



<b>Subject:</b>	Belfast Stories Update
<b>Date:</b>	23 August 2024
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Wendy Langham, Programme Director, Belfast Stories
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Eimear Henry, Strategic Lead, Belfast Stories

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?** Yes  No

**Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.**

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

**If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?**

<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Call-in**

**Is the decision eligible for Call-in?** Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<p><b>Purpose of the report</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Update Members on the Belfast Stories programme as part of the Belfast Region City Deal including design work undertaken to date as part of RIBA Design stages 1 &amp; 2.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Outline activity to support the next phase of development up to the end of RIBA Design stage 2 and the submission of the Outline Business Case.</li> <li>- To note a 12-week public consultation on emerging designs including an Equality Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Assessment.</li> </ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note a 12-week public consultation on emerging concept designs for Belfast Stories, to run from 26 September until 19 December 2024.</li> <li>- Agree that a Members' workshop take place during the public consultation.</li> <li>- Note that a report in December 2024 will be submitted to approve the submission of the Outline Business Case (OBC) to the Department for Economy (DfE) to secure a contract for funding as part of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD).</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	Members will be aware that Belfast Stories is the Council's flagship project under the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) and is due to open 2030. Positioned as a tourism anchor, Belfast Stories is set to deliver significant economic and social impact for Belfast and beyond helping to regenerate the city centre and connect the tourism offer to the neighbourhoods.
3.2	A dedicated Programme Management Office within the Council has been operational since 2020 and the team provides regular updates to Committees and to the Belfast Stories Members Working Group.
3.3	In March 2024, an update was provided to SPR Committee outlining work undertaken to date and the appointment of design teams including the architectural team which is a partnership between Oslo-based Snøhetta and Belfast based TODD Architects. Gleeds was also appointed to oversee project management and design assurance.
3.4	In April 2024 Ralph Applebaum Associates (RAA) was appointed to head up the Experience Design Team to deliver the Interpretive Masterplan and Concept Design through to the end of the current project stage. The teams have been working together towards the delivery of RIBA stage 2 concept designs by the end of March 2025.
	<u>Programme activities and key milestones 2024</u>
3.5	The focus in 2024 is the development of the design brief and concept designs for the experience and build and the development of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for submission to the Department for the Economy (DfE) for BRCD funding, which is expected to be submitted January 2025, subject to Council approval.

3.6	<p>Key milestones in 2024 are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of the Project Brief RIBA 1 by Q1 2024 - <i>complete</i></li> <li>- Concept Design (experience and build) RIBA 2 - Q2 &amp; Q3 2024 - <i>ongoing</i></li> <li>- Establish the Belfast Stories Network by Q1 2024 - <i>complete</i></li> <li>- Stories Pilot by Q1 2024 - <i>complete</i></li> <li>- Set up the Stories Panel by Q2 2024 – <i>due September 2024</i></li> <li>- Develop the Outline Business Case (OBC) to be complete Q4 2024 - <i>ongoing</i></li> <li>- Members' Study Visit by Q3 2024 - <i>scheduled</i></li> <li>- Consultation on the Concept Design (experience and build) Q4 2024 - <i>seeking approval to proceed</i></li> <li>- Completion of the OBC for SPR approval December 2024 - <i>ongoing</i></li> <li>- Submission of the OBC to BRCD January 2025 - <i>ongoing</i></li> </ul>
3.7	<p>These activities have been underpinned by a programme of ongoing engagement that recognises that the success of Belfast Stories hinges on the active participation and input of those who know the city best—its residents, local communities, cultural groups, business owners and visitors. Engaging with these diverse stakeholders through a structured consultation process is crucial to ensuring that the project reflects the collective vision and meets the needs and aspirations of all who will use and enjoy the space. A detailed Engagement Framework has been developed and an overview is included in <b>Appendix 1</b>.</p>
	<p><b>First Public Consultation, August - November 2022</b></p>
3.8	<p>The first public consultation on Belfast Stories was delivered from August to November 2022 running for 14 weeks. The consultation focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raising awareness of Belfast Stories so that people are excited and want to continue to be engaged in its development.</li> <li>- Making sure that Belfast Stories can be a positive experience for everyone, including consultation on the EQIA, RNIA and Story Collection Framework.</li> <li>- Asking people how they would like to continue to be involved in the ongoing engagement.</li> </ul>
3.9	<p>A comprehensive consultation programme included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online consultation hub</li> <li>- Workshops and exhibitions</li> <li>- General Public events and on street research</li> <li>- Creative engagement.</li> </ul>
3.10	<p>The reach of this consultation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2,755 visits and 2,495 unique visitors to Belfast Stories online consultation hub</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 234 unique visitors viewed or downloaded the consultation documents and videos</li> <li>- 149 responses to online survey and polls</li> <li>- 65 consultation workshops</li> <li>- 1,148 participants engaged through consultation workshops and events</li> <li>- 82 per cent of those completing the survey or responding at consultation and engagement events are now excited by the concept of Belfast Stories.</li> <li>- In the survey, 58 per cent of respondents offered stories, experiences, knowledge and networks they could share to help develop Belfast Stories.</li> </ul>
3.11	<p>Whilst the feedback received during the consultation was overwhelmingly supportive of Belfast Stories, there were several areas that were noted as requiring careful ongoing consideration throughout the development of the project. In particular, responses indicated that the main barriers that would stop people enjoying Belfast Stories included concerns over the experience not being considered inclusive, potential to be politically partisan or lack of trust in how the stories would be represented.</p>
3.12	<p>Specific barriers in relation to the building included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cost</li> <li>- Feelings of it 'not being for us'</li> <li>- Specific design considerations</li> <li>- Lack of interest/ relevance</li> <li>- Concerns over duplication or competition with what is on offer elsewhere</li> </ul>
3.13	<p><b>Second Public Consultation, September – December 2024</b></p> <p>From an early stage and in line with Council's consultation and engagement framework, the project had made a commitment to consult with the public, communities and key stakeholders at key points in the design process to allow feedback to be meaningfully taken on board. RIBA Stage 2 represents an important milestone and as such a second public consultation has been planned. It is anticipated that this second public consultation will take place for 12 weeks from 26 September to 19 December 2024.</p>
3.14	<p>This consultation programme will demonstrate how the emerging designs are already responding to feedback received to date. The information presented during this consultation is commensurate with the current design phase. As such it will not present detailed designs, however, it will offer a genuine and inclusive opportunity to engage on two primary areas of interest, the design of the building and the envisioned visitor experience. Through the consultation exercise it is hoped Belfast Stories will gain both quantitative and qualitative responses to inform the next stage of project development up to the end of RIBA stage 2</p>

and beyond. By undertaking consultation events, workshops and targeted activity, Belfast Stories will continue to ensure the potential of the project to deliver on inclusive growth through focusing on positive economic, social and environmental impacts.

- 3.15 The specific objectives of this consultation are to:
- Promote the project, raise awareness and gain buy-in.
  - Ensure that Belfast Stories is for everyone including undertaking an equality impact assessment and rural needs impact assessment.
  - Gain feedback on current plans and thinking.
  - Inform next phase of project development and design - feedback will be taken on board and reported on as part of the end of RIBA stage 2 report (March 2025).
- 3.16 Activities and opportunities for feedback during the public consultation will focus on the:
- Emerging design concept to reflect the current stage of the project, RIBA Design stage 2 of a RIBA seven-stage process.
  - Proposed facilities mix including creative hub, visitor attraction and public space.
  - Visitor experience as informed by the *draft* Interpretive Masterplan, and specifically focusing on primary audiences (visitor journeys) for all elements of the Belfast Stories site.
- Design Concept**
- 3.17 Emerging proposals bring the former Bank of Ireland back into the life of the city respecting the importance of Royal Avenue whilst developing the full site, ensuring that the design orientates towards and embraces local communities. In designing a home for stories, the design teams have placed significant emphasis on inclusivity and generosity, making spaces for stories and for a multiplicity of uses. Above all, their proposals focus on making spaces for both visitors and local people.
- Facilities Mix**
- 3.18 The proposed facilities mix at Belfast Stories is based on the site bringing together three threads as one:
- 1. A creative hub** where writers, musicians, artists and film makers can meet to create, collaborate and develop art and stories to sustain us. Proposals include education and learning facilities together with development and showcasing spaces for industry and a new home for archive.
  - 2. A visitor attraction** that visitors can engage with which clearly communicates the spirit of the city – its past, its present and its future. Proposals include a ticketed experience that can support a 90-minute core visitor journey aimed at local and international visitors as well as free to access areas including orientation and a springboard to neighbourhood tourism.

**3. A public space** – a place for everyone to gather, helping us to express our unique identities and share them with others. Proposals include generous outdoor space comprising of a programmable central courtyard for activities and events and an extensive roofscape offering panoramic views of the city.

Defining the proposed facilities mix further will continue to be an iterative process as we progress through the business case and design development processes.

### **Visitor Experience**

3.19 The emerging masterplan for the visitor experience challenges a conventional thematic approach to storytelling and replaces it with a narrative framework comprising of the two main proposed routes of time and space, supported by a series of crossroads that will support large scale interventions and creative installations. This approach also emphasises the importance of the city's authentic voice focusing on engagement with the people of Belfast through an extensive programme of ongoing story gathering as well as establishing a creative commissioning model for local artists.

3.20 The consultation programme and materials will be designed to be accessible for a wide range of stakeholders and groups. Activities will be structured around five key themes, aligned to the overarching aspirations of Belfast Stories and mapped against the physical form that the building could potentially take. These themes are:

- Regenerating the city centre
- Providing outdoor space for all
- Providing indoor space for all
- Trusted storytelling
- Engendering pride.

3.21 Planned activity during the consultation includes:

- Online consultation hub
- Pop up hubs including 2 Royal Avenue and neighbourhood locations
- Partnership sessions co-hosted by local organisations
- Citywide stakeholder events
- Creative engagement projects working with Belfast 2024 and NI Screen
- Deep dive programmes with priority groups and Section 75 groups
- Internal Council events including workshop for Members.

Full details of the consultation activity programme will be shared with Members, and we would encourage dissemination and communication of these details further when shared.

3.22	<p>A detailed report on the findings from the consultation, including how RIBA 2 end of stage designs have responded to feedback, will be presented to Committee in Q1 2025.</p>
3.23	<p><b>Outline Business Case</b></p> <p>An interim Outline Business Case was completed in 2020 in advance of the purchase of the site. This business case estimated that investment in a worldclass attraction could deliver an estimated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- £15m GVA (Gross Value Added)</li> <li>- 700,000 visitors per year anticipated</li> <li>- Potential to create 1,200 jobs including construction</li> <li>- Ambitions to become a net zero exemplar for the city.</li> </ul>
3.24	<p>This work is now being reviewed and updated to reflect progress, emerging concept designs and project development with an updated OBC due to be developed by December 2024. At this stage the project will then move to departmental casework review with Tourism NI and the Department for Economy. A detailed report will be presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in December 2024, in advance of the submission of the Outline Business Case for departmental review.</p>
3.25	<p>The estimated approval period for the OBC is 6 months. This will hopefully be followed by a BRCD Contract for Funding estimated by September 2025.</p>
3.26	<p><b>Next steps</b></p> <p>It is proposed that a Members' workshop is held during the public consultation period in October 2024. A report on the OBC will be presented to Committee in December 2024 followed by a further report in Q1 2025 outlining the key findings of the public consultation with details on recommendations and next steps.</p>
3.27	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>There are no new financial implications to this report.</p>
3.28	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>An Equality Impact Assessment and a Rural Needs Assessment were undertaken in 2022. These will be reassessed and updated in line with emerging designs and as part of the public consultation 2024. Findings will be reported on in Q1 2025.</p>
4.0	<p><b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b></p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Belfast Stories Engagement Framework</p>