

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 25th April, 2018

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor O'Donnell (Chairperson);
Aldermen Haire, Kingston and McGimpsey;
Councillors Boyle, Dorrian, Dudgeon, Graham,
Hussey, Kyle, Magee, McAteer, Mullan,
O'Hara and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the High Sheriff (Councillor Howard) and Councillor Johnston.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentations

MJM Group

In accordance with the Committee's decision of 7th February, it was reported that Mr. Brian McConville, Ms. Deborah Loughran and Mr. Barry McStravick, MJM Group, were in attendance to provide an overview of the company's property investments within the city and on its plans to develop a new high value industry fitting out cruise ships in the Belfast Harbour.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed the deputation to the meeting.

Ms. Loughran proceeded to outline the background to the organisation. She explained that Mr. McConville had started his primary business, MJM, 35 years ago. The MJM group had now grown into a £60m turnover business specialising in the interior fitout of cruise ships boasting the largest cruise liners in the world as its customers. In 2018 the company has ambitious plans for further growth having just recently completed its first drydock project in China and in bringing the first cruise ship refit of its scale to Belfast. Five years previously Mr. McConville had brought in two members of the next generation of his family into the business. She pointed out that the McConville family also owned Antrim-based specialist fitout business, Mivan, the former Shakleton Barracks in Ballykelly and an extensive property portfolio.

Ms. Loughran stated that the McConville family promoted the “Northern Ireland PLC” economic agenda at the highest levels. They had business interests right across Northern Ireland including:

- MJM Group in Newry employing more than 240 people;
- Mivan in Antrim employing 160 people;
- The 620 acre former Shakleton Barrack site in Ballykelly, Limavady, which was currently shortlisted for the Heathrow Hub bid; and
- Damolly Retail Park in Newry; Drumkeen Retail Park and Galwally House in Belfast; housing developments; farms and development property in Antrim, Rathfriland; Helen’s Bay and Newry.

She explained that the McConville family strongly respected the vital importance of Belfast as a capital city and as a place of energy, optimism and ambition and, as such, wished to contribute to the Belfast Agenda. Through working with the stakeholders to make history and mark heritage, it was committed to delivering quality projects which supported the wider objectives of the city.

The current primary interests of the company was as follows:

- The reinvigoration of the shipping and ship repair industry in Belfast;
- The restoration and redevelopment of Clarence Chambers; and
- The renewal of Pearl Assurance House.

Ms. Loughran explained that MJM was making history by bringing the Azamara, Pursuit, a cruise ship, to Belfast for a complete refit. She pointed out that it was a game changer in the industry and that the eyes of the marine world were on Belfast. There would be hundreds of people working on board delivering the repair and refit work and up to 600 crew on board before the ship sailed from Belfast to Southampton. The Company’s ambition was to make Belfast a home port, whereby cruise ships would be permanently based in Belfast.

With regard to the projects in the city centre, she stated that the company wanted to support and build on Belfast’s rich legacy of heritage architecture by bringing back to life buildings which had lacked investment for many years. They proposed to deliver grade A and B office accommodation in both Clarence Chambers and in Pearl Assurance House, as well as restaurants, cafes and leisure offerings to support the core of Belfast centre as a destination in itself.

Ms. Loughran stated that Clarence Chambers had been built in 1830 by John Workman, a ship owner, initially as residences, but then converted into office accommodation. This site was listed as Grade B1. It was currently 427m sq. arranged over five floors, four of which were set out as offices, with the basement as a bar/restaurant. It was a prime city location next to the City Hall and city centre retail core. The proposal in place was to restore the existing building and add more than a 1500m sq. extension over nine floors, comprising of a restaurant, bar and prime Grade A office space. With regard to Pearl Assurance House, it had been built between 1899-1902 and was of historical importance and was currently listed as Grade B1. It has been built in red sandstone, had a tall pinnacle corner tower and three-tiered oriel

window. The building had a series of fine shopfronts around its base, with beautiful decorative stone filigree-work around the windows. The site footprint was approximately 400m², currently arranged over six floors in total, including the basement and mezzanines. It was arranged as offices over all the floors, with the exception of retail at ground/first floor mezzanine levels. All the tenants were currently on short lease terms while the company worked through ideas to bring the building back to life.

Ms. Loughran concluded by stating that MJM was a progressive, forward thinking organisation, with a commitment to continually promoting Northern Ireland's potential and delivering on its objectives. It was fully committed to supporting Belfast City Council in its quest to delivering the Belfast Agenda and with its ambitious plans for the Lagan Corridor and the Core of the City it hoped to be part of that delivery

The deputation then answered a number of questions from the Members in relation to the proposals which had been outlined and the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked them for the presentation and they retired from the meeting.

NI Water

The Committee was advised that, in accordance with the decision of 7th February, Dr. Stephen Blockwell, NI Water, was in attendance to provide an update on the investment which it was making within the city.

Dr. Blockwell commenced by outlining the work undertaken by NI Water in relation to Wastewater services. He proceeded to outline the Capital Investments which had been made by NI Water over the previous four years and how much Belfast City Council benefited from that. He then reviewed the current Investments in relation to projects in construction or recently completed and those projects which were about to commence, subject to available funding. He then provided details in relation to the Wastewater Projects for 2018/19 which included:

- Upper Newtownards Road flood Alleviation £3m
- Belfast Streets Ahead Sewer Rehabilitation £3m
- Queens Bridge Siphons Repairs £5m
- McClintock Street new development sewers £0.8m
- Ormeau Avenue/Dublin Road £5.8m and
- Greystown Avenue and Upper Malone Road Flood Alleviation £2.9m

Dr. Blockwell then reviewed some of the customer improvements which NI Water had undertaken. This included customer feedback, customer communications, through a new website, a text messaging and call-back service. He then outlined the current public initiatives including: social media campaign to encourage people to drink more tap water; water theft – unauthorised connection; problems in relation to fats, oils and grease; a bag it and bin it campaign and winter awareness campaign in relation to pipe protection.

He concluded by stating that NI Water was a funding partner of the Northern Ireland Year of Infrastructure 2018 (Infra 2018). It was involved in creating better awareness amongst the Northern Ireland public of how infrastructure transformed our lives; and held major themed events throughout the year.

Dr. Blockwell then answered a number of questions from the Members and retired from the meeting.

Chairperson