

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 3rd February, 2016

## SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairperson);  
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Alderman Spence);  
Aldermen Kingston and McGimpsey;  
Councillors Attwood, Dudgeon, Graham,  
Magee, McAteer, McDonough-Brown,  
Donnghaile, O'Hara and Walsh.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;  
Mr. D. Durkan, Interim Director of Development; and  
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Stalford and Councillors Kyle and Craig.

### Declarations of Interest

Councillor Ó Donnghaile declared an interest in respect of Item 4a, viz. Deputation from Belfast Public Hire Taxi Association, as his father was an employee of the Belfast Public Taxi Hire Service.

### AECOM - Request to present to a future meeting

The Committee acceded to a request from AECOM and agreed to invite them to a future meeting to present on the Car Parking Strategy.

### Presentation from NI Water

The Committee was advised that Mr. Davy McGrath, Senior Project Manager, and Mr. Stephen McDonald, Networks Water Area Manager, from NI Water were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting.

Mr. McGrath provided the Members with a summary of NI Water's key priorities and investments within the city. He updated the Committee on a number of recently completed projects, which included water mains improvements and flood alleviation works, as well as a list of future projects which were currently in development. He provided an overview of the estimated £3million infrastructure investment project which was taking place within the Ormeau Avenue area of the city centre which was estimated to begin in August, 2016. The Chief Executive confirmed that NI Water and the Council would work together given that the Ormeau Avenue area was within the new "Linen Quarter" area and that it would be practical to align public realm works in order that streets were renovated at the same time.

The representatives outlined their Winter Contingency Planning and Major Incident Plan to the Members and also advised them that NI Water had developed a Smartphone application which enabled residents to report a leak.

In response to a Member's question regarding ongoing issues at the Skegoneill Avenue/Shore Road junction, Mr McGrath advised the Members that NI Water was aware of the problems and that investigations were ongoing to solve those issues. The representatives, in response to a further Member's query regarding the increased level of new buildings creating additional hard surfaces throughout the city, advised that they were keen to promote Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) which were a natural way of managing drainage in and around developments which worked by slowing and holding back water which would run off from a site.

The Members were advised of the details of the Glenmachan Flood Alleviation Strategic Project, Phase 1a, which incorporated the Sicily Park and Marguerite Park area of Finaghy within the city. The representatives pointed out that a SUDS proposal to create landscaped ponds with the Balmoral Golf Club was just one of a number of options for that project.

During discussion, a Member thanked NI Water for the work which had taken place in the Montgomery Road area and a further Member requested that NI Water be invited to attend a future East Belfast Area Working Group (AWG) to present specifically on the various works and flood alleviation measures which had taken place, and which were planned, within the east of the city. It was agreed that this proposal would be brought before the East AWG at its next meeting.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their presentation and they left the meeting.

### **DRD Consultation Exercise - Taxi Ranks in Donegall Square**

#### **Deputation from Belfast Public Hire Taxi Association (BPHTA)**

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that, at its meeting in September 2015, it had considered a number of proposals by the Department of Regional Development (DRD) to provide additional rank capacity for public hire taxis, in particular, a new feeder rank in Donegall Square West, using part of the area which had been allocated for coach parking (pick up and drop off), which would be in direct line of sight of the Donegall Square North rank. However, at that time the Council had not supported a new feeder rank in Donegall Square West as it would have reduced the space available for coach parking in the city centre by 20 metres and instead requested further assessment for an alternative site.

Subsequently, at its meeting on 13th January, it had agreed to defer consideration of a response to a DRD consultation on increasing the Belfast Public Hire Taxi Rank capacity within the Donegall Square area in order to invite representatives from the Public Hire Taxi Association to present to the Committee. The Committee was

advised that Mr. Pat Meighan and Mr. Ciaran Reilly from the Belfast Public Hire Taxi Association were in attendance and they were admitted to address the meeting.

Mr. Meighan advised the Members that they represented 450 licensed public hire taxi drivers and that all of their cabs were wheelchair accessible. He outlined that they were regulated by the Department of the Environment (DoE) but that their ranks were regulated by the DRD and that he felt that both departments were reluctant to bring change or invest in the Public Hire taxi service.

The representatives from the BPHTA outlined that there were just six spaces for taxis to park in their main rank in Donegall Square North and that there were often more than 40 taxis requiring use of the rank and, to avoid parking tickets, the drivers therefore spent a large proportion of their time driving around the city centre. The Members were reminded, while there was an additional rank on Chichester Street, that it was rarely used by drivers due to low footfall. Mr. Reilly highlighted that, in any other major city, public hire taxi ranks were based outside the airports and main tourist attractions and that he felt that this should also apply in Belfast. He invited the Members of the Committee to undertake a site visit with the BPHTA to allow them to illustrate the issues first hand. During discussion, a number of Members asked that comparator information on taxi rank provision in other cities, such as Glasgow, be explored.

Mr. Meighan reminded the Committee that, in May 2010, a DRD consultation had been brought before the Council's former Development Committee which had proposed a number of new ranks and extensions to eight existing ranks. He also advised that, in 2011, a DOE Consultation had recommended increased provision for public hire taxis, better signage for consumers, ranks to be located at areas with higher footfall, and that existing rank capacity should be increased. However, Mr. Meighan pointed out that, in the past five years, no progress had been made following these recommendations.

In response to Mr. Reilly's suggestion that they would like to have signs erected to advise tourists of the location of their ranks, a Member suggested that perhaps the Council should seek to incorporate the city's Public Hire Taxi Service into its City Centre Regeneration and Investment Plan along with details of how public hire taxis operated in other UK cities, particularly given that Belfast was seeking to improve its night-time economy.

After discussion with Members, the Chairperson thanked Mr. Meighan and Mr. Reilly for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

#### **Deputation from DRD Transport NI**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Mr. Ciaran de Burca, Director of Transport Projects, and Mr. Roy Gordon, Network Traffic Management, from the Department of Regional Development were in attendance and they were admitted to address the meeting.

The DRD representatives advised the Committee that there were six additional ranks being proposed throughout the city, including a rank on Botanic Avenue and they reported that the possibility of a double rank in Donegall Square North was currently undergoing a safety audit.

In response to the comments from the representatives from the BPHTA, Mr. Gordon explained that they would be willing to consider an alternative option for additional rank capacity around the City Hall. He advised that they would investigate reallocating part, or all, of the under-used public hire taxi rank at Chichester Street for coaches which would allow them to allocate some space in Donegall Square West to the public hire taxis for a feeder rank, as had previously been proposed by the DRD in September, 2015. It was highlighted to the Members that this proposal would also address the Council's previous concerns regarding a loss of coach parking in the city centre, which was considered an important tourism asset for the city.

In response to a Member's question regarding signage for the public hire taxis, the DRD agreed to enter into discussions with the Council to discuss the issue.

Mr. Gordon advised the Committee that the NI Assembly's DRD Committee had recently received a deputation from the BPHTA on the same issues and that it was convening discussions with both elected Members and key city centre stakeholders with the objective of making Belfast a modern city served by all forms of public transport. The Committee agreed that it should be consulted and that officers should bring information on the discussions to its next meeting.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives from DRD for their attendance and they left the meeting.

#### **Draft Council response to DRD consultation**

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of its response to the DRD consultation to its monthly meeting on 10th February in order that officers could compile a comprehensive report on all the issues which had been discussed.

Chairman