

THE BELFAST CITY COMMITMENT

BELFAST CHAMBER'S
5 COMMITMENTS
FOR A BETTER BELFAST



FOREWORD

MICHAEL STEWART | PRESIDENT

Belfast Chamber is proud to be the voice for our city's businesses.

Our unique blend of independently owned shops and big brand names have firmly established Belfast as Northern Ireland's retail capital.

Our cafes, bars, pubs, restaurants and leisure businesses contributed to Belfast becoming Lonely Planet's Best Region to visit.

Our ever-expanding tech sector is assisting Belfast to be recognised around the world as a centre of excellence for financial technology, medical technology and cyber security.

Belfast businesses, whether or big or small, whatever sector they operate in and in whatever part of the city they are located, combine to make Belfast the engine driving Northern Ireland's economy forward. And they continue to do that no matter what is thrown at them.

In the 5 years since the last election to the Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast's business community has endured much. Brexit, the Primark fire and a global pandemic. With war returning to Europe, the cost of business increasing and shortages in labour supply, it seems that the future will be every bit as tough as what we have just come through.

At a time when there is so much uncertainty in the world, we need to play to our strengths. Belfast is one such strength. In spite of the myriad challenges they've faced, our city's business owners and their staff have always exhibited their customary fortitude, resilience and adaptability. Those are assets we must use to our region's advantage.

Belfast's story is not fully written. Our city is still a work in progress. Slowly emerging from the challenges of our past but headed towards a brighter future. Belfast Chamber is asking candidates in the



upcoming Assembly election that they vow to help our city to realise its huge unfulfilled potential.

Our **Belfast City Commitment** asks election candidates to pledge their support for 5 steps that we believe can achieve an economic revival across our city that helps Belfast businesses to grow and employ more people and also transform Belfast into an innovative, inclusive and sustainable city fit for whatever the future may hold. Belfast is perfectly positioned to really 'push on' and, with targeted assistance from Stormont, provide the platform for more jobs, more investment and more regeneration right across Northern Ireland.

We have demonstrated our commitment to Belfast. In this, Belfast Chamber's **Belfast City Commitment**, we ask our Assembly candidates to do the same.

OUR 5 COMMITMENTS

1. ENSURING OUR CITY'S STREETS ARE CLEAN AND SAFE
2. EMPOWERING BELFAST AND OUR CITY REGION
3. GROWING BELFAST'S CITY CENTRE POPULATION
4. TRANSFORMING BELFAST INTO A PEOPLE CENTRED CITY
5. BOOSTING THE ENTIRE REGION'S ECONOMY



ENSURING OUR CITY'S STREETS ARE CLEAN AND SAFE

Cleanliness and safety are the foundation stones that any successful city is built upon. A city whose streets don't feel safe or clean will struggle to establish themselves as places that people choose to live in, work in, study in or visit. It is no surprise, that the cities that top the EIU's Safer Cities Index are thriving tech and tourist magnets like Copenhagen, Toronto, Singapore and Amsterdam.

It is simply not sufficient to say that other places have far worse problems with drugs, dereliction, homelessness or vagrancy. That may well be true, but it is not cause for complacency or an excuse for inaction.

For its part, Belfast Chamber operates the Radiolink system which helps city centre businesses to combat crime and anti-social behaviour and support both the PSNI's City Centre Beat scheme and the Night Time Volunteers. Our representations have helped ensure increased activity in terms of street cleanliness and we welcome the 'Complex Lives' project which seeks to draw on experience from Doncaster to deliver a more holistic, housing-based approach to helping those who are homeless and/or have addictions. However, much more needs to be done and on a far more concerted basis to make Belfast genuinely inclusive and attractive to everyone including workers, students, visitors, tourists and, particularly, families from across Belfast and beyond.

BELFAST CHAMBER CALLS ON CANDIDATES TO COMMIT TO:

The creation of a cross-Departmental, cross-Agency partnership with the city's business community to properly address persistent issues with cleanliness and safety in our city and especially within the city centre, and support this work with the resources and powers to make a real and lasting difference.



EMPOWERING BELFAST AND OUR CITY REGION

Belfast Chamber's Empowering Belfast report illustrated how our city and city region enjoys far fewer powers to deliver regeneration, infrastructure and economic development than our competitor cities in other parts of the UK and Ireland. Whilst places like Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham gain even greater powers, Belfast has far less ability to shape its own destiny.

As combined metropolitan authorities, often headed by directly elected mayors, tackle issues like transport and housing and embrace innovative policy interventions like Freeports on a city region wide basis, Belfast and its city region is nowhere near as empowered.

Belfast Chamber believes that the kind of cooperation that the transformational Belfast Region City Deal represents should be the beginning rather than the end point of working together across the wider Belfast metropolitan area to improve citizens lives.

Cities are emerging from the pandemic, edging towards recovery and bracing for the next set of challenges. Whilst other competitor cities push ahead at pace, progress in Belfast can, at times, appear to be slow. Belfast Chamber believes that the difference between our city and its competitors isn't a lack of vision or opportunity but rather a lack of power in the right places.

BELFAST CHAMBER CALLS ON CANDIDATES TO COMMIT TO:

The commissioning of a review into the powers of local government across Northern Ireland with a particular emphasis on how the Greater Belfast area could be further empowered to supercharge the whole city region's economy.



GROWING BELFAST'S CITY CENTRE POPULATION

Belfast Chamber's Growing Belfast research report – carried out by Grant Thornton – set out the size of the prize that awaits our city should we achieve the Belfast Agenda target of building 11,500 residential units in the city centre. The social, economic and environmental benefits include:

- Swelling the city's population by approximately 20,200 – the equivalent of a town the size of Omagh;
- Producing an additional annual spend in our economy of £165.9m, greatly assisting retail, hospitality and leisure businesses located in the city centre; and
- Eliminating 4,090 tonnes per annum of CO2 as a result of fewer commutes, the same as planting circa 205,000 trees a year.

Unfortunately, when it comes to realising those benefits, Belfast is falling far short with the Growing Belfast research showing that at the current rate of construction, we run the risk of missing the city's target by a staggering 99%. At the same time, competitor cities such as Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham are growing fast.

If we want to grow the city's population and do so in a way that attracts and retains talent, boosts spending in local businesses employing people from across the city, retail and helps us in the fight against climate change, then Belfast city centre needs a plan that matches its ambition.

BELFAST CHAMBER CALLS ON CANDIDATES TO COMMIT TO:

The development and delivery of a Belfast city centre housing plan that addresses barriers like the impact of rates on financial viability and planning requirements for car parking spaces in city centre residential developments that run contrary to the city's desire to encourage active and sustainable travel.



TRANSFORMING BELFAST INTO A PEOPLE CENTRED CITY

In Being Bold, Belfast Chamber's response to Belfast City Council, the Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure's Bolder Vision for Belfast consultation, we set out our vision for a more people centred city which is accessible and inclusive to everyone in our city, enhances citizens health and wellbeing, is greener and environmentally friendlier and, importantly, helps support the city's businesses by creating a city centre that is a must visit destination.

Belfast may have come on leaps and bounds but our city centre still suffers from insufficient open and green space, inadequate walking and cycling infrastructure and segregation from surrounding communities created by both physical and natural barriers.

Belfast needs to fast-track our reimagining into a post-pandemic city that prioritises people, public transport and necessary vehicles like taxis in a way that catalyses increased economic activity. Examples from cities like Milan and Paris who have prioritised investment in cycling infrastructure, Vienna and the redevelopment of Mariahilfer Strasse which more than doubled footfall and Chicago's Riverwalk that has generated \$12million in annual spend in local businesses, point the way to the kind of city Belfast can and must become.

BELFAST CHAMBER CALLS ON CANDIDATES TO COMMIT TO:

Ensure that incoming Ministers in the Department for Infrastructure and Department for Communities make the implementation of the 'Bolder Vision for Belfast' a priority and put in place a suitable structure to ensure that the delivery of the 'Bolder Vision' is coordinated across the different departments and agencies responsible for it.



BOOSTING THE ENTIRE REGION'S ECONOMY

Belfast's development over the past few decades has been astounding. Investments like those in the Glider, the new Ulster University campus and Titanic Belfast have, alongside private sector hotel, housing, office and strategically located car park developments, transformed our city, reshaping it into a much more modern, cosmopolitan, outward looking northern European city.

Investment in innovation and infrastructure in Belfast is not solely to the benefit of the city itself. Investing in Belfast boosts the entire region's economy. Whether it's enhancing the capacity and capability of our two universities, improving our public transport network or developing new and better essential infrastructure, each helps build a better Belfast and stimulates the wider NI economy as well.

We know that infrastructure investment is important to a region's competitiveness and productivity, but Belfast Chamber's Next Gen Belfast survey found that students and young people working in tech and professional services believe that infrastructure is crucial to attracting and retaining talent.

Whilst warmly welcoming progress on the Transport Hub and the new 'Belfast Stories' tourist attraction, now is not the time to apply a brake to investment in Belfast's infrastructure.

BELFAST CHAMBER CALLS ON CANDIDATES TO COMMIT TO:

The prioritisation and acceleration of infrastructure investments that boost our entire region's economy like the York Street Interchange, an EV charging network, the upgrading of the city's water and sewerage system and the various City Deal projects that will bring benefit to the entirety of NI and deliver an innovation and regeneration focused Freeport for Belfast that has the potential to radically change our economic fortunes for the better.





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