

Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Steering Group

Monday, 6th February, 2023

CASTLE, CAVEHILL, ZOO AND NORTH FORESHORE STEERING GROUP MINUTES HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Whyte (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Hutchinson, Maskey,
McCullough, Nelson and O'Hara.

In attendance: Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. A. Ferguson, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. S. Kalke, Project Sponsor; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 28th November 2022, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Access to the Hills - Presentation from ARUP

In the absence of the representative from ARUP, due to unforeseen personal circumstances, the Project Sponsor provided a brief outline of the project plan to develop improved access to the Belfast Hills.

The Project Sponsor stated that access to the Belfast Hills was a priority issue for the Council which had been supported by a previous motion to the Council highlighting the issue. She referred to the successful bid by the Council to secure funding from the DAERA Environmental Challenge Fund to undertake a feasibility study and deliver a comprehensive delivery plan for both the Belfast and Castlereagh Hills area.

She reported that external consultants (ARUP) had been appointed by the Council to facilitate that process. The Steering Group was informed that the work would be undertaken in two phases, with the first phase comprising a feasibility study in relation to access to the hills, including the identification of the various options around potential routes.

The Project Sponsor referred to a comprehensive stakeholder engagement programme which had been undertaken previously and stated that it was intended to have a further stakeholder workshop in February 2023. The Members were provided with a detailed analysis of the various proposed routes through the hills, which included an analysis of the physical topography associated with the proposed routes.

As part of the analysis ARUP was asked to identify both constraints and opportunities associated with the development of the various routes. The Steering Group was provided with a colour coded scoring matrix which identified those routes which provided the best development opportunities and potential benefits. The Project Sponsor stated that, following the completion of that process, ARUP would be required to provide a concept design for a number of the preferred routes, which would be submitted to DAERA, as part of a request for capital funding to progress the development proposal.

In response to a question from the Chairperson in regard to the timeline associated with the development proposal, the Project Sponsor stated that, after the priority routes had been identified and costed and after the stakeholder workshop had been undertaken, it was proposed that a funding application would be made to DAERA in the next funding round.

In response to a further question from a Member in regard to engagement with private landowners and in particular to ensuring that their livestock was protected, the Project Sponsor stated that to date engagement had taken place with public landowners and that engagement with private landowners to address their concerns would be required as part of the development process.

The Steering Group noted the information which had been provided and requested that a future meeting be arranged at the end of February in conjunction with the Chairperson to enable ARUP to provide a further detailed update on the Belfast Hills development proposal.

Zoo- Work (Verbal Update)

The Director of Economic Development reported that the Zoo continued to perform well and was above the projected five-year average in terms of visitor numbers. He stated that, while revenue had increased by approximately eight percent, operating costs had increased by approximately the same amount.

The Steering Group was informed of the success associated with some of the capital works undertaken, including the lion enclosure, scheduled to be completed by the early Summer of 2023.

The Project Sponsor added that the majority of the health and safety measures at the Zoo had been completed, including the erection of new enclosures and fencing. She stated that there was the potential for a small amount of funding to be secured to develop an art trail within the Zoo which would add to the artwork which had been completed previously.

The Steering Group noted the information provided by the Director and Project Sponsor.

Date of Next Meeting

The Steering Group agreed that its next scheduled meeting would be held on a date, as yet to be arranged, at the end of February 2023.

Chairperson