

Belfast Stories Working Group

Thursday, 18th September, 2025

MEETING OF THE BELFAST STORIES WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Smyth (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland;
Councillors Maghie and McKeown.

In attendance: Ms. W. Langham, Programme Director;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. E. Henry, Creative and Strategic Lead;
Mr. M. Doherty, Contracts Manager;
Ms. M. Lynch, Belfast Stories Development Officer; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Member Services and Digital
Support Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th June, 2025 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Update of RIBA Stage 2 Concept Design – Presentation from Integrated Design Team

Councillor Smyth welcomed to the meeting Mr. S. Gallagher, Associate Director, and Mr. P. McShane, Architect, from TODD Architects Ltd. and, together they provided the Members with an update on the RIBA stage 2 designs, including a flythrough of the proposed development, commencing with the external view and demonstrating the various approaches and journey through the proposed building.

Several of the Members expressed their appreciation for the fact that the former Bank of Ireland building felt integrated a part of the development as opposed to being a stand-alone building.

Following a query, the Architects confirmed that the proposal would be accessible from entrance points on Upper North Street and Kent Street. A Member emphasised the

need to ensure that it did not feel cut off from the rest of the city and was a welcoming place for local people and visitors. Discussion also ensued regarding the building being adequately signposted and mapped to ensure that people did not lose their orientation when moving through it.

The Creative and Strategic Lead detailed how the project was responding to consultation feedback and noted that the design was still subject to change and planning consultation. She highlighted that feedback would also be taken forward into the next design stage RIBA stage 3 and that there would be a further public consultation as part of the planning process at the end of 2025, with regular updates at key stages provided to Party Group Leaders and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Chairperson and several of the Members praised the RIBA stage 2 design proposal presented and commended the Architects on the design.

The Members acknowledged the need for regular updates and reiterated the need for the public to be informed of the project's progress.

The Working Group noted the update.

Programme Update on Key Milestones - Verbal Report

The Working Group was provided with an update on the delivery timetable and highlighted key milestones for 2025 including:

- Consultation on the RIBA stage 2 emerging concept designs, November 2024 - March 2025 – Complete;
- Completion of the OBC for Strategic Policy and Resources approval, April 2025 - Complete;
- Council approval and submission of the OBC for BRCD funding, May 2025 -Complete;
- Public Consultation 2 Report, May 2025 – Complete;
- RIBA Stage 2 concept designs and report, May 2025 - Draft Received;
- Set up of Stories Panel/Curatorial Oversight Group – Q4 2025;
- Further site surveys and investigations – underway Q3 2025;
- Further legal and financial input to the Operator model options – Q3 2025;
- Procurement document preparation for Main Contractor and Experience Design Team – Q3/Q4 2025;
- Inclusive Growth Strategy and Plan for RIBA stage 3 and 4 – Q4 2025;
- Commence RIBA stage 3a spatial designs – Q4 2025; and
- Assessment and approval of the OBC – Q3/Q4 2025.

The Contracts Manager provided an update on the site investigation works and the surveys that had been conducted.

The Working Group was advised that the pre-application community consultation would be taking place in November and December, prior to the submission of the planning application in February 2026. Members were encouraged where possible to attend and publicise the consultation events.

The Working Group noted the update provided.

**Inclusive Growth – Discussion on
Developing the Plan - Verbal Update**

The Programme Director provided the Working Group with an overview of the opportunities for change, as well as the significant benefits and outcomes that could be achieved through the project. This included those opportunities at preconstruction and construction stage, upon the completion of the Project in 2023, and details regarding the longer-term benefits and outcomes for the city. An update was also provided on the social value delivery to date, recognising the opportunity that the construction process brings.

The Working Group was advised on the approach to the development of the draft Inclusive Growth Plan which would be informed by data and link to the Benefits Plan. It was proposed that the draft plan would be tested initially with the Members, brokers and communities during consultation. It was noted that there would need to be adequate monitoring and evaluation systems in place for reporting.

The Working Group noted the update and that the final Inclusive Growth Plan would be presented to the Working Group Q1 2026. The Members were also advised that input to the draft plan was welcomed.

Noted.

Screen Working Group Update- Verbal Update

The Creative and Strategic Lead advised that, as previously agreed, a Screen Reference Working Group was currently in the process of being established. This would be made up of a group of advisors on a voluntary basis and there was an open call for expressions of interest until Sunday 21st September. The purpose of the Group would be to determine how the development would support the screen industry.

Noted.

Stories Engine – Verbal Update

The Creative and Strategic Lead informed the Working Group that five strands had been created to determine how the stories would be collected. She reported that two of the strands required further work, but officers would be recommending to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that three of the strands be progressed. An update on these would be provided to the Committee for approval in due course.

Noted.

Chairperson