



Subject:	Proposals for visual arts capital infrastructure - Update
Date:	12 August 2015
Reporting Officer:	Lisa Toland, Head of Economic Initiatives and International Development
Contact Officer:	Eimear Henry, Assistant Tourism, Culture and Arts Manager

Is this report restricted?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an overview of a number of proposals that have emerged in recent months relating to options for the development of visual arts capital infrastructure in Belfast.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Note the contents of this report and the stage that each of these proposals is at.- Agree that officers should continue to engage with key stakeholders, providing further updates to Council as required, focusing on how these align with a number of wider strategic objectives to support city centre regeneration, cultural development and tourism growth in the city.
3.0	Key issues
3.1	Members will be aware that there have been references to a major city centre museum or gallery attraction in a number of recent Council strategies. The City Centre Regeneration Strategy and Investment Plan indicates that: <i>"...serious thought should be given to the opportunity to create a second star attraction, preferably by making use of a piece of Belfast's built heritage. One promising opportunity that should be explored is a</i>

	<p><i>contemporary visual art museum with both local and global programming. Modern art has proved a strong draw in other cities – local content could give it a special edge.”</i> Similarly the Integrated Tourism Strategy for Belfast 2015-2020 identifies the theme of Contemporary Art and Design and points to the need for a city centre-based attraction of international quality.</p>
3.2	<p>In parallel, a number of organisations and partnerships have been working on proposals to develop a range of visual arts infrastructure proposals. Given the references in the strategic documents outlined above, the majority of the organisations involved have engaged with the Council as a consultee – and often as a potential funder – to consider strategic alignment and to identify whether the proposals meet the ambitions set out in these documents.</p>
3.3	<p>Two proposals have now completed economic appraisals. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Visual Arts Hub proposal – Regional Art Gallery proposal.
3.4	<p>However there are also a number of other proposals that are at varying stages of development. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The development of Riddel’s Warehouse, Ann Street by Hearth/RUA – Future developments in film exhibition and cinema – Future developments in the provision of artist studios in Belfast – Development proposals at Ulster Museum.
3.5	<p>These proposals draw on the desire for the development of visual arts infrastructure in Belfast. It is proposed that the Council should continue to be involved in plans as to how best to support this sector and discuss with the Arts Council the potential development of a Visual Arts Strategy in line with other art form strategies currently in place. Agreed objectives will be reflected in the new Cultural Framework Action Plan 2016-2020. In relation to the alignment of these proposals to Tourism and City Centre Regeneration priorities these proposals should be considered in the further assessment of the need and demand for an art gallery initiative and to help shape any future development of the concept.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Visual Arts Hub proposal</u></p> <p>At a meeting of the Development Committee held on 4 September 2012, approval was given to support a feasibility study into visual arts hub in the city. This research was jointly funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) and examined a proposal to relocate a</p>

number of independent organisations within one building creating a hub and contemporary gallery space. The lead organisation responsible for commissioning this work was Golden Thread Gallery (GTG).

- 3.7 GTG is a visual arts gallery that delivers three different programme strands:
- Audience development – hosting exhibitions in two in-house exhibition spaces
 - Profiling and support – undertaking touring exhibitions, international art fairs, representation and mentoring
 - Participation – education and outreach including talks, tours, workshops and the award-winning “Draw Down the Walls” project.

3.8 Golden Thread Gallery is the largest dedicated visual arts client supported by the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit, receiving £30,208 core multi-annual funding. In addition, the organisation is in receipt of a one-off £95,000 grant from Creative and Cultural Belfast fund to deliver the “Draw Down the Walls” project. In 2015, GTG was one of two Belfast galleries accepted on to the PLUS Tate programme. This is an affiliate programme involving thirty five cultural institutions across the UK with the aim of expanding Tate’s reach and increasing public access to major collections of international modern and contemporary art.

- 3.9 The findings of the feasibility study were presented to the Development Committee in June 2014. In summary, these identified that a strong case could be made for the relocation of a number of organisations however the most likely partnership emerged between contemporary art and cultural cinema. The study did highlight the need for further audience research to determine the level of market demand for such a proposal. The committee subsequently agreed to provide further funding to Golden Thread Gallery to move towards an economic appraisal of the proposal (also co-funded by ACNI). The focus of this work was to build on the feasibility study and assess the viability of a proposal that included:
- The relocation of Golden Thread Gallery
 - A large-scale contemporary art gallery
 - A permanent collection of art from the late 1960’s to the present
 - A mixed-use space: community and outreach
 - Cultural Cinema: 4 screen art-house cinema
 - Café/bar and retail space
 - Office accommodation for external use
 - Storage space.

3.10	<p>The appraisal concluded that the optimal configuration was a flagship city centre venue incorporating contemporary art and cultural cinema. Two potential sites were identified: the Jameson & Green building on Ann St or as part of Northside Development in the Cathedral Quarter. The spatial requirement was measured at around 3,000 sq.metres.</p>
3.11	<p>The total capital costs of this project were calculated at just under £9million with an ongoing annual revenue funding requirement of £600,000. It was estimated that this new venue would be expected to attract in excess of 250,000 visitors each year. The appraisal does not detail the potential funding sources for either the revenue or capital funding but the lead organisations have now been using this work as a basis for discussion with potential funders.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Regional Art Gallery</u></p> <p>For a number of years, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland has sought to develop a proposal for a Regional Art Gallery for Northern Ireland. This is clearly articulated in their current five year strategy 2013-2018 “Ambitions for the Arts”. In 2014, the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) approved an economic appraisal of this proposal to be carried out by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB).</p>
3.13	<p>The Strategic Investment Board has now completed a draft economic appraisal responding to the proposition that: “Culture and arts are increasingly acknowledged as significant catalysts in urban regeneration with the development of art museums and galleries acting as major economic anchors. They provide a powerful iconic symbol and make inner cities attractive and cultured places for business and tourism, bringing economic benefits. Despite this, Northern Ireland lacks a comparable major gallery dedicated to the visual arts. A new space is needed to show the indigenous collections of Irish and Northern Irish art, held in trust on behalf of our citizens. These collections in public ownership, including the collection of the Arts Council, represent a rich, unexploited resource deserving of a new dedicated gallery that will establish the credentials of Northern Ireland as a global centre for the visual arts.”</p>
3.14	<p>The proposal is for a new art gallery that would house the unique collections of Irish and Northern Irish art held by the Arts Council and National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI). The report categorises the art collections as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Historic art collections relating to art produced before the 1900 – Modern art or Modernism is the term given to the succession of styles and

	<p>movements in art and architecture which dominated the Western culture from the 1900 up to the 1960's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Contemporary art is defined as art produced in our lifetime or it is sometimes referred to as art produced by living artists and there is an overlap between the end of modern art and the start of contemporary art.
3.15	<p>The proposed project focuses on increasing access to historic and modern collections. The report does acknowledge that the National Museums of Northern Ireland are also preparing a strategy for consideration on how to increase accessibility of existing collections.</p>
3.16	<p>The preferred option identified by this appraisal is a two-site approach in Belfast and Derry-Londonderry with the site options in Belfast being the Northside development or Queen's Quay.</p>
3.17	<p>The capital costs of this proposal vary considerably depending on the model adopted. The Northside development is calculated at just under £10million with ongoing revenue costs of £4.7million to include a rental payment to the private developer. The other site option Queen's Quay includes outright capital costs of £32million with ongoing revenue costs lower at £4million as there would be no ongoing rental fee. The spatial requirement is 5000 sq. metres. It is estimated that this new Belfast venue would attract 500,000 visitors in year 1 with 250,000 per annum thereafter. At this point in time, no funding commitments are in place for either the capital investment or for ongoing running costs, however, the appraisal identifies a proposed annual funding contribution of between £1.2m and £1.7m from Belfast City Council.</p>
3.18	<p>The other proposals relating to visual arts infrastructure include:</p> <p><u>Riddel's Warehouse – Hearth/RUA project</u></p> <p>A listed building in Ann Street, Riddel's Warehouse, has been purchased by Hearth with support from charitable trust, Ulster Garden Villages. Hearth is involved in the acquisition and restoration of heritage assets at risk. It has access to a Revolving Fund which is used to restore buildings of importance which would otherwise be lost.</p>
3.19	<p>Hearth is working in partnership with the Royal Ulster Academy (RUA) to develop this building into a centre that would include galleries and exhibition space for the Diploma Collection of RUA. An estimated investment of £2-3 million is required to restore the building. While there has been some engagement with Council officers on the proposals,</p>

there is limited detail on ongoing cost commitments and no formal requests for support have been presented to the Council at this point.

3.20 Proposed Film Exhibition

British Film Institute (BFI) and Northern Ireland Screen are currently reviewing cinema provision in Greater Belfast. While this may not be considered visual arts in the same way as the other proposals listed, it does have the potential to impact the project brought forward by Golden Thread Gallery as this included a four screen cinema as part of the overall scheme. The proposal identifies that the vision of the film centre is “to have a cultural cinema complex in central Belfast that acts as the focal point for the burgeoning screen industry in Northern Ireland; as the central hub for Northern Ireland’s already world class film education; and, primarily, as a cultural cinema with double the capacity of the QFT, catering for 200,000 cinema goers a year of all ages and backgrounds.”

3.21 It is proposed that the Belfast Film Centre would also facilitate and house Nerve Belfast, the Creative Learning Centre in Belfast and become the administrative and delivery home for the Belfast Film Festival, Into Film, Creative Skillset and Northern Ireland Screen. This work is at a very early stage and therefore there is no detail at this point on costs, proposed location or building content/configuration. Likewise, it is not possible to make any estimate of possible capital or revenue costs.

3.22 Artist Studios

A separate challenge to the future of visual arts in Belfast has been identified as the state of artist studios. At a meeting of Development Committee in June 2014, the committee agreed to grant one of the city’s current studio providers – Flax Arts Partnership – funding to support a feasibility study. Funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland was also secured to examine the shortage of studio provision in the city as well as poor working conditions and long waiting lists in many workspaces. The feasibility study will identify the need for the best solution and future sustainability for the city and examine potential options across Belfast focusing on the regeneration of existing sites and buildings. Work is due to be completed on this study in September 2015.

3.23 Ulster Museum development proposals

The Ulster Museum has indicated the possibility of expanding gallery space at their Botanic Gardens site however no further information is available at this stage.

3.24	It is clear that not all of these proposals will come to fruition and at present a funding package is not in place for any of them. Therefore Council Officers will continue to engage with the project promoters and, at the stage which viable projects are developed, further reports will be brought back to Committee.
3.25	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> There are currently no financial implications to this report.
3.26	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no Equality or Good Relations implications.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	None.