



Subject:	City Development Engagement: provision of technical advice
Date:	9 May 2018
Reporting Officer:	Nuala Gallagher – Director of City Centre Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the ongoing work to deliver a City Development Engagement Plan and the intention, as a first step, to procure technical advice to assist residents understanding of and engagement with development taking place in the city as well as supporting them in articulating their views to various fora and decision makers.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• agree to the procurement of independent technical advice to help residents

	<p>understanding of and engagement with development taking place in the city, as well as supporting them in articulating their views to various flora and decision makers; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree an option in relation to the geographical extent of the pilot.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>In May 2017, members approved a proposal to develop and implement an engagement plan linked to regeneration in the city.</p>
3.2	<p>The Engagement Plan is required to focus on the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical inclusion – this focuses on the capacity building of residents and businesses to enable them to understand the impacts of physical developments, and providing technical advice as required so that they can meaningfully engage with the planning process and consultation activity. • Social inclusion – this element focuses on improving connectivity to and from the city centre, and also includes potentially engaging with residential and business communities to develop Meanwhile uses on vacant sites/buildings in the city centre; and • Economic inclusion – aims to help residents and businesses secure the maximum benefit from city centre development in terms of employment, training and supply chain opportunities.
3.3	<p><u>Update on the Engagement Plan</u></p> <p>The City Centre Development Team is working with the Development Department on a co-ordinated engagement strategy and will provide a further update as this strand of work progresses.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Physical inclusion- Independent Technical Advice</u></p> <p>Community Engagement Context</p> <p>In June 2016, the council published its Statement of Community Involvement as required by The Planning (NI) Act 2011. The Statement of Community Involvement sets out the council's policy for engaging with the community when carrying out its development plan, development management and enforcement functions.</p> <p>In relation to development management, the Planning Act also places a duty on applicants to engage with the community on their development proposals. Prior to the submission of a major planning application, applicants are required to submit a pre-application notice (PAN) outlining their approach to consulting with the community. The PAN must be submitted 12</p>

weeks prior to the submission of the planning application and the level of engagement must meet the minimum statutory requirements stipulated in The Planning (Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. In addition, the applicant is also required to prepare a pre-application community consultation report.

Existing support for residents to engage with planning

3.5 The Planning Act enables the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to provide grants to organisations whose primary objectives are to enhance an understanding of planning policy proposals or development proposals. In this regard, DfI provides funding to Community Places, a not-for-profit organisation to provide independent and impartial planning advice, support and capacity building to people and communities across Northern Ireland.

3.6 As the funding is required to provide support to the entire region, the ability to provide assistance to a particular community is dependent upon the number and scale of planning issues across the province at any given time. In recent years, resources have focused on providing assistance to communities on large scale renewable energy projects outside the Council area.

3.7 DfI (and the former DOE) has provided funding to Community Places for a number of years however funding is not guaranteed but applied for on a year by year basis and it is understood that DfI plan to review its planning support in the coming months.

3.8 In other jurisdictions, a not-for-profit organisation called Planning Aid provides planning advice and support to help individuals and communities engage with the planning system. In England for example, advice and support is provided by Planning Aid who rely heavily on chartered planners to volunteer. Arrangements are also in place to avoid conflicts of interest.

3.9 ***Pilot Independent Technical Advice Service***

It is recognised that despite opportunities for communities to engage in the planning process, it can sometimes be challenging to participate meaningfully without prior knowledge or experience of how the system operates. As planning applications come through the Pre-Application Notice (PAN) and Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) process, neighbourhoods potentially affected may need advice in relation to the proposal.

3.10 A budget of up to £30,000 has been identified within the existing budget of the City Centre to procure independent technical advice for a 12-month pilot to support communities affected

by proposed development and planning applications coming forward.

3.11

This will involve providing independent professional advice to help groups respond to and engage with the proposals and plans for physical change that are coming forward in the city centre. The pilot will help develop knowledge and skills of residents to facilitate a better understanding of the planning and development process and build capacity to enable them to effectively engage and respond.

3.12

A key component will be ensuring that the consultant and their advice is impartial and independent.

How will the technical advice service work?

3.13

The appointed consultant will be required to develop and deliver a range of services to eligible communities affected or concerned by major developments coming forward within the city. It is proposed that major applications will be defined in accordance with The Planning (Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

3.14

It is anticipated that the consultant will provide technical advice in relation to a range of planning and regeneration issues including:

- legislation, policy and guidance;
- development management; and
- effective community engagement.

3.15

In terms of the geographical scope of the pilot, two options have been considered:

Option 1: City centre pilot which would involve only communities within and adjacent to the city centre boundary availing of technical assistance; or

Option 2: City-wide option which would involve all communities throughout the council area availing of assistance.

3.16

Table 1 has been prepared to illustrate the volume of major planning applications within the Council since the transfer of planning to the Council in April 2015.

	2015/16	2016/17
Total no of major applications	35	27

received within BCC boundary		
Total no of major applications received within city centre boundary	-	8
Total no of live major applications within BCC boundary	-	73
Total no of live major applications within city centre Boundary	-	30

Table 1: Belfast City Council major applications (Source: Dfl)

3.17 The value of providing technical assistance to all communities in the city is recognised. However given the volume of major planning applications received (Table 1), it is considered that the current budget would not provide communities with an adequate level of technical assistance if the pilot is extended city-wide.

3.18 If option 1 is chosen, it is proposed to review and evaluate the scheme to inform further roll out across the city.

3.19 The council will develop a communication strategy for promoting the service to potential applicants including Online, City Matters and social media. The appointed consultant will be responsible for managing subsequent requests for advice and support. The council will work with the appointed consultant to develop eligibility criteria to ensure that those residents or groups with limited capacity and most directly impacted by development benefit from the programme. The criteria will be equality screened to ensure that all Section 75 groups have equal access to the technical advice.

3.20 VuCity/VuBelfast, the 3D visualisation tool for proposed development, is going live in March 2018 and it is envisaged that this tool be used to benefit residents understanding of the nature, scale and impact development may have. The Planning Department are engaging with developers to request that they use VuBelfast for their proposed development, however this currently will be at the developers' agreement.

3.21 Timescales for the pilot
Subject to advice from Legal and Procurement Services, and further consultation with Development Management, it is anticipated that a brief will be issued by June 2018 and a consultant appointed by August 2018. The pilot will be reviewed at 6 months and a report brought back to committee 6 months after the start of the service.

<p>3.22</p> <p>3.23</p> <p>3.24</p> <p>3.25</p>	<p><u>Implications of draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England</u></p> <p>Previously Committee members raised questions about the impact of changes to planning policy in other parts of the UK. In England, consultation is ongoing on the draft text of the National Planning Policy Framework. The impetus for change is primarily due to the need for more housing. The government has accepted that there is a clear need for radical and lasting reform to housing and planning policy to allow more homes to be built to meet housing demand. The draft revised Framework reflects proposed policy changes previously consulted on through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Planning Policy: consultation on proposed changes (December 2015); • the housing White Paper – Fixing our broken housing market (February 2017); • Planning and Affordable Housing for Build to Rent – a consultation paper (February 2017); and • Planning for the right homes in the right places: consultation proposals (September 2017). <p>The scope of the current consultation relates to England only. It will not have implications for communities within Belfast as Northern Ireland operates under a separate planning system and is guided by the Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>The pilot programme will be equality screened.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Resource requirements will be met from existing departmental budget allocation.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>