

Development Committee

Wednesday, 11th March, 2009

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Browne (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor D. Browne); and
Councillors Campbell, Crozier, Cunningham, Ekin,
Humphrey, B. Kelly, Kyle, Lavery, C. Maskey,
McCarthy, McCausland, Mhic Giolla Mhín, Rodgers
and Stoker.

Also attended: Councillors Mullaghan and Newton.

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 of the
Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Halls; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 3rd, 11th and 17th February 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 March, subject to the omission of that portion of the minute of 17th February under the heading "Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce" which, at the request of Councillor Newton, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Councillor Convery

The Committee was advised that Councillor Convery was in hospital and the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, wished him a speedy recovery.

Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 17th February under the heading "Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce" which had been taken back at the Council meeting on 2nd March at the request of Councillor Newton. An extract of the minute in this regard is set out hereunder:

“The Committee was advised that representatives of the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce were in attendance and accordingly Messrs. J. Moore, D. Penick and N. Gordon were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Moore advised the Members that the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce represented over 500 affiliated organisations and, in addition, it sought to support the interests of those businesses throughout the City who could not afford to be a member. He stated that the current financial crisis was having a severe effect on the businesses within the City centre and there was a real fear that many could stop trading and shop premises would remain vacant. He was therefore of the view that there was a need to ringfence and protect the City centre.

Mr. Penick stated that, it was not only the City centre which was affected by the economic downturn, but other trading locations throughout the City and surrounding cities and towns. He suggested that the problem would be exacerbated by the development of a large out-of-town retail unit at Sprucefield. He pointed out that his organisation would welcome the John Lewis company locating in either Belfast or Lisburn City centre, but they were opposed to the inappropriate out-of-town location.

Mr. Gordon suggested that a weak framework, in terms of the planning and development process, was having a detrimental effect on City centres and on smaller towns and villages throughout the province. The loss of local shops providing goods and services had an inappropriately detrimental affect on older people and people who could not afford to travel to large out-of-town shopping centres. He stated that there was a need to work together to encourage the development of the town/city centres throughout the province.

The deputation then answered a number of questions in relation to the development of out-of-town shopping centres and the likely effect this would have on the City centre and arterial routes throughout the City.

In relation to a question from a Member, the Principal Solicitor indicated that there was, at this point in time, no reason for the Council to seek a judicial review since no decision had been arrived at in regard to the planning application, and it appeared likely that the application would be subject to a local inquiry.

In conclusion, Mr. Moore advised the Committee that the majority of the John Lewis Group’s operations were located in city centres throughout the rest of the United Kingdom and that he was of the view that the opportunities offered by the developer at Sprucefield had been made very attractive to the John Lewis Group. He suggested that the Minister for the Environment should release Planning Policy Statement 5 with immediate effect. He pointed out that, since the development at Sprucefield would erode the rates base for the City, it would be appropriate for the Council to object to the development. Mr. Gordon stated that there was a need for investment on brownfield sites and not additional shopping centre constructed on out-of-town greenfield sites.

The members of the deputation thanked the Committee for receiving them and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee proceeded to consider the undernoted report in respect of the Council's position regarding the development at Sprucefield:

'Relevant Background Information

The Development Committee on the 10th December 2008 agreed to receive a presentation from the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce in respect of their concerns in relation to the current Sprucefield Centre Ltd application for further retail development at Sprucefield. The basis for the request and the details of the proposed development were set out in the report of 10th December 2008 which is included as Appendix 1 for information.

The adverse implications for the surrounding retail centres, arising from the proposed development, combined with the changed economic conditions highlights the necessity for a precautionary approach to both retail development and the application of policy. The advice contained in the previous report suggested that the Council, in recognition of the limited application modifications and changed economic climate, maintained the previously adopted positions both in respect of the objection to the application and the recommendation that the proposed development be subject to a Local inquiry.

The Committee resolved that in advance of the presentation and taking account of the changed economic situation it would not be appropriate, at that stage, for the Council to reiterate the previously adopted position in respect of the proposed application.

Key Issues

The modifications to the current planning application represent very minor changes from the previously submitted proposals that were the subject of objections from a number of organisations and the Council. The clearly identifiable adverse implications for the retail core of Belfast and the surrounding city and town centres therefore remain extant.

It should also be noted that the approval of the proposed application would have significant adverse implications for retail policy generally within the metropolitan area.

With regard to the retail policy Committee may wish to note that Planning Service in October 2008 requested the early release of that part of the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) BMAP Report relating to strategic retail issues. The Commission recently confirmed that it took the view that this was a discrete issue and, as the public sessions of the inquiry were complete, it could comply with the Department's request. Whilst the Commission recently confirmed that it had issued the report to the Department on 21st January 2009 both organisations have stated that the findings and recommendations contained within the report will not be made available to the public at this stage.

The Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce and Independent Belfast Retailers, along with a number of other objectors within the wider region, have indicated that they will be pursuing objections to the current Sprucefield Centre Ltd application. The Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce propose to make a presentation to the Committee in respect of the concerns arising from the proposed development and the potential impacts on the wider region over the short and longer term investment horizons.

The Chamber may also wish to take the opportunity to explore the potential for the development of similar working arrangements to those previously adopted whereby objectors shared a coordinated approach to the participation in any future public inquiry to reduce the potential cost of such an action.

Notwithstanding the above the Department it is suggested that the previous recommendation to the Committee remains the most appropriate course of action and the Council position, of objection to the proposed development and request for a Local Inquiry to be convened, be maintained.

Resource Implications

There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

Members are requested to:

- maintain the previously adopted positions and approve the submission of an objection to the proposed development at Sprucefield including a recommendation that the proposed development be subject to a Local inquiry.'*

After discussion, it was

*Moved by Councillor McCarthy,
Seconded by Councillor Lavery,*

That the Committee agrees to maintain its previously adopted position and approves the submission of an objection to the proposed development at Sprucefield, including a recommendation that the proposed development be subject to a public inquiry.

On a vote by show of hands six Members voted for the proposal and one against and it was accordingly declared carried."

Councillor Newton, with the permission of the Chairman, indicated that he understood the concerns which had been expressed at the meeting by the representatives from the Chamber of Trade and Commerce regarding the proposed development at Sprucefield. He pointed out that the John Lewis Company had indicated that it would not be building a new store within Belfast City centre and subsequent to the meeting on 17th February the Government had announced, in line with the Committee's request, that a public inquiry into the proposed development would be held. He pointed out also that the development would create 1,500 jobs, some of which would be for residents of Belfast, and that residents of the City would use the new shopping centre. He reminded the Committee that the developer of the Sprucefield site had plans to extend Castlecourt at a cost of £200 million. Accordingly, he suggested that the Committee should not submit an objection to the development at Sprucefield and explore with the John Lewis Company other opportunities for Belfast.

During discussion in the matter, several Members indicated that the Committee on previous occasions had indicated that it was opposed to out-of-town shopping centres given their adverse impact on city and town centres. They pointed out that such developments resulted in the relocation of jobs and shops rather than the creation of new ones. Other Members expressed the view that, given the Council's close relationships with the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce and Belfast City Centre Management, which were both opposed to the Sprucefield development, it would be very difficult for the Committee to withdraw its objection to the proposed development of the John Lewis store.

Following further discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Campbell,
Seconded by Councillor Crozier,

That the Committee agrees not to submit an objection to the proposed John Lewis development at Sprucefield.

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

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to adhere to its decision of 17th February.

Belfast City Council - Response to the Economic Downturn

The Director reminded the Members that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 6th February, had agreed a way forward for the Council to respond to the economic downturn. She pointed out that, whilst the Council was focused currently on the immediate future for Belfast's economy in light of the scale and depth of the economic crisis, it would be important that it did not abandon its medium to long term plans. Projecting ahead and planning for growth and sustainable development should still be pursued as part of the overall City-wide development agenda. Therefore, whilst the Council should seek to make adjustments and changes to services or initiatives, the overall goals and strategic objectives contained within the Corporate Plan, the City Investment Strategy and other thematic plans should not be forgotten about. She pointed out that the changed economic climate might require amendments to be made to the original proposals for as long as was necessary in order to underpin and stabilise the local economy. It would therefore be essential for the Council to undertake continuous monitoring, analysis and assessment in order to keep abreast of those trends and challenges which would require the Council's attention.

The Director then outlined key actions which the Committee and Department would undertake in the coming year and pointed out that these would be included within the forthcoming Development Departmental Plan. She suggested, in order to monitor and develop the work which would be undertaken as part of the Committee's response to the economic downturn, that a task group consisting of both Members and officers be established.

During discussion, a Member pointed out that, given the current economic difficulties, those organisations providing advice regarding debt were under considerable pressure and that any assistance which the Council and other agencies could provide to them would be most welcome.

In response, the Director indicated that officers from her Department would be meeting in the near future with representatives from Government Departments regarding this matter. However, she reminded the Committee that under current protocol the provision of debt advice was considered as "specialised" which meant that funding provided to the Council by the Department for Social Development could not be used by the Council to grant-aid specialist advice-giving organisations, although this issue would be discussed at the forthcoming meetings.

Following further discussion, the Committee noted the information provided by the Director and agreed that those actions outlined by the Director be undertaken and included within the Departmental Plan. The Committee agreed further that a joint Member/officer task group be established as a matter of urgency and that one Member from each of the Party Groupings on the Council be represented thereon.

Easter Retail and Hospitality Campaign

The Director reminded the Members that, in November 2008, the Lord Mayor had met with representatives from the Belfast Chamber of Trade, Belfast City Centre Management and the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau in order to examine how the Christmas period could be enhanced to try and counter the economic downturn.

The meeting had resulted in a number of ideas being developed which had led to the Christmas period being relatively successful for the retail and tourism sectors in the City. Accordingly, the same organisations had met recently to discuss the creation of a year long campaign for the retail and hospitality sectors and had agreed that the first part should revolve around the Easter period.

She informed the Committee that the theme for Easter would be "The Belfast Bunny". This concept would be used to create media stories, brand the City and promote Belfast as a visitor and shopping destination. She assured the Members that the branding would be used throughout Belfast and not just in the City centre. She pointed out that the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau and the Belfast City Centre Management would be amending their existing advertising and promotional campaigns to fit with the theme. In view of this, she requested that the Committee consider contributing a maximum of £25,000 towards the cost of providing additional promotional materials, banners and activities in relation to the Easter Retail and Hospitality Campaign.

Arising from discussion in this matter, several Members expressed concern that the campaign was being organised too late and that the money spent would not represent good value for money. Accordingly, the Committee agreed that it would not provide financial assistance to the Easter Retail and Hospitality Campaign. However, the Committee agreed that it would be prepared to consider the provision of assistance for similar retail and hospitality campaigns during other key seasonal periods of the year.

Review of Belfast City Council's Play Service

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information"

Belfast City Council Community Services currently supports a range of services for children and young people throughout our Play and Community Centres. The Play Development Service provides support to enhance these services, to organise central events and to provide support for the voluntary and community sector. The 6 Playcentres currently provide direct services for children through pre-school playgroups, after school clubs and holiday playschemes. Examples of the current range of services, their target age group and the support provided by Belfast City Council is available on Modern.gov.

Belfast City Council agreed at their meeting on 4 July 2005 to undertake a review of Council-owned Playcentres. The purpose was to:

- review the benefits against the cost of providing six dedicated Playcentres**
- to relate them to alternative methods of providing a play service**

- make recommendations as to the way forward in relation to the Council's role in delivering a play service

The review was undertaken by an independent consultancy, Venturei and involved consultation with a range of internal and external groupings. The report and recommendations were presented to the Development Committee on 11 June 2008. The report highly commended the quality of work undertaken by the play staff team recognising them as a substantive resource for services for children and young people. The report recommended that the staff team were maintained and that their skills are further developed and maximised. Furthermore it recognised the value of play and outlined a number of recommendations to extend the impact of the service by widening both the geographical scope and to broaden the age range of the service.

The Committee accepted the recommendations contained within the Venturei report including a recognition of:

- the significant role of play in the lives of children and the wider community and the 'right to play' as articulated in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- the clear fit for play with a wide range of strategies contained within the Corporate Plan including those relating to health & well being, education and learning, citizenship, community development and strategies specifically aimed at children and young people.
- the strong research and evidence base which supports the positive impacts that result from providing children and young people with enriched play experiences and the significant contribution that BCC has made to positively changing the lives of children in this city through its investment in the provision play workers and appropriate play spaces / environments.

Committee however expressed some concern at some aspects of the report including the accuracy of the statistical information in the report which supported the recommendation to cease the provision of a pre-school play service at the remaining play centres which still offered this as part of their menu of programmes. Committee was also interested in how the play team could increase the level of support to the community sector such as churches and youth organisations who were significantly involved in play provision in the City but who received very little by way of financial or other assistance from the public sector.

To facilitate consideration of the review, officers tabled an associated plan which proposed actions and related activity including details of the time-scale for implementation and the anticipated benefits and service implications.

To support implementation of the review, Committee agreed to establish a Consultative Group consisting of Councillors and Officers to examine the current facilities which were available within the City and how the work undertaken by the Play Service could be improved.

This would involve:

- (i) verifying the evidence base regarding the recommendation to exit from pre-school playgroups. The decision relates provision at 3 of the 6 Play Centres: Avoniel, Ballysillian and Olympia.
- (ii) to add value and determine how best to manage the implementation of points 2-6 of the agreed action plan.

The Committee further agreed that a decision regarding the provision of pre-school playgroups would need to be taken by Committee in February 2009 in order to support an effective exit strategy from pre-school playgroups and to inform parents and guardians.

Committee should note that the pre-school playgroup services based at Whiterock, North Queen Street and Loop River closed in previous years due to decreasing numbers and the inability to meet the agreed minimum number of children as agreed by Council. The resources released as a result of these closures have been used to enhance the current play service. This has included extending the remaining services based at the centres that support play opportunities for children through after school, seasonal and summer provision and support for the sector.

Key Issues

In considering the current position regarding pre-school playgroup provision by Belfast City Council, the Consultative Group undertook a number of tasks that included:

- (i) meetings with external stakeholders including the Early Years Organisation which provides support for the pre-school sector.
- (ii) examination of the statutory responsibilities for the provision of pre-school playgroups.

- (iii) exploration of the different types of pre-school provision, associated resource issues and the current demand within the sector.
- (iv) commission of a mapping exercise to examine the current supply of provision in the areas where the pre-school playgroups are based. This was undertaken by Herbie McLearnon, an independent consultant. The mapping exercise examined the number of places currently provided in Nursery schools and the Belfast City Council pre-school playgroups.

The mapping exercise indicates that there are excess places within the statutory nursery education sector based in the geographical area provided for by the pre-school playgroup based at Avoniel Playcentre.

In the geographical areas provided for by the playgroups based at Olympia and Ballysillian Playcentres, there is spare capacity within the statutory nursery sector to include two children in the qualifying year that may attend the pre-school playgroups based in the two Playcentres. This potentially leaves 5 children in the qualifying year that would need to access alternative provision.

The consultative group also considered the challenges related to the changing context of our current pre-school playgroup provision including those associated with the increasing demands of the certifying authority and the particular needs of a younger client group. The group believe that if Belfast City Council is to continue to provide pre-school playgroup provision, this will only be viable if we are to include children from outside the qualifying age group, that is, those in this younger age category. To enable this, an additional staff resource will need to be dedicated to each playgroup in order to ensure the continued provision of a quality service. This would involve a strong resource commitment for a small number of children and is not included in current or future budget estimates.

Through releasing those resources currently dedicated to the provision of pre-school playgroups at the 3 remaining centres, the play service would be able to move from a static facility based approach to one associated with the provision of an enhanced service that is both flexible and needs led. This would enable the service to target a greater number of children and extend the geographical reach and age range of the service.

This reallocation of resources will have a positive impact on our vision of changing the lives of more children and young people across the City. Resources will be utilised to support work with

marginalised children, to develop inclusive play opportunities, to piloting new projects, resources, training and practical support for community groups.

The service will also advance both internal and external partnerships in order to develop new areas of work and maximise the use of other Belfast City Council assets including parks.

Play staff would work with local stakeholders in each of the three locations where the pre-school playgroups are currently based to ensure an effective exit strategy.

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. Note the contents of the report
2. Agree the recommendation of the Play Review Consultative Group that Belfast City Council moves from a static facility based approach through pre-school playgroups to a city-wide approach that will enhance the service and enable it to be flexible and needs led.
3. Agree that officers engage with relevant stakeholders to ensure an effective exit strategy for each of the 3 affected areas”

The Community Development Manager drew the Committee’s attention to and answered questions from the Members concerning the report and agreed to provide specific information which was requested by a Member.

Following discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations contained within the foregoing report.

Economic Development Unit - Update

Co-Financing for European Social Fund Applications

(Councillors Cunningham, Lavery and C. Maskey declared an interest in this matter in that they sat on the Board of one of the organisations seeking assistance, Councillor Ekin declared an interest also in his capacity as landlord of one of the organisations and they took no part in the debate.)

Following a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report regarding applications which had been received from organisations seeking co-financing from the Committee in connection with projects which they organised and which had received assistance under the European Social Fund.

Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that Belfast, for the first time, was now eligible for support under the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme and, together with Lisburn City and Castlereagh Borough Councils, was working to develop a Rural Development Strategy. She indicated that a call for projects which were eligible for assistance would be opened shortly and that information sessions to promote the Programme would be taking place in the near future.

Noted.

United Kingdom Business Incubation Conference

The Committee was advised that United Kingdom British Incubation was the umbrella organisation responsible for providing business incubation support in the United Kingdom. It was intending to hold its 2009 International Conference in Belfast in November, which it was anticipated would attract up to 250 delegates from across the world. The Conference would examine the future of business incubation in the United Kingdom and, in particular, the challenges and opportunities which were facing business support organisations during the economic recession.

The Head of Economic Initiatives pointed out that the items to be discussed at the Conference were relevant to the City due to the plans which the Council had to develop a business centre on the North Foreshore and the transfer, under the Review of Public Administration, to the Council of additional economic development powers and responsibilities. Accordingly, she recommended that a maximum of £10,000 be provided to support the organisation of two workshops at the Conference and the provision of hospitality for those attending the event on the understanding that United Kingdom Business Incubation obtain funding of at least £50,000 from other sources for the Conference.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Independent Review of Economic Policy - Draft Response

The Committee was advised that, in December 2008, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment had launched an Independent Review of Economic Development Policy and had established an independent panel to undertake the review. As part of the associated consultation process the panel had launched a call for evidence with 27th February as the deadline for submission. Accordingly, the undernoted response had been submitted with the proviso that it had not been agreed by the Committee:

“1. Introduction

1.1 This document incorporates evidence which Belfast City Council considers to be appropriate in the context of the Review of economic policy within DETI and Invest NI launched by the Enterprise Minister in December 2008.

1.2 The document has the endorsement of the Senior Management Team within Belfast City Council. Its contents will also be formally endorsed by the elected members of the Council in due course. Given the tight turnaround of this call for evidence, it has not been possible for this to be formally endorsed at political level. We will confirm with the Review Panel once formal political endorsement has been achieved.

1.3 We remain supportive of all efforts to improve the economic performance of the city and the wider region and trust that we can make a useful contribution to the debate on the future economic policy for Northern Ireland.

2. Context

2.1 In advance of providing the evidence to support our comments, there are a number of points the Review Panel should take into account in their endeavours. These are as follows:

2.1.1 Belfast City Council is the largest of the local authority areas and the regional capital. It is the location of more than 3 in 10 international investments and provides around one third of all jobs in the region. It is clearly the regional driver and, in terms of economic policy, will require distinct and focused support to ensure its continued development and growth.

- 2.1.2 Around 35,000 jobs were created in Belfast in the period 1995-2005¹. This was set against the backdrop of a decreasing population at that time. Although more recent figures suggest that the population levels have now steadied, it is nonetheless clear that Belfast is providing employment not only for those living in the city but also for the wider population. This presents its own challenges in terms of pressure on the city's infrastructure and it is important that government investment is geared towards addressing this issue.
- 2.1.3 Through its Corporate Plan, Belfast City Council is committed to improving the quality of life, now and for future generations. Economic development is clearly an important component part of this challenge. As the city's only democratically-elected forum, the Council accepts that while economic growth is important in creating a prosperous society, it is important that this development happens in a sustainable and balanced manner and that all citizens have an opportunity to take advantage of the city's growth.
- 2.1.4 The current economic downturn has affected the city – and the region – and it will require a focused effort by all partners to minimise the adverse affects of the crisis on the citizens.
- 2.1.5 Belfast City Council is concerned that the review is limited to DETI and Invest NI activity in the field of economic development, given the imminent transfer of some – albeit limited – economic development activity to councils as part of the ongoing Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland (RPANI). Councils will also have the responsibility of undertaking actions to promote the economic and social wellbeing of their area as part of the Community Planning process which is also to be introduced as part of RPANI. We ask that, while the Review Panel may have excluded local authorities' work on economic development as part of this review, it gives consideration to their contribution to and role within the future economic development arena post-2011.
- 2.1.6 Along with its counterparts, Belfast City Council is keen to undertake additional responsibility in the field of economic development following the Review. Certain activity is better undertaken at the local area and we are prepared for the challenge of delivering additional support, particularly in

¹ <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity/docs/CurrentDevelopmentBrief/DevelopmentBrief1.pdf>

the field of business start-up, development and growth. There has been considerable collective experience built up within local authorities in the field of economic development and this experience should be utilised in the development and delivery of new activities to support economic development in local areas.

- 2.1.7 Belfast City Council is disappointed by the proposals on economic development proposed as part of the Review of Public Administration. We are ambitious to carry out additional activity but we will be hampered in doing so if due consideration is not given to providing local authorities with additional legislative powers in this field. The current plans appear to us to be limited to the transfer of a range of programmes that are already in operation rather than providing scope for local authorities to engage in any new activity related to the needs of their area.
- 2.1.8 Belfast City Council would also be keen to explore collaborate working relationships with Invest NI on property asset management. While we accept that the property portfolio of Invest NI is not to be transferred to Councils, we feel that there is merit in exploring opportunities for the development and management of facilities to target specific, defined sectors. In the case of Belfast – and possibly Derry – this could include the creative industries and both councils have significant experience of initiatives in this field. Belfast has a successful track record of asset development and management for business purposes, including the award-winning Gasworks development. In Belfast, a number of Invest NI property assets are empty or under-utilised. We consider that there is this can act as a brake on entrepreneurship and is at odds with the business start-up and growth targets. We consider that this could be addressed by closer planning between the Council and Invest NI to secure the optimal use of all assets.
- 2.1.9 We consider that there is room for improving the access to and input of local politicians to the debate on economic policy. The Sub-Regional Review of Economic Development and Regeneration² undertaken by the UK Department for Communities and Local Government in 2007 paved the way for representation by local elected representatives on the boards of the English Regional Development Agencies. This is a model that should be considered as part of the review of Invest NI's structures.

² DCLG (2007) *Sub-regional review of economic development and regeneration*, London, HMSO

2.1.10 We support the assertion that ‘the right mix of governance institutions can have a substantial impact on the competitiveness of local and regional economies’.³ We consider that local authorities are an important element of that mix and look forward to a more productive working environment with Invest NI, DETI and other government departments and agencies working in the field of economic development.

3. Evidence on issues within the review terms of reference

3.1 The following section includes some evidence to argue our case under a number of the points referred to in the terms of reference for this work, as requested in the call for evidence.

3.1.1 *Policy options to stimulate economic growth/productivity and build a larger and more wealth creating private sector*

It is widely accepted that one of the key attributes of a successful city is a dynamic economy which high levels of business start-up. According to the Belfast report from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)⁴ report for 2007, the level of early stage entrepreneurial activity in Belfast was 2.8 per cent which equates to around 4,500 individuals involved in a new business venture creation. This compares to 4.9 per cent in Northern Ireland as a whole and 5.6 per cent for the UK. Compared to urban areas in England the number of individuals engaged in new business venture creation in Belfast is significantly lower: 3.2 per cent compared to 5.2 per cent.

One of the best known and effective Invest NI interventions to address start-up rates in the region has been the Start a Business Programme. While the focus on the programme to date has been on *volume* of start-ups, the new programme appears to place more of a focus on the quality of business starts, particularly those in the high-end sectors. While this approach may have been appropriate prior to the economic downturn, there may now need to be further consideration of this proposed approach, given that self-employment may now become an option for some ‘necessity entrepreneurs’ as a result of becoming unemployed or being made redundant.

³ Herrschel, T. (2004) *Governance and new regionalism in the capital city regions of England and Germany* in Wood, A. and Valler, D. (eds.) *Governing local and regional economies*, Aldershot, Ashgate

⁴ Hart, M. (2007) *Entrepreneurial Activity in Belfast: results from the GEM Northern Ireland 2007 survey*

3.1.2 *Structure and remit of Invest NI and the existing governance arrangements between DETI, DFP and Invest NI*

The work on entrepreneurship and some business growth support is largely driven by Invest NI's local office network. In Belfast, the network operates on a wider basis than the Belfast City Council local authority area. It is our impression that, as a result, of this, there has been no method of regular, formal discussion and discourse between the organisations. Having said that, strong operational, working relationships do occur.

In line with the previous drive for co-terminosity as part of the Review of Public Administration, there may be merit in considering whether the local office network – if this is to continue to exist – should reflect the new council area structures. Again, it is our impression that the lines of responsibility are blurred between the local offices and the head office which is more prominent in Belfast where both are located within the Invest NI HQ.

While the ethos of Invest NI is that the organisation is driven and led by the private sector, it is unclear whether the accountability mechanisms imposed by government allow this to operate as it should.

Conversely, the lack of elected representatives on the board of Invest NI means that there are no checks and balances in terms of the economic *and* social impact of activities undertaken, as opposed to the pursuit of economic goals only.

3.1.3 *Issues which may inhibit the delivery of the productivity goal which fall to other Departments in the NI Executive, particularly DEL and DRD*

Integration and cooperation needs to take place across government departments to ensure a truly joined up approach to business support is achieved. Currently a number of government departments/agencies (DEL, DARD, DSD, DE, the Strategic Investment Board etc.) and Local Authorities deliver services and initiatives that impact upon the business community. The delivery of these services needs to be considered in the wider business environment, taking account of how these resources can work together to achieve private sector growth and productivity improvements.

There needs to be more recognition of regional/local area needs and how localised support structures (including local authorities) can complement and add value to DETI/INI policies and programmes. This process needs to be two way and clearly identified paths of communication need to be established rather than the ad hoc approach currently in operation. Belfast's needs are clearly different from those of its neighbours. The current one-size-fits-all approach does not work.

Each location has its own specific development needs. In the case of Belfast, specific neighbourhoods within the city are particularly disadvantaged while others have prospered from the recent economic growth in the city. These disparities are clearly illustrated in a recent report undertaken by Regional Forecasts to look at skills demand and supply in the city of Belfast⁵. Some headline statistics produced in this report include:

- Current estimates suggest over 64,000 people inactive in Belfast of which over 34,000 are long-term sick or looking after the home. This is more people than are employed in public administration throughout Northern Ireland;
- In 2006 13 of Belfast's Wards are estimated to have less than half the working age population in work. Going forward, 12 wards are likely to exhibit this alarming trait. In 2006 it is estimated that in 15 Belfast wards less than 10% of residents have a graduate qualification;
- Over half of net new jobs in Belfast over the next decade will require graduate qualifications. Less than 1 in 7 are expected to require no qualifications;
- In the recent period (or prior to the economic downturn), the city centre (Duncairn, Island and Shaftesbury wards) has been the 'red hot core' of jobs growth in Belfast, and will continue to be - creating over three-quarters of Belfast's 13,980 jobs in the next decade (2007 projections);
- Even with a forecast end in population decline and improvement in resident skills as better qualified young people start replacing older less qualified workers, Belfast's economy will depend on an

⁵ Regional Forecasts (2007) *Belfast Skills Demand and Supply*

increasing number of commuters (or more migrants) across all skill levels, particularly at graduate level. This is partly because the number of inactive residents is forecast to remain extremely high still in 2015 (63,000). Of this 63,000, almost 37,000 are forecast to still have no qualifications in 2015; and

- The extent and longevity of disparities within Belfast are remarkable. In the 2001 Census year, differences in resident employment rates ranged from 77% (Orangefield) to 32% (Falls), while the difference in the graduate share of working age population ranges from 59% (Malone) to 2% (Crumlin). By 2015, it is forecast that 12 wards will have a resident employment rate of less than 50% (the NI overall employment rate in 2015 is forecast to be 75% to put a rate of less than 50% in context).

These figures illustrate very clearly the point that, despite the best efforts of DETI and Invest NI to promote economic development, there is a need to ensure that supporting policy areas are dovetailing their priorities in order to underpin the growth potential of the region. This is clearly inhibiting the delivery of the productivity goal.

In the business development and support arena, there are a number of partners (Invest NI, DARD, DEL) operating a range of programmes. There is significant disparity in the operating mechanisms, targets, approach and funding regime of each of these. This adds to the confusion that already exists around business support mechanisms and could inhibit the numbers of businesses accessing these support initiatives.”

The Committee approved the contents of the foregoing response.

Community Festivals Fund

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that, following an approach by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2008, the Council had agreed to manage the Community Festival Fund, which had previously been organised by the former Northern Ireland Events Company, in the Belfast area. The Department had offered the Council an amount of £77,300 on the understanding that the Council would match this sum. The Committee had expressed the view that this amount was inadequate, had agreed that it would make available the sum of £120,000 for the Fund and had requested that the Department match this amount. Subsequently, the Department had indicated that it could not do so. Accordingly, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure had been requested to review the amount which would be allocated to Belfast before the scheme for the period 2009/2010 had been opened.

She informed the Members that the Department had offered the Council the sum of £77,300 towards the Community Festivals Fund for the 2009/2010 year, which was the same amount as had been provided last year. She pointed out that a similar sum had been included in the Committee's Revenue Estimates for the coming financial year and, since the Council was entitled to use 10% of the budget for the administration of the scheme, the total value of the Fund would be £139,140. She informed the Members that the first tranche of the Community Festivals Fund for the 2009/2010 year had attracted twenty-four applications totally £195,098.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to accept from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure the sum of £77,300 towards the Community Festivals Fund and to provide a similar amount towards the scheme.

Rolling Programme to Support Innovation in Arts and Heritage

The Head of Economic Initiatives informed the Committee that the above-mentioned Programme had been established by the Council in 2005 to assist arts and heritage organisations in Belfast to avail of opportunities which arose during the year which would benefit their group. She reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 9th April, 2008, it had delegated authority to the Director of Development to award grants under the scheme. She reported that, since April 2008, thirty-one applications for assistance had been received from twenty-eight organisations and that the undernoted groups had received funding as indicated:

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Awarded</u>
Arts Care NI	Specialist Training for Clown Doctors Project	£1,500
Bbeyond	Cross Cultural Visual Arts Exhibition & Outreach	£2,000
Beat Initiative	Carnival Launch Event, Training,	£2,000
Creative Media Partnerships	Development and production of 8 short films as part of the Outburst Festival	£2,000
East Belfast Titanic Festival	Community Festival	£2,500
Feile an Phobail	Creation of Celtic Village at Community Festival	£2,500
Friends of Ulster Orchestra	Creation of Archive resource	£1,500
Greenshoot Productions	Outreach package to accompany theatre production	£2,500
Happenstance Theatre Company	Heritage related theatre performance and workshops	£1,500
Linenhall Library	Creation of literary festival	£2,000
Open Arts	Performance opportunity for Disability Arts Choir	£1,500
Tinderbox Theatre	Development of new theatre production	£2,500
Total		£26,000.00

She pointed out, whilst the funding provided by the Committee to arts and heritage groups in Belfast represented approximately 10% of the collective budgets for projects assisted under the Rolling Programme, it had resulted in organisations leveraging considerable funding from other sources to enable events to be held. It therefore demonstrated the value for money which the scheme represented to the cultural infrastructure of the City. In addition, the number of people attending events supported by the initiative during the 2008/2009 year had increased by 13% over the previous year and the number of professional artists employed by such events had increased by 200%. She therefore believed that the Programme had made a significant contribution to the arts and heritage organisations in Belfast.

The Committee noted the information provided.

**Ballymacarrett/Connswater Community and Leisure Limited –
Extension of Lease**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

In 2004 the Client Services Committee agreed to the recommendation contained within the Strategic Review of Council Owned Indoor Leisure Facilities that the Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre be transferred to the community sector. In January 2005, the Committee agreed to hand over management of this facility to Connswater Community and Leisure Ltd (CC&L). This company was formed by Mersey Street Area Residents Association (MARA) and other local interests in order to manage Ballymacarrett L.C.

Following refurbishment, CC&L took over the management of the Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre in February 2006 on a basis of a 3 year lease, that is for the period to Feb 2009. Community Services has provided regular Community Development Worker (CDW) and Community Services Area Manager (CSAM) support to the group to ease and enable the process of managing Ballymacarrett L.C.

A preliminary 6 month review was undertaken concentrating on the area of governance and looking specifically at

- Accountability
- management structures and processes
- Financial management
- Centre usage
- Complaints received
- Wider community links
- Difficulties experienced

The result showed that CC&L had shown improvement but that further work was required in order to provide a high quality public service. One of the group’s strengths was that they had a highly committed and motivated manager who had around him a strong team of volunteers.

The balance between running the facility as a business and still addressing community need became an issue for the Board of Directors. The resulting conflict led to several resignations notably the Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer. This has further eroded the management capacity of the group i.e. the issue that had been questioned at the start of the lease. CSAM and CDW support was again put in place to help the group overcome the difficulties and resulted in the issues being addressed and new Directors appointed.

During this period, the group has continued to meet its monitoring requirements and since the summer of 2008 has increased their community development activities thus beginning to balance up what had initially been a largely leisure based programme.

Sadly, in December 2008 the centre manager Mr John Cochrane died unexpectedly.

His departure will severely impact on the day to day running and management of the Centre. The organisation, coordination and vision for the Centre was largely led by him and the Connswater group will have significant adjustments to make if they are to continue to develop the capacity that Mr Cochrane contributed to the organisation.

Key Issues

- The Centre's programme has only in the last 6 months begun to meet the required standard in terms of both in-centre services and programmes and wider community development support and outreach. MARA, the group which carries out the Community Development work, is based in the Centre and is heavily represented on the board of CC&L Ltd.
- The initial concerns concerning the management capacity of CC&L were compounded when internal difficulties led to the resignations of the Board's office bearers. The death of the centre manager highlights that the group's initial management and leadership capacity has been further weakened.
- CC&L initially required substantial officer support to enable them to get established and comply with their contractual requirements. This was further required to assist in overcoming the internal conflict at Board level. It is anticipated that officer support will again be required to help overcome the difficulties caused by the vacant centre manager's post.

- Under the terms of the original lease the Lessee has the option to extend the lease for a further period of three years, insofar as there is no breach or subsisting breach of covenant.
- Following advice from Legal Services, discussions have taken place with CC&L to test their openness to a time-limited lease extension during which a review of the Centre's performance and management capacity will take place. If the review is favourable, a further lease extension of 2 years may be granted. CC&L have received this option favourably.

Resource Implications

The renewal of the lease is within revenue estimates but would require officer input for monitoring and support.

The review will be part of a wider review of the performance and management of the Independently managed BCC centres

Recommendations

It is recommended that the lease be extended for a further 12 month period with a review of performance taking place after 6 months. It is further recommended that if the review is successful a further lease extension of 2 years would be offered."

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations contained within the report.

Summer Schemes 2009

The Director reminded the Committee that the Council supported a range of community-based Summer Play Schemes which offered a wide range of social, recreational and educational activities for young persons between the ages of five and fourteen. She explained that Summer Schemes in directly-managed Community Centres were funded through the Revenue Budget. In addition, grant assistance was made available to those organisations in the voluntary community sector which met the relevant criteria. She informed the Members that the Policy and the associated criteria had been agreed by the former Community and Leisure Services Sub-Committee.

The Director stated that an amount of £94,590 would be available within the 2009/2010 Revenue Estimates for seasonal play schemes. In addition, an amount of £175,000 had been included in the estimates in respect of grant-aid to be provided to Community Groups operating Summer Schemes. Grants in this regard would be based on previously agreed criteria and would be at set amounts of either £1,000, £1,800 or £3,000.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that a range of Summer Schemes would operate in directly-managed Community Centres and granted authority for grants not exceeding the amounts set out above to be awarded to qualifying Community Groups on the understanding that the total amount of money available in this regard would not exceed £175,000.

Request from the Belfast Media Group

The Members were advised that a request had been received from the Belfast Media Group suggesting that the Committee support the inaugural Texas Irish American Leaders Awards which would be held on 4th June in San Antonio, Texas. It was intended that the event would be held on an annual basis and would provide an opportunity for links to be established between Belfast and San Antonio which would complement the Council's connections in Nashville and Austin. The Group had indicated a number of ways in which the Council could support the Awards.

The Director pointed out that over a lengthy period of time the Development Committee had established a linking strategy with a number of American cities. Currently such work was being undertaken through links with Nashville, which was one of Belfast's Sister Cities, and concentrated on the creative industry and tourism sectors. As a result of attendance at recent South by South-West Festivals, links had also been established in Texas and the suggestion from the Belfast Media Group would assist in this regard.

During discussion in the matter, a Member informed the Committee that, at its most recent meeting, the Board of the Ulster-Scots Agency had deferred consideration of a request from the Belfast Media Group to become involved in the Irish American Leaders Awards event. It was pointed out that earlier in the meeting the Committee had decided that it would not provide funding for a retail campaign during the Easter period as it did not represent good value for money and, since the request from the Belfast Media Group would not create jobs or a feel good factor in Belfast, the request should be declined.

Other Members expressed the view that the approach from the Belfast Media Group represented an opportunity which would benefit Belfast and provide an opportunity for the Council to work with a private sector organisation.

Following further discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor McCausland,
Seconded by Councillor Campbell

That the Committee declines the offer from the Belfast Media Group to become involved in the Texas Irish American Leaders Awards due to be held in San Antonio on 4th June.

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

Sister Cities International Conference

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that the Sister Cities International Conference would be held in Belfast from 29th July till 1st August. This would be the first occasion that the event had been held outside the United States. It had been estimated that the economic impact of the Conference to Belfast would be £2.5 million and that delegates were expected from America, Africa, China, Japan and Europe. Given the significant positive impact on Belfast's economy, she recommended that, under the terms of the Council's Subvention Policy, £23,000 be allocated to assist with the costs of the organisation of the Conference.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Belfast Tall Ships Atlantic Challenge 2009 Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the planning of the Belfast Tall Ships Atlantic Challenge 2009. At a Special Development Committee in September 2007, Members agreed to Council funding of £1.077m and delivery mechanisms for the event which is taking place between 13 and 16 August.

Councillors are reminded that the Tall Ships Races are organised by Sail Training International. In 2006 STI announced that Belfast would be a host port for 2009 as part of a trans-Atlantic race. The event in Belfast will take place over 4 days, between 13 and 16 August, at the end of a four month Atlantic sailing that will see ships sail from Vigo, Tenerife, Bermuda, Charlestown, Boston and Halifax, Nova Scotia. Approximately 400,000 people are expected to visit the City during the event, which will cost approximately £3.2 million to deliver. This will create a legacy £1 million of infrastructural developments required to accommodate the vessels, with the estimated financial return to Belfast being £10 million and a target of 88,000 out-of-state visitors expected.

The event will be delivered in partnership with Belfast Harbour Commissioners via a specifically created delivery company, Belfast Tall Ships 2009 Limited.

Key Issues

Contractual Matters

Contracts have been signed between BCC and STI to deliver the event. In addition BCC and BHC have a separate agreement regarding their working relationship, along with a funding contract between the BCC and BTS09 Ltd.

Governance & Partners

The Board of BTS09 Ltd has a range of individuals from a number of public, voluntary and private sector organisations, with Councillors McCann and Stoker representing BCC, along with BCC officer support. The Chair of the BTS09 Ltd is held by Dr Gerard O'Hare, of Parker Green International, based in Newry. In addition to the Board of BTS09, six sub-committees have been created to assist in the delivery of the event. Alongside these a Governance Board, headed by the Chief Executives of BCC and BHC supported by senior Directors and officers of both organisations has been established to ensure that all mechanisms are robust and appropriately designed to give the highest level of public transparency and accountability.

Funding

As stated above, the overall event will cost £3.2 million to deliver. Funding has been secured from the following bodies: BCC - £1.077m; NITB - £500k; DCAL - £400k; BHC - £430k and DSD - £100k. The remaining £700k will be secured through sponsorship and income streams created by the event.

Ships

In total, 45 to 50 ships are expected to attend, with up to 18 Class A and B vessels. The number of Class A and B vessels is impressive given that the 1991 event had only 2 Class A vessels. All the ships will be open to the public during the event. The following ships will be in Belfast, subject to contractual arrangements, and others are currently being targeted.

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Class</u>
Europa	Holland	A
Captain Miranda	Uruguay	A
Tenacious	UK	A
Bounty	USA	A
Cisne Branco	Brazil	A
Mystic	USA	A
Kaliakra	UK	A
Stavros Niarchos	UK	A
Pelican	UK	A
Jeanie Johnston	Ireland	A
Atlantis	Holland	A
Oostererschelde	Holland	A
Etoile	France	B
Belle Poule	France	B

Charities

Given the history and potential size of the event, the board of BTS09 have agreed to appoint four official charities. Previous events in Liverpool and Waterford have provided tens of thousands of pounds for their nominated charities and the Belfast event anticipates a similar result.

Trainees and Volunteers

Over 200 people from Belfast and other Council areas have committed to become volunteers at the event. An additional 200 applications were received for trainees to take part in sailing trips. After a rigorous assessment process the initial applications from trainees was narrowed down to 50, 25 of which will sail from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Belfast, with the remaining 25 sailing from a variety of UK, Irish and European ports to Belfast. Both these processes have been assisted by the Council's Community Development Section and input from other Councils within Northern Ireland.

Partners

Along with the key funding partners BTS09 Ltd has had significant input from the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, Translink, PSNI, NIFRS, NIAS, the Ocean Youth Trust, the Odyssey Trust, Sheridan Group, W5, MCA, plus others. All of these organisations are represented at various levels within the Board and committee structures of BTS09 Ltd.

Marketing

The key marketing activities are being facilitated by BVCB with its Director of Marketing chairing the Marketing and Income Committee. The overall promotional activities will operate on three key strands:

1. Domestic marketing covering Belfast and Northern Ireland
2. Republic of Ireland marketing, which will target the border counties and
3. The Belfast/Dublin corridor and GB marketing which will target key surface and air links that operate to Belfast.

Site Locations and Content

The event will be staged between the main City centre harbour locations. These will include Queen's Quay and Abercorn Basin

(beside the Odyssey), Clarendon Dock (behind the Harbour Commissioners' Office) and Albert Quay (previously the Stena ferry terminal). These sites will contain amongst other attractions, fun fairs, continental markets, entertainment spaces, exhibition marquees, interactive children's areas and roaming performances.

Resource Implications

Human Resources

Existing resources for the event are in place and these include a fixed-term contract post within BCC structures.

Economic Impact

It is estimated that this event should generate a minimum of £10m for the local economy. Newcastle City Council estimated their 2005 event generated £45m.

Financial

Belfast City Council has committed £1,077 million to the event. This funding has been matched from sources that include, NITB, DCAL and DSD.

Recommendations

Committee are asked to note the above report.

Abbreviations

BCC	Belfast City Council
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
DCAL	Department of Culture Arts & Leisure
BHC	Belfast Harbour Commissioners
DSD	Department of Social Development
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
NIFRS	Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service
BVCB	Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
STI	Sail Training International
NIAS	Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
BTS09 Ltd	Belfast Tall Ships 2009 Limited
MCA	Marine Coastguard Agency
GB	Great Britain"

The Committee noted the contents of the foregoing report.

Renewing The Routes Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

This report provides an update on the general progress of the Integrated Development Fund (IDF) Renewing the Routes programme and clarifies ongoing issues relating to the commercial improvement programme and the funding provided by the Department of Social Development.

Key Issues

Shankill Road

The main emphasis for the regeneration activity on the Shankill Road remains the commercial frontage improvements. Over sixty premises have now taken part in the scheme, with a further 50 businesses in line to benefit from future phases. The block-by-block approach means that businesses and residents can immediately see the enhancement from the improvements works on the road, contributing to attractive places to work and shop.

The ongoing complementary activity has seen the completion of additional public realm improvements, funded by Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO), at the Agnes Street and Lanark Way junctions. This work, coordinated by the Unit on behalf of BRO, is continuing in the Woodvale Park area with improved pedestrian crossings and additional resurfacing. The project will also include feature embellishments to street lighting alongside the installation of several benches, with the work being completed by March 2009.

Completed IDF funded projects include railings and granite entrance features at West Belfast Orange Hall, floodlighting to Woodvale Methodist Church and new railings at West Kirk Presbyterian Church. Projects delivered in partnership with other Council departments include floral baskets, tourism signage and lighting to the Woodvale Park ‘Family Tree’ sculpture.

By March 2009 works should be substantially complete on several sites of architectural merit including the listed Shankill Rest Garden’s perimeter wall, stonework restoration to Shankill Library and landscaping at Woodvale Presbyterian Church. Following refurbishment it is proposed that the Shankill Rest Garden wall will be lit by recessed up-lighting, this project is currently at design stage.

Upper Springfield Road

The designs are now being finalised for an environmental project to improve the road frontage and upgrade an open space area to reduce the potential for anti-social behaviour and misuse at Springhill Park 'funnel'. Renewing the Routes, Parks & Leisure and Groundwork NI have worked with the local community over the last year and works are scheduled to begin on site in February 2009. New railings, paths, landscaping, planting and future artworks from the community will bring this green space back into community use by summer 2009.

Commercial improvements have now been designed to complement previous schemes in the area and will be presented to owners/occupiers for final approval this month with work scheduled to commence in March 2009. DRD Roads Service has approved the installation of street lighting embellishments to compliment these improvements.

An artist has been appointed to make a feature of the highly visible wall on this main arterial road at the JP Corry Ltd, near the entrance to Sliabh Dubh estate. The artist will work with the residents to produce a mosaic style piece on Industrial Heritage, Natural Environment or Families & Stories. The piece will be installed by April 2009.

Planting and boundary improvements were started at Whiterock Orange Hall in February 2009. Additional complementary public realm and landscaping works at other local sites are also at the design stage.

Other completed projects in this area include the new Panoramic Viewpoint at Monagh Road and a major public realm scheme at the main junction of Springfield Rd and Whiterock Road which followed on from the completion of the first phase of shop fronts and the parking area refurbishment.

Crumlin Road

The first phase of Commercial Improvements to six properties at Lower Crumlin Road is almost complete and should be fully completed by March 2009. The second phase of the commercial improvements at Glenbank will also be complete by this month. It is anticipated that third phase of the Crumlin Road commercial improvements, covering over twenty properties at the Ardoyne shops will commence this month, subject to final agreements with the individual owners.

The project to refurbish the Belfast Orange Hall on Clifton Street has commenced on-site with works to ground floor windows opening, the removal of cage surrounds and improvements to the boundary railings.

Proposals have been developed for landscaping schemes in Lower Crumlin (Oldpark/Clifton Park Avenue junction) which are due to commence on site this month. The detailed public realm proposals at Glenbank, Carlisle Circus and Ardoyne roundabout are also being developed following the consultations with the local community.

Falls Update

The first and second phases of the lower Falls commercial improvement covering 67 properties is nearing completion. The consultations in respect of a further 40 properties (Phase III -mid Falls) are currently underway with works having commenced to the first blocks of this latest phase. The next stage of this ongoing commercial refurbishment will see the programme shift to the Andersontown area with detailed consultations with retailers projected to commence in April 2009.

The amenity lighting schemes have been completed at both Carnegie Library and St Mary's University College securing the illumination of the general facades and building details. Detailed design for amenity lighting have been finalised for International Wall with a project start date (subject to statutory permissions being secured) of March 2009.

The refurbishment works to the category B1 listed railings at the St Comgall's has commenced. This project will be carried out in parallel with a landscaping project within the grounds which is expected to be complete by March 2009. Works to Willowbank Youth Club have also commenced including the upgrading of the surfaces and new gates with a target completion date of late March 2009.

Works are also continuing at Falls Park including the enhancements of the Falls Road entrance and final designs are being developed for works to Milltown cemetery with a view to commence works in April 2009.

Points to note for the renewing the routes programme.

Members should note that throughout the routes significant works have been carried out to a number of commercial properties with the intention to continue this approach in 2009. In line with sound project management principles we have reviewed and

refined some of the processes involved in order to successfully implement the programme throughout 2009. The ongoing success and popularity of the programme has necessitated careful monitoring of the overall budget and continued review of the scope or extent of the works that can be implemented across the target areas.

As previously outlined to Committee the operational and budget constraints mean that not all properties within the areas identified for commercial improvement will be included within the scheme. The finite level of resources and constraints associated with individual properties due to condition, ownership or agreement will result in properties falling outside of the scope of the improvement programme. In the initial programme approximately 15% of properties have not been included within the implemented works due primarily to issues around: property condition (either recently improved or suffering from structural problems); ownership (indeterminate, temporary, or non eligible eg Banks or Public Sector); unwillingness to participate.

The non-participation in the programme that occurs as a result of properties requiring significant amounts of structural or repair works are most unfortunate as this can result in situations where there are isolated examples of under investment within areas that have received comprehensive and significant enhancement. The experience in the initial phases has, however, confirmed that the potential level of investment required to address the properties with significant structural problems would curtail the ability of the programme to secure comprehensive improvement across the target areas.

In order to ensure the comprehensive approach it has been necessary to monitor and revise the scope of works for individual properties within improvement areas. These adjustments have in some instances led to a reduction in the extent of works previously envisaged to ensure the inclusion of the maximum number of properties within each of the target areas.

Members should also note that the Renewing the Routes Team is working towards a very ambitious implementation and spend profile from the Department of Social Development (DSD) (£1.6m 40 projects). The revised profile has set an ambitious financial target for expenditure under the Renewing the Routes programme in the current financial year. Whilst work is being developed and progressed to meet these targets there is an enhanced level of risk associated with external variables such as adverse weather conditions the requirement for statutory approvals and other potential contractual delays. Under the DSD approval for the

Integrated Development Fund expenditure it should be noted that failure to meet the revised targets could result in the loss of funding which would affect the ability to deliver the proposed comprehensive programme for 2009/10.

Resource Implications

There are no additional financial implications arising from the reallocation.

Recommendations

Members are requested to note the updates set out within the report”

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Transportation Issues

City Centre Traffic Management Proposals

The Head of Economic Initiatives informed the Committee that, as part of the Streets Ahead project, the Department for Social Development had appointed consultants to deliver proposals in connection with the removal of all northbound traffic from Donegall Place. The consultants were keen to discuss the matter with the Council and had requested permission to make a presentation to the Committee.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to receive a deputation in this regard at a special meeting.

Setting Local Speed Limits in Northern Ireland Consultation Document

The Committee was advised that the Department for Regional Development Roads Service had issued a consultation document in connection with proposals to set local speed limits in Northern Ireland.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the undernoted document be forwarded to the Roads Service as the Council’s response to the consultation process:

“Roads Service – Setting Local Speed Limits in Northern Ireland – Consultation on Draft Policy.

Having considered the consultation publication – *Setting Local Speed Limits in Northern Ireland – Consultation on Draft Policy* and the accompanying *Draft Policy Document*, the Council would take the opportunity to comment in respect of general and specific issues.

General

It is welcomed that the Department for Regional Development has stated that its principal objective is 'balancing the need to travel with the need to improve quality of life'. This latter element to improve the quality of life is a core objective that would be shared with the Council.

The document refers to a range of issues and considerations in respect of the wider localities and the communities through which roads pass. The document should contain overt recognition of the importance of road infrastructure as a significant part of the local environments. In addition to their role in enhancing connectivity, it should be recognised that there can be significant severance implications related to road infrastructure (Para 28). Whilst it is recognised that the document is inherently technical in nature and focus, there are elements of the processes or consideration in respect of locality or community that will be more subjective.

This recognition of the wider function and the potential impact on communities would contribute to the balanced consideration of proposals and suggests a formal requirement for earlier engagement and consultation in respect of proposals. The consideration of the 'improved quality of life' (Para 22) and the acceptance that speed limits are only one element of speed management places an onus on the Department to formally engage with Council at an early stage of the process. This engagement would also facilitate the consideration of the potential for such traffic measures to contribute to broader strategies or initiatives. The importance of the road infrastructure and operation to local environments contributes to the potential for their modification or management to make a positive contribution to broader agendas to enhance community well being.

In respect of the potential requirement for a range of calming or other measures (Para 72 to 75) there should be recognition of both the existing operational responsibilities of local Councils and their potential post RPA roles. This should be reflected in the formal recognition of the requirement to engage with local Councils early in the process. Whilst in Appendix B 'The Consultation Process', it is suggested that various bodies 'should' be consulted or notified at design stage, the engagement should be at the earliest stages of consideration.

Specific

It is again noted that the Department for Regional Development has stated that its principal objective is 'balancing the need to travel with the need to improve quality of life'. Accordingly,

the Department has highlighted that it is committed to reducing road traffic collisions and casualties, and developing safer environments for all road users, within a road system, which aids wider economic and environmental objectives in a sustainable way, acknowledging that effective speed management involves numerous components, designed to encourage, help and require road users to adopt appropriate and safe speeds.

Within Northern Ireland, the national speed limit of 30 mph applies on street lit roads, 60 mph applies on single carriageway roads and 70 mph applies on dual carriageways and motorways. However, it has been recognised that national speed limits are not appropriate to all road situations and therefore, the speed limit provisions enable the Roads Service to set 'local speed limits' in situations where it is desirable for drivers to adopt a speed, which is different from national speed limits. Therefore, the guidance document provides for Roads Service traffic managers to have the flexibility to set local speed limits that are appropriate for the individual road, reflecting local needs and taking account of all local considerations.

In establishing a local speed limit, Roads Service traffic managers have to ensure that the benefits of the speed limit exceed any disbenefits, acknowledging that quality of life criteria generally cannot be easily assessed in monetary terms. To overcome this problem, the Department has prescribed that Roads Service Traffic Managers should have regard for the following considerations:-

- Collision and casualty savings.
- Traffic flow and emissions.
- Journey times for motorised traffic
- Journey-time reliability.
- Environmental impact, including air quality and emissions.
- Level of public anxiety.
- Level of severance by fast-moving traffic.
- Conditions and facilities for vulnerable road users.
- Cost of associated engineering or other physical measures and their maintenance.
- cost and visual impact of signing and possible environmental impact of engineering or other physical measures and
- Cost of enforcement.

With regard to the impact of speed limits upon the environment to include air quality and emissions, it should be noted that Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, places a statutory duty upon district councils to periodically review air

quality within their areas in order to determine whether national air quality standards and objectives are being achieved, or are likely to be achieved within prescribed periods.

Where the district council determines that air quality standards or objectives are not being achieved, or are unlikely to be achieved within a relevant period, then the district council is required to designate an air quality management area covering, as a minimum, the geographical extent of the exceedence and then prepare a written action plan for exercise by the council, in pursuit of the air quality standards and objectives within the designated area.

The district council is also required to provide the air quality action plan to all relevant authorities who are subsequently required to submit additional actions within their remit in pursuit of the air quality standards and objectives. The Department for Regional Development is prescribed as a relevant authority within the Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

Within Belfast, the Council has designated four air quality management areas for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter, principally associated with road transport emissions. Section 3 of Volume 11 of the Highways Agency Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (February 2009) relating to environmental assessment techniques highlights the impact of vehicle speed upon ambient air pollutant emissions. The calibration graphs indicate that emissions of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide both rise sharply at slower speeds whereas emissions of nitrogen oxides and particulate material tend to increase at higher speeds.

Therefore, although the Department's draft policy document states that lower speeds benefit all urban road users, there may in fact be a detrimental impact from the increased hydrocarbon and carbon monoxide emissions upon residents living adjacent to a road where for example, a 20 mph speed limit has been introduced. Increasing urban speed limits to 50 mph, as applied to sections of the A12 Westlink, will have the impact of generating increased ambient particulate and nitrogen oxide emissions.

Similarly, with regard to noise emissions, it is acknowledged that the noise arising from road traffic has two main components. The first component is generated by a vehicle's mechanical components including the engine, exhaust and transmission and is the dominant source of noise at low speeds, or in a low gear. The second component of traffic noise is generated by the interaction of tyres with the road surface and tends to be the dominant noise source when traffic is freely flowing at moderate to high speeds. Therefore, the choice of speed limit has the capacity to influence the noise level to which pedestrians and residents living adjacent to roads are exposed.

Conclusions

In summary, it is unclear from the structure of the Department's Policy document how additional criteria should be treated in establishing a speed limit and what significance additional criteria will have in the overall process. Moreover, given the local authority statutory obligations regarding air quality management, etc. it is unclear what weight the Department will give to local authority views prior to establishing speed limits, particularly in urban locations where air quality management areas may already have been or are about to be declared.

The importance of roads and their operation in the local environment contributes to the potential for modification or management to make a positive contribution to local communities beyond the purely road safety benefits. Therefore, in developing a new policy for setting local speed limits, the Department for Regional Development Roads Service is encouraged to undertake early formal engagement in the consideration of changes to speed limits and road geometry in order to afford the Council adequate time to reflect its interests from an operational, environmental and community perspective. This approach would maximise the potential for proposals to make a positive contribution to broader regeneration agendas and enhance community well being."

Chairman