

West Belfast Area Working Group

Wednesday, 5th June, 2024

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE WEST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor McCann (Chairperson),
Alderman McCoubrey
Councillors Beattie, Canavan, M. Donnelly,
R. M Donnelly, Duffy, Garrett,
McCabe, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin, Verner and Walsh.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. C. McCann, Lead Officer Community Provision;
Ms. A. McGlone, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Election of Chairperson

The Area Working Group noted that it was required to elect a Chairperson for the coming year.

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy and

Resolved – that Councillor McCann be elected to serve as Chairperson to the West Belfast Area Working Group until the date of the Annual Meeting.

Apologies

No Apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations were reported.

Citywide Strategic Site Assessments

The Director of City Regeneration and Development drew the Members' attention to a report which provided an update in terms of the Strategic Site Assessment (SSA) programme across the city. She explained that this followed previous decisions of the Strategic Policy and Resources and City Growth Committees to undertake strategic site assessments of Council owned lands across the city to identify potential for housing led or mixed-use regeneration, either in isolation or in partnership with the private/voluntary sector

or other statutory agencies. She referred to the report which had been circulated which highlighted that housing led regeneration had been identified as a corporate priority and a priority within the Belfast Agenda. Following a recommendation of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in September 2023 it was agreed to bring emerging proposals in respect of Council assets city wide to respective Area Working Groups.

The Director provided an update in respect of the Strategic Site Assessments (SSA) Phase 1 which included a number of strategic Council owned city centre lands as well as a partnership approach in respect of adjoining public sector lands. Concept regeneration plans, community and stakeholder engagement and planning Pre-Application Discussions had been undertaken in respect of a number of cluster sites. She advised that, following the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee decision of September 2023, the Council was currently undertaking a Competitive Dialogue procurement process for a long-term partner for the delivery of housing led placemaking regeneration across these sites, as part of a multi-site residential-led mixed-use regeneration development opportunity. She advised that recommendations on the outcome of this would be submitted to Elected Members later in the year.

The Members were also reminded that it had previously been reported to both the City Growth and Regeneration and Strategic Policy and Resources Committees in September 2023, that a Development Brief for lands in the ownership of the Department for Communities (DfC) and Belfast City Council at Little Donegall St/Library St /Kent St (the Inner North West Development Brief) had been reissued following input from DfC (as the land owner of part of the lands) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). The Members were reminded that this Development Brief process had previously been paused at the request of Members. In line with the Committee decision, the reframed brief had been issued to all 15 developing Housing Associations, with a deadline for return of 28th June 2024.

The Director also referred to the Housing Led Regeneration Group which had been established under the Belfast Agenda Community Planning structures, chaired by NIHE CX and included senior officers from BCC, NIHE, DFC, LPS and SIB. She reported that a key task of this group had been to identify and map public lands across the city with potential for housing led regeneration as well as identifying strategic private sector land opportunities and exploring partnership opportunities and identifying barriers to delivery and potential solutions.

As a second phase of the Strategic Site Assessments programme, and as agreed by Council, a comprehensive assessment had been undertaken in respect of Council lands across the city to ascertain the potential for housing led and /or mixed-use regeneration. This had also included working in partnership with other public sector bodies as part of the Housing Led Regeneration Group and including wider public land review and where appropriate to also include private sector land.

With the aid of PowerPoint, the Director updated the Working Group with further information in respect of the ongoing SSA work. She advised that the policy context across the various policies and plans included:

- By 2035 to deliver to 31,600 new homes, with 8,000 units within city centre and to increase population by 66,000 people;
- To increase city centre living across all tenure types;
- To identify publicly owned land for housing and mixed use developments;
- To see Belfast transition to an inclusive, low carbon climate resilient economy; and
- To recognise that housing was an equivocal lever for economic development.

She referred to various barriers and challenges associated with demand and housing supply and the potential role for Council. The Members considered and discussed potential assessments/options for housing led/mixed use regeneration for various Council owned lands identified through this SSA process in the West of the city. It was highlighted that these were intended to be initial high level options for consideration by the Members to help inform next steps.

The Director advised that officers had been working with Mr K. Carlin, Carlin Planning Ltd, to consider potential options for the various lands. Mr. Carlin was welcomed to the meeting. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Director and Mr. Carlin provided the Working Group with further information in respect of the ongoing SSA work.

A Member thanked the Director for the work that had been undertaken to date. He stated that he felt there was an opportunity to bring a number of these sites forward for potential housing led regeneration, with further consideration to be given to the next steps in respect of the various sites.

Given the finite suitability of public lands across the city, the Members were encouraged to advise officers of any lands they considered might potentially have housing led regeneration potential and which could be assessed through the work of the Housing Led Regeneration Group referenced above.

Noted.

Summer Scheme Funding (Additional Needs)

The Lead Officer (Community Provision) reported that the People and Communities Committee, at its meeting in February 2024, had agreed that £20,000 would be allocated to each of the four areas of the city for specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, with a view to delivering the additional schemes in summer 2024, one in each area of the City.

He explained that officers had attended a summer provision planning meeting organised by the Education Authority's Special Education team, involving Special Schools, Councils and charity and voluntary organisations. At that meeting, officers had been able to engage directly with the principals of Belfast Special Schools to understand the challenges and opportunities with which they were faced.

The Members were advised that, working with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's (BHSCT) Locality Planning Co-ordinator, officers had carried out an expression of interest exercise to all 470 members of the Belfast Locality Planning Group, sponsored Day Care providers and Special Schools. 22 organisations had replied to the questionnaire advising of their potential to deliver programming.

Council officers had attended the Belfast meetings of the Special Schools Partnership pilots, identified under Children and Young People theme within the Belfast Agenda. The Belfast schools involved were Glenveagh in south Belfast and Clarawood in east Belfast. Other organisations in attendance included the Education Authority's Special Education Team, Sólás, the Mae Murray Foundation, Guide Dogs NI, Middle Town Autism and Angel Eyes NI, to explore potential for collaborative approaches. That group had advised that the

time frame required to pilot a safe and properly resourced holiday was too short for the summer of 2024.

Following a query, the Lead Officer confirmed that officers had committed to looking at developing a model from September for a trial delivery during the Easter of 2025 and advised that officers would continue to attend Belfast Special Schools Partnership meetings.

The Members were also advised that officers had met with the BHSCT staff to discuss the potential to extend funding through the Family Support Hubs, however, due to time and resource pressures within the sector there was not capacity to extend delivery beyond the current planned programming.

Officers therefore requested that the Area Working Group agree to support a recommendation to provide 8,100 to St. Gerard's for 12 days, £9,100 to Kids Together for a three week programme and £2,800 to Snowflakes for a one week programme

The Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources the aforementioned allocations.

Chairperson