

# West Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 22nd March, 2018

## MEETING OF WEST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Magennis (Chairperson); and  
Councillors Attwood, Baker, Beattie, Canavan, Corr,  
Heading, Hutchinson, McConville, O'Hara and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;  
Mrs. R Crozier, Assistant Director;  
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Estates Manager;  
Mr. G. Dickson, Policy and Performance Analyst; and  
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

### **Apologies**

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Carson, Collins, and Nic Biorna.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd February were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Decision Tracker**

The Working Group noted that the Decision Tracker document had been emailed to Members before the meeting which provided them with a brief overview of actions since the last meeting held on 22nd February.

The Director of Property and Projects informed the Working Group that the MMA Regional Centre of Excellence (Whiterock) (WLIF-14) - £70,000 had requested that the project promoter be transferred to Corpus Christie Youth Club. Following discussion, the West Area Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the £70,000 funding be transferred from the MMA Regional Centre of Excellence to Corpus Christi Youth Club. He stated further that the overall project remained unchanged.

Noted.

### **Land at Former Beechmount Leisure Centre Site**

The Director of Property and Projects provided the Working Group with an update on the proposal to develop land at the site of the former Beechmount Leisure Centre. He reminded the Members that, previously, the Blackie Group had lodged a request with the Council to develop the land. He referred to the planning restrictions which had been put in place in that, B.M.A.P. had designated the land under PPS8 as open space and that this planning restriction would require to be removed, prior to any development proposal being undertaken. He informed the Working Group that, because the land referred to was owned by the Council, it would be appropriate for the Council to progress any future development proposals for the site. He reminded the Working Group that a previous decision by the Council had resulted in the appointment of Forbairt Feirste as the preferred developer, subject to certain conditions being put in place. The Director advised the Working Group that the Council would be required to rescind its previous decision prior to progressing any further development proposals for the site.

The Director referred to the statutory obligation on the Council to dispose of the land at best price and stated that any proposal to dispose of the land at less than its market value would require Department approval. He stated that, to date, no proposal had been forthcoming from Forbairt Feirste to develop the site and recommended that, in order to develop the site, that the Council rescind the previous decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee appointing Forbairt Feirste as the preferred developer and instead, use its own in-house Estates Management team to explore the potential development options with all interested parties for the site, after which, the Council would be in a position to enter into a development agreement with potential developers for the land, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Following discussion, the Area Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the previous decision to appoint Forbairt Feirste as the preferred developer be rescinded, enabling a full options appraisal to be undertaken in respect of the site.

Noted.

### **Springfield Charitable Association**

Mr. T. McNeill (Springfield Charitable Association) attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.

The Working Group was provided with a presentation outlining plans to construct a new state of the art Community Hub for older people at Lower Cupar Street, West Belfast. Mr. McNeill outlined the range of facilities which it was intended would be provided at the proposed centre including, amongst other things, a hydrotherapy pool and gym. He provided the Members with a range of financial information in respect of the construction and fitting out of the new proposed facility, stating that there was a shortfall of approximately £250,000 in funding to complete the project. He requested further that the Working Group might consider making a financial contribution towards the shortfall which would allow the project to be completed.

The Working Group considered the proposal and acknowledged the community benefits which the development proposal could bring to West Belfast. The Members expressed the view that it might be more beneficial to complete the project on a phased basis, which would allow time for additional funds to become available. In response to a question from a Member in respect of finances being provided by the Health Trust to

address the shortfall in funding, Mr. McFall stated that, to date, no progress had been made in respect of securing funding from that source.

The Working Group suggested that the option of securing funding from the health sector should be explored and that officers investigate the availability of other funding streams from the health sector.

Noted.

### **Folktown Regeneration Initiative**

Ms. S. Rasmussen and Mr. J. Fox (Folktown Regeneration Initiative) attended in connection with this Item and were welcomed by the Chairperson.

Ms. Rasmussen provided the Members with an update on the work of the Folktown Regeneration Initiative. She outlined a number of developments which had taken place during the ten year period since the regeneration initiative had commenced. She referred to the important contribution which the market had made in providing a catalyst for change, including the promotion of investment in the Bank Square area. She outlined also the work which had been undertaken in regard to the provision of animating space and connecting streets, including the development of that area as a cultural quarter.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to engagement with the Inner North West Masterplan, the Working Group was informed that they would be submitting a formal response to the consultation. Ms. Rasmussen referred to the work which had been undertaken in conjunction with the Department for Communities to develop a permanent event space and community hub in the area, as identified in the Council's Regeneration and Investment Strategy. To achieve its objectives, Ms. Rasmussen stated that the project required up to £20,000 of investment and requested that the Working Group consider providing the necessary additional funds.

The Working Group advised the representatives from the Folktown Regeneration Initiative that, whilst it did not have the necessary resources to fund the project, it would refer the funding request to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee for its consideration.

Noted.

### **Belfast Islamic Centre**

Mr. R. Al-Wazzan, Mrs. N. Green (Belfast Islamic Centre) and Ms N. Lane (Good Relations Manager) attended in connection with this item and were welcomed by the Chairperson.

Mrs. Green reported that the Centre was located currently in a Victorian house in Wellington Park. However, the building was no longer fit-for purpose, in that it was in constant need of repair had limited access and lacked adequate space to meet the requirements of a growing Muslim community. In order to address the issue, it was reported that in 2015, the Belfast Islamic Centre had purchased, at a cost of £700,000, Aldersgate House on University Road, a short distance from its current location. It was reported further, that Planning and Building Control approval had since been granted, permitting the project to proceed to its next phase.

She explained that the new building could accommodate 700 worshippers and include an Islamic library and information centre, a multi-function room classrooms include a café. Mrs Green stated that the second floor would cost approximately £274,500 to develop and would be designated primarily for community and educational use and would be used to host events, seminars and various social activities.

The Working Group recognised the extensive community work which had been undertaken by the centre and suggested that officers help the Islamic Centre explore other funding streams. The Assistant Director stated that funding for the new Islamic Centre had been identified as an emerging project as part of the Belfast Investment Fund by the South Belfast Working Group.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided, and thanked the representatives from the Belfast Islamic Centre for their informative presentation.

### **Future Agenda Items**

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

- Good Shepherd Primary School;
- St Galls G.A.C.; and
- The Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The Working Group noted that the next meeting would take place at 4.30 p.m. on Thursday, 26th April 2018.

Chairperson