

BELFAST STORIES ACTION PLAN – UPDATED MAY 2023

CONCEPT DESIGN STAGE (JULY 2023 TO SEPTEMBER 2024)

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INTRODUCTION

On completing the cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, and beginning to consider opportunities to bring the multiple voices of the people of Belfast into the cultural life of the city, through Belfast Stories, Belfast 2024 and other city-wide programming and events, it became clear that an overarching Story Collection Framework that better understands existing collections and supports any further collection and use of stories at a city-wide level was needed.

Belfast City Council commissioned Lord Cultural Resources in 2021 to carry out this work. Although the Belfast Stories had certainly prompted the need for such a tool, the resulting Framework was much broader than the Belfast Stories in its scope, as it considered the Custodianship of a Collection of Belfast Stories and set a strategy at the city level, offering guidance for year-round cultural programming around Belfast: activations, programs and events aligned to Belfast Stories.

The Framework recommended that Belfast City Council undertake an audit of stories already collected relating to the City of Belfast. Phase I of this work has now been completed.

This Action Plan responds to the recommendations set out in both the Story Collection Framework and Stories Audit as well as drawing on insights and feedback from the Public Consultation on Belfast Stories completed in November 2022.

STORY COLLECTION FRAMEWORK

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 outlined 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.

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.

Appendix 6: Stories Action Plan

The following mission and vision statements support Belfast's Story Collection Framework.

Mission Statement

The Story Collection Framework is integral to the city of Belfast's goal of capturing and making accessible the stories of the people of Belfast. Using a partnership-driven approach, it augments opportunities for story collecting and sharing at a city-wide level.

Vision Statement

Sharing people's stories is FOUNDATIONAL to the city of Belfast's transformative journey toward new perspectives and connections as individuals and communities.

This is an UNPARELLED and UNIQUE opportunity for the city to create authentic and creative expressions of Belfast which connects its past, present, and future.

STORIES AUDIT

One of the key recommendations from the Story Collection Framework as agreed by City Growth and Regeneration Committee in May 2022 was to undertake an initial Stories Audit to better understand what stories have been collected and current levels of access to these collections. The scope of the audit was to:

- Complete an audit of stories, archives and collections relating to the city of Belfast in line with the mapping tool developed as part of the Story Collection Framework.
- Analyse findings including identification of trends and gaps.
- Identify any access issues or barriers to partnership working.
- Recommendations and roadmap for ongoing story collection and partnership programmes.

Belfast City Council commissioned Starling Start to complete this work. The research began with sector mapping to identify the range of organisations and bodies involved in collecting. A series of discovery conversations with stakeholders and experts in the field were held, revealing a wide variety of specific collections to be audited and highlighting the depth of knowledge and insight to be gained from collection holders, community representatives and subject matter experts. These complemented the extensive engagement already undertaken as part of the development of the Story Collection Framework and on an ongoing basis by the Belfast Stories project team. Drawing on these discovery conversations four story collection case studies were developed with each one highlighting important considerations for ongoing partnerships, including ethical considerations, accessibility, representation, rights and preservation of collections that can be applied across the audit.

The report presents key findings, an initial analysis of the catalogue of story collections, highlighting collections by sector, overarching themes and content tags to provide a sense of the variety of story collections, their context and contents. Finally, the report considers barriers to ongoing partnership working and accessing collections and offers several key recommendations to overcome these and proposes a roadmap for ongoing story collection partnership programmes.

STORIES ACTION PLAN

The following actions have been developed in response to:

- Recommendations included in the Story Collection Framework
- Recommendations included in the Stories Audit
- Feedback from the public consultation on Belfast Stories
- Required inputs to complete Belfast Stories to RIBA 2

Recommendation	Action	Timeframe
Establish a programme of outreach with potential collection holders.	Integration of this action into Belfast Stories engagement activity and delivered via development of a Heritage Plan for Belfast. This will be included in ongoing work to agree corporate interdependences and priorities.	August 2023 – corporate priorities to be agreed with roll out of activities to be finalised.
Training and knowledge sharing on archiving and preservation of existing collections.	As above with potential to scope partnership with other heritage providers and funders.	August 2023 – corporate priorities to be agreed with roll out of activities to be finalised.
Commission new story collections with partners to address gaps identified.	Further audit, taking into account the sectors currently underrepresented.	December 2023.
	Story Gathering - Pilot study sharing stories uncovered via social media and other channels to create transparency.	October 2023.
	Development of interpretative plan as part of Interpretative Planning and Exhibition Design Team's	January 2024.

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	(IPEdT) scope to be included public consultation.	
Disseminate thought leadership that explores the challenges of sharing story collections.	Establish Stories Panel to ensure appropriate focus and skills in relation to story gathering and sharing.	September 2023.
	Delivery of conference/event.	March 2024.
Develop an ethical framework for story collecting.	As above - setting up of Stories Panel to ensure appropriate focus and skills in relation to story gathering and sharing.	September 2023.
	Develop and publish ethical framework to be included in public consultation.	January 2024.
Explore new ways and perspectives of telling the stories of the people of Belfast and bring in new perspectives and creativity in adding to the city-wide cultural offerings.	Strategic Delivery Partner as part of Belfast 2024.	Agree specific partnership projects by August 2023.
	Develop creative learning programme in partnership with NI Screen.	October 2023.
	As above - Integration of this action into Belfast Stories engagement activity and delivered via development of a Heritage Plan for Belfast. This will be included in ongoing work to agree corporate interdependences and priorities. Identify potential partnerships with other heritage providers and	August 2023 – corporate priorities to be agreed with roll out of activities to be finalised.

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	funders e.g. National Lottery Heritage Fund.	
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.	Establish Stories Network.	October 2023.
	As above - Integration of this action into Belfast Stories engagement activity and delivered via development of a Heritage Plan for Belfast and new neighbourhood tourism investment programme. This will be included in ongoing work to agree corporate interdependences and priorities.	August 2023 – corporate priorities to be agreed with roll out of activities to be finalised.

How we will evaluate progress

We will develop stories related Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be included in our annual evaluation report. This will also summarise how we are responding to what we learn through the process especially in relation to overcoming barriers to people participating in the activity including sharing their story. These findings will be monitored via the governance structures of Belfast Stories and reflected in ongoing work to deliver corporate priorities in relation to culture and heritage.

The findings will then be used to inform next steps including in relation to the Belfast Stories design and stories development programmes.