

# Development Committee

Wednesday, 22nd November, 2006

## SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCausland (Chairman);  
the High Sheriff (Councillor Humphrey); and  
Councillors M. Browne, Convery, D. Dodds, Ekin,  
Hartley, Kirkpatrick, Maginness, P. Maskey,  
McGimpsey and Ní Chuilín.

Also attended: Councillors Adamson, D. Browne, Campbell, Cobain,  
Hanna, Hendron, McClenaghan, Moore, Mullaghan,  
O'Neill, O'Reilly and Rodway.

In attendance: Ms. M. T. McGivern, Director of Development;  
Mr. M. McCann, Information Officer;  
Mr. K. Sutherland, Planning and Transport  
Policy Manager; and  
Miss L. Hillick, Committee Administrator.

### **Population Changes in Belfast**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 20th September, it had agreed to receive a presentation from a representative of Regional Forecast Limited in connection with the research which had been undertaken by that Company in relation to population changes within Belfast. Accordingly, Mr. A. Webb was admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Webb advised the Committee that Regional Forecast Limited had been commissioned by the Council in order to examine the dynamics of urban populations in Belfast and in other United Kingdom cities and the factors affecting Belfast's population decline and to make recommendations to address the situation.

He explained that changes to the urban environment through regeneration initiatives had altered the perception of "Inner City" living. Many large industrial cities within the United Kingdom, which had experienced a loss of industrial jobs and decline in population throughout of the twentieth century, appeared to have entered a new era of urban renaissance. He pointed out that the growth in city employment in certain cities had been as a result of the current trend for advanced economies to become service-based. This had proven advantageous to former industrialised cities, since their key economic functions were now based on the provision of financial and business, administrative and cultural services and the growth of those services was expected to continue.

Mr. Webb advised the Committee that Belfast's housing stock had been expanding as rapidly as most other United Kingdom cities from 2000, however, the occupancy rate, which had tended to fall in most cities, had been falling even faster in Belfast. Low levels of international migration in the past had contributed to Belfast's faster than average decline. A further factor was the high level of single persons and single parent households. Mr. Webb pointed out that, since the accession of Eastern European countries into the European Union during 2004, large numbers of international migrants had moved to Northern Ireland. He referred to data which had been received from the United Kingdom Workers' Registrations Scheme which had suggested that between 15,000 and 30,000 migrants had entered Northern Ireland during the second half of 2004 and in 2005. Of this total, approximately 2,500 had settled in Belfast. Accordingly, due to the arrival of such migrants, the population decline in Belfast had slowed down and it was possible that the trend had reversed.

Mr. Webb stated that, in order to address the decline in the City's population rate, Regional Forecasts Limited had proposed the introduction of measures to support:

- Strong planning control
- Balanced housing development
- Repopulating the urban core
- Making the City safer
- Increased home ownership
- Provision of high quality education services
- Increased powers to local government

The Chairman thanked Mr. Webb for the information which he had provided and he retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the matter be considered in further detail at a future meeting.

### **Translink**

The Director of Development reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 20th September, it had agreed to receive a presentation from representatives of Translink regarding the changes which had been made to the metro system and the Company's proposal for its future development.

The Committee was informed that a deputation comprising representatives of Translink was in attendance. Accordingly, Messrs. F. Clegg, B. Gilpin, K. Moffat, P. O'Neill and C. Rogan were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Moffat advised the Committee that, since the Metro's launch during February, 2005, an additional 53,000 passengers per week had utilised the Service equating to 950 additional full busloads. Research had indicated also that, whilst buses were carrying approximately 30% of commuters travelling into the City, they accounted for only 2% of the total vehicles on the road. It was therefore necessary for buses to be given priority use of the public roads.

He reported that Translink was planning the introduction of further improvements to the frequency and reliability of its services which could be achievable through the creation of quality bus corridors. The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 had been published during November, 2004 and contained a statement that, in order to address the priority for public transport traffic within the City centre, bus parking would be phased out from Donegall Square East and West. He pointed out that Translink had commissioned ARUP consultants during July, 2005, to carry out a Belfast City centre bus operations study and he outlined the objectives of the study. This research had been carried out in parallel with work which had been undertaken in relation to the ongoing development of public realm proposals for the City centre. Translink's view was that buses only should have access within the Donegall Square, May Street, Wellington Place and Chichester Street areas with other traffic being diverted around the City centre. Alterations would be required to be made to Castle Street, Queen Street, College Square and King Street in order for Translink to improve its services.

In conclusion, Mr. Moffat stated that there was an urgent need for the introduction of a long-term traffic management strategy before the implementation of the Public Realm Strategy for the City centre.

After discussion, during which the Chairman thanked the representatives for their attendance, the Committee agreed to note the contents of the presentation.

Chairman