

Development Committee

Wednesday, 11th June, 2008

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Humphrey (Deputy Chairman) (in the Chair) ;
and
Councillors Attwood, Campbell, Convery, Crozier,
D. Dodds, Kelly, Kyle, McCausland, Mhic Giolla Mhín,
Rodgers and Stoker.

Also attended: Councillors Jones and Mullaghan.

In attendance: Ms. M. T. McGivern, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives;
Ms. C. Taggart, Community Services Manager;
Mr. T. Husbands, Managing Director,
the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Halls; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor M. Browne) and Councillor Ekin.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th May were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd June, subject to:

- (i) the amendment of the minute under the heading "Planning and Transport Issues – Residents Parking Consultation" to provide that the Council's response indicate that any future parking schemes in residential areas be introduced on the basis that there would be no charge levied against residents; and
- (ii) the omission of the minute under the heading "Economic Development Update – Co-financing for European Social Fund Applications" which, at the request of Councillor Jones, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Ms. Siobhan Stevenson

The Chairman informed the Committee that this would be the last meeting which would be attended by Ms. Siobhan Stevenson, Culture and Arts Manager, as she was leaving the Council to take up a new position. He thanked Ms. Stevenson for the work she had undertaken on behalf of the Development Department and wished her well in her new appointment.

Ms. Stevenson thanked the Chairman for his kind remarks.

West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the above-mentioned matter to enable the organisation to make a presentation to Councillors from the Shankill area of the City.

Co-financing for European Social Fund Applications

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 14th May under the heading "Co-financing for European Social Fund Applications" which had been taken back by the Chairman at the Council meeting on 2nd June at the request of Councillor Jones. An extract of the minute in this regard is set out hereunder:

"The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that the European Social Fund provided funding for training measures to assist people into employment and to enhance their career prospects. The closing date for applications under this Programme had been November, 2007 and successful projects had been notified in December. She advised the Committee that the Council had been successful in attracting funding for a project to support access to employment in the independent retail and hospitality sectors. It had emerged subsequently that eight projects which had applied for funding had indicated that the Council would be co-financing their schemes. However, at the time of submission, only two projects had advised the Council of this. At its meeting on 21st February, the Committee had agreed to co-fund these two projects, together with a further initiative which had been submitted by Women in Business.

The Head of Economic Initiatives advised the Committee that the Council had been requested recently to consider the undernoted additional three projects for co-financing over the next three year period:

- (i) 'Advancement of Women Initiative', submitted by the Training for Women Network which had requested co-financing of £54,068 per year;*
- (ii) 'Women Working for Themselves', submitted by the East Belfast Enterprise which had requested co-financing of £26,237 per year;*
- (iii) 'Skills for Enterprise', submitted by East Belfast Enterprise which had requested co-financing of £30,948 per year;*

She advised the Members that the other two projects which had named the Council as potential match funders had not yet formally approached the Council.

She informed the Committee that no budget had been set aside for these three new schemes when the Economic Development Unit's Business Plan had been prepared. In addition, these projects could not be co-financed through any other European funding stream. Therefore, the Department was not in a position to provide financial assistance to these projects.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed not to support the three requests which had been received for co-financing under the European Social Fund's, 'Helping People Into Employment' scheme."

Councillor Jones, who had requested that the item be taken back, informed the Committee that he was concerned at the decision not to provide funding to the Advancement of Women Initiative which had been submitted by the Training for Women Network. He pointed out that the aim of this scheme was to assist unemployed women to gain employment and he believed that the Committee should support the application. He requested that the Committee agree to financially assist the project.

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Members that the Council had not been consulted by the three organisations whose requests had been considered at the meeting on 14th May prior to them advising the Department for Employment and Learning that the Council would be a co-funder. Therefore, the Council had made no provision in its budget for these projects. In addition, the Council was aware that two other projects had named the Council as potential co-funders and that they had not yet formally approached the Council. She pointed out that if the Committee were minded to accede to the request from Councillor Jones it would be necessary to make savings elsewhere in the Department's budget.

The Director of Development indicated that, should the Committee agree to provide finance to the Advancement of Women Initiative, it would also have to consider providing funding to the two other projects which had been discussed at the meeting on 14th May. She informed the Committee that the situation could have been avoided if the Department for Employment and Learning, which had organised the funding call, had required organisations to submit to it a letter of commitment from co-funders with the application for funding.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter to enable a deputation to seek an urgent meeting with the Minister for Employment and Learning.

Forum for Local Government and the Arts

The Managing Director of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Halls informed the Committee that the Council was represented currently on the Forum for Local Government and the Arts by the Chairman of the former Arts Sub-Committee, the Culture and Arts Manager and a representative from one of the organisations which received multi-annual funding from the Council.

He explained that the Forum, which aimed to ensure that the arts featured prominently in local politics and undertook an instrumental role in raising awareness of the value of the arts at a local community level, organised plenary meetings on a quarterly basis and an Annual Conference. The organisation intended to hold its 2008 Conference in Ballymena on 4th November with the theme of "Growing Communities through the Arts" and that the cost of attending would be £80 per delegate.

The Managing Director pointed out also that the Council's fee for membership of the Forum was based on the City's population and was now due for payment, in the sum of £3,324.

During discussion, several Members expressed the view that, since the Council paid considerably more in membership fees to the Forum than other local authorities in Northern Ireland, the Council should be entitled to a larger representation on the Forum than was the case currently.

Following further discussion, the Committee agreed:

- (i) to the payment of the Council's membership fee for the 2008/2009 year to the Forum for Local Government and the Arts in the sum of £3324, subject to the Council obtaining additional seats on the Forum; and
- (ii) that any member of the Committee who so wished, together with no more than two officers, be authorised to attend the Forum's Annual Conference on 4th November.

Consultation on Historic Buildings Grant-Aid Scheme

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Environment and Heritage Service is the government agency with responsibility for advising on and the implementing environmental policy and strategy in Northern Ireland. Its aim is ‘To protect, conserve and promote our natural environment and built heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.’

The Environment and Heritage Service currently offers financial assistance to owners of eligible buildings, through a Historic Buildings Grant Programme which provides financial aid for works of repair and maintenance to the historic fabric of a building. The scheme is designed to off set the additional costs related to historic buildings and to ensure that they are carried out to appropriate conservation standards which preserve the historic integrity of the buildings concerned.

Key Issues

A consultation document has been issued to seek views on proposed changes to the existing policy for funding to non-governmental organisations. The principle change is to extend the assistance to cover the majority of listed building (of all levels) as currently only the limited number of building listed as grade A and B1 are included. There are also new proposals for funding to Building Preservation Trusts.

The key changes to existing policy are:

- To extend provision of grant aid to B2 grade listed buildings
- Implement as single rate of 35% grant-aid on eligible costs
- Ensure that professional agents are suitable qualified
- That works resulting in removal of any original character will not be grant aided
- To extend aid to preventative maintenance works
- Maintain grant aid for thatch work at 75% of costs
- Extend grant aid to other areas including setting elements and elements within the cartilage of a listed building (see proposal for a full list)
- To provide access as a condition of funding
- To retain the enhanced level of grant aid (90%) for owners in receipt of benefits
- To retain the existing policy in relation to ecclesiastical building (due to exemption from listed building consent)

Outline of recommended response to the changes

It is recommended that the Council welcomes the above changes, however, that concerns are expressed regarding the resources available to support the recommended measures including the funding and the skills resources available. In relation to the inclusion of additional element to be funded it is suggested that the certain elements may be disproportionately expensive in terms of the benefit to historic fabric and that consideration should be given to specifying in the listing a wider range of elements that might be included. The justification for exemption regarding ecclesiastical buildings is also questioned.

Key changes to the proposed funding for Building Preservation Trusts

- To provide funding for Building Preservations Trusts
- To provide up to £500,000 from the existing budget for this purpose

- To provide funding through the same organisation relating to different projects
- To manage funding through a third party; the Architectural Heritage Fund
- To proposed specific conditions for funding

Outline of recommended response in relation to proposed funding for Building Preservation Trusts

It is recommended that the proposals are broadly welcomed as enhancing the role of Building Preservation Trusts which are a particularly effective way to bring back into use many threatened historic buildings. Some comment is also included on the specific conditions relating to the support such as distinction between recurrent funding and capital loans, however, there was felt to be a lack of detail included in the proposals to enable detailed comment.

Resource Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications

Human Resources

There are no human resource implications

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members endorse the proposed response set out below:

Response by Belfast City Council to the consultation on proposed changes to listed building funding and administration

Historic Buildings – Grants

PP1. Do you agree with the proposal to extend grant-aid to the B2 category for secular buildings? If not, please explain.

Belfast City Council strongly supports the extension of grant support to all categories of listed buildings, as it believes that the historic built environment is key to a number of issues relating to quality of life, citizens secure and confident in their identities, economic regeneration and minimizing growth in carbon emissions.

PP2. The proposal is that a single rate of 35% grant-aid on eligible costs would be beneficial to assisting with the cost of the repair and maintenance of listed properties.

Is this rate appropriate? If not, please explain

35% is probably an appropriate rate of support to incentivise maintenance. In the case of major work required to save or stabilize a listed building this level of grant will probably not be sufficient to enable less-well-off owners to carry out the work. It is felt that the total amount of money available is not sufficiently large to cope with likely demand, particularly in the early years after the changes, given the ratio of B2 to other categories of listing. £500,000 is not a large sum in the context of overall public expenditure, or indeed the budget of the relevant department.

PP3. The proposal is that all professional agents or designers engaged on grant applications should be suitably qualified and/or experienced as defined by EHS, or an independent professional selection body. Do you agree? If not, please explain.

In this context 'professional agent' seems an unusual term to use and may raise expectations that payments could be made for the service of preparing grant applications. The detail of qualification/experience by the EHS is crucial and two other issues also appear likely to impact on the effectiveness of the initiative: that the overall quantity of expertise available locally is currently inadequate; that there is a danger the hurried import of external experts may give rise to inappropriate practice in the local context – for example English thatchers working with reed may both prefer this material and lack specific skills to work with straw. The problem could appear at all levels, from architects down, and we suggest that a gradual introduction of the measure might be necessary.

PP4. The proposal is that works resulting in the removal of any original character will not be grant aided.

Please provide comments.

Belfast City Council strongly supports this measure and believe that it sits well with the investment it has made in identifying and promoting cultural quarters in the City. 'Original character' requires careful definition, however, in that the character of building does not merely relate to those features in place at the time of its original construction.

PP5. Do you agree with the principle of extending grant-aid to preventative maintenance works in future years?

If not, please explain.

This is an essential and cost effective measure. The City Council urges that the principle should be extended to prioritise stabilization measures, in whatever form. The transferability of lessons gained from trials with an organization with huge capacity and experience of the National Trust might be examined.

PP6. Do you agree that the existing grant policy relating to thatch work should remain unchanged? If not, what are your proposals?

Whilst not immediately relevant to the Belfast area, the principles behind both the preservation of thatched roofs and the associated skills needed to roof with local materials, rather than imported reed, are supported by Belfast City Council

*PP7. Do you agree that the following elements / components should be grant eligible? For example:-
Organs, in churches, etc.*

The City Council thinks it inappropriate to fund organ conservation as part of architectural preservation, certainly beyond the visible external elements. Work to preserve the internal workings is disproportionately expensive in terms of benefit to building preservation and character.

Setting elements, such as cobbled courtyards.

Belfast City Council supports this, and urges particular attention to the preservation of original surfaces as well as to wider contexts, which need sensitive handling, controlled through planning mechanisms.

Clocks, in bell towers, cupolas, etc.

Belfast City Council supports the conservation of original clocks still in situ. This should not necessarily extend to the full restoration to working condition, or grant aid for replacement clocks, though a good argument can be made for replacing clock faces if these are missing.

Other elements within the curtilage of a Listed Building.

Belfast City Council feels this raises the issue of what should be included within listing. It might be a more transparent and consistent approach to grant-aid only what is listed, and hence protected, but additionally include a wider range of elements in listings. This again raises the problematic issue of 'original character'.

PP8. Should a condition of grant-aid be to provide access to the building on particular occasions, for example public access could be made available on two European Heritage Open days in a five year period?

There is a well-established practice involving tax exemptions for material culture, which are held on a central database. The Council is strongly in favour of public access being a condition of grant aid. Making all possible sites available on a single day, such as European Heritage Open Day, does not seem to be the best way forward. We suggest access on a specified number of days, for example ten, but by appointment only. The Council also believes that it has led by example on this issue in terms of working towards maximizing access to its own stock of historic properties when possible.

PP9. Do you agree that the existing grant policy relating to eligible individuals should remain unaltered? If not, what are your proposals?

It would appear likely that in many cases persons in receipt of means-tested benefits could not afford even 10% of major repairs. One way forward might be to give 100% support for this work, but recoup 65% (100% - 35%) on sale or transfer, including inheritance.

PP10. The proposal is that the existing grant policy relating to ecclesiastical buildings should remain unchanged.

If you disagree, what are your proposals?

Should 'Ecclesiastical Exemption' be reconsidered with regard to grant-aid?

Should grant-aid for listed churches be offered with conditions, as stated in alternative ii?

Should grant-aid be made available to all listed churches? This may impact on available grant-aid budget.

Belfast City Council feels that there is limited continuing justification for ecclesiastical exemption especially as there have been some egregious examples of interference with important structures in the past enabled by the exemption.

On that basis, it seems logical to remove any distinction between churches and secular buildings (i.e. under new proposals, all grades eligible for 35% grant) and that ecclesiastical structures compete for support against other applications.

PP11. Are the above proposals, to provide funding to Building Preservation Trusts, appropriate?

Belfast City Council believes that Building Preservations Trusts have made a valuable and substantial contribution to the sustainability of the historic environment and welcomes support which will enable them to continue and increase this role.

The assumption is made that £500,000 per annum will be a specific N. Ireland allocation within the overall Architectural Heritage Fund pot. This should be allocated by the same criteria as the general fund, but informed by the relative local importance of the building.

PP12. £500K represents a significant proportion of the Historic Buildings grant-aid budget. (a) Is this figure appropriate, and (b) is a revolving fund structure appropriate?

Belfast City Council suggests that a distinction needs to be made between annual expendable grant-in-aid and the capital sums offered as loans. As the capital is essentially recoverable and £500k represents only a fraction of many building projects, we suggest that it could be substantially increased in the initial stages of these changes.

The revolving fund model is an excellent one.

PP13. Is this the most appropriate method of providing funding?

As the best way of deriving value from the public purse, both in financial and wider terms, the Council urges that BPTs should be able to retain 'profit' made on projects up to generous limits, provided this is expended on further preservation projects within a certain period.

PP14. What are your views on a third party, specifically AHF, managing this funding for EHS?

The Architectural Heritage Fund has a high level of appropriate experience and it has the potential to deliver capacity additional to that already within the EHS.

PP15. Are the above conditions for an offer for funding appropriate? Are there any other conditions you believe should be included?

The detail provided in this document makes it difficult to comment meaningfully on the grant conditions. In particular, £125,000 is a substantial sum in revenue funding, but less significant in capital loan terms. The exact manner in which 'gainshare' is applied could have significant impact."

Following discussion in the matter, the Committee approved the above comments as the Council's response to the Consultation document, subject to the inclusion of a request that Building Preservation Trusts be made responsible for built heritage as well as historic buildings.

Ulster Hall - Removal of Canopy at Main Entrance

(Mr. M. Stanley, Project Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was advised that the Ulster Hall had been completed in 1862 in accordance with the plans which had been prepared by the architect, W. J. Barre. In 1882 a glazed canopy had been added to the front of the porte cochere at the Bedford Street entrance which, in turn, had been replaced by the current canopy in 1994.

The Managing Director of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Halls indicated that the refurbishment work being undertaken currently to the Hall included the repair and redecoration of the front façade and the provision of a glazed entrance porch to the South side which would permit level access to the building. It was envisaged that the new porch, which would complement the original classical detailing, would become the principal point of entry, thus negating the need for the canopy at the front of the Hall. He pointed out that a request to remove the original canopy had been submitted to both the Planning Service and the Environment and Heritage Service and neither organisation had raised any objection. He indicated that there were a number of reasons why the canopy at the main entrance to the Ulster Hall should be removed, including:

- (i) it was not an original feature of the building;
- (ii) it cluttered the front elevation of the building;
- (iii) it encouraged loitering and anti-social behaviour at the front of the building; and
- (iv) it would enable the original classic proportions of the Hall to be seen and would provide a more welcoming and united frontage.

During discussion in the matter, several Members expressed the view that the current canopy was in keeping with the building and, since one had been in situ for all but the first twenty years of the building's existence, it should be retained. Concern was expressed that applications had been made to both Planning Service and the Environment and Heritage Service to remove the canopy prior to the matter being discussed by the Committee. Other Members indicated that the existing colour of the front of the Hall should be changed during the refurbishment and enquired as to whether the lamps at the front of the building would be retained and when the coat of arms at the top of the front elevation had been replaced with an Ulster badge.

In response, the Project Manager indicated that the Environment and Heritage Service had been consulted regarding the possible removal of the canopy since it was providing considerable funding towards the refurbishment work. In addition, guidance had been sought from it and the Planning Service to enable their views to be reported to the Committee so as to enable it to take an informed decision. He assured the Committee that the lamps would remain at the front of the Ulster Hall. He indicated that he would present a report to the August meeting of the Committee which would provide options regarding the colour scheme for the front elevation and include information regarding the coat of arms at the front of the building.

Following further discussion, the Committee agreed that the glazed canopy at the main entrance of the Ulster Hall be retained and noted that a further report would be submitted to its meeting in August.

Tourism Unit Update

Conference Subvention

The Committee agreed, under the terms of the Council's Subvention Policy, that £1,000 be allocated to assist with the costs of the Northern Ireland Gas Industry Conference to be held in September.

Hospitality and Retail Sectors Project

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 16th January, it had been advised that financial assistance had been obtained from the European Social Fund to enable the Council to implement a training programme which would assist local unemployed people obtain work in the hospitality and retail sectors.

She indicated that it would be necessary for a tendering exercise to be undertaken in order to select the company to deliver the programme. In order to expedite the procurement process, she recommended that the Committee agree to delegate authority to the Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to accept the most advantageous tender received.

In answer to questions from a Member, she indicated that it had been estimated that the project would cost in the region of £495,000 and that the Council's contribution in the first year would be £30,000. She undertook to circulate to the Committee further information regarding the project.

Following further discussion, the Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to accept the most advantageous tender received in order to undertake the hospitality and retail sectors project.

Sister Cities International 2008 Annual Conference

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Members that the Sister Cities International Annual Conference would be taking place in Belfast in 2009. This would be the first time that the event had been held outside the United States and had the potential to contribute at least £2.5 million to the local economy.

She reported that the organisation's 2008 Conference would be held in Kansas from 16th till 19th July and would provide the Council with an opportunity to promote and market the 2009 Conference. She pointed out that the cost of each delegate attending the Conference would be approximately £2,200 if they travelled on economy class flights and £4,020 if business class flights were used.

The Committee agreed that it be represented at the Sister Cities International 2008 Annual Conference by the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the Director (or their nominees).

During discussion a Member indicated that he was of the view that some years previously the former Policy and Resources Committee had agreed that business class flights may be booked where Members or officers were undertaking flights of more than three hours in duration. The Committee requested that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be requested to clarify this matter.

Other Members expressed the view that, since the Committee needed to ensure that ratepayers' money was spent wisely, the party should fly economy class.

After further discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Rodgers,
Seconded by Councillor Crozier,

That the party travelling to the Sister Cities International 2008 Annual Conference in Kansas should fly business class.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Kelly,
Seconded by Councillor Attwood,

That the party travelling to the Sister Cities International 2008 Annual Conference in Kansas should fly economy class.

On a vote by show of hands four Members voted for the amendment and five against and it was accordingly declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed, with five Members voting for and four against that business class flights be booked for those attending the Sister Cities International 2008 Annual Conference.

Sunday Tourism Product

The Committee agreed to defer to its special meeting on 24th June, consideration of a report regarding the improving of the tourism product which was available in Belfast on Sunday.

**Department for Social Development's
Retail Sequencing Policy**

The Committee deferred consideration of a report regarding the Department for Social Development's Retail Sequencing Policy to enable further information to be circulated to all Members of Council.

Arising from discussion in this matter, the Committee agreed that it would receive, at a future meeting, representatives from a number of interested parties, including Westfield Shoppingtowns Limited and William Ewart Properties Limited, regarding their proposals.

Independent Retail

The Committee noted the contents of a report specifying the work which was ongoing in the Council to support the independent retail sector in the City. It was agreed that a presentation by the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association be received at a future meeting and that representatives of the independent retail sector in the City be invited to attend that meeting.

Markets Unit Update

Smithfield Market Letting

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 22nd September, 1999, it has granted authority for the Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to approve the terms of future lettings at Smithfield Market, subject to those terms being reported retrospectively to the Committee.

The Head of Economic Initiatives reported that Unit 20 had been let to Mr. Mark Webb, 1 Dillons Avenue, Newtownabbey, at a cost of £190 per month, for the purposes of hair styling, hair extensions, braiding and the sale of associated accessories.

Noted.

Redecorating the Exterior of Smithfield Market

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that the interior of the Smithfield Market had been redecorated in 2007. She indicated that, during recent meetings between the Chairman, officers and tenants, there had been discussions regarding the possibility of the exterior of Market being redecorated. It had been estimated that this work would cost in the region of £8,000.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed that the exterior of Smithfield Market be redecorated at a cost not exceeding £8,000.

St. George's Market

The Head of Economic Initiatives advised the Committee that in October, 2007 a lease had been granted to Messrs Philip McKee, Dean Irwin and Rachid Naji for Unit 5 in St. George's Market. However the lease had not been signed by all of the parties involved. Accordingly, the Director, under delegated authority, had issued a new lease for the Unit in the names of Philip McKee, Dean Irwin and Rachid Naji.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided regarding Unit 5 in St. George's Market.

Review of the Council's Play Service

The Committee considered the undernoted report;

"Relevant Background Information"

Belfast City Council currently provides play services for children and young people through 22 community and 6 play centres. The play development service provides support to enhance these services, to organise central events and to provide support for the voluntary sector.

The play centres are located in six specific areas which are historical and had been inherited from when that service was part of the Parks Section. The format in which the service has been run has remained the same, providing a pre-school playgroup, after school club and holiday playschemes.

Changes within both the internal and external environment have impacted on the way play service provision should be delivered to meet the needs of children and young people in Belfast. In order to inform our response to these changes, a decision was made and ratified by Belfast City Council at their meeting on 4th July 2005, to undertake a review of Council-owned Playcentres. An independent consultant, Venturei was appointed to undertake the review which involved looking at both the internal and external environments, relevant legislation and consulting with a range of internal and external stakeholders.

The report, with the key recommendations, was presented to the Development Committee on 14 May 2008 where a decision was made to defer to allow further time to consider the report and recommendations.

Key Issues

The Review considered both internal and external factors that have impacted on the delivery of the current service and the report concluded:

1. There has been no City-wide approach taken in response to identified need;
2. Duplication and gaps in service provision have not been considered;
3. The nature of the service is resource intensive providing for a limited number of children;
4. Changes in the demand for pre-school playgroups services have resulted in the closure of three out of the six centres and the remaining centres providing primarily for children outside the targeted age group;
5. There is limited flexibility in developing the service; and
6. The nature of the service does fit in with the Community Services ethos and the Community Support Plan.

The Review of the Play Service made two key recommendations

1. To exit from pre-school playgroups. This part of the service has been impacted on most by external factors including demographic changes and government funding. This has resulted in the closure of three out of the six playgroups resulting in a reduction from 104 available places to 48. Currently only 90% of the places in the remaining playgroups are filled with only 25% from the targeted age group. Appendix 1 indicates the current position within each of the Playcentre Pre-school Playgroups. Other concerns are that the service is most resource intensive and provides for a limited number of children. Pre-school services are the main responsibility of the Education and Social Services.
2. The play service should become more strategically focused, with a needs-led approach that is more flexible in the delivery of services. This would include the extension of the age range to enable the play service to cover 4-16 years; to undertake a needs analysis; and to develop the service to enable it to provide a range of services to be more responsive to the needs of local communities. This will also enable the development of internal and external partnerships and maximising the use of all BCC assets.

Resource Implications

Financial

To take place within existing resources.

Human Resources

No implication on the current allocation

Asset and Other Implications

There is no impact on any physical BCC asset.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members

1. Consider and accept the content of the *Venturei* report a copy of which is available on Modern.gov;
2. Consider and accept the recommendations of the *Venturei* report; and
3. Approve the Action plan to implement the recommendations of the *Venturei* report.

Key to Abbreviations

BCC – Belfast City Council

Documents Attached

- Appendix 1 – Current position – Play Centre Pre-School Play Groups.
- Appendix 2 – Recommendations of the *Venturei* Report.
- Appendix 3 – Play Service Action Plan.

Appendix 1

Current position regarding provision for 3 year olds in areas covered by BCC Playcentre Playgroups

1. Olympia Playcentre

Catchment area for pre-school playgroup:
Electoral wards: Blackstaff, Shaftesbury and Windsor

Number of 3 year olds living in catchment area: 102

Pre-school provision in catchment area

Provider	Number of Places
Olympia PG (Based in Olympia Playcentre)	16
Early Learners Playgroup	32
Arellian Nursery School	52
Blythefield Nursery Unit	26
Fane Street Nursery	26
Total	152

Within the catchment area, there is a surplus of 50 places for children in their pre-school year.

Olympia Playgroup (2007/2008)

Number of places available: 16
Number of places filled: 14

19% of the places are filled by children in the pre-school year who are in the targeted age group

Source for statistics: Belfast Health & Social Services Trust, April 2008

2. Avoniel Playcentre

Catchment area for pre-school playgroup:
Electoral wards: The Mount and Bloomfield

Number of 3 year olds living in catchment area: 127

Pre-school provision in catchment area

Provider	Number of Places
Avoniel Playgroup (Based in Avoniel Playcentre)	16*
Oasis Playgroup	24
See Saw Playgroup	24
Bloomfield Playgroup	24
Euston Street Nursery Unit	52
Avoniel Nursery unit	52
Ravenscroft Nursery School	52
Total	244

*Avoniel was originally registered for 24 children. Due to a decreased demand for places, the numbers in the playgroup was reduced to 16.

Within the catchment area, there is a surplus of 117 places for children in their pre-school year.

Avoniel Playgroup (2007/2008)

Number of places available: 16
Number of places filled: 13

19% of the places are filled by children in the pre-school year who are in the targeted age group

Population and Provision statistics: source: Belfast Health & Social Services Trust, April 2008

3. Ballysillan Playcentre

Catchment area for pre-school playgroup:
Electoral wards: Ballysillan

Total number of births in Ballysillan Ward 2003 – 2006

Total Births: Ballysillan	
2003	72
2004	89
2005	77
2006	66

Source

- www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk

Making the assumption that families have remained in the area since the birth of their child, the above table indicates that there will be 77 children who will turn 3 and therefore be in their pre-school year in 2008.

The table also shows an indication that the birth rate is decreasing within the Ballysillan ward.

Pre-school provision in catchment area

Provider	Number of Places
Ballysillan Playgroup	16
Joanmount Playgroup	16
Ballysillan Nursery Unit	26
Total	58

Ballysillan Playgroup (2007/2008)

Number of places available: 16
Number of places filled: 16

Within the catchment area, the above indicates a deficit of 19 places for children in their pre-school year. Within the Ballysillan Playgroup, 38% of the places are filled by children in the pre-school year who are in the targeted age group. This indicates that although there is a deficit of places for children in their pre-school year they are accessing these outside the catchment area.

Provision based on 2008 information

Appendix 2

Venturei Report Recommendations

This section of the review sets out the recommendations of the independent review team. The recommendations have been developed against the following themes:

- Refocusing the Play Service - Short Term (2008-09)
- Refocusing the Play Service - Medium Term(2009-10)
- Refocusing the Play Service - Long Term (2011-13)

Refocusing the Play Service-Short Term

The following are the short term (2008-2009) recommendations:

- It is clear that the Play Service has stagnated over the past three to five years from a lack of strong strategic and operational leadership. On the basis that Play now sits within the Community Services Unit it is recommended that this review and its associated actions are implemented and that it does not become another in a long line of abandoned reviews and service improvement initiatives for Council's Play Service. Any emerging organisational structures should recognise the value of Play.
- The Council's service has largely been provided through six dedicated play centres. It is recommended that the service delivery model shifts from a centre focused to a needs led model. This will require a more flexible needs led service delivery model. All service should not be provided from Play Centres. The team should work in other indoor and outdoor environments where need has been established.
- Part of this model will entail a more "joined up" and integrated approach to Playwork and play provision, recognising for example, the benefits of working in partnership with other sections such as Parks and Leisure. Co-operation such as this recognises the play can be both indoor and outdoor, making use of open spaces and other community facilities.
- There is a need for an integrated strategy for children and young people across all Council services, in order to avoid possible duplication of service provision and ensure a strategic approach to the issues of Playwork.
- In particular, a more joined up and proactive approach by Council can more fully address the needs of all children, especially children with a disability, thus providing a more fully inclusive service.

- It is clear from an analysis of the user/waiting list for Councils existing Play Service that demand for pre-school (morning sessions) has been reducing over a number of years. Three centres do not have sufficient children registered to provide a pre-school service. On the basis that there are other providers, including Sure Start and the community sector it is recommended that Belfast City Council withdraw from the provision of a pre-school play service via its play centres.
- It is recommended that the withdrawal should be phased across 2008/9. Parents in the communities adjacent to the Play Centres seeking to register children for the service would be informed of the decision. The 2009 timescale would allow Council to meet its responsibilities in respect of existing users and parents planning to use the service over the timeframe up until the their children enter the formal primary education provision
- It is recommended that, in the short term, the Play worker team (16 FTEs) use the time freed up as a result of the decreasing demand for its pre-school service to carry out a range of play development projects under direction of the Play Development Officer. The projects can form a pilot for future service delivery.
- Clearly the Play service must move in line with the direction of the Community Service Unit.....that is it must provide needs led services whilst adhering to community development principles. In order to do so the role of the Play staff team will change. It is recommended that the management of this change is carried out as follows:
 - The principal role of the Play staff team is the provision of play sessions. This should remain the case. If the service is to promote sound play practice and support other organisations to develop children's services based on the play work principles they must do so from a practice(hands on) rather than academic base
 - The shift from the current centre focused play service model to a flexible, needs led and championing service must be a 'managed transition'. The current team is experienced and qualified in play work. It will need a skills support programme across the 2008/9 timeframe to leave the team ready to implement the proposed medium term action plan
 - Playworker recruitment criteria should focus on Playwork (NVQ) qualifications, as opposed to early years qualifications

- An annual needs analysis of the playservice should be undertaken as a short term measure, the findings of which should be implemented over the medium term
- It is recognised that Belfast City Council has addressed a number of the issues associated with the play service. The appointment of a Play Development Officer has provided the service with strong and appropriate operational management. The appointment of a new Community Service Manager and the development of a new Community Support Plan which directs all community services, provides a strategic framework within which the playservice will change and develop. However, it is also recommended that Belfast City Council recognise the importance for a strategic approach to meeting the needs of children and young people across its departments. It is recommended that the Play Development Officer becomes a member of a cross department/services children and young peoples team. This would help to bring a strategic management approach to Councils provision for children and young people, sharing best practice and reducing duplication. It is recommended that this happens within the short term. On a longer term basis, and in line with a likely out workings of community planning, it is recommended that Council examines the potential for an interagency strategic forum for Belfast City Council area which will focus on identifying and understanding the needs of children and young people, mapping existing provision across the Council area and coordinating service provision across the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- A detailed mapping exercise will be required to determine the role of the current Play Centres within the Play Service. Identifying, in detail, provision for services for 0-16 year olds will confirm the availability of environments, indoor and outdoor which will support play provision or be able to host/include play provision. This data is needed to confirm the need for Play Centres. If need is confirmed this information will identify the optimum number and locations for Play Centres.

Refocusing the Play Service - Medium Term

- Implementation of the findings of the needs analysis of the play service should happen over a two to three year timeframe to embed the findings and emerging processes

- It will be vital to link the playservice to the wider external environment, including the policy and strategic environment discussed at Section 4. Given the move towards Community Planning in relation to local service provision, this process should take place over the medium term in order to develop meaningful and sustainable linkages.
- Mapping exercises should be undertaken on a five year cyclical basis, in order to ensure that the service remains responsive to local needs and circumstances. This exercise should also consider other provision, including that provided by the community and voluntary sector, in order to avoid duplication.

Refocusing the Play Service - Long Term

- Any emerging long term models should be based on the findings and recommendations of the mapping exercise discussed above.
- Given the scope and nature of play provision it is vitally important that any long term model is flexible and needs driven.
- In terms of potential play models, these should consider a variety of approaches, including outdoor environments eg Play Ranger schemes and adventure play, recognising the value and impact of different types of play as discussed in Section 5.

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466

Development Committee
Wednesday, 11th June, 2008

**Appendix 3 – Play Service Action Plan can be viewed by opening
Item No. 12 within the Agenda pack**

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468

Development Committee
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The Community Development Manager stated that it might prove to be beneficial for a Consultative Group consisting of Councillors, Officers and representatives of interested organisations to be established to examine the current facilities which were available within the City and how the work undertaken by the Play Service could be improved.

During a lengthy discussion, several Members expressed concern at some aspects of the report, including a recommendation that the Council would cease to offer a pre-school Play Service at its Play Centres. A Member indicated that he believed that certain figures contained within the Venturei Report were inaccurate, which could have serious implications should the Council take decisions based on this information. Other Members expressed the view that it would be important that the proposed outreach programme did not operate to the detriment of the existing Play Centres. Further Members pointed out that the proposed removal of play facilities from certain locations could have a detrimental effect on the viability of the buildings in which the service was provided.

In response to a Member's question regarding the length of time it had taken for the report to be prepared, the Community Development Manager indicated that the production of the report had been delayed due to the transfer of the Play Service from the Parks Department to the Development Department, the generation of the Community Support Plan and because the report had been sent back several times to Venturei as the Department had had concerns regarding the accuracy of the statistical information contained therein. She pointed out that the Consultative Group which the Department wished to establish would be able to challenge or confirm the statistical information contained within the report.

During further discussion, several Members pointed that much of the play provision undertaken within the City was carried out by churches and youth organisations which received very little financial assistance from the public sector and that it would be important that the proposed Consultative Group consulted such groups to establish how best the Council could assist them in their work. It was pointed out also that many of the services provided for mothers and toddlers was undertaken within local communities rather than by statutory organisations and it was suggested that the Consultative Group should examine this issue also.

Following a lengthy debate regarding the makeup of the proposed Consultative Group, it was

Moved by Councillor McCausland,
Seconded by Councillor D. Dodds,

That a Consultative Group to examine the provision of play facilities within the City be established on the basis that the political representatives be appointed in accordance with the Party Group strengths on the Council.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Attwood,
Seconded by Councillor Convery,

That the Consultative Group be established with each Party Grouping represented on the Council having one seat only.

On a vote by show of hands two Members voted for the amendment and four against and it was accordingly declared lost.

Accordingly, the original proposal standing in the name of Councillor McCausland was thereupon put to the meeting when four Members voted in favour and two against and it was accordingly declared carried.

The Committee agreed also to:

- (i) note the contents of the Venturei report;
- (ii) accept the recommendations contained within the Venturei report, with the exception of that relating to the Council ceasing to offer a pre-school Play Service within its Play Centres; and
- (iii) approve the action plan to implement the recommendations of the Venturei report.

Restructuring of Development Department

The Director pointed out that, as a result of the additional functions which had become the responsibility of the Development Department in the previous year, a major restructuring of the Department was being undertaken, which would have consequences for staffing levels. Accordingly, she indicated that she would be arranging briefings for the various political groupings within the Council during the summer period to discuss these issues.

Noted.

Advice Services Supplementary Funding

Councillor Crozier declared an interest in this matter in that an organisation of which he was the Director had been awarded grant-assistance under this scheme and he left the room while the matter was under discussion.

The Community Development Manager reminded the Committee that the Council was a major provider of funding to organisations which delivered advice and information services within Belfast and that this was arranged through the establishment of consortiums in the North, South, East, West and Centre of the City. During the previous three years, the Department for Social Development and the Council had provided additional funding to enable these consortiums to provide outreach advice services in areas of the City which had little or no such provision. She indicated that the Department

for Social Development would be prepared to provide in the current financial year the sum of £309,725 on the understanding that the Council would contribute the sum of £152,725 and to the supplementary funding being used to provide outreach advice services and to help prepare the groups and consortiums to meet the requirements of the Department's planned Regional Advice and Information Strategy pilot scheme.

The Community Development Manager advised the Members that the staff in the Community Services Unit were examining whether the Council should become involved in the Department for Social Development's proposed Regional Advice and Information Strategy pilot scheme, which was scheduled to commence in April, 2009.

She pointed out that an independent review of the advice services support provided by the Council had been completed recently. A report regarding the review would be considered by the Committee at its monthly meeting in August as an integral part of the broader review of the various grants which were issued by the Development Department.

During discussion in the matter, a Member pointed out that there was a disparity in the level of financial assistance provided by the Council for advice services across the City which did not reflect the fact that a considerable level of advice service was provided by organisations in areas which were not viewed as being deprived. The Director indicated that the report which would be presented to the next monthly meeting, together with the Department for Social Development's pilot Regional Advice and Information Strategy, would enable the Committee to reconsider the level of funding which it provided currently across the City.

Following further discussion, the Committee agreed:

- (i) to accept the offer of funding from the Department for Social Development in the sum of £309,725 and to authorise expenditure of £152,725 in order to provide supplementary funding to organisations providing advice services in Belfast;
- (ii) that the Council should continue to administer the additional monies provided by the Department for Social Development;
- (iii) that the experience gained in managing the funding provided in the current financial year be used to inform the Council's bid for funding from the Department for Social Development's proposed Regional Advice and Information Strategy pilot scheme in 2009; and
- (iv) that the report to the Committee at its August meeting on the review of grant-aid provided by the Council include specific recommendations in respect of future funding by the Council of the advice and information sector in the City.

Revenue and Community Development Project Grants

(Mr. J. Nelson, Community Services Co-ordinator, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Grant Aid Policy ‘A Guide to Grant Aid for Community Organisations’ was agreed by Council in January 2004. Two of the six grant types contained within the Policy are Revenue Grant and Community Development Project Grant.

1. Revenue Grants

Awards are allocated under three categories or grades towards the running costs of community facilities. Precedence is given to neighbourhood groups demonstrating a broad based programme of activity. The grade of award is determined by the size of the building, programme content, throughput, and current running costs. When applications are received from organisations operating in the same geographical area, assessment is made in relation to potential duplication of programme and target groups including use of a digital mapping process.

The Community & Leisure Services Sub-Committee of 11 May 2004 awarded 77 Revenue Grants for the period 2004-7. Due to the timescale for the Department's Grant Aid Review these awards were subsequently extended for the period 2007-8 and 2008-9 by the Community & Leisure Services Sub-Committees of 5 September 2006 and 8 May 2007 respectively. In extending the contract period the Committee was aware of the potential risk of limiting equality of treatment and opportunity of those organisations which had not had the chance to apply for this grant previously. Subsequently, the Development Committee 12 December 2007 agreed a one off additional allocation to the Revenue Grant budget of £50,000 to allow new applications from groups who had established, or had acquired premises, since the 2003-4 open call.

2. Community Development Project Grants

Project grant awards of up to £500 are available for small scale community projects that contribute to the overarching aim of building the capacity of local people. Specifically projects which:

- Develop the programme of a community building
- Enable new community groups to become established

- Contribute to the organisational costs of community projects
- Support training courses for Committees/Volunteers

An open call for applications is advertised each year in March and October.

Key Issues

1. Revenue Grants

A total of 10 Revenue Grants were received by the submission date of 1 March 2008.

Applications have been assessed under the same due processes as applied to those received at the previous application date of October 2003. In addition to the general eligibility criteria for this grant, Groups have had to demonstrate that they meet the specific additional criteria as agreed by the Development Committee December 2007. Four applications have been recommended for funding to the cumulative amount of £20,031.63. These are listed at Appendix 1. Six applications have been recommended for rejection and these are listed and the reasons for rejection given at Appendix 1.

Where an application for Revenue funding is rejected by Committee, the applicant Group is notified of its right of appeal in relation to this decision. Any appeals submitted will be considered by Committee at a subsequent meeting.

2. Project Grants

A total of 64 Project Grant applications were received by the submission date 1 March 2008. Fifty six applications have been recommended for funding to the cumulative amount of £31,936. These are listed at Appendix 2. Eight applications are recommended for rejection for the reasons listed at Appendix 2.

Both grant types have been assessed within current agreed eligibility criteria, and there is no equality or environmental implications. Where possible, it is intended that Development Staff will offer support to those groups not recommended for funding in order to assist them to improve practice and reapply for grant aid support at a later stage.

Resource Implications

Financial

The budget for Revenue awards is agreed as £50,000 so recommendations are within the maximum additional allocation agreed by Committee.

The available current Community Development Project Grant budget category is £55,166 so recommendations are within budget limits.

Human Resources

There is no additional staff resource required other than those normally deployed in the administration and assessment of this grant category.

Asset and Other Implications

There is no impact on any physical BCC asset.

Recommendations

Members are requested to approve the recommendations in respect of Revenue Grants at Appendix 1 and Community Development Project Grants as attached at Appendix 2. Members should note that the recommendation in regard to Community Development Project Grant application number 995 (Ligoniel Improvement Association) is subject to specific additional assurances being supplied by the Organisation. These assurances are in relation to the possible consequences to the Organisation of alleged irregular financial activities. Payment of this award will progress only upon receipt of these assurances.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Revenue Grant Applications
Appendix 2 – Project Grant Applications”

APPENDIX 1

REVENUE GRANTS MARCH 08

Table 1: Recommendations for Grant Approval

<u>NAME OF GROUP</u>	<u>REQUEST</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>RECOMMENDED</u>	<u>COMMENT</u>
<i>North</i>				
North Belfast Women's Initiative & Support Project	£4,140	1	£3,601.63	Maximum award amount for Grade 1 (08/09 figure)
<i>East</i>				
Lower Castlereagh Community Group	£2,206	1	£2,206	
Willowfield Parish	£10,894	3	£10,894	
<i>West</i>				
Glencolin Residents	£3,330	1	£3,330	
TOTAL	£20,570		£20,031.63	

Table 2: Recommendations for Rejection

	<u>REQUEST</u>	<u>REASON FOR REJECTION</u>
<i>North</i>		
Ligoniel Improvement Association	£30,200	Premises acquired prior to the eligible period of 2003-4
Sailortown Cultural & Historical Society	£3,631	Not a broad based programme

	<u>REQUEST</u>	<u>REASON FOR REJECTION</u>
<i>South</i>		
Annadale & Haywood Residents Association	£3,550	Not a broad based programme
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	£12,560	Group already approved for Revenue Grant for current period (08/09)
Village Focus Group	£9,650	Not a broad based programme No evidence of financial systems No annual report
<i>East</i>		
Crossroads	£2,995	Not a broad based programme

APPENDIX 2

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT GRANTS MARCH 2008

Table 3: Recommendations for Grant Approval

<u>NAME OF GROUP</u>	<u>REQUEST</u>	<u>REC</u>
<i>North</i>		
Basement Youth Club	£500	£500
Brookvale Seniors	£550	£500
Corner House Cross Community	£500	£500
Donegall Park Avenue Community Assoc.	£750	£500
Grapevine Seniors	£500	£500
Indian Community Centre	£700	£500
Ligoniel Improvement Association	£486	£486
Lower Oldpark Community Association	£500	£500
Lower Oldpark Fellowship Club	£500	£500
Midland Art Club	£500	£500
Midland Senior Citizens	£500	£500
Mountainview Pensioners	£500	£500
Shore Crescent Friendship Club	£500	£500
Trinity and New Lodge Senior Citizens	£500	£500
Upper North Belfast C.E.P.	£500	£500
Whitecity CDA	£500	£500

<u>NAME OF GROUP</u>	<u>REQUEST</u>	<u>REC</u>
Whitecity CDA Over 50's Club	£568	£500
Whitecity Parent & Toddler	£500	£500
Woodvale Young At Heart	£500	£500
Woodvale Mens Group	£500	£500
Sub Total	£10,554	£9,986
<i>South</i>		
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	£500	£500
Lower Ormeau & Botanic Environmental Grp.	£500	£500
Sandy Row Residents Association	£940	£500
St John Viannie Senior Citizens	£500	£500
Sub Total	£2,440	£2,000
<i>City Centre</i>		
Belfast Pride	£1,500	£500
Sub Total	£1,500	£500
<i>East</i>		
Ardcarn Residents Association	£500	£500
Ballymac Centre	£500	£500
Belles of Belmont	£500	£500
Bridge Roslyn Street Youth Club	£500	£500
Bridge - Lagan Village	£500	£500
Clarawood Community Association	£500	£500
Walkway Community Centre	£500	£500
Wandsworth Comm Association	£500	£500
Sub Total	£8,000	£8,000
<i>West</i>		
Ardmonagh Family & Community Centre	£500	£500
An Munia Tober	£500	£500
Blackie Community Centre	£500	£500
Clonard/Springfield Senior Citizens	£1,500	£500
Conway Youth Centre	£500	£500
Conway Pensioners Group	£500	£500
Falls Resident Association	£3,200	£500
Friends of Fruithill	£500	£500
Glencolin Residents Assoc	£450	£450
Gort na Monagh Historical Society	£600	£500
Holy Trinity Monday Club	£700	£500
Ionad uibh Eachach	£500	£500
Link Womens Group	£500	£500
Link Youth & Young Adults	£500	£500
Middle Andersonstown Festival Ctte.	£500	£500

<u>NAME OF GROUP</u>	<u>REQUEST</u>	<u>REC</u>
Newhill Youth & Community	£500	£500
Sliabh Dub Residents Association	£500	£500
Stadium Projects	£500	£500
Southlink Day Centre	£500	£500
Thursday Lunch Club Senior Citizens	£500	£500
Whiterock/Westrock Residents	£500	£500
West Belfast Athletic & Cultural	£500	£500
West Belfast Suicide Awareness	£1,200	£500
Sub Total	£16,150	£11,450
Total	£38,644	£31,936

Table 4: Recommendations for Refusal

<u>NAME OF GROUP</u>	<u>REQUEST</u>	<u>REASON FOR REJECTION</u>
<i>North</i>		
Manor Street/Cliftonville Community Centre	£500	Late Submission – 4 March 2008
Thornbush Hearing Impaired Pensioners	£500	No Group bank account
<i>South</i>		
N.I. Community Addition Service	£500	Organisation outside Belfast boundary Not a Community Development Organisation
South Belfast Malecare	£500	No evidence of financial systems No A.G.M. minutes
<i>East</i>		
Belfast Photo Imaging Club	£500	Not a Community Development Organisation
Steadfast Association	£500	Organisation outside Belfast boundary
<i>West</i>		
Careers & Kids	£500	Not a Community Development Organisation
Clonard/Springfield Parent/Youth Group	£1,400	Application incomplete”

During discussion in the matter, a Member drew the Committee's attention to an application from the Steadfast Association for a Community Development Project Grant which was being recommended for refusal because the organisation was located outside the Belfast boundary. He pointed out that, whilst the Association's secretary lived outside Belfast, the organisation undertook work within the City. In response, the Community Services Co-ordinator indicated that the address which had been given on the application form had been outside the Belfast boundary and that the form indicated that much of the work undertaken by the Association was outside Belfast City Council's area. Accordingly, it had been recommended that the grant be refused.

After further discussion the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the request from the Steadfast Association to enable further information to be provided and adopted the other recommendations set out above.

Vetting

The Community Development Manager informed the Committee that the Inquiry which had been established following the murder of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham, Cambridgeshire, had recommended that those persons who wished to work with children or vulnerable adults would require to be registered and would be subject to an enhanced system of disclosure. In Northern Ireland these recommendations would be implemented and overseen by two new bodies, Access Northern Ireland and the Independent Safeguarding Authority. The former would undertake the criminal checks which had been carried out previously by the Police, including details of convictions and information held by the Police which was relevant to a person's suitability to work with children or young people. The main focus of the latter would be to establish a register of persons who would be suitable for working with children or young people.

She indicated that the Council's Human Resources Section undertook currently checks regarding employees who had contact with children and young people. Volunteers who worked in Community and Play Centres were checked by the Community Services Section, which also provided support for independent groups who used Council facilities to undertake such checks. Under the new system, a charge of £30 for each check carried out for a volunteer involved in a statutory organisation, including Councils, would be levied. However, volunteers involved with independent community groups would not be charged.

She indicated that the Community Services Unit had registered with Access Northern Ireland to undertake checks of volunteers and to act as an umbrella body to administer the checks for the independent groups. This would result in the Council only incurring the cost of paying for volunteers who would be working on projects directly managed by Council staff. She pointed out that the Unit employed temporary staff throughout the year, particularly for the Summer Schemes, who were recruited through an agency which passed on the £30 fee to the candidate. Given the short-term nature of these posts, this fee had the potential to restrict the number of candidates who applied for temporary posts. Accordingly, the Community Services Unit would be meeting the costs of the £30 charge for candidates who worked in Summer Schemes during 2008 in order to enable a longer term policy to be agreed between the Human Resources Section and the Council's Recruitment Agency. The Community Development Manager indicated that it had been estimated that the cost in the current financial year of undertaking the Access Northern Ireland checks for volunteers and Summer Scheme staff would be £7,000.

Following discussion in the matter, the Committee agreed to note the information which had been provided by the Community Development Manager regarding the vetting process.

Belfast City Centre / Northside Urban Village Draft Regeneration Framework

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Draft Regeneration Framework for North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre constitutes proposed supplementary guidance to the Department for Social Development's (DSD) Regeneration Policy Statement for Belfast City Centre adopted by the Department in April 2004. It sets out further guidance on the proposed range of mix and location of uses for the North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre to maximise the physical, social and economic regeneration of the area. The North West Quarter Part 2 comprises the neighbourhood of Brown Square, Carrick Hill and Press / Library Quarters. Council responded comprehensively in January 2007 to the North West Quarter Part 2; Baseline Regeneration Issues Report.

Key Issues

The report has addressed the issues within this area under three broad themes, Urban Design Analysis, Vision and Concept Plan and Urban Design and Land Use.

Detailed below are the proposed comments from the Council relating to these themes.

Urban Design Analysis

- Background

Draft BMAP designates the area as CC013 Scotch and Cathedral Quarters.

Character Area and outlines urban design criteria for the area. The Council would request clarification on how the regeneration framework relates to the local area plan. The neighbourhoods of Brown Street and Carrick Hill are designated as Protected Housing Areas in City and Town Centres in BMAP which means the spread of commercial uses will be resisted.

- Character

The Council supports the recognition of the historic character, landmarks and views in the North West Quarter area. The incorporation of cultural heritage into revitalisation of the area should be seen as an asset and unique selling point.

- Open Space

An assessment of the need for open space within the city centre living areas is needed. The public space has to be created and managed in a sustainable way to ensure a well used public asset for the wider area.

- Access Movement

The Council considers that the high levels of community severance at Millfield and Carrick Hill due to the high capacity and over designed road system must be recognised and addressed as a priority. The framework should also consider the impact in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport plan such as the completion of the inner ring road and traffic management problems.

- Strengths and Opportunities

1. Draft BMAP identifies a number of Development Opportunity Sites contained in the area such as: CC 035 Castle Court and the lands to the north, CC 037 Little Donegall Street / Carrick Hill, CC 038 Stephen Street, CC 039 Library Street, CC 041 Kent Street, CC 040 Carrick Hill / North Street, CC 050 Clifton Street, CC 051 Gardiners Place / Peters Hill and CC 052 Millfield / Wilson Street. However Draft BMAP lacks information on the key site requirements for the development of these sites.
2. The Council considers that the Regeneration Framework should identify development opportunity sites within the area and provide further key site requirements in order to promote and give certainty to the potential developers or investors. A number of the sites are in public ownership and phasing of these development sites could be programmed. The concept plan fails to follow through with concrete proposals for the area and build on the analysis in Draft BMAP.
3. Gateway Designations have also identified in Draft BMAP at the junction of North Street and Carrick Hill and Millfield and the junction of Donegall Street and Carrick Hill. Additional smaller gateway sites have been identified in the regeneration framework with little guidance on how to take these forward.

- Vision and Concept Plan

The Council would support the vision for the area emphasising high quality urban form and building on the strong historic character of the area.

- Press / Library Quarter

The Council considers the area too large for evening economy dispersal and would consider other uses appropriate such as independent retail and small offices. The promotion of creative industries in this area would be strongly supported by the Council. The provision of incubation space close to the University may encourage greater spin out companies and opportunities for graduates from the art, design and technology courses.

Creative industries work best in an area where there is also a critical mass of other services e.g. cafes and bars, Leisure facilities and living accommodation. The University of Ulster has recently commissioned a study on business incubation for the Creative Industries. It would be important that the findings of this work feed into any further work on this framework, linking creative industries and retail there is an opportunity for supporting independent retailers in showcasing new designers, products and fashion.

With 150 sq.m as the average size for retail units, independent retailers may find that these are too large. It may be more appropriate to look at a range of smaller units within designated areas, possibly within the Press / Library Quarter. Independent retail will be an important element of service provision in the context of the Urban Village that DSD are promoting.

The Council would strongly support guidelines to ensure future residential development in this area is high quality and of a scale appropriate for the area. The recent high rise apartment development on the junction of Library Street and Union Street is of poor quality design, out of scale with the surrounding area and has ground floor level parking creating a dead frontage. Mixed use development with active ground floor frontages such as retail with office and residential above should be promoted in this area.

As previously mentioned, the Council considers that development opportunity sites should be identified and key site requirements to promote and guide future use should be outlined.

- Brown Square and Carrick Hill

The Council considers that the high levels of community severance at Millfield and Carrick Hill is an issue which must be addressed as a priority. The roads are generally wide with four or five lanes in some parts and the option of reducing the amount of road space dedicated to the car should be considered. There is also a need to improve pedestrian priority, create connections along desire lines and reduce the physical and psychological barriers created by the high capacity road infrastructure. There are recent examples in Nottingham where the inner ring road system is being revamped to improve pedestrian movement.

The issue of the quality of life in the residential areas backing onto the Westlink at Brown Street and fronting onto Carrick Street should be recognised in terms of noise and air quality.

The opportunity exists to introduce student accommodation.

The Council requests clarification on what is proposed at the Gateway designation at junction of Divis Street and Westlink.

Opportunities exist in the Brown Street area next to the playground to create an opportunity meeting point, for additional recreational and community activities.

- Millfield

The Council considers that an opportunity exists to open up the Belfast Metropolitan College site at Millfield and connect it to the surrounding area. Currently the site has security fencing, with poor access and poor connectivity to the surrounding areas. There is a green open space within the site which is poorly used and the college buildings are developed around a car park, which is the centre of the courtyard.

Urban Design and Land Use

The Council would request further urban design and land use principles to be considered:

- Public and Private developers should have an obligation to provide public realm in their projects to contribute to an attractive urban village.
- Environmental sustainability guidelines or targets should be set.
- Active ground floor frontages should be encouraged in the Press and Library Quarters.

Resource Implications

None to Belfast City Council.

The implementation of the eventual adopted framework by DSD is subject to market response, available funding, economic appraisal and satisfying all statutory requirements.

Recommendations

- 1. It is recommended that the Council endorses the Draft Regeneration Framework for the North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre as a tool to promote the regeneration of the area, subject to the clarification and comments referred to in this report and the formal BCC response.**
- 2. It is recommended that the Council promotes community involvement as an additional factor in all aspects of the regeneration process. Recognition of Community ensures ownership and acceptance of initiatives.**
- 3. It is recommended that the Council considers that the promotion of high quality design has to be established as one of the main principles early on in the process as it can increase the value of the land, attract investor interest and ensure local ownership and pride in the area.”**

During discussion in the matter, a Member pointed out that local residents had not been consulted about the draft regeneration framework and that it appeared that the plans would have an adverse impact on North Street, which was the main entry point to the City Centre for residents of Brown Square and Carrick Hill. In addition, there was no mention made of linkages to the Crumlin Road Gaol or Cathedral Quarter developments nor to the provision of a park within the area. Another Member pointed out that the Framework made no reference to the two segregated communities who lived currently in this area and expressed concern that the proposed new housing scheme would serve to maintain this segregation, which would hinder the Council's aim of the City centre becoming a shared space. He pointed out also that the Framework did not deal with the poor linkages from York Street to the City Centre.

The Director of Development concurred with the views which had been expressed regarding the neutrality of the City Centre and stated that she was hopeful that the funding which the Council had received under Peace III could be used to deal with a number of the issues which had been raised by the Members.

Following further discussion, the Committee agreed that the undernoted document be forwarded to the Department for Social Development as the Council's response to the Belfast City Centre/Northside Village Draft Regeneration Framework, subject to it being amended to reflect the comments which had been made by the Members.

“Introduction

The Council welcomes a Regeneration Framework for the North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre as a tool to promote the regeneration of the area.

The key regeneration principles outlined in Paragraph 7: connectivity; maximise physical social and sustainable regeneration; retain the historic character; social exclusion and environmental sustainability are supported as important guidelines for the regeneration of the area.

The Council would promote community involvement as an additional factor in all aspects of the regeneration process. Recognition of community interests at an early stage ensures ownership and acceptance of initiatives.

The Council also considers that the promotion of high quality design has to be established as one of the main principles early on in the process as it can increase the value of the land and attract investor interest and ensure local ownership and pride in the area.

Urban Design Analysis

Background

Draft BMAP designates the area as CC013 Scotch and Cathedral Quarters Character Area and outlines urban design criteria for the area. The Council would request clarification on how the regeneration framework relates to the local area plan. The neighbourhoods of Brown’s Street and Carrick Hill are designated as Protected Housing Areas in City and Town Centres in Draft BMAP which means the spread of commercial uses will be resisted.

Character

The Council supports the recognition of the historic character, landmarks and views in the NW quarter area. The incorporation of cultural heritage into revitalisation of the area should be seen as an asset and a unique selling point. The specific comments of our Health and Environmental Services department are detailed below.

The proposals outlined indicate additional residential, retail and leisure use within the proposed geographical area and, as such, would require potential developers and other parties to pay due regard and attention to the following areas:

- Public toilet provision in the areas identified.

- Waste disposal and collection mechanisms in both residential and commercial properties. Both residential and commercial developers or other interested parties should make contact with Belfast City Council, Waste Management Service, on 028 90320202, Ext. 3680, for technical guidance and advice.
- Both street recycling bins and litter provision in the areas identified.

If you require further clarification, contact Maria McAleer, Policy & Compliance Officer, Waste Management Service, Ext. 3639.

Our Building Control Service has made the following comments:

The proposals outlined indicate additional residential, retail and leisure use within the proposed geographical area and, as such, would require potential developers and other parties to pay due regard and attention to the following key areas:

- There are a number of unlicensed sex shops in the 'North West Quarter Part 1'. This may have a detrimental impact upon any development undertaken.
- The Building Control Service can assist in providing advice and direction to developers in regard to environmental sustainability in the design and use of materials for construction.
- The Building Control Service can assist in development proposals designed to reflect the historic character of the area given the Service's responsibilities in terms of Street Naming.

If you require further clarification, contact Mark Mulholland, Policy, Research and Legal Officer, Building Control Service, Ext. 2373.

Open space

An assessment of the need for open space within the city centre living areas is needed. The public space has to be created and managed in a sustainable way to ensure a well used asset for the wider area. The specific comments from our Parks and Leisure Department are detailed below.

In terms of open space owned / managed by the Council within the boundaries of the Belfast City Centre Northside Urban Village draft regeneration framework, the Parks & Leisure Department would highlight;-

- a. Carrick Hill; and
- b. Brown Square Playgrounds.

The Council would make the point that significant value and progress, in terms of regeneration could be made by investing in existing public space and the facilities which already exist within the boundary of Belfast City Centre Northside Urban Village draft regeneration framework – namely, the two sites named above. The mapping and catchment socio-economic data for these areas is attached in Appendix 1. The socio-economic data and the significant deficiencies highlighted by the draft BMAP open space assessments for both areas makes the case for increased regeneration and the need for new open space. Significant benefits would be gained through some smaller level investment in the sites which already exist within the confines outlined in the draft regeneration framework.

The Council supports the purposes of the concept plan in ‘linking’ open spaces / green spaces in the City and ‘improving local connections’ and would highlight that the Cathedral Gardens area, which abuts the boundary on the map represents a prime opportunity for redevelopment and regeneration.

The DSD’s public realm strategy details the Cathedral Gardens area as the number one catalyst project in the city, agreeing that Cathedral Gardens was a prime location for a public realm regeneration scheme. The strategy highlighted that the Cathedral Gardens open space is;

‘Strategically placed to service the entire City Centre and its adjacent uses, and aims to provide Belfast with much needed public urban parks of a scale that can facilitate a large number of major uses as well as local recreation.’

The proposed development outlined in the Belfast City Centre Northside Plan may lead to an increase in the levels of anti-social behaviour which already exist in the Cathedral Gardens space if it remains on the fringe of high quality development and is not considered as a vital ‘link’ to the development proposed.

The Council undertook consultation in 2007 with regard to the development of the Cathedral Gardens and it was highlighted by all those consulted (University of Ulster, PSNI, Environment & Heritage Service and DSD) as extremely valuable open space in an area of the city which is in need of open space. Some comments raised by those consulted included that the open space;-

- Must be retained and regenerated as public green space;
- Needs to link to surrounding public space;
- Must become a gateway to the Quarter and the City Centre;
- Must be made safer at night – with a high quality lighting scheme to make the site safe at night;
- Should encourage more civic / cultural events; and
- Must showcase the architecture.

The Council has further concerns that this regeneration proposal will continue to disassociate the Cathedral Gardens from the rest of the Cathedral Quarter, where there has been significant high quality development which further serves to dislocate Cathedral Gardens from its neighbours.

The Council supports the high quality development proposed in the regeneration framework but would emphasise that it is essential that the associated uses proposed for the high-quality public space at the centre of the area [green heart] would need to 'relate' to the area in order to ensure that the area, much like the Cathedral Gardens area, does not become a redundant / derelict space 'after hours'. It is essential that the associated development not only increases footfall in the area but also uses the area as a link route, helping to feed traffic through the area.

The Council supports the development of the 'NWQ Gateways' which are also valuable areas of open space, which could be considered 'neutral' space and offer opportunities for making the connections / linkages to the existing open spaces and to improve footfall through the area, positively contributing to the 'animation' of the space and offering potential users / customers the associated uses of commercial focus.

Access movement

The Council considers that the high levels of community severance at Millfield and Carrick Hill due to the high capacity and over designed road system must be recognised and addressed as a priority. The framework should also consider the impact in the North West quarter area of future transport proposals contained in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport plan such as the completion of the inner ring road and traffic management proposals.

Strengthens and opportunities

Draft BMAP identifies a number of Development Opportunity Sites contained in the area such as: CC 035 Castle Court and lands to the north, CC 037 Little Donegall Street/Carrick Hill, CC 038 Stephen Street, CC 039 Library Street, CC 041 Kent Street, CC040 Carrick Hill/North Street, CC 050 Clifton Street CC 051 Gardiners Place/ Peters Hill and CC 052 Millfield/Wilson Street. However, Draft BMAP lacks information on the key site requirements for the development of these sites.

The Council considers that the Regeneration Framework should identify development opportunity sites within the area and provide further key site requirements in order to promote and give certainty to the potential developers or investors. A number of the sites are in public ownership and phasing of these developments sites could be programmed. The concept plan fails to follow through with concrete proposals for the area and build on the analysis in Draft BMAP.

Gateway Designations have also been identified in Draft BMAP at the junction of North Street and Carrick Hill and Millfield and the junction of Donegall Street and Carrick Hill. Additional smaller gateway sites have been identified in the regeneration framework with little guidance on how to take these forwards.

Vision and Concept Plan

The Council would support the vision for the area emphasising high quality urban form and building on the strong historic character of the area.

Press / Library Quarter

The Council considers the area too large for evening economy dispersal and would consider other uses appropriate such as independent retail and small offices. The promotion of creative industries in this area would be strongly supported by the Council. The Council's comments are detailed below:

1. This is an excellent location as there many businesses who want to be located in this part of town. Companies that are currently based in areas such as Cotton Court and the managed workspace in Royal Avenue are planning to move from here due to increased rents and it would be good to put in place an infrastructure which supports a critical mass of companies in this sector.
2. The fact that the incubation space is close to the University may encourage greater spin out companies and opportunities for graduates from the art, design and technology courses. It would also help attract companies to this location, where they could attract graduates with the skills that they need.
3. Consideration would need to be given to the management of an incubation strategy that supported the businesses in the initial stages of development but then encouraged them to move on to new premises (probably at market value). The functioning of such a strategy will depend on developing linkages with the university and other support services to help the businesses develop and to support them with issues such as access to technology, finance etc.
4. Creative industries work best in an area where there is also a critical mass of other services e.g. cafes and bars, leisure facilities and living accommodation. Therefore we would endorse a mixed-use development and feel that this would support use of the area all through the day.
5. The Council understands that the University of Ulster has recently commissioned a study on business incubation for the creative industries. It would be important that the findings of this work feed into any further work on this framework
6. If the area is to be designated as an area that will attract the creative industries, there are a number of questions around the management/ownership and the technology – probably issues for consideration at a later stage.
7. It may also be worthwhile considering other creative uses – for example studio space for TV production – Maysfield is no longer in use and it would be worthwhile thinking of small studio space for this type of thing.

With regard to retail, the Council would make the following comments:

- Linking in with the creative industries, there is an opportunity for supporting independent retailers in showcasing new designers / products / fashion etc coming out from the design courses in the
- At 150sqm as an average size for the retail units, independent retailers may find that this is too large. In independent retailers are to be encouraged, it may be appropriate to look at a range of smaller units within designated areas, possibly within the press/library quarter.
- Independent retail will be an important element of service provision in the context of the 'urban village' that DSD are trying to create in this area.

The Council would strongly support guidelines to ensure future residential development in this area is high quality and of a scale appropriate for the area. The recent high rise apartment development on the junction of Library Street and Union Street is of poor quality design, out of scale with the surrounding area and has ground floor level car parking creating a dead frontage. Mixed use development with active ground floor frontages such as retail and office and residential above should be promoted in this area.

As previously mentioned the Council considers that development opportunity sites should be identified and key site requirements to promote and guide future use should be outlined.

Brown Square and Carrick Hill

The Council considers that the high levels of community severance at Millfield and Carrick Hill is an issue which must be addressed as a priority. The roads are generally wide with four or five lanes in some parts and the option of reducing the amount of road space dedicated to the car should be considered. There is a need to improve pedestrian priority create connections along desire lines and reduce the physical and psychological barriers created by the high capacity road infrastructure. There are recent examples in Nottingham where the inner ring road system is being revamped to improve pedestrian environment.

The issue of the quality of life in the residential areas backing onto the Westlink at Brown Street and fronting onto Carrick Hill should be recognised in terms of noise and air quality

Opportunity exists to introduce student accommodation

The Council requests clarification on what is proposed at the Gateway designation at junction of Divis Street and Westlink.

Opportunities exist in the Brown Street area next to the playground to create a community meeting point, for additional recreational and community activities.

Millfield

The Council considers that an opportunity exists to open up the Belfast Metropolitan College site at Millfield and connect it to the surrounding area. Currently the site has security fencing, with poor access and poor connectivity to the surrounding area. There is green open space within the site which is poorly used and the college buildings are developed around a car park, which is in the centre of the courtyard.

Urban Design and Land use

The Council would request further urban design and land use principles to be considered:

- Public and private developers should have an obligation to provide public realm in their projects to contribute to an attractive urban village.
- Environmental sustainability guidelines or targets should be set
- Active ground floor frontages should be encouraged in the Press and Library Quarters

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Development Committee
Wednesday, 11th June, 2008

**Map of area adjacent to Carrick Hill and Brown Square
Playgrounds can be viewed by opening Item No. 16
within the Agenda pack**

Brown Square Playground

- Brown Square Playground sits within the Shankill Ward which is the most deprived ward in N. Ireland. The playground is also within the Greater Shankill Neighbourhood Renewal Area.
- 35.6% of people in the Shankill Ward have a Limiting Long Term Illness (24.2% in Belfast).
- Population density in Shankill Ward is almost double the average density of Belfast (40.81 persons/Ha)
- Open space assessments undertaken as part of draft BMAP show that there is a total deficiency of 14.6 acres of outdoor playing space within the Shankill Ward, including 12.1 acres of outdoor sport and a 2.5 acre deficiency of casual play areas and equipped playgrounds.
- Output area statistics show that 1799 people live within a 15 minute walk of Brown Square Playground including 224 children under 9 years old and 181 young people aged 10-15 years.

Carrick Hill Playground

- Carrick Hill Playground sits within the New Lodge Ward which is the 5th most deprived ward in N.Ireland. The playground is also within the Inner North Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area.
- 32.4% of people in the New Lodge Ward have a Limiting Long Term Illness (24.2% in Belfast).
- Population density in New Lodge Ward is approx. 3 times the average density of Belfast (72.95 persons/Ha).
- Open space assessments undertaken as part of draft BMAP show that there is a total deficiency of 29.8 acres of outdoor playing space within the New Lodge Ward, including a 20.7 acre deficit of outdoor sport and a 9.1 acre deficit of casual play areas and equipped playgrounds.
- Output area statistics show that 572 people live within a 5 minute walk of Carrick Hill Playground including 65 children under 9 years old and 60 young people aged 10-15 years.”