

Development Committee

Wednesday, 14th February, 2007

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCausland (Chairman);
the High Sheriff (Councillor Kirkpatrick); and
Councillors M. Browne, Convery, Crozier, Ekin,
Hartley, Humphrey, Kelly, Maginness, A. Maskey,
P. Maskey, McGimpsey, Newton, Stoker and Smyth.

Also attended: Councillor Mullaghan.

In attendance: Ms. M. T. McGivern, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives;
Ms. S. Wylie, Head of Urban Development; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 17th January were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st February, subject to the omission of that portion of the minute under the heading "Belfast City Council's Contribution to the Broadway Junction Public Art Sculpture" which, at the request of Councillor Stoker, had been taken back for further consideration.

Belfast City Centre Management

The Director of Development advised the Committee that representatives from Belfast City Centre Management were in attendance to make a presentation regarding its proposed Business Plan for 2007/2008 and to request that the Council provide the organisation with £140,000 for the forthcoming financial year. She pointed out that the amount being requested was the same as that which had been provided by the Council in the current financial year.

The Committee agreed to receive the deputation. Accordingly, Ms. Joanne Jennings, City Centre Manager, and Mr. Joe Drew, Acting Chairman, together with three representatives from the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman (Councillor McCausland).

With the assistance of visual aids, Mr. Drew informed the Members that the Company had received awards during the previous year for a number of its schemes, including the Evening Economy Initiative and the Regeneration of Historic Entries. He stated that, in the current year, the membership of the organisation had increased by 14% and that retail sales during December and January in Belfast had increased by

3.2%, compared to the United Kingdom average of 2.5%. He pointed out that the organisation had supported the Council on a number of issues, including the Judicial Review which had been taken regarding the Sprucefield Development and an initiative involving the independent retail sector. He reviewed the work which Belfast City Centre Management had undertaken with the outreach workers who worked with homeless persons in Belfast City centre.

Ms. Jennings outlined the key issues which Belfast City Centre Management would face in the coming year. These included the expansion of the City centre, the work which would be undertaken to the Public Realm and the threats which might come from out of town shopping centres. She outlined the new initiatives which would be undertaken and referred to a scheme which had involved the collation of information regarding retail thefts, which had attracted funding of £50,000 from the Police Service of Northern Ireland. She pointed out that for each £1 of funding provided by the Council, Belfast City Centre Management had secured £13 from the private sector. She concluded her presentation by requesting that the Committee approve Belfast City Centre Management's Business Plan for the coming year and agree to provide funding in the sum of £140,000 to the organisation in respect of the 2007/2008 financial year.

The representatives from Belfast City Centre Management thanked the Committee for receiving them and retired from the meeting.

The Director of Development indicated that she would be presenting at the next monthly meeting a report regarding the City Centre Action Plan which would, amongst other matters, examine the work which was undertaken by Belfast City Centre Management.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to provide funding of £140,000 to Belfast City Centre Management in respect of the 2007/2008 financial year.

**Belfast City Council's Contribution to the
Broadway Junction Public Art Sculpture**

The Committee considered further the undernoted minute of 17th January under the heading "Belfast City Council's Contribution to the Broadway Junction Public Art Sculpture", which had been taken back by the Chairman at the Council meeting on 1st February at the request of Councillor Stoker:

"Relevant Background Information

The Committee was last appraised of developments with this project in October and November 2005. At that time, the Council had initiated the commissioning of a major public art piece for the Broadway junction (through an international competition) and had selected Ed Carpenter as the preferred artist. It had also agreed that the longer term maintenance of the art piece would be the responsibility of Belfast City Council.

Public art of this scale and nature has been shown in other Cities to make a significant contribution to regeneration, increase public pride in local areas, contribute to cultural tourism and demonstrate local confidence which in turn helps to attract inward investment. Recent local public art pieces such as 'The Angel of Thanksgiving' at Lanyon Place now represent a symbol for a new Belfast.

The result of the commissioning consisted of sketch designs and an outline specification for a major sculpture, with an outline budget of £400,000 for design and installation. However, no contract has yet been signed with the artist as there have been a number of issues relating to project management, roles and responsibilities and funding.

The project to date has been taken forward through a partnership between the Department for Regional Development (Roads Service), Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate (Department for Social Development), the Arts Council for Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council. The Roads Service is responsible for the ongoing structural work relating to the roundabout/junction which is part of the M1/Westlink improvement scheme, and the Arts Council and DSD are providing the majority of funding for the project. To date Belfast City Council's role has been limited to leading the Commissioning process and agreeing to become responsible for the long term maintenance of the piece.

The Roads Service has undertaken significant work to the roundabout structure to ensure it will support such a major sculpture and an economic appraisal is currently being carried out. This appraisal is due to be completed in March 2007. Planning permission is still to be sought for the sculpture.

Key Issues

The delays in progress have resulted from a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities and a funding shortfall. No organisation has yet agreed to perform a leadership or project management role which has resulted in confusion and frustration. Since being selected, the artist has been working with a local structural engineer to further develop the designs, however to date this has been 'at-risk' as there is no formal contract between the artist and any other body.

The final installation of the art piece could still be delivered by 2009 as originally planned, providing that progress is made from here on in. Work on site cannot start until the Roads Service has completed the road improvement works in the Autumn of 2008. The artist has already been made aware that no inflation increases will be allowed within the project.

If the project is to proceed, Belfast City Council will need to take on a leadership role and project manage the contract itself as otherwise the project is likely to ground to a halt. The Project Management Unit within the Urban Development Service undertakes such work for the Council's capital programme and has the experience necessary to provide such a service. However the costs in terms of human resource to carry out this project management role for a contract of this size would be approximately £50,000 over the period of the project.

Currently the following funding has been committed:

- DSD - £300,000 towards the design and installation of the art piece;*
- DSD - £15,000 towards the economic appraisal (not part of £400,000);*
- Arts Council - £50,000 towards the art piece*
- Arts Council - £21,500 towards commissioning (not part of £400,000);*
- DRD - £183,000 'in-kind' for the additional structural work necessary to the roundabout (not part of £400,000);*
- BCC - approximately £10,000 on the commission process as well as 'in-kind' contributions in terms of the human resources involved in the commissioning process and on the steering group.*

There is currently a funding shortfall of approximately of £50,000 for the piece itself. However, the Culture and Arts Unit has submitted a supplementary application to the Arts Council for a further £30,000 under its Lottery Programme for New Work, asking it to consider a second application as exceptional circumstances. The Arts Council will make its decision known by March 2007, but is likely to look more favourably on this if Belfast City Council commits to both a cash contribution (of £20,000) and an in-kind contribution by way of the provision of a project management service.

The project cannot proceed any further until a favourable economic appraisal is completed, all the funding is secured and agreement is reached on leadership and project management. This will enable the contract to be signed with the artist, allowing him to produce sufficiently detailed sketches for an application to be made for full planning permission.

If the Committee agrees to Belfast City Council co-ordinating the delivery of the project, it will be necessary to set up both a Project Board (as a decision-making body) and a steering group with a more consultative role. These groups would have representatives from all relevant agencies and local communities.

Resource Implications

Financial

The current funding arrangements for Trillian are outlined above. The Council has to date only made 'in-kind' contributions in terms of officer time involved in the project.

If the Committee agrees that Belfast City Council should project manage the contract, then the Project Management Unit will need to make a charge of up to £50,000 to the City Development Budget, as the Project Management Unit operates on a cost neutral basis. This initial contribution would be spread over year 07/08 and 08/09.

Additionally, if the committee agrees to a contribution of £20,000 to the project to meet the shortfall and facilitate a greater chance of further Arts Council funding, then this will need to be allowed for in budget 08/2009, when the major part of the capital spend will occur.

Human Resources

Input in terms of time will be needed to co-ordinate the partnership arrangements, funding administration, publicity, etc. This can be factored into future staff resourcing plans.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee agrees:

- To co-ordinate the further design and delivery of the Broadway Junction Art piece, including management of the contract and the partnership arrangements. The Committee should also agree on what if any representation Members wish to have on the Project Board and/or Steering Group.*

- *That the Project Management Unit undertakes the project management role and up to a cost of £50K spread over the 07/08 and 08/09 financial years.*
- *To commit to a contribution of £20,000 to the capital cost of the project during the 2008/2009 financial year;*
- *That continuation with the above agreements is subject to a favourable economic appraisal and adequate funding being secured to meet the shortfall.*

Key to Abbreviations

- DRD - Department for Regional Development**
- DSD - Department for Social Development'**

After discussion, the Committee adopted the foregoing recommendations, subject to the economic appraisal being undertaken by the Department for Social Development indicating that the Project was worthwhile. It was agreed also that a further report be submitted to a future meeting regarding the representation which Members would have on the Project Board or Steering Group."

Councillor Stoker expressed the view that the two communities which lived close to the Broadway Junction would only consider the public art sculpture acceptable if the project were to be included as part of a wider regeneration scheme to be undertaken in the area.

The Director pointed out that the Council intended to establish a Project Board and a Steering Group in connection with the scheme and indicated that she would ensure that they developed a strategic plan for the area around Broadway Junction.

In view of the comments of the Director, the Committee agreed to affirm its decision of 17th January regarding the Council's contribution to the Broadway Junction Public Art Sculpture.

Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings of the Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee of 29th January and 7th February be approved and adopted.

Arts Sub-Committee

The minutes of the meetings of the Arts Sub-Committee of 31st January and 7th February were approved and adopted.

Belfast Festival at Queen's

Arising out of discussion of the minutes of 31st January, the Committee agreed that the Council should continue to lobby the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Arts Council for Northern Ireland for additional funds for the Belfast Festival at Queen's.

Economic Development Sub-Committee

Linkages with Washington DC and Portland

In considering the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development Sub-Committee of 31st January, the Head of Economic Initiatives drew the Committee's attention to a decision of the Sub-Committee agreeing, inter alia, that the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Economic Development Sub-Committee participate in a visit to Washington in late June. She pointed out that, subject to the adoption by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 16th February of the new Governance arrangements, the Sub-Committee would cease to exist following the Annual Meeting of the Council on 4th June. She suggested, therefore, that the decision be amended to provide that the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Development Committee, together with the Lord Mayor and two officers, undertake the visit to Washington. The Committee agreed with this suggestion.

Adoption of Minutes

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development Sub-Committee of 31st January, subject to the minute under the heading "Linkages with Washington DC and Portland" being amended to provide that the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Development Committee, rather than the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Economic Development Sub-Committee, accompany the Lord Mayor and two officials on the visit to Washington in late June.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Future City Report

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information

The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development was formed by the governments of 30 countries to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. It works to help governments respond to new developments and challenges by developing policy, identifying good practice and seeking answers to common problems. The OECD is now seen as providing gold standard statistical and qualitative research across the world.

The OECD carries out many research and review case studies and has completed 2 in Belfast on the Laganside Corporation; the most recent a review of Laganside's achievements over its lifetime published in February 2007. The OECD has taken a particular interest in the work of Belfast City Council and has used the City as an example of a city recovering from serious decline and building a stronger sustainable future. For these reasons Belfast City Council was invited to become a member of OECD's Local Economic and Employment Development Programme, an invitation only network that seeks to amass evidence on the basis of creating sustainable economic cities and regions throughout the world. This has placed Belfast in a position of high visibility on the world development stage.

Key Issues

The OECD has for some time been keen to work more closely with Belfast City Council to develop a study on city competitiveness. The OECD methodology for this is to bring together a panel of international experts who will study a city or region and produce a report charting the key developments for the city/region, doing comparative work with other best practice cities/regions and putting together recommendations for the future.

The OECD has recently produced 2 challenging reports for Newcastle/Gateshead and the North East region and for Glasgow both of which are forming the blueprint of action for the future in both.

In discussion with OECD, Belfast is now judged to be at a point where a study looking at the changes in the City, the economic strategy for the next period, the changing role of the Council in this and the potential partnerships and collaborations which the city might try to build would have major impact. Such a study normally takes 9-12 months as it involves a number of visits by the expert panel and the analysis and production of a final report.

The cost of commissioning such a report is approximately £47,000. As the OECD is a not for profit organisation this covers the cost of their personnel, the expert teams expenses, the analytical work and the production and publication of a final report. The benefits of commissioning this report for Belfast City Council and for Belfast are multiple:

- it builds on the work the Council has been undertaking and masterplanning, the City To Do list, and the State of the City process;

- it puts at the City's disposal a group of internationally recognised experts who can give us access to good practice and other networks;
- it allows for a blueprint and recommendation to be handed on to a new Council who will have much greater responsibility for City development; and
- it has potential income generating capability as Belfast is seen as a best practice model especially for the new and accession states to the European Union.

For these reasons it is recommended that the Committee agree to commission the OECD to carryout a Belfast study.

Resource Implications

The cost of commissioning is approximately £47,000.

Recommendations

Members are requested to agree to the commissioning of a Belfast study by the OECD at a cost of £47,000.

Key to Abbreviations

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development"

After discussion, the Committee adopted the foregoing recommendation.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and the Proposed Retail Development at Sprucefield

(Mr. J. Walsh, Principal Solicitor, attended in connection with this item.)

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

The Principal Solicitor reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 6th December, he had been granted authority to investigate the possible instigation of a Judicial Review regarding the level of the Council's representation at the Planning Inquiry into the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan. He indicated that, whilst it had been established that there could be merit in such a Review, it was considered that such a challenge could be sustained only on the basis of a collaborative action with other parties. However, it had been established that no other public organisation would be prepared to collaborate with the Council. Accordingly, the Judicial Review had not been pursued.

The Committee noted the information provided by the Principal Solicitor.

Proposed Retail Development at Sprucefield

The Head of Urban Development informed the Members that, since it had objected previously, the Council had received notification of a further submission of information in respect of the Sprucefield Retail Development planning application, which had required the Council to respond by 2nd February.

She indicated that the retail aspect of the Council's response had been compiled by the Consultants which had been appointed in connection with the first application and that the issues regarding the "non-severability" of the John Lewis Department Store and the twenty-nine additional units had been addressed through a submission which had been compiled by the Development Department. These had been submitted by the response date. The Head of Urban Development reminded the Members that copies of the Council's responses had been circulated and were available on the Members' Portal.

After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the submissions which had been made in relation to the planning application which had been submitted in connection with the proposed retail development at Sprucefield.

**Department for Social Development's Proposals
for the City Centre Public Realm – Update Report**

The Committee considered the contents of the undernoted report regarding the proposed development of the City Centre Public Realm:

“Relevant Background Information

At the September special meeting EDAW (the Consultants appointed by DSD) provided information on the detailed designs which had been prepared for the proposed works. They circulated examples of the proposed materials which would be used in the construction of the pedestrian areas and detailed drawings and artists' impressions.

They advised the Members that works on the improvement of Donegall Place had been deferred to permit consultation to be held with a number of organisations, particularly as to whether buses should be permitted access to the area. The consultants indicated that Donegall Place could be transformed into a prime fully pedestrian shopping street of international standing that could become a piazza-type area with the potential to be used for events throughout the year. In addition and subject to further resolution of the traffic routes through the city centre it was highlighted that this new space could in turn be integrated with an enhanced and expanded Donegall Square.

Key Issues

EDAW on behalf of DSD have continued to progress the scheme for the first phase towards implementation whilst addressing the development of the second phase that will be the subject of a bid for further funding. In order to ensure the coordination of the works and future enhancement proposals a 'Design Code' or manual has been produced and the potential for a web based information source to inform future proposals is being investigated in partnership with the Council's ISB.

Phase one has now reached a significant milestone with the appointment of the contractor consortium (Farran's and WS Atkins) under the 'design and construct' contract for the proposed works. Although slightly delayed the first area under contract for the physical works (Area 1) is scheduled to go on site in the near future. Area 1 covers Anne St, Arthur St, Arthur Pl, Arthur Sq, Callender St, Castle land and Corn Market and will include the provision of a designated space for a significant piece of public art at Corn Market.

It is proposed that the procurement of this and other pieces of public art will be secured through a separate competitive process for which additional resources have been identified. A separate steering group will be established to oversee the selection and procurement of the public art and DSD have requested that the Council nominate both a political and operational / officer representative.

Area 3 covering Castle St, College St, Fountain Lane, Fountain St and Queen St is expected to be on site either towards the end of 2007 or early 2008. The extent of the anticipated work in this area has on the basis of further consultation been extended to include Kings Street. DSD have also indicated that they intend to proceed with a funding application (Peace III) to cover the cost of extending the proposals to include the Bank Square area.

It is anticipated that Area 2 covering Donegall Place, High Street (part) and Castle Place Junction will be the last element of Phase One and subject to resolution of the traffic routing begin on site in 2008. A report from the Transportation Consultants on the preferred approach to accommodate the bus and general traffic within the public realm proposals (including the consideration of routing around City Hall) is scheduled to be completed this month.

The resolution of the transportation issues for Area 2 will enable the proposals to develop the Square to provide an iconic setting for the City Hall. The Committee previously considered the concept of

a design competition for Donegall Square which in addition to providing a mechanism to procure the design and implementation of the works could culminate in a large exhibition of entries and agreed a contribution of up to £50,000.

The competition would be carried out jointly with DSD and would have to reflect the developmental work carried out by EDAW in relation to the 'Design Codes' and approaches to the public realm implementation. It is anticipated that this joint working would also be extended in the form of an agreement in relation to a bid for resources to be identified for Phase Two for implementation at the post Review of Public Administration timescale.

The Brief / Terms of Reference for the competition and final commission are currently being drafted and it is proposed that a three stage competition will be announced in the late spring. It is anticipated that there will be a separate steering group for this competition and project. In addition to the ongoing engagement of Council officers in the development of the competition it will be necessary to nominate two representatives from this Committee

It should also be noted that the detailed operational work in relation to the implementation of the proposed works and the future management arrangements in relation to the restricted access to the new pedestrian and public realm areas will continue with officers participating from across the organisation.

Resource Implications

Asset and Other Implications

No additional direct asset implications involved with these recommendations. However, the implications of the proposed works could have significant a significant impact on the setting of City Hall.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- note the contents of the report; and
- consider the request from the Department for Social Development (DSD) for a nomination from the Committee to represent the Council on the proposed steering group for public art related to the City Centre Public Realm proposals

- **consider the request from the DSD for two nomination from the Committee to represent the Council on the Donegall Square Competition steering group.”**

Following discussion, the Committee agreed that the Chairman be appointed to represent the Council on the proposed Steering Group for the public art to be located within the City Centre Public Realm and that the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Committee be nominated to represent the Council on the Donegall Square Competition Steering Group.

Giant's Park – Update Report

The Committee noted that the consultation process regarding the Giant's Park proposal, which was the subject of a BIG Lottery Fund application, would be launched on 22nd February in the Belfast Waterfront Hall. In addition, the Committee agreed that Members should undertake a series of study visits to the North Foreshore site to view the work being undertaken thereon in connection with the Giant's Park.

Gasworks Estate – Safety at the Water Feature

The Committee agreed, since there were no Members present at the meeting who represented the Lower Ormeau Road area, to defer consideration of a report regarding the safety at the water feature located within the Gasworks.

Heating and Ventilation of St. George's Market

The Director of Development informed the Committee that there was currently no provision to heat or cool the market hall, which resulted in it being uncomfortably cold during the winter and during the summer uncomfortably hot. Accordingly, tenders had been invited to provide heating and ventilation equipment at St. George's Market. She reported that, in response to a public advertisement, twenty-one firms had applied for inclusion on the Select List to undertake the project. She reported that these applications had been evaluated in accordance with Council's procurement procedures and the six companies which had achieved the highest points would be invited to submit tenders. She pointed out that, in order to expedite the installation of the ventilation system before the Summer period, it would be beneficial if authority could be delegated for the eventual acceptance of the tenders.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that tenders for the installation of a heating and ventilation system in St. George's Market be invited from those contractors on the Select List and agreed further to delegate authority to the Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to accept the most advantageous tender on the understanding that it was within the amount of £270,000 included for the project in the Capital Programme.

Independent Retail

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Members have raised issues surrounding independent retail over recent months in particular, highlighting its significance for the local economy and signalling the difficulties faced by such businesses in Belfast. Members are also aware that contact has been made with several retail groupings as part of Council’s work on the Evening Economy, Markets, City Centre, Business Development and other Economic Initiatives programmes.

Our work in Belfast is underpinned by an emerging body of research on the negative aspects of cloning of towns and cities across Europe and internationally. The predominance of multiples and chain stores selling the same products and presented in the same way is a common and often depressing feature of townscapes.

In ‘Clone Town Britain’ (June 2005) it was revealed that 42% of UK towns are clones with a further 26% under threat. Furthermore the domination of giant food retailers such as Tesco’s has also heightened tensions in local economies where individuals and independents are starting to fight back against such competition. Tesco and others changed their growth strategy in recent years and have now moved into the ‘corner shop’ arena. Presently the Competition Commission is investigating the Groceries Market and whether features of it prevent, restrict or distort competition. A detailed analysis of the supply chain and land/planning issues is being conducted as well as retailer competition which has further eroded the markets of local businesses.

Key Issues

Within Belfast there are currently no regular forms of support for independent retailers which are the lifeblood of thriving and vibrant communities, including city centres.

We are presently researching the health of the independent retail sector in Belfast overall including the state of readiness of trader groupings to positively tackle any issues arising and to act as a support mechanism for the revitalisation of independent retail in Belfast. Through our contacts in Eurocities we are also investigating alternative practices of sustaining and developing independent retail as part of the economy mix. Over the last year we have developed a number of initiatives which support independent retail directly or indirectly.

- An audit of independently owned businesses in Belfast has been carried out through BCCM and further databases created of retail groupings of which we in BCC are aware. These include; Donegall Pass, Holywood Arches, Sandy Row, West Belfast, Queens Quarter, Shaftsbury Square, Spires Mall, Fountain Street, Castle Street, North Street and Belmont Road.
- An independent retail shopping guide has been produced and launched on 13th December 2006. Over 200 independent businesses are profiled within the guide which is being distributed through BVCB as a promotional tool and guide for visitors and locals alike. Its purpose is to draw attention to the points of difference which Belfast demonstrates and the breadth of product offering which supports the presence of multiples in the city.
- Investigation into expanding the range of street markets in certain pre-designated parts/streets of the city is underway.
- Support for textile related businesses through the Thimble Network as well as other craft related businesses is also underway through the provision of incubator space in Belfast and the implementation of marketing initiatives.

In order to support the independent retail sector explicitly the following additional actions are proposed;

1. Support for a business development initiative to assist 30 independent retailers in Belfast (Appendix 1 contains the outline programme). This programme would be subject to the normal tender process. Given the limitation of the programme it is proposed that the city centre area is used as a pilot and that pending success, a further programme may be developed for traders outside the City Centre subsequently.
2. Investigation of suitable premises in the City Centre for craft outlets (possible use of unit in Smithfield Market, which would also add as an attractor for Smithfield) A further report will be brought to Committee in due course.

Resource Implications

Financial

£50,000 to implement a programme for 30 businesses.

Human Resources

Absorbed by Development Department staff in economic development, Markets and Tourism.

Recommendations

That Members agree to support the development and implementation of an independent retail support programme for 30 businesses in Belfast.”

A Member expressed concern that the pilot programme would be operated only in the City centre and pointed out that a large number of independent retailers operated on the arterial routes.

In response, the Director of Development indicated that in the forthcoming financial year additional money would be available to expand the proposed scheme. She suggested that this money could be used in conjunction with that which was available for the proposed pilot scheme, thereby enabling a larger pilot project to be undertaken involving the independent retail sector in both the City centre and on the arterial routes.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that, in addition to the programme to support thirty independent retail businesses in the City centre, the pilot scheme be enlarged to include the independent retail sector on the arterial routes and in the suburbs of Belfast.

Proposed New Road Junction at Connsbank

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 17th January, it had considered a report regarding the final draft of the Titanic Quarter Masterplan/Development Framework and had endorsed the response which had been provided by officers to the document. This response had included comments on the general approach to transportation matters, including the developer meeting the costs associated with the provision of a new road junction at Connsbank to provide vehicular access to Titanic Quarter.

The Committee was advised that, following several meetings between Council officers and representatives from the Planning and Roads Services and Titanic Quarter Limited, the Council had submitted two responses to these Bodies, copies of which had previously been circulated to the Members, regarding the proposed junction. These had raised a number of concerns, including the loss of Council-owned land at Victoria Park and King George V Playing Fields.

After discussion, the Committee endorsed the contents of the two response documents and agreed that the proposed new junction at Connsbank be included on the agenda for the special meeting of the Committee which would be held to discuss Titanic Quarter. In addition, the Committee agreed that representatives from the Planning and Roads Services and Titanic Quarter Limited be invited to attend that meeting.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners

Arising from discussion in the previous matter, the Director of Development informed the Members that the Belfast Harbour Commissioners had indicated that they were keen for the Committee to visit the Port to discuss matters of mutual interest and to enable the Members to view the facilities which were available within Belfast Harbour.

The Committee agreed that a special meeting in this regard be held on a date to be determined in conjunction with the Chairman.

Business Improvement Districts

The Director informed the Members that Business Improvement Districts, which had been pioneered in America, were operating in England and Wales and would shortly be introduced in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. These Districts were designed to encourage the development of business-led innovation and a greater degree of local control over the provision and administration of services. However, the legislation to introduce such Districts did not exist in Northern Ireland, although various initiatives to establish voluntary Business Improvement Districts were at a formative stage.

She indicated that the scheme involved charging businesses within the designated area an agreed levy based on the rateable value of the property. This levy was used on projects to improve or regenerate the local district. The Districts were not a substitute for investment by Central and Local Government but provided additional investment to strengthen an area's economic outlook.

The Director indicated that research had been undertaken which suggested that there would be merit in a Business Improvement District model being established in Belfast and that it would be advantageous for Northern Ireland to learn from the United Kingdom's experiences and put in place a refined Business Improvement District process which reflected the needs and sensitivities of the City.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and the comments thereon of the Director.

European Unit – Update Report

The Committee considered the undernoted report regarding the progress which had been achieved in the previous month by the European Unit:

“Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that regular progress is reported to the Development Committee with regard to European activity. With respect to the February Meeting progress will be reported on:

- (i) Unit Staff
- (ii) Quartiers En Crise
- (iii) Lithuanian Trade Event

Key Issues

1. Unit Staff

Members will be aware that the European Unit has been in existence since 1 September 2003. The Unit is located within the Development Department and is the only dedicated European Local Authority resource on the Island of Ireland. It is comprised of a European Manager, two core European Officer posts and two project teams – Connect and Interreg.

The European Officer posts are fixed term contracts and it has come to our attention in reviewing contract documentation that the contract of one of the European Officers was wrongly written which terminates the post on 31 March 2007. In reality funding is in place to support the post to December 2007, therefore Members are asked to approve this and extend the contract to December 2007. At present the European Unit is undergoing an external objective review and early signs are showing that the Unit has performed a valuable role to both City Council and its Stakeholders. The European Officer posts are critical to the service provided by the Unit. Monies have been allocated to support the two European Officers' posts within the 2007/2008 estimates.

In the context of maintaining the current level of European project and policy support for Belfast City Council, Members are asked to extend the Officer post to December 2007 with a view to reviewing the long term viability of the posts on consideration of the European Unit review.

2. Quartiers En Crise

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council is a member of the 'Quartiers En Crise' or 'Neighbourhoods in Crisis' network.

This network was established in 1989 and consists of over twenty European towns and cities. Its principal aim is to facilitate the exchange of views and best practice for persons living in, working in and representing some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Europe. In addition, network members have been involved in a number of projects designed to promote social inclusion and integrated approaches to urban regeneration. Members should note that the network was renamed in 2004 and is now known as the QECERAN – European Regeneration Area Network. This decision was taken to put a more positive slant on the organisation's name and image and reflect the over arching urban regeneration focus of all programme activity. The network is managed by a small secretariat based in Brussels and directed by an over arching Executive Bureau of which the City of Belfast is Treasurer.

The Belfast Group is led by the North and West Belfast Health Trust and its membership includes the Belfast Regeneration Office, the South & East Trust, the Belfast Area Partnership Boards, DEL, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Belfast Education and Library Board, Belfast City Council and communities throughout Belfast. The Council was formerly represented on the Group by the Director of Development and since 2003, by the European Manager.

The Belfast Group played a key role in securing European funding for North Belfast under the Urban II Community Initiative, the Interreg IIC Programme and for West & North Belfast under the Equal Community Initiative.

Since 2004 the Belfast Quartiers En Crise group has chaired a Belfast Urbact Steering Committee to co-ordinate and promote the six Urbact Programmes that the City of Belfast is involved in. Members will be aware of the Council's direct involvement in three of these programmes including:

- One focusing on youth with direct participation through the Community and Recreation Department
- One focusing on urban integration which is now complete
- One focusing on urban regeneration entitled Regenera led by the City of Lyon with participation by the Development Department.
- Members are asked to agree to the annual subscription to Quartiers en Crise at a cost of £2,500.

3. Lithuanian Trade Event

Members will be aware that aware that the European Unit engages regularly with the European Honorary Consuls across Northern Ireland.

Increasingly the Consuls are keen to develop actual projects with the Council and other stakeholders and one such example is a current request from the Lithuanian Honorary Consul Mr Bill Sinnerton, to co host a trade event in Belfast City Hall on 24 April 2007. The aim of the event is to invite companies from across all sections in Belfast and the Metropolitan region to hear first hand of the sectoral trade opportunities within Lithuania as a fast developing European Member state.

The Deputy Minister for Economy in Lithuania the Trade Attache based in London, the Klaipeda Chamber of Commerce and the Honorary Consul will all participate in the event.

A planning visit was held with the European Unit and the Lord Mayor by the Lithuanian Ambassador on 2 February 2007.

Members are asked to agree to host an event at City Hall and provide a maximum budget of £1,500 to cover events and catering costs.

Resource Implications

1. There are no unforeseen resource implications to support the European Officer post as salary costs have already been allocated from within the Development Department estimates and the European funded local Economic Development Plan.
2. £2,500 resources required for the Quartiers En Crise Subscription
3. £1,500 resources required for hosting the Lithuanian Trade Event

Recommendations

1. To approve the European officer post extension to 31 December 2007.
2. To approve the Annual Quartiers En Crise Subscription of £2,500 for period 2007/2008

- 3. To approve the use of the City Hall for a Lithuanian Trade Event the budget of £1,500 to host the event and attendance of the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development.”**

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Laganside – Update Report

The Committee agreed to refer to its special meeting on 21st February an Update Report regarding the current situation concerning the Laganside Corporation.

Consultancy Framework Agreements

The Director reminded the Committee that the Project Management Unit had a number of framework agreements in place in connection with construction-related design consultancy services and for the undertaking of economic appraisals.

She pointed out that it had become apparent that two further frameworks would be required to enable the Council to engage specialist consultants to provide advice on planning decisions and to assist in the development of projects through the planning system. She informed the Members that submissions from interested companies had already been invited and that a Select List would be created from which bids for planning advice would be invited as and when necessary. She indicated that, in order to avoid the need for repetitive approvals, it would be advantageous if the Committee delegated authority to accept any bids which exceeded the quotation limit, which was currently £30,000, to the Director and the Head of Urban Development, in consultation with the Chairman. In addition, to prevent delays in establishing the framework agreement, it would be advantageous if the Committee were to delegate authority to the Director and the Head of Urban Development, in consultation with the Chairman, to approve the Select List from which bids would subsequently be invited.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Director and the Head of Urban Development, in consultation with the Chairman, to:

- (i) approve the Select List from which bids for planning advice would subsequently be invited; and
- (ii) accept any future bids during the term of the framework agreement for planning advice which exceeded the quotation limit.

2007 Ambit Programme

The Committee noted that the Director of Development had been selected to participate in the Ambit Programme which was an annual study visit to America and provided civic leaders in Northern Ireland with the opportunity to learn about certain aspects of economic, social and cultural development in the United States.

Tenders for the Supply and Delivery of Annual Supplies

The Director of Development informed the Committee that tenders had been invited by public advertisement for the supply and delivery of Annual Supplies for the following:

- (i) supply of promotional items, which would be for the period 1st April, 2007 to 31st March, 2010;
- (ii) supply of protective gloves, which would be for the period 1st April, 2007 to 31st March, 2010;
- (iii) the supply of broken stones and screenings, which would be for the period 1st April, 2007 to 31st March, 2008; and
- (iv) the supply and delivery of litter pickers, which would be for the period 1st April, 2007 to 31st March, 2011.

The Director reported that twenty companies had submitted tenders for the various categories of work. The schedule of the tenders being recommended for acceptance had previously been circulated to the Members. She stated that the list of recommendations made represented the lowest, equal lowest, lowest tender on aggregate to specification or most economically advantageous tender received and that they were based on the evaluation criteria listed within the individual tenders.

The Committee noted the comments of the Director of Development and adopted the recommendations contained within the aforementioned schedule, a copy of which was signed by the Chairman (Councillor McCausland).

Future of the PLACE Design Centre

The Head of Urban Development reminded the Committee that, in 2003, it had agreed to provide a PLACE Design Centre in order to promote awareness and understanding of quality urban design and architecture and to facilitate community outreach in relation to the built environment. The Centre had subsequently been located in a ground floor space opening onto Fountain Street which was included within the lease for the Belfast Welcome Centre. In 2004, the Council had entered into an agreement with the Royal Society for Ulster Architects to manage the Centre and employ appropriate staff. She indicated that the Royal Society was responsible for programming and organising events within the Centre and employed a curator and administrative assistant. Since 2004, over thirty exhibitions had taken place within the Design Centre and 8,237 persons had visited the facility.

The Head of Urban Development informed the Members that an evaluation of the project was underway currently, although the results would not be known until April, after which it would be necessary to develop a business case for the longer term future of a built environment centre for Belfast. However, in order to do this, it would be necessary for the existing arrangement, which was due to expire in September, to continue until March, 2008. She pointed out that the maintenance costs of the building, which were met by the Council, were approximately £5,000 per annum and that this amount had been included in the estimates for the forthcoming financial year.

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The management costs of the Centre were met by the Royal Society for Ulster Architects. She informed the Members that a further report regarding the longer term future of the built environment centre would be submitted to the Committee later in the year.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the agreement between the Royal Society for Ulster Architects regarding the PLACE Design Centre be extended until March, 2008.

Chairman