

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 22nd September, 2021

SPECIAL REMOTE MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Alderman Kingston; and
Councillors Donnelly, Ferguson, Gormley,
Harvey, Hussey, Lyons, Maskey,
McLaughlin, McMullan, O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mr. F. Smith, Project Sponsor; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported for Alderman Dorrian and Councillors Howard and Whyte.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentations

Transport Hub Alternative Group

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. W. Dickson and Mr. K. Martin from the Transport Hub Alternative Group to the meeting.

Mr. Dickson thanked the Committee for accepting a presentation from the Transport Hub Alternative Group and explained that the organisation aimed to raise its concerns regarding plans by Translink for a transport hub, and that he felt that there had not been adequate political involvement or representation at relevant meetings.

Mr. Dickson and Mr. Martin outlined several reasons which had caused concern with regard to Translink's plans, which included:

- that Translink's proposals involved demolition of the Boyne Bridge and replacing it with a busy four lane road;
- that there would be Increased traffic, noise and pollution, especially for Sandy Row residents;

- that the proposals involved the demolition of the 1936 Bridge, the structure of which, was unique and was a critical part of Belfast's industrial Heritage;
- that the existing station was to be replaced with commercial developments provided by the private sector;
- that two entrances to the station create a Catholic/Nationalist access and a Protestant Loyalist Route;
- Potential shadow casting, as a result of the positioning of a thirteen-story office building;
- that Weavers Cross was a weak name and suggested naming it 'Belfast Central',
- that, a report by THAG indicated that Translink had not followed the Gunning Principles in their Consultation Process;
- Concerns regarding the disappearance of the traditional entrance from Great Victoria Street; and
- That the proposals could see the disappearance of traditional names such as The Great Northern, Great Victoria and Boyne Bridge.

Mr. Dickson stated that progress and history could and must co-exist and that a review of the planning of the Transport Hub development should take place to allow concerns to be raised and addressed. He asked that Members consider supporting the Transport Hub Alternative Group in its pursuit of a review and to convene a working group to investigate all the aspects of the plans.

In response to some of the concerns raised, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy reported that there were two planning applications to be considered, one of which had already been adjudicated on by the Department for Infrastructure which concerned the Transport Hub, Saltwater Square and the treatment of the Boyne and Saltwater bridges. He stated that, on that basis, Translink was bringing the project forward to construction stage.

He added that Belfast City Council was expecting to receive the second planning application, for the Weaver's Cross Regeneration Development, which would be considered by the Members of the Planning Committee.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Dickson and Mr. Martin for their presentation, and they retired from the meeting.

The Members of the Committee agreed to note the content of the presentation.

Cathedral Gardens - Update on Masterplan and Next Steps

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development of the emerging master plan for the redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to;

- Note that they will receive a presentation on the emerging design concepts for the Cathedral Gardens Master Plan from Council appointed consultants – Hassell - at this meeting (22nd September 2021)
- note that the next stage will be to go out for public consultation on the concept design with a further update to be brought back.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will recall that at Committee last month they received a detailed update paper in respect of ‘City Centre Open Spaces’. In this it was highlighted that the City Centre Connectivity Study: ‘A Bolder Vision’, in line with the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), proposes the development of a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city centre with a greener, walkable and connected core. BCCRIS identifies that the city centre lacks major publicly accessible open spaces, and that the majority of open spaces are disconnect and have a hard landscape and character, with the centre lacking in greener streets that can provide relief in the most densely developed part of the city. BCCRIS has also identified the opportunity to provide a sizable new open space and greening opportunities by linking St. Anne’s Cathedral to Cathedral Gardens and Writers Square. At the Future City Workshop, held with Members of the CG&R Committee in May 2021, Members also noted that the provision of high quality, inclusive and sustainable open spaces for families and city users to enjoy and utilise the outdoor environment was a key priority.

3.2 The Council’s key asset in the city centre in terms of open space is Cathedral Gardens. The SP&R Committee has previously agreed the redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens. Members will be aware that originally this was to be taken forward as part of Streets Ahead Phase 3. However, when this was placed on hold it was agreed the redevelopment of the Gardens should be decoupled from this.

3.3 The redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens provides a significant opportunity to inject critical and much needed quality public urban space into the city centre. The area adjacent to and surrounding Cathedral Gardens is home to a rich history of fabrication and cultural identity. It is a precinct in the process of evolution through a mixture of commercial, education and housing related developments that are transforming this part of Belfast into a new and vibrant mixed-use neighbourhood for the city.

3.4 Members have been advised that the Council have commissioned Hassell Consultants to develop a concept masterplan for the redevelopment of the Cathedral Gardens space. The Master Plan has been commissioned with the intention to create a unique urban space. As part of this process a number of engagement sessions have taken place with key stakeholders to inform the emerging design concepts that will be presented to Members at this Committee for consideration. The emerging design concepts include the reinvigorating the civic space, the integration of landscape and urban forestry and building in exemplary grey to green infrastructure along with looking at how the site can be programmed to become a year round asset for use by all audiences.

The redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens is currently a Stage 2 – Uncommitted on the Capital Programme. The project will be required to go through the 3 stage approval process as agreed for all capital projects. This includes consultation on proposed designs. The next proposed step is to go out for wider consultation on the concept masterplan including public consultation via the ‘Your Say’ consultation platform, continued engagement with key stakeholders (e.g. UU, DFC, DFI, St. Anne’s Cathedral), and targeted consultation with a range of stakeholders (e.g. the Events sector). Following this the final proposed design will be brought back to Members

3.5 As previously outlined a key consideration during delivery of the project will be how to offset the loss of open space at Cathedral Gardens during the permanent construction works, with potential utilisation of vacant city centre lands for temporary open space currently under exploration by Officers. Pending agreement and subject to funding it is proposed to recreate a play space within a suitable site. The final scope of these works will take into consideration the final design for the redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens to ensure complementarity. This work is continuing and an

update report will be brought into this Committee for approval prior to proceeding.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

Finance - The redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens is an agreed project on the Council's Capital Programme.

Resources - Officer time in terms of the next steps of consultation

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process."

The Committee agreed to:

- Note that they would receive a presentation on the emerging design concepts for the Cathedral Gardens Master Plan from Council appointed consultants – Hassell; and
- note that the next stage will be to go out for public consultation on the concept design with a further update to be brought back.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during the presentation associated with the report as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. A. Bruce, Ms. N. Albertin and Mr. S. Travers, from Hassell Studio to the meeting and they presented the Committee with an overview of design concepts for the Cathedral Gardens Masterplan.

Upon completion of the presentation, the Chairperson thanked Mr. A. Bruce, Ms. N. Albertin and Mr. S. Travers for their presentation, and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the content of the presentation.

Chairperson