

Report from a Stakeholder Summit Workshop on the Proposal to designate Belfast district (or city centre) as a “holiday resort”, providing large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours between March and October 2018

1. Introduction

This is an independent summary report of a roundtable, stakeholder summit called by the Council to address issues arising from the proposal to designate Belfast district (or city centre) as a “holiday resort, providing large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours between March and October. The workshop-style event was facilitated by Richard O’Rawe and took place on Thursday 10 May 2018, 11:30am to 1:30pm at 9 Adelaide St, Belfast

2. Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to facilitate a roundtable discussion involving interested parties in a proposed holiday resort designation for Belfast City Centre. The extended Sunday trading hours would cover the summer period up to the end of September 2018. The extension of Sunday trading hours is permissible under Article 6 of The Shops (Sunday Trading & c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

3. Attendance

Gerry Lennon	Visit Belfast
Gerry Murphy	ICTU
Michala Lafferty	Usdaw
Glyn Roberts	Retail NI
Gavan Wall	Retail NI
Martin Graham	Tourism NI
Les Hume	BCCM, Retail Steering Group
Stephen Mewha	Belfast Chamber of Commerce
Emer McKerr	House of Fraser
Clare Maguire	Belfast One Bid
Eimear McCracken	Belfast City Centre Management
Russell Connelly	Belfast City Council
Lisa Toland	Belfast City Council
John Greer	Belfast City Council
Nora Quigley	Belfast City Council
Christina Bateson	Belfast City Council

4. Stakeholder Contributions

Each participant was given the opportunity to express the view of their organisation regarding the proposal to provide an option to extend Sunday trading hours for large stores between March and October.

The views expressed around the table were consistent with the views presented by deputations to the Council's Strategic Policy and Resource (SP&R) Committee of 20 April 2018.

Council staff confirmed that the mandate from the SP&R Committee was to facilitate a roundtable discussion involving interested parties in a proposed holiday resort designation for Belfast City Centre but acknowledged that it would be possible to report back to the Committee on wider issues raised as part of the discussion.

Retail NI presented a new proposal, supported by Usdaw, that instead of extended trading hours for larger shops, the Council should introduce some form of city centre animation programme around the theme of "Small Shop Sunday", encouraging small retailers to open for longer hours on a Sunday. Those in favour of extending Sunday trading hours also spoke in favour of a programme to create a more vibrant city centre on Sunday mornings, but they wanted to see this happen *in addition to* allowing extended trading hours for large stores and *not as a substitute*.

In summary, the discussion covered the areas of:

- Making the city centre a welcoming and vibrant place on Sunday mornings
- Extending Sunday trading hours – for both large retailers and smaller stores
- Establishing a Charter to protect workers' rights and explicitly commit to no worker being compelled to work on a Sunday
- Creating a Small Shop Sunday programme as part of a city centre weekend strategy

There was unanimous agreement that:

- We need to create a more vibrant and welcoming city centre experience on Sunday mornings and
- There should be some form of weekend strategy to animate the city centre and attract more visitors and shoppers on a Sunday morning, thereby increasing footfall and spend in the local economy.

The disagreement is how to best achieve this.

The following table summarises the positions taken by stakeholders in response to the **proposal to extend Sunday opening** for large retailers.

Organisation	For the Extended Sunday Hours Proposal	Against the Extended Sunday Hours Proposal
Belfast City Centre Management	x	
Belfast One BID	x	
Belfast Chamber of Commerce	x	

Organisation	For the Extended Sunday Hours Proposal	Against the Extended Sunday Hours Proposal
BCCM Retailers Steering Group	x	
House of Fraser (Staff Rep.)	x	
Retail NI		x
Usdaw		x
ICTU		x
Tourism NI	x	
Visit Belfast	x	

This next table summarises the positions taken by those in attendance in response to the **proposal to establish a Charter** as a voluntary undertaking to ensure that workers' rights are protected in line with existing legislation and that there is a regular forum for raising any issues related to the implementation.

Organisation	For the Charter	Against the Charter
Belfast City Centre Management	x	
Belfast One BID	x	
Belfast Chamber of Commerce	x	
BCCM Retailers Steering Group	x	
House of Fraser (Staff Rep.)	x	
Retail NI		x
Usdaw		x
ICTU		x
Tourism NI	x	
Visit Belfast	x	

Finally, this table summarises the positions taken by those in attendance in response to the idea of a **city centre animation programme involving small shops only**, as an alternative to extending Sunday trading hours for large shops.

Organisation	For the Retail NI Proposal	Against the Retail NI Proposal
Belfast City Centre Management		x

Organisation	For the Retail NI Proposal	Against the Retail NI Proposal
Belfast One BID		x
Belfast Chamber of Commerce		x
BCCM Retailers Steering Group		x
House of Fraser (Staff Rep.)		x
Retail NI	x	
Usdaw	x	
ICTU	x	
Tourism NI		x
Visit Belfast		x

Those against the Retail NI proposal were very much in favour of a compromise which combined both extended Sunday hours for large stores and a city centre animation programme focused on small, independent retail outlets.

5. Summary of Comments Raised in Roundtable Discussion

Each of the stakeholder organisations were given space to express their views of the proposal and the following points were raised.

Visit Belfast

- Visit Belfast are in favour of extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- Their mission is to drive up visitor numbers and spend
- They maintain that the city needs to be adaptable to survive
- Their research suggests potential demand with 90% hotel occupancy, and on 21 Sunday mornings, the city will have visiting cruise ships
- They also maintain that whilst we are getting good visitor numbers, this is not translating into high spend as happens in other cities
- Visit Belfast research into the GB market (which accounts for 41% of overnight stays) found that 60% expected to be able to shop on a Sunday morning and 93% expected shops to open earlier than 1pm
- Retail is an important element of a vibrant city:42% of GB visitor spend is on shopping.

Retail NI

- Retail NI are against extended trading hours for large shops and are against the proposed Charter
- They feel that the summit should look at a wider weekend strategy, to create something distinctive for visitors and shoppers

- And they consider that what is currently in place (1pm-6pm opening) is already a compromise for retailers and workers
- Retail NI see large shops as having many competitive advantages over small shops and view this proposal as the thin edge of the wedge in terms of deregulation
- They introduced a new proposal to have a 'Small Shop Sunday' for those retailers already able to open and based on the UK Small Business Saturday model (they suggest this will include 80% of retailers in the city centre)
- Retail NI would consider this as a first step in a wider project. They would like to see a guide to independent retailers for visitors published – to include all areas of the city (Ballyhackamore, Belmont, Ormeau). This proposal is supported by Usdaw and Retail NI would be willing to allocate funding to support this option.
- They are against the idea of a Charter.

Udaw

- Usdaw are against extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- They want to see a vibrant Belfast and feel the impact of the extended opening hours would be a disproportionate in cost to the retail gain.
- Usdaw want to keep Sunday different and protect work-life balance – they are concerned for impact on parents and carers
- They maintain that the current compromise (opening 1pm to 6pm) has worked for a number of years and any change would affect parents and carers as the workforce faces pressure to work
- They are happy to endorse and work on a weekend strategy
- If more small businesses open on a Sunday, which Usdaw supports, then they would advocate for a work-life balance approach
- They do not believe that there is evidence of economic benefit from extended trading hours.

ICTU:

- ICTU are against extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- They are aligned to the Usdaw position and in favour of the Retail NI position.

Tourism NI:

- Tourism NI are in favour of extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- Retail is part of the wider visitor experience, and this is often part of the culture of the visitors' home country (USA, China etc)
- Belfast plays a role as the gateway to NI, with 30% of all tourism spend in Belfast
- We expect over 1,000 new hotel rooms to open in 2018 and a similar number to be available in 2019 – these visitors will need something to do on a Sunday morning
- New direct flights are planned (e.g. Dublin-China) and these will bring visitors who are known to be big spenders
- Tourism NI expects the extended hours case to be demand-led initiative.

Retail Steering Group (BCCM)

- The Retail Steering Group are in favour of extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- They see the Charter as supporting the Trade Unions' position on protecting workers
- One representative stated that without Sunday trading, his independent outlet would be struggling to be viable
- Retailers have noticed real changes in the retail environment over the last year, more so than previous years and new initiatives are needed to address this
- Would like to see a joined-up message on Sunday morning opening hours based on what is best for the city?
- The group views not having parity with other UK traders (i.e. 10am morning opening) as a problem (e.g. when seeking investment).

Belfast Chamber of Commerce

- Belfast Chamber of Commerce is in favour of extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- They also want to see more animation and tourist attractions available on Sunday mornings, including more shops (large and small) opening
- Would favour a compromise of extended opening hours and an animation programme to attract visitors and shoppers to the city centre on Sunday mornings
- They maintain that visitors are coming because of the large stores which in turn provides exposure to small independent shops
- Very much in favour of choice – for retailers and workforce
- The Belfast legacy means that there is little or no city living as is the case in other major UK cities, so there is greater reliance on tourists and shoppers who travel in
- While tourist numbers are increasing, the spend is not as much as the rest of the UK as the city doesn't have the same Sunday offering
- They want to address challenges facing the high street, such as the loss of department stores and increase shopping online
- They point out that footfall on a Sunday is the highest after Saturday afternoon.

House of Fraser (Staff Representative)

- House of Fraser is in favour of extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- Staff feedback suggests that they are not opposed to extended opening hours and would like the option of shifts on a Sunday
- Longer opening hours will provide flexibility for part time staff in that it will allow for two shifts on a Sunday.
- Childcare is easier to organise on a Sunday and extended Sunday opening will facilitate a day off during the week.

Belfast One BID

- Belfast One BID is in favour of extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- Their mandate is to promote, enhance and support the development of the BID area (900 businesses, of which 35% are retailers)
- They have activities to bring people into the city centre on a Sunday morning but it lacks atmosphere and animation and atmosphere go hand in hand
- Footfall tends to increase on a Sunday from 11am, but there is no option to shop in larger stores
- Belfast One is finding that some small shops will not open without the larger stores as it is the larger stores that drive the footfall.

Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM)

- BCCM is in favour of extended trading hours for large shops and the proposed Charter
- They stated that footfall and sales are challenging areas and BCCM believes that larger shops need the option to open on Sunday mornings
- BCCM sees designation as an opportunity for residents as well as visitors
- They want to see a mixture of retail opening (large, small, cafes etc) on Sunday mornings
- They believe that tourists are buying into the experience of being somewhere else and will want to shop and spend whilst on a weekend city break and will visit retail units, even if they have similar brands in their city.

6. Plenary Discussion

Some points made during further discussion included:

Retail NI

Would like to hear from retailers outside the city centre and have made the offer to support a broader campaign to promote the city centre as a place to go on Sunday mornings.

Udaw

See the issue as one of balance, rather than choice. They reiterated their view that Sunday is a day for the family, although they would support a campaign to encourage smaller outlets to open on a Sunday morning.

Belfast Chamber of Trade / BCCM/Belfast One

Propose doing the Small Shops Sunday along with the extended opening for all so as not to give mixed messages.

7. Summary of Positions

Areas of Agreement

Everyone agreed that there is merit in creating a more vibrant city centre to attract visitors and residents on a Sunday morning. Stakeholders also agreed that a programme to promote Sunday morning trading should be developed, involving city animation and promotional campaigns.

On Extended Sunday Trading

Most of the organisations in the room were in favour of a pilot scheme running to the end of September 2018. They view the benefits as being social (Sunday morning recreation) and economic (increasing visitor spend and more viable trading environment).

The Trade Unions and Retail NI are vehemently opposed to the proposal on the grounds that they believe it will take trade from smaller independent retailers and it will be detrimental to workers and their families. However, they would support a campaign to encourage extended trading hours for small retailers, accompanied by animation activity and promotion.

Those in favour point to the extended trading hours as being optional and suggest that this will provide a choice that extends to shops, workers and customers.

Those against extended hours are not convinced by the economic argument and believe that a Small Shop Sunday programme would bring greater overall economic benefit.

It was pointed out that the disagreement on the economic value arising from extended Sunday trading hours will be tested if the pilot is approved.

On the Charter

Most were in favour of having an explicit commitment to reinforce protection of workers' rights and make it clear that employees can opt out of working on a Sunday. A Charter will serve this purpose.

The Trade Unions feel that it is meaningless as it has no legislative effect and in any case they believe that the draft should have been agreed with them. They have no faith in the idea of a Charter.

Those in favour of a Charter highlighted that everything in the draft Charter is in law and so retailers would uphold it. The Chamber of Commerce is in favour of it being adopted. Consideration needs to be given to how non-Chamber members can be signed up to the charter.



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