

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 22nd October, 2018

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillors Craig (Chairperson) and Councillors Boyle, Dudgeon, McAteer and Nicholl.

In attendance: Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects; Mrs. R. Crozier, Director of Neighbourhood Services; Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager (South Belfast); Ms. K. Mullen, Project Sponsor; and Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 30th August were approved.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Welcome

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, welcomed Mr. S. Leonard, who had been appointed recently to the post of Neighbourhood Services Manager for South Belfast, to his first meeting.

Mr. Leonard thanked the Chairperson and provided the Working Group with a brief overview of his role.

Presentation

Lagan Valley Regional Park

The Working Group was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st May, it had agreed to receive at a future meeting a presentation from representatives of the Lagan Valley Regional Park Board.

Accordingly, Mr. R. Wasson, Chair of the Board, was welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. Wasson informed the Working Group that the Lagan Valley Regional Park was Northern Ireland's only regional park and had been one of the first areas to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The park, which covered around 4,200 acres and attracted over 1.4 million visits annually, delivered a wide range of activities under six

key areas, namely, biodiversity, visitors, community, landscape, heritage and health and recreation.

He reviewed the role of the Lagan Valley Regional Park Board, which included Councillors McAteer and Reynolds, and then proceeded to outline funding difficulties which, if not addressed in the short term, would have a significant impact upon the future operation of the park.

He reported that the current budget for delivering core activities was approximately £180,000 per annum, 75% of which was absorbed by staffing costs. He explained that the five core staff who were deployed within the Park were employees of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, with their costs being shared equally under an agreement between it and Belfast City Council. In recent years, there had been no increase in the annual contribution of £41,000 from each Council to take account of increased staffing costs and inflation. In addition, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency had, in a change in policy generally, withdrawn its annual core funding of £15,000. As a consequence, the Board was, for the second successive year, faced with a budget deficit, which would, amongst other things, further delay the implementation of its five-year plan, which had been published in 2017.

Mr. Wasson explained that the Board had obtained approval to utilise reserves to cover the budget deficits in 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 and that those would be likely to be depleted further if financial stability was not achieved. He then outlined a number of measures which the Board was putting in place to address its current difficulties, such as increased cost controls, the establishment of a Finance Sub-Committee and of a fundraising team and the holding of meetings with Elected Members, Council officers and representatives of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. He concluded by confirming that the Board was requesting Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council:

- i. to each increase their core funding to £80,000 per annum, to cover staff costs and associated non-staff costs and to index that figure in the same way as other Council costs;
- ii. to provide a three-year rolling core funding commitment to ensure certainty of operation; and
- iii. to each make a one-off contribution of a minimum of £25,000 to replenish the Board's reserves account.

Mr. Wasson was thanked by the Chairperson and he left the meeting.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services pointed out that, on the basis of advice which had been received from the Director of Finance and Resources, the Board's request had been submitted as a growth proposal and was being considered currently in the context of the Council's budget setting process.

After discussion, the Working Group endorsed the Lagan Valley Regional Park Board's request for increased revenue funding and agreed that the relevant Council staff should work with the Board to identify other potential sources of funding.

Update on Physical Programme

The Working Group considered the following report:

“1. Introduction

The Council’s Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, LIF, BIF, Social Outcome Fund (SOF) and the projects that the Council is delivering in behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

The Working Group is requested to note:

- the contents of this report and the updates on LIF (attached);
- the completion of the LIF project - St George's Amateur Boxing Club (SLIF2-06)
- that the LIF celebration event will be happening on Thursday, 25th October, 2018
- that a series of Party Group briefings on the Physical Programme are taking place this month.

3. Local Investment Fund

To date, 24 projects have received in principle support under LIF1 and LIF2. A summary of the status of the LIF projects is outlined below and a full progress report is attached.

Stage/ Description	LIF 1		LIF 2	
	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	10 (77%)	£932,600	9 (82%)	£676,000
Number of Projects in Delivery	2 (15%)	121,000		
Number of Projects in Pre-construction			1 (9%)	£80,000
Number of Project in Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	1 (8%)	£30,000	1 (9%)	£40,000
Total Number of Approved Projects	13	£1,083,600	11	£796,000

- **SLIF2-06 St George's Amateur Boxing Club – the AWG will note that the refurbishment and fit out of St George’s ABC have been completed.**
- **LIF Ceremony/ Dinner – AWG will note that the SP&R Committee, in April 2018, agreed to host LIF ceremony/ dinner in the City Hall to mark the impact of Local**

Investment Fund programme. Members are reminded that the event will be happening on Thursday, 25th October 2018.

4. Belfast Investment Fund

To date, 6 projects have received an in-principle funding commitment under BIF. There is 1 project on the BIF list that has no commitment.

South	Stage 3—Lagan Gateway—£2.1m; Lanyon Tunnels—£1.3m; Bredagh GAC- £700k Stage 2— Gilpins— £1.3m <i>Stage 1—Belfast Islamic Centre—no commitment</i>
--------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Balmoral DEA	<i>Stage 1— Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC—£250k; Knockbrea Parish Church Hall—£250k</i>
---------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Below are brief updates on the projects that have received in-principle funding.

Project	Status and update
Lagan Gateway	Project works on site has been stopped as the contractor went into administration. Discussion with contractor, administrator and legal is ongoing to resolve the situation. Legal advice is that due to challenges project must be re-tendered. Procurement to re-start in November 2018.
Lanyon Tunnels	Project has been delayed due to legal proceedings regarding the adjacent development. Officer has looked at the feasibility for an alternative solution with a single access from the Lanyon side. However, MDA have made it clear that they are not willing to look at another option. Process on hold until planning application from developer received.
Bredagh GAC	Officers have been working with the club to try to resolve an access issue to the left hand side of the site to allow construction. This issue is close to a resolution and it is hoped the project can progress in terms of finalising designs and getting a contractor procured before the end of 2018.
Gilpins	Meetings took place with Department for Communities and community stakeholders. DfC to formally confirm commitment as Lead Partner. There is a requirement to fully scope out project in terms of community and political requirements for the scheme. <i>(See separate report)</i>
Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC *	BIF support to focus on Phase 1A of the sports hub project i.e. replacement of Belvoir FCs grass football with associated widen of adjacent road access and resurface of existing car park. Officer engagement ongoing. Discussed at BIF Due Diligence on 6 th Sept 2018 and DD made some comments. Awaiting information from their consultants on land tenure/ ownership before progressing further.

Knockbreda Parish Church Hall *	Discussed at Due Diligence on the 17th May 2018. DD requested Business Plan be carried out on project. Business Plan now completed. Project will then go back to DD in October 2018.
---------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

*** Outer South projects**

Belfast Islamic Centre – Members will be aware that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 15th December 2017, approved the recommendation of the South Area Working Group in relation to adding the Belfast Islamic Cultural Centre as a Stage 1 emerging project under BIF. Officers have engaged with the Belfast Islamic Centre with a view to identifying potential funding sources however given the current economic climate access to capital funding is proving difficult. Belfast Islamic Centre have recently completed a business case (September 2018) in respect of a proposed new Islamic Cultural Centre which will provide the Muslim community with a 7,900 ft² (734m²) flagship centre at premises known as Aldersgate House. The preferred option shows a capital cost of £1,684,980. There is the likelihood of financial support from Department for Communities on the basis of the completed business case however there remains a £259,980 shortfall in capital funding.

Members should note that, given the current BIF financial allocations, there is no capital funding available from the South Area Working Group. Recommended that officers continue engagement with Belfast Islamic Centre and Department for Communities with a view to exploring options for progressing the project and that it be held as Stage 1 – Emerging. A further update will be provided to South Area Working Group following discussions with Department for Communities.

5. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building / buying new ones. Below are the updates on the projects under the programme in South.

Project	Status and update
LTP- Olympia	Stage 3 – Committed. Project completed
Alleygating Phase 4 – City wide	Stage 3 – Committed. On Ground
Playground Refurbishment Programme 2018/2019 – City wide	Stage 3 – Committed. On Ground
Pitches Programme- Ulidia Playing Fields	Stage 3 – Committed. On Ground
Palm House, Botanic Gardens	Stage 1- Emerging. Link to Tropical Ravine

- **Arellian Nursery School – Members will note that on 26th March 2018, the AWG agreed that an officer would be assigned to look at the proposals for the Nursery and to assist the school in applying for funding. Project Sponsor has met the group and assisted in the funding application with Groundwork/ Alpha Programme. The Officer was informed by the group on September 2018 that Alpha Programme approved its application and allocated £50k for the project.**
- **Party Group Briefings – AWG will note that the SP&R Committee on 21st September 2018 noted *‘that moving forward the Council will face a number of challenges in respect to the physical programme including pressures on the capital financing budget; managing expectations in terms of delivery; that Council’s estate is ageing which increases pressure on maintenance budgets and competing demands for investment.’* Given the complexity of this issue and its implications for Members, the Committee agreed that a series of Party Group briefings on the Physical Programme be undertaken in October 2018.**

6. Social Outcome Fund

To date, 3 projects have received an in-principle funding commitment under SOF. Below are the brief updates on those projects.

Project	Status and update
Assembly Buildings Conference Centre (Transport Hub)	Exhibition and Genealogical Research Space – project on ground. Works well underway and due to be completed by end of November 2018
Coffee Culture (Transport Hub)	Development of a social economy café designed to support investment in tourism infrastructure including the Transport Hub and Gilpins. Discussions ongoing with the Group. On UV future capital project pipeline. The Council has written to UV requesting that this business case is prioritised due to match funding opportunities
Sandy Row Community Forum (Transport Hub)	Development of a Tourism Trail (with digital element) to complement the Transport Hub. The project was discussed at Due Diligence in May and September 2018 and number of issues raised that need to be resolved including the project concept, delivery on site and future maintenance arrangement. Project concept needed significant development.

7. Externally- funded programmes

Social Investment Fund – The overall SIF programme has been significantly delayed, however, considerable progress on outstanding issues has been made recently and a number of projects are moving forward. Below is a status update on SIF projects in South Belfast.

Project	Status and update
South City Resource and Dev't Centre (St. Simon's)	Project at design procurement stage. PQQ/ ITT to be completed in January 2019 with the view of appointing the contractor by Feb 2019. Preparation for conveyancing is underway
Mornington Community Project	Design and survey work underway. PQQ/ ITT to be completed in Jan 2019
Lanyon Tunnels	Project has been impacted by the JR decision— MDA have made it clear that they are not willing to look at another option—has implications for the BIF funding

Urban Villages - Members are asked to note that Letter of Offer has been received in the amount of £602,582 for the capital works of Rev Robert Bradford Memorial Playground. Also, Officers are continuing to work with UV on Sandy Row Play Park and other emerging UV projects.”

After discussion, the Working Group adopted the recommendations.

Update on Gilpin's Project

The Working Group was reminded that £1.35m of BIF funding had been ring-fenced for the delivery of a project on the Gilpin's site within the Sandy Row Urban Villages area. The project had subsequently been held at Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow for discussions to continue with Urban Villages, the local community and stakeholders, with a view to working up proposals.

The Director of Property and Projects reported that, following a number of meetings, Urban Villages had, in November 2015, formulated a concept paper which, although not identifying a lead partner, had set out a number of potential options for the Gilpin's site. Those had included a village square, a community hub, rental housing and retail/activity, heritage/culture and employment space and high level costs of £6m had been identified.

He explained that, since November 2016, the project had stalled somewhat, due to the inability to secure all of the required funding and to agree on its scope. In addition, the site had recently been purchased by a private developer, who had informed Department for Communities representatives that he had no plans for its development. Following the receipt by that Department's Historic Environment Division of concerns from the local community, the Council's Planning and Building Control Section had placed a Building Preservation Notice upon the Gilpin's building.

The Director of Property and Projects pointed out that the Department for Communities had expressed a desire to develop a holistic area plan for Sandy Row, given the imminent development of the Belfast Transport Hub. To that end, it had agreed to facilitate discussions between all interested parties in order to attempt to identify the scope of the project, funding availability and a lead partner. Accordingly, he sought the Working Group's approval for Council officers to participate in those discussions.

The Working Group granted the approval sought and noted that it would, at its next meeting, receive a further update on the matter.

Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed to hold no further meetings until January, 2019.

Chairperson