



### Belfast City Council

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Report to:</b>         | Strategic Policy & Resources Committee                                |
| <b>Subject:</b>           | <b>Update on Peace III Priority 2.1 Capital bids for Shared Space</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 20 August 2010  |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects                         |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects                         |

#### Purpose of Report

Members will recall that a paper was taken to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in June 2010 updating Members on the status of the Council's four applications under Priority 2.1 'Creating Shared Public Spaces' of the Peace III programme that were submitted to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) in November 2009. As Members know at this stage the status of the Council's applications was as follows -

| <b>Proposed Project</b>   | <b>SEUPB Decision</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| <i>Girdwood Community Hub</i> - the development of an integrated hub containing leisure, community, library and educational facilities in a shared space with an associated plan of shared space activities               | Deferred              |
| <i>Giant's Park Community Sports Village</i> - a partnership between the Council and Crusaders/ Newington Football Clubs to develop a shared sports complex using sports and heritage to promote peace and reconciliation | Rejected              |
| <i>North Belfast Cultural Corridor</i> - to improve the physical environment, in order to create an attractive, welcoming and shared public realm in an area uniquely rich in the city's built and cultural heritage      | Rejected              |
| <i>Gasworks Bridge</i> - the development of a pedestrian and cycle bridge to improve connectivity between the city centre, Gasworks Business Park, Lower Ravenhill and Ormeau Park  | Rejected              |

At this time the Committee agreed that debriefing sessions should be arranged with SEUPB to gather further detail on SEUPB's reasons for the deferment and rejection of the Council's bids. Delegated authority was granted to the Director of Property & Projects to meet with SEUPB on these and to decide if there was merit in formally appealing any of SEUPB's decisions. The purpose of this paper is to update Members on the outcome of these debriefing sessions and to seek guidance from the Committee on the next steps in this process. A briefing session on this process, to which all Members were invited, was also held on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August.

#### Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that the Council agreed, at its meeting in November 2009, to submit 4 bids as outlined above to the call for capital bids under Priority 2.1 'Creating Shared Public Spaces' of the Peace III programme. The central issue that projects needed to demonstrate was their ability to deliver peace and reconciliation outcomes and to be iconic, transformational projects that would provide a lasting legacy to the PEACE III programme. All monies under this call have to be committed by December 2013 and spent by 2015 so the timescales are extremely tight for capital

projects

As Members are aware, of the 4 projects submitted, the Girdwood Community Hub and the Sports Village went to economic appraisal in February 2010 while the North Belfast Cultural Corridor and the Gasworks Bridge were rejected at the first stage. Independent consultants, Cogent Consulting, were appointed to carry out the economic appraisals. In light of the economic appraisal, the SEUPB Priority 2.1 Steering Committee then discussed the Girdwood Community Hub and Sports Village projects at its meeting in May and at this stage the decision on the Hub project was deferred while the Sports Village bid was rejected.

As reported to SP&R Committee in June the Council had the right to meet with SEUPB for a debrief session on all the projects and following this debrief the right to formally appeal the decisions. Appeals could only be made on the grounds that

- The outcome/decision by the Steering Committee was unreasonable or
- The proper procedures were not followed

Appeals had to be made within 14 days of the debriefing session and it is quite a protracted process with little guarantee of success. The Director of Property and Projects was granted delegated authority at the Committee meeting in June to formally appeal any of the decisions if he felt it appropriate given the tight timescales for the appeals to be lodged.

### **Key Issues - Update on the debriefing sessions**

Officers from the Council have now had debriefing sessions on the 4 projects with senior officers from SEUPB. Key points arising from the debriefs include -

#### ***Girdwood Community Hub***

SEUPB have advised that the Steering Committee felt that this project has the capacity to be transformational and iconic but that this was caveated by the risks involved in moving forward. SEUPB have requested further information on this project be submitted including -

- an implementation timetable for the Hub and the wider site (including housing and infrastructure) within an agreed masterplan
- further evidence that there is full political and local community support, particularly in the Protestant/ Unionist community, for the project
- an Equality Impact Assessment incorporating further consultation
- further details on the programming of the facility by strategic partners and SLAs

#### **Next steps**

The SP&R Committee agreed in June that work was progressed on submitting the further information as requested above by SEUPB in relation to this application. As a result -

- The Director of Property & Projects has forwarded a letter to the Minister for Social Development, Alex Attwood, requesting a meeting to get an update on the overall Girdwood masterplan and funding for the site infrastructure and to get an update on the DSD's plans for the Shankill and Lower Oldpark areas
- An engagement matrix for consulting with local political and community representatives has been developed and the first meetings will take place over the next few weeks

An update on these areas will be brought to Committee as necessary over the coming months. Members are asked to note that SEUPB have not set a timeframe for the submission of the additional information in relation to the Girdwood bid but that it is recommended that, if it is possible following the outcome of the above meetings, that this information is submitted as quickly as possible to ensure the deliverability of the project if it is successful.

#### ***Sports Village***

SEUPB facilitated two debriefing sessions on this application which included very full discussions on the reasons for its rejection. Copius Consulting who primarily helped Crusaders/Newington Football clubs in the preparation of this bid were also in attendance. Cogent Consulting were present at one of the debriefing meetings to go through in detail the economic appraisal. Key points made by SEUPB on this bid included -

- the application did not adequately demonstrate peace and reconciliation outcomes and fell down on its ability to provide a lasting legacy to the Peace programme – it was considered to

- be more of a sports development project with peace outcomes as an add on
- the deliverability and sustainability of the project were highlighted as an issue – concerns were raised over the financials and the value for money demonstrated by the project

**Decision** – Not to appeal on the basis of the discussion with SEUPB

**Next steps** - Crusaders/Newington are now exploring alternative avenues of moving this project forward. Discussions are ongoing with the Council to explore potential for involvement

### ***North Belfast Cultural Corridor***

SEUPB advised that they felt the Corridor project was much more an environmental and tourism project and that it was weak in demonstrating peace and reconciliation outcomes at a local level.

Members are asked to note that this project was rejected by SEUPB at the first stage of the process and did not reach the threshold for getting through to economic appraisal stage, unlike the Sports Village and the Girdwood Community Hub. SEUPB scores are based on projects demonstrating levels of evidence in meeting the programme objectives. The Cultural Corridor scored medium points across all the programme criteria but to be successful it would need to score highly across all areas. The project failed to score the threshold in the cross cutting themes. Whilst there were some weaknesses in the application, the feedback from SEUPB was that this was a reflection on how the Cultural Corridor fits with this specific programme as opposed to the application presented. SEUPB are seeking iconic flagship capital projects; it is more difficult to present the development of a corridor through a series of smaller projects as iconic compared to a defined space or building. It should be noted that if the Council was to resubmit this application, the project concept would need considerable work as SEUPB's feedback suggests that the current project is unlikely to meet the aims of the Priority 2.1 Programme. Members should note that there may be alternative sources of funding for this type of project, including Heritage Lottery Fund, which may have more appropriate criteria. The project could be delivered on a phased approach.

**Decision** – Formal appeal not proceeded with on the basis of the discussions with SEUPB as it was indicated that this would not be successful

### ***Gasworks Bridge***

Like the Cultural Corridor project above the Gasworks Bridge also did not meet the threshold scores for progressing to economic appraisal stage and was knocked out by SEUPB in the initial round. Discussions with SEUPB indicated that this project fell down on its demonstration of peace and reconciliation outcomes and its ability to provide a lasting legacy to the peace programme. It was also considered weak in terms of its ability to act as a catalyst and be transformational. Concerns were also raised over the value for money and the need for the project. SEUPB drew comparisons with the Peace Bridge in Derry which had successfully received funding under an earlier call for this priority highlighting that this was seen as a project which had an impact on the whole city whereas it was considered that the impact of the Gasworks proposal would be much more localised and therefore less iconic and transformational.

**Decision** - – Formal appeal not proceeded with on the basis of the discussions with SEUPB as it was indicated that this would not be successful

At the briefing session on 10<sup>th</sup> August several Members expressed their concern and disappointment at the decisions taken by SEUPB in relation to the Council's 4 applications and the complete absence of engagement with local political representatives as part of the process, either during application stage or during the economic appraisal stage. Members are asked to consider if they wish to formally write to SEUPB to raise these issues within the context of the overall process.

### **Points to note**

#### ***Reopening of the call under Priority 2.1***

Members are asked to note that there is €29million available under this call. At present only one application has been successful while two other applications, in addition to Girdwood, have been deferred. Discussions with SEUPB have indicated that they are confident that all the money under this Priority will be allocated and spent within the necessary timeframe.

SEUPB have indicated that it is their intention to reopen the call for applications under this priority in October/November of this year. This presents the Council with a number of options -

1. a significant opportunity to consider any new projects that might be suitable for

submission under this call

2. resubmit any of the projects above – however it should be stressed to Members that these projects have already been rejected by the Priority 2.1 Steering Committee, and that Cultural Corridor project and the Gasworks Bridge projects in particular were knocked out in the first stages and did not reach the threshold for proceeding to economic appraisal. However these projects can be reworked if Members wish these to be pursued

It is important that the learning from the previous rounds of applications is taken on board if any new projects are submitted, including –

- a. it is recommended that if new projects are chosen for submission this should be limited to 1 or 2 very well defined projects
- b. in order to maximise the Council's chances of a getting a successful application under the next call it will be necessary that any new projects which are chosen can clearly demonstrate their peace and reconciliation outcomes, are iconic and transformational, will provide a lasting legacy to the Peace programme in Northern Ireland, clearly identify the need for the project and are fully costed.

Members are therefore asked to start to consider this process and potential new projects now. These issues will also be further discussed with Members at the North/South/East/West briefings which are being held at the end of August/start of September. A further report on Peace III will be brought back in September.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

None at present

#### Human Resources

Additional officer time will be required to progress work on the Girdwood bid and to work up any additional bids if the Council wishes to proceed with these

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to note the information in this report and to -

1. note that work is progressing on submitting the additional information that SEUPB have requested regarding the Girdwood bid and that updates on this will be brought back to Committee as necessary
2. note the decision taken not to formally appeal any of the rejected bids due to the tight parameters within which appeals can be taken and the feedback from SEUPB during the debriefing sessions that it was highly unlikely that any of these projects would be successful
3. agree if the Council should formally write to SEUPB to express its disappointment at the absence of engagement with locally elected political representatives throughout the process
4. in light of the fact that SEUPB are intending to reopen this call, start to consider other projects which could be submitted. A further report seeking views on potential projects will be brought to Committee in September

### **Officers to contact for further information:**

Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects

### **Abbreviations**

SEUPB – Special European Union Programmes Body