

Development Committee

Wednesday, 5th December, 2001

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT) SUB-COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Browne (Chairman);
the High Sheriff (Councillor Crowe); and
Councillors Alderdice, Cush, McCarthy
M. McGimpsey, O'Broin, O'Donnell and E. Smyth.

Also attended: Councillor O'Reilly.

In attendance: Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives;
Dr. E. Jackson, Economic Development Manager;
Ms. L. Leonard, Economic Development Officer; and
Mr. J. Goodall, Committee Administrator.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 29th October and 7th November, which had been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Mr. Jim Lyons

The Chairman (Councillor M. Browne) advised the Members that Mr. Jim Lyons of the Friends of Belfast Initiative in Denver was currently on a short visit to the City and was in attendance to give a brief presentation in respect of the growing relationship between Belfast and Denver. Mr. Lyons, accompanied by Mr. Frank Costello, the Council's United States Consultant and representatives of the Fighting Bull Technology Company of Denver, was admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

The Chairman paid tribute to Mr. Lyons, an advisor to the former President Clinton, for his tireless work in promoting peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland. He pointed out that this was Mr. Lyons' sixty-second visit to Belfast, a fact which indicated his commitment to furthering the economic development of the region.

Mr. Lyons thanked the Chairman for his comments and pointed out that his visit was a follow-up to the recent visit of the Mayor of Denver and had been undertaken with a view to formalising the City's links with Denver. He pointed out that Denver was one of the top five economic centres in the Rockies region of the United States and outlined the various areas in which links with Belfast might be established to the mutual benefit of both cities. He concluded by introducing the representatives of the Fighting Bull Technology Company who were visiting the City with a view to developing a project in association with the Queen's University of Belfast.

In reply to a question from a Member in relation to urban regeneration, Mr. Lyons outlined the major success which had been achieved in regenerating a derelict area of downtown Denver and pointed out that he would look forward to introducing the Members to the prime movers of that successful regeneration during a future visit to Denver. In reply to a further question, Mr. Lyons pointed out that he would be contacting Investment Belfast Limited with a view to liaising with it in promoting future projects. Mr. Lyons responded to further questions by elaborating on the growth and improved quality of life which had been generated in Denver and pointed out that hi-tech industries and the production of agricultural products formed the basis of its economy. He concluded by highlighting the improved air links between Denver and the United Kingdom and stated that these would assist in developing closer links between both cities.

The Chairman (Councillor M. Browne) thanked Mr. Lyons for being in attendance and for the information which he had provided and presented him with a framed certificate of appointment as a Friend of Belfast. The delegation then left the meeting.

Atlantic Rim Economic Summit

The Head of Economic Initiatives provided for the information of the Members an overview of the Economic Summit which had taken place in Boston from 9th till 11th April. In considering the discussions which had taken place in relation to spatial developments, she outlined their relevance to the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan process and to the development of the Brownfields Network. The Head of Economic Initiatives outlined also the progress which had been achieved in the development of tourism, particularly in relation to marketing, branding and logistics. The Members were advised also of the benefits which had been derived from discussing business development between the Cities of the Atlantic Rim Initiative. The Head of Economic Initiatives pointed out that detailed background materials and lecture notes had been collated by the Economic Development Unit and copies of these would be available on request to any Member who wished further detailed information on the events of the Economic Summit.

The Head of Economic Initiatives proposed that the next annual meeting of the Atlantic Rim Initiative should be held in Belfast and timed to coincide with the "Titanic: Made in Belfast" events which were scheduled to be held in early April. She sought authority to compile a full programme of events, together with associated costs, and to submit this for consideration by the Sub-Committee early in the New Year.

The Sub-Committee granted the authority sought.

International Council for Small Business - World Congress 2003

The Sub-Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the above-mentioned Conference which would be held in Belfast from 15th till 18th June, 2003:

"Purpose of Report

To advise members in respect of a request for support for the International Council for Small Business World Conference, to be held in Belfast from 15-18 June, 2003.

Background

International Council for Small Business

The International Council for Small Business (ICSB) has headquarters in the USA and has 11 affiliate organisations which give it a worldwide presence. Affiliates are based in Australasia; Brazil; Canada; Caribbean; Europe; Japan; Puerto Rico; South Korea; Singapore; South Africa; Taiwan; and the USA. The World Conference is an annual event which has been held every year for the last 48 years. It is the most respected, most successful and well established small business event of its type.

The opportunity to host the conference is awarded on the outcome of a competitive bidding process. Previously, many regions within the UK and Ireland have tendered, to host the conference but none has been successful. It is seen as a significant honour that Belfast has succeeded where others have failed.

The right to host the world conference has been won by the University of Ulster in partnership with LEDU. The local organising committee is grateful for the support and commitment of the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, whose input to the process was very instrumental in ensuring the success of the bid.

The International Council for Small Business integrates the activities of diverse organisations and individuals involved in the creation and distribution of new knowledge on small and medium sized enterprises. This knowledge base comprises both small business management processes and entrepreneurial development activities.

ICSB stimulates research and information exchange through national, regional and world conferences, educator/teacher exchanges, small and medium enterprise consulting/advising, global networking, and publications such as the ICSB Bulletin and the Journal of Small Business Management.

ICSB encourages and provides support for knowledge exchange with similar or complementary organisations worldwide, including strategic relationships to facilitate exchanges between organisations and individuals.

Conference

The Belfast conference will feature keynote addresses, plenary sessions, panel discussions and breakout sessions. Papers will be presented on many aspects of small business research, policy and best practice.

The conference will consider many aspects of entrepreneurial endeavour, innovative approaches, leading edge research and ways in which the policy and attitudes of governments around the globe can be influenced.

This event has a strong and prestigious history and, as noted, competition to host it is strong. It has been held in the following locations:

1994	Strasbourg	1999	Naples
1995	Sydney	2000	Brisbane
1996	Stockholm	2001	Taipei
1997	San Francisco	2002	Puerto Rico
1998	Singapore	2003	Belfast

The ICSB world conference will offer an important opportunity to showcase Belfast as a tourism destination and will create the potential for many important business meetings and possible inward investment opportunities.

The programme will also involve a series of pre- and post-conference tours.

Conference Delegates

Attendance at the ICSB World Conference is diverse and reflects the membership of the organisation per se. Typically it attracts between 350 and 500 delegates. The majority of these tend to be:

- Professional and business associates (consultants, bankers, accountants, trainers, publishers etc)
- Government officials and policy makers (including the United Nations, World Bank and ILO representatives)
- National and regional business associations.
- Educators and business researchers

Revenue Generation

Delegates will be high quality corporate representatives and Belfast City Council's own research shows they will spend c. £200 per person per day. With an estimated 400 out of state delegates,

this would realise a potential tourism spend of £240,000 (400 x £200 x 3 days). In addition the conference will generate approximately 1,200 bed nights during a period of traditionally low occupancy.

Proposal

Belfast City Council has received a request from the Steering Committee for sponsorship of £30,000 over three financial years and for the provision of a civic dinner during the event. The sponsorship would be payable in three equal amounts (i) upon agreement; (ii) March 2002 and (iii) March 2003; and would be directed to marketing materials, promotion of the conference on a global basis, venue hire and conference speakers.

Funding Context

The overall funding requirement to host the conference and to ensure that it takes place will be of the order of £250,000, which will be financed from delegate fees, and sponsorship from government agencies and the private sector.

Steering Committee

The committee meets on a regular basis and is comprised of representatives of the University of Ulster and LEDU. A professional event management company has been appointed to manage and bring forward the project on a day to day basis. The steering committee reports on progress to the main board of ICSB on a quarterly basis.

Link to Development Strategy Objectives and Activities

This proposal fits well with the Economic Development Strategy 2000 - 2003 and is especially relevant to the stated ideals of the Development Department and its role in establishing Belfast as a Beacon City.

In addition this sponsorship complements pioneering Belfast City Council initiatives such as Friends of Belfast. Although a worldwide organisation, ICSB has its headquarters in the USA and is in direct contact with many of the key business and academic audiences which are targeted by Belfast City Council. This sponsorship will provide another important tool in the marketing armoury and will significantly raise the profile of the city with primary US audiences.

The conference will have a strong marketing and communications programme which will allow significant opportunities to market Belfast. This will involve electronic promotion (e-mail and internet), traditional print media (brochures etc) and a PR campaign.

As Members will be aware, the vast majority of companies in Ireland, the UK and indeed central Europe are in fact 'small businesses' but yet they are not always recognised for the

significant contribution they make to the economy and to growth. Again this sponsorship will sit well with other Belfast City Council initiatives as represented within the theme of Business Growth and Development.

Environmental Implications

None

Development Strategy Reference: 4.1 Creating Prosperity

To establish the Council's lead position as the voice for economic growth in the city through;

- i) the promotion of Belfast domestically and internationally
- ii) to promote Belfast as the first choice for sustainable inward investment and accessibility

Budget

It is estimated that Belfast City Council's contribution to this global conference including hospitality, will not exceed £40,000.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members approve the request for funding of £10,000 over each of the three planning years and a civic dinner.

Decision Required

To approve the foregoing recommendations."

After discussion, the Sub-Committee adopted the recommendation contained within the report.

Denver Visit

The Sub-Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 7th November, it had agreed to accept an invitation from Mayor Webb of Denver, Colorado to undertake a civic or trade visit to that City in the near future.

The Economic Development Manager advised the Members that, subsequent to that decision, Dr. Frank Costello, the Council's United States Consultant, had been undertaking preliminary investigative work to identify key business and academic leaders in Denver and, to date, a number of high profile individuals had indicated their willingness to consider assisting the Council to extend the Friends of Belfast Initiative on a sectoral basis. He proposed that the Members consider undertaking a fact finding visit to Denver during May, 2002 including a reciprocal visit to the Mayor's office and to establish personal contact with key individuals. He reminded the Sub-Committee that a

similar approach had been adopted in 1999 as a prelude to the highly successful trade

mission to Boston and Pittsburgh in 2000 which had resulted in the securing of £10.5 million of investment for local companies. Accordingly, the proposed preliminary visit would be undertaken with a view to leading a trade mission to Denver during the Autumn of 2002.

The Economic Development Manager outlined the terms of reference for the proposed visit and suggested that the Sub-Committee consider extending this to include the City of Pittsburgh. This element of the visit would seek to consolidate the Friends of Belfast Network in that City, explore opportunities within the medical and business sectors and to research further cultural tourism and creative industries opportunities. In addition, it would attempt to reinforce sectoral relationships which were first established during the trade mission to Pittsburgh in 2000. It would provide also an opportunity to meet with Mr. John Kirkwood, a Board Member of the Ireland Institute and a key Friend of Belfast, who was currently assisting a local growth company in Belfast to expand into the Pennsylvania marketplace and who had developed plans to establish a £10 million investment fund for Belfast businesses. It was considered that, on the basis of previous experience in undertaking Trade Missions, combining visits to more than one city would afford the maximum return in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

Accordingly, the Economic Development Manager recommended that the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Director of Development, the Head of Economic Initiatives, the Economic Development Manager and the Tourism Development Manager (or their nominees) undertake a working visit to Denver and Pittsburgh in April/May, 2002. It was recommended also that a representative of the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau be invited to partake in the working visit, with that Body being responsible for the costs associated with its attendance.

During discussion in the matter, a number of Members expressed the view that it would be appropriate to have the Member representation increased. Accordingly, it was

Moved by the High Sheriff (Councillor Crowe),
Seconded by Councillor O'Donnell,

That the Sub-Committee adopts the recommendation of the Economic Development Manager on the basis that the Chairman of the Principal Committee (or her nominee) be authorised also to partake in the working visit.

On a vote by show of hands six Members voted for the proposal and none against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Friends of Belfast

The Economic Development Manager submitted a report, copies of which had previously been circulated, providing information in respect of the progress which had been achieved in developing further the Friends of Belfast Initiative and seeking approval for the appointment of new members.

He reminded the Members that the Initiative was led by Mr. John Cullinane of the City of Boston and, to date, 180 key persons throughout North America had signed up as Friends of Belfast. The Members were advised that, since June, work had been

undertaken to reinvigorate the network in Boston and to initiate exploratory work in New York and Denver. A progress report in this regard, which had been compiled by Mr. Frank Costello, the Council's Consultant in the United States, had been appended to the report.

In considering the report, the Members were advised that the success of the Boston model remained vital to the expansion of the network and provided evidence of the economic, civic and strategic planning benefits which could be achieved to the mutual benefit of participating cities. The Economic Development Manager pointed out that, despite the tragic events of September 11th, progress was being made in relation to the formation of a Friends of Belfast Network in New York. It was pointed out also that attention would be concentrated on the City of Denver on the basis of its growth sector compatibility with Belfast in the fields of biotechnology and electronics, software development and cultural tourism and the arts. He highlighted the success of the Friends of Belfast website and pointed out that it was intended to redesign the site in December to make it more innovative and interactive.

The Economic Development Manager concluded by pointing out that, over recent months, the Economic Development Unit had received in excess of twenty requests for the Friends of Belfast promotional and application pack. This had resulted in six formal applications being received and, these having been evaluated, it was considered that each of these individuals would contribute significantly to the network in their respective cities. Accordingly, the Economic Development Manager recommended that the undernoted persons be appointed as Friends of Belfast:

Dr. Lawrence Fiorentino	Chairman - Cambridge Investments, Boston
Mr. Harry Grill	Boston Attorney
Mr. Paul Neeson	Vice President of Deland Gibson Insurance Brokers, Massachusetts
Mayor Wellington Webb	Mayor of Denver
Councillor Edward Thomas	City of Denver
Councillor Polly Flobeck	City of Denver

After discussion, the Sub-Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that the above-mentioned persons be appointed as Friends of Belfast.

Chairman