

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 26th October, 2022

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Alderman Dorrian;
Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Duffy, Heading,
Hussey, T. Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, McCabe,
McDonough-Brown, McLaughlin, Murray,
Nelson, O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Whyte declared an interest regarding item 2.a) Queen's University Belfast, as he worked for the organisation.

Presentations

Queen's University Belfast

The Committee was reminded that representative's from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) had been invited to discuss the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on both its staff and students, the possible reduction in student numbers, and to provide an update on the work of the City Deal. It was highlighted that QUB were also scheduled to present to Committee again in December to discuss Purpose-Built Managed Student Accommodation in Belfast, alongside the Ulster University.

The Chairperson welcomed representatives of Queen's University Belfast to the meeting: Mr. R. Feeney, Director of Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility, and Ms. K. Baillie, Deputy Director Strategic Programmes (Belfast Region City Deal).

Mr. Feeney explained the reasons behind the University's declaration of a critical incident in October in relation to the cost-of-living crisis on both its staff and students. He provided an overview of the financial assistance and measures which had been put in place to help its students and staff, following consultation with its Trade and Student Unions.

Ms. Baillie provided an overview of the Belfast Region City Deal which unlocks £1 billion of transformative co-investment to deliver more than 20 highly ambitious projects and programmes. She advised how its impact-focussed Innovation Centres were helping to lead the way for a new Belfast region, bringing together great minds and creative thinking to solve some of the biggest global challenges. She explained that the Innovation Centres intend to create extraordinary ecosystems and drive momentum to create real-world impact through connected-up, purpose-driven innovation.

She detailed the three pillars of Innovation: Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre; Institute for Research Excellence in Advanced Clinical Healthcare; and Global Innovation Institute and detailed the benefits and potential economic impact.

During Members questions, the representatives explained further the impact the cost-of-living crisis had had on student accommodation fees, and how the one-off payments to staff and students had been funded.

In answer to a Member's question on recent staff resignations, Mr. Feeney confirmed that the University had commenced a staff restructuring exercise which should be completed by the start of 2023 and highlighted that this would have no impact on the City Deal financial contribution as the fund had been ring-fenced.

In relation to a possible reduction in student numbers, Mr. Feeney reported that potential funding cuts might impact student admissions in future years and highlighted the necessity of an extra ten thousand student places by the end of 2030, together with the challenges faced by the cap on funding for Northern Ireland students. He also pointed out the importance of growing the international student provision.

During further discussion, Mr. Feeney pointed out that the University had a Widening Participation Programme which assisted student intake came from lower income backgrounds and QUB were exploring new initiatives in this regard. He advised that further information would be provided to the Committee in relation to how areas of social deprivation benefit from the economic impact of the University.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance, and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, QUB would provide further information on the issues raised.

Artemis Technologies

The Chairperson welcomed representatives of Artemis Technologies to the meeting: Mr. I. Percy, CEO; and Ms. K. Thompson SIPF Programme Director, Belfast Maritime Consortium.

Mr. Percy provided a presentation on the Strength in Places-funded Belfast Maritime Consortium programme and the development of Artemis eFoiler™.

He provided an overview of the company's inception to lead in the decarbonisation of the maritime industry and to provide design and engineering services to high - performance and commercial clients, as well as developing unique products, like the world's most advanced maritime simulators.

He explained the vision for the decarbonisation of Maritime Transport and illustrated how the solution of using Artemis eFoiler™ vessels would work.

The Committee was reminded that the Belfast Maritime Consortium (BMC) led by Artemis Technologies had been awarded £33 million in 2020 from the UK Research and Innovation flagship Strength in Places (SIP) Fund.

He highlighted that BMC was using the SIP Fund to launch the world's most advanced high-speed zero-emission passenger ferry and develop the technical and operational requirements for a maritime transport system of the future. The project costs were £53million (of which £33million was in grant funding) with a timeframe from September 2020 – 31 January 2024.

He advised that the key objectives were to:

- Develop the technical and operational requirements for a maritime transport system of the future;
- Research into marine composite materials, integration of sensors, anti-fouling, collision avoidance systems, cyber security and safety;
- Create an education programme and route to high value jobs;
- Act as a catalyst for collaboration between NI's marine, aerospace and automotive clusters; and
- Demonstrate the technologies and innovations created during the project through the operation of passenger ferry pilot scheme.

He reported that the consortium members currently included: Artemis Technologies, Spirit Aerosystems, Creative Composites, Condor Ferries, Belfast City Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Power NI, Belfast Harbour, Queen's University, Ulster University, Belfast Met, Invest NI, Catalyst and NI Advanced Composites and Engineering (NIACE).

He explained that, as part of the project, Artemis Technologies had also developed and launched globally a 100% electric high-speed foiling workboat prototype from the company's research and manufacturing facility in Belfast and provided details of how the vessel worked.

He described the project of a zero emission foiling ferry service between Belfast and Bangor and reported that this was expected to be operational in 2024.

He highlighted that the Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council had confirmed mutual interest in exploring the commercial viability of a zero emission foiling ferry service to:

- develop a competitive ferry transportation service that offers commuter choice and congestion relief;
- that is integrated into local and regional transportation plans and services; and
- acts as a catalyst for economic development and tourism.

Mr. Percy described the benefits of using sustainable and public transport, together with a comparison matrix of transport methods, highlighting the advantages of the eFoiler Ferry and its large capacity for passengers and bicycles, together with lower fuel costs. He provided examples of where ferry services had been used around the world and the additional benefits ferry terminals brought to the social and economics of a city.

He pointed out that the project included working in partnership with Belfast City Council, Maritime UK and other partners to develop a programme of outreach initiatives to showcase the maritime sector, encourage participation in the sector from young people across the city and provide an educational pathway to rewarding careers.

He confirmed that the Council could further support the project by engaging with the Proposed Solution; Include zero-emission water borne transportation in Net-Zero Carbon Roadmap and Lobby the Department for Infrastructure for necessary funding and legal changes. He also invited the Committee to a site visit to Artemis Technologies.

During Members Questions, the representative's answered a range of questions in relation to the manufacturing of the vessels, timescales of the projects, infrastructure maintenance, pontoon requirements and the potential for other ferry routes.

He provided further detail on the collaboration between Artemis and Belfast Met's apprenticeship programme and advised that it was central to its plans to build a pipeline of skills to support the development of this new class of zero emission craft.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that a site visit to Artemis Technologies be arranged in the future.

Community Finance Ireland

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. Sharvin, Head of Community Finance (NI), to the Committee and he was admitted to the meeting.

Mr Sharvin explained that Community Finance Ireland (CFI) was a charity providing loan finance to third sector organisations, including charities, community organisations, social enterprises and sports clubs. It was established in the late 1990s in response to concerns regarding decreasing grant support and the need for community organisations to have access to alternative sources of funding. He advised that, as a registered charity, all profits generated by CFI were retained and recycled for reinvestment into the third sector.

He highlighted that the organisation had been established as Ulster Community Investment Trust, but had recently rebranded as Community Finance Ireland to reflect its all-island business model.

Mr. Sharvin provided an overview of the organisations typical loan purposes and clients. He advised that the benefits of using Community Finance Ireland included:

- We take a 'Relationship Approach'- We are accessible and value face-to-face meetings;
- Minimum bureaucracy;
- Competitive Interest rate;
- Support & guidance throughout term of loan;
- No penalties against early repayment;
- Flexible & tailored specifically to need;
- No Arrangement Fee; and
- As a charity all profits go back into the pot for reinvestment into the sector

He highlighted that the considerations of investment included a positive social impact, management competency and repayment capacity. The Committee were shown a video of testimonials from two recent loan clients.

During Members questions, Mr. Sharvin advised that marketing streams included local community referrals systems such as enterprise networks, online footprint, webinars, social media and local press. He explained further its interest rates, how the organisation had established its initial capital investment, and detailed the role of its Board Members and Membership opportunities.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked Mr. Sharvin for his attendance and he retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Requests to Present

Translink - Metro Update

It was reported that Correspondence had been received from Translink requesting to present to this Committee on the ongoing Zero Emission Fleet rollout programme, the passenger growth numbers and to discuss the Translink position on the emerging 'A Bolder Vision for Belfast'

The Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed to receive a presentation from Translink at a future Committee.

D
2544

City Growth and Regeneration Committee
Wednesday, 26th October, 2022

People's Museum of the Troubles and Peace Project

The Committee agreed to defer the request to present and that the Museum of the Troubles and Peace Project discuss its proposals with the Council's Cultural and Tourism Unit, in the first instance.

Chairperson