

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 3rd March, 2021

REMOTE MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson);
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and
Councillors Beattie, Donnelly, Gormley,
Harvey, Heading, Howard, T. Kelly, Lyons,
Maskey, McLaughlin, McMullan, Mulholland,
Murphy, O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. E. Henry, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for the inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillor Ferguson.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st March.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Donnelly declared an interest in relation to item 2.c) Department for Communities (DfC) COVID19 Revitalisation Fund, in that he was an employee of the Upper Springfield Development Trust, an organisation which had been a successful grant applicant.

Councillor T. Kelly declared an interest in relation to item 2.c) DfC COVID19 Revitalisation Fund, in that her husband was a staff member of one of the organisations which had been allocated funding.

In respect of item 2.c) Councillor Gormley also declared an interest in that he was a Board member of Lower Ormeau Resident's Action Group.

Councillor Murphy declared an interest in relation to item 7.a) Belfast Bikes - allocation of stock to social enterprises and charities, in that he was a Board Member of

the Legoniel Improvement Association, an organisation which had been a successful applicant.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following 3 items were restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Finance Update

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided an overview of the monthly finance update and the Quarter 3 finance report.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report which had been presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in February, including the forecast update and the Quarter 3 Finance Report (Appendix 1); and
- Noted the re-instatement of financial reporting arrangements based on Financial Regulation G12.

Festival 2022 Commission

The Director of Economic Development explained that Festival 2022 was an initiative funded by the UK Government in partnership with relevant departments in the devolved governments. The focus of Festival 2022 was a celebration of creativity and innovation, with a global outlook.

He advised that the Festival would bring together creative teams of scientists, artists, engineers and technologists to create ten large-scale extraordinary, public engagement projects; each commissioned with the goal of reaching 66 million people globally. He explained that, of these ten commissions, six would be driven by collaborations from across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and contracted by Festival 2022 Ltd; the special purpose vehicle established to curate, manage and promote the Festival. However, the remaining four commissions would be delivered by Strategic Delivery Bodies and led by creatives from each of the four areas. All ten commissions were expected to be global in ambition.

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in October 2020, it had been agreed that the Council, in partnership with the other councils, would act as a Strategic Delivery Body alongside equivalent organisations in England, Scotland and Wales.

The Director explained the process of the public open call for organisations and individuals from across the STEAM sectors to come together and form Creative Teams. He described the three staged Research and Development process which culminated in the submission of a feasibility report and a presentation to the assessment panel in February 2021. He highlighted that a summary of the feasibility format and criteria was included at Appendix A, together with details of the assessment of each of the teams was included at Appendix B.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development and the Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism confirmed the importance of the legacy of the project, including its evaluation, building capacity and community outputs of the project

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of this report;
- Agreed the recommendation that the commission, as part of Festival 2022, be awarded to the Nerve Centre led team, subject to confirmation of funding from Department for Communities; and
- Agreed the recommended governance structure for the delivery of the project as set out in Appendix C.

Department for Communities (DfC) COVID19 Revitalisation Fund

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an overview of the work packages and budget envelopes which had been agreed through the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in relation to the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme.

She highlighted the collective programme of projects that, through the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, officers had been working with city stakeholders to help rebalance the use of public space, to safely promote economic recovery and provide a people focused approach. She presented some of the ongoing physical and streetscape improvements in the city such as new parklets, public realm and environmental schemes including outdoor seating areas, proposed community gardens and shop front improvements.

She tabled an update in relation to the Business Cluster and Community Grant Scheme applications. She explained that officers had now re-engaged all applicants through the Small Business Grant Scheme and, due to reasons including applicants withdrawing from the scheme and actual claims totalling less than originally requested, there was now an underspend of approximately £95k within this budget line of the DfC Revitalisation Programme.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development highlighted that, in addition to the recommendations outlined in the report, the Committee was asked to also consider the reallocation of the aforementioned £95k of underspend, and any future underspend within the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, to the Business Cluster and Community Grant Scheme to meet the funding gap as identified within the report. She pointed out that this underspend would be allocated to extinguish the remaining City Centre Business Cluster fund, followed by assessing the application in the order in which they were received as previously agreed by Committee.

She reminded the Committee that the Council's request for additional support from DfC for the Business Cluster and Community Grant scheme would be issued to the Minister for Communities, as agreed by the Committee at its last meeting.

During discussion, the Director of City Regeneration and Development provided further information in relation to sustainable active travel and advised that a report on the outcome of the feasibility study on additional city wide infrastructure to support the cycling network and to inform potential capital interventions would be submitted to a future meeting. In response to a Members query she confirmed that this included the potential for a temporary Active Travel Hub at Cathedral Gardens.

In response to a Member's query on the success of the pop up park at Cathedral Gardens, the Director City Regeneration and Development also confirmed that work was being undertaken in relation to a permanent park, as agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted that £4.039m of funding had been provided to the Council through the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme to date;
- Noted the progress update on the various agreed strands of work underway through this Revitalisation Programme with the developing designs for the proposed physical improvements and streetscape improvements presented at the Committee meeting;
- Approved the reallocation of this £95k of underspend, and any future underspend within the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, to the Business Cluster and Community Grant Scheme to meet the funding gap as identified within the report. The Committee noted that the underspend would be allocated to extinguish the remaining City Centre Business Cluster and Community Grant fund, followed by assessing the applications in the order in which they were received, as previously agreed by Committee;
- Noted that a request for additional support from DfC for the Business Cluster and Community Grant scheme would be issued to the Minister for Communities, as agreed by the Committee in February and ratified at Council on 1st March, 2021; and

- Noted that a report on the outcome of the feasibility study on additional city wide infrastructure to support the cycling network and to inform potential capital interventions, as previously identified as part of the DfC Revitalisation Fund, would be submitted to Committee for consideration in the near future.

Presentations

Visit Belfast

The Chairperson introduced Ms. K. Thomson, Chief Executive, National Museums NI, Mr. G. Lennon, Chief Executive, Visit Belfast, and Mr. H. Hastings, Managing Director, Hastings Hotels, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting.

Ms. Thomson highlighted Visit Belfast's vision and long-term commitment to improving tourism in Belfast and thanked the Council for its support over the last decade.

Mr. Lennon provided a presentation on Visit Belfast's strategic plan 2021/22 which focused on supporting tourism recovery. He explained the impact which the Covid-19 pandemic had had on city tourism, with a reduction in Hotel Room Revenue by 69.7% and a reduction in Air Passenger Transit by 72%.

He highlighted that tourism was a pillar of the city's economy and should be prioritised in the economic recovery plans for the City. He pointed out that Belfast was a region of strategic importance and provided a summary of its significance in relation to visitor numbers and spend.

He provided an example of a new regenerative model for Belfast, which included: Building a resilient economy; Delivering inclusive growth; and Protecting the environment. Mr. Lennon explained their plans for future destination marketing, with a focus on drawing demand and a variety of offerings through collaboration and cohesion.

He summarised Visit Belfast's Guiding Principles and Objectives, together with the operating challenges it needed to overcome. He explained the organisation's Policy Framework and highlighted the excellent data and research which had been provided by the Council.

Mr. Lennon suggested what tourism might look like in Belfast, post covid-19, and explained changing visitor behaviours and preferences for the future and how this would influence marketing, sales and new initiatives.

He provided an overview of priority markets and segments, together with key business tourism and travel trade priorities. He informed the Committee of its Visitor Servicing work and change project outcomes.

Mr. Hastings explained further the three year tourism recovery strategy and the vision for Belfast to become even more competitive post Covid-19. He also highlighted the objective for Belfast to become a low carbon economy.

During discussion, the representative's answered a range of questions in relation to the demand for travel after the pandemic, predicted occupancy rates, the impact of Brexit on tourism, data sharing across the industry, air travel rates, the demand for business tourism and conferences, the importance of neighbourhood tourism, post covid-19 preparedness of hotels and its staff, accessibility and inclusion for disabled people and their families, the employment market, environmental and societal metrics, green tourism, the promotion of Council assets, and diversity and shared history events. One Member also suggested that Members of Council could also contribute different ideas for future neighbourhood tourism plans.

The Director of Economic Development stated that a report on the Council's 10 year tourism plan would be submitted to Committee in June and would include an update on neighbourhood tourism. He also highlighted the need to build capacity and capitalise on the cities tourism assets to align with anchor products.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their informative presentation and they retired from the meeting.

The Director of Economic Development drew the Members' attention to the report which had been published alongside the presentation which outlined the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2021/22 financial year and set out the organisation's strategic plan, which focused on supporting tourism recovery.

He advised that it provided further information in relation to rebuilding city tourism and future tourism outlook which highlighted that Visit Belfast sought to re-purpose and re-structure its operations and activities to adapt to the changing environment and operating context. He provided an overview of the activities which aimed to maximise efficiencies and prioritisation of resources to facilitate an appropriate and rapid response to dynamic market, customer and operating challenges.

He reported that, in 2021-22, Visit Belfast's core objective continued to be driving the visitor economy through securing trips to the city and visitor spend. This would be achieved through the ongoing delivery of main service areas:

- Marketing, Communications, Partnership and Commercial;
- Business Development; and
- Visitor Servicing.

He explained that, in the current financial year, the Council's funding arrangement with Visit Belfast was £1,997,465 and an allocation of £1,997,465 had been set aside within the Departmental estimates for the financial year 2021/22.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2021/22 and that the overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year had been taken account of in the revenue estimates that had already been approved by the Council.

- Approved the funding allocation of up to £1,997,465 for 2021/22 expenditure, subject to the development of a funding agreement confirming priority areas of activity as outlined in the presentation and agreed targets.

**York Street Interchange Alternatives –
Mr. M. Hackett**

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Hackett to the meeting.

Mr. Hackett provided a presentation which detailed an alternative design solution to the planned York Street Interchange project – a Department for Infrastructure scheme to address a major bottleneck on the strategic road network, replacing the existing signalised junctions at York Street with direct links between the Westlink, M2 and M3.

He stated that the alternative vision intended to get the roads design resolved as soon as possible, since the congestion was causing local pollution. He suggested that the scale and delays to the current scheme was holding back the city. However, repair was only possible with better design.

Mr. Hackett presented illustrations of alternative options to the main routes of the scheme and described how changes to traffic, lighting and street realignment could reimagine the York Street Interchange. He highlighted that the suggested alternative solution removed traffic lights, so that evening traffic could clear, phases 1 and 2 could be implemented with no disruption and final bridges could be implemented quickly. He stated that the design would also be lower carbon and cost that could unlock renewal and create sustainable transport. He provided examples of how the introduction of walkways and street allocations to pedestrians and cyclists might promote safer spaces.

He stated that the current scheme suggested temporary road closures which could be damaging to the city and suggested the alternative design would use less land, giving way for further development opportunities, whilst reconnecting North Belfast to the River Lagan.

He suggested that the alternative design would have no underground routes, used more of the existing structure and would be faster and cheaper, with an overall better result for the city. He advised that the York Street Interchange could become an 'Infrastructure for all' reconnecting whole sectors.

He concluded that he wished to work with the Minister for Infrastructure and the Assembly to reach a consensus of design.

During discussion, Mr. Hackett explained further the potential risks of the current design, the background and current status of the scheme including the public enquiry and reviews of the scheme.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Hackett for his informative presentation and he retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting to provide an overview and background of the Council's decision to support the current York Street Interchange design.

Requests to Present

Requests to Present to Committee

It was reported that a request had been received from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to provide the Committee with an update in relation to the Belfast Rapid Transport (Glider) Phase 2 Scheme and the Ulster University in regards to the new City Centre Campus.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that, given the strategic, city wide importance of the next phase of this public transport infrastructure scheme, it was recommended that Members received a presentation from DfI senior officials on the BRT Phase 2 Scheme and the emerging proposals. It was anticipated that a presentation would be provided to the Committee at its meeting in April, subject to confirmation by DfI.

She informed the Committee that Ulster University also intended to provide an update on the ongoing development works and the migration strategy for the new City Centre Campus, to include an update on the University's progress in opening the city centre campus in 2021, the regenerative impact of the new campus, the Migration Strategy and the ongoing Transport and Travel and Campus Impact Study.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Agreed to receive a presentation from Department for Infrastructure (DfI) senior officials on the Belfast Rapid Transport (Glider) Phase 2 scheme and requested that the presentation included an update in relation to the Safe Cycle Route Network; and
- Agreed to receive a presentation from the Ulster University providing an update on the ongoing development works, the migration strategy for the new City Centre Campus, and campus impact study. The Committee also requested an update in relation to the impact of its purpose built managed student accommodation, and how, as an anchor tenant of the Inclusive Growth Strategy, it was contributing to the inclusive growth and investment for the local community.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Connectivity Issues - Letters to Ministers

The Committee was provided with an update on the responses which had been received to recent letters that had been sent to Ministers at the request of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

The Strategic Director of Economy and Place highlighted the following points:

York Street Interchange (YSI)

The Council had received a response from the Minister for Infrastructure (Appendix 1) indicating that the review was now complete and that the Minister was currently considering the findings. The Minister went on to promote a collaborative approach between the Department and the Council in terms of the future development of the York St. Interchange Scheme and other infrastructure solutions in line with the City Centre Connectivity Study.

Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme: Connectivity Related Projects

The Council had received a response from the Minister for Infrastructure and the Minister for Communities (Appendix 2 and 3) outlining the £19.3m of urgent funding to Councils to prepare town and city centres to reopen safely. The Ministers also reiterated the departmental commitment to providing assistance, support and partnership working in delivering the programme of works.

Public Realm Schemes at Shankill Gateway and Fredrick Street

The Council had received a response from both the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Infrastructure (Appendix 5 and 6). These responses refer to the ongoing work of the joint Junctions Stakeholder Group to review the designs with the Minister for Infrastructure stating that '*officials would work at pace to bring forward proposals for alternative junction layouts that would better reflect the priority that we all agree needs to be given to public transport, pedestrians and cyclists*' with a further update to be provided to the Council in due course.

Increasing Sustainable Transport in Belfast

The Council had received a response from the Infrastructure Ministers office (Appendix 8) which confirmed the Departments commitment to creating more opportunities for active travel and making our roads safer for those who walk, wheel and cycle. The Minister referenced the importance of reimagining our city and town centres with a focus on making them greener, more walkable and more connected with commitments from the Department including the establishment of a Walking and Cycling Champion, a £20m capital funding for Blue and Green Infrastructure, progression of two key sustainable transport projects in the BRT Phase 2 and the Ormeau Road Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge, and the pending publication of the final Belfast Bike Network.

During discussion, the Senior Development Manager advised that the designs in relation to the Shankill Gateway would be submitted to the Committee once they had been received by the Department.

In response to a Members question in relation to the lack of information provided in the letter to the Department for Infrastructure, and the response received, regarding Increasing Sustainable Transport in Belfast, the Strategic Director of Economy and Place advised that the letter for DfI had been sent following an amendment to the minutes at Council, however, feedback would be provided to Democratic Services on the issue.

The Committee noted the responses which had been received in relation to letters which the Council had issued regarding connectivity related matters as follows:

- I. York Street Interchange;
- II. Covid 19 Revitalisation Programme: Connectivity Projects;
- III. Public Realm Schemes at Shankill Gateway and Fredrick Street; and
- IV. Increasing Sustainable Transport in Belfast.

Growing Business and the Economy

Economic Inactivity Research

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Committee with an update on the key findings of a report into barriers experienced by economically inactive residents within the Urban Village areas across Belfast.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the key findings and barriers of this research; and
- Note and agree the way forward, based on this research.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will be aware that economic inactivity is one of the most significant challenges for Belfast – and has been so for some time. Economic inactivity rates in the city are regularly ahead of the Northern Ireland average and, in some parts of

the city, can be almost double the regional figure. A key element of the council's work on employability is to focus on supporting inclusive growth by targeting our interventions on those furthest from the labour market – including those who are long-term unemployed and economically inactive. In order to understand the barriers faced by those individuals in finding work, the council undertook a research project in collaboration with The Executive Office's Urban Villages programme. The data gathering element of the research was largely undertaken in advance of Covid-19. However, it is important to acknowledge that the pandemic is likely to exacerbate the barriers to economic activity as identified in the results of this research.

- 3.2 The research process was initiated through a series of meetings with representatives of the Urban Village Local Reference Groups and included desk research; 36 one-to-one interviews, 252 questionnaires and 12 focus groups to qualitatively explore any perceived barriers to economic inactivity in depth. Those engaged in the research are currently engaged within community provision within their local communities (through Urban Villages).
- 3.3 Of those individuals who were involved in this research, 1/3 have been out of work for between 2-5 years and 27% were out of work for over 5 years. Over half of respondents are living with a health condition or disability. Almost 3/4 of those aged between 19-49 years reported having no qualifications.

Overview of key findings

- 3.4 While respondents were not specifically engaged on employability or skills-based projects when they were interviewed, over 75% considered securing employment to be important. Just under half stated that the salary level required for an individual to leave the welfare system in favour of paid employment was between £16,000 and £24,000. The two key driving factors for finding a job were for financial gain and also to have a sense of purpose.
- 3.5 The preferred employment sectors for female respondents were retail, office and administration. For males, the preferred employment sectors were manufacturing and construction. Only 2% view finance; and 6% IT as preferred employment sectors – while these are recognised as two key growth sectors for the city. 24% of respondents have considered the option of self-employment or starting their own business.
- 3.6 The main barriers identified by respondents include:

- **Qualifications:** two thirds feel they require skills training and almost two thirds have been unable to resource this and feel this is exacerbated by a lack of employment experience and not being able to identify referees to provide to prospective employers
- **Intergenerational Economic Inactivity:** three quarters indicated that the potential impact on their benefits, or those of their household, is a challenge to securing and remaining in a job and 87% reported that they do not have family support and encouragement to help them get a job
- **Capacity and Confidence:** over two thirds described themselves as not being confident in presenting themselves at job interviews and 60% worried their communication skills would be a barrier in a job environment
- **Caring Responsibilities:** two thirds of respondents have dependent children or care for other family members and 81% of those with primary care responsibilities cannot afford the childcare to work. Half of these respondents indicated they would need to work part time or secure flexible working arrangements
- **Health & Disability:** almost a fifth of respondents stated that they live with a physical health condition and almost all of these stated they consider their physical health to be a barrier to employment. 26% of respondents stated they live with a mental health condition and all considered their mental health to be a barrier to employment
- **Age:** almost two thirds of those aged 50+ years believe that age is a barrier to getting and remaining in a job
- **Legacy Issues:** the research illustrated that 65% of respondents felt confident about working in a community not considered to their own although this was predominantly by those from ethnic minority/migrant communities
- **Language and Recognition of International Qualifications:** just under 80% of black and minority ethnic (BAME) respondents feel that their ability to speak English is a challenge to getting and remaining in a job and 84% of BAME respondents have been unable to access certain types of training because they couldn't afford to pay.

3.7 The research also identifies a key roles for local authorities in tackling long-term economic inactivity and notes that place-based solutions are necessary to reach those who are out of work for a long period and/or economically inactive.

This confirms the rationale behind the ongoing work on the Labour Market Partnership for Belfast in partnership with the Department for Communities, as reported at the November meeting of this Committee.

3.8 Taking account of the findings, officers plan to use the insights in a number of ways:

- Share with the Department for Communities in order to explore the potential for additional support to address barriers – particularly the provision of support for childcare both during training and in the early stages of employment, in order to ensure that an individual can confidently take on a role
- Ensuring that these findings shape all of our employability interventions for these target groups as part of our development approach
- Continue to work with employers through our Employment Academy model, including negotiating with the employer to explore how the qualification/experience levels normally expected at recruitment stage can be adapted to provide opportunities for people within these target groups, with the Employment Academy packaging together the skills/qualifications required as well as employability support for the individual
- Engaging with local communities around opportunities within the digital sector – including youth engagement support, school engagement activity and the co-design of Employment Academies and other bespoke solutions within this sector
- Continuation of the Enterprise Pathway programme as a way of engaging with those who are economically inactive/long-term unemployed and helping them move into self-employment by providing intensive wrap-around support
- Disseminating the research finding across Council, for example in the development of the Inclusive Growth City Charter through to our approach to Social Value and Developer Contributions as well as the economic, social and community recovery plans within Council
- Continue to influence the scope and remit of the emerging Shared Prosperity Fund and other large-scale interventions to ensure that they are informed by the specific needs of these target groups and that eligible activity reflects their needs.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.9 No specific financial or resource implications

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.10 The unit undertakes equality screening on the overall work programme to ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of each project. The Urban Villages programme covers targeted areas across Northern Ireland.”

The Committee noted the key findings and barriers of this research and agreed the proposed way forward, based on this research.

The Committee also noted that a workshop would be held at the end of March to discuss the issues further.

Update on Tourism

The Committee considered the following report, together with associated appendices:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the development of a new tourism plan and set out key actions for quarter 1 of the 2021/22 financial year.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report and progress made to date on the development of the new tourism plan with agreement to receive a full draft in June 2021.
- Agree to progress the key actions as set out in appendix 1 and supported by 2021/22 departmental budget for tourism development.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 Members will be aware that at a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in August 2020, it was agreed that a new ten-year plan for tourism was to be developed. The purpose of this plan is to:

- Deliver on the tourism priorities set out the *Belfast Agenda*, recognising the importance of tourism to *Growing the Economy* and *City Development*.
- Align to the ten-year cultural strategy *A City Imagining*, in order to ensure that tourism development supports cultural development and is based on an authentic and sustainable Belfast offer.
- Support economic and social recovery in the context of Covid-19 including stabilisation, recovery and growth with the opportunity to build back better.
- Provide strategic context to the Belfast City Region Deal.

3.2 A further update was provided to Committee in December 2020 setting out findings of the initial research and development phase and the emerging four draft strategic themes:

- Grow Belfast
- Experience Belfast
- Position Belfast
- Sustainable Belfast

3.3 An initial timeframe had aimed to present a full draft plan to Committee in March 2021. However due to ongoing challenges facing the tourism and hospitality sectors it is proposed that this is now extended to June in order to facilitate sectoral engagement and to better understand the recovery trajectory. This report therefore provides an update on further progress made during the development phase of the plan and sets out key foundation actions to be taken forward in quarter one of the 2021/22 financial year.

3.4 Experience Belfast – developing neighbourhoods

The cultural strategy recognises the importance of cultural tourism and the role of Council in supporting the development of local destinations and quality products across the city. In particular the strategy commits to:

- Developing cultural tourism through building capacity and opportunity for citizen and culture led approaches to tourism development and infrastructure (e.g. local tourism programme).

3.5 This will be further expanded in the ten year tourism plan through one of the four draft themes, Experience Belfast. This will include experiences that can be brought to life through the development of an optimal mix of ‘anchor’ and

ancillary products that get people into an area and keep them there. This also increases connectivity between all parts of the city raising the visibility and appeal of the breadth of the tourism offer with a focus on encouraging international visitors to immerse themselves actively in the locale, interacting with people and learning the history and stories of the places.

3.6 Further work will be undertaken to embed neighbourhood tourism into the overall experience plan with proposals for a competitive funding scheme to be developed in line with the investment approach to the cultural sector. Details will be included in future Committee reports for consideration from 2022/23 onwards. However to ensure continuity and to build on local tourism development provided to date it is proposed to provide interim support for key programmes such as the City Connections local tourism programme and other ongoing partnership agreements. In 2020/21 these local conduits have continued to deliver support programmes throughout COVID-19 including:

- Insights and research into impact of the pandemic on tourism businesses at a localised level.
- Public events and activities – adapting to restrictions including hybrid models of digital content and on the ground activity during summer months when permitted.
- Developing linkages between heritage programmes and community tourism.
- Connecting local regeneration to tourism development.

3.7 It is proposed that these ongoing partnerships can be utilised to ensure that recovery plans are pivoted to consider local needs and opportunities with the focus of activity for 2021-22 to include:

- Increase engagement and promote the benefits of participating in local networks including identifying new and emerging partners delivering local tourism experiences.
- Investing in local programmes that engage directly with visitors including support to attract target markets during phase one of recovery such as domestic staycations as well as UK and Ireland.
- Capacity building and development work on clustering approaches with involvement of industry experts and practitioners to develop geographic and thematic models.

- Supporting and commissioning robust evidence base to increase understanding of the market including consumer testing of local products.

Programme Development supported by the Global Destination Sustainability Index

3.8 Members will be aware that Belfast has completed its year one benchmarking as a member of the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDSI). The Index is based on 69 Indicators broken down into four categories:

- Environmental Performance
- Social Performance
- Supplier Performance
- Destination Management Performance

3.9 As previously reported to Committee in December 2020, a series of recommendations for action have been identified for Belfast to take forward to increase our ranking position in the Index in advance of the benchmarking review which is due for submission in August 2021. A number of these specifically relate to the Destination Management Organisation and will be taken forward as part of Visit Belfast's business plan for 2021-22. In addition to this, under Council's contract with the GDSI, they have been engaging with the ICC (as the City's Congress venue) to identify a suitable 3rd party accreditation scheme, likely to be the globally recognized Earthcheck scheme.

Environmental research

3.10 Belfast's Resilience Strategy with its alignment to UN Sustainability targets was commended by the GDSI as exemplary. It was noted that although great progress has been made in terms of recycling over recent years, overall Northern Ireland has a relatively high landfill rate and export of waste remains high. Officers wish to understand the overall contribution of the tourism industry to this process in greater detail in order to make informed decisions on future plans. It is proposed that a piece of research is carried out to establish baselines and future areas of action specifically in relation to landfill and the export of waste.

Social and cultural initiatives

3.11 In 2020 Belfast City Council partnered with QUB to host a student placement from QUB's MSc Leadership for Sustainable Development programme to analyse sustainable

practices currently used by festival and event organisers in Belfast, highlight best practice and identify areas for improvement. Officers facilitated engagement with events and festivals through BCC's Festivals Forum. The output of this project was a Sustainable Events Toolkit aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is hoped that once events and festivals re-open that this toolkit can be mobilised to enable both Council and our partners in the cultural sector to assess their accountability in the context of sustainability and begin to adapt.

3.12 This year, our delivery partner Visit Belfast are hosting a further student placement to develop a Sustainable Events Framework. Due to complete in April 2021, this project will map the current sustainable initiatives which are underway in Belfast and identify best practice in terms of sustainable destinations globally. The outcome of this project will be the creation of a Sustainable Events Framework which will be used to assist Visit Belfast, Council and clients to connect to, produce and promote events and cultural activities which have sustainable environmental, community, social and economic impacts.

3.13 Working from this framework, we will identify and curate 'Green Stories' for businesses in the Belfast City Council area for promotion in a range of media to inspire, motivate and further incentivise engagement.

3.14 **Supporting Suppliers**

The GDSI benchmarking exercise identified a number of gaps in relation to the city's supply chain. Officers have been working in partnership with the GDSI, Visit Belfast and the Resilience Team to progress a third party accreditation strategy for the hospitality industry and events and festivals sector. This will involve a strategic partnership with Green Tourism and a scheme to incentivise 3rd party accreditation across the Visit Belfast partnership and Council client portfolio.

3.15 In addition to the accreditation strategy, officers have identified a lack of capacity building initiatives and programmes which assist and encourage the industry to commit to sustainability in the long-term. A number of initiatives will be developed to address this gap:

- Officers will establish a pilot scheme for the hospitality industry encouraging the reduction of food waste (aligning with the UN sustainability target of reducing food waste by 2030). Previous successful

pilot schemes in other cities have involved initiatives such as training kitchen staff in food reduction techniques which also bring financial benefits to the business.

- Officers will work in partnership with key stakeholders to enhance reduce, reuse and recycling initiatives both internally (across our own tourism assets) and externally across the tourism and hospitality industries and related sectors.
- Early discussions have taken place with the Resilience team and other Council Departments to look at the potential for co-designed schemes with a specific focus on sustainable food.
- Officers are discussing the potential for a Belfast showcase at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) which will take place in November 2021 in Glasgow.

Creating new digital content to support the positioning of Belfast

3.16 As part of the development of the new tourism plan and in support of the concept development for the Belfast Destination Hub, research has been commissioned to:

- Better understand consumer attitudes and motivations to visiting Belfast
- Establish a baseline for perceptions of the city as a cultural tourism destination
- Receive feedback on the proposed cultural tourism narrative and themes included in the cultural strategy.
- Test the Belfast Stories concept and the wider product in the Belfast Destination Hub

3.17 The final report identified an opportunity to strengthen and broaden the emotional connection of the market to Belfast beyond those that are seeking a niche experience. The key recommendation coming out of this research is the role that Council can play in transforming perceptions of Belfast by enabling the creation of much richer and diverse digital content that represents the breadth of the city's tourism experience and authentic Belfast offer.

3.18 **Summary of feedback**

- Unless people had some prior connection, the majority of participants did not know enough about Belfast to include it in their sub-list of choices for a city break destination. In particular there were limited

emotional connotations required to make it a destination of choice.

- Some of participants were aware of Belfast marketing most notably those from ROI – however this is not necessarily their preferred format for influencing where to go. Formal marketing is considered insufficient of itself to prompt action. Searching digital content does not provide the necessary supplementary information to set Belfast apart in a competitive marketplace or to challenge established perceptions of the city. Setting this in context against digital content of other cities such as Edinburgh, Galway, or further afield but of similar population size to Belfast, Arhus (Denmark), or Varna (Bulgaria) presents a difficult first hurdle for potential tourists to overcome.
- In the absence of strong positive digital content, potential tourists must rely on formal communications, opinions of others and prior knowledge. This leaves Belfast open to generalisation.
- Internationally, people see Belfast as a potential destination, but not quite yet and this is in part based on a lack of curated digital content.

3.19 COVID-19 has amplified the importance of digital spaces. At the appropriate time consumers will return to making decisions of future destinations of preference. It is important that Belfast develops a digital strategy that can spark and sustain global dialogue about the city to create the connections that ultimately will move from a digital space to experiencing the place through city breaks. In turn the production of digital content supports of the positioning of the city internationally in all sectors including investment, events and education.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.20 The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2021/22 budget for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy Departmental budget.

3.21 All programmes will be subject to ongoing review with cost savings identified where projects cannot proceed due to Covid-19. The breakdown is detailed below with further detail provided at appendix 1.

GDSI Membership	£7,500
Capacity building including Green Tourism accreditation	£75,000
Research and development	£10,000

Local tourism support	£200,000
Digital content	£60,000

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

3.22 The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). The ten year tourism plan will include a further equality screening.”

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development provided further information on funding agreements and confirmed that further detail in relation to inclusivity and accessibility would be provided in the 10 year tourism plan being submitted to the Committee in June.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and progress made to date on the development of the new tourism plan with agreement to receive a full draft in June 2021; and
- Agreed to progress the key actions as set out in appendix 1 and supported by the 2021/22 departmental budget for tourism development.

Sunday Opening Hours for Large Retailers

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy advised the Committee of the request to extend the current approach on Sunday opening hours for large retailers for a period of three months from the current proposed end date (5th April 2021) in order to support the management of shopper numbers as part of ongoing social distancing measures as the city prepared for re-opening.

The Committee was reminded that the current Northern Ireland Executive guidance – which became operational on 26th December 2020 – confirmed that only those retailers deemed as “essential” retail were permitted to remain open at this time, until at least 1st April 2021. In January 2021, the Council considered and acceded to a request from large retailers to support extended Sunday opening hours (in line with Northern Ireland Executive guidance) on a temporary basis, to be reviewed by 5th April 2021, as part of the efforts to manage shopper volume and support social distancing.

It was reported that, on 2nd March, 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive had produced “Moving Forward: the Executive’s Pathway out of Restrictions” which outlined the first step in the Executive’s Roadmap to Recovery and set out how it would approach the relaxation of restrictions. The first formal review by the Executive would take place on 16th March and there would be subsequent reviews every four weeks thereafter. The Executive had also confirmed that, while it would formally review and

make decisions on restrictions every four weeks, the monitoring cycle provided them with the ability to move more rapidly on emerging priorities should the need arise before the next review point.

The Strategic Director explained that, following the announcement on 2nd March, it was likely that the restrictions on capacity within retail and services would remain in place for some time in order to maintain some level of social distancing in indoor premises. He stated that one of the issues that had been raised by the businesses and the representative organisations was that it would be helpful to have some flexibility on the current Sunday trading hours, in order to support recovery efforts and enable retailers to manage their footfall better over a slightly extended trading period on a Sunday.

He highlighted that Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council had extended its current approach to enforcement until the end of June 2021.

During discussion, Members raised issues in relation to consultation with retailers and the demand for extending opening hours.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to accede to the request from Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) to support extended Sunday opening hours (in line with Northern Ireland Executive guidance) on a temporary basis, to be reviewed on 5th July, 2021, as part of the efforts to manage shopper volume and support social distancing.

The Committee also agreed that officers consult with Trade Unions, Retail NI and relevant stakeholders on the matter and report its findings at the next Committee.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Belfast Bikes - allocation of stock to social enterprises and charities

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in November 2020, it had been agreed that officers should take forward a programme of work to distribute some of the Belfast Bikes that were due to be replaced, and it was agreed that these were to be offered to the Social Economy, Co-operative and Charity sectors in Belfast.

The Director of Economic Development advised that 100 bikes were made available for distribution and organisations were able to use the bikes for a range of uses, including but not limited to; stripping the bikes for parts; repairing them to sell or gift out; and upcycling them. The Council's main stipulation was that the handover of these bikes created a positive social impact in the communities across the city.

He explained the expression of interest process to allocate the bikes on a first come, first served basis, with a final closing date of 29th January, 2021. He confirmed that the bikes had now been allocated to the following 15 successful organisations, each receiving between 5 and 10 bikes:

- East Belfast Mission;
- Saints Youth Centre;

- The Turnaround Project;
- 18th Belfast Scout Group;
- Forward South Partnership;
- Lyric Theatre;
- Tools for Solidarity;
- Belfast South Community Resources;
- Failte Feirste Thiar;
- Mount Merrion Parish Church;
- Sudanese Community Association Northern Ireland;
- Salvation Army;
- Kith and Kin Financial Wellbeing for Employers;
- Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne; and
- Ligoniel Improvement Association.

The Director of Economic Development advised that organisations would be using the bikes for a variety of purposes, with many refurbishing them to promote healthier lifestyles within their communities and to support them to access employment by cycling to work. Others wanted to gift these to the vulnerable, homeless and newly-arrived asylum seekers to help them get to appointments whilst others planned to refurbish the bikes to sell or lease through the use of a pop-up shop.

He confirmed that, if further bikes became available, they would be allocated to the remaining organisations who expressed an interest on a first come, first served basis as per the guidelines.

He highlighted that, overall, this model worked extremely well, and officers were now considering how a similar model could be used to distribute reusable items in the future to deliver local impact. The sectors had not only shown great interest in obtaining these items but were also able to showcase how they would create a positive social impact in our local communities.

The Committee:

- Noted the work which had been undertaken by the Enterprise and Business Growth Team to allocate the stock of bikes to date;
- Noted the recipients and proposed use of the old bikes; and
- Noted the opportunity to utilise this model to create further opportunities to create positive social impacts through the distribution of materials and products.

Update on Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on progress to date, on work to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and to provide an overview of plans for the official launch of the Corridor Partnership.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and progress to date to develop the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.
- Approve the budget allocation to be managed by Fingal County Council to support the delivery of the work programme aligned to the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

3.0 Main report

3.1 At its meeting on the 7 November 2020 members were provided with an update on progress to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. At the meeting members noted the progress to date, endorsed the emerging plans and member representation for participation on the political advisory group as part of the governance structure of the partnership.

3.2 Members will be aware that since the establishment of the partnership, partner councils have been working to shape its future direction and to find ways to work collaboratively to realise the potential benefits of the further development of the Corridor. In 2019 DCU and UU were commissioned to carry out research on behalf of the councils to inform how the councils could collaborate for mutual benefit between the cities of Dublin and Belfast and the regions between. The report detailed the current economic performance of the Corridor and the prospects for the region based on current trends. The report also began the work of identifying potential areas for cooperation which could create a stronger trajectory for growth.

3.3 However, since this initial research was undertaken the global economy has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in monumental declines in levels of economic activity across the board. The pandemic has also had an impact on the speed of the partnership's

plans to support economic regeneration across the corridor area, however the pandemic has highlighted the interdependencies across the area and reinforces the need for a coordinated commitment to enhancing the future economic potential of the corridor.

3.4 Officers continue to work in partnership to progress the recommendations of the research and have been engaging with councils along the economic corridor on a monthly basis. These specific areas for collaboration included;

- Opportunities for branding and promoting the area to attract private and public investment;
- Identification of areas of complementary policy and objectives to support collaborative opportunities and the development of joint interventions;
- Skills development to ensure that the skills pipeline is appropriate to meet future demand;
- Use of sectoral strengths to influence of FDI pipeline;
- Further development of sectoral concentrations which already exist in tradeable services, Agri-Food and high-tech Manufacturing and Construction;
- Cooperation in the development and delivery of enterprise supports to increase the number of new businesses along the corridor area;
- Development of joint policies on infrastructure to enhance transport, innovation, education;
- Enhancing Research and Innovation through the development of cross border complimentary research, access to funding, access to students etc e.g. joint internships;
- Collaboration to collectively address the shared challenges which are not confined by spatial or administrative boundaries such as Environmental resilience and management.

3.5 Thus far the partnership has agreed/progressed the following;

- The governance structure including roles and responsibilities for the partnership at an advisory, strategic, operational and political level.
- Engagement with the North South ministerial Council, and the shared Island Unit to draw their attention to the important and ongoing work of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor Network and its efforts at promoting cross-border economic development. Highlighting the importance of our collaborative endeavours in maximising the potential of the network to kick-start the economic recovery in each of our

respective areas. The initiative was positively welcomed by the NSMC and the Shared Island Unit are keen to engage in further dialogue with the partnership to identify opportunities to bid for funding for cross border research, research infrastructure etc.

- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council have taken the lead in developing the branding and suite of marketing material for the partnership. This is now complete, and work is underway to develop a website showcasing the partnership, key projects and linking to the work in each of the council areas.
- Development of the Corridor Research Seminar Series which aims to grow the knowledge base among partners and enhance the potential of the corridor. The series will provide a platform for regional, national and international sharing of ideas and initiatives designed to maximise the assets of corridors.
- Review of existing policies in areas of R&D, Skills, Tourism, Infrastructure, Trade and Investment to identify areas of alignment and areas for immediate collaboration and development of joint interventions.

3.6 At the meeting of the Chief Executives in December 2020 it was agreed that there would be an official launch of the partnership on the 24 March 2021 which would highlight the current profile of the corridor, potential in recovery and opportunities for cooperation. The aim of the launch is to position the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor in the minds of decision-makers in government and other state agencies and in the business community to present a cohesive, regional approach to economic development along the corridor among the 8 local government bodies.

3.7 The format of the event will include a range of segments highlighting reasons to collaborate which will outline the key findings from the research undertaken to date to profile the corridor area and provide an outline of the strategic vision of the partnership. The event will also include a range of panel discussions with businesses, agencies and politicians from across the corridor area which will focus on opportunities for collaboration. This section will set out the possibilities across the area for innovation and collaboration, the role that agencies will play in supporting the messaging and the role of politics in strengthening the Economic Corridor and making the strategic vision into a reality through strong decision making. The details of the launch event are currently being finalised, at that point members will be issued with an invitation to attend.

- 3.8 To support the development and delivery of the launch event and the programme of work completed to date it has been agreed that each council would be required to make a contribution to Fingal County Council as the current chair of the partnership of £27,000 in to cover activity in 2020 and 2021. This budget would be retained by Fingal County Council and utilised to cover the cost of any partnership activity approved by the Strategic Oversight Group of Chief Executives.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.9 The activities outlined within this report will be resourced from the 2020/21 Economic Development budget agreed by this Committee on 4 March 2020.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.10 The unit is currently undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme, this will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of this project.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations and noted that an update report on the Peace Plus EU cross-border programme would be provided to the Committee in due course.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

**Developing Clean Technology in the City
(Alderman Dorrian to raise)**

Following the request from Alderman Dorrian in relation to the development of clean technology, levels of engagement, and the types of clean technology the Council was working on, the Committee noted that the issue would be investigated, once resources became available, and agreed that a report, on how this could be facilitated, resourced, managed, be brought back in due course.

Chairperson