

All-Party Working Group on the City Centre

Friday, 6th December, 2024

MEETING OF THE ALL-PARTY WORKING GROUP ON THE CITY CENTRE

Members present: Councillor Long (Chairperson);
Alderman McCullough; and
Councillors, Groogan and Maskey.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of External Affairs;
Communication and Marketing;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business Research and Development
Manager;
Mr. D. O’Kane, Planning Manager;
Ms. L. O’Donnell, Senior Manager – Culture and Tourism; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 27th September, 2024 were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Local Development Plan - Local Policies Plan

The Principal Planning Officer provided the Working Group with an overview of the work which was ongoing in respect of the Local Policies Plan.

The Principal Planning Officer explained that the city centre was the economic, social and civic hum that provided the greatest accessibility to jobs, services, shops, entertainment and public transport and that developments should be proportionate in scale and form and appropriate to the role and function of the city centre.

He summarised the following local policies, in relation to the function of the city centre, to the Working Group:

- Policy SD2 – Settlement Areas;
- Policy EC2 – Employment Land Supply;

- Policy RET1 – Establishing a City Hierarchy;
- Policy HOU1 – Accommodating New Homes;
- Policy HOU4 – Density of Residential Development; and
- Policy HOU3 – Protection of existing Residential Accommodation.

He outlined the Sailortown Concept Plan to repurpose lands beneath the M3 Motorway and transform Dunbar Link and Corporation Street into an urban boulevard and strengthen key vistas that would enhance the setting of historic assets.

He explained that the Ormeau Avenue Concept Plan would reknit the urban fabric of the city core, promote city centre living, accommodate a Belfast Glider service to improve connectivity and enhance the public realm and pedestrian experience.

The Working Group noted the report.

Belfast Night Czar

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Stewart, Belfast Night Czar, to the meeting.

Mr. Stewart explained that the role of the Night Czar followed Belfast's award of the Purple Flag which recognised the city's thriving and diverse nighttime economy. He stated that the role was a part-time role funded by the Linen Quarter BID, Belfast One and Destination CQ business bodied and was supported by the Purple Flag Steering Group that included the Belfast Chamber, Hospitality Ulster, Belfast City Council, the PSNI and Translink.

He outlined the following five goals which he wished to achieve while undertaking the role:

- Late night connectivity;
- Ending violence against women and girls;
- Reintroduction of Culture Night;
- A common-sense approach to café licensing; and
- Pedestrianisation of particular areas of the city centre.

He stated that he had recently attended Design the Night, a nighttime economy conference in Bristol, and outlined his learnings from the conference and recent scoping visits to comparable cities in the UK and explained that Belfast city centre's Christmas animation was exceptional in comparison to Manchester and Bristol.

He concluded by stating that partnerships were key in supporting the nighttime economy, particularly nighttime connectivity and welcomed the Council's support.

In response to a question from a member with regard to financial responsibility for transport, Mr. Stewart explained that finance was the main issue with regard to connectivity and allowing people to travel home safely from the city centre late at night and that he felt the contribution of the nighttime economy had been undervalued by government departments.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Stewart for his attendance and the Working Group agreed to invite him back to a future meeting.

Request to Present to a future meeting – ROAM NI

The Working Group acceded to a request from Councillor Doherty to invite ROAM NI to present to a future meeting.

Chairperson