

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 4th October, 2018

MEETING OF EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

- Members present: Alderman Haire (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland, Rodgers and Sandford; and
Councillors Dorrian, Graham, Johnston, Long,
McReynolds, Mullan, Newton and O'Donnell.
- In attendance: Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. N. Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. R. Crozier, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. C. Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman McGimpsey and Councillors Armitage, Howard, Hussey and O'Neill.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meetings of 6th September were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

Alderman Rodgers declared an interest in Item 6, King George V Update, in so far as he was a shareholder of Glentoran Football Club.

Presentation

Department for Infrastructure – Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. C. de Burca, Director for Transport Projects and Business Services in the Department for Infrastructure, to the meeting.

He provided the Working Group with an overview of the recent launch of the Glider vehicles which were operating between the east and west of the city. He stated that, while there had been a few teething problems in the first few weeks of the operation of the glider vehicles, he advised the Members that there had been a 17% increase in public transport users along the Belfast Rapid Transport route and that it had been closer to a 30% increase since the introduction of the bus lanes.

He advised the Members that he was pleased with the success of BRT and that an additional two glider vehicles had been ordered, while a business case had been lodged for a further two.

In relation to Members' comments regarding Glider vehicles which were on the road but displaying "Not in Service", the Director for Transport Projects advised the Working Group that there was an intermittent fault with some of the vehicles showing this when they were in fact in service, and that passengers should still seek to board the vehicles.

During discussion, he advised the Working Group that Translink were closely monitoring user numbers of the Glider service, and would be seeking to increase the number of glider vehicles during peak times.

A number of Members questioned the necessity of having 12 hour bus lanes on Saturdays. Mr. de Burca explained that it was agreed that the Monday-Saturday, 7am-7pm hours would operate for the first six months of operation and that a review would take place to evaluate the necessity of their operation on Saturdays, for example.

In response to a number of Members' questions, he confirmed that car users were permitted to use the bus lane in order to overtake a vehicle which was turning right off the main road, or in order to exit the main road onto a side road. He clarified that the Department for Infrastructure would use discretion in determining when to issue a fine for inappropriate use of the bus lane.

A number of Members stated that an information campaign to educate road users of the rules around the use of bus lanes would be welcomed and the Director of Transport Projects acknowledged this.

In response to a Member's question relating to the recent heavy traffic in the Titanic Quarter, since the introduction of the Glider service, Mr. de Burca explained that the Belfast Harbour Commissioners were planning to widen the Sydenham Road outside the SSE Arena to provide the extra bus lane which was required to connect it with the city centre.

A number of Members raised the following points relating to bus stops, including:

- that the Department would reinstate the bus stop for non-glider users outside Wyse Byse on the Newtownards Road;
- that non-glider passengers did not have a bus shelter on Chichester Street; and
- that the glider halt, country-bound, at Summerhill Avenue be looked at, as it seemed too narrow.

After further discussion, the Chairperson thanked Mr. de Burca for his attendance and he retired from the meeting.

**Hollywood Arches Greenways Projects/
Ballymacarrett Options Site**

The Director of Property and Projects provided the Working Group with an overview of the numerous capital projects and investments which were planned within the Hollywood Arches area.

He explained to the Members that officers were working with numerous external agencies to ensure that a joined up approach was being taken for the development of the area, including the masterplans of the Bloomfield and Ballymacarrett Walkways.

He presented the Members with details of three high-level development options which had been developed for a council site at Ballymacarrett. It was stressed that the details of the options remained confidential at this stage.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed that officers should continue to explore each option, with further details submitted to a future meeting for the Working Group's consideration.

Physical Programme Update

The Director of Property and Projects provided the Area Working Group with an overview of the status of the projects which were funded through the Council's Physical Programme, including the Capital programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), the Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) as well as projects which the Council was delivering on behalf of other agencies, such as the Social Investment Fund (SIF).

LIF

He advised the Working Group that, to date, 20 projects in the east of the city had received in principle support through LIF. He pointed out that the new pitch, floodlighting and associated works had recently been completed at the Malone Rugby Club.

He explained to the Working Group that it had £54,009 remaining in its LIF budget, which included the underspend from the Walkway project.

The Members were advised that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 20th April, had agreed to hold a celebration event in the City Hall to mark the impact that the Local Investment Fund Programme had made in the city, and that it would take place on 25th October.

BIF

He outlined that, to date, nine projects had received in-principle funding commitment under BIF, with five projects on the outer BIF list.

The Director outlined that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 21st October, 2016, had agreed that the Strand Cinema "be moved to Stage 3, committed, with a maximum allocation of £1,800,000 to be ring-fenced for a period of two years, with an option to extend by a further year on the basis that it received addition funding from other sources which would enable the project to proceed".

The Working Group was advised that the two year period had now reached its completion, and that no additional funding for the Strand Cinema had been secured.

During discussion, the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services confirmed that a report providing an update on the Strand Cinema and the Bloomfield Community Centre projects would be submitted to the next meeting.

Capital Programme

The Director outlined to the Area Working Group that, moving forward, the Council would face a number of challenges in respect of the physical programme, including pressures on the capital financing budget and with the Council's ageing estate. He explained that a series of Party group briefings would take place on the issues during the month of October.

Social Outcome Fund (SOF)

The Director advised the Working Group that the Eastside Visitor Centre had received an in-principle funding commitment under SOF. He explained that the proposal was for a heritage-based development near C.S.Lewis Square and that discussions were ongoing with key stakeholders.

He explained that further project information had been requested in relation to costs and on a feasibility work/options appraisal.

Noted.

Externally Funded Programmes

The Director outlined to the Area Working Group that the Oasis Early Years Intervention project was no longer going ahead under SIF and had therefore been withdrawn.

He provided the Working Group with an update on five remaining projects which the Council was delivering through SIF in East Belfast, namely, Glenburn Church Community Outreach, Mount Merrion Parish Development, Titanic People, Greenway Women's Group and Walkway Community Association

The Working Group also noted that officers were continuing to work with Urban Villages on four projects in the east of the city, namely, a number of Belfast Bikes docking stations, Foundry Training Centre, Short Strand CF Play Area and The Diamond Project.

Noted.

Religious Use of Cregagh Community Centre

(Mrs. C. Taggart, East Neighbourhood Manager attended in connection with this item)

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To inform Members of the Education Authority's position on Religious use within Cregagh Community Centre.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Councillors are asked to note the contents of the report including the plans to communicate with affected users to find alternative accommodation.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 When Cregagh Primary School and Cregagh Youth and Community Centre were built in 2003 it was done so through a partnership approach between the South Eastern Education & Library Board and Castlereagh Borough Council. SEELB, now the Education Authority, own the buildings and CBC (now BCC) is the tenant of the Community Centre.

3.2 In April 2015 and as a result of the RPA process, CBC's interest in Cregagh Community Centre transferred from CBC to BCC. At the time of RPA, and to support business continuity, BCC ensured that the services provided within Cregagh YCC continued as they had done prior to transfer.

3.3 By way of background information, the lease in place between the EA and CBC (now BCC) in relation to the Youth & Community Centre is dated 31st March 2015 and is subject to variations as agreed between BCC and the EA and we are very close to signing off on these variations. Under the terms of the Lease, religious use of the Premises is not permitted and the EA has confirmed that this is a non-negotiable position applied regionally to all of their properties.

3.4 A separate Licence Agreement is being negotiated for use of the school hall by the Council. The school hall is owned by the EA and is not a part of the youth and community centre (although the buildings are physically linked). The EA has confirmed that the Licence will also prohibit use of the school hall by religious groups for religious purposes (rather than use by religious groups per se).

3.5 Under the management of CBC three religious groups have historically been allowed to operate within the community centre for community activity and also have had access to the school hall for religious services. The groups are:

- Riverock - 45 members**
- John Greeves Christian Group – 25 members**
- Congregational Reformed Church – 10 members**

- 3.6 All 3 groups have been using the premises every Sunday for between 10 and 14 years. The EA has now said that religious use of the premises should never have been permitted as this has been a policy of theirs for over 90 years. They will not change their position on this.
- 3.7 There is no religious use of the centre at present. However the 3 organisations have booked rooms for children and community activity. Given the terms of the Lease of the Community Centre, the Community Centre cannot offer to accommodate the church groups for their religious services.
- 3.8 The EA's Solicitor is now putting pressure on the Council to complete the Licence for use of the school hall. If Council sign the Licence, it will be legally bound to comply with all terms.
- 3.9 To manage the impact on current centre users, Community Services Officers have met with Officers from EA and a local interim arrangement has been agreed. This will allow the 3 affected groups to continue to use the School for their religious services until the end of December 2018. This arrangement will offer time for them to seek alternative accommodation.
- 3.10 Community Services staff will meet with the 3 groups to advise them of the situation and then offer assistance to find alternative premises.

Financial & Resource Implications

None

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

The religious use restriction imposed by EA on Cregagh Youth and Community Centre means this arrangement is not aligned to the permitted religious usage of our other community premises. The later, however, is considered to support groups in exceptional circumstance.”

The Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the EA be requested to meet with an All Party Deputation to discuss the issue of religious use of the Community Centre.

Update on King George V Playing Fields

(Alderman Rodgers declared an interest in this item and left the room for the duration of the discussion)

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

- “1.0 **Purpose**
Members are asked to note the content of this report, which provides an update on the current status of discussions with

Glentoran around proposals for minor works to improve the condition of King George V Playing Fields and a request for a preferential use agreement.

2.0 Background

Members will be aware that at its meeting in March 2018 the SP&R Committee endorsed the recommendation of the east AWG to replace the KGV 3G pitch proposal on the capital programme with a new 3G pitch at Blanchflower Playing Fields.

In addition, Members requested that officers undertake research into the provision of suitable and convenient pitch facilities for Glentoran Football Club, including its youth academy with an update to be reported back to Committee in due course.

Following the SP&R decision in March 2018, officers have investigated the potential for carrying out works to KGV, which would bring the existing grass pitches up to a standard suitable for Glentoran or any other groups who may wish to book them.

Meetings have taken place with Glentoran in respect of this issue and in May 2018 Glentoran proposed that they would invest in the pitches to bring them up to a suitable standard and carry out ongoing maintenance works. This included a request for the Council to install low level fencing at both pitches. Within this context Glentoran have also asked the Council to consider entering into a preferential use agreement for KGV.

3.0 Key Issues

Officers have been carrying out due diligence on Glentoran's proposal and a positive meeting was held on Wednesday 3rd October. The following key points/issues emerged from the meeting:

Scope of work to make pitches ready:

- As noted above Glentoran's proposal included a request for the Council to install low level fencing – officers have assessed the feasibility of this within the context of the work Glentoran were proposing. This identified that the budget allocated by Glentoran would not be sufficient to level the ground, making it ready for the installation of fencing and would result in Glentoran's initial costs rising to approximately £90k. *It was agreed with Glentoran that this would be removed from the proposed scope of works.*
- Glentoran have proposed that they will finance the initial costs to make the pitches ready for use, which they estimate will cost £33,250. *In order to give Council assurance over the quality and value of the proposed*

works an assessment will take place with a horticultural contractor within the next two weeks. The recommendations of this assessment will be included within the specification of works should this proceed.

- Should approval be granted to proceed and within the context of seasonality for the proposed works it is envisaged that work could start in March/April 2019 with the pitches being ready for use in August/September 2019.

Preferential Use Agreement:

- The principles that would be included within any preferential use agreement were discussed with Glentoran, this included:
 - Glentoran would have first refusal on bookings at KGV and pay the agreed Council price – Glentoran have advised that bookings would be for their junior academy teams. Based on current pricing this would be at a cost of £13.50 per hour;
 - Glentoran would be required to provide a programme of use, including wider community use;
 - Other groups would be free to book the pitches at all other times;
 - The Council would continue to be responsible for management of bookings and maintenance
- Following confirmation on the scope of works and associated value it is envisaged that an update will be brought back to the east AWG. Should Members be minded to progress with a preferential use agreement a request will be brought to the People & Communities Committee seeking the necessary approval.

Consultation:

Should approval be granted to proceed with minor works to KGV and to enter into a preferential use agreement with Glentoran, it is envisaged that a community consultation event will be scheduled to take place in advance of works commencing.

Fields in Trust:

In 2017 KGV was awarded a Fields in Trust (FIT) Deed of Dedication under their protection programme for recreational lands.

FIT have requested sight of any preferential use agreement to ensure that it does not create disproportionate restrictions on the availability for hire to other user groups or the general public.

6.0 Recommendation

Members are asked to note the content of this report and consider the following suggested next steps:

1. Officers will complete an assessment with a horticultural contractor within the next two weeks, with recommendations being included within the specification of works;
2. Further meeting will be held with Glentoran to confirm the scope of works and their funding commitment; and
3. Firm proposals will be brought back to the East AWG and, should Members be minded to proceed, a recommendation will be brought to the People & Communities Committee to enter into a preferential use agreement with Glentoran use of KGV.”

The Working Group agreed to recommend the suggested next steps as outlined in the report to the People and Communities Committee.

The Working group also requested that an update on Blanchflower Playing Fields be provided at its next meeting.

Temporary Structure at Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised the Working Group that, in accordance with the Council's decision of 3rd September, a letter would be sent to East Belfast Football Club asking that the temporary structure at Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park be removed within 21 days.

Noted.

Request to Present at a Future Meeting

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services advised the Members that correspondence had been received from East Belfast Football Club, requesting to present to a future meeting, in relation to the installation of floodlighting.

The Working Group agreed to receive a deputation from the Club at a future meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that its next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 31st October at 5p.m.

Chairperson