



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Investment Programme – Study Visit to Dublin
Date:	Friday, 19th April, 2013
Reporting Officer:	Mr. John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext. 3509
Contact Officer:	Mr. Barry Flynn, Democratic Services Officer, ext. 6312

1.0	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will recall that the Committee, at its meeting on 24th August, 2012, agreed to undertake a study visit to Dublin in order to view The Digital Hub, the headquarters of Waterways Ireland and the Convention Centre Dublin. Given the proposal under the Investment Programme to establish a digital hub in Belfast, extend the Waterfront Hall and the long-term plans to rejuvenate the Lagan Canal, it was felt that such a visit would provide a valuable insight into the level of investment and planning which would be required to deliver such projects.
1.2	Accordingly, the visit took place on Wednesday, 27th March, and was attended by Aldermen M. Campbell and Rodgers; Councillors Attwood, Curran, Haire, Mullan, McCarthy, McVeigh, Mac Giolla Mhin, O' Donnghaile and O' Muilleoir. They were accompanied by the Directors of Development and Property and Projects, together with a Democratic Services Officer.
1.3	The Members were also welcomed to the Mansion House by Cllr. Claire Byrne, the Deputy Lord Mayor, representing the Lord Mayor of Dublin who was in San José on Council business.

2.0	Key Issues
2.1	<u>Waterways Ireland</u> The deputation visited the headquarters of Waterways Ireland, which is based at the Grand Canal Dock, south of the River Liffey. The body is one of the six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement in 1998. It is responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes.

The waterways under the remit of the body are the Barrow Navigation, the Erne System, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, the Royal, the Shannon-Erne Waterway and the Shannon Navigation.

The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure works with Waterways Ireland in the management, maintenance, development and restoration of operational waterways throughout Northern Ireland. However, the Lagan Canal does not come under the remit of Waterways Ireland and, as such, the British and Irish governments would be required to enact legislation to adopt the waterway formally for redevelopment. At this time, there are no plans for such a step to be taken.

2.2 **The Convention Centre Dublin**

The Deputation proceeded on foot to the Convention Centre Dublin (CCD) overlooking the River Liffey, which was opened in 2010. The tour of the facility was quite beneficial, given that a significant conference/exhibition was ongoing at the time and Members were able to see the centre from an operational perspective.

The CCD was developed by the Irish Government as part of a public private partnership and has become a landmark building with its unique glass-fronted atrium running the full height of the building, which gives visitors panoramic views of the River Liffey, Dublin city centre and the Wicklow mountains. The facilities at the CCD include 22 multi-functional rooms suitable for meetings, conferences and exhibitions. In addition, the top floor of the CCD contains a 2,000 seat auditorium with full theatrical stage; 4,500 square metres of exhibition space; theatre capacity for 3,000 delegates in The Forum and Banqueting facilities for up to 2,000 guests.

2.3 **The Digital Hub**

The deputation was the provided with an overview of The Digital Hub by Breandán Goss, the Hub's Enterprise Development Manager. He outlined its role in supporting innovation and encouraging collaborative working on technological, strategic and commercial levels. He explained that the Hub, which had been established in 2003 by the Irish Government, had supported over 2,000 jobs and 170 enterprises. It is based in a nine acre site, formerly owned by Guinness, and has played a vital role in regenerating the adjacent Liberties area of inner-city Dublin. He outlined the range of successful companies which had originated in the facility and explained how the Hub had worked closely with the local community and provided vital opportunities for schools and colleges to engage with the digital economy.

The Digital Hub is the base for a wide range of companies at the forefront of animation, computer games, web design, mobile applications and online media. It is managed to ensure that its tenant companies enjoy the benefits of a collaborative space. Relationships are fostered and encouraged between suppliers and vendors, creators and consumers, inventors, entrepreneurs and investors.

2.4	<p><u>Courtesy Meeting with the Deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin</u></p> <p>The Deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin received the Members and provided a tour of the Mansion House. She was accompanied by Michael Sands, Deputy Director for International Relations, who gave a brief update on a number of initiatives being progressed by Dublin City Council, in particular the City's plans to launch its Digital Dublin strategy in the near future. Mr. Sands indicated that he would welcome representatives from Belfast City Council to the launch and that his department would like to explore areas of potential mutual economic benefit where the two councils could work in partnership.</p>
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3.0	Resource Implications
	The travel costs for the trip was £400.

4.0	Equality Implications
	None

5.0	Recommendations
	The Committee is requested to note the information provided and take such action thereon as may be determined.