



BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Lagan Canal- Ministerial Visit
Date:	20 January 2012
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects

1.0	Background
1.1	It was agreed by Council in November 2011 that an All Party Group should accept an offer to meet with the Minister for Culture, Arts & Leisure regarding the potential support for a Lagan Canal Project.
1.2	The meeting took place on 21 November and was attended by Alderman Rodgers, Councillor Ó Muilleoir and Councillor Mullan, with apologies from Alderman Stalford and Alderman Ekin. Council Officers accompanied Members and the Minister was of course supported by staff from DCAL.

2.0	Key Issues
2.1	Members outlined the background to the project, the context of the All Island Waterways Network, the work undertaken to date by the Council and our relationship with Ulster Garden Villages who are a keen supporter of the Lagan Canal concept.
2.2	Members then expended on the various benefits of this project including tourism, links to maritime history, leisure, community cohesion, enhanced open space and opportunities for sport, physical activity and ensuing health benefits.
2.3	The Minister accepted and endorsed these benefits and was particularly taken with the possibilities for increasing the participation of working class communities in river and riverside activities.
2.4	The Minister did however point out that her Department had no spare budgetary capacity for this Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period and that the priority for the Department was the development of new Stadia over the next few years. She did not rule out future funding if the project was sufficiently developed.

2.5	The Minister did, however, see merit in involving both DSD and DETI in discussion on this project as it impacted on areas with those departmental remits and agreed to raise the issue with ministerial colleagues.
2.6	Furthermore the Minister also undertook to write to Sports NI, seeking advice on how they might increase river and towpath participation in working class communities and also to ask SIB for their views on the project and possible funding options.
2.7	The Members responded by providing some further detail on the broader range of physical projects then identified in the draft Stimulus Package and also explained that the Council's economic appraisal for the project was being refreshed as part of an overall business case looking at the whole of river from the harbour to Lough Neagh.
2.8	Members also accepted that money would not be immediately available but were encouraged at the Ministers idea of broadening support to include other Departments. The Members also suggested it may be helpful to arrange via the Lord Mayor an event for all interested parties to look at ways forward.
2.9	The Minister welcomed the meeting and suggested further communication with Belfast City Council in terms of a more joined up approach to capital projects and more frequent meetings between Belfast City Council and the Department.
2.10	In summary the meeting was positive and besides the issue raised regarding the Lagan Canal Project, was a useful step in enhancing the overall advocacy of Council in making things happen for Belfast.

3.0 Resources

No additional implications on staff or budgets at this stage.

4.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- i. Note the report of the meeting.
- ii. Agree to seek the Lord Mayor's support for an event for all interested parties to this project.
- iii. Agree to continued and increased communication with the Department in regard to Capital Projects and to follow up with other Departments in regard to the Lagan Canal Project.