

North Belfast Area Working Group

Tuesday 19th March, 2019

NORTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Alderman Convery (Chairperson); and
Councillors Campbell, Clarke, Corr-Johnston, Magee,
Murphy and Pankhurst.

In attendance: Mr. R. Black, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Mr. G. Dickson, Policy Analyst;
Miss C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported for Aldermen L. Patterson and Spence.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th February were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Decision Tracker

The Working Group noted that the Decision Tracker document had been emailed to the Members before the meeting which provided a brief overview of actions since the last meeting held on 19th February.

Presentation – North City Business Centre

The Working Group was reminded that, at its meeting on 30th October, 2018, it had agreed that it would be beneficial to obtain a presentation on the North City Business Centre.

Accordingly, Mr. D. Murphy, Chief Executive Officer, and Ms. N. Fisher, Finance Manager, North City Business Centre, were welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. Murphy informed the Members of the North City Business Centre's (NCBC) mission to play the lead role in meeting North Belfast's needs by working individually and in partnership with others to address enterprise creation and development, skills for employment and as a catalyst for economic regeneration. He added that NCBC was seeking to play a key role in developing north Belfast to be vibrant and thriving with a

sustainable mix of businesses, good employment opportunities and to develop an attractive physical environment where people respected other traditions, that was free from sectarian interfaces and where people wanted to live and work.

Mr. Murphy provided details on North City Business Centre's property portfolio and how it had developed since it was established in 1991. He advised the Members that NCBC was entering Phase 4 of its development which was estimated to cost £4Million, and gave an overview of how NCBC had planned on sourcing funding for the development.

He concluded by highlighting how NCBC's drive to support enterprise and business development in north Belfast was aligned with the Council's objectives through, for example, the Belfast Agenda.

After discussion, Mr. Murphy and Ms. Fisher answered a number of questions by the Members in relation to the levels of social deprivation in north Belfast and if NCBC had sourced funding from other government agencies. They were thanked by the Chairperson, following which the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Presentation – North Belfast Heritage Cluster

Ms. P. Reynolds, CEO Belfast Charitable Society and Chair of North Belfast Heritage Cluster, Mr. S. Quinn, Belfast Buildings Trust, and Mr. D. Morrow, Director of Community Engagement, Ulster University, were welcomed to the meeting.

Ms. Reynolds informed the Members that the North Belfast Heritage Cluster's Great Place North Belfast Project was comprised of a network of voluntary organisations with responsibility for historic assets within north Belfast.

She explained that the Great Place North Belfast project would focus on a one mile stretch starting from Donegall Street and ending on the Crumlin Road and that it would involve working closely with the sites and associated organisations to reflect the diverse stories and vibrant history of north Belfast.

Mr. Morrow informed the Members that the cluster organisations and assets involved in the Great Place North Belfast project were:

- St Anne's/ St Anne's Cathedral;
- Redeemer Central / Donegall Street Congregational Church;
- Belfast Buildings Trust / St. Patrick's School & Carlisle Memorial Church;
- St Patrick's Church & Parochial House;
- Quaker Society / Frederick Street Institute;
- Belfast Charitable Society / Clifton House & Graveyard;
- Belfast Orange Hall;
- Indian Community Centre;
- UniTorah / Annesley Street Synagogue;
- St. Malachy's College & The O'Lavery Library;
- Carnegie Oldpark Library;
- St. Mary's Church of Ireland Church & Halls;
- North Belfast Working Men's Club;
- Duncairn Complex – 174 Trust;

- Dunlewey – Cliftonville Road.

A Member thanked the deputation for work that had been carried out in relation to Clifton Street Cemetery and Carlisle Circus. The deputation was then thanked by the Chairperson, following which the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Cavehill Mountain Biking

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

To advise members, as requested, of the timeline for actions required to implement the recommendations of the report supplied by Forestry Commission Scotland officer John Ireland.

Recommendations

Activity	Start w/c	End w/e
Identification and mapping of mountain bike club proposed bike trails	11/03	29/03
Externally Facilitated discussions with residents group	1/04	26/4
Environmental Impact assessment by Consultant	15/04	24/5
Officer and Environmental Consultant Engagement with key stakeholders	13/05	24/5
Committee approval of routes identified as suitable by environmental assessment	June	
Public consultation <i>if required.</i>	17/6	30/08

Main report

Initial engagement with the mountain biking club has led to the identification of a number of current trails through steeply wooded areas which they would propose to retain with our consent and adapt as required to improve safety where they terminate close to recognised walking paths. A number of current trails have also been proposed for abandonment or diversion due to their overlap with walking trails. All of these trails are currently being mapped by officers to facilitate engagement with stakeholders and to inform the environmental impact assessment. As this work is currently ongoing it is anticipated maps will be available by weekending 29th March.

Ongoing engagement with those walkers who made representation to N AWG in opposition to mountain biking on the Cavehill has shown this user group to be still strongly opposed to the activity and actively campaigning against any BCC adoption of the trails. It is proposed, in line with advice from forestry commission Scotland, that an external mediator is used to facilitate engagement with this

group. An initial meeting would involve only officers, the facilitator and the group in order to introduce the proposed routes. This would be followed by a series of mediated meetings between this group and the mountain biking club, the object of which being development of a code of conduct agreeable to both user groups. It is anticipated that this mediation activity would continue throughout the month of April until a level of mutual tolerance is reached.

Assessment of the potential environmental impact of the proposed trials cannot be carried out until there is an adequate level of Spring growth. Given the habitats in question the earliest possible period identified is the 4 weeks running from mid April to mid May. It is intended that all initial engagement on proposed routes will be subject to their being no negative environmental impact identified. Should a negative impact be identified routes will be altered to avoid any sensitive environmental areas.

The external expert in parallel with carrying out the environmental assessment will assist officers in formally engaging with those stakeholders for whom the environmental aspects of the scheme may be of most concern. It is proposed that this would include as a minimum:

- NIEA
- Cavehill Conservation Group
- Belfast Hills Partnership

Given the two strand approach to the environmental assessment and engagement it is anticipated that this combined activity will be complete by weekending May 24th.

Assuming the time frames above are achieved final recommendations for the adoption of specific routes will be ready for submission to People and Communities Committee in June.

Risks

Legal risks

As previously advised, under the Occupier's Liability (NI) Act 1957 the Council has a duty to take such care as is reasonable to ensure that a visitor will be reasonably safe for the purposes for which he is permitted to be there.

Legal Services has considered the report obtained from John Ireland in detail. Mr Ireland evidently has a wealth of experience in dealing with mountain biking issues on Scottish land. The approach recommended by Mr Ireland will mitigate the risk of injury to users at Cavehill, however it will not eliminate the potential for liability claims to be made against the Council.

Mountain bikers are currently using the trails on Cavehill and will continue to do so throughout the period of engagement outlined above. Those club members who have been actively engaging with council officers are endeavouring to discourage any alteration of the current trails, the building of ramps and jumps, by those riders who frequent the hill.

The view of Legal Services in relation to mountain biking continuing has been set out in the April 2018 report to the North Area Working Group. The continuing activity carries a public liability risk. The signage previously installed should remain in place and be appropriately monitored during the consultation process.

Financial & Resource Implications

- Consultancy costs for environmental assessment circa £3000
- Facilitation/Mediation costs circa £7000

Noted.

Former Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre – Future Options Report

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre became vacant when the former occupier Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre Limited (UAYC) dissolved. The Council owns the land and had entered an Agreement for Lease with the former UAYC although the lease was never executed.

Having considered the building in the context of the wider needs of the area the North AWG of Sept 2017 recommended that the building would return to council possession.

It was agreed that once the condition of the building had been established a further paper would be brought to committee to identify options for future use. This paper presents the current options. The long list is attached at Appendix 1

2.0 Recommendations

That by means of an expression of interest exercise (EOI) carried out by officers of our Estates service and targeted on community focused organisations currently active in the North Belfast area the following options are tested:

- Retain and make available to multiple external service providers on hire basis. Use for delivery of BCC services as required
- Lease to partner organisation/s for service delivery
- Dispose by CAT

That, should the EOI not return a viable operating proposal, the final option of disposal by sale is considered.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

The Council entered into an Agreement for Lease with UAYC on 25 October 2007 to facilitate construction of a Community Centre and Community Garden on land owned by the Council. The Company constructed the youth centre using funding provided under Urban II through the former north Belfast Partnership. The facility comprises a single storey brick built building laid out to provide partitioned meeting room, office, youth room and ancillary facilities, together with external yard space and grassed area. It is located on the boundary of Ballysillan Park.

The longlist of future options for the building which are based on the broad options of retaining or disposing of the asset. Some immediate pros and cons of each are also indicated in the table. The options are detailed below:

Option 1: Retain and use for administrative purposes.

This option has been discounted as there is no identified need. The building layout is unsuited to purely administrative use due to the scale of the rooms which were specifically designed for youth/community use, physical alterations would be required for adaptation to any other use.

Option 2 Retain and use for in house, customer facing, community service delivery.

There is currently no gap identified in BCC services which could be filled from this building. This option is very likely to result in activity displacement and duplication of effort given the proximity of Concorde Community Centre. This option is not being recommended

Option 3 Retain and make available to multiple external service providers on a hire basis. Use for delivery of BCC services as required.

This option is being recommended for testing via an EOI process as it is possible that organisations may wish to avail of premises for delivery of occasional services or time bound programmes which do not require a long term permanent base. Note that there are cost implications in the staffing (occasional) and equipping of the premises for this option as well as the ongoing maintenance costs.

Option 4 Retain and lease to partner organisation for service delivery

This option is being recommended for testing by EOI as it is possible that the building may be of interest to an existing or new service provider or a consortium of providers seeking greater access to this part of North Belfast

Option 5. Dispose by Community Asset Transfer or similar.

This option is being recommended for testing by EOI as there is the potential for an organisation as at option 4 to be interested in more than a lease term.

Option 6. Disposal by sale

Should the EOI not return a viable operating proposal, the final option of disposal by sale could be considered.

Financial & Resource Implications

Acting on advice from the Crown Solicitors, officers facilitated the removal of the equipment and furniture representing the contents of the centre by members of the former board of the UAYC. It is our understanding that much of the equipment was transferred to another youth facility in North Belfast. This in effect means that any organisations wishing to provide services from the premises will require a budget for furniture and equipment.

Over and above any ongoing revenue costs incurred for annual maintenance, for which there is no budget provision in revenue estimates, should the building be retained the condition survey Appendix 2 highlight the following expenditure which would be required to bring the building back into operational use. All options except Option 6 are likely to incur some or all of these costs:

Fabric Repairs and Redecoration	£7,900
Mechanical Repairs	£4,500
Electrical Repairs	£2,960
Total	£15,360

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report

The Working Group agreed that an expression of interest exercise be undertaken, which targeted community focussed organisations in north Belfast to test the proposed options.

Social Innovation – Challenge Programme

The Neighbourhood Services Manager reminded the Working Group that the Council had previously agreed to test how Community Planning might be applied at a local area level and help inform future neighbourhood working in the New Lodge. He added that, to support the programme, the Council had agreed to commission the Young Foundation to work with Council officers to develop and test a social innovation model and that as part of that model, a Challenge Programme was being implemented with funding available for up to four projects within the New Lodge area, up to a maximum of £15,000 per project

He informed the Members that, as part of the process, local residents and community groups had been working with the Young Foundation and Council officers to complete a two stage application process that included accelerator workshops and pitching exercises.

He advised the Working Group that at a workshop held on 12th March, the Breakthrough Project successfully pitched its idea to assessment panels that included practitioners who worked in the field of innovation.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager asked the Working Group to consider recommending that £15,000 be awarded to the Breakthrough Project, which aimed to promote LGBTQ awareness and safety for young people in the New Lodge.

The Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that £15,000 be awarded to the Breakthrough project

Future Agenda Items

The Policy Analyst reminded the Working Group that there would be no meeting in April and notification would be sent of a future meeting should the Council reconstitute the working groups following the local government elections in May.

Chairperson