 m	700 m	600 m
Post office	5,000	800 m	700 m	600 m	600 m
Community centre	4,000	800 m	600 m	600 m	500 m
Local centre	6,000	1,000 m	800 m	700 m	600 m
District centre/superstore	24,000	1,900 m	1,500 m	1,300 m	1,200 m
Leisure centre	24,000	1,900 m	1,500 m	1,300 m	1,200 m

Barton, Grant & Guise 2010 [xliii]

Examples of existing practice

Urban Density and Transport Accessibility: Curitiba, Brazil

The Brazilian city of Curitiba is well known for its innovative approach to urban planning and public transport, particularly its implementation of a highly effective and low cost Rapid Bus Transit System. This approach has resulted in major benefits to the quality of life, economy and overall functioning of the city as the public transport system has been strongly integrated with other public services and especially the approach to land use planning. This has included introducing pedestrianised areas and particularly a strategy of allowing significantly higher urban densities along the rapid bus routes, allowing developments of up to 18 floors along the strategic transport arteries. This approach has enhanced overall transport accessibility across the centre, encouraged the development of vacant sites, increased land values, facilitated conservation of sensitive heritage areas and through innovative financial instruments, funded a variety of progressive measures to support sustainable development across the city. The fact that Belfast is itself now beginning to implement a Rapid Bus Transit system also offers major opportunities to integrate transport and planning to enhance the long term quality of life of its citizens, not least its children.

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Street based urban design and regeneration: Stockholm, Sweden

Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, is experiencing significant population growth that is projected to continue for the foreseeable future. To facilitate this growth, the city has put in place a major development plan that includes the Stockholm Royal Seaport, one of the largest development projects in northern Europe that will when complete provide 12,000 new housing units and 35,000 jobs. Sustainable development and accessibility are cornerstones of this plan, and green space as well as priority for walking and cycling is integrated as a core element within all developments.

The planning of Stockholm Royal Seaport is based on the experience gained from the Hammarby Sjöstad project, which is a world-wide environmental model for sustainable districts. Like Hammarby Sjöstad, Stockholm Royal Seaport is a former brownfield area that is in the process of being regenerated into a modern sustainable urban district but it aims to avoid the poor provision of facilities for children that is one of the major shortcomings of Hammarby Sjöstad.[xliv]

The Masterplan is planned to create a more socially sustainable and child-friendly living environment by providing accessible playparks, kindergartens and schools. It also offers excellent access to natural greenspace, a network of public and neighbourhood landscaped amenity areas and low levels of car parking provision to calm the streets.   In addition, new schemes are utilised as pilots for sustainable resource management options and renewable energy; for example heating for Stockholm Royal Seaport is based on a district heating system. Building heights are restricted to 25 metres, and the entire development is a mixed use scheme with active uses at street level.[xlv]

4.5   Green and active place

Access to green space is the key priority of children in Belfast. This aim includes the key elements required to create child friendly places in Belfast, and it is essential that the preferred options are integrated and implemented through the Plan. The network approach proposed in GA2 offers a potentially very effective way to increase access to green space in all communities, while it also can encourage active travel and more active lifestyles, as well as support tourism.

The aim would be strengthened by:
* Integrating clear accessibility criteria and open space standards:
* GA4 could integrate policies on promoting green verges and buffer zones, to maximise green space particularly in inner city areas

Summary: How the Local Development Plan can promote child friendly places

* **Public transport access within 400m should be a key criterion for new development**
* **Accessibility criteria for all services should be established as a basis for decision making**
* **Policies on street based urban design should be developed to support children and encourage a move to walking and cycling**

Standards and criteria to support decision making

Open space

The extant *Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space*, Sport and Outdoor Recreation includes a provision for 10% open space of a total development site area[xlvi]. This offers considerable potential to develop valuable public space, including play and meeting space. The effectiveness of the provision could be enhanced by including a requirement that public space must be meaningfully located and sized. This can involve a number of parcels or a central public space, but fulfilling the provision through unused plots or isolated 'left over' space should not be permitted.

Fields in Trust offers detailed guidance on providing access to green and open space for all population groups. The guide *Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard*[xlvii] emphasises the importance of a range of spaces, formal and informal, within a reasonable distance from homes. The core distances highlighted in the guide are:

Table 2: Recommended Application of Quantity Benchmark Guidelines - Equipped/ Designated Play Space

Scale of Development	Local Area for Play (LAP)	Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP)	Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP)	Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)
5-10 dwellings	✔			
10-200 dwellings	✔	✔		Contribution
201-500 dwellings	✔	✔	Contribution	✔
501+ dwellings	✔	✔	✔	✔

Table 3: Fields in Trust Recommended Benchmark Guidelines - Informal Outdoor Space

Open Space Typology	QUANTITY GUIDE-LIND* (hectares pwer 1,000 population)	WALKING GUIDE-LIND* (walking distance: metres from dwellings)	QUANTITY GUIDELIND*
5-10 dwellings	✔		• Parks to be of Green Flag status • Appropriately Landscaped • Positive Management • Provision of footpaths • Designated so as to be free of the fear of harm or crime
10-200 dwellings	✔	✔	
201-500 dwellings	✔	✔	
501+ dwellings	✔	✔	

Fields in Trust [xlviii]

Examples of existing practice

Prioritising children's space: Sandnes, Norway

Sandnes in Norway has committed to protecting children's local, informal play areas in planning policy for almost 20 years. In 2000, children in pre and primary schools across the city were asked to identify the places where they play, and also the routes they use to get there. These trails were mapped using GIS, and are safeguarded in decision making, integrated into the health and environmental impact assessment that all planning proposals have to go through before a decision is made.

© Photo by Sandnes City Council, Norway

Children and young people also played a critical role in informing the current Sandnes plan 2015-2030, which builds on the priorities identified by children: a green, inclusive, active, happy and safe cycling city. The plan, which projects continued rapid growth of the city, also stipulates that all new residential accommodation must provide access to at least 150 square metres of informal playable space suitable for children under seven within 50 metres from homes, and space suitable for under 13s within 150 metres. The plan includes requirements for playable spaces in terms of access to sunlight (at least 50% of the space in direct sun), road safety and location. Standards set in the plan also require access to formal green space suitable for all ages within 400 metres from homes.

https://www.sandnes.kommune.no/Fillager/Internett/dokumenter/planer/kommuneplan/
Kommuneplan_2015_2030/vedtatt/Bestemmelserogretningslinjer.pdf

© Photo by Sandnes City Council, Norway

5. Process: Engaging the future decision makers of Belfast

A central element of child friendly places is that decision makers engage with children to listen to their experience and ideas for how the built environment can work for them and their community. Key benefits of engaging children include a stronger evidence base, new relationships with local communities, and ensuring an inclusive decision making process.[xlix] For children, being heard in decision making is essential to develop active citizenship and strengthen understanding of the process, which also supports engagement later in life. Ongoing engagement with children throughout the Plan development and delivery offers an important mechanism for gathering evidence to support monitoring and evaluation of Plan performance.

Belfast Healthy Cities has demonstrated the potential of engaging children in decision making on the built environment through the *Taking Action on Child Friendly Places: First Steps* action plan. The models developed to support the process can be employed and deepened to support the development of relevant engagement mechanisms for the Belfast Local Development Plan.

Methods for engaging children and young people can take many forms, depending on the resources available. Planning is also an element of the World Around Us curriculum in primary schools and the geography curriculum in post primary schools, and therefore schools can be valuable partners in the engagement process. UNICEF has also produced a toolkit for Child friendly cities and communities, which offers tools and ideas to support effective engagement.[l]

Examples of engagement methods include:

• Walking assessments of local neighbourhoods
• Photography and video based approaches, eg. video diaries or posters demonstrating ideas
• Art and design challenges and competitions
• Workshops in schools or youth clubs

Case studies

The Scottish Place Standard

The Place Standard is a tool developed by the Scottish Government in collaboration with NHS Public Health Scotland, local authorities and developers to support engagement with local communities about place. It is an evidence based tool structured around key physical and social qualities of a place, which is designed to enable assessment of any given geographical area. It has been piloted in neighbourhoods across Scotland and is informing development of spatial planning frameworks at the national level.

The tool is available at http://placestandard.scot/#.

Carlisle Primary School Council

Carlisle is piloting a council for primary schools, building on the work of Carlisle Youth Council. As an initial step, all primary schools in the city were invited to a 'full school council meeting', where schools were asked to present their ideas for how Carlisle, as a WHO Healthy City, could become healthier. Ideas ranged from healthy eating competitions and healthier options at supermarket tills and developing outdoor gyms. The Council committed to listening to children's ideas, and as a result of the meeting has invested in developing outdoor gyms.

© Photo by Carlisle Partnership

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KidsSpace and Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods – engagement models developed in Belfast

The Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children model sought to give primary school age children an opportunity to share their views and priorities for change within their local environments. Over 400 primary school children aged 8-11 years in a total of 17 groups across the city participated in the programme, between 2011 and 2014. Photography and art were used as engagement methods accessible to all children. The model was delivered over three sessions and focused on children identifying ideas following a guided walk researching their local neighbourhood. The model has now been developed into a teaching resource being piloted in over 15 schools in Belfast and five in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.

KidsSpace is a pop up child friendly space and engagement model, which explores the creation of child friendly space in the city centre. It aims to encourage children and families to take ownership of public space. Activities such as arts and crafts, dance and puppet theatre are offered to encourage children to engage with the space, along with flexible play equipment and free use of the space. Since 2011, KidsSpace has taken place in a variety of locations across the city centre, including St Anne's Square, Buoys' Park, Writer's Square, Belfast City Hall and vacant units in CastleCourt and Victoria Square shopping centres. It has become a key event in the annual Culture Night programme, attracting over 1,000 participants each year, and has contributed to greater visibility for children's events within the Culture Night programme.[li]

A guidance document on engaging children and young people will be published by Belfast Healthy Cities in late spring 2017. Belfast Healthy Cities will also support stakeholders wishing to engage children in using it.

6.   Conclusion

The Local Development Plan is a major opportunity for Belfast to put in place a plan focused on creating a people oriented city. This is important to create places that support people of all ages in the city, and can also contribute effectively to the Belfast ambition to grow and develop as a global city.

Child friendly places could offer an organising framework for ensuring that policy GR1 contributes to supportive and liveable neighbourhoods for all ages. Support for children, particularly in relation to play and green space provision, should be integrated into all developments, while engaging children, families and communities is an essential element of effective delivery.

Children are vulnerable due to their age and immature physical and mental systems. This makes children a kind of canary in a coalmine, who have a unique insight into what supportive environments look like. Utilising this insight will help reduce environmental and place inequalities not only for children, but also other vulnerable groups.

The POP provides a long term and strategic approach to developing Belfast, and its comprehensive approach is particularly refreshing. It offers a basis for integrating children's needs and ideas in delivery of the Plan as well as in its development. Many of the policies proposed directly support the priorities identified by children in Belfast. The key issues that require attention and are highlighted throughout this publication are:

- Emphasis should be on mixed development, including mixed tenure housing, in all neighbourhoods as well as the city centre
- Standards for access to open space should be introduced and implemented; informal space should be available within 250m or 2-3 minute walk from homes
- New development should integrate walking and cycling infrastructure and access to public transport within 400 metres
- The city centre should be developed for all ages, to enable families to choose city centre living
- Children should be engaged as a population group with specific knowledge and potential to support delivery of the vision that will enhance their well-being

7.   Building on the experience of Belfast as a WHO Healthy City

Belfast has been a WHO European Healthy City since 1988. The concept of healthy urban environments was introduced to the city through membership of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, and Belfast has been a pioneer across the Network on child friendly places, identified as a mechanism to realise and demonstrate the concept.

Internationally, membership of the Network provides a wide ranging network of contacts across WHO Europe and European cities, which can be drawn on to provide both examples of good practice and potential partnering arrangements. The WHO European Healthy Cities Network also offers a platform for showcasing the city and sharing learning internationally. Belfast is a key contributor to Network conferences and publications, and the Network also offers growing opportunities to share learning through WHO Europe more widely. Through WHO Europe, expertise and capacity on the SDGs can also be levered into the city.

Locally, Healthy Cities provides a platform for intersectoral collaboration involving the academic and voluntary sector as well as the public sector. Membership of the Healthy Cities partnership includes Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Department of Health, Department for Infrastructure, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Queen's University Belfast, Urban Villages and Ulster University.

Examples of the expertise and experience developed in the city include:

- Capacity building: The annual capacity building programmes on healthy urban environments as well as health equity share learning from local experts as well as leading European cities, and also create opportunities for Belfast to connect directly with leading experts on these topics.

- Tools: Belfast has developed a number of tools that can be used to support policy and decision making.

  - Community engagement and co production:

    - The Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods and KidsSpace models are particularly geared towards engaging children and young people in decision making affecting local neighbourhoods [li]

    - The Walkability Assessment for Health Ageing tool offers a way to engage with older people on both the quality of the environment and the living experience in a given neighbourhood.

    - All models also provide a systematic approach to gathering evidence and local narratives from typically less heard groups

  - Assessment tools:

    - The Health Equity tool assists in consideration of inequalities at proposal development stage

    - Belfast also pioneered the use of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and has capacity both in undertaking HIAs and adapting this approach in ways that utilise its principles of engagement and focus on inequalities

    - The Good for Regeneration, Good for Health, Good for Belfast regeneration indicators provide an indicator set to monitor how regeneration impacts on health and inequalities. The set was developed by a partnership of organisations including the five Belfast Area Partnerships, Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Public Health Agency. This set builds on existing routinely available data, while highlighting areas for data development

that would support more detailed understanding of how regeneration investment contributes to reducing inequalities and improving well-being.

- Health profiles: A number of intersectoral health profiles have been developed, which provide a model for bringing together and mapping data in a way that can support the integration of social aims into spatial planning. The profiles also provide a historical overview of change in health and inequalities since 1998.

The tools and outlines of capacity building programmes are available online at www.belfasthealthycities.com.

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