

Approach for future Pilot Projects

testing ideas through a collaborative process

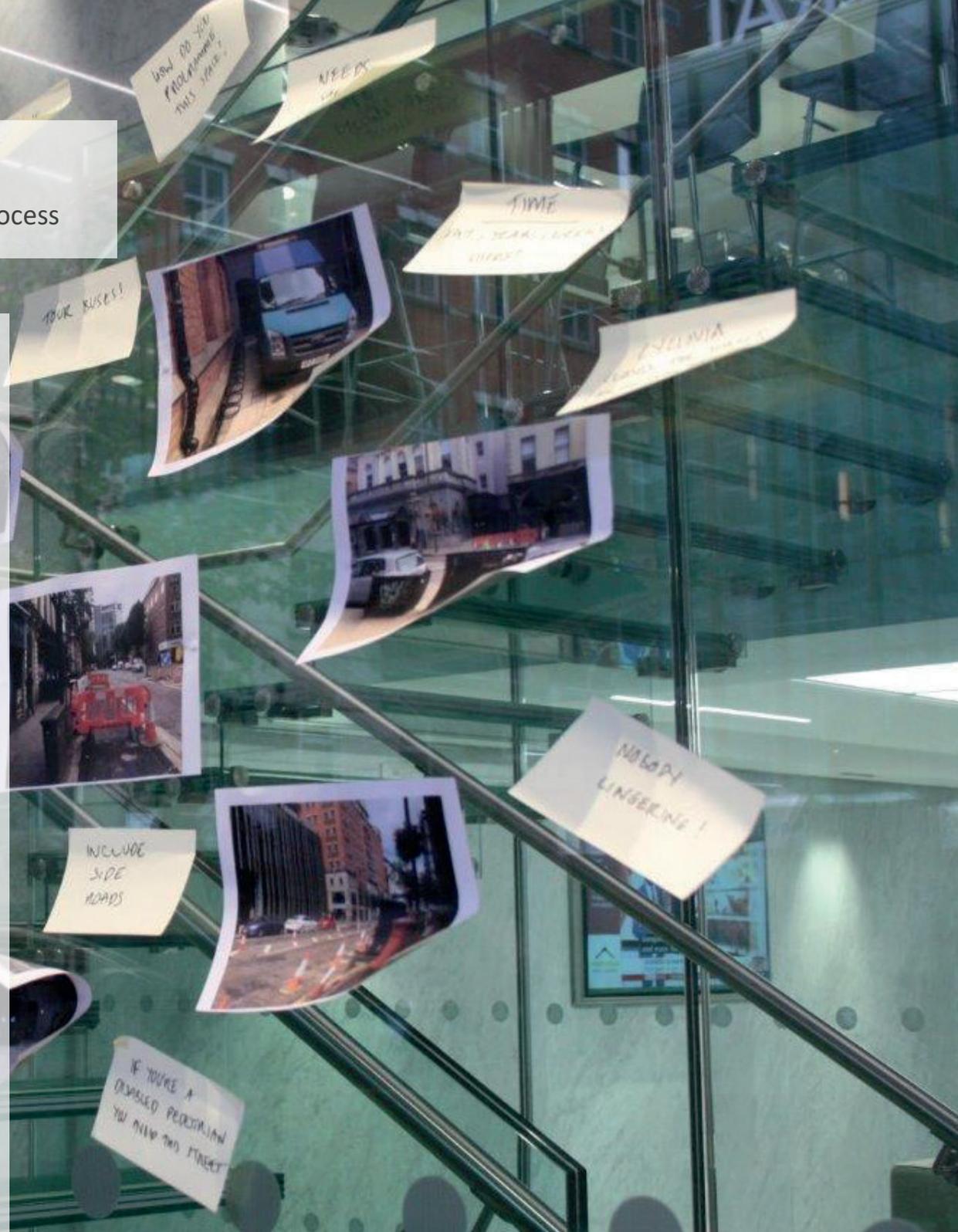
Good places are not a luxury, they are a necessity and to increase the quality of our towns, cities and villages we need to explore their potential and strive for better design and stewardship.

When there are significant opportunities for improving our places there are wide benefits in using a pilot project to test ideas and create engagement with a wide audience in advance of developing long term proposals for a street, space, site, village, town or city quarter.

Better Bedford Street was conceived as a pilot project by the Strategic Design Group (SDG), inspired by the Department for Infrastructure's "Living Places" guide.

SDG is led by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Planning Group and the Department for Communities' (DfC) Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) for Architecture and the Built Environment for NI. SDG includes Belfast City Council, DfI Roads, DfC Regeneration, Institution of Civil Engineers, Royal Society of Ulster Architects, PLACE, Linen Quarter Business Improvement District and a range of other public, private and voluntary sector organisations. The aim of the Group is "Working together to promote successful, inclusive, well designed places which inspire civic stewardship and have an enduring positive impact on people's lives."

The benefits and learning from this first pilot project provide ideas for others planning to use this creative process to test ideas for the future of their places.



Process

The Better Bedford Street pilot project was chosen to test ideas through a collaborative process.

The short-term installations were delivered to change the nature of the street by increasing pedestrian space for the primary users of the street and trialling ideas with learning feeding into future plans and proposals for the area.

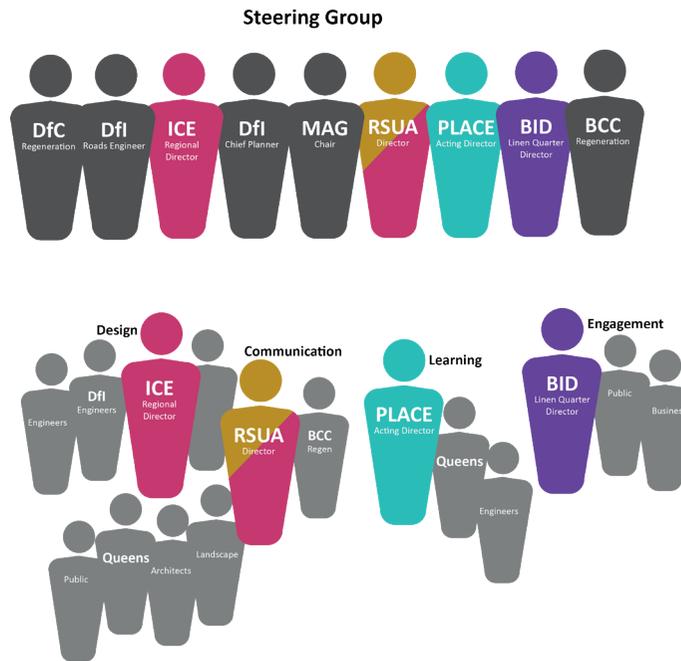
The 100 day challenge was the result of partnership working between central and local government, the business community and a range of other stakeholders in an innovative way. The trust and respect between the stakeholders enabled decisions to be made quickly and responsibility to be shared.

Participants donated their time to the project and the amount of people offering their services for free was inspiring and contagious.

Four inter-connected strands of work were identified by the joint Chairs of the SDG, Andrew Haley (Chair of MAG) and Angus Kerr (Chief Planner & Director of Regional Planning, DfI) and leads identified by skills required.

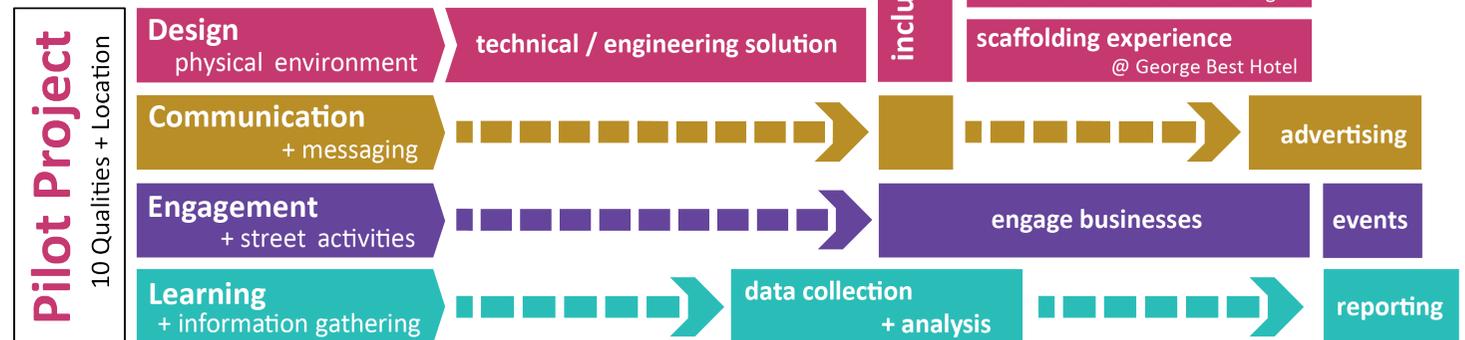
The brief was relatively fluid with broad objectives agreed and the budget was only approved once the key components were established. After the engineering solution was agreed a design workshop with the wider participants generated a series of ideas. Due to practicalities some of these did not come to fruition but lessons were learnt the details of these are covered in the Learning report.

The Steering Group included Andrew Haley and Angus Kerr; the leads from the four work streams; and representatives from Belfast City Council; DfI Planning and Roads Division; and, DfC Regeneration Office and MAG.



The adjacent diagram illustrates the process, which was iterative and collaborative.

#BetterBedfordStreet



Findings from pilot project

These findings have emerged through a series of meetings with key participants in this pilot project when they have shared the positive and negative experiences that led to the lessons learnt through this innovative process.

Benefits:

Collaboration - across Local and Central Government; with other agencies; and, engaging multi-disciplinary professionals and local businesses.

Generosity - giving time and creativity; the ripple effect and increase in participation from wide and varied network.

Capacity building - increasing participants understanding of their environment; ability to articulate their views; creating reasons for engagement with wider audience and changing the conversation.

Design - could inform longer term streetscape proposals for future plans and proposals, including Streets Ahead 5.

Processes - informed solutions at pace after Bank building fire.

Learnings - could inform other pilot projects; and influence policies, strategies and guidance.

Challenges + obstacles:

Policies and processes - this relates to technical issues and regulations that have potential health and safety implications and other permissions; procurement; budgets both capital and revenue from various sources with different parameters; administration and duplication; and, co-ordination of efforts.

Limits of volunteers - capacity/time limitations and implication on programme; availability of skills and level of quality; different values and motivation for participating; co-ordination of efforts difficult when working in different ways and at different times to fit in with other paid work.

Risks - achieving value for money; ownership issues; insurances required; health and safety implications.

Quality assurance - limited evaluation against key objectives through process; impact verses efforts; and managing expectation levels.

Better Bedford Street

Primary lessons learnt:

Scale versus impact - need to check design options against objectives throughout; scale (size and length) can reduce energy of participants and impact of interventions.

Volunteers versus paid - level of collaboration is increased when time is given for free as the generosity of spirit is infectious; issues can occur with meeting programme when volunteers have competing commitments; quality can vary as skills needed may not match volunteers available.

Evidence - need to collect data; set out indicators and measure against them at key stages to inform findings that are robust and can influence better places in the future.

Testing concepts - the temporary nature and timing allowed a flexibility to introduce measures knowing that they could be removed or returned to the original state as appropriate which traditional consultation would not allow for.

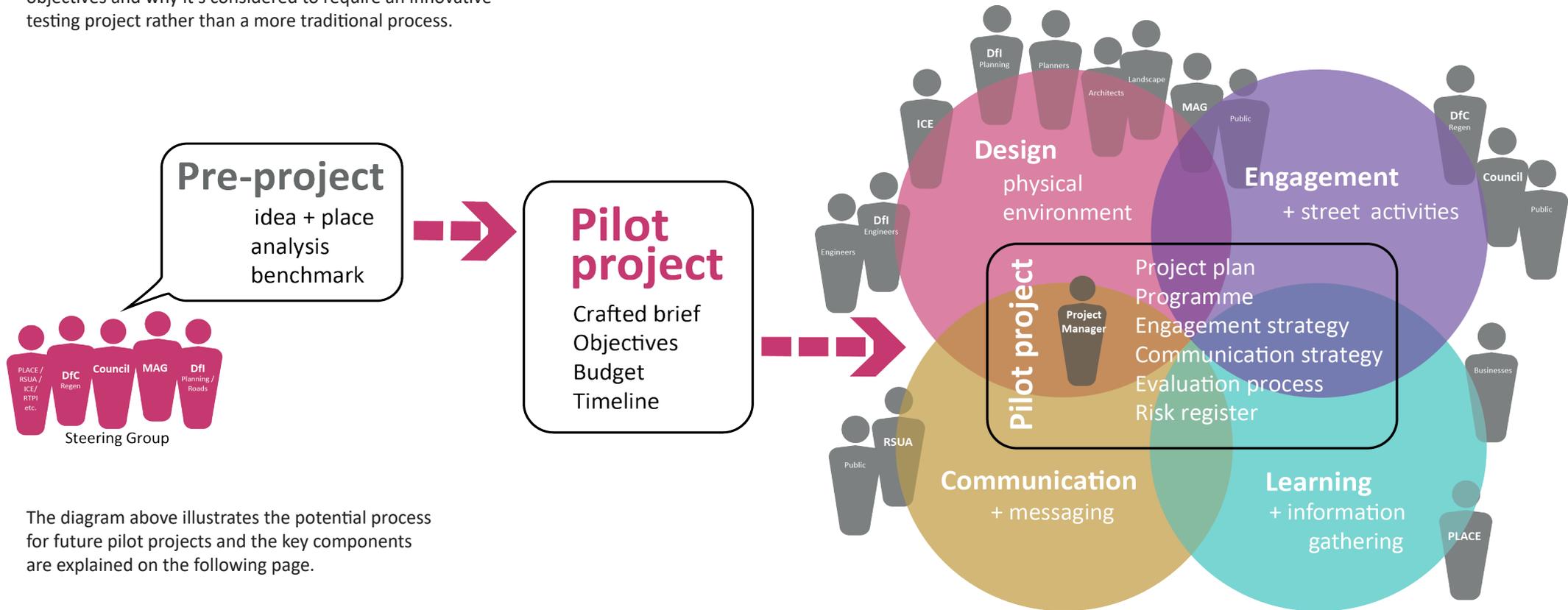
Co-ordination and communication - critical to success and could have been executed in a better way.

Thoughts

for future pilot projects

Pilot projects could range from events or a festival to a temporary installation or series of physical interventions...

The scope and scale of pilot projects needs to reflect the objectives and why it's considered to require an innovative testing project rather than a more traditional process.



The diagram above illustrates the potential process for future pilot projects and the key components are explained on the following page.

Key components

for future pilot projects

Steering Group

Critical to the success of any project is the people involved, and this becomes even more important for a pilot project. From inception the Steering Group needs to be central to the process and should comprise decision makers that have the respect and trust from the highest level and the ability to influence colleagues and collaborators.

Members' need to include skills, experience and passion for placemaking that are needed to address the many facets of a pilot project. They could include: SDG members; MAG Members and/or Advisors; Council officers; DfC Regeneration Office; DfI engineers and/or planning policy; organisations representing professional disciplines; community representatives, IMTAC etc.

Crafting the brief

The Steering Group needs to be responsible for crafting the brief. This will involve initial analysis of the potential challenges to inform the scope and scale of the project and the associated budget. There are benefits in looking at ownership, legislative, financial and procurement constraints at a strategic level to inform the scope as this should assist in delivering the appropriate impact for the efforts and budget. It should clearly set out the objectives of the pilot project and practical requirements such as reporting process, risk register and communications strategy.

Collaboration and participation will be objectives in every pilot project. The brief should clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of participants and how engagement could be maximised.

Build evidence

It is important to collect data to inform future permanent solutions. Careful consideration needs to be given to the nature of data and analysis to ensure it is robust and proportionate. Subject to the type of project and people, a budget may be required.



Project manager

A consistent recommendation is the need for a project manager that has a vested interest in the success of the project. This person would co-ordinate efforts and ensure the practical requirements are fulfilled including facilitating decision making and adhering to the programme. Depending on the scope and scale they may be a member of the Steering Group or a project manager/officer from a Department or Council.

It is important that the role of the project manager is to co-ordinate the project and orchestrate inputs from participants, not design the outputs.

Collaboration + participation

Collaboration could be through a public event or activities for various users and ages to test ideas which are developed into temporary installations and/or activities.

Depending on the nature and scale of the project there may be opportunities to secure sponsorships. This could lead to mini design competitions for young architects, landscape architects, engineers and planners to collaborate, or elements adopted by sponsors to maintain and manage.

Consideration could be given to corporate responsibilities from appropriate organisations where skills and creativity could be harnessed from staff to deliver elements of the project.

Other recommendations

Consideration should also be given to potential ways to influence policies, strategies and/or guidance that will contribute to better place making and continually improve our environments.

Key is changing the conversations to: empower people to discuss what is important to them and consider how we change things; and encourage more creative interpretations of rules.

When developing future strategies and policies consider how they could be tested as part of pilot projects that may enable long term benefits. For example parking provision versus more pedestrian space and testing seating areas and spaces to linger.

Trialing ideas and concepts should be promoted at early stages of option development for schemes, whether streetscapes, development or regeneration proposals. This pilot process could inform business cases and Green Book Appraisals.

Future consideration to how we could benefit from other guidance such as Manual for Streets 1 and 2 and the benefits realised from other public realm / placemaking schemes.

The design suggestions for the future of Bedford Street and its immediate area are set out in the report 'Learning from a collaborative placemaking project'.

Make a difference

Good places are not a luxury and we need to explore their potential and strive for better design and stewardship and testing ideas through a collaborative process should be encouraged.

Critical to delivering future pilot projects will be the capacity of people to initiate and take responsibility for progressing them. But the more pilot projects we pursue the more we learn and improve places for future generations.



Many thanks to:

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www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

other Steering Group members:



MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP
FOR ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT
ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



RSUA

place

and participants:

AECOM - BARRIE TODD - CONSARC - IMTAC - MCCADDEN DESIGN - THE PAUL HOGARTH COMPANY - OGU ARCHITECTS - QUEENS UNIVERSITY - RE ARCHITECTS - SEEDHEAD ARTS - SUSTRANS - ULSTER UNIVERSITY