URBAN VILLAGES POLICY

Urban Villages - policy synopsis

Contents

1. **Strategic Context** **Page 1**
2. **Why do we need an Urban Village Initiative?** **Page 2**
3. **What is the Urban Village Initiative?** **Page 3**
4. **Urban Village Areas** **Page 5**
5. **Aims and Objectives** **Page 6**
6. **Involving and Influencing** **Page 7**
7. **Summary of Aims, Objectives and Outcomes** **Page 9**

1. Strategic Context

Together: Building a United Community

The 'Together: Building a United Community' strategy (2013) sets out a vision of "*a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance*."

The Strategy includes 4 key priorities:

- Our children and young people;
- Our shared community;
- Our safe community, and
- Cultural expression.

The Executive agreed the following commitments in respect of Priority 2, "Our Shared Community":

- To address all barriers that prevent or interfere with shared space, and ensuring that all individuals can live, learn, work and play wherever they choose.
- To build community confidence and work with local representatives to address the underlying issues, attitudes and mindsets that have the potential to perpetuate division.
- Ensure that good relations considerations lie at the heart of the planning of new service delivery models so that we can encourage greater sharing and maximise opportunities for reconciliation.
- Ensure that all Government contracts for work at interface areas and areas of contested space contain a social clause that provides training and employment opportunities and that members of the local populations will be able to apply for these opportunities.

Each of these priorities is being implemented through a range of practical commitments and seven headline actions:

- Establishing ten new shared education campuses;
- Getting 10,000 young people, not in education, employment or training, a place on the new United Youth volunteering programme;
- Establishing ten new shared housing schemes;
- Developing four urban village schemes;
- Developing a significant programme of cross-community sporting events; and
- Removing interface barriers by 2023; and
- Pilot 100 shared summer schools by 2015.

2. Why do we need an Urban Villages Initiative?

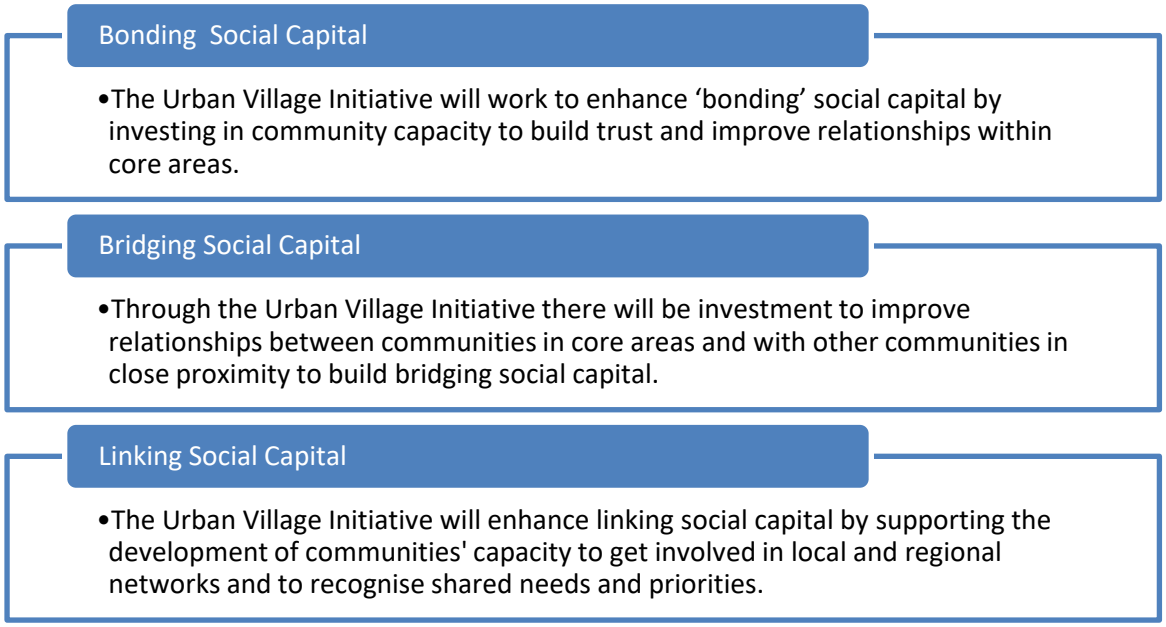
The Urban Village initiative is a response by the Northern Ireland Executive to a body of evidence which shows that division, dereliction and inequality continue to limit potential. In some places, particularly those with a history of multiple deprivation and community tension, the perception remains that the peace process has not delivered tangible change.

The importance of a bespoke intervention is further supported by joint statements from HM Government and the Northern Ireland Executive in 2013, which highlighted the inter-dependencies between rebalancing the economy, securing investment, providing new and better jobs and the need to tackle long-term divisions in society.

Learning from previous good relations and regeneration initiatives tells us that this requires:

- a focus on building 'social capital' that leads to more trusting relationships within and between neighbourhood areas;
- making the most of social assets (people and amenities); and

- supporting the creation of well designed places that people can be proud of.



3. What is the Urban Village Initiative?

Urban Villages is an approach designed to improve good relations outcomes and develop thriving places where there has been a history of deprivation and community tension.

The Urban Villages initiative has three inter-connected aims:

1. To foster positive Community Identities;
2. To build Community Capacity; and
3. To improve the Physical Environment.



In achieving these aims a key mechanism will be aligning and influencing investment. In practice, this will mean:

- Co-ordinating and aligning effort across NICS Departments, local Councils and community organisations to deliver good relations outcomes;
- Identifying and building on what is working, in recognition that sustainable change requires investment in both social (people and communities) and physical assets;
- Exploring ways of investing and trying new approaches which stimulate private investment and economic activity.

Building local momentum

The Urban Village initiative is underpinned by an intensive process of engagement and experiential consultation in communities and with residents and a wide range of public and private sector stakeholders. This will harness the insight, experience and learning of local organisations, delivery bodies and a diverse range of formal and informal networks, groups and individuals. This model of engagement is designed to

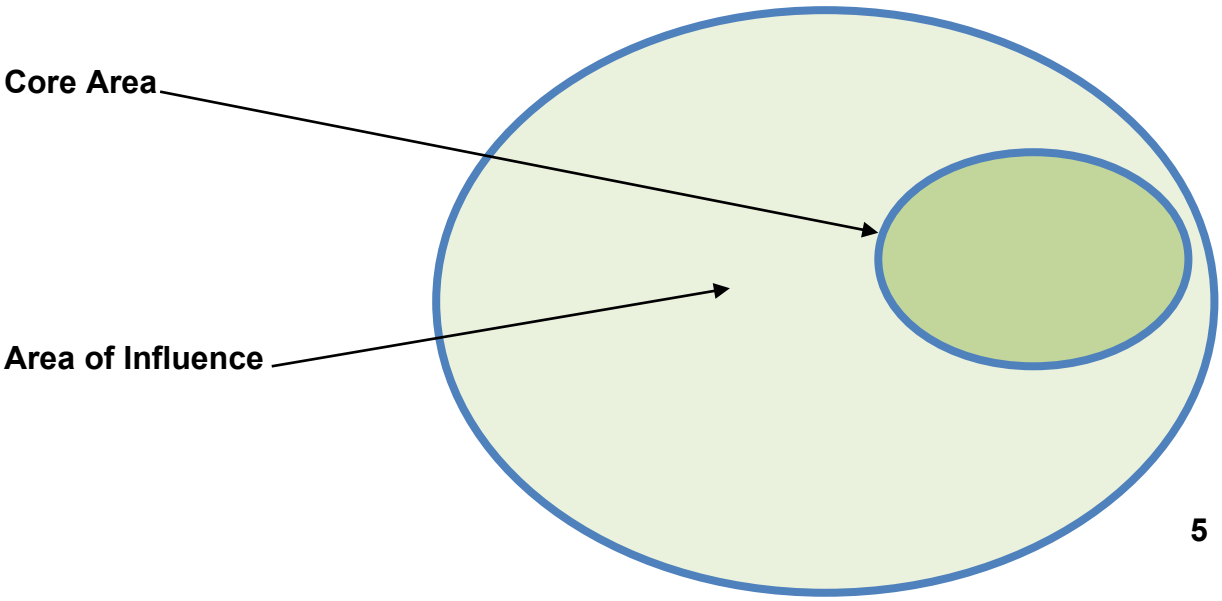
help to build community capacity and involve, mobilise and sustain a community response that supports effective civic stewardship. In this context, civic stewardship is the outworking of communities and other stakeholders connecting and aligning efforts to break down barriers and promote positive change.

The Urban Village initiative will help people and organisations to work together to design better ways of doing things. This includes *'doing more with what we've got'* and enabling current and future investment to be targeted and delivered in more effective and sustainable ways.

Among the headline actions within the Together: Building a United Community strategy, the Urban Village initiative has significant potential to be a focal point for a comprehensive and joined up approach by departments and wider stakeholders in support of the strategy's overarching priorities and commitments.

4. Urban Village Areas

Urban Village areas are those places affected by a history of multiple deprivation, good relations challenges and community tension. These include a core area identified as the primary focus for capital and revenue investments through the Urban Village initiative. However, the policy recognises that physical and social assets in surrounding areas can drive positive outcomes in core areas too, and can benefit from investment and action within them. Investment decisions and actions will be informed by the likely impact on core areas.



5. Aims and Objectives

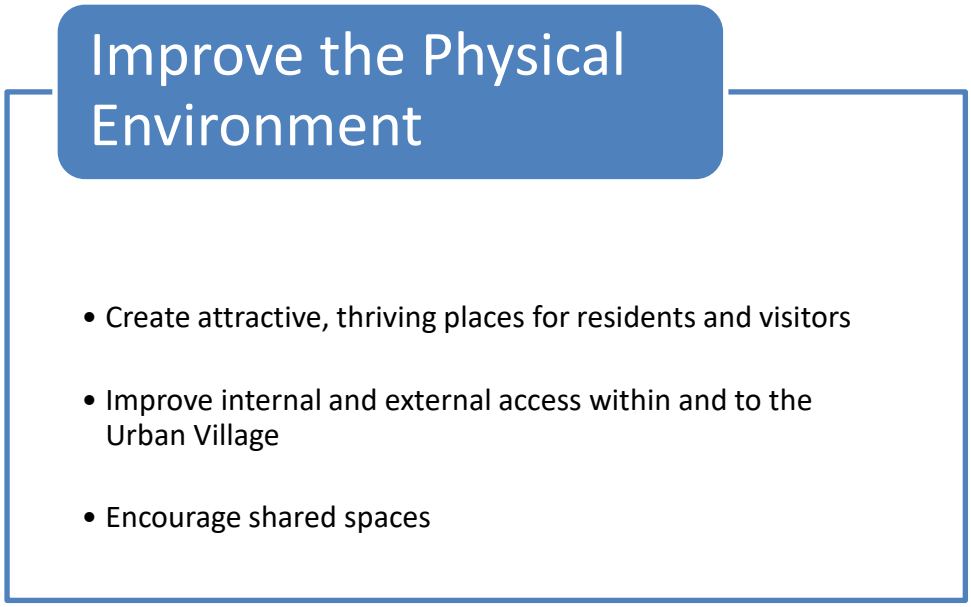
The inter-connected aims of the Urban Village Initiative are to **build community capacity**, **foster positive community identities** and **improve the physical environment**. Associated objectives are shown in the boxes below.

Foster Positive Community Identities

- Build trust and relationships
- Enhance pride and confidence in Urban Village areas
- Create welcoming places where people feel safe and connected, regardless of religious or ethnic background

Build Community Capacity

- Encourage and support communities to express their views and influence what happens in their areas
- Enhance the capacity and confidence of communities to work and socialise within and outside their immediate neighbourhoods
- Enhance community capacity to participate in local and regional networks and recognise shared needs and priorities



6. Involving and influencing

An Urban Villages team (made up of urban designers, community engagement specialists, construction experts and good relations practitioners) will work with local residents, community organisations and others on a cross-sectoral basis to develop a set of shared priorities against good relations outcomes. Development Frameworks covering each core Urban Village area will identify the challenges and strengths of each place and provide the basis for delivery over the period covered by the next Programme for Government.

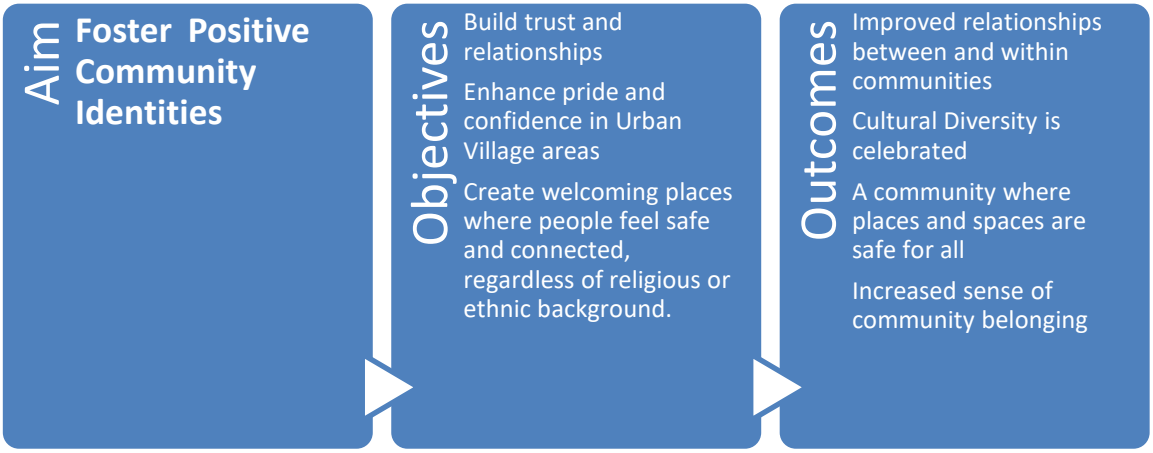
Actions will be planned and delivered through a process of co-design involving local people, public sector investors and private sector interests. Key activities in the initial phase will include an intensive round of 1-to-1 meetings, workshops, surveys, focus groups and public events. High profile community-based initiatives will also maximise the impact and reach of existing initiatives led or supported by community engagement and expert advice to align investment.

4. Outcomes

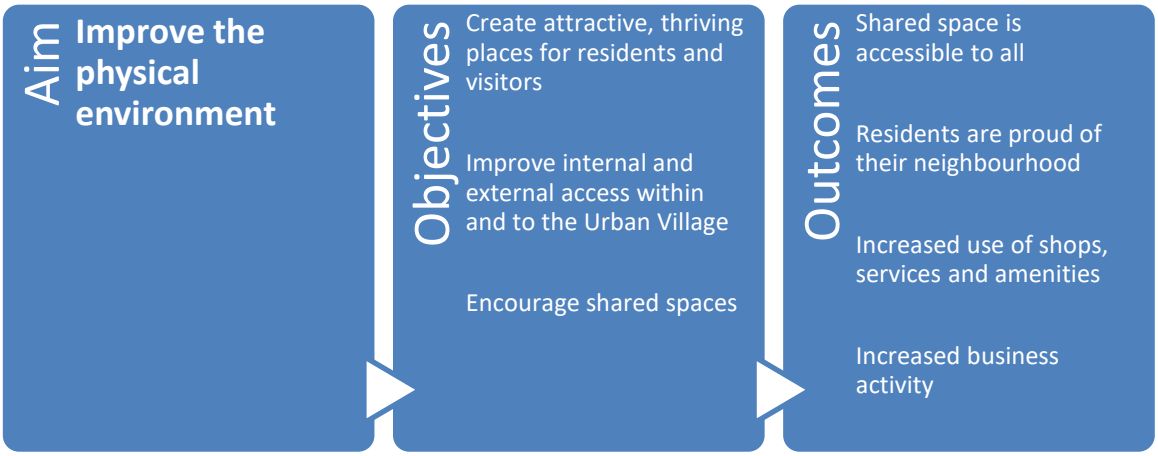
In keeping with the principles of outcome based accountability, the Urban Village initiative will utilise a framework of desired outcomes to provide a focus and sense-

check throughout the life of the programme. We will aim to develop thriving, sustainable communities where civic stewardship is developed and encouraged.

The following diagram summarises the aims, objectives and outcomes.


Aim
Foster Positive Community Identities
Objectives
Build trust and relationships
Enhance pride and confidence in Urban Village areas
Create welcoming places where people feel safe and connected, regardless of religious or ethnic background.
Outcomes
Improved relationships between and within communities
Cultural Diversity is celebrated
A community where places and spaces are safe for all
Increased sense of community belonging


Aim
Build community capacity
Objectives
Encourage and support communities to express their views and influence what happens in their areas
Enhance the capacity and confidence of communities to work and socialise within and outside their immediate neighbourhoods
Enhance community capacity to participate in local and regional networks and recognise shared needs and priorities.
Outcomes
Increased use of shared spaces and services
Greater voice and influence
Confident and enterprising community


Aim
Improve the physical environment
Objectives
Create attractive, thriving places for residents and visitors
Improve internal and external access within and to the Urban Village
Encourage shared spaces
Outcomes
Shared space is accessible to all
Residents are proud of their neighbourhood
Increased use of shops, services and amenities
Increased business activity

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