

West Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 26th January, 2018

MEETING OF WEST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Magennis (Chairperson);
Alderman Kingston;
Councillors Attwood, Baker, Beattie, Bunting, Carson,
Collins, Corr, Garrett, Heading, Nic Biorna, McConville,
O'Hara and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mrs. R Crozier, Assistant Director;
Mr. G. Dickson, Policy and Performance Analyst; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Hutchinson, Groves and McVeigh.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd November were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Outstanding Actions – Decision Tracker

The Director of Property and Projects explained that the Decision Tracker document had been emailed to Members before the meeting and he provided the Working Group with a brief overview of actions taken since the last meeting held on 23rd November.

The Working Group agreed that for the next meeting officers would submit:

- an update report in respect of the Falls Parks Gatelodge; and
- a report outlining the various options as to how the Council might assist in progressing the development of the required spinal road at the Glen 10 site.

Presentations

Presentation - Forbairt Feirste

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting, Mr. J. MacSiacais, Director of Forbairt Feirste.

Mr. MacSiacais provided the Working Group with a brief background to Forbairt Feirste and A Living Language which was currently housed in the library at Coláiste Feirste at Beechmount House. He advised that Beechmount House had been in the ownership of Coláiste Feirste Irish Language School secondary school since 1999. The school now had 630 pupils.

He detailed that the site had been acquired in 2013 through the Department of Education. The school was now expanding its provision with new classrooms and sports facilities at a construction cost of 11.5m.

The representative advised that, during the process of negotiation around the site acquisition in 2013, an opportunity had arisen for the erection of a small sports facility, he advised that the 'Handball Building' had been completed in 2015 with the assistance of Sport NI funding and Belfast City Council LIF funding.

Mr. MacSiacais then proceeded to take the Members through the architect's impressions for Forbairt Feirste's proposal to erect a glazed archive/observatory above the existing handball building, which included an artist impression of the final scheme. He also advised that there was a second proposal which was an extended option that included a roof over handball court one.

The representative then drew the Members' attention to a detailed breakdown of the projected build cost for the two proposals. The extended option, which was the preferred option, was projected to cost £866k whilst the projected cost for the smaller option was £582k.

Following a query, the representative confirmed that he was aware that currently no funding was available, however, he stated that he would welcome the opportunity for the organisation to be considered for funding should it become available.

The Chairperson thanked the representative for attending and for the excellent work that Forbairt Feirste undertook with the local community and he retired from the room.

The Working Group noted that no funding was available at present but agreed to convene a site visit to the facility.

Brassneck Theatre Company

(Ms. C. Osborne O'Toole, Tourism Culture and Arts Development Officer, attended in connection with this item.)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. T. Devlin and Mrs. A. McCrudden, representing Brassneck Theatre Company, to the meeting.

Mrs. McCrudden advised the Working Group that Brassneck Theatre Company had been established in 2007 and Brassneck Youth had been setup in 2015.

She then detailed the various Strands of Works as follows:

- Creation: quality, accessible and professional theatre;
- Development: local artists, writers, designers and technicians;
- Contribution: to the reimaging of West Belfast;
- Promotion: themes of identity, history, culture and tolerance;
- Representation: local communities by providing them with a collective and inclusive voice; and
- Collaboration: with new and existing funders as well as private sponsors towards sustainability.

Mr. Devlin advised that the youth organisation provided weekly classes, outreach projects, masterclasses and theatre visits and he proceeded to detail some of the benefits of this work as follows, increased self-esteem, confidence building, increased social skills and leadership skills.

The Working Group was advised that Brassneck Theatre Company wished to undertake a feasibility study to assess the economic, social, community and cultural viability of establishing a dedicated, multi-purpose theatre space in West Belfast.

Mrs. McCrudden advised that the Company wished to secure the decommissioned press hall of the Belfast Media Group and to transform it into an outstanding professional arts venue which would be known as the 'Print Hall'. She advised that initial ideas for the space included:

- 200 seat auditorium;
- rehearsal studio/ drama studio (teaching space);
- offices for use by Brassneck Theatre and Brassneck Youth Companies; and
- hospitality facilities.

The representative advised that the Theatre Company had already been awarded £4000 from the Arts Council Northern Ireland towards the feasibility study and detailed that they were asking the Council to match fund this. In addition, it was seeking the Council to partner it in exploring how its vision could be transformed into action.

A Member highlighted the overheads associated with owning premises and sought clarification that this had been considered within the business model in terms of long-term sustainability. He also referred to the current cultural infrastructure and the importance of ensuring that investment in any such a facility would ultimately provide a resource that would be used by the wider cultural sector.

A further Member sought clarification as to whether alternative spaces would be considered as an option as this would help assess whether the proposed premises represented value for money.

The representative confirmed that the anticipated running costs/overheads would be taken into consideration within the study, and that other spaces could be looked at as comparators. In terms of sharing space with other users, the representative explained the Company's need for a dedicated teaching space but stated that its vision was that the

auditorium would be used by other theatre establishments, in the same way it currently used the Lyric Theatre and the MAC.

At this stage in the proceedings the Chairperson thanked the representatives and they left the meeting.

The Working Group considered the possibility of match funding the Arts Council's contribution of £4000 to help the organisation progress its feasibility study.

Following discussion, it was agreed that officers would liaise with the Council's Economic Development Section to ascertain if it would be possible/appropriate for match funding to be secured from its existing budgets.

Building Capacity in Communities in Transition – Update

The Chairperson advised the Members that Mr. A. Quinn, Co-operation Ireland, and Ms. A. Fitzpatrick, Department for Communities, were in attendance and they were welcomed to the meeting.

Ms. Fitzpatrick provided the Working Group with an overview of the work which was being carried out through 'Communities in Transition', which he explained was a two phase project to support The Executive Office in the delivery of action B4 of the Executive Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime.

He outlined to the Working Group that the project aims were to:

1. deliver long term prevention;
2. build confidence in the justice system
3. develop strategies and powers to tackle criminal activity; and
4. build capacity to support transition.

She advised the Members that eight target areas had been selected, with Lower Falls, Twinbrook, Poleglass, Upper Springfield, Turf Lodge and Ballymurphy having been chosen within West Belfast.

She outlined to the Members the details of Phase 1, which was to be completed by the end of February 2018, which involved costed Transition Plans being drawn up to identify the priority issues which underpinned the continued influence and coercive control of paramilitarism, as well as proposals on possible future inventions.

The Working Group was advised that the consultation had commenced and that they were operating within a tight timeframe. She emphasised to the Members that they would welcome input from all the political representatives.

In response to a Member's question regarding other areas of West Belfast which were not included in the Target areas, Mr Quinn advised that the eight target areas that had been identified through prior analysis and assessment but that he believed successes from the project could be rolled out and used in other areas in the future.

A Member queried why three of the areas identified, that is, Upper Springfield, Turf Lodge and Ballymurphy were being dealt with as three separate areas whilst they were known locally as one area known as 'Upper Springfield'. Ms. Fitzpatrick reiterated how

these areas had been identified but she undertook to feed this comment back to the Programme Board.

She also advised that a wider briefing which gave an overview of the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme and complementary projects of the programme was available for the Working Group.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting and noted further updates, together with a broader overview of the Programme, would be provided as the programme progressed.

Update in respect of the Public Access Defibrillator Pilot Programme

The Assistant Director of City and Neighbourhood Services provided the Working Group with an overview of the Public Access Defibrillator Pilot Programme. She explained that the People and Communities Committee, at its meeting on 5th December, 2017, had agreed the third phase of installation across a further eight Council sites and that the proposed locations of the defibrillators would be brought to each Area Working Group for its consideration and approval.

The Assistant Director highlighted that unfortunately there had been a number of incidents of vandalism during the pilot programme. Three separate incidents had taken place in Fullerton Park alone. In the first incident the defibrillator had been retrieved from the local PSNI Station, in the second the defibrillator had been damaged beyond repair (the defibrillator had been replaced free of charge by the local manufacturer) and most recently the defibrillator cabinet had been vandalised. The officer stated that it was therefore proposed that the defibrillator be relocated to within the Changing Room Pavilion building.

She advised that it was also proposed that in terms of progressing the third phase of installation that a defibrillator be installed in the West of the City – Suffolk Playing Fields.

A Member requested that a proposed list of priority sites for the location of defibrillators in the West of the City be tabled at a future meeting for the Members consideration, should funding become available for a future phase.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed the Suffolk Playing Fields location for the placement of a defibrillator and also to relocation of the Fullerton Park defibrillator to the Changing Room Pavilion building.

Update regarding the Provision of Temporary Transport from Andersonstown Leisure Centre

The Assistant Director referred to the proposal to provide temporary transport on a trial basis, to shuttle users affected by the closure of Andersonstown Leisure Centre to alternative centres.

A Member stated that, as that the centre had now been closed for over six months, he did not feel that the service would be utilised. He also expressed concern at the anticipated cost of the trial.

Following consideration, the Working Group agreed:

- that the proposed temporary provision of a bus service would not be progressed; and
- that a detailed report be submitted to the next meeting which would outline the spend, to date, of the £2 million mobilisation budget and also the status of the Traders Forum that was to be established between the closure of the old leisure centre and the opening of the new centre.

Correspondence from Townsend Street Social Outreach Centre

The Working Group was advised that correspondence had been received from Townsend Street Social Outreach Centre seeking the Council's advice and assistance as the organisation explored its plans to refurbish and renovate its building and also possible funding support.

The Working Group agreed that an officer from the Property and Projects Department be instructed to liaise with the Group in order to acquaint the Council with the organisation and its request for support first hand and to update the Working Group accordingly at a future meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that the next meeting would take place at 4.30 p.m. on Thursday, 22nd February, 2018.

Future Presentations

The Working Group agreed that representatives from the following organisations would be invited to present to a future meeting:

- Upper Springfield Capital and Regeneration Working Group; and
- The Belfast Islamic Centre.

Chairperson