

Belfast Stories Working Group

Thursday, 26th October, 2023

MEETING OF THE BELFAST STORIES WORKING GROUP

**HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOVED VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Members present: Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Bunting, Maghie and Smyth.

Also attended: Councillor Duffy (in place of Councillor Beattie).

In attendance: Ms. W. Langham, Programme Director;
Ms. E. Henry, Strategic Lead;
Ms. M. Bagnall, Programme Manager;
Ms. N. McElroy, Programme Support Assistant; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Election of Chairperson

The Working Group agreed that Councillor Smyth be elected to serve as Chairperson for the period to end on the date of the annual meeting of the Council in June 2024.

(Councillor Smyth in the Chair.)

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Beattie.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Role of the Working Group/Terms of Reference

The Programme Director reminded the Members that the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 14th June, had granted approval to establish a Belfast Stories Working Group, to provide advice and oversight on the progression of the Belfast Stories Programme, with the Terms of Reference set out as follows:

1. Purpose

The Belfast Stories Working Group will be responsible for providing cross-party strategic advice to ensure that the programme vision, outcomes and objectives are realised.

The issues to be considered by the Working Group will include:

- Inclusive growth, including social value opportunities during design, construction and operations;
- Equality, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility;
- Ethics and approach to stories - gathering, holding and interpretation;
- Sustainable development, including net zero build aspirations;
- Stakeholder engagement, consultation, communications and public relations;
- Linkages to the development and implementation of the Council's and the City's key plans, strategies and programmes;
- Consideration of good practice and benchmarks from other relevant projects and/or cities;
- Emerging actions which the Council may take to mitigate against any adverse impacts arising from the project and capitalising on any opportunities that may arise; and
- Monitoring of the Belfast Stories programme and progress against key milestones.

2. Membership

The Chair shall be appointed at the first meeting of the Working Group

3. Frequency of Meetings

The Group will normally meet on a quarterly basis and the minutes will be submitted to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

The Working Group endorsed the Terms of Reference.

Presentation - Belfast Stories Programme

The Programme Director reminded the Working Group that Belfast Stories, formerly known as the Belfast Destination Hub, was the Council's flagship project under the Belfast Region City Deal.

She reviewed the governance arrangements which had been put in place to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of each key stage of the project and made reference to the various oversight groups, boards and strategic partners involved. In delivering the project, three important objectives would be fulfilled, namely, to grow Belfast's economy through tourism-led regeneration and support for screen-based creative industries, to create and sustain a diversified vibrant city where people want to

live, work, visit and invest and to engender a greater sense of connection and belonging, thereby realising the vision of making Belfast a caring, vibrant and more visited city, transformed by the power of the stories of past, present and future generations.

In terms of the progress which had been made to date, the Programme Director reported that:

- an interim Outline Business Case had been completed in 2020;
- the first public consultation on the Belfast Stories project had been delivered between August and November 2022;
- the North Street/Royal Avenue site had now been acquired in full by the Council;
- a Benefits Realisation Framework had been developed to define and refine the range of benefits and outcomes linked to the project;
- the Integrated Design Team and Project Management and Design Assurance Team had now been appointed and would be publicised at a launch on 7th November; and
- the procurement process for the appointment of an Exhibition Design Team was nearing conclusion.

The Strategic Lead informed the Working Group that the Belfast Stories project was based around three pillars, namely, Stories, Screen and Social Spaces and pointed out that the site was perfectly positioned, in that it was adjacent to, for example, the Cathedral Quarter, with all its cultural activities, the new Ulster University campus and the retail core. It was also, importantly, situated close to some of the oldest inner-city communities, all of which were rich in heritage and had plenty to offer in terms of input to the content of the project.

She went on to outline the inclusive growth and social, economic and environmental sustainability benefits to be derived from the Belfast Stories project and provided information on the detailed engagement programme which would be undertaken over the coming twelve to eighteen months, alongside the design programme. A pilot stories programme was also being developed, details of which would be provided at a future meeting.

In terms of city-wide opportunities, she referred to the need for the Council, as a whole, to develop the tourism and place positioning, regeneration and infrastructure and culture and good relations offer, as part of the Belfast Stories project.

The Programme Director then drew the Working Group's attention to the following key milestones for 2023/24:

- Design Teams appointed – November 23;
- Development of the concept design – Dec 23 to June 24;

- Commencement of the stories gathering pilot – Jan to Mar 24;
- Establishment of Stories Network and Stories Panel – Oct 23 to Mar 24;
- Development of the Outline Business Case – Dec 23 to Nov 24;
- Consultation on concept designs – Aug to Oct 24; and
- Submission of Outline Business Case for Belfast Region City Deal approval – December 24.

She concluded by stating that the main risks around the delivery the Belfast Stories project related to concept, the external environment, Belfast Region City Deal funding/Department for the Economy approval, capital works, sustainability and city integration and providing details in relation to those.

After discussion, the Working Group:

- i. noted the information which had been provided;
- ii. noted that it would, at its next meeting, be presented with the Belfast Stories Benefits Realisation Plan, which would address some of the issues which had been raised by Members over the course of the meeting around the potential opportunities for local communities and residents; and
- iii. noted that arrangements would be put in place to enable Members to visit the Belfast Stories site and agreed that an invitation be extended to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Shared City Partnership.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that a date for its next meeting would be identified and circulated in due course.

Chairperson