



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Arc21 Residual Waste Treatment Facilities – Proposals for Community Consultation.
Date:	19 th September 2008
Reporting Officers:	Willie Francey, Director of H&ES – ext 3260 and Ciaran Quigley Director of Legal Services – ext 6038

Purpose of the Report.

To present recommended options to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee (the Committee) on the process for consulting the local community on the possible transfer of land at the North Foreshore to arc21 for the purposes of building and operating a residual waste treatment facility; namely a Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility or an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility.

Relevant Background Information.

At its meeting on 22nd August, the Committee considered a report on the proposed transfer of land at the North Foreshore to arc21 for potential use for development of a Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility or an Energy from Waste (EfW) incineration facility. The report had highlighted the timescale constraints faced by arc21 concerning the inclusion of sites in its site selection process and its stated position that a delay in the decision on the availability of the land beyond September 2008 could prevent delivery of the project in time to avoid non-compliance fines. Following discussion the Committee decided that, to take an informed decision, there should be consultation with the local community to establish whether location of an EfW incinerator on the site would be appropriate. A copy of the relevant extract from the minutes from 22nd August is attached at appendix 1. The Committee's decision was approved by the Council at its meeting on 1st September.

The Chief Executive wrote to arc21's Chief Executive on 2nd September to inform him of the Council's decision and to confirm that the Council would be unable to decide on the availability of the proposed site during September.

The matter was reported to the arc21 Joint Committee at its meeting on 4th September. The Joint Committee considered the main consequences of delay and adopted a recommendation to wait until early December for confirmation of the Council's decision on site availability. It also agreed that baseline environmental studies be commenced, up to a maximum cost of £10,000, so as to prevent avoidable delay in the project delivery date.

Officers have looked at options for consulting local people and a recommended approach to the consultation, with options for its geographical scope, is set out below. The following recommendations take into account a number of issues including equality considerations and best practice consultation and engagement processes.

Key Issues.

Equality Considerations

The Equality Officer has considered the project and does not believe that the decision on disposal of land for such purposes will have an adverse impact on any of the Section 75 groups and therefore recommends that the policy can be screened out. (Members are also asked to note that the wider Arc 21 Waste Management Plan has been subject to consultation and EQIA). However, she has made the point that consultation with all affected stakeholders is now a major principle of modern good governance and best practice. As this decision potentially affects all residents in Belfast, she suggests that the Council should consider whether the consultation should enable all the ratepayers

of Belfast to provide their views. Accordingly, she recommends that consideration be given to:

- an information process for all ratepayers in Belfast explaining the issues being consulted on and why;
- a city-wide mechanism for enabling the public to comment on the proposed land transfer; and,
- a series of roadshows (or similar) across the city to provide opportunities to discuss issues and concerns

While the Equality Officer has expressed the above view, should Members decide to restrict the consultation to the "local community" of North Belfast, she has recommended that this should focus on the geographical boundary comprising of the Castle, Court and Oldpark electoral areas.

Inform, Consult and Involve – Good Practice

The first stage in any process of consultation and engagement is "informing" – providing residents with information on which to judge the Council's performance or to inform a decision. This recognised approach is now also reflected in Government policy. Many Councils across the UK have adopted the following tiered definition, based on *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (SJ Arnstein 1969) and as adapted by the International Association for Public Participation.

Level	What's involved
1. Inform	Giving people information and telling them about our services
2. Consult	Consulting over options - asking people for their views in surveys and forums
3. Involve	Enabling the community to influence priorities and actions by discussing the issues and priorities and working together to improve and design new services

Proposed Approach to Consultation

In the event that the Committee agrees to a citywide consultation exercise, it is proposed that:

1. A questionnaire be sent to all households and business addresses in Belfast. However, respondents will be asked to tell us which part of Belfast they live in so that the results can be segregated and, subject to adequate response rates, we should be able to differentiate between residents, business and broad areas of Belfast including those living in North Belfast.

The Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIS) advises that respondents should be allowed 4 clear weeks to respond to postal surveys. This will be factored into the consultation process. A copy of the proposed questionnaire and cover letter is attached at appendix 2.

2. A user-friendly information sheet be included with the questionnaire to help explain the issues and the technical terms so that people can make an informed response to the consultation. A copy of the information sheet is attached at appendix 3
3. A series of informal roadshows be held in various locations across the city to enable local people to drop by and get more information, ask questions and provide more detailed comment about these proposals. The roadshows will be staffed by Council employees. The roadshow schedule is currently being organised, details of which will be included in the information sheet which will accompany the questionnaire.
4. A dedicated information webpage be set up on the Council website where people can get more information, including access to the Waste Plan briefings and photographs etc.

If the Committee wishes to restrict consultation to the community of north Belfast the same approach would be recommended, but with the questionnaire (1 above) sent only to households in that part of the city. The roadshows (3 above) would also be restricted to locations in north Belfast.

Scope of questions / issues

Members will recall that the proposed transfer of land to arc21 is for the purposes of building a residual waste treatment facility. This will either take the form of a Mechanical Biological Treatment

(MBT) facility or an Energy From Waste (EfW) incineration facility. The discussion at Committee tended to focus on the EfW incineration facility – perhaps because it was felt likely to cause the most concern to local residents. However the Council has been asked to make a decision on the transfer of land for either a MBT or an EfW facility. Therefore for completeness, the proposed consultation deals with both scenarios and the questionnaire at Appendix 2 asks people their views on the potential use of the site for either of these facilities. Members are asked to approve the inclusion of questions relating to both MBT and EfW facilities within the questionnaire.

Resource Implications

The cost of the recommended citywide consultation and engagement process is outlined below.

<i>City Wide</i>	<i>Cost</i>	
<i>Questionnaire:</i>		
Printing	£10,500	Households (128,000) and business (9,150)
Postage & Packaging	£29,700	
Freepost Returns	£4,000 – £12,000	10% response rate = £3700 20% response rate = £7,406 30% response rate = £11,109
Input & Analysis	£12,250	Estimated (based on industry rates)
<i>Information Sessions:</i>		
Banners/Posters	£500	Officer time - uncosted
Total	£56,950 – £64,950*	

If consultation is restricted to the community of north Belfast the estimated costs of the various elements are as follows:

<i>North Belfast</i>	<i>Cost</i>	
<i>Questionnaire:</i>		45,200 households - Castle, Court & Oldpark electoral areas
Printing	£4,130	households only
Postage & Packaging	£12,750	
Freepost Returns	£ 1220 – £3660	10% response rate = £1,220 20% response rate = £2,440 30% response rate = £3,660
Input & Analysis	£5,000	Estimated (based on industry rates)
<i>Information Sessions:</i>		
Banners/Posters	£500	Officer time - uncosted
Total	£23,600 – £26,040	

*Note: it has been estimated that the above costs could be reduced by up to 75% by using a representative sample, with the results still remaining statistically valid. However, by sending the information sheet that accompanies the questionnaire to all households, either in Belfast or in the north of the city, the Council has an opportunity to inform and raise awareness of the issues with a wider section of the population. The added benefit in this regard of a full household survey as opposed to a representative sample would need to be considered alongside the costs.

Recommendations.

Members are asked to approve the following recommended approach to consulting and engaging with local people on whether to transfer land at the North Foreshore to arc21 for the purposes of building and operating a residual waste treatment facility (ie a MBT or an EfW facility) and to decide on the options concerning the geographical scope of the survey:

- (i) A questionnaire in the form set out in Appendix 2 be sent to:
 - (a) all household and business addresses in Belfast; or,
 - (b) all household addresses in north Belfast; or,
 - (c) a representative and statistically viable sample based on either option (a) or (b) above;
- (ii) A user-friendly information sheet (as attached in Appendix 3 – subject to possible changes highlighted through piloting of the form to ensure it is easy to understand and complete) to accompany the questionnaire to explain the issues raised and the terms used in the questionnaire;
- (iii) A series of informal sessions be held in various locations across the city (or in north Belfast only if (i) (b) is chosen) to enable local people to drop by and get more information, ask questions and provide more detailed comment about these proposals; and,
- (iv) A dedicated information webpage be set up on the Council website where people can get more information, including access to the Waste Plan.

Key to Abbreviations

MBT – Mechanical Biological Treatment
EfW – Energy from Waste

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Minute of SP&R Committee from 22nd August 2008
Appendix 2 – Draft Questionnaire
Appendix 3 – Draft Information Material – text version