# Sinn Féin faces backlash over stalled pedestrianisation of Belfast’s Hill Street



Belfast’s Hill Street, a quaint cobbled passageway in the lively Cathedral Quarter, has become a focal point of political scrutiny, especially towards Sinn Féin’s governance. Though shorter than the walk from Dublin’s GPO to O’Connell Bridge, it illustrates a larger narrative about the party's operational efficacy and decision-making skills.

Recent calls to permanently pedestrianise Hill Street—a proposal that enjoys substantial public support—have been inexplicably stalled. Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd's announcement that plans to close the street to traffic are on hold due to "competing work priorities and underfunding" raises serious questions about the prioritisation of local needs. This disappointing development has drawn sharp criticism from local business owners and political representatives who argue that pedestrianising Hill Street is not just a matter of public safety but essential for revitalising the city’s beleaguered night-time economy.

The night-time economy of Belfast is increasingly critical, especially as the city fights to enhance its appeal to leisure and tourism. Michael Stewart, Belfast’s first night czar, voiced his disappointment regarding the delay, mirroring the frustrations of local businesses who contend that an accessible Hill Street is vital for a thriving nightlife. Such criticisms reflect a broader and disturbing dissatisfaction with Sinn Féin’s management of infrastructure and economic revitalisation.

The Department for Infrastructure’s claims of underfunding prompt further scrutiny of Sinn Féin’s leadership and budget priorities. With a substantial £19 billion budget at its disposal, the party's assertions of austerity when it comes to fundamental tasks, such as installing safety bollards, seem increasingly hollow. This contradiction fuels public scepticism regarding the party's leadership capabilities, especially when compared to its ambitious but seemingly disconnected plans for cultural events and future development projects like Belfast 2024.

Concerns over resource allocation permeate beyond highway projects. Recent critiques from within Sinn Féin regarding the cost-effectiveness of the Belfast 2024 cultural programme illustrate a troubling inconsistency in the party's management of financial resources. Councillor Conor Maskey's worries about high per capita costs in light of event benefits indicate a growing discourse regarding financial prudence and overall efficiency within the party.

Moreover, Sinn Féin’s opposition to policies supporting cycling infrastructure further complicates its image. Critics have branded this stance as "anti-cycling, anti-road safety, anti-climate action," igniting a substantial debate over what the party envisions for a sustainably mobile future. Such discussions could prove pivotal in reshaping public perception and enhancing community engagement with pressing contemporary issues.

As Hill Street remains mired in administrative delay, the implications extend far beyond a mere traffic closure. They reveal an urgent need for Sinn Féin to reassess its governance strategies and engage more effectively with the communities it serves. The party’s current situation invites heightened scrutiny and demands a renewed commitment to transparent decision-making and responsiveness to civic needs. If it hopes to maintain its credibility and support, Sinn Féin must not just advocate for ambitious cultural initiatives but also demonstrate an equal commitment to the practical realities of local governance.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/sam-mcbride/forget-brits-out-sinn-feins-hapless-ministers-cant-even-get-cars-out-of-a-tiny-belfast-street/a1922408228.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8djg4jln20o> - Plans to pedestrianise Hill Street in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter have been paused due to competing work priorities and underfunding, according to Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd. The proposal to permanently close the street to vehicles has faced delays since its trial in 2020. Business owners and local politicians have criticized the decision, urging the Department for Infrastructure to reconsider and support the city's night-time economy.
* <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/disappointing-and-surprising-delays-to-belfast-pedestrianisation-plans-criticised-by-night-czar/a1093090383.html> - Belfast's first night czar, Michael Stewart, expressed disappointment over the delay in pedestrianising Hill Street, a key area in the city's nightlife. The Department for Infrastructure cited competing work priorities and underfunding as reasons for the postponement. Local businesses and politicians have called for a reconsideration of the decision to support the city's night-time economy.
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/belfast-city-council-urges-rethink-on-stormont-pedestrianisation-decision-QEHAICTHKFJ7HMEINZISBTV7TE/> - Belfast City Council has urged the Department for Infrastructure to reconsider its decision to pause the pedestrianisation of Hill Street. The council expressed concern over the impact on the city's night-time economy and called for the project to proceed to enhance safety and support local businesses.
* <https://belfastchronicle.co.uk/local-news/sinn-fein-questions-belfast-2024-cultural-programmes-value-for-money/> - Sinn Féin councillor Conor Maskey questioned the value for money of Belfast's flagship cultural programme, Belfast 2024. Maskey highlighted the high cost per head of some events compared to others, raising concerns about the programme's efficiency and financial management.
* <https://www.irishcycle.com/2024/02/06/green-td-calls-sinn-fein-stance-against-protected-cycle-lanes-anti-cycling-anti-road-safety-anti-climate-action-bolloxology/> - A Green TD criticized Sinn Féin's opposition to protected cycle lanes, describing it as 'anti-cycling, anti-road safety, anti-climate action bolloxology.' The TD emphasized the importance of segregated cycle tracks for safety and environmental benefits, challenging Sinn Féin's stance on the issue.
* <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/04/09/sinn-fein-has-16-constituency-properties-in-republic-and-northern-ireland/> - Sinn Féin owns 16 constituency properties across the Republic and Northern Ireland, including a terrace on Falls Road. The party's director of finance, Des Mackin, mentioned that while not every constituency has a property, some have two or three, indicating a substantial property portfolio.