

Development Committee

Tuesday, 24th June, 2008

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Browne (Chairman); and
Councillors Campbell, Convery, Ekin, Kelly,
C. Maskey, McCarthy, Rodgers and Stoker.

Also attended: Councillor Hendron.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Ms. M.T. McGivern, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McKay, Head of Economic Initiatives; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Attwood and Humphrey.

Strategic Regeneration Frameworks

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Under the Renewing Communities Programme each Area Partnership Board (APB) has been resourced to, and tasked with, producing a Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) for their area by the Department for Social Development (DSD). Each APB has engaged a consultancy team to support them in this work which is due for completion in June – September 2008. Whilst each APB is at a different stage in development, efforts are being made to co-ordinate activity across the frameworks.

Engagement with Councillors in each partnership board area has been pursued directly by the APBs. Some Councillors are participating on the steering groups of the SRFs whilst others input through the APB meetings and consultation processes. Minister and MLAs have been engaged to a varying level dependent on the approach taken by the APB and the stage of development of their SRF.

Members will be aware that at the Development Committee meeting of 14 May, the Committee agreed to receive presentations from BRO and the Area Partnership Boards on the subject of Strategic Regeneration Frameworks.

Key Issues

The SRFs are due for completion during summer 2008, after which time they will be submitted to the Minister for Social Development. It is important to note that there are no specific resources committed for implementation of actions arising out of SRFs beyond those monies committed by DSD/BRO for the preparation of the SRFs.

Substantial staff support has been committed to working with the APBs, their consultancy teams and DSD/BRO in the SRF preparation process.

Each APB will submit their final SRFs to Council for consideration and endorsement which is likely to take place post summer. However, in advance, each APB along with BRO are seeking an opportunity to appraise Committee of key issues arising in each area before the finalisation process.

In its civic leadership role, Belfast City Council undertakes tasks relating to coordination, exerting influence and acting as an advocate. Using Council's convening authority, Belfast City Council frequently brings organisations together to agree an overall vision and accompanying strategy or plan. With the advent of community planning coming to Councils as a result of the recent RPA announcement, Belfast City Council will have a statutory duty to prepare an agreed strategy for its area. In advance of this, Belfast City Council is currently engaged in the preparation of a new corporate plan which will consider how Council can best fulfil a strategic leadership role in city-wide planning. In this regard, Council will be considering how the SRFs should be linked or encompassed as part of city-wide planning processes.

Presently under the SRF process it is apparent that APBs are highly supportive of Council taking a lead role in city-wide planning. The APBs are eager that the SRFs are utilised and incorporated into any emergent city-wide plans. BRO are currently reflecting on their view of joining up the SRFs and city-wide planning processes.

In order to initiate discussions on how all 3 organisations can work positively together on integrated city planning, a workshop was held at officer level on 3 March. Options for strategy alignment between all bodies are being further examined through a sub-group and will be brought back to Members for further consideration in due course.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee receive presentations from BRO and the Area Partnership Boards on the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks.

Key to Abbreviations

SRFs – Strategic Regeneration Frameworks
APB – Area Partnership Board
DSD – Department for Social Development
BRO – Belfast Regeneration Office”

The Chairman welcomed the following persons to the meeting:

Messrs. T. Mackey and M. Murray, representing the North Belfast Area Partnership Board;

Ms. E. Newberry and Ms. A. McMurray, representing the East Belfast Area Partnership Board;

Ms. A. McAleese, representing the South Belfast Area Partnership Board;

Mr. N. Rooney and Ms. C. Persic, representing the West Belfast Area Partnership Board;

Messrs. T. Scott and J. Redpath, representing the Greater Shankill Area Partnership Board; and

Messrs. M. McAvoy and M. O'Donnell, representing the Belfast Regeneration Office.

Mr. Mackey indicated that he would be addressing the Committee on behalf of the various Partnership Boards. He informed the Committee that the Boards valued the participation of both Members and officers from the Council in their work and congratulated the Council on the initiatives which it was undertaking across the City and, in particular, the Arterial Routes Programme. He pointed out that the five Boards were of the view that the various Government Departments would need to commit to the findings contained within the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks to ensure that improvements were made to the services which were provided to the residents across the City.

He pointed out that there had been considerable debate as to whether one or five Frameworks should be produced but the Boards had concluded that it would be better for Belfast as a whole if, eventually, one overarching plan for the City were to be produced since common and City-wide themes were emerging from each Framework, including a

desire for each area to re-connect with the rest of the City. This overarching plan would include the specific needs of certain areas of the City. However, as each Board was required to submit its draft Framework to the Department for Social Development in the near future, five documents were currently being produced. He pointed out that each of the Frameworks had been prepared with the aim of influencing the Government's expenditure programme over the next eighteen to twenty-four months.

Representatives from the five Area Boards then advised the Members of the major items which would be contained within their respective Frameworks.

During discussion in the matter, Members expressed concern that, as had happened with previous plans and initiatives, Government Departments had not set any money aside to implement the recommendations contained within the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks. The point was made that, although the Council was in a similar financial position to Government Departments in that it was operating an extremely restricted budget, it had still managed to undertake work across Belfast which had been appreciated by the communities.

In response, Mr. O'Donnell from the Belfast Regeneration Office indicated that the implementation of the recommendations contained within the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks would be carried out over the longer-term. He explained that, when the plans had been completed, there would be engagement with the various Government Departments to ensure that the issues raised were used to assist the Departments to develop their budgets and plans for the various areas.

During further discussion, several Members suggested that the Boards should consult also with the private sector to encourage entrepreneurs to engage with and invest in the work being undertaken by the various Partnership Boards.

In conclusion, Mr. Mackey indicated that the five Boards were working together for the benefit of the City and that, whilst it would be fair to say that some of the representatives shared the cynicism which the Councillors had expressed regarding whether Government funding would be forthcoming to ensure that the Regeneration Frameworks were undertaken, the Boards were hopeful that there would be useful and co-ordinated inter-Departmental co-operation to ensure that the plans contained within the Frameworks were delivered. He also indicated that the Boards were keen for the Council to champion their work and hoped that it, together with the Boards, might succeed in influencing Government Departments' spending.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Mackey and the other members of the deputation for their presentation and for the information which they had provided.

The representatives from the Partnership Boards thanked the Committee for receiving them and retired from the meeting.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to note the report and the information which had been provided by the representatives of the five Area Partnership Boards.

Sunday Tourism Product

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the Cultural Tourism Strategy, *Developing Belfast’s Opportunity*, outlines the need to develop the quality of the visitor experience in Belfast on Sundays and enhance and promote the current product offering. Northern Ireland Tourist Board Research and feedback from the tourism sector and Welcome Centre found that virtually all identified a problem on Sundays. Members may also be aware that media coverage surrounding the Lonely Planet announcement in November 2006 commented on the need to develop the Sunday offer. The long-term closure of a number of City attractions and the closure of the cultural venues significantly adds to the need to create a critical mass of activity for the short-break market.

Key Issues

Research from all sectors shows the current level of Sunday activity is inadequate and unsatisfactory to visitors. Visitors are complaining that there is nothing to do on Sundays, that there is poor public transport and they do not have a full picture of what is currently available. Cruise ship visitors and guests staying in hotels are being actively encouraged to leave Belfast to visit the Causeway Coast or Mourne Mountains, which is an obvious loss to the Belfast economy.

The report recommends raising awareness of the current cultural tourism offer and coordinating product development. This is to enhance the quality of the visitor experience by conveying the range of leisure activities which people might choose to pursue on Sundays as there is a lack of knowledge regarding the current offering.

We respectfully recognise that there will be residents, visitors and organisations who wish to uphold Sunday Observance. Organisations not wishing to partake or contribute can opt out of offering cultural activity if they so wish. Activities will concentrate on areas that are non-residential and much of the proposed activity, particularly in relation to art, music and family tourism, is free of charge.

The report also recommends including Christian Heritage: organised walking tours detailing Christian, architectural and historical heritage and liaising with Churches and Chapels to determine times of services and access for cultural tourists.

Appendix 1 is a summary of actions that will be undertaken with identified partners to raise awareness of the current cultural tourism offer and coordinate product development in order to enhance the quality of the visitor experience. Feedback has shown that cultural tourism providers would increase Sunday initiatives and be proactive in their programming if they had marketing support. A marketing strategy to domestic and out-of-state visitors is crucial to the success of any Sunday Product Development as research shows that there is a lack of knowledge regarding current offering.

The programme seeks to create awareness of and enhance the current Sunday product offering in order to improve the quality of the visitor experience and contribute to the competitive success of Belfast. It will also seek to co-ordinate information in partnership with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau on what is available in Belfast on Sundays (including details of public transport) in order to inform visitors of the Sunday cultural tourism offering. Other sources of support will be explored in order to develop the programme contained within Appendix 1.

Resource Implications

Financial

Cost of Pilot Sunday Product Development Recommendations,
£46,250

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Recommendations”

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Special Development Committee
Tuesday, 24th June, 2008

**Appendix 1: Recommendations can be viewed
by opening Item No. 3 within the Agenda Pack**

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The Head of Economic Initiatives informed the Members that the foregoing report had been amended to take account of the comments which had been made at the Committee's meeting on 11th June. In addition, briefings had been offered to the various Political Groupings represented on the Council regarding this issue and one Grouping had availed of this opportunity.

During discussion in the matter, some Members expressed concern that the report indicated that the Council would be providing £46,250 towards the development of the tourism product which was available within the City on Sunday but that that amount would not be sufficient to undertake all of the recommendations contained within Appendix 1 and that the Committee was being requested to approve the programme with no guarantee that any other funding would be forthcoming from either public or private sources. It was suggested that, if sufficient money were forthcoming, it might not be necessary for the Department to spend the entire £46,250, which would be of benefit to the ratepayers.

In response, the Head of Economic Initiatives indicated that the expenditure referred to in the report would be used to produce marketing material to promote the Sunday product which was available within Belfast. She pointed out that funding had been sought from other organisations and, since the Northern Ireland Tourist Board was keen to support the development of the tourism product which was available within Belfast on Sunday, it might provide finance towards this scheme.

During further discussion, Members indicated that it would be important that the programme covered more than the City centre and that the music and literary events referred to in the Appendix were held in venues other than licensed premises to make them attractive to everyone.

Following further discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Campbell,
Seconded by Councillor McCarthy,

That the Committee agrees not to authorise expenditure of £46,250 in connection with the development of the Sunday tourism product within Belfast until match funding has been secured for this initiative from other sources.

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

Following further discussion, the Committee agreed to authorise expenditure of £46,250 in connection with the development of the Sunday tourism product within Belfast on the understanding that every effort is made to secure match funding from other sources.

Chairman