



Maritime Belfast Trust – Belfast Waterfront Blueway Feasibility Study

December 2025



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Executive summary

Introduction

Outscape was commissioned by Maritime Belfast Trust (MBT) to undertake a feasibility study to assess the viability of developing a Belfast Waterfront Blueway - a multi-activity trail network that enhances access to the River Lagan and its surrounding urban waterfront.

The study was carried out in line with the established processes and criteria for the accreditation of Blueways as outlined within the Blueway Developer Toolkit (2024), to provide MBT with clear recommendations and actions to progress the concept.

Key findings

The study found that:

- The proposed Blueway aligns with key strategies, all of which are working towards developing the waterfront, bringing life back the river and providing opportunities for surrounding communities.
- Belfast's waterfront and the River Lagan offers an engaging landscape, rich in natural and cultural heritage assets.
- Existing trails and greenspaces offer excellent land-based recreation potential, while the River Lagan and Harbour areas provide opportunities for on-water recreation.
- There is strong community and stakeholder support to increase access to the water for recreation.
- A concept was identified that has the potential to achieve Blueway status through a range of development and capacity building opportunities.

Water Quality

The study highlighted poor water quality as the greatest barrier to achieving Blueway status. Current levels of pollution, primarily caused by a combination of untreated sewage and stormwater discharges, pose a serious risk to public health and restrict immersive on-water activity. Fundamentally, providing a sufficient level of water quality is essential to the success of the project. All development recommendations are contingent on improved water quality to ensure a safe experience for the visitor, as well as to protect the corporate reputation of delivery partners.

Phased development plan

A two-phase approach is recommended to enable achievable short-term delivery while allowing for longer-term expansion:

- Phase 1 (1 to 5 years) – focuses on enhancing and combining existing and developing new infrastructure and opportunities with the goal of achieving Stage 1 Preliminary Accreditation.
- Phase 2 (5+ years) – builds on the success of Phase 1 to expand the Blueway proposition and further enhance the waterfront through future development of opportunities whose feasibility is uncertain.

Phase 1 priorities include:

- A paddling trail extending from McConnell Weir to Stranmillis Gateway using existing, enhanced access points.
- Progressing opportunities and actions at key water access points - Stranmillis Gateway, Governors Bridge and Ravenhill Reach and supporting the development of McConnell Weir and John Murray Lockhouse.
- Enhancing walking and cycling trails to provide those essential land-based recreation offerings – using Ormeau Park, Botanic Gardens, Maritime Mile, Lagan Towpath.
- Continued promotion of existing culture and heritage assets.
- Exploring opportunities to avail of additional facilities along the river.

Actions

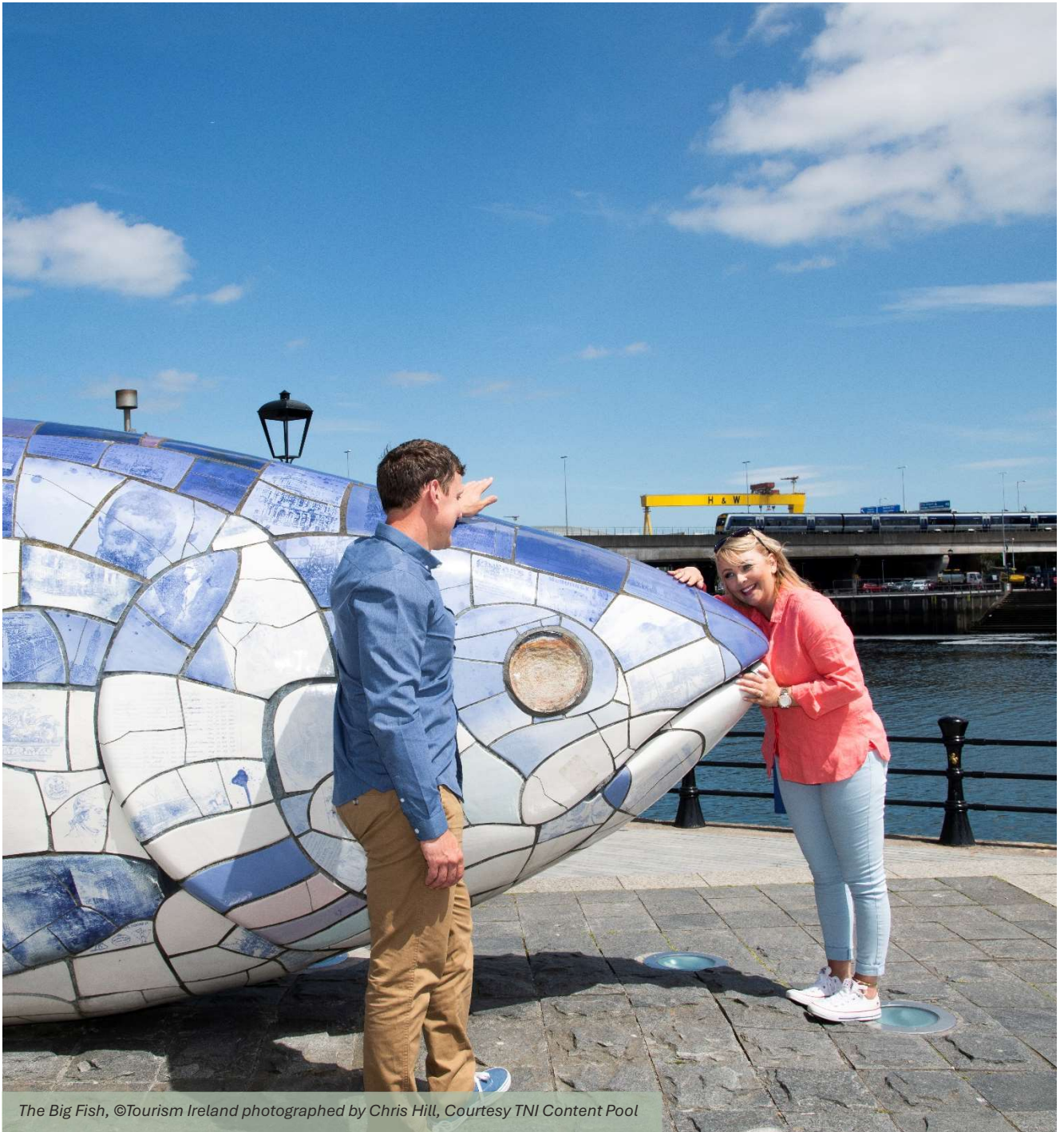
To ensure the success and delivery of the proposals, several key actions were identified:

- **Understanding water quality.**
- Engage with the Blueways Partnership.
- Set up a Blueway Management Group.
- Appoint a Blueway Management Co-ordinator.
- Maintain active stakeholder engagement.
- Develop and deliver supporting infrastructure.

Conclusion

The study confirmed that a Belfast Waterfront Blueway is feasible through stakeholder support, phased planning and infrastructure enhancement. **However, to achieve Blueway status, action is required to address the issue of water quality to allow safe, on water experiences which are central to the Blueway offering.**

The initiative represents a unique opportunity to reconnect Belfast's communities with its waterways. If delivered, Belfast could host the first accredited Blueway in Northern Ireland and the first urban Blueway on the island of Ireland, positioning the city as a leading Blueway destination.



The Big Fish, ©Tourism Ireland photographed by Chris Hill, Courtesy TNI Content Pool

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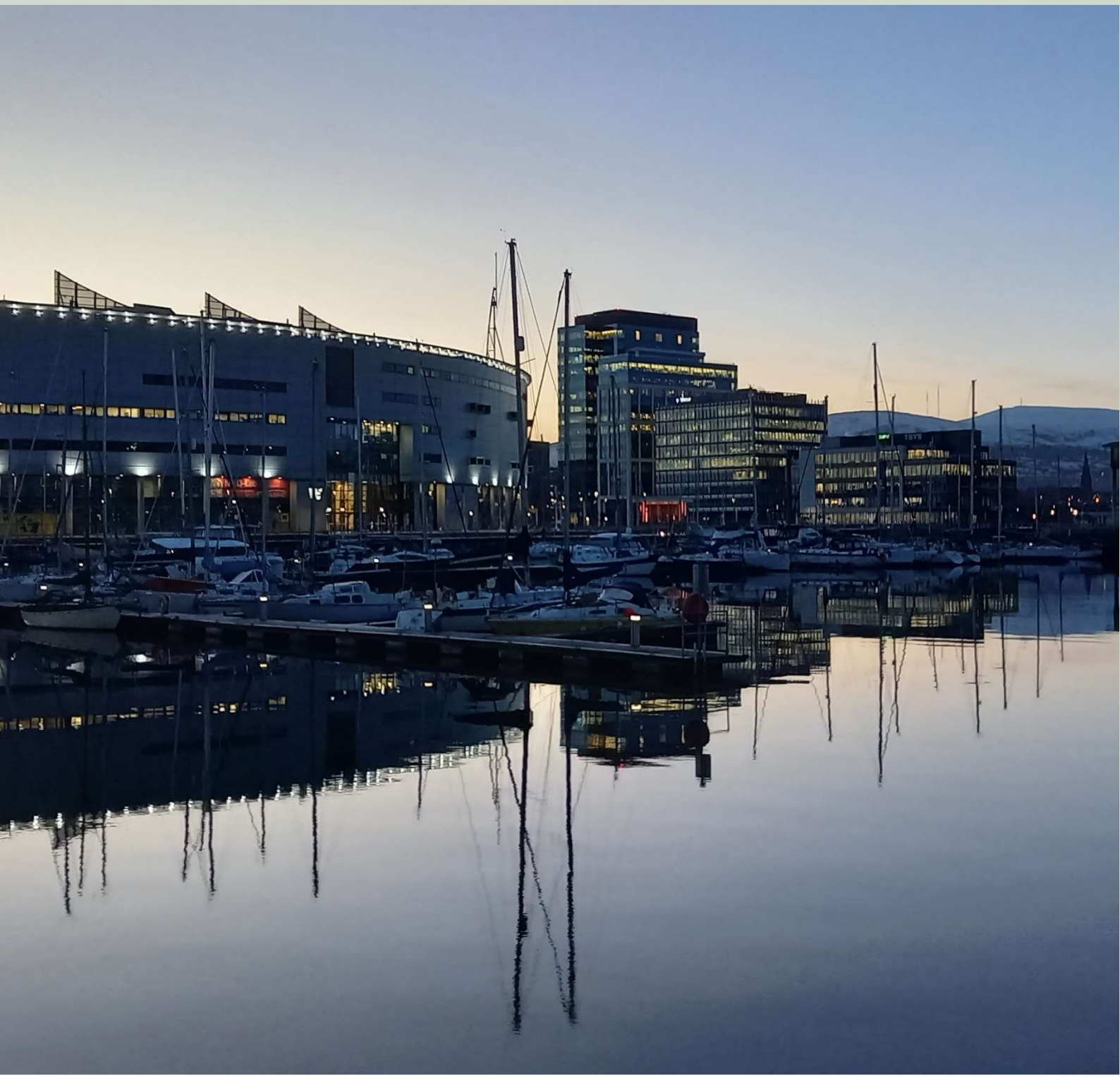
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1. Introduction



1.1 Brief

Outscape has been commissioned by Maritime Belfast Trust (MBT) to undertake a feasibility study to assess the viability of developing a Belfast Waterfront Blueway (the Blueway) - a multi-activity trail network that enhances access to the River Lagan (the River) and its surrounding urban waterfront.

This report is intended as a platform for MBT and its partners to progress a shared vision to guide future investment, stakeholder engagement, and funding applications. It sets out:

- Key research findings and user insights.
- A feasibility investigation to identify the potential of a Blueway on Belfast's waterfront.
- A concept design with recommendations for the phased development of recreation infrastructure.
- Indicative costings and delivery plan for the next 5+ years.

1.2 Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following approach was adopted:

1. Identification of best prospect visitor and critical success factors

Defining success at the outset was essential to guide the remainder of the study. This involved gaining a clear understanding of the vision for the Blueway, the core visitor, their needs, and the factors critical to delivering a successful Blueway.

2. Scoping and assessment

Potential opportunities were identified through a comprehensive assessment of current and potential

visitor experiences against the critical success factors, based on findings from a combination of desk research, site visits, and a wide-ranging stakeholder engagement process.

3. Concept identification and refinement

Ongoing fieldwork and consultation were undertaken to carry out a physical assessment of potential Blueway options, considering both opportunities and constraints, allowing the preparation of a high-level concept design supported by a costed approach to phased implementation.

1.3 Background

1.3.1 What is a Blueway?

By definition, a Blueway is *'a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on, and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences.'*

The brand concept was developed by the Blueway Partnership in 2018 as a water orientated tourism and outdoor recreation proposition. It is a relatively new concept with the aim of creating an experience that encourages local people and visitors to engage and connect with the waterscapes around the island of Ireland.

1.3.2 Blueway Success Factors

The Blueways Partnership¹ has an established process and criteria for the accreditation of Blueways which are outlined within the Blueway Developer Toolkit (2024), the aim of which is to ensure they are developed and managed to a consistently high standard to deliver for the visitor.

¹ The Blueway Partnership was established in 2019 and is the body responsible for the strategic oversight, guidance and brand management of Blueways. The Partnership is an all-island body

comprised of Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and Waterways Ireland.

The key principles of a successful Blueway are defined within the Toolkit and are outlined below.

Principle	Qualifier
Water at its heart	The waterway must be at the core of the offering. Hubs and trails must be on and alongside water.
Being active in nature	The Blueway must encourage <i>active and responsible</i> participation in nature.
Appropriate for the dabbler	The paddling trail must be suitable for those with little or no experience i.e. there must be a section of 'Simple Waters' and if 'Moderate Waters' are included there must be an appropriately qualified activity provider available.
On-trail activity providers	Appropriately qualified activity providers (permanent or mobile) must offer bookable experiences on at least a seasonal basis
Animated by Heritage and Culture	The experience must provide an opportunity to appreciate and explore an attractive landscape and engage with the unique heritage and culture of the area
Variety of Eat, Stay and Play	Bars, Cafés, restaurants and attractions must be easily accessible from trail heads and / or trails
Land offering connected to the water	Land based trails must either have a trail head at the water or a significant section of trail adjacent or providing a view of the water.
Responsible Recreation	Blueways must be planned, developed and managed to ensure their environmental sustainability. As a minimum a Blueway should avoid negative impact on the environment and ideally provide enhancement e.g. through education and access

1.3.3 The Blueway user

A Blueway is an experience. Therefore, it is fundamental to put the user at the heart of the Blueway, whether they are a member of the community exploring their local waterway or a visitor exploring a new destination. In line with Blueway principles², a Blueway will primarily appeal to the '*dabbler*': someone with little or no experience in watersports or outdoor activities. Dabblers are therefore fundamental to how the Blueway is shaped, as they typically seek:

- Enjoyable, safe, and easy-to-access experiences, rather than challenging ones.

² Blueway Developer Toolkit 2024

³ Blueways Concept Deep Dive, Fáilte Ireland, 2024

⁴ 'The 'Unconstrained adult' is a Fáilte Ireland domestic visitor segment that refers to a person within a specific age group (usually

- Activities that also serve as a means of experiencing and exploring the destination.
- Supporting experiences enriched by culture, hospitality, and heritage.

Research conducted by Fáilte Ireland³ across key domestic and international markets (including Northern Ireland and Great Britain) shows strong interest in the Blueway concept, particularly from young families and 'unconstrained adults':

Segment	Description
Families	Most engaged international segment: lower domestic uptake, but opportunity exists. In terms of age, younger families represent the greatest opportunity.
Unconstrained Adults⁴	Strongest domestic market in NI and ROI; with the greatest intention to consider Blueway activity owing to flexibility and interest in active leisure.
18–34s	Highest intention to consider Blueway experiences in Northern Ireland.
35–54s	Globally engaged and highly relevant for heritage and wellbeing offers.
55+	Lower engagement overall, but still relevant for walking, events, and wellbeing.

Belfast, as a destination, is already a major tourism draw accounting for 32% of Northern Ireland's overnight stays and 40% of tourism spend. Belfast's visitor numbers are rebounding post-COVID with city-centre footfall in 2023 reaching 94% of 2019 levels, indicating strong urban tourism demand.⁵

Localised audience research for the Maritime Mile⁶ indicates that the area already primarily attracts a balanced visitor mix of:

- **Tourists** (35%, including 800,000 visitors to Titanic Belfast in 2024).
- **Local residents and workers** (27%, particularly for walking and events).
- **Wider local communities** (26%).

A Blueway has the potential to diversify and enhance Belfast's appeal as a cultural and leisure destination by linking flagship waterfront attractions, such as W5 and Titanic Belfast, by layering storytelling, seasonal events, and accessible outdoor recreation.

According to the 2021 Census, 21% of people in Northern Ireland have a disability or long-term health condition. Given this evidence, it is key that the Blueway should therefore consider inclusivity and

under 45) who is free to make travel decision without significant constraints like family or financial limitation.

⁵ Visit Belfast Tourism Strategy 2024 - 2027

⁶ Maritime Mile Audience Report, December 2019

accessibility for all, from infrastructure and interpretation to programming and branding.

1.3.4 Adding Value

The opportunities that a Blueway provides to add value to an area are summarised below:

- Opportunities to engage with trade to identify commercial opportunities.
- Provides a platform for the development of other businesses – hire, retail, food and drink etc.
- Increasing the seasonality of offerings through adding volume with additional experiences.
- Increasing the distribution and type of accommodation and activities.
- Creating opportunities to link potential Blueways with each other to create a Blueway destination and encourage dispersal of visitors.
- The development of hubs or sites for orientation and information to create an integrated sense of the area, provide equipment hire and supplies, and basic retail and refreshments.

Going forward, the development of a Blueway should include the following information being collated on an annual basis:

- Visitor numbers – through installation of visitor counters, user figures etc.
- Visitor feedback surveys.
- Business surveys – including visitor numbers, job creation, business development and income information (including at pre-development stage if available).
- Community feedback – gain an insight into local programme development as well as the impact of the Blueway on the local community e.g. footfall, tourism capacity, traffic etc..
- Environmental impact – assess the impact on water quality and the receiving environment against baseline levels and proposed mitigations.

As well as economic benefits, a large body of international and national research clearly evidences how outdoor recreation provides a significant number

of other benefits, including mental and physical health benefits and environmental benefits. The table below illustrates these benefits in an Irish context.

Mental Health Benefits	In Ireland, middle-aged and older adults walking 150 minutes per week report a better mental health status, better quality of life and overall wellbeing. ⁷ According to the CSO ⁸ , of the respondents who spent time in natural spaces over the past six months 93% felt happier afterwards and 97% felt healthier
Environmental Benefits	“By being in green or blue natural spaces we foster a bond to nature which helps us become more environmentally aware.” ⁹
Physical Health Benefits	“Inactivity increases the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes by 25- 30% and shorted lifespan by 3-5 years.” ¹⁰

1.3.5 AWE Factors

To meet user expectations and attract dabblers, the Blueway experience must deliver what the *Blueway Developer Toolkit* describes as ‘AWE’:

- **Attractive locations** - Striking waterscapes, safe and welcoming environments.
- **Water and land-based activities** - High safety standards, novice-friendly, guided and hire options.
- **Eclectic experiences** - Heritage interpretation, seasonal events, local food and accommodation, and immersive storytelling.

Success will be defined by the Blueway’s ability to contribute to the transformation of Belfast’s waterfront into a shared space which is enjoyable and accessible not just for visitors, but for the communities who live and work around it.

1.3.6 Why it matters / The Blueway accreditation process

The Blueway brand is managed by the Blueway Ireland Partnership which is an all-island body responsible for development and oversight of Blueways. The body consists of representatives from Waterways Ireland,

⁷ Donoghue, O., O’Connell, M. & Kenny, R.A. (2016) Walking to Wellbeing: Physical Activity, Social Participation and Psychological Health in Irish adults aged 50 years and Older.

⁸ Our Lives Outdoors, CSO, May 2022. 9,346 responses from adults living in the Republic of Ireland

⁹ Dr Tadhg MacIntyre, Environmental Psychologist, Maynooth University, Ireland

¹⁰ Wen CP, Wu XF. Stressing harms of physical inactivity to promote exercise. *Lancet* 2012, 380:192–193

Tourism Northern Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland.

The Partnership oversees the accreditation process through an appointed Blueway Coordinator and Development Advisor¹¹, who provides support to developers, conducts assessments and inspections, and ultimately awards Blueway status.

The benefits of Blueway accreditation include:

- **A consistent standard** and approach across all accredited Blueways across the island of Ireland.
- **Ongoing support** and guidance from the Blueways Partnership and access to shared learning, including through an annual forum.
- **Trust and quality assurance** for stakeholders, including landowners, funders, communities and businesses, that the development follows best practice.
- **Enhanced promotion and growth** as part of a recognised and trusted brand supporting joint marketing, repeat visitation, and a “cross-sell” effect across the wider Blueway network.
- **Funding and development opportunities** through recognition in regional and national tourism strategies.
- **Access to the Blueway brand** in signage and visitor materials, giving users confidence in the quality and safety of their experience. This brand represents:
 - Being active in nature.
 - Exploration of waterscapes.
 - Multi-activity trail options.
 - Accessibility supported by service providers.
 - Experiences enriched by local culture, heritage, and attractions.
 - Responsible recreation within the environment.
 - Opportunities to eat, stay and explore within the destination.

A Blueway will be assessed by the ‘SCATES’ model criteria which combines visitor-focused principles with essential safety, environmental, access, and infrastructure considerations. These are drawn from international benchmarking and reflect a sustainable, place-based approach to Blueway development. The six core criteria are:

- **Safety** - *Is risk being appropriately managed for all Blueway users?*
 - Suitability and clear definition of user responsibility
 - Assurance that providers and operators are competent and experienced
- **Conservation (and environment)** - *Is the Blueway environmentally responsible, and ideally contributing positively to the local environment?*
 - No adverse environmental impact
 - Statutory approvals in place
 - Environmental management, including biosecurity, litter control, and education
 - Opportunities to raise environmental awareness among users
- **Access** - *Will the Blueway be publicly accessible for at least ten years post-accreditation?*
 - Agreements with landowners or relevant authorities
 - Appropriate insurance cover secured
- **Technical** - *Does the infrastructure meet recognised standards and follow best practice?*
 - Trails (walking, cycling, shared use, paddling etc. accredited or compliant with recognised standards
 - Appropriate signage and trailhead facilities
 - Design to manage user flow and reduce conflict
 - Accessible and inclusive design principles applies
- **Experience** - *Will the Blueway meet or exceed the expectations of visitors, especially the 'dabbler'?*
 - Engaging natural, cultural, and heritage landscapes
 - Multi-activity offering
 - Visitor information and interpretation
 - A complete visitor experience including access to food, accommodation, and attractions
 - Appropriate trail lengths and durations to suit novices and mixed ability groups
- **Sustainability** - *Are governance and management processes in place to ensure long-term success?*

¹¹ The Blueway Coordinator and Development Advisor is contracted role currently delivered by Outscape on behalf of the Blueway Partnership. One of the key functions of the role is to provide

support and advice to aspirant Blueways developers or interested parties.

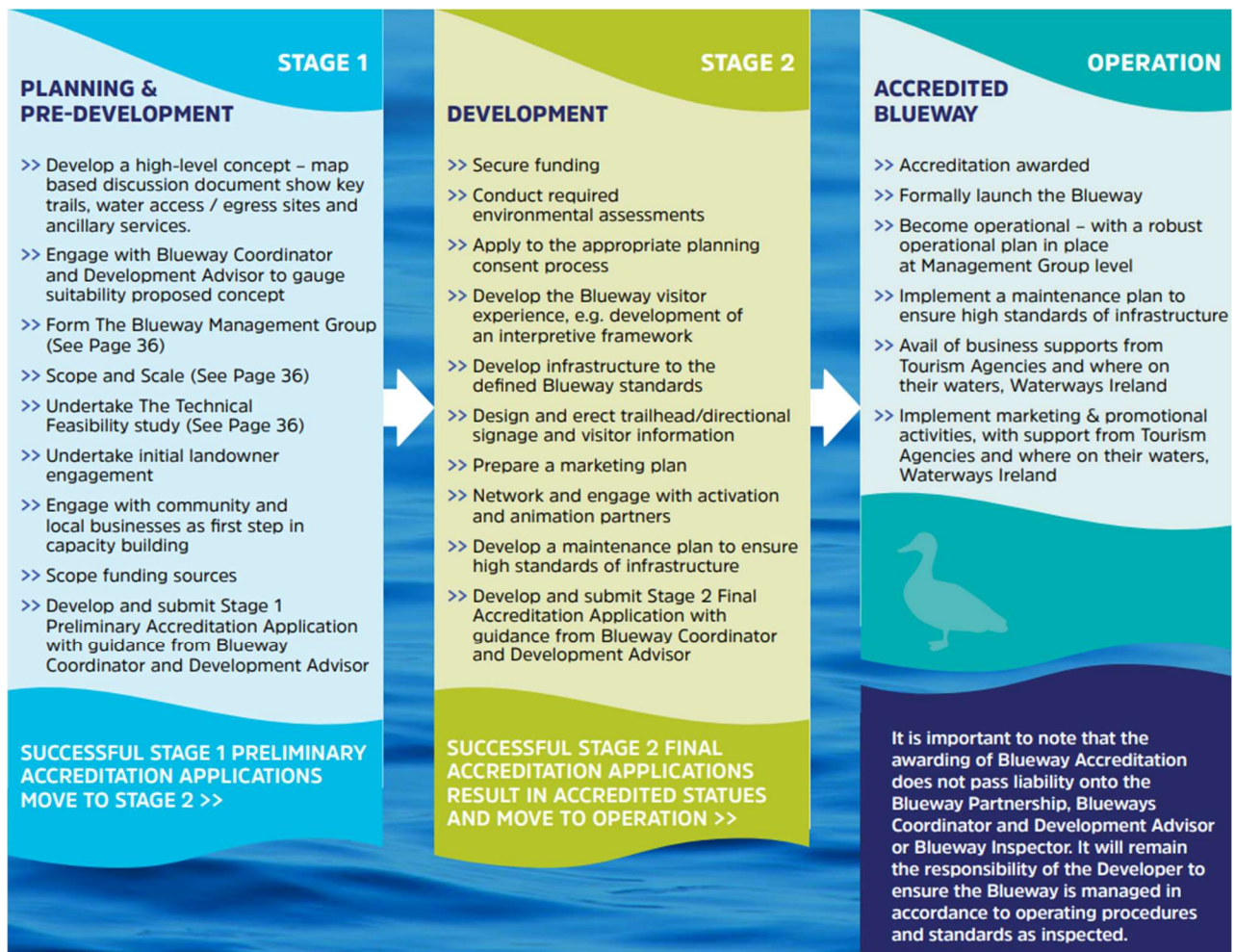
- o Clear management structures and partnerships
- o Long-term management plans and monitoring processes
- o Capacity-building within the local tourism and recreation economy
- o Supporting products and services (e.g. rentals, guides, local operators)

The accreditation process has two key stages (see summary below):

- **Stage 1 - Preliminary Accreditation** – in which the Blueway Developer sets out the current position and intended actions to meet the Blueway Accreditation Criteria. The purpose of this stage is to provide the opportunity for the Blueway

Partnership to review the potential of a proposed Blueway to meet the Blueway Accreditation Criteria. In turn this will provide Blueway developers with invaluable feedback before further money, time and resource is invested. The feedback may provide an endorsement of the current proposal, advice on areas for improvement or determine if the proposal is not viable in its current form.

- **Stage 2 – Final Accreditation** – following Stage 1 approval, the Blueway Developer will undertake the required actions to develop the Blueway and undergo inspection to ensure adherence to the Blueway Accreditation Criteria. Those which pass this stage become an Accredited Blueway and move to day-to-day operation.



Blueway accreditation process (Blueway Developer Toolkit 2024)

1.4 Strategic policy context

There is growing momentum behind the development of Blueways in Northern Ireland, reflecting wider recognition of the social, environmental and economic value of connecting communities to their waterways.

The *Blueways Partnership Action Plan (2023–25)* aims to develop 10 Blueways across the island of Ireland. Support for inclusive access to the outdoors and the protection and enhancement of blue and green infrastructure is evident across international, regional and local policy and strategies.

1.4.1 International strategic context

A Belfast Waterfront Blueway has the potential to contribute to the delivery of several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key areas of alignment include¹²:

- **SDG3** - Good Health and Wellbeing.
- **SDG6** - Clean Water and Sanitation.
- **SDG11** - Sustainable Cities and Communities.
- **SDG13** - Climate Action.
- **SDG15** - Life on Land.
- **SDG17** - Partnerships for the Goals.

1.4.2 Regional strategic context

In Northern Ireland, the value of access to the natural environment is highlighted in key frameworks including:

- *Programme for Government (PfG) 2024 – 27*
- *Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland*
- *Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035*
- *Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)*
- *Outdoor Recreation Action Plan (ORAP)*

These documents identify outdoor recreation as a key enabler of community wellbeing, climate adaptation, biodiversity enhancement, and sustainable tourism.

Relevant regional strategies and policy supporting the development of the Belfast Waterfront Blueway are summarised in Appendix A.

¹² Full details, including specific SDG targets, are provided in Appendix A.

¹³ The Waterfront Task Group consists of key landowners and stakeholders along the waterfront including Maritime Belfast, Belfast Harbour, Belfast City Council, Titanic Quarter Limited,

1.4.3 Local strategic context (Belfast)

A Bolder Vision for Belfast (2019) is a joint blueprint for Belfast, led by Department for Communities (DfC), Department for Infrastructure (DfI), and Belfast City Council (BCC). It outlines a transformative civic infrastructure strategy for the city built on four key objectives:

- Create a north-south civic spine.
- Reimagine the inner ring road and end car dominance.
- Promote city centre living with a city-wide network of people friendly routes and city parks.
- Embrace the River Lagan and waterfront and strengthen connections between the River and the city centre.

The proposed Blueway would provide a practical way to help deliver the ambitions of the *Bolder Vision*. By enhancing movement along the Lagan waterfront, it can contribute to the creation of a ‘civic spine’ adjacent to the River offering a safe, continuous, and accessible corridor for walking, cycling, and paddling, enabling everyday active travel across the city.

Blueway development can help reconnect the river and the urban core, presenting the Lagan as a shared public space and can contribute to a more liveable, vibrant, and attractive city by:

- Reducing physical barriers between neighbourhoods and the River.
- Offering people-focused alternatives to car travel.
- Enhancing active travel routes through the city centre, and adjacent communities.

By recommendation of the *Bolder Vision*, the Belfast Waterfront Task Group (WTG)¹³ was established to scope how the waterfront can fully realise its potential as a connected, vibrant corridor linking to and with key destinations, neighbourhood communities and city centre. A key requirement was an agreed placemaking Framework for the city’s waterfront promenade.

Embracing the Belfast Waterfront Framework (2023), commissioned by the WTG, sets out a strategic vision to reimagine Belfast’s urban waterfront as a connected, vibrant, and inclusive promenade. It

Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure, Department for Economy, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Tourism NI.

identifies Belfast's waterfront as a key asset, defined by character areas and serves as a design toolkit to guide long-term investment to create a continuous public realm along both sides of the water and across it serving residents, workers, and visitors.

A Blueway aligns with the Framework's goals to:

- Enhance connectivity between neighbourhoods and key destinations across the River through new bridges and active travel infrastructure.
- Enable recreation and active lifestyles by creating welcoming and accessible green corridors.
- Improve water access through the development of slipways, pontoons, and edge treatments.
- Celebrate and animate heritage and culture through public art, interpretation, and creative reuse of the waterfront.
- Catalyse tourism and investment by creating new experiences and destinations - particularly at priority sites highlighted in the Framework, including Hickson's Point, Thompson Dock, and development of a new pedestrian river crossing to create a 'Harbour Loop'.

The Framework highlights the importance of ecological restoration, inclusive design, and water quality improvements in any future waterfront development.

Currently the study area falls under the responsibility of several landowners and developers working to different masterplans and timescales. Notably, a significant portion of the River remains an active channel within the working Belfast Harbour.

The Belfast Harbour Strategy (2025 – 2029) sets out a vision to be a 'gateway to opportunity', supporting operations while 'transforming one-fifth of the city into a vibrant, sustainable urban destination'. Alongside its core port functions, the Strategy has prioritised placemaking, with plans to invest over £100 million in new mixed-use neighbourhoods featuring homes, workplaces, public spaces and green infrastructure.

A Blueway has potential to complement the Harbour's ambitions by improving active travel connections between the Harbour and the wider city. Through safe and accessible walking, cycling and paddling routes, the Blueway would support more sustainable movement while linking key destinations along the waterfront.

It also aligns with the Harbour's vision for a connected riverside corridor, also identified as a priority by the WTG, by helping to deliver a coherent, people-focused route from the inner harbour to the city centre. With interpretation, animation, and wayfinding, the Blueway can also contribute to celebrating the area's industrial heritage and shaping a distinct sense of place as the Harbour evolves.

The Belfast Agenda is the city's first Community Plan and sets a long-term vision for Belfast as a sustainable, inclusive, and dynamic city by 2035. It emphasises five strategic outcomes, including improved health and wellbeing, inclusive economic growth, and a vibrant, connected, and environmentally sustainable city.

Blueway development offers a clear mechanism to advance these outcomes by connecting people to the natural environment, enhancing access to active travel and outdoor recreation, and creating high-quality public spaces along the River Lagan. The Agenda also highlights the Local Development Plan (LDP) as a key tool to coordinate infrastructure and shape the city sustainably; a role a Blueway can help fulfil by promoting climate resilience, accessibility, and community wellbeing along a strategic corridor.

The ***Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) Strategy***¹⁴ adopted in 2023 sets out the planning policy framework to guide sustainable growth and regeneration in Belfast to 2035.

The plan promotes compact urban growth, brownfield regeneration (including key waterfront sites), active travel, and public realm investment, and encourages a people-first approach to placemaking and city design.

Its strategic policy aims are:

- Shaping a liveable place.
- Creating a vibrant economy.
- Promoting a green and active place.
- Building a smart, connected and resilient place.

The LDP explicitly supports the development of a continuous and connected waterfront, encouraging access to the River for recreation, sustainable transport, tourism, and biodiversity. It promotes inclusive design, new connections across the River, and high-quality public realm that can serve both local communities and visitors.

¹⁴ The Belfast Local Development Plan Strategy sits within a policy context including SPPS, RDS, the *Belfast Agenda* and *Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy*.

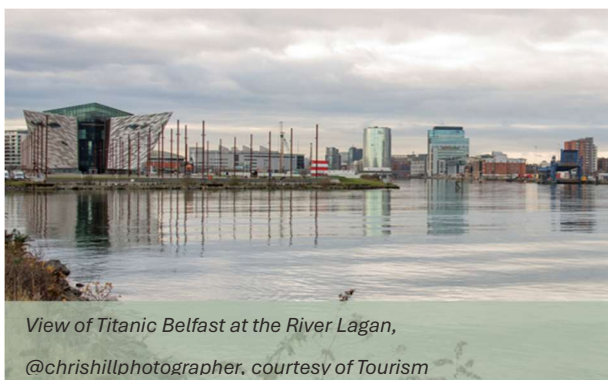
2. Current Position



2.1 About the Study Area

The study area is defined as the navigable corridor of the River Lagan extending from Ormeau Bridge to the Lagan Weir, and the tidal section of Belfast Harbour downstream of the Weir to Thompson Dock. Its extent on land will be determined by each component parts connectivity to the water as defined within the Developers Toolkit:

- **Land recreation** offering i.e., walking trails, cycling trails with a trailhead or part of the trail adjacent to the water.
- **Water recreation** offering i.e., access points, water trails, water recreation.
- **Heritage points of interest** within proximity to land and water recreation offering.
- **Visitor services** – accommodation and eateries – within proximity to land and water recreation offering.



2.2 Stakeholder engagement overview

A stakeholder engagement plan was developed in collaboration with Maritime Belfast Trust to ensure that key stakeholders had the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the study. These included statutory and non-statutory agencies, local government, tourism sector, community and volunteer groups and river users. All information provided has fed into the findings and recommendations of this report.

The key stakeholders engaged are outlined below.

- *Department for Communities*
- *Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs*

- *Belfast City Council*
- *Tourism NI*
- *Belfast Harbour Commissioners*
- *Titanic Quarter Limited*
- *Blueway Partnership*
- *Lower Ormeau Action Group*
- *Lagan Legacy*
- *Lagan Search and Rescue*
- *HMS Caroline*
- *Belfast Bike Tours*
- *Bryson LaganSports*
- *Sailortown Regeneration*
- *Eastside Partnership*
- *The Waterways Community*

Engagement was also carried out with the following stakeholder groups representing various interests from across the study area:

- Maritime Mile Sustainability Group
- Maritime Mile Destination Forum
- Waterfront Task Group¹⁵
- Maritime Belfast Trust Board of Trustees and staff

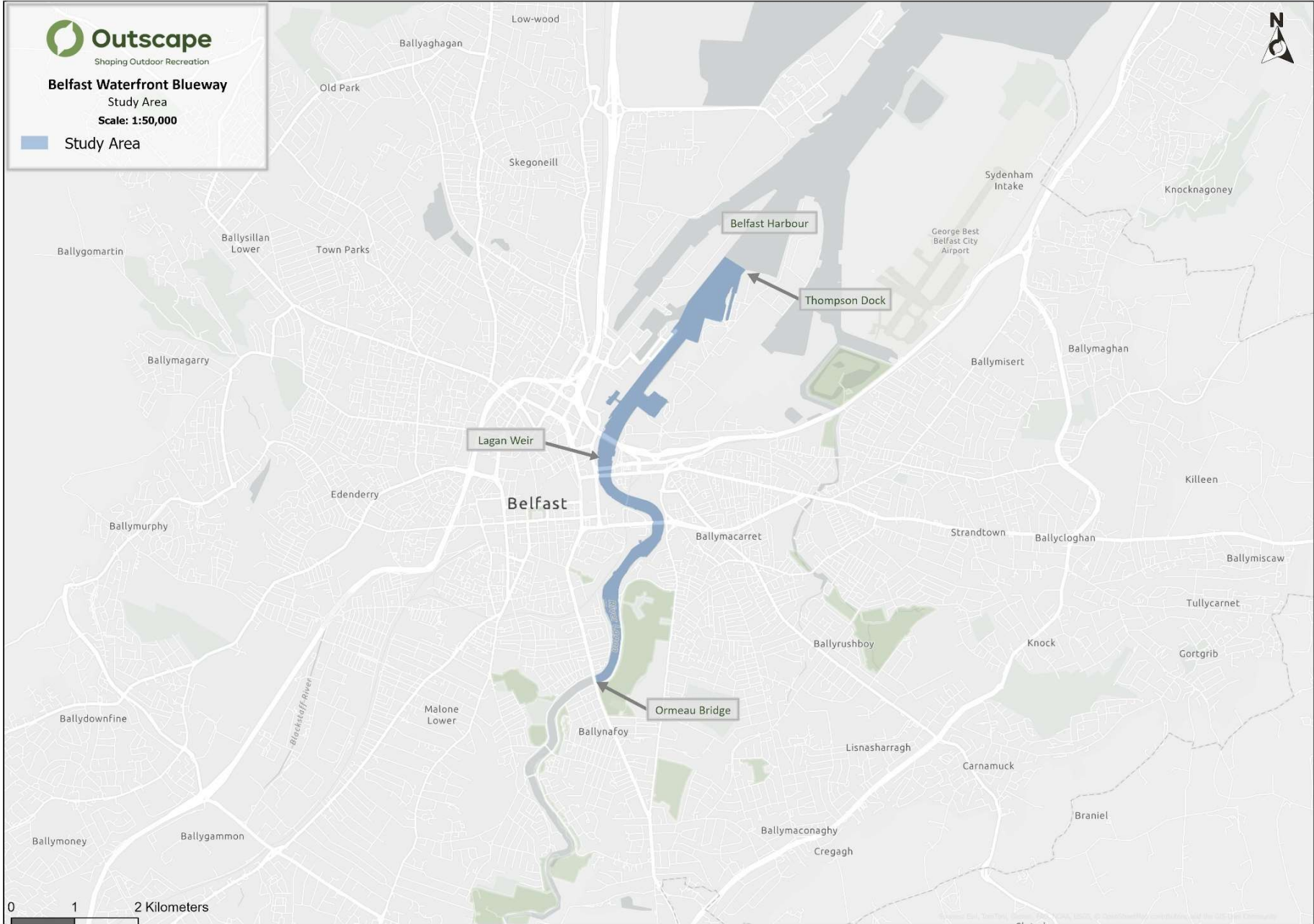
A full list is provided in *Appendix B*.

Key themes emerged from stakeholder engagement:

- Stakeholders are broadly supportive of the project as a catalyst to promote and develop the waterfront, bring life back to the river and provide opportunities for surrounding communities.
- There is extensive support for the *Belfast Waterfront Framework* and its ambitions.
- There are multiple existing and proposed stakeholder led initiatives that will complement a Blueway - including development, participation etc.
- The project provides an opportunity to highlight key challenges that are currently preventing full use of the river.

Several key constraints were also identified which are explored in more detail in the strengths and challenges analysis

¹⁵ The following stakeholders sit on the Waterfront Task Group – Department for Communities, Tourism NI, Titanic Quarter Limited and Eastside Partnership



2.3 Desk research and fieldwork overview

In combination with stakeholder engagement, desk research and fieldwork were undertaken to assess the current position against the key principles of a successful Blueway and inform the development of a concept proposal. This process included:

- Assessing how the study area is currently used for recreation – on water and land – user types, existing trails, access points etc. - and how this would help to shape the potential Blueway.
- Identifying the availability of supporting visitor services such as bars, cafés, restaurants and accommodation.
- Reviewing the accessibility of heritage and opportunities for the visitor to engage with it.
- Highlighting existing and potential projects and initiatives – recreation, environment, participation - which could enhance the Blueway offering.
- Reviewing landownership and associated responsibilities within the study area.
- Identifying potential delivery partners to support the development of the Blueway.

2.3.1 Strengths and Challenges summary

It is evident the study area has the potential to incorporate of Blueway. However, there are several key challenges which will need further consideration.

Strengths

- **Strong strategic context, vision and partnerships** – The study area is central to the vision for Belfast's waterfront which is supported by an array of strategic plans and a wide and varied community who see themselves in this vision. There is an existing track record of initiatives which are supported by a range of partnerships and relationships that can be built on to deliver this kind of project.
- **Diverse and engaging heritage and landscape** – There is a unique mix of urban, civic, industrial, and greenspace areas which offer varied experiences all of which are close to Belfast City's cafes, restaurants, accommodation, museums and attractions, and transport links.

- **Established and proposed land trail infrastructure**
The study area has an existing network of accessible high-quality recreation trails, off road cycling and active travel routes and water access points. These routes, complement public realm to provide open public space for recreation that is close to the water.
- **Existing active on water recreation** - The river and Harbour areas are used for a range of water recreation and activities, including Hydrobikes, rowing, Dragonboats, Currachs, boat tours, floating Yoga and canoeing. Both areas are well served by existing and planned water access points, with multiple floating pontoons and slipways.



Hydrobikes at Waterfront Hall

- **Activity providers** – There are several providers operating within the study area that facilitate tours and activities on foot, by bicycle and on water.
- **Land use, management and ownership** – Landownership and management within the study area is broadly well understood, with clearly defined land use designations, many of which are supportive of Blueway development. Statutory responsibilities along the river and within the Harbour area are also clearly established.
- **Managed river corridor** – Flow rates of the River upstream of the Lagan Weir are controlled by the weir. The riverbed is regularly inspected, and dredging is carried out to maintain navigability.
- **The navigable extent** - Although not within the study area, the area of the river upstream of Ormeau Bridge, extending to Stranmillis Gateway, provides an opportunity to add value to and enhance the Blueway. Additionally, extending the Blueway to the Stranmillis Gateway will allow for

future connectivity with the emerging River Lagan Community Blueway.

- **Environmental projects and education** – Although there are no environmental designations within the study area, many stakeholders are engaged with a range of environmental projects that seek to educate, restore and enhance.

Challenges

- **Continuity and connectivity** – Much of the riverbank is navigable on foot and bicycle via the existing towpath trails along the waterfront. However, there are notable sections that lack continuity:
- **River left / western bank** - Upstream of the Maritime Mile, connectivity to Ormeau and beyond is fragmented – notably from Queen’s Bridge to East Bridge Street - due to physical barriers, inconsistent surfacing and anti-social behaviour.
- **River right / eastern bank** – From East Bridge Street, there is no riverbank path until Ravenhill Reach. However, recommendations within the Belfast Waterfront Framework and preparation works carried out by DfC to create a promenade from Bryson LaganSports to Ravenhill Reach will improve connectivity in this area in the future.

“Much of the river promenade is walkable however historic pressures and piecemeal development have left a fragmented public realm.”

Embracing the Belfast Waterfront Promenade Framework

- **Physical separation of the Lagan Weir** - The Lagan Weir was opened at Queen’s Quay in 1994 to manage tidal fluctuations and prevent exposure of the mudflats which were deemed unsightly and created a strong odour. In the context of a Blueway and development of a continuous water trail, it creates a clear divide between the River and the Harbour. Due to operational and visitor safety constraints, recreation users can only pass through the weir at specific times and with prior permission from DfC and BHC. No recreation or water access is permitted within 50m of the weir.
- **User conflict and safety** - The navigable extent of the river is considered wide enough that

recreation can be carried out in both directions with minimal user conflict. However, within the Harbour area, priority is given to commercial operations within the shipping channel, therefore recreation is prohibited and only users with prior agreement from BHC can use the area – notably occasional rowing and sailing. In principle, recreation could take place outside of the shipping channel within zones – identified as Alexandra and Victoria Coves. However, the limited space and prohibition on immersive recreation activities within the Harbour area due to water quality would restrict the types of recreation to those which are not typically supported by a Blueway (floating lido, sports pitch, yoga etc.) but which could add value to the wider proposition.

- **Lack of greenspace within the inner harbour area** –High-quality greenspace is limited within the Titanic Quarter and harbour areas due their commercial and urban nature. Beyond the harbour area, formal greenspace is provided through Ormeau Park, Victoria Park and Botanic Gardens, which are accessible via the existing active travel corridors. The opportunity of the urban Blueway for Belfast will be connecting a range of greenspaces along the waterfront corridor to create a more linear green/blue experience.
- **Community water safety** – Historically, due to the use of the river and harbour for commercial and industrial purpose and the associated poor water quality, surrounding communities have not used the water for recreation and will therefore likely lack an understanding of the risks associated with these environments. Consideration will need to be given to the education of these communities on water safety as access increase and they ‘turn back’ to the water.
- **Water quality** - Poor water quality is a long-standing issue along the river and within the Harbour. This is largely attributed to the discharge of treated and untreated sewage and stormwater via combined sewage overflows directly into the waterways.

2.4 Water quality

2.4.1 Water quality and recreation

Water quality and on-water recreation are closely linked because the safety, enjoyment, and overall experience of recreational activities depend on the cleanliness and health of the water. The relationship can be summarised into the following key areas:

1. **Health and safety** – Poor water quality due to pollution, bacteria (E. coli), or harmful algal blooms can pose risks to swimmers, boaters, and anglers, causing skin infections, gastrointestinal illnesses, or respiratory problems.
2. **Aesthetic and enjoyment factors** – Clean, clear water enhances the recreational experience, while murky, smelly, or debris-filled water can deter visitors and locals alike.
3. **Biodiversity and fishing** – Water contaminated with chemicals, heavy metals, or low oxygen levels can harm fish and aquatic life, affecting recreational fishing and eco-tourism.
4. **Regulations and access** – Authorities may impose restrictions or close beaches and lakes when water quality falls below safety standards, limiting recreational opportunities.
5. **Economic impact** – Poor water quality can reduce tourism and revenue for businesses that rely on water-based recreation, such as boat rentals, fishing charters, and waterfront resorts.

It should also be recognised that water recreation can potentially have a negative impact on water quality and biodiversity. The introduction of invasive alien species into aquatic environments can significantly impact on the wildlife, habitat structure and functioning of the waterbody. This affects human dependence and interactions with the waterbody including the loss or alteration of fisheries, clogging of waterbodies and waterways, affecting water quality and supply, and impacts on recreational boating, water sport and recreational activities including angling.

Once invasive alien species become established in waterbodies it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to control or eradicate them. The presence of these invasive alien species can also affect the ability of agencies or managers to maintain the ecological quality and halt degradation of the environment. As invasive alien species can be unintentionally transported with recreational boating and watercraft activities. Aquatic invasive alien species can impact on

recreational boating by fouling submerged structures and boats, blocking water intakes, increased maintenance costs, impeding and affecting navigations and impacting on recreational access to waterbodies.¹⁶

2.4.2 Current water quality monitoring practices

Anecdotally water quality in the area is considered to have improved over the last decade, however there is limited quantitative evidence to support this perception. This is largely due to the absence of a consistent, coordinated water quality monitoring regime.

In Northern Ireland, the only statutory testing standards apply to designated bathing waters under the *Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008* which require regular and robust monitoring. However, the study area does not fall within any of these designated sites and is therefore not subject to any statutory water quality testing.

Current monitoring practices

- **River Lagan** – DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division and DfC carry out limited testing at various locations to understand ecological and chemical conditions. Parameters include temperature, salinity, turbidity, and macroinvertebrates observations. DAERA also conducts some bacteriological testing, and this shows that levels are extremely variable, and typically well above thresholds which would invoke '*advice against bathing*'.
- **Belfast Harbour** – The Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) conduct bacteriological testing at Abercorn Basin / Marina and Clarendon Dock, primarily for e-coli and coliforms.

This testing shows that chemical and biological conditions are poor within the waterways, posing risk to recreational river users.

2.4.3 Water quality improvement strategies and efforts

While there is currently no statutory water quality monitoring within the study area, it is recognised that there are ongoing strategic efforts aimed at improving water quality in Belfast.

¹⁶ Ireland's invasive alien species recreational boating and watercraft pathway action plan 2022 – 2027, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The Living With Water Programme is an interdepartmental programme led by NI Water and DfI. The Programme was approved by the NI Executive in 2014 to develop and deliver a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan (SDIP) to address critical weaknesses in Belfast's drainage system which had become inadequate to meet the requirements expected of it.

The delivery plan was published in 2021, and set out three core objectives to:

- Protect against flooding by managing surface and foul water from source to sea.
- Enhance the environment through improved water quality and blue-green infrastructure.
- Support economic growth by enabling new development.

Central to the strategy is the integration of blue and green infrastructure: natural or semi-natural systems such as parks, rivers, wetlands and sustainable drainage solutions, alongside traditional 'hard' infrastructure like sewers, pumping stations and treatment works.¹⁷

The Programme sets out a series of interventions aimed at reducing the discharge of untreated sewage and stormwater into the river system, with a particular focus on tackling pollution from Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) which is a major contributor to poor water quality in the River Lagan and Belfast Harbour. These improvements would enable safer and more sustainable recreational use of Belfast's waterways.

As of 2025, a projected 50% increase in estimated costs, from £1.4bn to £2.1bn, means that the delivery timeframe is unachievable within the allocated budget.

As a result, NI Water have confirmed that:

- Major upgrades to wastewater infrastructure have been paused indefinitely.
- NI Water has shifted focus to asset maintenance to keep existing systems operational.
- The programme will no longer proceed as a coordinated delivery framework, but rather as piecemeal work undertaken by partners within available budgets.

This delay means that untreated sewage continues to enter rivers and coastal waters, and developers face constraints due to lack of wastewater capacity.

2.4.4 Limitations for water-based recreation

Mitigations currently in place to manage recreation activities within the study area include:

- **River Lagan** - Application for water recreation events and commercial licences on the river are managed through DfC who provide advice on safe use and constraints as required. Immersive activities (swimming) or activities that may lead to immersion (paddling, SUP) are discouraged.
- **Belfast Harbour** - All activities (recreation and commercial) within the Harbour area requires formal permission from BHC. Immersive or potentially immersive water recreation is not permitted due to poor water quality.
- **Clubs and general river users** - Only non-immersive activities with limited water contact are carried out on the river (predominantly rowing). In all cases, guidance provided to users advises that in the event of accidental immersion (e.g. via capsizing), users must monitor for sickness over the following 24-to-48-hour period.

The range of on-water recreational activity is therefore limited. Notably, there is no promoted paddling trail on the river, and Bryson LaganSports has ceased canoeing operations due to poor water quality.

The only activity provider led activities are Hydrobikes, rowing (Lagan Currach, Bryson LaganSports - Dragonboat, club tours). River boat cruises also take place on the river through *Ahoy Belfast* and *Lady of the Lagan*.

¹⁷ In alignment with Belfast City Council's **Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan and Open Spaces Strategy**

2.4.5 How does poor water quality impact Blueway accreditation?

Water based recreation is a fundamental component of every Blueway. Water quality must therefore be at a sufficient level which will ensure water-based experiences are safe for the visitor and do not create a health and safety risk. Sustained poor water quality will prevent a Blueway from achieving accreditation as it poses a risk to users.

As the current understanding of water quality within the study area is largely anecdotal, action will be required to formally assess the risks to users and the impact on the sustainability of a Blueway proposition. Moreover, it is essential to ensure sufficient water quality to manage corporate risk (delivery partners) in relation to providing access for water recreation.

2.5 Introducing the Initial Concept

Based on an analysis of the strengths and challenges, a high-level working concept Blueway was identified that is cognisant of both the study area's current position and future projects (this includes extending the scope upstream of Ormeau Bridge to Stranmillis Gateway). The purpose of this working concept is to provide a model which can undergo feasibility assessment and be refined as required.

The concept is centred around the River and Harbour areas, comprising the existing network of land-based trails and existing, proposed and potential water access points along a paddling trail. When combined with the areas vibrant culture and heritage, accommodation and eateries offering, the proposed Blueway has the potential to achieve the expectation of the visitor by providing a location that is well connected and served by water and land-based activities and a range of experiences.

The concept is based on a scenario where water quality has been improved to a sufficient level to enable the creation of a safe user experience.

2.5.1 Water Recreation Offering

Central to the initial Blueway concept is the development of a paddling trail along the River enabling users to engage with the waterway and its environs, primarily through experience provider-led tours. The proposed linear paddling trail extends from Stranmillis Gateway to the Waterfront Hall - a distance of 4.5km - and is accessible via a range of existing, proposed and new water access and egress points (in order from upstream to downstream):

- Stranmillis Gateway
- Belfast Boat Club
- Governors Bridge
- McConnell Weir / Lockhouse
- Ravenhill Reach
- Sirocco Works
- Bryson LaganSports
- The Waterfront Hall

The paddling trail could potentially extend a further 1.5km into the Harbour area, with access and egress points provided at:

- Abercorn Basin / Marina
- Alexandra and Victoria Coves
- Sailortown
- Thompson Dock

Continuity from Stranmillis Gateway would be hindered by the Lagan Weir due to operational safety concerns, therefore portage facilities would be required at this point. Agreement could be sought from DfC to allow users to pass through the Lagan Weir on specific dates and times.

Clarendon Dock has the potential to provide a 'have a go' opportunity in which visitors could sample water sports in a smaller enclosed environment.

2.5.2 Land recreation offering

The concept comprises a range of walking and cycling trails which create the land recreation offering. The trails are located close to or at the water's edge

ensuring that the essential component of connectivity with water identified within the Blueway principles is achieved. A list of trails is provided below:

Name / Area	Activity	Start / End Point	Length / duration
Maritime Mile (Public Art, Glass of Thrones, Belfast Maritime routes)	Walking and cycling	Titanic Quarter and surrounding	Self-guided walks ranging from 30 – 60 minutes
Titanic Trail	Walking	Belfast City Hall to Thompson Dock	3.5km (linear) Waymarked
Lagan Towpath	Walking and cycling	Queens Bridge to Lisburn	23km (linear)
Ormeau Park	Walking and cycling	Ormeau Embankment to	Multiple - Main loop 2.5km
Botanic Gardens	Walking and cycling	Stranmillis Embankment to Botanic Avenue	Multiple - Main loop 1.5km
Lagan Meadows (connecting into Lagan Lands East)	Walking		2.8km (looped)

Wider connectivity is provided through high-quality public transport links (including Glider) and active travel routes which connect into the National Cycling Network and Connswater Greenway, and onwards to the Comber Greenway.

2.5.3 Culture and heritage

The concept is enhanced by the wide range of accessible cultural and heritage assets which are located across the Blueway. The focus of the assets is primarily maritime heritage – telling the stories of the communities and people that lived and continue to live in the area and the industry that made it what it is today. These stories are told through public art, museums, exhibitions, built heritage etc.

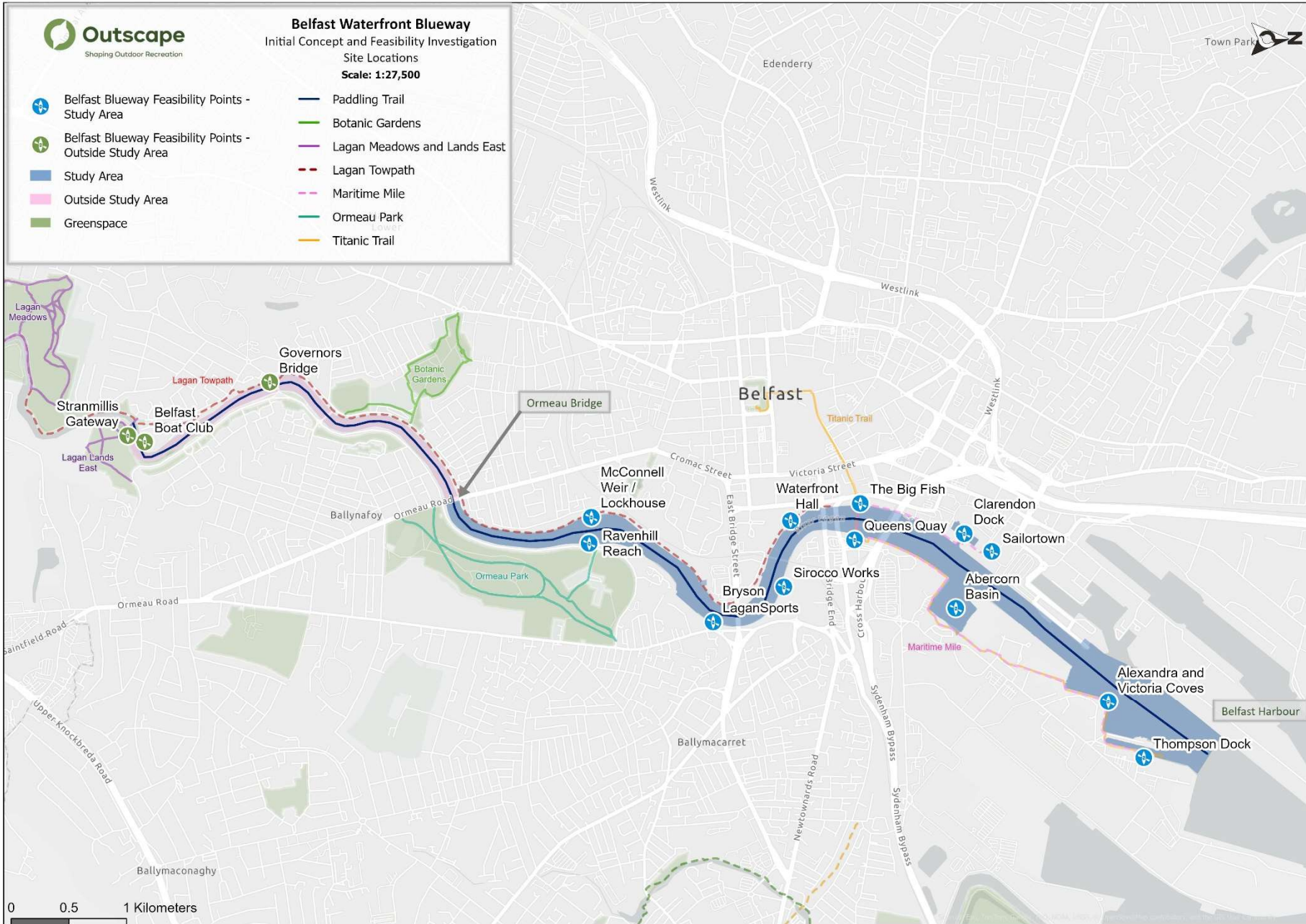
Public Art	Museums and Exhibitions	Built Heritage	Other
The Big Fish Glass of Thrones Dividers Belfast Buoys SoundYard The Kit The Great Light RiverBox	Titanic Belfast SS Nomadic HMS Caroline Titanic Distillery / Pump House W5 Public Records Office Northern Ireland Lagan Legacy	Custom House Sinclair Seaman's Church St Joseph's Church John Murray Lock House McConnell Weir Belfast Harbour Commissioners SSE Arena Lagan Weir Sirocco Works Thompson, Clarendon, Alexandra and Hamilton Docks Harland and Wolf Cranes	Sailortown Ormeau Park Botanic Garden

2.5.4 Visitor services

The concept is served by an abundance of accommodation and eateries (cafes, take aways, restaurants, food tours and experiences) within proximity to the River and Harbour. Additionally, a range of activity providers would operate on the water providing tours of the paddling trail and Clarendon Dock on kayak, canoe and Stand-Up Paddle (SUP) board. On land, tours are provided via walking and cycling tour providers adding to the offering of the Blueway.

Belfast Waterfront Blueway
Initial Concept and Feasibility Investigation
Site Locations
Scale: 1:27,500

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Belfast Blueway Feasibility Points - Study Area |  Paddling Trail |
|  Belfast Blueway Feasibility Points - Outside Study Area |  Botanic Gardens |
|  Study Area |  Lagan Meadows and Lands East |
|  Outside Study Area |  Lagan Towpath |
|  Greenspace |  Maritime Mile |
| |  Ormeau Park |
| |  Titanic Trail |



0 0.5 1 Kilometers

3. Feasibility Investigation

Imagery: The Big Fish, ©Tourism Ireland photographed by Chris Hill, Courtesy TNI Content Pool



3.1 The Process

The first step in developing a Blueway is to undertake a feasibility investigation which provides a determination of the potential of a concept and identifies any requirements needed to achieve accreditation status. Assessment is informed through desk research, stakeholder engagement and site assessment.

The key stages are outlined below:

1. Testing the concept - The initial screening assesses the concept against the key principles of a Blueway based on a high-level understanding of the current position and opportunities. This determines if the proposal aligns with Blueway objectives and is therefore viable in principle.

2. Technical Assessment – If the concept is identified as meeting or having the potential to meet the key principles of a Blueway, the next stage is a more detailed technical assessment of the water and land recreation infrastructure. This involves identifying development requirements and opportunities to meet accreditation criteria as outlined through the SCATES approach, which ensures all key Blueway standards can be met.



St Joseph's Church, Sailortown

The SCATES Approach

SAFETY: is risk being appropriately managed?

CONSERVATION / ENVIRONMENT - As a minimum does the Blueway avoid any negative impact on the environment or ideally how does it add to or improve the environment e.g. through education and access?

ACCESS: Will the Blueway be open for public use for at least ten years following accreditation?

TECHNICAL: Does trail infrastructure and signage follow best practice?

EXPERIENCE: Are the visitors' expectations met?

SUSTAINABILITY: Are the management structures / partnerships, plans and processes in place to ensure the Blueway can continue to meet the required standard?

Further information on assessment criteria derived from the SCATES Approach is provided in Appendix C.

3. Development phasing – Based on the outcome of the technical assessment, development opportunities are then phased and actions outlined, with the aim of achieving eventual Blueway status. Or - If the technical assessment confirms that the proposal is feasible, a phased development plan is prepared.

This plan outlines priority actions and a clear pathway toward achieving full Blueway accreditation.

3.1.1 Water Quality

The assessment is based on a scenario where water quality has been improved to a sufficient level to enable the creation of a safe user experience.

3.2 Testing the Concept

Initial, high-level screening of the concept indicates that it has the potential to meet all the key principles through intervention. However, the ability to achieve Blueway criteria will be dependent on improving water quality within the River and Harbour areas. There are opportunities to develop and enhance the current situation based on existing and proposed initiatives and projects to enhance the overall offering.

Key Principle	Qualifier	Study Area
Water at its heart	The waterway must be at the core of the offering. Hubs and trails must be on and alongside water.	Achievable – The River Lagan and Belfast Harbour are at the core of the offering.
Being active in nature	The Blueway must encourage active and responsible participation in nature.	Achievable – the Blueway setting has the potential to achieve this principle.
Appropriate for the dabbler	The paddling trail must be suitable for those with little or no experience i.e. there must be a section of 'Simple Waters' and if 'Moderate Waters' are included there must be an appropriately qualified activity provider available.	Achievable – As per the Water Trail Criteria Grading within the Water Trail Criteria for Ireland, the River Lagan and Belfast Harbour areas are graded as Moderate Waters therefore access to the water for the dabbler will be with support from an activity provider. Combined with the offering of Clarendon Dock (Simple Waters through development), there is sufficient scale to provide a minimum of a half day experience which is required for a Blueway. Water quality poses a risk to user safety.
On-trail activity providers	Appropriately qualified activity providers (permanent or mobile) must offer bookable experiences on at least a seasonal basis	Achievable – there are several activity operators offering experiences within the study area. Further consideration of the approach to business capacity building would be required (notably for water recreation).
Animated by Heritage and Culture	The experience must provide an opportunity to appreciate and explore an attractive landscape and engage with the unique heritage and culture of the area	Achievable – Belfast City, the Harbour, Titanic Quarter and the River are rich in heritage and cultural assets which are animated through a diverse range of interpretation, museums, sculptures, events etc. to ensure the visitor fully engages and appreciates the heritage.
Variety of Eat, Stay and Play	Bars, Cafés, restaurants and attractions must be easily accessible from trail heads and / or trails	Achievable – Belfast provides a variety of opportunities in its current position.
Land offering connected to the water	Land based trails must either have a trail head at the water or a significant section of trail adjacent or providing a view of the water.	Achievable – there is a variety of existing, high-quality walking and cycling trails at the water's edge via – Maritime Mile, Annadale Embankment, Lagan Meadows, Lands East and Lagan Towpath. There are also publicly accessible, well-connected greenspaces within the wider study area at Ormeau Park, Botanic Gardens and City Quays Gardens.
Responsible Recreation	Blueways must be planned, developed and managed to ensure their environmental sustainability. As a minimum a Blueway should avoid negative impact on the environment and ideally provide enhancement e.g. through education and access	Achievable – with a considered approach the Blueway would have the potential to meet this principle.
The ability to achieve Blueway criteria will be dependent on improving water quality within the River and Harbour areas.		

3.3 Technical assessment

Technical assessment investigates the initial concept in the context of water and land recreation offering to understand how they will help the extended study area to achieve the Blueway Criteria based on their current position. Assessment will identify infrastructure and development requirements to achieve the criteria where possible. Locations are shown on the map above, and detailed site assessment findings are provided in Appendix C.

3.3.1 Water access

The initial concept identified ten locations within the study area, alongside a further three upstream locations, to be assessed for their **potential** to meet the accreditation criteria. The assessment categorised each location as having:

	Potential to help achieve criteria at present, or through intervention and subject to specific conditions in the short term (1 to 5 years)
	Potential to help achieve criteria or opportunities for intervention in the long term (5+ years)
	No potential to achieve criteria

A summary table showing the findings from assessment of potential to meet accreditation criteria is provided below:

		McConnell Weir / Lockhouse	Ravenhill Reach	Queens Quay, Waterfront Hall, Big Fish	Clarendon Dock	Governors Bridge	Belfast Boat Club	Stranmillis Gateway	Sirocco Works	Bryson LaganSports	Abercorn Basin	Alexandra and Victoria Coves	Thompson Dock	Sailortown
Current Position	Engaging landscape / waterscape	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Proximity to experiences, heritage and culture and visitor services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Activity provider offering	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	✓
	Multi-activity offering adjacent to and/or on water	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Existing safe water access infrastructure	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X ¹⁸	X	X	X
	Car parking and staging	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X
	Toilets and changing facilities	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X
	Landownership is known	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Suitability for the dabbler ¹⁹	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X
Potential														

¹⁸ The existing water access at Abercorn Basin is for private marina users and therefore not suitable for recreation as defined within this report.

¹⁹ Assumption is made that water quality will be improved to enable the creation of a safe user experience.

3.3.2 Land Recreation offering

Six walking and cycling recreational trails were identified within the extended study area and assessed against their potential to help achieve the Blueway criteria. The Blueway Developer Toolkit outlines specific criteria²⁰ which must be met to ensure a consistent approach across the island of Ireland. The assessment categorised each trail as having:

	Potential to meet criteria at present, or through intervention and subject to specific conditions in the short term (1 to 5 years)
	Potential to meet criteria or opportunities for intervention in the long term (5+ years)
	No potential to meet criteria

A summary table showing the findings from assessment of potential to meet criteria is provided below.

		Maritime Mile – various routes	Titanic Trail	Lagan Towpath	Ormeau Park	Botanic Gardens	Lagan Meadows (connecting into Lagan Lands East)
Current Position	Engaging landscape / waterscape	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Proximity to experiences, heritage and culture and visitor services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Landowner / access agreement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Blueway visitor information and signage	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Suitable trail infrastructure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	An experience suitable and safe for the visitor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Environmental impact mitigations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Trail management plan in place	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Trailhead and/or part of the trail adjacent to water	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Connectivity to access points	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Accessibility	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Potential							

²⁰ Walking Trails are compliant with the relevant **Walking Trails Criteria for Ireland** and Cycle Trails are compliant with the **Recreational Cycle Trails Criteria for Ireland**

3.4 Other Factors of Success

Although not assessed as part of the Technical Assessment, the following criterion are critical to success of a Blueway:

- **Insurance** – Appropriate insurance must be put in place prior to the development of any Blueway.
- **Rights** – Sporting, riparian, fishing rights etc. should be fully explored prior to Stage 1 accreditation application.
- **Blueway Signage** – Each Blueway is required to have appropriate, branded signage to assist with wayfinding and interpretation. All signage must comply with the Blueway Signage Guidelines which outlines the Brand application and best practice for signage implementation. It considers the ‘User Journey’ and how the Blueway brand, typography and colours are used in pre-visit information, welcome signage, directional signage, language principles, interpretation, and safety signage. Developing a signage and interpretation plan will be essential.
- **Accessibility** – Designing for accessibility from the outset enhances the overall quality of the Blueway experience, broadens its audience, and aligns with Blueway accreditation expectations around inclusivity and responsible recreation. An accessible approach to design must therefore be taken to ensure the needs of the end user are identified and placed at the forefront of decision making during the design process ensuring that people of all ages and abilities can safely and comfortably access and enjoy the experience. This approach aims to identify and remove the physical barriers that prevent users from participating in land and water-based activities as fully as they can and on their own terms.
- **Participation** - Activity and participation programmes developed in partnership with user groups, clubs etc. play a vital role in improving access and inclusion by helping to familiarise users with the infrastructure, build confidence, and promote regular, sustainable use of the trails and water access points.

NCN Barriers - Belfast Waterfront Area

In 2022, Sustrans assessed the Lagan Towpath from Queen Elizabeth Bridge to Lisburn to identify obstructions preventing some users from walking or wheeling along this section of the National Cycle Network. The assessment identified 37 barriers that require redesign to ensure fairer and more inclusive access.

These barriers include access-management bollards, pinch points on bridges, and narrow gates. The report provides recommendations for each barrier to improve accessibility while still meeting their intended purpose. An extract relevant to the Blueway Feasibility Study area is included in Appendix G.



3.5 Feasibility Investigation summary

The feasibility investigation confirmed the suitability of some elements of concept to help the extended study area achieve the principles and criteria of a Blueway in the future. It has identified a range of infrastructure development proposals as well as opportunities to increase capacity amongst activity provider offerings on the River (currently only 1 provider). These interventions will create a proposition that offers the visitor and user an opportunity to explore an attractive landscape, engage with the unique heritage and culture of the area, participate in water- and land-based activities and experience bars, restaurants and cafes all within the vicinity of the River and Harbour areas.

The assessment is based on a scenario where water quality has been improved to a sufficient level to enable the creation of a safe user experience.

A summary is provided in the following tables, including the minimum requirements to achieve Stage 1 Preliminary Accreditation:

WATER ACCESS			
Location	Recommendation	Timescale	
McConnell Weir / Lockhouse	Support the development of the Lockhouse and associated water access currently underway Work alongside LORAG (the project lead) to develop a programme of events and activity provider led activities	Short	
Queens Quay	Explore the potential to create a gateway to the Blueway – including installation of signage, developing events and experiences Engage with the current water-based activity provider to identify potential opportunities (use of current access, exploring other locations etc.)	Short	
Clarendon Dock	Engage with Belfast Harbour to develop water access and associated facilities	Short	
Governors Bridge	Develop the existing pontoon to enhance the accessibility to the river	Short	
Ravenhill Reach	Develop the existing pontoon to enhance the accessibility to the river	Short	
Belfast Boat Club	Engage with the club to identify opportunities to use facilities and provide suitable water access	Short	
Stranmillis Gateway	Develop the existing pontoon to enhance the accessibility to the river	Short	
Sirocco Works	Engage with landowner and community to identify ‘meanwhile’ project opportunities and ensure that water access is included in future proposals	Long	
Bryson LaganSports	Engage with Bryson LaganSports to determine potential use of facilities as access point and identify opportunities for activity provision	Long	
Abercorn Basin	Engage with landowner and community to identify future opportunities and explore delivery of Belfast Waterfront Framework objectives	Long	
Alexandra and Victoria Coves	Engage with landowner and community to identify future opportunities and explore delivery of Belfast Waterfront Framework objectives	Long	
Thompson Dock	No potential to provide water access – <i>refer to land access summary</i>	-	
Sailortown	No potential to provide water access – <i>refer to land access summary</i>	-	

LAND RECREATION			
Location	Recommendation	Timescale	
Maritime Mile – various routes	Develop Blueway signage strategy to integrate into existing visitor information and develop wayfinding Explore extending the Maritime Mile upstream and enhancing connectivity to existing points of interest along the routes – notably Sailortown and Thompson Dock	Short	
Titanic Trail	Develop Blueway signage strategy to integrate into existing visitor information and develop wayfinding	Short	
Lagan Towpath	Develop Blueway signage strategy to integrate into existing visitor information and develop wayfinding Explore connecting into Lagan Meadows and Annadale Embankment to create an additional loop (using wayfinding)	Short	
Ormeau Park	Develop Blueway signage strategy to integrate into existing visitor information and develop wayfinding	Short	
Botanic Gardens	Develop Blueway signage strategy to integrate into existing visitor information and develop wayfinding	Short	
Lagan Meadows (connecting into Lagan Lands East)	Develop Blueway signage strategy to integrate into existing visitor information and develop wayfinding Explore opportunities to improve accessibility Explore connecting into Lagan Towpath and Annadale Embankment to create a more varied loop	Short	



Essential for Stage 1 accreditation **only** when water quality has been improved to enable the creation of a safe user experience.

4. Concept Development



4.1 Concept Refinement

The feasibility investigation has identified that the initial concept has the potential to achieve Blueway status (subject to improving water quality) through a range of development and capacity building opportunities. Delivering water access infrastructure improvements within the study area must only be carried out once the risk to users is understood and appropriate actions implemented to improve water quality.

This section outlines the refined concept based on these findings.

4.2 Water Recreation Offering

Investigation of water access points identified that the development of a linear paddling trail along part of the River is feasible, subject to water quality being tested, understood, and improved to enable the creation of a safe experience for users.

The paddling trail would form the spine of the Blueway - providing that key connection to the River and its environment. Its success is dependent on the enhancement of and provision of infrastructure along its route from McConnell Weir to Stranmillis Gateway:

- McConnell Weir – Access – underdevelopment.
- Ravenhill Reach - Egress – enhancements required.
- Governors Bridge – Egress – enhancements required.
- Stranmillis Gateway – Egress - enhancements required.

The proposed linear paddling trail would be 4.5km in length (1.5 hours duration) and could be extended by a further 1.5km (40-minute duration) to include an egress point at Bryson LaganSports and an access point at Queens Quay (Waterfront Hall). This will be determined by the ability to gain access to the pontoons at these locations following engagement with the landowners. Further opportunities for water access upstream of the study area could be explored. Belfast Boat Club, for example, may offer potential as an upstream access point at Stranmillis, subject to engagement with and agreement from the landowner.²¹

The development of a paddling trail in the Harbour area was deemed unfeasible due to water safety concerns associated with commercial operations in this area.

4.3 Short Term Water Recreation Proposals

The following proposals have the potential to contribute to the overall Blueway meeting the criteria through development in the short term.

4.3.1 Queen's Quay (including the Big Fish, Waterfront Hall areas)

Opportunity: Position Queen's Quay as the starting point of the Blueway with connection to land trails adjacent to the River and potential, future access to the paddling trail.

Proposal: The *Belfast Waterfront Framework* identifies Queen's Quay and the surrounding area as the 'Gateway' - creating a welcoming space for the city's urban waterfront. Its proximity to the city centre, connectivity and amenity makes it an ideal location to serve as a starting point for a Blueway in the city. Recent projects to improve the public realm and provide additional services (e.g., Native Coffee) have shown how the area can be enhanced.



Actions: Queens Quay is located along existing land trails (Maritime Mile trails, Lagan Towpath and Titanic Trail) and would require the development of welcome, trailhead and wayfinding signage to help visitors navigate the Blueway. Further engagement with the existing water-based activity provider (Hydrobikes) at Waterfront Hall will be required to explore opportunities as an access point on the paddling trail.

4.3.2 Clarendon Dock

Opportunity: Clarendon Dock presents an opportunity to develop a standalone water access venue and destination, suitable for users of all abilities, within an historic neighbourhood in the city centre. As a mostly isolated structure, water quality at the dock is understood to be generally better than in the adjacent river and is therefore identified as a potentially viable

²¹ Belfast Boat Club was invited to participate in the study consultation process but did not respond.

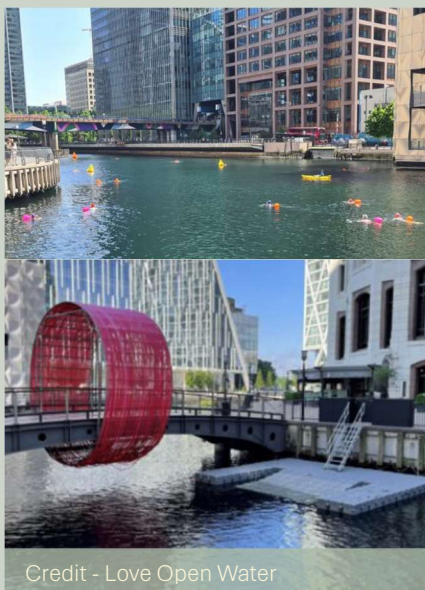
short-term development location while wider water quality issues are addressed.

Proposal: The area of Clarendon Dock comprises 3No. dry docks (one of which is permanently flooded) constructed in the 1800s and which are the oldest remaining dry docks in Belfast. They play an important role in Belfast’s maritime heritage and that of the adjacent Sailortown community. The area is located along Maritime Mile routes and close to the recently completed City Quays Gardens. Clarendon Dock is highlighted in masterplans and strategies as an opportunity to enhance the waterfront through recreation and leisure. It has the potential to offer a unique water recreation offering in the heart of the city.

Actions: Create a unique, city centre experience within the flooded dock that provides water access and associated facilities (changing, toilets, cafe within adjacent buildings e.g. pump house) for visitors and the local community to enjoy a range of activity provider led activities – paddling, SUP and swimming. A proposed layout of the dock pontoon is provided in Appendix D. Opportunities should also be explored to enhance the connectivity via land trails (Maritime Mile and active travel routes) to encourage more visitors into the Clarendon Dock and Sailortown areas.

Love Open Water, Canary Wharf

Located within Canary Wharf, the historical Eden Dock was opened in October 2024 as a seasonal open water swimming venue. A collaborative project between Canary Wharf Group, Love Open Water and NOWCA (National Open Water Coaches Association), the facility is staff and lifeguard supported (during sessions) and includes swim events, marked swim courses, accessible infrastructure, toilets, changing rooms and outdoor warm water rinse shower. Swimming lessons are also provided.



Credit - Love Open Water

4.3.3 McConnell Weir and John Murray Lockhouse

Opportunity: Creation of an enhanced access point along the paddling trail located within an historic neighbourhood of the city.

Proposal: This community led development (Lower Ormeau Action Group and BCC) has the potential to become a key component of the Blueway proposition through its connectivity along the paddling trail and Lagan Towpath. Work is currently underway to develop this community facility, including:

- John Murray Lockhouse renovation and extension project (due Summer 2026) comprising - Social enterprise run café, seating and terrace, community garden, function space, proposed equipment store.
- DfC proposal to install managed water access at McConnell Weir – currently at design stage.
- Proposed community led seasonal (April to October) activities - Instructor led canoe hire, canoe tours (bat tours, river history tours, bird and wildlife tours with food and music), paddle and dine, paddling competency programme, row and sail.
- New pedestrian/cycle bridge between Gasworks and Ormeau Embankment (due to complete 2027) – allowing greater connectivity to Ormeau Park and Annadale Embankment.

Actions: As infrastructure development is underway, it will be essential to support the development of the various projects – including assisting with promotion, exploring opportunities to build capacity for activity provider offering along the Blueway, and providing input at design stage of the water access to ensure it is accessible to all users, including disabled people.



Projection - John Murray Lockhouse (Courtesy LORAG)

4.3.4 Ravenhill Reach

Opportunity: Provide an enhanced egress and rest point along the paddling trail.

Proposal: Owned and operated by DfI, the pontoon at Ravenhill Reach is located on the opposite side of the River to the weir and lockhouse. It was installed to provide access to the river for those wishing to use water taxis. As water taxis have not been introduced to the River, the pontoon and adjacent slipway is used for informal water access.

The pontoon could be developed as a formal egress and rest point along the paddling trail. It could be used as a secondary access point for activities out of McConnell Weir or those visitors and community users wishing to access the paddling trail from that side of the river.

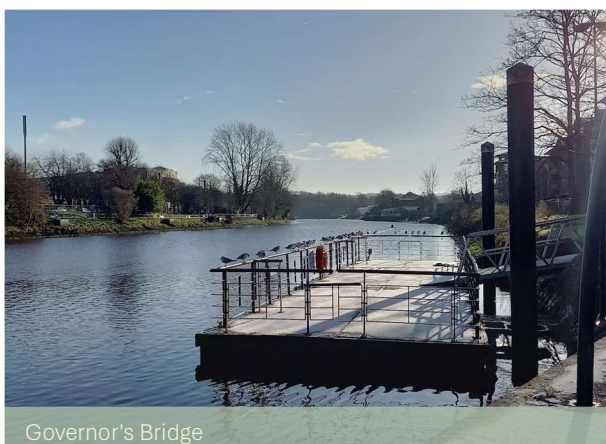
Actions: The existing pontoon was constructed for water taxis, therefore the height of the pontoon above the water level is unsuitable for kayaks, canoes etc. which sit lower in the water. Developing the pontoon by attaching a lower, floating pontoon section with added accessibility features (swim ladder, winch, bench, rails, slip resistant surfacing, launch – if required) would improve accessibility for users of all abilities on the paddling trail. A proposed layout is provided in Appendix D.

4.3.5 Governor’s Bridge

Opportunity: Provide an enhanced egress and rest point along the paddling trail.

Proposal: The pontoon at Governors Bridge is also owned and operated by DfI and was developed as a water taxi access pontoon. As with Ravenhill Reach, the pontoon could be developed as an egress and rest point with enhanced accessibility along the paddling trail.

Actions: The pontoon would benefit from improved accessibility enhancements (as outlined above) to assist users of all abilities on the paddling trail. A proposed layout is provided in Appendix D.



Governor’s Bridge



Example of adaptations (credit DSNI)

4.3.6 Stranmillis Gateway

Opportunity: Provide an enhanced egress and rest point along the paddling trail.

Proposal: In 2021, BCC (in partnership with Ulster Garden Villages, DfC, DfI and Lagan Navigation Trust) completed the Stranmillis Gateway project comprising a new foot and cycle bridge connecting the Lagan Towpath to Annadale Embankment, water taxi pontoon and the refurbishment of Stranmillis Weir (including a new navigation lock and canoe portage which will provide a connection to the emerging Lagan Community Blueway).

As with Ravenhill Reach and Governors Bridge, the pontoon could be developed as an egress and rest point with enhanced accessibility along the paddling trail.

Actions: Like Ravenhill Reach and Governors Bridge, the pontoon at Stranmillis Gateway would benefit from improved accessibility enhancements (as outlined above) to assist users of all abilities on the paddling trail. A proposed layout is provided in Appendix D.

4.3.7 Belfast Boat Club

Opportunity: Promotion of a water access point along the paddling trail using existing facilities (changing, toilets, water access) close to visitor services (Stranmillis) and located along the Lagan Towpath.

Proposal: Set on the banks of the River, Belfast Boat Club is a sports and leisure club offering rowing, tennis, padel and squash. Part of the site (accessible to the public) hosts mobile coffee van, juice bar and toastie stand and is close to visitor services within the Stranmillis area. The location has the potential to serve as a key access point along the paddling trail using existing facilities and water access.

Actions: Engage with the club to identify opportunities to use facilities and water access - including exploring opportunities to enhance existing access to allow users of all abilities to access the river.

4.4 Long Term Water Recreation Proposals

Assessment identified four locations which have limited potential for development in the short term but could provide opportunities to enhance Blueway proposition in the future.

4.4.1 Sirocco Works

The former Sirocco Works is a brownfield site located between the river and Short Strand. It is currently in private land ownership with limited confirmation on future proposals for development. There is an opportunity to work with the developer and wider community to explore ‘meanwhile’ project opportunities that seek to enhance the area and improve connectivity with river. Additionally, it will be important to engage with the developer to emphasise the benefit of providing water access within any future design proposals for site allowing it to play a role in the paddling trail.

4.4.2 Bryson LaganSports

Bryson LaganSports is an outdoor adventure charity which focuses on charities, corporate clients, youth groups and marginalised communities. Their facilities on Ravenhill Road include changing, toilets and accessible pontoons. Currently, the operator does not have an interest in tourism offering, nor does it provide water activities on the Lagan (except commercial/fundraising dragon boat). However, there may be an opportunity to explore use of the facilities as an access, egress or rest point along the paddling trail, or developing complementary activity provider led activities in the future.

4.4.3 Abercorn Basin (including the Marina and Hickson’s Point)

Recreation access (except sailing) is not permitted at the BHC owned Abercorn Basin and Marina due to poor water quality and water safety (submerged objects around Hickson’s Point and proximity to navigation channel). BHC Place Making proposals include a proposal to expand the marina – including subsurface clearance - in the future (funding dependant). In the interim, opportunities could be explored to develop segregated seasonal floating recreation offering – e.g. Lido, pitch, event space.

Hickson’s Point is owned by Titanic Quarter Limited and is earmarked for residential development in the Titanic Quarter Masterplan/Development Framework. However, the Belfast Waterfront Framework recommends embracing this prominent point for civic use such as a building of national importance or an iconic public space. Additionally, the development of a bridge from Sailortown to Titanic Quarter (at Hickson's Point) which is currently at feasibility stage and would further enhance connectivity through the creation of a Harbour Loop walking and cycling route.

4.4.4 Alexandra and Victoria Coves

Recreation is not permitted in the Coves due to poor water quality. However, there may be opportunities to create seasonal, segregated recreation e.g. floating Lido, pitch, event space here. The Belfast Waterfront Framework identifies adjacent land as suitable to develop a linear greenspace to enhance the area and improve connectivity towards Thompson Dock, HMS Caroline etc.

4.5 Water safety

Central to any Blueway proposition is the visitor – *the dabbler* – and the assurance that on water experiences are deemed safe and suitable. When assessing the suitability for the visitor, assessment is carried out using the relevant Sport Ireland Criteria²² which provides a standardised criteria for water trail development across Ireland and ensures a consistent approach across all Blueways. Trails are categorised as below. The Developer Toolkit outlines that water access that is facilitated through a paddling trail:

- Must be suitable for those with little or no experience i.e. there must be a section of 'Simple Waters'
- If 'Moderate Waters' are included there must be an appropriately qualified activity provider available

GRADE	BEGINNER: Simple Waters	INTERMEDIATE: Moderate Waters	ADVANCED: Challenging Waters
Suitability	Ability to swim essential For a Beginner/Novice, prior training with a club, or booking with a competent activity provider, is highly recommended	Ability to swim essential Ability to undertake basic paddling strokes, self-rescue and navigate confidently using a map. Booking with a competent activity provider, is essential.	Ability to swim essential Ability to undertake advanced paddling strokes, self-rescue and navigate confidently using a map. Practical experience of moving water – eddies, standing waves, stoppers and route selection.
Conditions	Very slow-moving rivers/canals. Small lakes which do not become rough when conditions change.	Slow moving rivers without obstruction. Lakes which can become Challenging Waters in windy conditions.	Rivers with simple obstructions and places where the flow accelerates. Stoppers and small drops can be present. Lakes which become rough in windy conditions.

²² Water Trail Criteria Grading within the Water Trail Criteria for Ireland

The assessment made across the study area has attributed the following categories:

- Clarendon Dock – Moderate waters, with potential for simple waters through the provision of additional access.
- River Lagan – Moderate waters.
- Belfast Harbour – Moderate waters.

On the basis of flow rates, the River and Clarendon dock are deemed suitable for the visitor. However, activity provider led provision will be essential at along the river.

Although recreation is not permitted within the shipping channel of the Harbour area, adjacent areas have been identified for potential segregated recreation which would be considered moderate. Any recreation associated with the Blueway must be activity provider led.

It will be vital that all those involved in improving water access within the Blueway ensure education of surrounding communities and users on water safety.

4.6 Water quality

As outlined in Section 2.4, water quality has been identified as the greatest limiting factor for the delivery of a Blueway project within the study area. Fundamentally, providing a high level of water quality is vital to the success of a Blueway in terms of visitor safety and experience. **Therefore, if water quality remains poor, water recreation would not be safe, and Blueway status unachievable.**

A key recommendation is to work with a range of stakeholders to improve water quality. The feasibility assessment is therefore carried out under the assumption that water quality is suitable to permit water access (except where noted). Associated next steps and actions are outlined later in this report.

4.7 Land Recreation Offering Summary

The connection between the waterway and land recreation offering is an important factor in a successful Blueway. The feasibility investigation has shown that all existing walking and cycling trails are at some point along their route located adjacent to water. When compared against the assessment criteria, some of the existing trails would benefit from minor development or enhancements which can be carried out in the short term:

- **Maritime Mile** - Explore opportunities to enhance connectivity to areas upstream of Queens Bridge e.g. Lagan Legacy, East Bridge Street to Ormeau, sirocco Works, etc.
- **Lagan Towpath and Lagan Meadows** – Create a looped walking route (through signage and visitor information) at Stranmillis and Annadale Embankment using existing towpath and trails.
- **Lagan Meadows** - Explore opportunities to improve accessibility (where suitable).
- **Sailortown** – Enhance the areas visibility and connectivity along Maritime Mile.
- **Thompson Dock** – Enhance the areas visibility and connectivity along Maritime Mile.

Essential to each trail will be the development of a suite of Blueway signage to improve the overall experience for the visitor and ensure they remain connected to the Blueway. This will require improved network planning, interpretation, orientation and wayfinding.

Recommendations outlined within Sustrans NCN Barriers report should be implemented to improve equality of access (Appendix G).

4.8 Environmental considerations

A Biodiversity Review was carried out across the extended study area to understand the potential impacts, mitigations and enhancements of the proposed short term development opportunities.

The report identified that whilst the study area is not protected by any national or international designations, it is upstream of Belfast Lough Ramsar Site, Belfast Lough SPA and Inner Belfast Lough ASSI - nature conservation designations. Impacts from developments must therefore be considered in the context of their potential to impact these sensitive areas via hydrological processes.

It considers that the potential detrimental impacts upon the habitats from proposed development will be minimal, and that there are opportunities for a range of ecological enhancements to be undertaken as part of the Blueway. These include:

- Clarendon Dock – using the proposed pontoons for additional nursery space for Oysters, installing nest tubes for Black Guillemots.
- McConnell Weir – engaging with local schools, installing swift boxes in the new building, development of a biodiversity enhancement

scheme e.g. planting pollinators, introducing wildflowers etc.

- Ravenhill Reach – extending the existing tree and shrub areas.
- Queen’s Quay – provision of troughs and hanging baskets attractive to pollinators.
- Belfast Boat Club – creation of dead wood piles to encourage micro habitats for invertebrates

Engaging with key stakeholders during the development phase will be essential - DAERA Marine and Fisheries, NIEA, UWT, Environmental Groups (e.g. Wild Belfast), BCC and neighbouring landowners and managers.

4.8.1 Clarendon Dock

Ulster Wildlife Trust has identified a section of the wet dock to expand oyster farming and sea grass cultivation. Whilst this reduces the extent of the useable dock, engagement with the Trust has confirmed that recreation will not adversely impact these activities. There is an opportunity to educate visitors on the initiative and potentially share facilities

4.8.2 Environmental Education

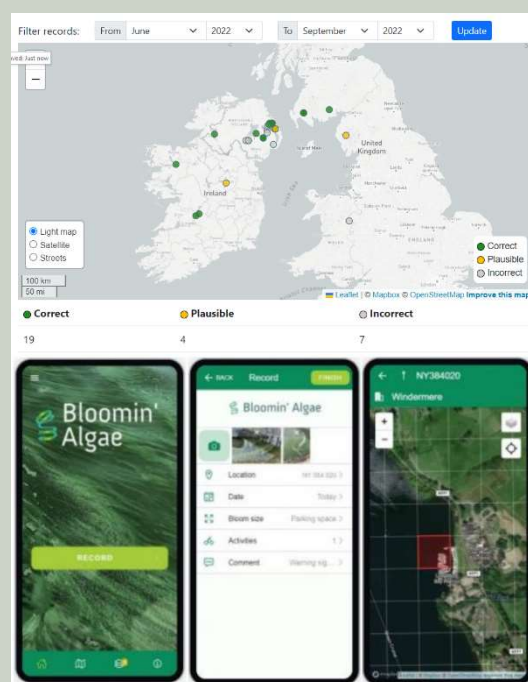
Environmental education should be provided to engage visitors on ecological sensitivities, advise on best practice and inform on initiatives that are taking place along the Blueway. This could include:

- Implementing and informing visitors of the Leave no Trace Ireland principles²³.
- Providing information on surroundings, climate action, special ecological considerations etc.
- Raising awareness of biodiversity enhancement initiatives carried out by through signage and interpretation.
- Partnering with regional initiatives through community and environmental organisations and initiatives to improve awareness, water quality and habitat resources.
- Training local guides and activity providers to inform the visitor and raise awareness of the environment.
- Implementing and promoting biosecurity measures.

²³ <https://www.leaveotracereliance.org/education/education-introduction/>

Bloomin’ Algae App

Bloomin’ Algae is a citizen science app developed by UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology²⁴ to assist with easy reporting of the presence of algal blooms of blue-green algae. Records of the location, date alongside photographs of blooms are submitted by users to inform the relevant agencies of these potential public health risks on the waterways. Users can then receive alerts or view up to date maps via the app and website showing submitted records. Whilst the app covers Ireland, no agencies are currently partnered to assess actions required e.g. testing, notification etc.



²⁴ <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/bloomin-algae>

4.9 Concept Refinement - Access types

To further develop the Blueway concept, access ‘types’ were identified to shape and understand the how each of the identified locations will serve the user and determine a development pathway. These were based on the characteristics of the existing infrastructure and the wider study area.

Access Type	Definition	User Experience	Facilities	Location(s)
Gateway Prominent central landmark or area that serves as a symbolic Blueway entry point.	A focal point for various activities and services, located close to a range of amenities. A ‘start point’ that connects at least via land-based trails to the overall Blueway offer.	A place to gather information, orient oneself, meet activity providers, and connect to the Blueway network.	Signage, Visitor information, Interpretation Pedestrian and cycle connectivity Optional - Water access, Public transport connections	Queen’s Quay
Paddling trail trailhead Primary access/egress point with facilities.	A fully equipped access point supporting both water and land-based users, suitable for launching, landing, and resting.	A well-serviced location for launching or exiting the water trail, with facilities to support paddlers and other users.	Water access, parking, changing facilities with toilets and potable water for washdown, staging area, water trail connectivity, pedestrian and cycle connectivity, Activity provider / Equipment hire	McConnell Weir Belfast Boat Club Waterfront Hall Sirocco Works
Paddling trail egress point / touchpoint Egress point which has fewer facilities than a Trailhead.	A secondary / supporting / limited access point. Typically lacking full trailhead facilities. Used mostly for egress or as a rest stop rather than launching.	A facility for stopping/exiting for rest/emergency exit rather than planned access. Suitable for launching but not fully serviced.	Water access Parking and changing facilities recommended but not required.	Ravenhill Reach Governors Bridge Stranmillis Gateway Bryson LaganSports
Hub Standalone water access point with similar provision to a Trailhead.	A standalone, self-contained, hub designed for ‘stay and play’ activities, rather than access to a linear Blueway water / paddling trail.	Users engage in localised water recreation rather than a linear water trail experience.	Water access, Parking (vehicle and cycle), Changing facilities with toilets and potable water, Staging area, Pedestrian and cycle connectivity, Activity provider / Equipment hire.	Clarendon Dock Abercorn Basin Victoria and Alexandra Coves
Discovery Point Animated and accessible heritage, landscape and waterscape points of interest.	Locations which create heritage, landscape and waterscape focal points when visitors are exploring the Blueway.	Provide additional attractors and animation.	Water trail connectivity (where possible) Pedestrian and cycle connectivity Signage Visitor information Interpretation Optional - Public transport connections	Culture and heritage points as listed
Walking and cycling trail Land recreation offering	Location which provides connectivity to land based trails with a trailhead or part of the route adjacent to the waterway	Users engage with and explore the Blueway and surrounding environment.	Signage, Visitor information, Interpretation, land, connectivity Optional - Water access, public transport connections	Walking and cycling trails as listed

4.10 The Developed Concept

The Blueway Developer Toolkit outlines the stages of developing a Blueway to accredited status. The first stage (planning and pre-development) results in the submission of a Stage 1 Preliminary Accreditation Application that outlines the proposed Blueway in line with the accreditation criteria. Based on the findings outlined above, a refined concept that could be submitted for Stage 1 Preliminary Accreditation Application has been identified based on the short-term proposals and existing assets.

The proposed Blueway concept can play a key role in making Belfast an even more engaging destination by offering a new and unique way to explore and connect with the city's culture, heritage, and hospitality. By supporting Discovery Points, restaurants, and accommodation, it can further enhance how people discover and enjoy Belfast. However, the ability to achieve accreditation is dependent on improvement of water quality along the river.

The key components of the developed concept are outlined in the table and maps below.

Water Recreation Offering	4.5km Paddling Trail: McConnell Weir – trailhead Ravenhill Reach – Egress / touchpoint Governors Bridge – Egress / touchpoint Belfast Boat Club – Trailhead Stranmillis Gateway – Egress / touchpoint			
Land Recreation Offering	Various walking and cycling trails: Maritime Mile (Public Art, Glass of Thrones, Belfast Maritime routes) Titanic Trail Lagan Towpath Annadale Embankment Loop Ormeau Park Botanic Gardens Lagan Meadows (connecting into Lagan Lands East)			
Culture and Heritage	Public Art The Big Fish Glass of Thrones Dividers Belfast Buoys SoundYard The Kit The Great Light RiverBox	Museums and Exhibitions Titanic Belfast SS Nomadic HMS Caroline Titanic Distillery / Pump House W5 Public Records Office Northern Ireland Lagan Legacy	Built Heritage Custom House Sinclair Seamans Church St Joseph's Church John Murray Lock House McConnell Weir Belfast Harbour Commissioners Lagan Weir Sirocco Works Thompson, Clarendon, Hamilton and Alexandra Docks Harland and Wolff Cranes Titanic Slipways	Other Sailortown Ormeau Park Botanic Garden
Visitor Services	Local accommodation and eateries Activity providers Tour operators			

4.11 Developing the Refined Concept

A phased approach is required to deliver on achievable options which can be expanded upon in future phases. The recommended phasing is as follows:

- **Phase 1 (1 to 5 years)** – focuses on enhancing and combining existing infrastructure and opportunities which have been identified as being feasible. includes those projects which will be submitted as part of the Stage 1 Accreditation Application.
- **Phase 2 (5+ years)** – builds on the success of Phase 1 to expand the Blueway proposition and further enhance the waterfront through future development of opportunities whose feasibility is uncertain.

Interim options are also provided to allow projects to be progressed and ensure continued delivery on the ambitions of the Belfast Waterfront Framework - to develop water access, support ongoing projects, and enhance connectivity across the study area – during the process of accreditation.

4.11.1 Phase 1

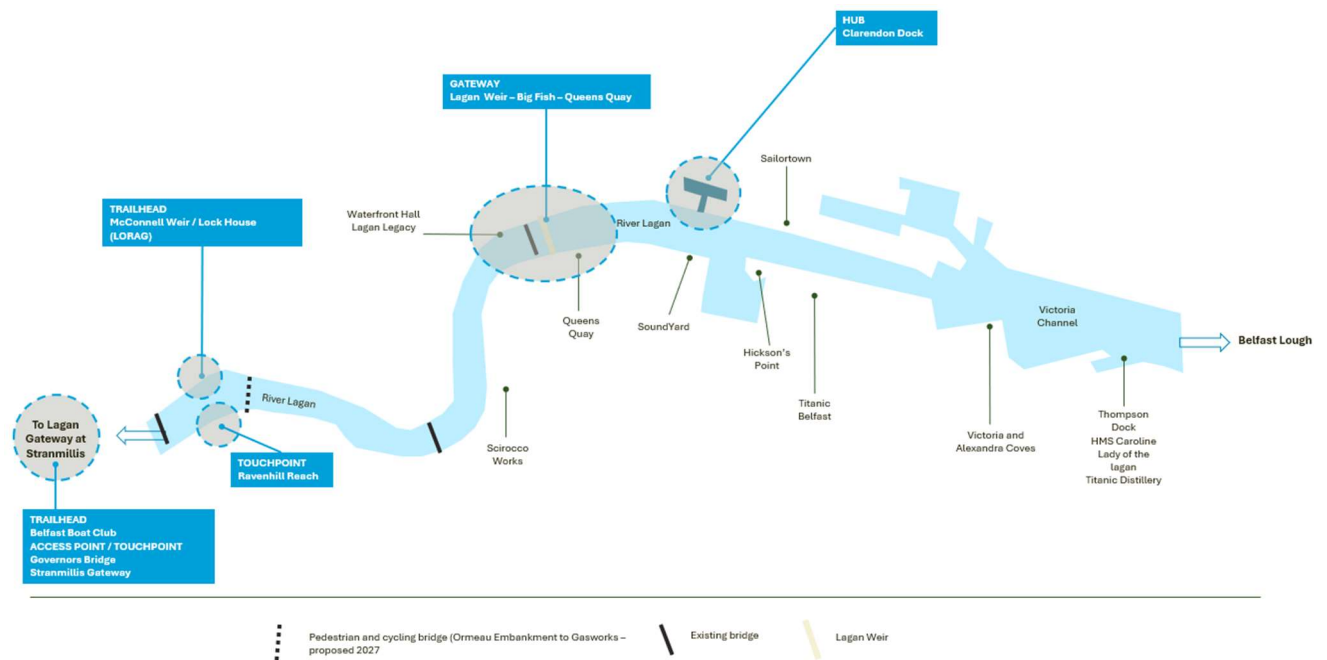
Projects identified in Phase 1 will form part of the Stage 1 Accreditation Application. It includes:

- Development of a 4.5km paddling trail extending from McConnell Weir to Stranmillis Gateway using existing, enhanced access points
- Progression of identified opportunities and actions at key water access points.
- Enhancements to walking and cycling trails.
- Continued promotion of existing culture and heritage assets.

WATER ACCESS			
Location	Access Type	Offering	Blueway Development Requirements
Queen's Quay	Gateway	Land based connectivity with potential water recreation	Signage and associated infrastructure
McConnell Weir	Trailhead	Land based connectivity and water recreation (paddling trail)	Support Ongoing development of proposals and activity providers programmes Signage and associated infrastructure
Clarendon Dock	Hub	Land based connectivity and contained water recreation	Water access infrastructure, facilities, signage, activity provider
Ravenhill Reach	Egress point / touchpoint	Access and egress point (paddling trail)	Accessibility interventions, Signage and associated infrastructure
Governor's Bridge	Egress point / touchpoint	Access and egress point (paddling trail)	Accessibility interventions, Signage and associated infrastructure
Belfast Boat Club	Trailhead	Land based connectivity and water recreation (paddling trail)	Improved water access infrastructure, facilities use agreement, signage and associated infrastructure
Stranmillis Gateway	Egress point / touchpoint	Access and egress point (paddling trail)	Accessibility interventions, Signage and associated infrastructure

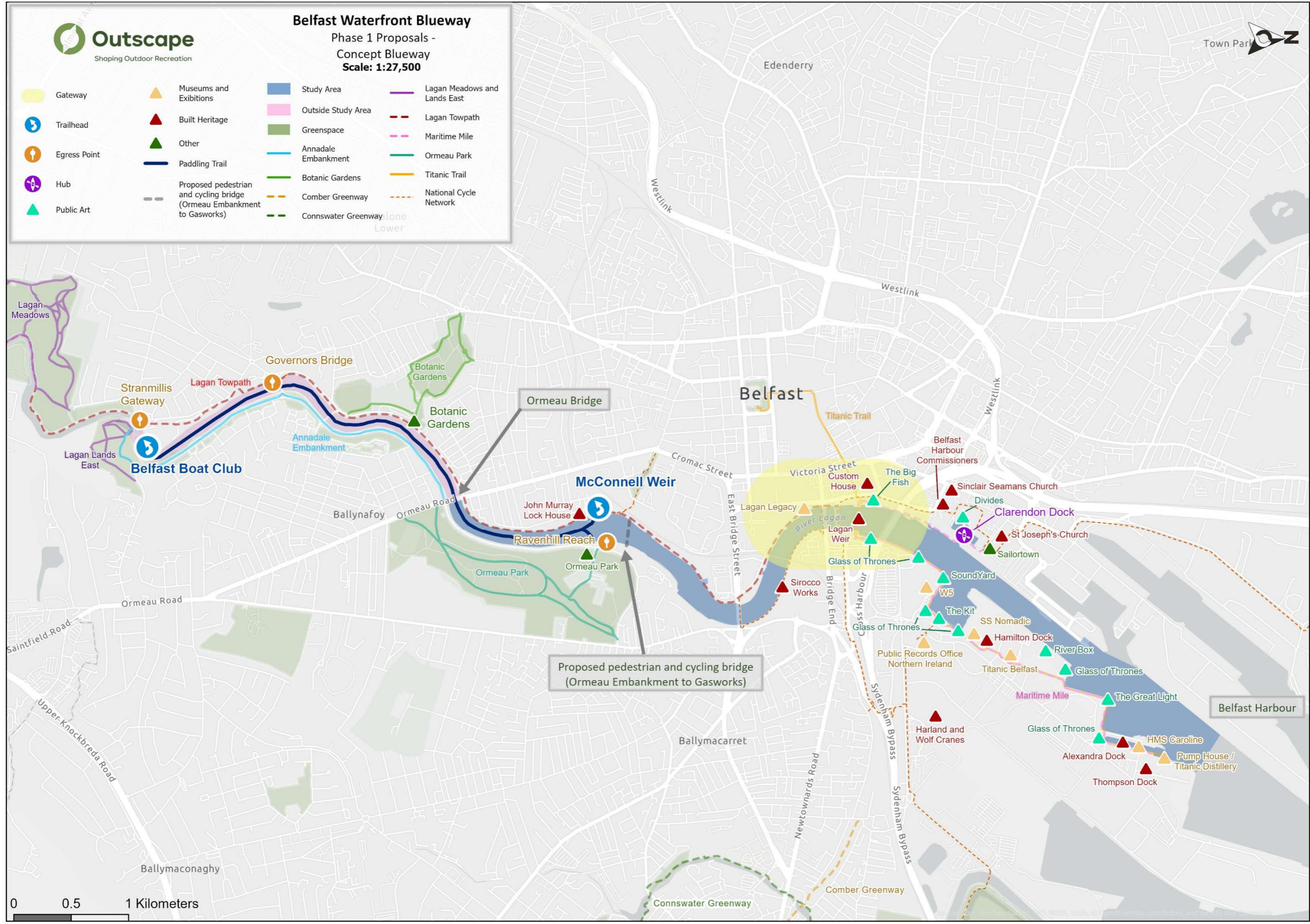
LAND RECREATION OFFERING		
Name / Area	Activity	Blueway Development Requirements
Maritime Mile (Public Art, Glass of Thrones, Belfast Maritime routes)	Walking and cycling	Explore opportunities to enhance connectivity to areas upstream of Queens Bridge (Lagan Legacy, East Bridge Street to Ormeau, sirocco Works) and improve visibility and connectivity of Sailortown and Thompson Dock.
Titanic Trail	Walking	-
Lagan Towpath	Walking and cycling	-
Annadale Embankment Loop	Walking and cycling	Create a looped walking route (through signage and visitor information) at Stranmillis and Annadale Embankment using existing towpath and trails.
Ormeau Park	Walking and cycling	-
Botanic Gardens	Walking and cycling	-
Lagan Meadows (connecting into Lagan Lands East)	Walking	Explore opportunities to improve accessibility (where suitable).

All land recreation trails will require network planning, interpretation, orientation and wayfinding in line with Blueway signage guidelines.



Belfast Waterfront Blueway
Phase 1 Proposals -
Concept Blueway
Scale: 1:27,500

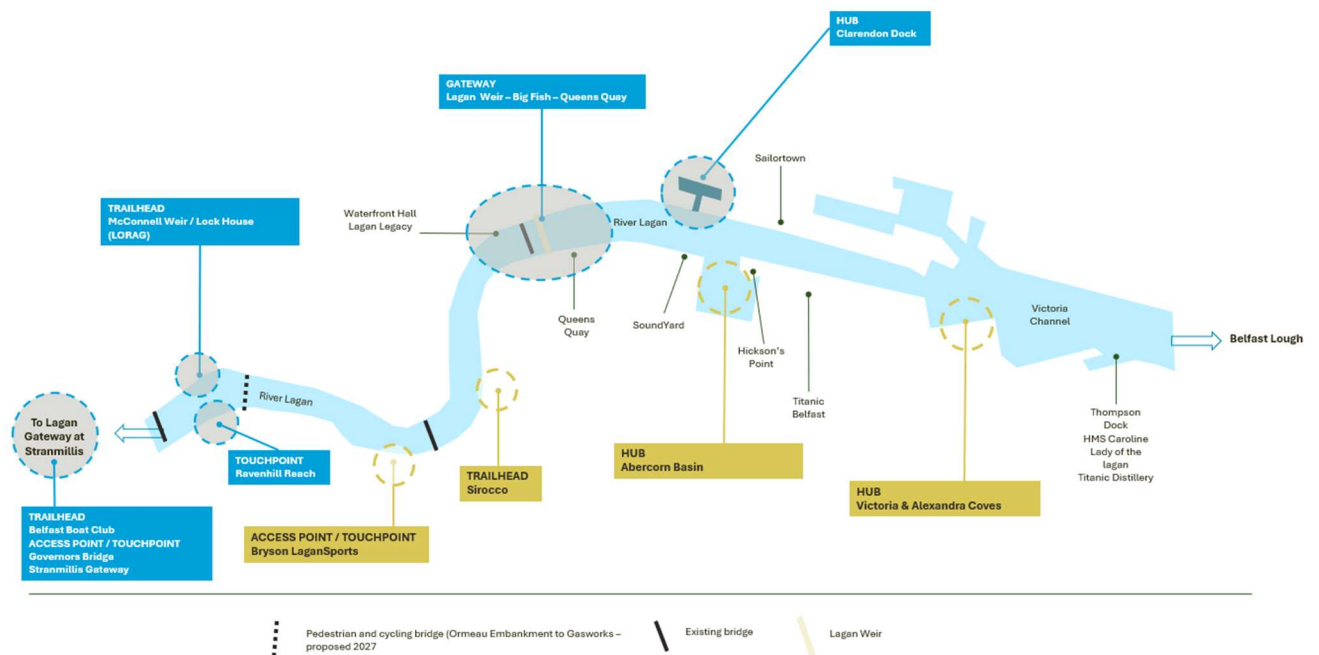
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| Gateway | Museums and Exhibitions | Study Area | Lagan Meadows and Lands East |
| Trailhead | Built Heritage | Outside Study Area | Lagan Towpath |
| Egress Point | Other | Greenspace | Maritime Mile |
| Hub | Paddling Trail | Annadale Embankment | Ormeau Park |
| Public Art | Proposed pedestrian and cycling bridge (Ormeau Embankment to Gasworks) | Botanic Gardens | Titanic Trail |
| | | Comber Greenway | National Cycle Network |
| | | Connswater Greenway (Lower) | |



4.11.2 Phase 2

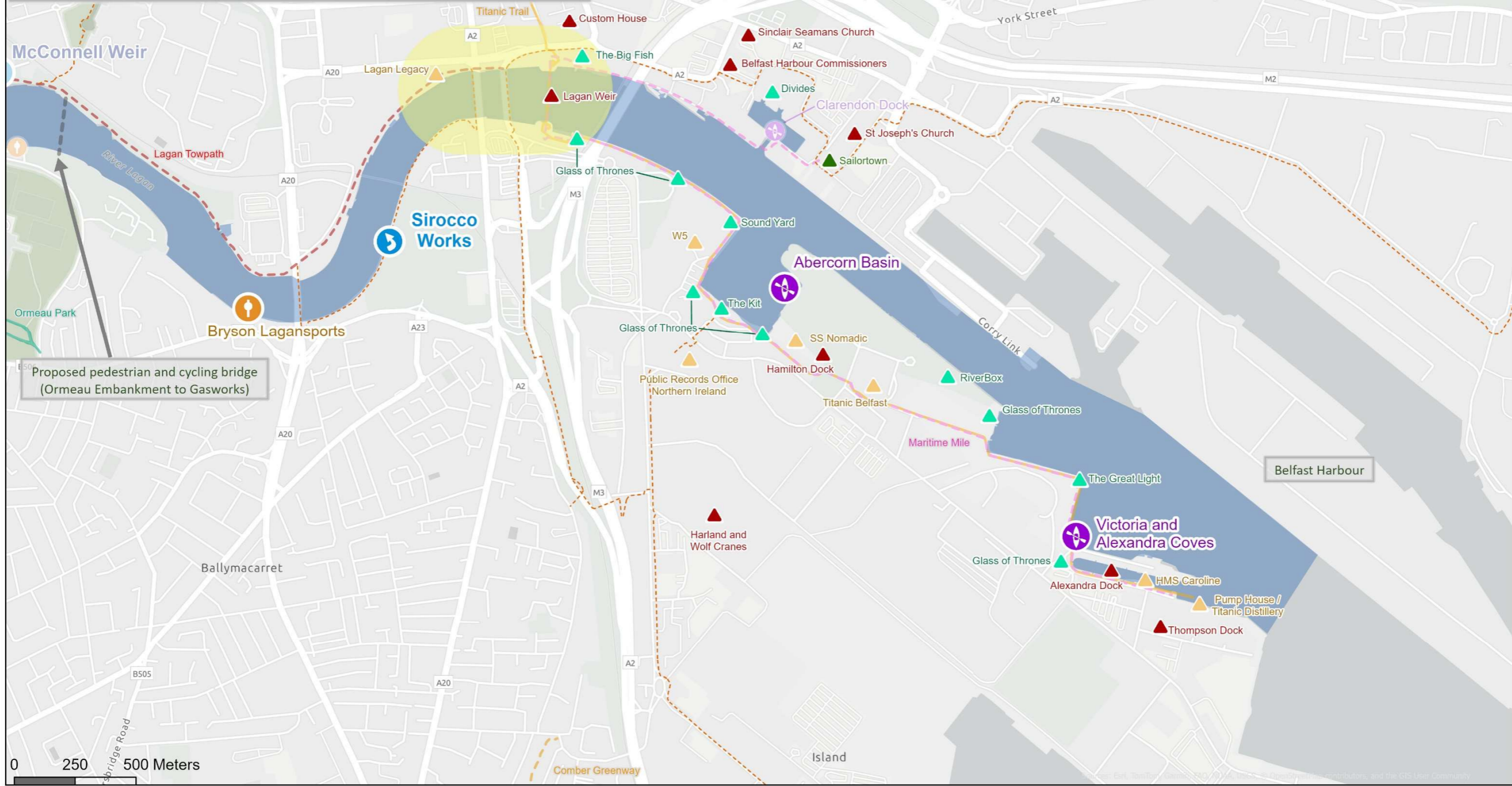
Phase 2 includes those opportunities which require greater consideration due to level of risk associated with their development. These are projects that were identified as having potential in the longer term. Each is outlined below.

Location	Access Type	Offering	Development Constraints	Interim Options
Sirocco Works	Trailhead	Land based connectivity and water recreation (paddling trail)	Capital funding Stakeholder agreement Water quality	Meanwhile project Discovery Point
Bryson LaganSports	Access point / touchpoint	Access and egress point / rest point	Stakeholder agreement Water quality	Activity provider engagement
Abercorn Basin	Hub	Land based connectivity and water recreation (segregated)	Funding Agreement Water quality and safety	Sailing activities Seasonal offerings Discovery Point
Alexandra and Victoria Coves	Hub	Land based connectivity and water recreation (segregated)	Funding Agreement Water quality and safety	Seasonal offerings Discovery Point





- | | | |
|--------------|--|------------------------|
| Gateway | Museums and Exhibitions | Outside Study Area |
| Trailhead | Built Heritage | Greenspace |
| Egress Point | Other | Comber Greenway |
| Hub | Paddling Trail | Lagan Towpath |
| Public Art | Proposed pedestrian and cycling bridge (Ormeau Embankment to Gasworks) | Maritime Mile |
| | Study Area | Ormeau Park |
| | | Titanic Trail |
| | | National Cycle Network |



5. Next Steps and Action Plan



5.1 Next steps

To ensure the success and delivery of the proposals, there are several key actions that will need to be implemented.

5.1.1 Improving Water Quality

Water quality remains an issue beyond the scope of this project but stands as the greatest risk to its success. All development recommendations are contingent on the ability to ensure a safe experience for the visitor and user who can enjoy good water quality. Therefore, it is vital to understand the risks associated with water quality prior to accreditation and any development.

It is recommended that the Management Group works with partners and statutory bodies to develop a strategy to understand and improve water quality. This will include compiling baseline data on water quality to identify risks to recreation users and environment, engage with stakeholders, identify opportunities for public engagement and to advocate and lobby for infrastructure improvements and change.

Partnership working will be essential to achieve this action. Key partners will include:

- Statutory Bodies - DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division, NIEA, BHC, DfC.
- Infrastructure - NI Water, DfI.
- Users - Clean Water Sports Alliance, Clubs, User Groups, community.
- Environment - DAERA Marine and Fisheries, NIEA, UWT, Wild Belfast, Belfast City Council and neighbouring landowners and managers.

It is likely that the ability to effect change to the water quality within the study area will not be a quick process. Therefore, as outlined within development phasing, there are opportunities to deliver on interim options – including meanwhile projects, discovery points, alternative recreation etc. - which can be progressed and delivered to enhance the overall waterfront area, but which will serve to benefit any Blueway proposition in the future.

The Clean Water Sports Alliance

The Clean Water Sports Alliance (CWSA) is made up of representatives from water sport National Governing Bodies (NGBs) across the UK with the aim of tackling water pollution in each region. In Northern Ireland, this includes the 7 water-based NGBs for rowing, paddling, swimming, sailing, angling, coarse fishing and triathlon, and is supported by the NI Sports Forum. The campaign recognises the impact poor water quality has on sport and recreation and has 3 asks for Government which seek to improve water quality:

1. A long-term funding commitment put in place to improve water quality and regulation.
2. Investment into real-time water quality monitoring equipment.
3. Advocating a change from ‘bathing waters’ to ‘recreation waters’ within government policy to recognise the wide range of activities that depend on clean water.

Central to the campaign is the collation of user data on impacts to water sports. The campaign is asking for information on when or where events (training, competition, recreation, leisure) are cancelled as well as any observed pollution during activities. This information will then be used to further evidence the need for action.

5.1.2 Engagement with the Blueway Partnership

All aspirant Blueways are encouraged to engage with the Blueway Partnership and the Blueway Coordinator and Development Advisor at an early stage of the process to support and advise Blueway Developers throughout the planning, development and accreditation process. A Stage 1 application is submitted prior to development actions taking place – a summary of the accreditation process is provided in Appendix E.

5.1.3 Setting up a Blueway Management Group

A Blueway Management Group oversees the co-ordination and management of a Blueway and ensures that the development process and operational phases are suitably led and supported.

Key tasks will include:

- Leading on engagement with landowners, stakeholders, activity providers, business community, the surrounding residential communities, funders etc.
- Undertaking risk assessment and risk control exercises and obtaining appropriate legal/insurance advice in relation to development and operation.
- Developing a Blueway Management Plan (including monitoring the impact of the Blueway).
- Capacity building to increase the range of Blueway services and help to grow the local economy.
- Managing the delivery of infrastructure development phasing, including appointing

consultants and design teams, and engaging with key delivery partners and stakeholders.

- Development of a paddling trail
- Ensuring an accessible approach is at the core of all design considerations and programme development (in partnership with user groups, clubs etc.).
- Development of signage and interpretation strategy – in line with Blueway Signage Guidelines – to explore network planning, interpretation, orientation and wayfinding.
- Implementing environmental biosecurity and enhancement recommendations.
- Exploration of sporting, riparian, fishing rights etc. and engaging with holders.

The Management Group should include key stakeholders and potential delivery partners. Typically, it is led by a statutory or other local authority agency and comprises representation from non-statutory bodies, specialists (tourism, recreation, infrastructure, users etc.) and community. Given this exists within the established Waterfront Task Group, the Management Group could sit within this remit.

It is recommended that MBT leads on establishing the initial Management Group. This will involve identifying roles and responsibilities to deliver on the key actions. Subsequently, the Management Group will collectively progress the delivery of the Blueway.

5.1.4 Appointment of a Project Management Co-Ordinator

It is recommended that the Management Group explore appointing a Blueways Management Coordinator to lead and co-ordinate the delivery of key actions during the planning, delivery and operational phases.

It will be necessary to identify funding for the role which could sit within any of the lead partners within the Management Group. Depending on resourcing available, this role could sit as a new, separate position or responsibilities be added to an existing position.

5.1.5 Key Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders play a central role in the development process and overall success of a Blueway. Developing an engagement and communication plan will ensure effective messaging on project updates and milestones in the Blueway journey with all stakeholders (statutory, non-statutory, business, community, environment etc.). It will also allow for the development of the proposition through capacity building - identifying new experiences and additional infrastructure opportunities that can be promoted during the development period and to further enhance the Blueway offering.

5.1.6 Infrastructure Development and Delivery

The phased development plan outlines the roadmap for delivering water access improvements. This is based on delivery partner and key stakeholder support and agreement, as well as availability of funding to develop up and deliver on proposals.

No development should take place until there is a robust understanding of the risks to water recreation users from poor water quality and actions implemented to bring the River and Clarendon Dock to a safe standard.

Recommendations are not provided in a particular order; however, they are interdependent on each other. Delivery will be influenced by many factors – community and stakeholder interest and support, availability of funding, other opportunities presenting themselves etc.

5.2 Action Plan

The following action plan sets out a phased approach to delivering these recommendations:

<i>Objective - Stage 1 Preliminary Accreditation and Infrastructure Development</i>			
Action	Requirement	Potential Lead Stakeholders	Key Stakeholders
Understanding water quality²⁵	<p>Work with partners and statutory bodies to develop a strategy to understand and improve water quality and inform the potential to deliver on water access infrastructure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compile baseline data and agree an approach to monitoring water quality. 2. Use data to evidence the risk to recreation users and the environment. 3. Identify opportunities for public engagement and to advocate and lobby for infrastructure improvements and change. 	DAERA MFD / NIEA / DfI / DfC / BHC / BCC	NI Water, CWA, users, community, environmental groups, MMSWG
Engagement with the Blueway Partnership	Initial engagement should take place with the Blueway Co-ordinator and Development Advisor as early as possible to discuss options and timings around Stage 1 Preliminary accreditation application and next steps.	BMG / PMC / MBT	WTG
Formation of Blueway Management Group (BMG)	A BMG oversees the co-ordination and management of a Blueway. It typically comprises representatives from local authorities, delivery partners, statutory agencies, recreation, community and tourism. This action could sit within the remit of the WTG to support planning and the future delivery of the Blueway proposal.	MBT / BCC	WTG
Appointment of Project Management Co-ordinator (PMC)	Through the BMG, identify resourcing requirements (including host/lead organisation) for the appointment of PMC to lead and co-ordinate the delivery of key actions. As required, secure funding to resource appointment for Stage 1, 2 and operational phase.	BMG / MBT	WTG
Key Stakeholder Engagement	<p>Develop an engagement and communication plan to ensure effective messaging on project updates and milestones in the Blueway journey with all stakeholders (statutory, non-statutory, business, community etc.).</p> <p>Seek to identify opportunities for capacity building - new experiences, programming, additional infrastructure etc. that can be promoted during the development period and to further enhance the Blueway offering and enable a wider variety of users to engage with the Blueway</p>	WTG (BMG) / PMC	All
Infrastructure Development and Delivery	In line with the development and delivery actions for phased delivery of Stage 1 infrastructure development projects (including paddling trail) - developing concepts, obtaining agreements, applying for planning permissions, identifying funding, leading and supporting delivery, marketing plan etc.	Project leads	PMC / BMG / delivery partners

²⁵ It should not be underestimated that improvements to water quality are critical to enabling safe public access to the river. As such, evidence of actions to understand and address water quality concerns should be progressed prior to submission of a Stage 1 Preliminary Accreditation application.

5.3 Development Proposals

The following table outline the proposed development and delivery actions. Further information is provided in Appendix F.

<i>Development and delivery of Phase 1 infrastructure proposals</i>				
Access	Proposal	Infrastructure Requirements	Development Actions	Key stakeholders / delivery partners
Queens Quay	Visitor Gateway	Blueway visitor signage and way finding	Blueway signage and interpretation strategy Installation of signage and associated infrastructure	DfC, Dfl, BCC, BHC
Clarendon Dock	Hub	Water access Blueway visitor signage and way finding	Working up concept comprising changing facilities, water access and water-based activity programme, identify planning pathway, Infrastructure development, Blueway signage and interpretation strategy, Installation of signage and associated infrastructure	BHC, BCC, DfC, Dfl, Sailortown Regeneration
McConnell Weir	Trailhead access and associated infrastructure	Ongoing capital development proposals – renovation and extension, water access, Blueway visitor signage	Support LORAG and project partners in delivery of capital works to lockhouse and weir, and future development proposals and water-based activity programme, Blueway signage and interpretation strategy, Installation of signage and associated infrastructure	LORAG, DfC, Dfl, BCC
Belfast Boat Club	Trailhead access and associated infrastructure	Water access and associated infrastructure Blueway visitor signage	Engage with Belfast Boat Club to identify opportunities for development, infrastructure requirements, develop designs, delivery etc. Blueway signage and interpretation strategy Installation of signage and associated infrastructure	Belfast Boat Club, DfC
Ravenhill Reach	Egress point / touchpoint	Accessibility adaptations to existing pontoon Blueway visitor signage	Installation of pontoon extension, hoist, seating, railings Blueway signage and interpretation strategy Installation of signage and associated infrastructure	BCC, DfC, Dfl, LORAG
Governors Bridge	Egress point / touchpoint	Accessibility adaptations to existing pontoon Blueway visitor signage	Installation of pontoon extension, hoist, seating, railings, Blueway signage and interpretation strategy, Installation of signage and associated infrastructure	BCC, DfC, Dfl
Stranmillis Gateway	Egress point / touchpoint	Accessibility adaptations to existing pontoon Blueway visitor signage	Installation of pontoon extension, hoist, seating, railings Blueway signage and interpretation strategy Installation of signage and associated infrastructure	BCC, DfC, Dfl, Waterways Community

5.3.1 Abbreviations

MBT – Maritime Belfast Trust
 BCC – Belfast City Council
 WTG – Waterfront Task Group
 DAERA MFD – Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Marine and Fisheries Division
 NIEA – Northern Ireland Environment Agency
 DfI – Department for Infrastructure
 DfC – Department for Communities
 BHC – Belfast Harbour Commissioners
 CWSA – The Clean Water Sports Alliance (Northern Ireland Sports Forum)
 MMSWG – Maritime Mile Sustainability Working Group
 LORAG - Lower Ormeau Action Group

5.4 Development Cost Estimates

Indicative development cost estimates have been provided for the design development and delivery of water infrastructure projects and progressing a Blueway Signage and Interpretation Plan. Cost breakdowns are provided in *Appendix F*:

Location	Development	Cost estimate (ex VAT)
Clarendon Dock	water access only	£555k +
Clarendon Dock	building refit	£2,250 per m ²
Ravenhill Reach	Pontoon adaptation	£50k+
Governors Bridge	Pontoon adaptation	£50k+
Stranmillis Gateway	Pontoon adaptation	£50k+
Blueway Signage and Interpretation Plan	Development of plan	£50k+

Costs attributed to other key actions will be dependent on resourcing and the lead organisation.

6. Appendices



6.1 Appendix A - International and regional strategic context

In Northern Ireland, the value of access to the natural environment is highlighted in key frameworks such as the *Programme for Government*, the *Environmental Improvement Plan*, *Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)*, and the *Outdoor Recreation Action Plan (ORAP)*. These documents identify outdoor recreation as a key enabler of community wellbeing, climate adaptation, biodiversity enhancement, and sustainable tourism.

The most strategically relevant strategies and policy supporting the development of the Belfast Maritime Blueway are summarised below:

Policy	Alignment
SPPS	<p>Proposed Blueway development should help to meet the core planning principles set out within SPPS by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving Health and Wellbeing - Through the development of green space and infrastructure, which can provide opportunities for social interaction (as a focal point for recreation and community activities), as well as influencing the choices we make which may contribute positively to improving our health and well-being e.g. whether to walk or cycle, or whether to stay longer in a good place. • Creating and Enhancing Shared Space - Through the creation of an environment with enhanced accessibility, opportunities for shared communities and which provide a high standard of connectivity. • Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth - Appreciating that Belfast's built and natural environment is an asset for economic growth in its own right, and to help protect and enhance the quality of the built and natural environment, thus contributing to higher social standards and improving the health and wellbeing of our society overall. • Supporting Good Design and Place Making – A Blueway in Belfast can be designed to enhance and promote improved accessibility, encourage healthy living, create a public space to bring communities together and encourage healthy living, whilst recognising the natural environment (including landscape character and ecology) to ensure the character and quality of the place are maintained. • Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment – Future Blueway development must consider the importance of the built and natural environment in which the proposal is set – including carrying out a range of assessments to understand the impacts on the receiving environment and implementing required mitigations.
RDS	<p>Proposed Blueway development should help to meet the outcomes set out within RDS by:</p> <p>Society</p> <p>RG6 Strengthen community cohesion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing integrated services and facilities. • Promoting stronger community spirit and sense of place <p>RG7 Support urban and rural renaissance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting regeneration in areas of social need <p>Environment</p> <p>RG9 - Reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate mitigation and adaptation to climate change whilst improving air quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport • Reducing noise and air pollution from transport • Using more energy efficient forms of transport <p>RG11 Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustaining and enhancing biodiversity • Identifying, establishing, protecting and managing ecological networks • Recognising and promoting the conservation of local identity and distinctive landscape character

In the Executive's new Programme for Government (2024–27), an outdoor recreation indicator was introduced to ensure greenspace access for health and social inclusion. Blueway development can enable the creation of safe, accessible waterfront routes for cycling, walking and paddling, offering daily exercise and nature contact. This directly supports objectives of improving public health, reducing carbon travel, and providing safe, thriving places that enhance wellbeing.

Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland

Blueway development on Belfast's waterfront aligns with the following outcomes and targets:

- Future vision:
 - People, places and nature are connected through nature rich routes.
 - Increase the off-road network of local community trails and regionally significant NI-wide routes.
 - Landowners and managers are enabled to provide formal and informal outdoor recreation on their properties without significant disruption to their business.
 - Everyone is enabled to connect to the natural environment, each other and their local services through a network of sustainable quality off-road nature rich routes and spaces.
 - Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality outdoor sports and physical activity infrastructure.
 - A safe, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional sports and physical activity infrastructure.
 - A national greenways network linking population centres and our best landscapes and nature rich spaces, encouraging active travel, understanding of and benefits for the environment, people's health and well-being and the rural and tourism economy.
 - Local people are engaged in protecting, managing and improving these routes and places.
 - Everyone appreciates and respects the environments they visit and the impact of their behaviour on the countryside, nature and farmers.
 - Children and young people can: access and interact with the natural environment at home, in school and in daily activities; and work to improve and enhance the quality of the environments in which they live, learn and play.
- By 2050:
 - 84% of households have access to natural space >2ha within 400m, and a site >20ha within 2km.
 - 90% of the population visit the outdoors at least once a week.

Sport NI (SNI) Draft Corporate Plan 2020-25

Blueway development aligns with SNI vision that: "We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2025, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all."

The emerging draft SNI Corporate plan has proposed two outcomes that SNI will work towards over the *next* five years:

- Outcome 1: People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and physical recreation.
- Outcome 2: NI Athletes among the best in the world.

Department for Communities (DfC) Active Living: Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland 2022

This Strategy recognises the importance of creating inclusive environments and encouraging community participation as key foundation of encouraging lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity.

Key themes and related goals that this aspiring Blueway directly addresses include:

- Promoting participation, inclusion and community engagement
- Providing inclusive, shared spaces and places
- Promoting partnership and integration

NI Outdoor Recreation Action Plan (ORAP)

Theme 3 of the NI ORAP focuses on making the outdoors more accessible:

- Action 3C highlights the importance of community trails.
- Action 3F highlights the need to develop better recreation opportunities near to where people live.

Eastern Transport Plan 2035 (ETP)

The Eastern Transport Plan 2035 (ETP) is a regional strategic framework initiated by the Department for Infrastructure and covering five council areas: Antrim and Newtownabbey, Ards and North Down, Belfast City, Lisburn and Castlereagh, and Mid and East Antrim. Its vision is to shape an integrated, low-carbon transport network that meets future mobility needs up to 2035, with a strong focus on active travel, public transport, and demand management.

A Blueway aligns closely with the ETP's objectives by delivering and enhancing safe, off-road routes for walking, cycling, and paddling along the River Lagan, offering sustainable travel options. By connecting neighbourhoods, employment hubs, and destination points, the Blueway supports the ETP's goals to reduce car dependency, improve air quality, and enable healthier lifestyles. It also helps to facilitate a multimodal transport network, linking to key active travel corridors and public transport nodes, reinforcing the vision of a seamless, resilient transport system for the eastern region.

Titanic Quarter Masterplan/Development Framework – Contributing to Belfast’s Future 2035

This plan sets out Titanic Quarter Limited’s ambition for 2035 to:

- increase investment to £2 billion
- create over £0.5 billion of social value
- grow its residential population to over 9,000 residents
- increase the number of direct and indirect jobs to 27,100
- generate £502 million in social value generated through work, health and wellbeing, apprenticeships and volunteering projects

It sets out a vision to create a sustainable community and safe environment that enhances the wellbeing of those who live, work, visit and stay in Titanic Quarter. Notably through providing extensive active travel opportunities and enabling public realm and green space in the area to be utilised by a range of community groups including walking groups, running clubs, cycle clubs and for other leisure activities such as outdoor yoga.

Great Clarendon (Sailortown) Masterplan Report 2016

Commissioned by the Department for Communities and the Strategic Investment Board Northern Ireland, the Masterplan provides an overarching framework for the future development of the area of Greater Clarendon, known locally as ‘Sailortown’, to create an exciting future destination adjacent to City Quays north of Belfast City Centre.

The Masterplan outlines recommendation for leisure and recreation (notably pedestrian and cycling routes and green space) as well as improve connectivity with the eastern side of the River Lagan.







Belfast East Bank Development Strategy 2030

The strategy sets out a long-term vision for East Bank – extending from the M3 bridge to Short Strand and East Belfast. It outlines ambitions to ensure the area will become lively, diverse, accessible and well connected to the city core, the River Lagan, Titanic Quarter and surrounding communities; providing places to live, work and socialise. It sets out action to:

- encourage sustainable development and respect the natural and historic environment
- facilitate the optimum development of key sites
- energise the River Lagan corridor
- create a connected and legible East Bank
- make streets and spaces for people

6.1.1 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Development of the Belfast Maritime Blueway has the potential to contribute towards the following UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

	SDG Targets	Alignment
 <p>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>	<p>SDG3: Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>3.4: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.</p>	<p>The integration of recreational public access to green and blue spaces can contribute to improved physical and mental health and wellbeing by providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and access to nature.</p>
 <p>6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p>	<p>SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation</p> <p>6.3: Improve water quality by reducing pollution, minimising the release of hazardous chemicals and materials, and substantially increasing water-use efficiency across all sectors.</p>	<p>Increased public use of, and proximity to, the waterfront can support a strong case for improved stormwater management, monitoring, and waterway health.</p>
 <p>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	<p>SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities</p> <p>11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.</p>	<p>Sustainable Blueway development can support the creation of inclusive and accessible green and blue spaces that improve the quality of life in the local communities of Belfast, with potential for enhanced active travel connections.</p>
 <p>13 CLIMATE ACTION</p>	<p>SDG 13: Climate Action</p> <p>13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.</p>	<p>Blueway development can enable measures to protect against flooding, erosion, and biodiversity loss. Incorporating sustainable design (e.g., drainage, planting and rehabilitation, and wildlife corridors) can enhance resilience to climate-related hazards while encouraging climate-conscious tourism and outdoor recreation.</p>
 <p>15 LIFE ON LAND</p>	<p>SDG 15: Life on Land</p> <p>15.1: Ensure the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands.</p> <p>15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity, and protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.</p>	<p>The linear nature of a Blueway enables design supports ecological connectivity, habitat preservation and biodiversity enhancement.</p>
 <p>17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</p>	<p>SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals</p> <p>17.17: Encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.</p>	<p>Blueway development will involve collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including Maritime Belfast Trust, Belfast Harbour, DAERA, DfI, DfC, Belfast City Council, community groups and private landowners, reflecting a strong partnership approach. Such collaborations can enable sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices to achieve wider SDGs.</p>

6.2 Appendix B – Stakeholder Engagement List

Organisation	Name	Role	Format of Engagement
Department for Communities	Peter Gallagher (and colleagues)	River Manager	Online / River Forum
Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Claire Vincent and Claire Young	Principal SO / Marine Ecologist M&F Division	Online / WTG
Belfast City Council	Sabine Kalke and Callie Persic	Client Manager (Property & Projects Dept), Development Manager	Online / WTG
Tourism Northern Ireland	Maria McAlister	Interim Manager Landscapes and Activities	Online
Schulze and Grassov	Krista Doersch and Oliver Schulze	Landscape Architect & Associate, Partner	Online
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Michael Robinson Graeme Johnston Nicolas Cowan Kevin Allen Jamie Faulkner	Port Director Property and Place Director Head of Sustainability Harbour Master Deputy Harbour Master	Online / WTG
Titanic Quarter Limited	James Eyre	Chief Executive Officer	MMSG / MBT
HUB-IN / BCC (Mapping)	Andrea Thornbury	Project Manager	Online / MMSG
Lower Ormeau Action Group	Gerard Rice Natasha Brenna	Director of Service, Project Co-Ordinator	In person / WTG
Sailortown Regeneration	Terry McKeown	Project Lead	Online / in person / WTG / MMDF
Eastside Partnership	Michele Bryans	Chief Executive	Online / MMDF
The Waterways Community	Brenda Turnbull	Volunteer	Online
Lagan Legacy	Joyce Anderson and Declan Boyle	Directors	Online
Blueways Ireland Partnership	Chris Scott	Blueways Co-Ordinator	In person
Rowing Ireland (NI Branch) / RYA / Lagan Users Committee	Gordon Reid	Various	E-mail / River Forum
Lagan Search and Rescue / Belfast Lough Sailability / BCC	Stephen Tate	Various	Online
HMS Caroline	Sharon Hanna	Museum Manager	Online / MMSG
Hometown Tours	Steven Patterson	Tour Operator	Online
Belfast Bike Tours	David Kirkwood	Tour Operator	Online
Bryson LaganSports	Joanna Morrow	Head of Activities and Events	In person
Ulster Wildlife Trust	Nick Baker-Horne	Marine Biologist	MMSG
Sustrans	Perla Mansour	Network Development Senior Manager, Northern Ireland	Online / In person / MMSG
Lagan Currachs	Catherine McKenna	Volunteer	Online
Belfast Rowing Club	David Webb	Club Representative	Online

A list of stakeholders that were contacted but did not respond or were unable to participate was provided to MBT at the time of reporting.

Abbreviations:

WTG - Waterfront Task Group

MMSG - Maritime Mile Sustainability Group

MBT – via Maritime Belfast Trust

MMDF - Maritime Mile Destination Forum

6.3 Appendix C - Detailed Site Assessment criteria and summary

BLUEWAY ACCREDITATION CRITERIA	
Category	Criteria
EXPERIENCE	
Engaging Landscape / Culture and Heritage	Offers an opportunity to appreciate and explore an attractive landscape and engage with the unique heritage and culture of the area
Multi-activity	Offers a combination of water and land-based trail (with connectivity to water) options
Capacity Building	A programme is in place to develop 'Eat / Stay / Go' and 'Activity / Experience' opportunities
Eat / Stay / Go	Bars, cafés, restaurants, and attractions are easily accessible from trailheads and/or trails
Activity / Experience Providers	Guided activity experiences appropriate for 'novice' are available and can be booked in advance
Length of Time	Offers a minimum experience duration of between half a day to one day
Visitor Information	Visitors can access information to allow them to plan and enjoy their Blueway experience
TECHNICAL	
Shared Use Trails	Shared Use Trails are compliant with the Sport Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails: Walking Trails are compliant with the Sport Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails Cycle Trails are compliant with the Sport Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails Paddling Trails follow the Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines Snorkel Trails follow the guidelines of the Irish Underwater Council Sailing & Windsurfing Activities are compliant with Irish Sailing and/or RYANI Accreditation standards
Signage	All signage follows Blueway Signage Guidelines
Trailhead Facilities*	Trailheads are clearly identified and offer adequate parking and staging areas. Toilet and changing facilities are available within close proximity of water-based trailheads
Managing User Conflict	Consideration and identification of steps to mitigate against potential conflict with waterway/trail users has been undertaken
Accessibility/Inclusivity	Reasonable steps have been undertaken to provide disabled access
ACCESS	
Landowner / Authority Agreement	Access is permitted by all landowners and relevant authorities (public and private) for a minimum period of 10 years
Insurance	Public liability insurance is in place providing indemnity for all infrastructure, land-based trails, and water trails' access and egress points
SAFETY	
Suitability	The experience is suitable for the 'novice' with little to no skills or prior experience in undertaking adventure activities
Responsibility	Visitors are not exposed to hidden dangers. Visitors should be aware of the risks they face and understand that safety is a shared responsibility between the visitor and the Blueway Developer/Responsible Authority
Activity Providers / Experiences	A programme is in place for activity providers to demonstrate their safety credentials
CONSERVATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT	
Statutory Approval	Evidence of consultation and approval with appropriate statutory bodies can be demonstrated
Biosecurity & Invasive Species	Proactive measures are in place to stop the spread of invasive species and harmful pathogens
Environmental Education	The Leave No Trace Ireland Principles have been incorporated
Litter	The Blueway is free from litter and fly-tipped waste
SUSTAINABILITY	
Management Group	A Blueway Management Group is in place – led by a Local Authority or State Agency
Management Plan	A Blueway Management Plan is in place
Visitor Feedback	A formal process is in place to monitor visitor feedback

Location	Landownership / Management	Current Infrastructure and Provision	Opportunities	Challenges
McConnell Weir / Lockhouse	LORAG / BCC / Dfl / DfC	No water access Parking, staging, toilets and changing facilities at Shaftsbury Recreation Centre Connectivity to tow path, Ormeau Park, active travel routes and Embankment Local heritage	Main water access point through community (LORAG) led project to develop Lockhouse – including café, equipment store and new water access underway (due summer 2026) Proposed programme of seasonal activity provider led activities Enhanced connectivity to Ormeau Park via new pedestrian/cycling bridge (due 2027)	Community water safety
Ravenhill Reach	Dfl	Existing water access (water taxi), parking and staging area close to facilities at Ormeau Park/O-Zone (toilets and changing) Connectivity to tow path, Ormeau Park, active travel routes and Embankment Local heritage	Standalone water access/egress point - minor modifications would enhance accessibility Additional access/egress alongside Lockhouse development Enhanced connectivity to Gasworks and towpath via new pedestrian and cycling bridge (due 2027)	Community water safety Requires agreement to use and enhance pontoon and facilities
Queens Quay (including the Big Fish, Waterfront Hall areas)	Dfl / DfC / BCC	Connectivity to public transport, active travel routes, towpath, Maritime Mile Existing activity providers (land and water) Abundance of heritage experiences Existing private water access and staging area	Central location that lends itself as the starting/entry point to Blueway (land and water) Supports position as ‘Gateway’ identified within Waterfront Framework Opportunities for day and night experiences to be developed within the wider Gateway area – including water access Minor modifications to existing water access would enhance accessibility Extend Maritime Mile connectivity upstream towards Ormeau	Requires agreement to use and enhance pontoon and facilities City centre location limits nearby parking
Clarendon Dock	BHC	Self-contained water body segregated from River Lagan and Harbour No water access Nearby parking Availability of space for staging area Connectivity to public transport, active travel routes and Maritime Mile Abundance of heritage experiences (including site)	Provide a unique ‘stay and play’ city experience with exposure to maritime heritage Contained water recreation – activity provider led, seasonal, community facility Repurpose part of existing pump house or other building for toilets and changing	Funding and resourcing Community water safety Understanding of hydrology and water quality Balancing commercial and

			<p>Supports enhanced connectivity with Sailortown and city centre, promoting events, future Place Making proposals within Clarendon, Sailortown, Barrow Square, City Quays</p> <p>Natural heritage engagement through UWT projects</p>	recreation offering within wider setting
Sirocco Works	Private	<p>Undeveloped brownfield site in private ownership</p> <p>No facilities or existing water access</p> <p>Connectivity to public transport, active travel routes and Maritime Mile</p> <p>Abundance of heritage experiences (including site)</p>	<p>Engage with landowners and wider community to explore ‘meanwhile’ project opportunities to improve community relations and connectivity with river</p> <p>Ensure developer includes water access as a key element of future development proposals</p>	No confirmation of future development proposals
Bryson LaganSports	Bryson LaganSports	<p>Outdoor adventure company run facility</p> <p>Existing changing, toilets and accessible pontoons</p>	<p>Access/egress point along river</p> <p>Potential, future activity provider</p>	<p>Operator does not currently use Lagan due to poor water quality</p> <p>Connectivity to existing recreation routes</p> <p>Limited parking</p> <p>Operator not tourism focused</p>
Abercorn Basin (including Marina and Hickson’s Point)	BHC	<p>Existing marina with water access and changing facilities</p> <p>Hickson’s Point – informal greenspace</p> <p>Connectivity to public transport, active travel routes and Maritime Mile</p> <p>Abundance of heritage experiences (including site)</p>	<p>Develop segregated seasonal recreation offering – e.g. floating Lido, pitch, event space</p> <p>Belfast Waterfront Framework identifies Hickson’s Point as potential civic greenspace</p> <p>BHC Place Making proposals comprise expansion of the marina – including subsurface clearance</p>	<p>Hickson’s Point is earmarked for residential development</p> <p>All development proposals are funding and resources dependent, and long term</p> <p>Recreation access (except sailing) not permitted due to water quality, water safety - proximity to navigation channel</p> <p>Marina toilets and changing facilities for private use – requires new facilities</p>
Alexandra and Victoria Coves	BHC	<p>Existing coves located outside of the harbour navigation channel</p> <p>No water access</p> <p>Connectivity to public transport, active travel routes, Maritime Mile</p>	<p>Creation of segregated non-immersive, recreation activity space (existing historic precedent) for seasonal offering – e.g. floating Lido, pitch, event space</p>	Immersive access not currently permitted due to water quality

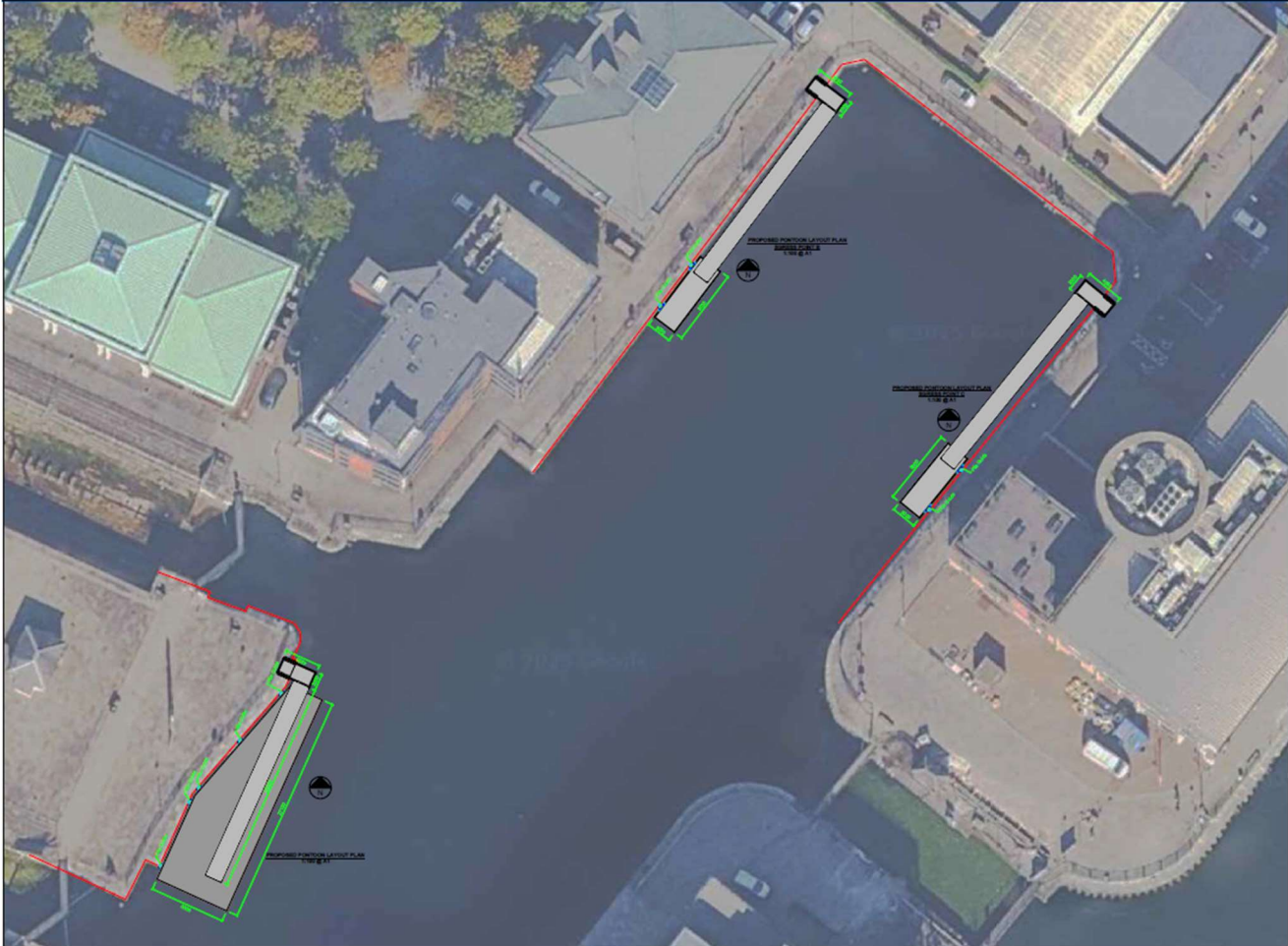
		Abundance of nearby heritage experiences	Belfast Waterfront Framework identifies adjacent land as linear greenspace to enhance area and improve connectivity to Thompson Dock, HMS Caroline etc. Water taxi/bus network – Queens Quay, SSE Arena, Sailortown, Loft Lines, Thompson Dock	Requires provision of facilities
Thompson Dock	BHC	Connectivity to public transport, active travel routes, Maritime Mile Water access via floating pontoon Abundance of nearby heritage experiences Boat tours	Improve connectivity to Maritime Mile Water taxi/bus network – Queens Quay, SSE Arena, Sailortown, Loft Lines, Thompson Dock	Moderate to challenging waters Recreation access not permitted water safety - proximity to navigation channel – moderate to challenging waters
Sailortown	BHC / BCC / Community / Private	Nearby parking No water access Connectivity to public transport, active travel routes, Maritime Mile Abundance of nearby heritage experiences	Improve connectivity to Maritime Mile and heritage Proposed bridge connecting Sailortown to Titanic Quarter Water taxi/bus network – Queens Quay, SSE Arena, Sailortown, Loft Lines, Thompson Dock	Recreation access not permitted due to water quality and safety - proximity to navigation channel – moderate to challenging waters No opportunity for segregated recreation Community water safety Bridge and proposals are funding and resources dependent, and long term
Governors Bridge	Dfl	Existing water access (water taxi), nearby parking Connectivity to tow path, Ormeau Park, active travel routes and Embankment Local heritage	Standalone water access/egress point - minor modifications would enhance accessibility	Community water safety Requires agreement to use and enhance pontoon and facilities No additional facilities
Belfast Boat Club	Belfast Boat Club	Existing water access, parking and staging area with toilets, changing and cafe Connectivity to tow path, Belvoir Forest, active travel routes and Embankment	Use of existing, high-quality facilities as an access point Provision of floating pontoon to improve accessibility to water from existing rowing steps	Community water safety Requires agreement to use and enhance existing facilities

		Local heritage		
Stranmillis Gateway	BCC / DfI / DfC	Existing water access (water taxi) Connectivity to tow path, Ormeau Park, active travel routes and Embankment Local heritage	Standalone water access/egress point - minor modifications would enhance accessibility	Community water safety Requires agreement to use and enhance existing pontoon and facilities No additional facilities within immediate vicinity

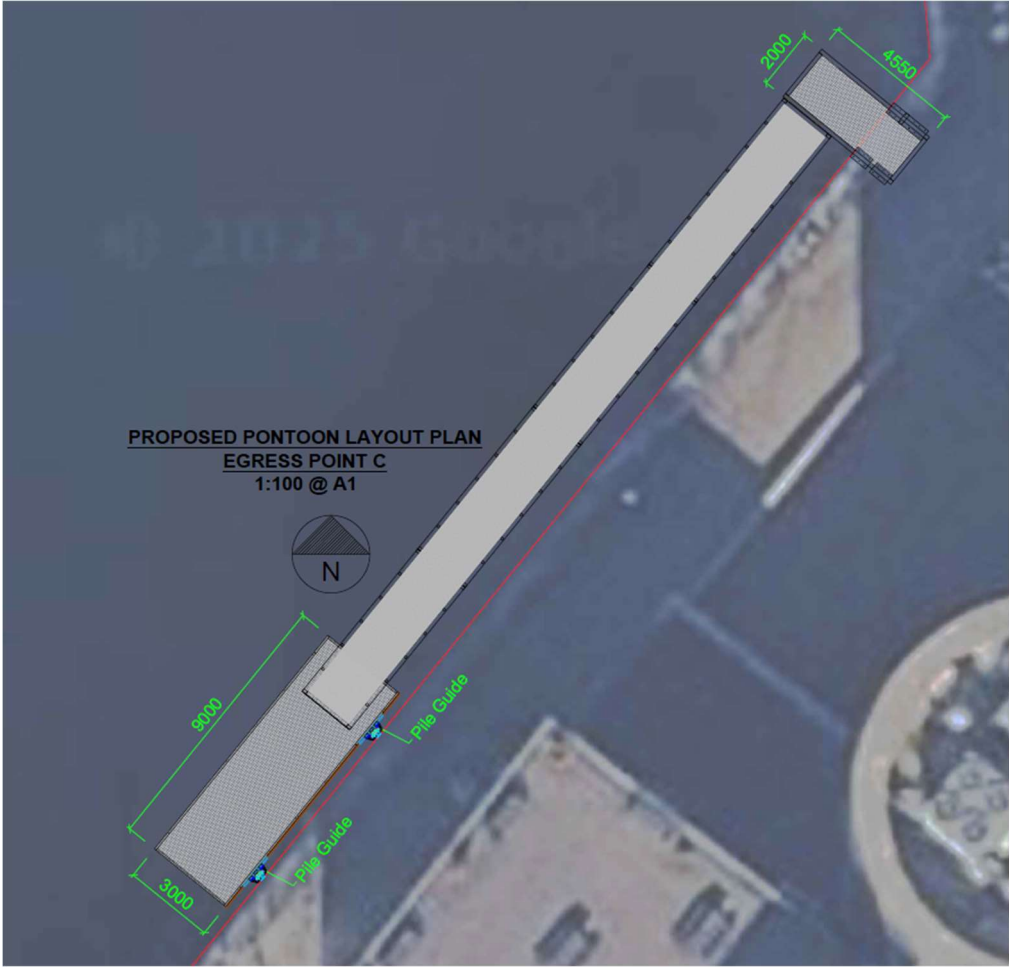
Walk Name / Area	Ownership / Management	Activity	Start / End Point	Description	Length / duration	Information
Maritime Mile including Public Art Trail, Glass of Thrones, Belfast Maritime Trail routes	MBT	Walking and cycling	Titanic Quarter and surrounding	A range of looped walking routes taking visitors amongst the maritime heritage of the waterfront and harbour areas	Self-guided walks ranging from 30 – 60 minutes within the Maritime Mile area	Level route with largely consistent surfacing Traffic Free
Titanic Trail	BCC	Walking	Belfast City Hall to Thompson Dock	Bringing visitors from the Titanic Memorial Garden at Belfast City Hall to Titanic Quarter	3.5km (linear) Waymarked	Level route with largely consistent surfacing Road crossings
Lagan Towpath	BCC / DfI	Walking and cycling (part of the National Cycle Network)	Queens Bridge to Lisburn Leads to Belvoir Forest and Barnett Demesne trails	Takes the walkers and cyclist along the river and canal system through a variety of wetland, riverside meadows and mixed woodland from Belfast to Lisburn	23km (linear) Waymarked	Gently undulating traffic free route with some incline at bridges etc. Consistent surfacing
Ormeau Park	BCC	Walking and cycling	Ormeau Embankment to	Historic parkland overlooking the Lagan with a varied trail network	Main loop 2.5km Waymarked	Undulating traffic free route Consistent surfacing
Botanic Gardens	BCC	Walking and cycling	Stranmillis Embankment to Botanic Avenue	A trail network which explore this historic urban park	Main loop 1.5km Waymarked	Undulating traffic free route with inclines Consistent surfacing
Lagan Meadows (connecting into Lagan Lands East)		Walking		Local Nature Reserve in the Lagan Valley which takes visitor to the bank of the River Lagan	2.8km (looped)	Steep traffic free route Mown grass and tarmac trails

6.4 Appendix D – Proposed Layouts

6.4.1 Clarendon Dock







6.4.2 Ravenhill Reach



6.4.3 Governors Bridge



6.4.4 Stranmillis Gateway



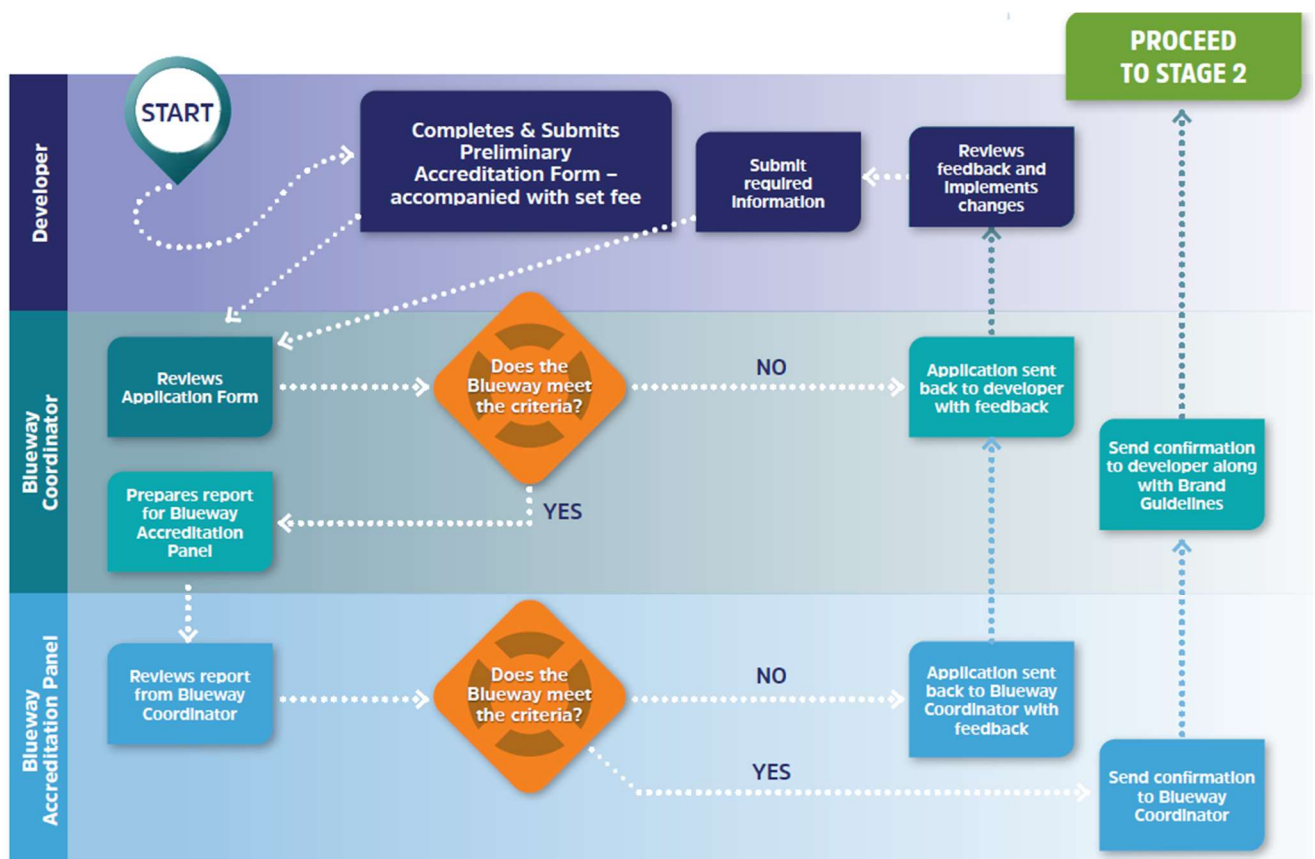
6.5 Appendix E – Stage 1 Preliminary Accreditation Process Overview

The process of accreditation is fundamental to ensuring that Blueways are developed to a consistent high standard across Ireland. Accreditation is overseen and supported by the Blueway Accreditation Panel (a sub-group of the Blueway Partnership).

Stage 1: Preliminary Accreditation Assessment – The aim of Stage 1 is to determine whether the proposed Blueway concept aligns with the Blueway Accreditation Criteria and is suitable to proceed to full development (Stage 2). Once a concept has been developed the process to Preliminary Accreditation should be followed:

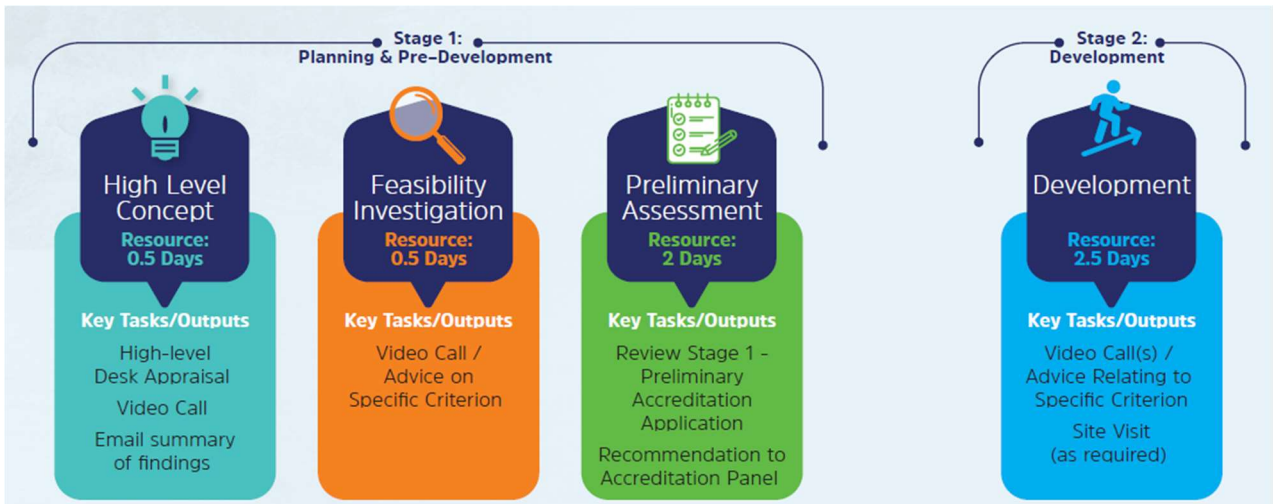
- **Engage with Blueway Coordinator & Development Advisor** - Initial engagement should take place with the Blueway Co-ordinator and Development Advisor (currently held by Outscape) as early as possible to confirm the suitability of the concept and implement any modifications.
- **Application Form** - Once the concept has been modified, information is then submitted via the Stage 1 application form. This outlines the current position, the concept and intended actions to ensure it aligns with accreditation expectations (e.g. developing infrastructure, improving water quality). Following submission of the form, further advice and guidance is provided on the concept.
- **Decision making** - Once satisfied, a report with recommendations is provided to the panel for ratification. The panel will issue one of three outcomes:
 - **Pass**
 - **Deferred pass** (where accreditation is granted subject to specified conditions being met e.g., water quality improvement to enable safe access.)
 - **Fail** (where the concept does not currently meet the criteria).

Associated fee - €800 + VAT (€984).



Extract from Blueway Developer Toolkit

If successful, the project will proceed to **Stage 2: Final Accreditation**, where on-the-ground development begins. Blueway Final Accreditation should be applied for once issues or conditions have been addressed by the developer. Advice and guidance is provided through this stage to ensure quality is maintained.



Extract from Blueway Developer Toolkit

6.6 Appendix F – Estimated Development Costings

Clarendon Dock

Action	Detail	Timeline	Cost Estimates
Pre-planning			
Concept Refinement	Engage with community, users, businesses etc. to understand need, opportunities Development of concepts on access and associated infrastructure (including building refit): Architect / Conservation Architect / Design Engineer led team Ecological and Environmental Consultant Structural and marine civil engineer Obtain in principle agreement (BHC)	12 -18 months	£50k - £150k
Obtain planning permission	Preparation of planning documents and application followed by period for approval.	6 – 12 months	£5k - £15k
Post-planning		From planning approval	
Funding	Identification of funding and application.	+ 3 months	
Appointment of CPM and suitably experienced contractor	CPM to compile tender documents, manage tender process, appoint suitably experienced Design & Build Contractor and oversee delivery of the construction contract.	+ 6 months	10% of overall capital costs
Construction	Construction of pontoons, sealing of weir gates and building refit.	+ 6 months	Water access infrastructure and signage - £500k + Building re-fit - £2250 per m2
Operational and management and maintenance plan	Develop an operational management and maintenance plan to ensure that the trail is inspected and maintained regularly to maintain the trail to a high standard.	For the lifespan of the project	Resource dependant

Ravenhill Reach, Governors Bridge, Stranmillis Gateway (each)

Action	Detail	Timeline	Cost Estimates
Pre-planning			
Concept Refinement	Engage with community, users, businesses etc. to understand need, opportunities Development of concepts: Structural / marine civil engineer Ecological and Environmental Consultant Obtain in principle agreement (DfC)	3 months	£5k - £10k
Obtain planning permission (if required)	Preparation of planning documents and application followed by period for approval.	3 – 6 months	£5k - £10k
Post-planning		From planning approval	
Funding	Identification of funding and application.	+ 3 months	
Appointment of CPM and suitably experienced contractor	CPM to compile tender documents, manage tender process, appoint suitably experienced Design & Build Contractor and oversee delivery of the construction contract.	+ 3 months	10% of overall capital costs
Construction	Construction of and refit including infrastructure items.	+ 1 months	Access infrastructure and signage - £50k
Operational and management and maintenance plan	Develop an operational management and maintenance plan to ensure that the trail is inspected and maintained regularly to maintain the trail to a high standard.	For the lifespan of the project	Resource dependent

6.7 Appendix G – Sustrans – NCN Barriers Summary



What are barriers?

In 2018 as part of its Paths for Everyone report Sustrans identified around 16,000 barriers on the National Cycle Network including bollards, chicanes, gates, A-frames, steps and steep ramps. The majority of these barriers are on traffic-free sections or at access/egress points – this is equivalent to approximately three obstructions for every mile of traffic-free route. Barriers mean that there is inequality in the access to safe active travel routes. They prevent legitimate users from walking or wheeling along the National Cycle Network. Barriers disproportionately impact on those who use non-standard cycles or other mobility aids, which may be longer or wider than a regular bicycle, and on those who are not able to get off their cycle to manoeuvre through the restriction.



Figure 1 Example barrier along NCN Northern Ireland

Removing or redesigning restrictive barriers is a key step in creating an inclusive network where everyone can walk and wheel together. Some routes also need to enable the access of equestrian users.

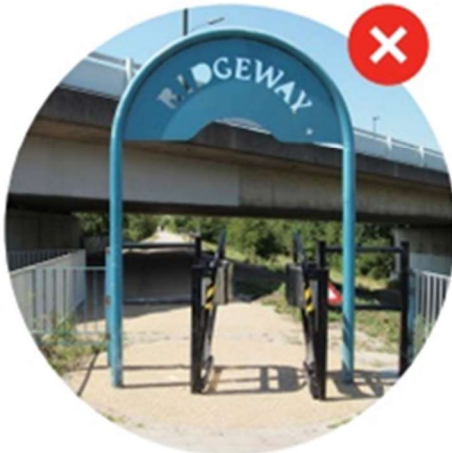
Sustrans have identified the strategic priority of removing or redesigning all 16,000 barriers on the network by 2040 in order to make the NCN accessible to everyone.



Obstructive railings on cycle path.
Ridgeway, Greenwich



Alignment of railings permits comfortable park access
to legitimate users, Lambeth



Motorcycle prevention A-frame control,
Ridgeway, Bexley



Bollard arrangement allows legitimate users,
Kingston upon Thames

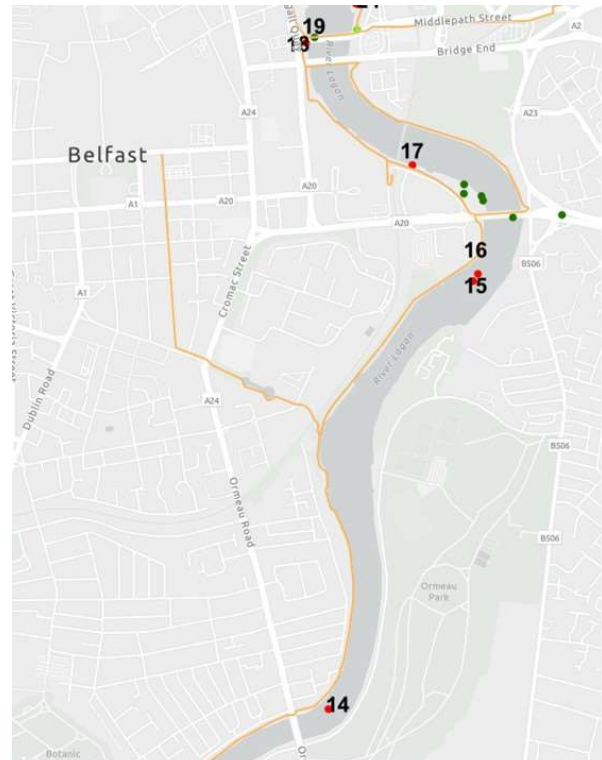
Figure 2: Access Control Barriers: What to avoid and recommended layouts, Source TFL

NCN Barriers in Belfast

Sustrans has identified 37 barriers along the NCN for redesign or removal within the Belfast City Council boundary. Redesign of these barriers will ensure that the National Cycle Network is compliant with LTN1-20 standards. This involves re-designing substandard barriers (or in some cases, removing barriers entirely) to allow 150cm gaps accessible to all users.

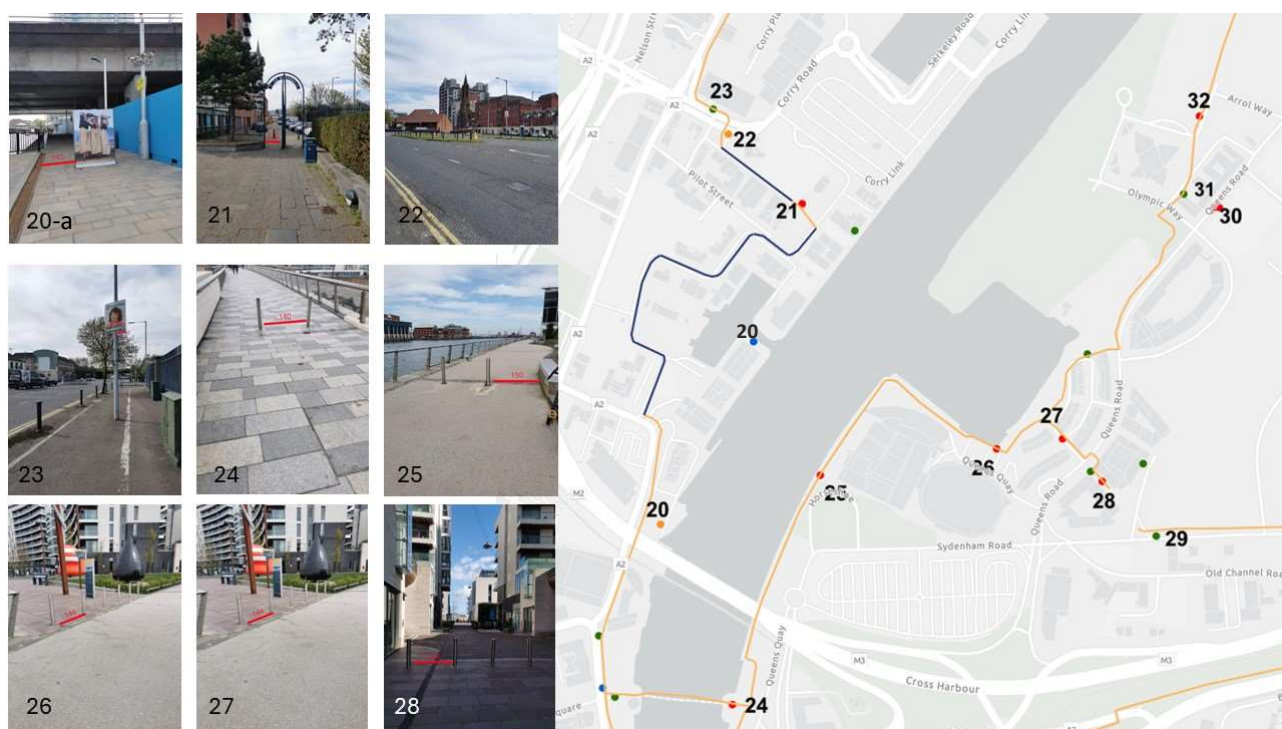
Analysis of Barriers

Ormeau Embankment



Number	Status	Restriction Type	Audit Comments	Gap (cm)
14	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple	two drop bollards	130
15	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple	measurement at widest 65cm narrowest	128
16	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple	again at widest (middle)	128
17	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple	all new drop barriers	120
18	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple		149
19	Other Issue	Other	Lamppost in the road, but the lane on north side of the bridge are wider and obstacle free.	0

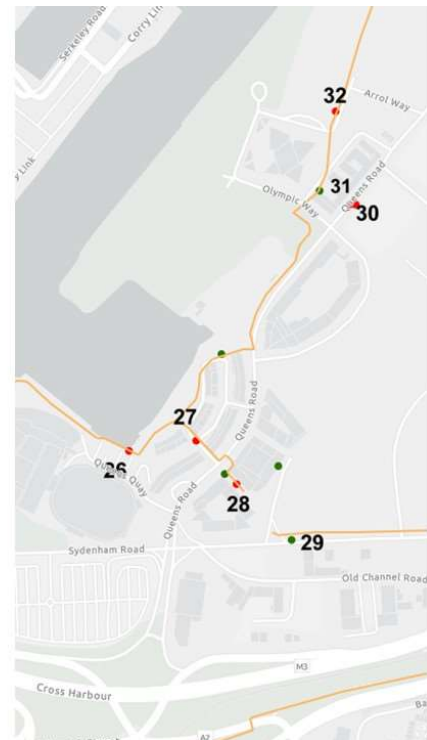
Belfast Harbour/Titanic



No.	Status	Restriction Type	Audit Comments	Gap (cm)
20	Too Narrow	Pinch Point-Bridge	Bridge crossing at Clarendon Dock, most direct option for route continuity	90
20-a	Other Issue	Other	Display on the road- Might be temporary	
21	Too Narrow	Gate	Clarendon Dock Gate	115
22	Other Issue	Other	SIGN for connecting the routes in the 'black line' on the map is very poor presented. Cycle lane across the busy road without proper safety warnings.	
23	Other Issue	Other	lamp post in the lane, access width 240cm	
24	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple		140
25	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple	The right bollard in the photo is removable type.	149
26	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple		146
27	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple	part of the pavement covered with rough brick surface	128

No.	Status	Restriction Type	Audit Comments	Gap (cm)
28	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple	lamp post in the lane	145

Titanic Area



No.	Status	Restriction Type	Audit Comments	Gap (cm)
29	Other Issue	Other	lamp post in the lane.	0
30	Too Narrow	Pinch Point		120
31	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple		140
32	Too Narrow	Bollard Multiple		115

Design Solutions

Why are they there?

Historically barriers were often put on to cycle routes to prevent unauthorised access by motorbikes and other motorised traffic. In many cases barriers are ineffective at keeping motorbikes out as that intent on anti-social behaviour find

or make alternative access points to the traffic free routes, such as a gap in a fence further down or by lifting their motorbike over the barrier; options that are not available to many legitimate users. This creates a segregated area where many legitimate users are excluded and those using the path illegally know they are unlikely to be seen. In this sense these barriers are having the opposite effect than intended.

In places where there are concerns around illegal motorbike activity there are several solutions that can be considered as an alternative to barriers; these include targeted activity by local policing teams, installation of CCTV, speed restriction features, or other measures appropriate to the location. The potential for anti-social behaviour should not be used as a reason to prevent access to legitimate users.

Multiple Bollards

In the cases where the barrier includes multiple bollards, the solution could be to simply remove one of the bollards.



Figure 4: Barrier 20

For example in figure 5, one of the bollards could be removed, replacing one in the middle of the lane. This will serve the purpose of preventing vehicles while allowing all legitimate users to travel through without stopping. In an alternative case, where the bollard/structure is wide, the solution could be to reduce the side of the bollard rather than remove it.



Figure 5: Barrier 14

Pinch Point

At a pinch point the path is too narrow for certain passengers to pass and requires a redesign. For example, figure 7 is a narrow footbridge with a step onto the bridge. The solution would be a new footbridge, with a width between 300 and 400cm.

Figure 6: Pinch point, Barrier 20



Gate

The redesign or removal of gates may require engagement with landowners. It is important to understand the reason why the gate was installed. If now redundant, the gate should be removed or redesigned. In the example

of figure 8 below, the gate could be removed and replaced by a single bollard with 150cm on either side of the bollard.



Figure 8: Barrier 21

Alignment with Policy and Plans

Plan	Owner	Alignment with redesign
Belfast Agenda	BCC	<p>Connectivity, active and sustainable travel.</p> <p>The target is to <i>increase the percentage of people who walk or wheel, or cycle to five days a week from 54 per cent to 70 per cent.</i></p> <p>Action plan strategic intent statements that this barrier removal project aligns with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support projects that encourage people to use forms of sustainable travel. • Support behavioural change projects that replace car journeys with walking, wheeling and cycling. <p>Currently, only 44% of disabled people walk or wheel at least once a week and only 8% of disabled people cycle at least once a week. 14% of non-disabled people cycle at least once a week (Belfast Walking and Cycling Index). The target above will be difficult to achieve without removing physical barriers to active travel.</p>
A Bolder Vision for Belfast	BCC	<p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise Walking, Cycling and Public Transport • Remove Reliance on Car Travel • Active and Inclusive Public Realm and Green Spaces <p>Visioning principle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removing severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.

Plan	Owner	Alignment with redesign
Local Development Plan	BCC	<p>Transport hierarchy places strategic importance on walking wheeling and cycling.</p> <p>Policy TRAN 1 - planning permission will be granted for new development where it takes account of the needs of pedestrians, wheelers and cyclists ensuring that it creates a safe and convenient environment, and where provision is made for supporting infrastructure including cycle parking and that it links to existing or proposed networks and public transport.</p> <p>Active travel routes should achieve the core design requirements set out in LTN 1/20 - currently, the identified barriers do not comply with LTN 1/20.</p>
Net Zero Roadmap For Belfast		<p>Currently, transport contributes to 20% of Belfast's emissions.</p> <p>This project would support a modal shift to non-motorised transport.</p>
Belfast Cycle Network	Dfi	The BCN will not function as an accessible and inclusive network if the existing routes have many physical barriers.

Other plans and projects:

- Eastern Transport Plan
- Belfast Streets Ahead
- Blueway Accreditation for Belfast Waterfront

This project aligns with Belfast City Council's vision of creating attractive, healthy, vibrant and accessible places where people want to be.

To find out more about the work Sustrans are doing on barriers re-design or removal, visit our website: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/about-us/paths-for-everyone/barriers-on-the-national-cycle-network/what-are-barriers/>
You can also refer to our guide on barriers redesign or removal here: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/about-us/paths-for-everyone/barriers-on-the-national-cycle-network/how-to-get-barriers-redesigned-or-removed/>



Outscape

Shaping Outdoor Recreation

The Stableyard
Barnett Demesne
Malone Road
Belfast BT9 5PB

Contact for this submission:
Philip Weston, Head of Place Shaping
+44 (0)28 9030 3930
philip@out-scape.com

[out-scape.com](https://www.out-scape.com)