

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 11th May, 2022

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Alderman Dorrian; and
Councillors, Beattie, Donnelly, Gormley, Harvey,
Howard, Hussey, T. Kelly, Maskey, McLaughlin,
McMullan and O'Hara.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. W. Langham, Project Director, Belfast Destination Hub;
Ms. E. Henry, Strategic Lead, Belfast Destination Hub;
and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee of 6th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 9th May.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Beattie, Lyons and O'Hara declared an interest in relation to item 4(a), under the heading 'Freeport/Innovation Zones' in that they were on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and left the meeting while the item was under consideration.

Presentations

Translink - Weavers Cross Regeneration Scheme

The Chairperson introduced representatives from Translink and Weavers Cross to the meeting: Mr. L. McComb, Mr D. McAllister, Mr. D. Taggart and Ms. H. Harrison, to provide an update on the Belfast Transport Hub at Weavers Cross.

Mr. McAllister outlined the ongoing building works and progress of four major projects which were being carried out on site and stated that rail and bus operations

would continue throughout the construction process until 2024, when the site would then be occupied by Translink.

He referred to recent branding and marketing activities how the transport hub had been launched as Belfast Grand Central Station, and he stated that it had been well received with positive feedback

He explained to the Committee the investment priorities for Translink between 2020 and 2030, which included transport hubs, integrated ticketing, rail infrastructure, decarbonising its fleet and all-island connectivity.

Ms. Harrison highlighted Translink's recent success at the National Social Value awards and explained the social value activities, such as employment academies, and outlined the benefits, to date, of the Busway Bridge project.

She referred to arts and heritage activities and community engagement and plans to work with art projects in both Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road, which would allow young people in the areas to showcase what they would like to see and work to move those ideas to move forward.

Mr. McComb outlined how the project was an integral part of the newly reimagined Belfast and that, it linked to other schemes being undertaken in the city such as the new Ulster University.

Ms. Harrison pointed out how the project aligned with some key Council strategies, which included the Belfast Agenda, Bolder Vision, Resilience Strategy and the Inclusive Growth Strategy.

Mr. McComb concluded the presentation with an overview of the Weavers Cross Masterplan and outlined the benefits of the project. He referred to it being the main transport hub for all of Northern Ireland with strong political and community support and exemplary social, economic and environmental credentials.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the planting of trees to improve air quality in the area, Mr. McAllister stated that diesel engines were being phased out over the following ten years in favour of electric and hybrid alternatives, in both buses and trains. He added that the building would draw all of its power efficiently using green energy forms. Ms. Harrison added that tree planting and landscape works had been designed in detail and would be in place prior to or immediately after the opening of the hub.

A number of Members expressed concern regarding displacement of traffic, particularly with regard to Sandy Row. Mr. McAllister responded by stating that the design of the new bus yard had taken into account 2000 additional passenger journeys per day, accounting for those who would previously have used a diesel or petrol car and entering the city centre and that work was being undertaken and would report those calculations back to the Committee in due course.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their informative presentation and the Committee noted the update.

Requests to present

Renewed Ambition Task Force

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from representatives of the Renewed Ambition Partnership Task Force, and its commissioned consultants, in relation to a report which examined the role that the built environment plays in delivering social, economic and environmental benefits to Belfast and the wider Belfast City Region.

**Department for Infrastructure –
Spring and Autumn Report 2022**

The Committee agreed to receive presentations from DfI on their Spring and Autumn 2022 reports and to delegate authority to the Director of City Regeneration and Development to schedule future DfI Spring and Autumn reports and presentations to the Committee.

The Committee further agreed to consider any strategic city infrastructure questions to put to officers from the Department for Infrastructure at the presentation of the spring report to the Committee.

**Pragma Consulting - Retail and Leisure
Performance Strategy**

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from Pragma Ltd in relation to the findings of the Retail and Leisure Performance Strategy at its Special Meeting, which was scheduled to take place on 22nd June, 2022

Positioning Belfast to Compete

Freeport/Innovation Zones

(Councillors Beattie, Lyons and O'Hara, having declared an interest in this item, left the meeting for the duration.)

The Director of Economic Development updated the Committee on developments with regard to Freeports across the UK, and that, following the publication of the English Freeport Prospectus, eight freeports had been designated.

He outlined the current Freeport model, which aimed to support a place with a clear economic geography and outer boundary that must contain at least one port, one customs site and one tax site, and that, Freeport bids had initially been expected to be led and operated by the private sector. However, due to the due diligence that would be required to draw down public funding, they had become increasingly public sector led.

He described the Scottish Government's Greenport proposal, where nine areas were being considered for the establishment of two Green Freeports and how the UK Government had indicated that it would continue to work with devolved administrations in order to extend the Freeport programme across the whole of the UK.

He referred to the emerging Northern Ireland proposition, which had resulted from a strategic appraisal of a Freeport proposition, the findings of which identified the potential for a Northern Ireland Innovation Zone to deliver innovative and sustainable economic growth for the region. He outlined a range of objectives which had emerged from the strategic appraisal, which included:

- Innovation;
- Competitiveness and productivity;
- Trade and investment;
- Regeneration; and
- Net zero.

He pointed out that the emerging proposition had considered specific circumstances in Northern Ireland which would require enhanced investment and that any Northern Ireland bid would have to be constructed in a unique way and that the submission of several Innovation Zones could result in competing bids.

The Director of Economic Development stated that the City Deals would play an integral role in supporting some of the NI Innovation Zone components and that tax incentives could increase the attractiveness of the region to the private sector and support the delivery of the priorities of various regional and sectoral economic strategies.

The Committee agreed to note the content of the report and it was

Moved by Councillor McLoughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Heading,

That officers would no longer explore the potential for a Freeport, as part of a Northern Ireland Innovation Zone.

On a vote, six Members voted for the proposal and five against and it was declared carried.

Update on Harkin International Disability Employment Summit

The Director of Economic Development informed the Committee that the Harkin Summit had been conceived in 2016 by Senator Tom Harkin, who represented Iowa in the United States Congress for more than four decades and had led on legislation to protect the civil rights of millions of Americans with physical and mental disabilities.

He stated that the summit was internationally recognised as a platform which brought leaders and activists together to highlight and address disability employment issues, showcase best practice and to build relationships.

He reported that the event would take place in the ICC Belfast on 7th and 8th June, 2022, which would be the first time that the summit had taken place outside of USA, and it had been expected that the event would attract more than 400 international delegates over the two days. He added that the Council would be hosting the conference reception in City Hall and that the Lord Mayor had been invited to make an address at the event.

He pointed out how the summit aligned with a new strategy which was being developed by the Department for Communities, which was to support access to employment for those with a disability and that the Department would use the event as a launchpad for a range of legacy interventions to increase access to employment for those with disabilities.

He stated that many local organisations would promote their activities during the event, which would offer an opportunity to both learn from good practice and to promote the many positive interventions underway in the city for access to employment for those with a disability.

The Committee:

- Noted the Harkin International Disability Employment Summit, scheduled to take place in Belfast on 7th-8th June 2022;
- Noted the commitment to securing a significant legacy from the event, which included the proposals around access to employment, mentoring and work experience; and
- Agreed to promote the event through networks and contacts, to maximise impact and support the wider discussion on a new disability employment strategy which was being led by the Department for Communities.

Electronic Travel Authorisation

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 6th April 2022, the Director of Economic Development was asked to update Members on the impact of the introduction of the proposed Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) for travel between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the evidence heard by and presented to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at the House of Commons on 20th April 2022.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report
- A further update on the progression of the legislation and how the ETA will operate will be brought to a future Committee.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background to the proposed Electronic Travel Authorisation Scheme

Under new post-Brexit immigration and border control legislation going through Westminster, non-Irish EU citizens living in or visiting the Republic of Ireland would require an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) to cross the border into Northern Ireland. The Nationality and Borders Bill is primarily an asylum and immigration bill, however the new legislation extends to short visits into the UK, so tourists will have to comply.

Last month, MPs voted 298 to 216, majority 82, on the Nationality and Borders Bill to reject a Lord's amendment to the Bill which sought to remove the requirement for foreigners to need an ETA. The Bill is now at the consideration of amendments stage and it is planned that the ETA will be fully operational by the start of 2025.

The visa-waiver style scheme, which would be similar to the one used in the US, would not apply to Irish or UK citizens, who are guaranteed free movement around the island under the terms of the long-standing common travel area (CTA) agreement.

- It would require non-British and non-Irish EU citizens to apply for pre-travel clearance.
- An ETA will be required for those international tourists who want to travel onwards to Northern Ireland, even if it is just for a day trip.
- The system would be similar to the declaration that international passengers have to fill in before travelling to the United States or Canada.

The draft bill contains measures to require non-British and non-Irish nationals to apply in advance for permission to travel to the UK via an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme. The Government has not yet announced full details of the ETA such as how much it will cost, but there are concerns, highlighted by votes in the House of Lords, that the ETA could be a disproportionate response by the Government to concerns about issues such as people trafficking. The UK Government has insisted the ETA process will be simple and will not involve physical checks on the border.

**3.2 Impact on Belfast and Northern Ireland –
Oral evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee**

3.3 Oral evidence on the introduction of the ETA was heard by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at the House of Commons on 20 April 2022 and was heard from:

- Dr Joanne Stuart OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA) established in 2018 and led by industry, is the voice for tourism and travel in Northern Ireland with members spanning all sectors of the tourism economy.
- John McGrillen, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism NI
- Shane Clarke, Director of Corporate Services, Policy and Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland

3.4 Dr Joanne Stuart OBE, NI Tourism Alliance (NITA) advised the Committee:

- There had been no consultation at all with the industry on the planned introduction of the ETA and the impact in Northern Ireland and detailed information on how it will work is limited
- We currently have seamless travel across the island of Ireland with our main gateway for overseas travellers via the Republic of Ireland, and particularly with tour operators, people come and arrange their trip based across the island of Ireland.
- The perceived single-entry system would be unworkable and completely impractical as often people cross the border multiple times during a visit and people want to have hassle free travel. Research by Tourism Ireland on our overseas markets has shown that anything that is perceived to be an additional obstacle or barrier to a trip could result in deciding to stay within the Republic of Ireland.

- Recent challenges with different regulations around international travel during Covid resulted in tour operators cancelling the Northern Ireland elements of their trip due to the additional testing requirements, administration with the UK passenger locator form and the additional cost. We have seen the impact that it can have when there is not alignment across the island.
- About £160m of visitor spend is at risk impacting on about half a million visitors (based on 2019 NISRA figures) – not just leisure tourism; but a lot of people will travel via the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland to attend international conferences. Any additional administration or barrier to entry could have an impact on our competitiveness to attract those conferences to Northern Ireland.
- There are concerns about the impact on cross-border workers such as coach drivers and tour guides, many of whom are living legally in the Republic of Ireland due to their EU membership but are not Irish citizens. Through the EU settlement scheme people who work on a full-time basis in Northern Ireland are covered, however, a lot of coach drivers and tour guides who will come over with the tours will not be in that situation and given the skills shortage in this sector we need to make it more attractive, not put those already working here at risk.

In summary we estimate that we have lost around £1 billion in visitor spend to tourism and the tourism economy. We are an export industry, so we are bringing money into the economy. When tours and conferences are being planned, we are looking three to five years out. The uncertainty about what the requirement is going to be and how it is going to work in Northern Ireland can be very off-putting. We ask that it be considered as a matter of urgency so that we can clarify the situation and have the opportunity to work through the detail of what, as currently laid out, we think is unworkable for us in Northern Ireland.

- We are suggesting an exemption for those people who arrive in the Republic of Ireland and travel across the land border to Northern Ireland so that they do not require the ETA. Their trip is within the island of Ireland. We do have people who arrive directly into Northern Ireland from European countries. We have some European flights, and as they are arriving in an official port of entry, they will

be aware that they will need an ETA and will have to have that. Also, if anybody were coming from Dublin to Northern Ireland and then on into GB, they could only get into GB via an official port of entry. At that point, they would need the ETA, which would be checked.

- Our challenge is that there are no checks, and we have been told by the Home Office that it does not intend to have any checks on the land border. Our concern is whether we are going to start having ad hoc checks and how they will determine who they check for an ETA, which could cause some problems around how they identify who they want to check. The exemption is very much specified as, or restricted to, those who are travelling from the Republic of Ireland across the land border into Northern Ireland.

3.5 John McGrillen, Tourism Northern Ireland advised the Committee:

- It has taken us a long time to build up the level of business we have got. Our fear would be if we don't make this simple or easy to understand, there is the potential for that business to be lost again.
- In 2019, which was probably the most recent year in which we got reasonable statistics, about 780,000 visitors out of the 3 million overseas visitors who visited Northern Ireland came from outside the common travel area. The estimation is that about 60% of those people spent time on both sides of the border on the island of Ireland.
- We do not have statistics for people who have arrived in the Republic of Ireland, travelled into Northern Ireland and then travelled on to GB, but I would say that the numbers of people doing that would be minimal because people typically come for a visit to the island of Ireland. The tour operators tend to operate on an island of Ireland basis, although there are a number who would operate on the island of Ireland, then go into Scotland and then perhaps return to Dublin to fly home again.
- There is a fear that many tour operators in the south would simply choose to forego trying to sell packages including Northern Ireland over the plans advising that 'the fact this ambiguity exists, or this level of explanation is required, will make it much

easier for that agent to simply say: 'I don't need to be bothered with this hassle it is much easier for me to sell a trip to Cork or Kerry'.

- It is an issue for coach tour operators because that sector is very dependent on migrant labour, particularly in the Republic of Ireland. They would employ lots of Poles, Lithuanians and suchlike to drive their coaches. Imagine a coach driver who currently crosses a border 70 to 80 times a year bringing a coachload of people from Dublin to the north and back again. It is an issue for the coach tour operators, and they have raised it with us.
- The industry over the last two years has survived on visitor numbers from the Republic of Ireland and staycations. As our routes open up, those people who have been locked into the island of Ireland for the last two years will want to travel abroad. The recovery and growth of the sector will really be dependent on the numbers of visitors we attract from the rest of the United Kingdom and further afield in the years ahead. From our perspective, the growth of the tourism sector is going to come from those overseas markets.

3.6 Shane Clarke from Tourism Ireland outlined the damage the system could have island wide advising:

- At the moment, we have really seamless travel across the island of Ireland. Our main gateway for overseas travellers is via the Republic of Ireland, and particularly with tour operators, people come and arrange their trip based across the island of Ireland.
- It is not only going to be damaging to visitors that would go to Northern Ireland, but it would also be damaging to visitors who would be considering the island of Ireland as it would be just seen as another barrier.
- This is an industry that has been on its knees the last few years with Covid. They can't really believe this kind of regulation has been brought in.

- The only feedback from the research that we did is that tour operators and industry clearly want to be compliant with the applicable laws. That means that, from a marketing point of view, we would need to tell people that there was a difference and they needed to be compliant with the laws. Clearly, that would mean people being less likely to want to travel into Northern Ireland. The tour operators would be less willing to programme it because of the associated complexities and costs, and because they would not want their coach driver to be breaking the law inadvertently in any way. Northern Ireland is also a transit point for people going from the south of Ireland up to Donegal, so there is all that complexity.
- To summarise some of the findings from our research with the tour operators and the industry. They said that this was a bad idea for tourism for the island of Ireland and a really bad idea for tourism prospects into Northern Ireland. From our point of view, it is value-destroying. We have invested over £1 billion in marketing the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland over the last 20-odd years as a place where people can come with unfettered access across the island. That would need to be reworked to add in these complicating factors.

3.7 Written evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Written evidence was also submitted by NITA, TNI and TI included at Appendix 1 which provides additional information, statistics and detailed independent research commissioned by Tourism Ireland.

3.8 Government Response to the Evidence:

Following the oral evidence session, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Immigration and Future Borders, Kevin Foster gave evidence to the committee, defending the plans and reiterated that there would be no physical checks on the border and the system would operate electronically.

Kevin Foster said the purpose of bringing in an ETA scheme is to improve border security. People will be cleared for travel before they depart rather than if, for example, you happen to decline them at the border and then remove them afterwards. That is in relation to travel into the UK from outside the Common Travel Area (CTA) and said the move was necessary to prevent any abuse of the Common Travel Area. There are no proposed checks on the land border.

He advised that for operators around the world, they will not have to acquaint themselves with a raft of UK immigration statuses and documents. The ETA system not only clears people for travel who are non-visa nationals, but can confirm wider immigration statuses, so people are no longer having to present UK documents to get permission to travel.

Simon Hoare, Chair of the NI Affairs Committee asked Kevin Foster why he had not engaged with NITA, TNI and Tourism Ireland. He did acknowledge that there had been no consultation with the tourism industry or tourism bodies in Northern Ireland and would be happy to do so. However, he emphasised that they had had several engagements with the Irish government and that these types of systems are becoming common around the world. The points made were:

- This type of system has been implemented in many countries and many more countries will go down this route
- The cost, although yet to be decided, will not be prohibitive and will only add a small additional cost to the total cost of a holiday
- The same immigration controls in Belfast should be the same as for the rest of the UK
- It will be the responsibility of tour operators organising trips which include NI to ensure that travellers are aware of the need to have an ETA.
- There are no planned immigration checks on the land border and any checks will be intelligence led
- The Minister did confirm that there has been ongoing engagement with the Irish Government, and they were looking at developing a solution to address the issue for those legally residing in RoI but not Irish Citizens.

One potentially positive update was the fact that the ETA will be multiple entry, as this would resolve the issue of tourists crossing the border multiple times on any one trip. and is likely to cost about £10 and would be valid for more than a year and would cover multiple trips. He also suggested it would begin operating in 2025. However, this is not currently in the legislation.

3.9 Way Forward

It is likely that the introduction of the ETA will go ahead in 2025 despite NITA's request for exemption. Council will

continue to work with our strategic partners in NITA, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland as they engage with ministers to lobby for the inclusion of a multiple entry ETA into the legalisation and for the cost to be kept to a minimum.

Council will also work with our partners to ensure that other issues are clarified including for example liaison with insurance companies regarding car hire and use of coaches in NI; and support non-Irish residents who live in ROI to gain the required permission to work in NI. In addition, ongoing work to ensure that tour operators are supported by TNI and TI to make it as easy as possible for them to explain and to include Northern Ireland as part of their itineraries; work with airlines and other carriers to ensure that they advise visitors in advance of the ETA requirements and it is easy to access online.

Council Officers will continue to keep a 'watching brief' on the ETA and a further update on the progression of the legislation and how the ETA will operate will be brought to a future Committee for Member update / consideration.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 There are currently no new financial implications to this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.11 None.”

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report; and
- Noted that, a further update on the progression of the legislation and how the Electronic Travel Authorisation would operate, would be brought to a future Committee; and
- Agreed to invite representatives from Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance, Northern Ireland Office and The Committee on the Administration of Justice, to a future meeting of the Committee, to discuss the impact of Electronic Travel Authorisation on Belfast and what could be done to mitigate its effect; and
- Agreed that Legal Services undertake to provide a report to the Committee, that would explore the legal actions available, that could be taken against the implementation of Electronic Travel Authorisation.

Belfast Stories Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report which was accompanied by a presentation, which was delivered by the Project Director and Strategic Lead of Belfast Destination Hub:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Update Members on the Belfast Stories programme as part of the Belfast Region City Deal including the development of a Stories Collection Framework.
- Outline emerging engagement plans and seek approval to undertake a public consultation.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and progress against Belfast Stories programme of work.
- Agree to complete a public consultation exercise to include elements of the Stories Collection Framework as set out in Appendix 1.
- Agree to hold a Members’ workshop in August 2022 as part of the consultation process.
- Agree to receive a future report setting out the key findings of the public consultation and recommendations on next steps.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Members will be aware that Belfast Stories is the Council’s flagship project under the Belfast Region City Deal and is due to open in 2028. Several important milestones in relation to the project have been achieved including the acquisition of the site for Belfast Stories in October 2021 and the signing of the Deal Document for the BRCD and press launch of Belfast Stories in December 2021.

3.2 Members will be aware that majority of the site (95%) was secured by BCC for Belfast Stories and that negotiations for the acquisition of two smaller properties on the site are ongoing.

- 3.3 Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed at its meeting on 19th November 2021 to progress a number of key pieces of work, in order to ensure we meet the 2028 anticipated opening date including the appointment of the integrated design team, the exhibition design team and the stories collection. City Growth and Regeneration Committee received a programme update in December 2021 where Members noted that a further presentation would be brought to Committee in 2022.

Programme Update

- 3.4 Progress against the agreed programme is ongoing.
- 3.5 Members will be aware that an initial Outline Business Case was completed in 2020 in advance of the purchase of the site. This work will now be updated to reflect progress and project development. Following engagement with Tourism NI and the Department for Economy (DfE) and an assessment of options by the project team it is proposed that an updated Outline Business Case is submitted when concept designs have been further developed to RIBA Stage 2 in 2023, when the project would then move to departmental casework review. We have requested BRCD approval to move to this approach via the Tourism and Regeneration Advisory Board and the BRCD Executive Board.
- 3.6 To align with Belfast City Council's Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast and the Resilience Strategy, a feasibility study has been commissioned to assess the viability of using geothermal technology to meet the building's heating and cooling requirements. An initial report has been completed by Tetra Tech Ltd and concludes that geothermal is a viable option for the site with a shallow closed loop geothermal solution preferred. This would increase capital costs and alternative funding sources are being considered. However, as well as being a low carbon solution there would also be operational savings compared to air source alternatives. Further work will be required as detailed design work progresses and Members will be updated in due course.
- 3.7 Work is ongoing with Physical Programmes supported by KPMG to bring forward a number of key appointments as the project moves to the next phase of development.

These include:

- RIBA has been appointed following a tender exercise to provide the necessary expertise to conduct a Design Competition to appoint the Integrated Design Team.
- Documentation is being finalised to commence the procurement in June 2022 of an Integrated Design Team, Interpretative Planning and Exhibition Design Team and Project Management and Design Assurance Team.

- 3.8 A Benefits Realisation Framework has been developed to define and refine the range of benefits and outcomes linked to the investment spending objectives of the project and Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) funding. A key spending objective is 'to create and sustain a diversified, vibrant city centre – attractive place to live in, invest in and work in' and within this objective we have been examined the wider impacts on the city centre, local community, local residents and local economy. Crucial to realising the impacts will be identifying the enabling mechanism(s) to deliver against expected benefits.
- 3.9 An important aspect of the wider benefits of Belfast Stories is to define and deliver social value including increasing secure employment and skills, building ethical and resilient supply chains, promoting wellbeing and delivering zero carbon. Social clauses will be included in all contracts in line with buy social Public Contract Regulations PPN 01/21 with the main value opportunities to be delivered during the construction phase 2025 - 2028.
- 3.10 A Social Value, Employability, Skills and Education group has been set up to advise and input on opportunities. In addition, members of the Belfast Stories project team have attended Social Value in Construction Contracts training as part of BRCD programme, to further understand and support the key themes around creating job opportunities, investing in skills, supporting social enterprises, new businesses, voluntary and community organisations, reduce our carbon footprint, promote equality and diversity and improve mental health and wellbeing.
- 3.11 It will be important for the Business Case for Belfast Stories to demonstrate delivery against social value outcomes. As part of the consultation and engagement process, the work strands of the draft engagement plan will be developed to ensure all opportunities are maximised that in turn will

feed into the overall project Benefits Realisation Framework. This approach will be embedded into all aspects of the programme including opportunities as part of Stories collection.

Stories Collection Framework

- 3.12 The collection of Belfast's stories underpins the Belfast Stories concept and is key to the success of the project in meeting its ambition and delivering the benefits. To support this work, Council commissioned Lord Cultural Resources to develop a Stories Collection Framework. The purpose of the Framework is to support the development of the Belfast Stories project and delivery of Council's wider ambitions as set out in the *Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy*, the *Belfast Agenda*, the ten-year cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* and the recently finalised tourism plan, *Make Yourself at Home*. This will provide a Framework for future plans and recognises the important role that many city partners representing the community, cultural and tourism sectors have in telling Belfast stories across the city and throughout the year.
- 3.13 Members will be aware that the Belfast Stories project seeks to strengthen existing structures and networks to ensure that the benefits of the project are realised on multiple levels. The initial concept for Belfast Stories identified the opportunity for a significant new anchor in the city centre that would not only deliver regeneration in the immediate area but also act as an anchor that would help establish a hub and spoke model to strengthen connectivity and flow of visitors across the city and support community tourism projects.
- 3.14 Working in collaboration with key stakeholders and subject matter experts across the city we have developed a Stories Collection Framework (SCF). The Stories Collection Framework outlines the proposed direction on a number of areas including:
- Guiding principles – programmes such as the Decade of Centenaries have established good practice in setting clear guiding principles that inform Council's position and partnership approach.
 - Ethical parameters – there are important ethical considerations that must be assessed and necessary processes put in place to ensure best practice is reached across engagement, collecting and telling of Belfast stories.

- Themes – the purpose of the thematic framework is to assist in what will be a considerable undertaking to collect and arrange stories. This is an organisational tool and is not how the stories will be presented or told as this will be addressed at the next stage when the curatorial approach will be developed as part of public engagement and design processes.
- Partnership approach – this sets out a phased approach to a wider programme and partnership model to support cultural and tourism development in relation to collecting and telling Belfast stories. Whilst this will in turn support the building project, the potential benefits are much wider.
- Governance – Council is not a collecting organisation. This requires significant infrastructure and expertise. The governance is linked to the partnership model that locates Council within a wider stories ecosystem for the city and acknowledges the considerable expertise that exists in partner organisations.

3.15 The Stories Collection Framework is a flexible tool that will evolve over time. It is critical to ensuring the authenticity and diversity of the stories represented in Belfast Stories and across multiple initiatives. In its present form, the Framework seeks to:

- Explore new ways and perspectives of telling the stories of the people of Belfast.
- Bring the people of Belfast into the heart of the initiatives.
- Increase accessibility of existing collections across the city and beyond.
- Identify and address gaps in stories that have not been collected or that lack visibility.
- Encourage long term active engagement with partners creating a network across the city and beyond that will increase opportunities to participate in the cultural life and support neighbourhood tourism.
- Identify efficient and sustainable ways of sharing and putting collections to their best use.
- Bring in new perspectives and creativity in adding to the city-wide cultural offerings.

- 3.16 From 2022 it is proposed that Council delivers a Belfast Stories Programme that will include:
- Story collection audit – to better understand what stories have been collected and current levels of access to these collections.
 - Feasibility study – to establish what infrastructure (including digital) may be required to support a city level collecting initiative.
 - Public engagement programme – as outlined below and at appendix 2 the public consultation is the beginning of a sustained programme of engagement with the city.
 - Pilot projects – this would include alignment to planned activity and commissioning of new work to help test the Framework.
 - Partnerships – establish joint working within Council on initiatives such as Year of Culture, UNESCO City of Music and neighbourhood tourism to deliver on shared objectives. New partnerships would also be developed (local and international) with community, cultural and tourism partners to begin to establish a Stories network in advance of the building opening in 2028.

Public consultation

- 3.17 Belfast City Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework describes a broad spectrum of two-way communication (from consultation to engagement to involvement) between the council and its residents and stakeholders. It recognises that effective dialogue helps make decisions, policies and services that are better suited to the people they are intended to benefit. It is in line with this that Belfast Stories seeks to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are at its core, supported by a co-designed and inclusive process throughout all aspects of the project.
- 3.18 Belfast City Council appointed Smith and Kent Consulting to provide specialist guidance and support to plan and assist with Belfast Stories consultation and engagement. This Belfast Stories Engagement Plan (Appendix 2) brings together a range of consultation, engagement and involvement approaches to build on best practice, statutory requirements and stakeholder expectations.

3.19 The overall approach seeks to build long-term relationships while using a variety of methods to engage people on the terms they want to be engaged. As an initial step it is proposed that a public consultation is carried out early in the process.

3.20 The purpose of the engagement plan is:

- To help make Belfast Stories a destination that resonates with local people, captivates visitors and is welcoming of all.
- To bring Belfast Stories to life through the knowledge, insight and ideas of its people and stakeholders.

3.21 This engagement plan covers RIBA Stage 2 as aligned to overall Belfast Stories programme, which runs from May 2022 to June 2023. During this stage, concept designs and plans are produced in line with the requirements of the project brief. This will include plans for:

- the layout of the building
- the design of the exhibition space
- the Story Collection Framework

3.22 There will be two broad parts to our engagement between May 2022 and June 2023.

Public Consultation

3.23 The public consultation is planned to run for 14 weeks from week commencing 6th June to 14 September 2022. The public consultation will focus on:

- Raising awareness of Belfast Stories so that people are excited and want to continue to be engaged in its development.
- Making sure that Belfast Stories can be a positive experience for everyone, including consultation on the EQIA, RNIA and Story Collection Framework.
- Asking people how they would like to continue to be involved in the ongoing engagement.

Ongoing Engagement

3.24 Ongoing engagement will be structured around four work strands:

- Equity
- Sustainability
- Partnership
- Experiences

3.25 These will set the foundations, building relationships and shaping further ongoing engagement up until (and possibly after) Belfast Stories opens in 2028.

Next steps

3.26 It is proposed that a Members' workshop is held during the public consultation period in August 2022. A report will be presented in October 2022 outlining the key findings of the public consultation and will present further detail on recommendations and next steps.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.27 There are no new financial implications to this report.

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

3.28 An initial Equality screening has been complete. An Equality Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Assessment will be undertaken as part of the public consultation and will be reported on in due course."

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and progress against Belfast Stories programme of work;
- Agreed to complete a public consultation exercise to include elements of the Stories Collection Framework;
- Agreed to hold a Members' workshop in August 2022, as part of the consultation process; and
- Agreed to receive a future report which would set out the key findings of the public consultation and recommendations on next steps.

Strategic and Operational Issues

City Regeneration and Development Work Programme 2022/23

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 Members with an overview on the work programme of City Regeneration & Development for 2022 – 2023, and to seek approval to progress necessary procurement for key actions in 22/23 aligned to the priorities of this Committee as well as the wide strategic corporate objectives of the Belfast Agenda.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to:

- Note the 2021 – 2022 progress across the regeneration and development activities aligned to the City Regeneration and Development Division.
- Agree the outlined activities for 2022 - 2023 as set out in the report including the budget implications as below being met from approved and existing departmental budget.
- Agree that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate framework arrangements) be initiated for any of the planned City Regeneration and Development activities for 22/23 as required and in line with the approved departmental budget.

3.0 Background

3.1 The City Regeneration and Development Division are focused on supporting the priorities of this Committee which include:

- Enabling and shaping city regeneration, development and investment ensuring alignment across the Place and Economy Department and wider organisation, in order to deliver on the Council’s Strategic objectives for the physical and inclusive development of the city.
- Delivery of programmes and projects within Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) and associated Masterplans together with other citywide regeneration activities, as aligned with the Belfast Agenda, Belfast: Our Recovery, Corporate Plan 2019 - 2023 and the Improvement Plan 2022 –

2023. With an understanding that underpinning the delivery of regeneration and development is the ability to attract investment to ensure a thriving city, maximising the regeneration impact to deliver on inclusive growth.

3.2 In 2021 – 2022, despite the challenges of the Pandemic, significant progress was made across regeneration and development in the city. Specifically, some key highlights in relation to the role of the City Regeneration and Development Division this included:

- **Delivery of £4.039m DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme including Business and Community Cluster Programme Grant across the city, active travel measures, new social and placemaking projects across the city, and notably the award-winning Belfast Entries programme**
- **Continuing to develop A Bolder Vision Strategy with DfC and DfI including the completion of the public consultation exercise. The Bolder Vision Strategy will provide a more holistic approach to infrastructure and major development investment, providing more of an onus on delivering transformative place-making and regeneration opportunities within our collective capital public and private investment plans, aligned to the principles and Key Moves of the Bolder Vision.**
- **The acquisition of the site for Belfast's flagship BRCD project Belfast Stories which will be housed in one of Belfast's most beloved heritage buildings, the art deco former Bank of Ireland building on Royal Avenue, along with the surrounding 4,000sq metres site.**
- **The acquisition of 2 Royal Avenue and working to develop long term and future uses collaboratively across Council for this listed heritage building, providing Council with a key opportunity to help address the challenges impacting on the city centre while protecting our heritage assets.**
- **Strategic Site Assessments (SSA) Phase 1 - city centre cluster sites including regeneration concept plans progression to PAD stage on a number of sites, and the completion of the initial EoI stage to attract Institutional Investment.**
- **SSA Phase 2 - City wide Strategic Site Assessments, including the establishment of a joint public sector housing group as the appropriate vehicle, chaired by the NIHE, to drive this forward through an agreed methodology. Continuing the comprehensive mapping of public sector assets in conjunction with**

partners, assessing these assets in line with the Urban Capacity Study and the Housing Monitor to identify and bring forward opportunities for Housing Led Regeneration.

- Developing a City Centre Living Vision through focused engagement with communities and other stakeholders to inform the City Centre Living Vision Document
- Leading the refreshed City Development Board, under the Community Planning Partnership; including supporting sub structures to work towards the finalisation of draft actions plans for each priority theme of:
 - Housing Led Regeneration
 - Future City Centre Programme
 - Connectivity, Access, Active and Sustainable Travel
 - City-Wide Development and Regeneration
- Securing £207,500 funding for active travel enabling infrastructure through DfI's blue and green infrastructure fund to deliver secure and covered cycle stands and cycle repair stands.
- Securing additional funding for Belfast Entries Phase 2 and development of tactical regeneration programmes for the SW Quarter, the 5C's and Castle Street area.
- Progressing design work on a number of public realm catalyst projects utilising developer contributions including the 5C's, Little York / Little Patrick St and the North South Spine
- Providing civic leadership and regeneration advice including representation on various Programme/Project Boards) on a number of key city projects and programmes including, Belfast Rapid Transport Phase 2, BRCD, the Junctions Working Group, and Streets Ahead Programme Board as well as a number of major private/public sector developments including Weavers Cross, Waterside, Tribeca, and Queens Quay
- Vacant to Vibrant Programme: includes launch of an EoI to inform the viability of a £700k capital grant scheme to incentivise both property owners and potential occupiers to bring vacant spaces in Belfast city centre back into use and support the revitalisation of the city centre
- Working with public and private sector partners to position the city to compete and promote the city for inclusive investment. Including supporting the Renewed Ambition public and private partnership, focused on promotion, advocacy and engagement and research work on social, economic and environmental impact of real estate development.

4.0 Main Report

4.1 The focus of the Division in 2022 – 2023 is again aligned to the priorities and plan for this Committee as well as the wider strategic objectives for Council and themed across a number of programme pillars, below is a high-level outline of activities under these:

4.2 Future City Centre (FCC) Programme

- The FCC now forms an integral part of the CG&R Committee Plan and the Community Planning Partnership Board and provides a holistic oversight of the various priorities to ensure alignment and co-ordination and seeks to maximise the benefits of collective private and public sector investment across a number of strategic, cross-cutting activities /projects. These cross-cutting activities are aligned under the key pillars of the FCC Programme:

- Physical Regeneration and Connectivity
- Business & Investment
- City Centre Vitality
- Positioning the City to Compete
- Digital Innovation
- Clean Green & Safe.

The FCC includes programmes such as the Vacant to Vibrant scheme, Housing Led Regeneration, Strategic Acquisition of key assets, the Entries Programme, Tactical Regeneration, the Bolder Vision and Positioning the City to Compete.

- Undertaking a refresh of the overall FCC programme based on ongoing work across the pillars to ensure that the programme takes account of changing local and global situations.
- Launching and delivering the Vacant to Vibrant capital grant scheme
- Tactical Regeneration Programme feasibility, design and delivery focusing on the Grey to Green initiative, SW Quarter and 5C's Tactical Regeneration projects as previously agreed by this Committee.
- £150k from approved and existing departmental budget will be allocated to further developing and delivering the FCC Tactical Regeneration Programme.

4.3 Housing Led Regeneration

- Finalise regeneration plans, PADs and all due diligence detail on Strategic Site Assessment Phase 1 cluster sites linked to the approach around attracting an institutional investor / development partner to bring forward housing led regeneration across SSA Phase 1 Council assets and, where appropriate, together with other public sector partners (DfC, NIHE, DfI) and private sector landholdings.
- Finalise the City Centre Living Vision that will support progression of residential development aspirations for the city centre, to include engagement with relevant stakeholders and progressing recommendations as appropriate.
- Continue with work to procure an institutional investor/development partner to progress Council's housing led regeneration ambitions.
- Continuing to bring forward the Strategic Site Assessment Phase 2 city wide work via the CPP City Development Board and its substructure (Housing Led Regeneration Group) chaired by the NIHE. Finalise the extensive cross public sector mapping exercise (including LPS, DfC, NIHE) to assess landholdings identified within LDP's Urban Capacity Study and the Housing Monitor, identifying and assessing a refined list of opportunities for Housing Led Regeneration
- Analysis of public sector assets, alongside existing private sector opportunities (including key city developments) to identify barriers to delivery and potential mechanisms for unlocking, aimed at maximising opportunities and ensuring prioritisation of funding/delivery through the appropriate delivery agent.
- Progress the Inner North West Development Brief to deliver housing led regeneration by addressing barriers to unlock delivery of mixed tenure residential development.

4.4 Connectivity, Active Travel and City Infrastructure

- Finalise the Bolder Vision Strategy and Action Plan with partners in DfI and DfC; establish an integrated working approach with partners through an MoU Partnership approach and prioritise funding approaches for feasibility and delivery of the priority projects emerging from the Bolder Vision Work. £200k from approved and existing departmental budget will be allocated to developing up the Bolder Vision Action Plan suite of projects.
- Continue to provide civic leadership and direction to enable the timely delivery of capital connectivity, active travel and city infrastructure projects.

- Develop and oversee an overarching city-wide programme to co-ordinate Council's approach (inc partnership working) to connectivity and active travel aligned to the Corporate priority on Connectivity & Active Travel and as part of the CPP City Development Board priority.
- Further develop the Belfast Urban Greenway in conjunction with the DfI Cycle Network and seek funding for delivery and further development and delivery of sustainable travel initiatives.
- Ongoing monitoring and implementation of the of the Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan in line with the emerging BMTP & LDP documents.
- Work collaboratively with DfI in relation to the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, and the Belfast Cycle Network

4.5 City Development and Investment

- Develop a Regeneration Programme Framework for key regeneration projects including partnership projects at a citywide level; to include preparation of feasibility studies and business cases as appropriate. To include regeneration projects to support development and investment for Bolder Vision and housing / mixed uses regeneration projects.
- Identification of barriers preventing investment to key city regeneration and developing approaches, with partners as appropriate, to de-risk, unlock and support bringing forward development proposals.
- Undertake a review and purpose of the City Centre Investment Fund to align with delivery of city development aspirations.
- Developing long term uses and attracting funding for 2 Royal Avenue
- Continue to promote the Sixth investment & development opportunity
- Complete assembly of optimal site for development of Belfast Stories project
- Delivering the Vacant to Vibrant Grant Programme to address the rising level of ground floor vacancy within the city centre
- Overseeing the delivery of the streetscape environmental improvements of the city-wide Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations in conjunction with Officers from across the P&E Department
- Working across Council and via the Community Planning process to progress a joined-up approach to city wide regeneration and development priorities on a place based approach involving communities and wider city partners.

- Undertake a review of the priorities /projects within the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy and progress /oversee those where Council is the lead partner.
- Chair and driving forward the regeneration work programme of the UU Community Campus Regeneration Forum.
- Continue to provide civic leadership regeneration advice, including representation on Programme / Project Boards, on key city infrastructure and regeneration projects (public and private).

4.6 Positioning the City to Compete

- Continuing to positively position Belfast globally as an attractive investment location through targeted marketing and communication interventions to support the delivery of regeneration projects across the city and inclusive sustainable growth, aligning to city recovery plans, Belfast Region City Deal, Reset for Growth, Net Zero and Innovation City Belfast ambitions.
- Support the Renewed Ambition public private partnership and the various elements of that work programme as previously reported to Committee.
- Refreshing the Invest in Belfast website to ensure the city is positioned to attract investment including across real estate development, Innovation and Green Growth sectors.
- Developing a CRM system to manage the database of investment and development contacts.
- Continue to deliver the strategic physical / real estate investment and marketing programme for the city including the implementation of a cohesive city and investment narrative.
- Launching the Building Impact Report which examines the role the built environment /real estate plays in delivering Social, Economic and Environmental benefits to Belfast and the wider Belfast City Region, including the development of a targeted action plan to support the implementation of the report recommendations to deliver enhanced social and environmental benefits.

4.7 It is also worth highlighting that as well as the above outlined activities the Division align significant officer resource to driving and facilitating regeneration and development opportunities through various city level fora, including community engagement. Specifically, this involves working with city partners including anchor institutions,

public and private sectors, developers, communities and umbrella organisations to bring forward and maximise the regeneration potential of development projects as aligned to corporate and city priorities e.g. facilitating / representing Council at reference groups / board members including, Weavers Cross, Waterside, Tribeca, Belfast Stories, High Street Task Force, Housing Supply Strategy Programme etc. This role of advocacy and influencing whilst difficult to measure is critical to shaping the future development of the city aligned to our strategic policy and growth ambitions of the Belfast Agenda, LDP and BCCRIS.

- 4.8 The Division will also continue to complete the existing Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme in line with the agreed projects and timelines and continue to develop projects to feasibility stage to attract further funding for catalyst opportunities across the city.
- 4.9 Members are also asked to agree that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate framework arrangements) be initiated for any of the planned City Regeneration and Development activities including externally funded projects for 22/23 as required.
- 5.0 **Finance and Resource Implications**
- 5.1 The activities and allocation budget to these activities in this report will be resourced from the approved 2022 – 2023 budget for City Regeneration and Development and with tenders/contracts to be awarded in line with this.
- 6.0 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**
- 6.1 **Specific projects if not already screened will be subject to equality screening.”**

The Committee:

- Noted the 2021–2022 progress across the regeneration and development activities aligned to the City Regeneration and Development Division;
- Agreed the activities for 2022-2023, which included the budget implications being met from approved and existing departmental budgets; and
- Agreed that necessary procurement processes would be initiated for any of the planned City Regeneration and Development activities for 2022/23, as required, in line with the approved departmental budgets.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

**Cut in Student Places announced by
Queen's University - Councillor Heading**

Councillor Heading referred to an event which had been held at Queen's University Belfast, with the Confederation of British Industry and local politicians, where the Vice Chancellor had included in a speech to the group that the university might have to cut more than 1500 undergraduate student places by 2025.

Councillor Heading expressed his concern at the Vice Chancellor's remarks and the impact that such cuts could have upon the economy of Belfast and he highlighted that the Council had passed numerous planning applications for student accommodation based on the city moving forward to becoming a high-tech student city.

He stated that he felt that it would be useful for the Committee to ask representatives from the university to come and explain the reasons for a potential cut in student places and to discuss the impact on course provision, university staff, the local economy and the quality of the education system in Northern Ireland.

The Committee agreed to invite representatives from Queen's University Belfast and the Department for the Economy's Higher Education Unit to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the decision to cut student places and its impact upon students.

Chairperson