

Development Committee

Wednesday, 24th November, 2010

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Maskey (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Humphrey); and
Councillors Crozier, Ekin, Lavery, Mac Giolla Mhín,
Mallon, McKee, Mullaghan, J. Rodgers and Rodway.

Also attended: Councillors Hartley and Kingston.

In attendance: Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives;
Mr. K. Sutherland, Planning and Transport Policy
Manager; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Campbell.

Consultation - Belfast on the Move

The Committee was reminded that the Minister for Regional Development had launched in the City Hall on 30th September the "Belfast on the Move" Transport Masterplan proposals for Belfast City Centre. The main aims of the proposals were to reorganise traffic management within Belfast City Centre to facilitate the reduction in general traffic levels and encourage walking, cycling and public transport. The Department for Regional Development had launched a public consultation process on the proposals and had requested comments to be submitted by 30th November. The Committee, at its meeting on 11th August, had agreed that representatives of the Department for Regional Development be invited to a meeting to outline the proposals and, accordingly, Mr. C. De Burca, Rapid Transport Division, and Mr. S. Pollock and Ms. H. Brady, Roads Service, were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

With the assistance of visual aids, Mr. De Burca outlined the background to the development of the Transport Masterplan for Belfast City Centre which had arisen as a result of the 2004 Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan. Mr. De Burca then displayed maps which outlined the proposed network layout, the proposed rapid transit city centre network and presented images as to how the plans would affect areas like Wellington Place and May Street. He then reviewed the proposed improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, which would include the number of controlled crossings increasing from seventy-three to ninety-three, the length of dedicated cycle lanes increasing from 391 metres to 1,353 metres and bus lanes, which are also available to cyclists, increasing from 104 metres to 2,646 metres.

In conclusion, Mr. De Burca outlined the next steps which would be undertaken. Following the initial consultation exercise, the Department would consider any responses, develop proposals and then undertake further consultation with stakeholders and interest groups, which would then be followed by a formal consultation process.

During discussion, the Members made the following points:

- the reduction in car usage in the City centre and an increase in the number of people using public transport would require a significant shift in public attitudes in order for the transport proposals to succeed;
- much of the City centre traffic congestion was caused by improper use of junctions, which was not properly enforced by the appropriate agency;
- a strategic Transport Masterplan was needed to integrate the whole City, including the outer edges. The proposals would appear to be displacing the problems of traffic congestion from the City centre which would increase the volume of traffic in other areas of the City;
- the reduction in traffic lanes for general use and the increase in the number of bus lanes needed to take cognisance of Council's responsibility for waste collection and street cleansing and allow waste collection vehicles to use bus lanes for short periods to enable Council operatives to undertake statutory waste management functions;
- consideration needed to be given to removing the buses laying over in Donegall Square West and East and inappropriate parking which contributed to traffic congestion;
- given the current economic climate would finance be made available to undertake this scheme and the Rapid Transport proposals;
- the proposals provided priority for buses and cycles but there appeared to be less consideration being given to persons with disabilities;
- the reduction in the number of taxis using the public hire taxi ranks and enforcement would also help to reduce some of the traffic problems;
- the proposals did not appear to include the northern side of the City centre and connection to the north of the City;
- there would be merit in buses using the parking bays in front of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. Also, there would be benefits in Translink allowing buses other than their own to use their depots for parking;

- the problem around Wellington Place was exacerbated by both Translink and tour buses parking illegally and that needed to be addressed;
- the proposals could be considered to be hostile towards car users and a reduction in the number of car parking spaces in the City centre could be economically detrimental and lead to a loss of business in the City centre; and
- the reduction to one lane for vehicular traffic, other than buses and taxis, in some of the areas of the City could cause traffic congestion to increase, particularly in the event of an accident.

In response, the members of the deputation made the following comments:

- the Department recognised that a major cultural change had to take place in relation to the use of public transport. However, 60% of the traffic using the City centre was through traffic and by allowing public transport to operate more efficiently it would be possible to encourage less people to use cars and more people to use buses;
- the enforcement of junctions was the responsibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, although, during the Review of Public Administration process the Department had been developing proposals to decriminalise this type of offence and allow it to use its own staff to issue tickets. It was hoped that those proposals would be resubmitted when the Review of Public Administration process was restarted;
- the Transport Masterplan for Belfast City centre was being considered as the commencement of an integrated strategy for the whole of Belfast. A number of other schemes were currently in place or being rolled-out, such as Park and Ride initiatives, and the City centre proposals would complement those;
- the bus lanes could be used by cleansing vehicles and staff during off-peak times;
- the proposals were looking at ways of improving access to Donegall Square East and West and had suggested the relocation of three of the bus stops from Donegall Square West to Queen Street, which would help the flow of traffic;
- funding bids for these proposals and the Rapid Transport project had been submitted to the Northern Ireland Executive;
- the question of car parking for persons with disabilities were being considered as part of the proposals and officers from the Department were meeting with a number of Groups on 26th November to discuss this issue. The proposals would include more dedicated spaces to accommodate persons with disabilities;

- the Rapid Transport Lanes would run alongside the public taxi hire ranks which would reduce the problem of double parking;
- there was currently a major engineering works scheme earmarked for York Street and consideration as to how to make best use of the traffic flow in York Street would be included in that scheme. In addition, it was recognised that Dunbar Link had too many lanes and that would be considered at that point also;
- the problems with the parking of tour buses had been recognised and it was an issue which was currently being discussed in order to identify possible solutions;
- new coach parking bays would be located in Durham Street and College Square North. In addition, the Department was looking also at drop off and pick-up points near the City centre, after which the coaches would relocate to coach parking areas; and
- the Department did not want to be seen as anti-motorist. Whilst there would be a reduction in longer-stay parking the number of parking facilities for people who wanted to stay on a short term basis, that is, shoppers, would increase.

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

The Director advised the Committee that a draft response to the consultation had been circulated for the information of the Members. However, it was proposed that this be updated to include any comments which had been made by the Members and that a further response be submitted to the Committee for its approval at its meeting scheduled to be held on 6th December.

The Committee agreed to this course of action and agreed also that a letter be forwarded to the Police Service of Northern Ireland expressing the Committee's concern at its failure to enforce traffic regulations at junction boxes.

Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010-14

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010-2014 was agreed in draft format by Development Committee on 29 January 2010 and open for public consultation for four weeks from 2 March 2010. The Framework has been developed in partnership with Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) and is based on an interdepartmental approach across the Council as it impacts not only on Development Committee but Parks and Leisure, Environmental Health, Good Relations etc.

The final draft was presented to Development Committee on 15 September 2010. Members requested that party briefings be undertaken to review the consultation and amendments before finalising the report.

Two priorities identified with the Framework were tabled at Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 22 October 2010. That Committee had agreed to scope the Belfast Story as a potential capital project to the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) under the Peace 3 Priority 2.1 Creating Shared Public Space and to allocate £100,000 additional funds to the Development Committee to progress the Tourism Place Destinations during 2010/2011 period.

Key Issues

As a result of the Party Briefings and Consultation, the main changes that have been incorporated into the document include:

- A greater balance is now reflected between North, West, South, East and Shankill areas. The Maps will be reworked at publication stage to represent these changes.
- Tourism Figures have been updated to reflect 2009
- The Belfast Story has been included as a visionary driver

The final draft of the Belfast Integrated Strategic Framework 2010 – 2014 has been circulated as Appendix 1. Changes are highlighted in yellow. Where text has been replaced, the previous text is shown in box at side under “deleted”.

Once agreed by Council, the Framework will be uploaded on the Council’s website with consultation responses and actions taken to address these responses. A shorter summary document will be published.

The Belfast Tourism Forum will be established and chaired by the Lord Mayor or the Chair of Development Committee (subject to availability). It will be inclusive of key private and public sector stakeholders and will play a key role in overseeing delivery of the Framework. The first meeting will be an opportunity to launch the document and demonstrate achievements to date. A key output of the meeting will be to agree a 4 year action plan.

In relation to the specific actions agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the Tourism Culture and Arts Unit will liaise with Property and Projects to prepare an application to SEUPB under Peace 3 Priority 2.1 for the Belfast Story. This will focus on working with communities across Belfast to capture local stories and create an exhibition space within Belfast Central Library. This is a unique opportunity as the Belfast Central Library is undergoing redevelopment work in the region of £32 million and the Peace 3 Priority 2.1 currently has a fund of €29 million.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has also agreed to provide an additional £100k to initiate the Investing Locally in Tourism based on the Local Tourism Destinations. This aims to demonstrate some early wins to Members and Stakeholders as part of the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010–2014. Based on a preparatory economic appraisal, research, consultation and agreement of priorities some pilot projects will be delivered by March 2011. The pilot projects will be agreed by Development Committee and will reflect East, North, Shankill, South and West Belfast.

Due to the timeframe, the Belfast Story and Investing Locally in Tourism projects may require additional external consultancy support to undertake feasibility/appraisal work before the end of March 2011.

Resource Implications

A budget of £120,000 is required to launch the Framework and progress the Belfast Story and Local Tourism Destinations. £100,000 additional funding has been approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and remaining £20,000 will come from existing Departmental Budget.

A maximum of £10,000 will be ring fenced from the overall budget of £120,000 towards external consultancy to support feasibility and appraisal work

Recommendations

Members agree;

- To publish a summarised version of the Framework, with the full report available on line; and
- A Belfast Tourism Forum be established to oversee implementation of the Framework, chaired by the Lord Mayor (envisages 2-3 meetings in 2010/2011 period)
- Officers progress the Belfast Story and Tourism Place Destinations projects before the end of March 2011.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Sister City Nashville

The Director submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that at a meeting of the Development Committee on 12 May 2010, approval and budget was given to develop the Nashville Sister City relationship and 2010/11 Action Plan and its implementation. It was agreed that an update report in relation to planning and preparation will be brought to Committee.

Members will also be aware that new partnerships have been formed to deliver the Belfast Nashville 2010 /11 Action Plan, which has been greatly expanded to include not only culture and tourism, but education, economic development, genealogy, literary tourism, music tourism, international exhibitions, international marketing, creative industries, film and digital media and communications. Group membership has been expanded to reflect the new plan and now includes formal partnerships with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Queen's University. The group meets on a bi-monthly basis in order to achieve economic benefits from the Sister City relationship.

The Action Plan is delivered by the Belfast Nashville Advisory Group, which includes representatives from the leisure and cultural sector, historical groups, genealogy associations, community development, media and educational organisations. The aim is to explore, agree and implement identified areas of cultural, tourism and economic development and collaboration between the two cities, and to co-ordinate and support the activities taking place between both cities and better maximise economic outputs from Sister City Nashville.

Key Issues

1. Approval is sought from Committee to develop the Nashville Sister City relationship by approving the contents of the 2010/2011 Action Plan and its implementation. The relationship between the two cities has been greatly strengthened with a focus on achieving maximum economic benefits for Belfast. A considerable number of partner organisations contributed both financially and in kind to sustaining the relationship, including Tourism Ireland, US Consulate, BBC, Ulster Historical Foundation, Ulster Scots Heritage Society, Queen's University and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Feedback from Partners has been circulated.

2. **Support for the Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival and Belfast Nashville Songwriters Convention is a key component of the Belfast Nashville Action Plan. The 6th Festival, held on 24–28 February 2010, increased dramatically in profile and scale and included over 100 Songwriters, 30 Concerts and 20 Seminars. It attracted higher profile artists to Belfast and hence successful local musicians. Visitor numbers have increased by 29% in comparison to 2008 and it attracted over 18% of its visitors from outside Northern Ireland, leading to a much greater economic impact for Belfast.**

Approval is sought to support the 7th Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival, scheduled for 23 – 27 February 2011. As part of the ongoing review of Culture and Arts funding provided by the Development Committee as part of the Integrated Cultural Strategy, it is recommended that the support of the Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival from 2012 onwards will be aligned to the support provided to all festivals across the city through the Culture and Arts funding streams.

The Nashville Music Council was established by the Mayor's Office in order to spearhead economic development efforts that capitalise on Nashville's identity as Music City USA. Mayor of Nashville, Karl Dean has extended an invitation to Belfast City Council to attend the Music Council's Annual Programme for Civic Leaders which focuses on how city leaders can receive maximum economic return from its Music Industry and Music Tourism. The Mayor's office has agreed to develop a stronger relationship with Belfast in relation to music development, joint showcasing, and exchanging models of best practice in order to generate economic return for both cities.

Approval is sought to investigate opportunities for an outward visit to Nashville in 2011, to coincide with the Civic Leaders Programme, and to avail of support from our partners ACNI, Tourism Ireland, BBC and Queen's University in order to schedule cultural tourism, education and creative industry activity during this time. A report will be brought to Committee in December 2010 with full details.

Resource Implications

N/A. On 12th May 2010, Members approved £50,000 which has been provided within the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit budget for implementation of the 2010 /11 action plan.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members

1. Note the contents of this report
2. Commit to developing the Nashville Sister City relationship by approving the contents of the 2010/11 Action Plan, a copy of which is available on the Council's website and its implementation within budget.
3. Approve support of the Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival, 23 – 27 February 2011, of £20,000
4. Agree that officers investigate options of an outward visit to coincide with the Music Industry Programme for Civic Leaders and report back at December Committee meeting.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that representation on the Sister City Nashville Group be increased to include, in addition to the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman, one representative from each of the other Party Groupings on the Council.

Attendance at Go Belfast Awards and Cinemagic 20th Anniversary Celebrations and Awards Dinner

Go Belfast Awards

The Committee was reminded that the Council had been shortlisted in the Go Belfast Awards which was taking place on Friday, 26th November in the Europa Hotel. The Continental Market, the Ulster Hall and the Belfast Zoo had all been shortlisted for awards, with the final decision to be announced at the event. The Committee had approved previously the attendance of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), along with two members of staff. In addition, the Parks and Leisure Committee had approved the attendance of its Chairman and Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), along with two members of staff.

The Head of Economic Initiatives reported that, as the Belfast Continental Market had been shortlisted at the Awards, MPEL, which was responsible for that event, were attending also and had invited representatives of the Council to join them as their guests. Up to three places had been allocated to the Council. Accordingly, it was recommended that an additional two Councillors, along with one member of staff, accept that invitation.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Cinemagic 20th Anniversary

Further to that, the Council had teamed up with Cinemagic, the International Film and Television Festival for Young People, for Reel Business 2010, a targeted meet-the-buyer project for Belfast-based companies based in the Film and Television sector. The project would bring together a group of leading companies involved in buying, commissioning and developing innovative creative content for the global film and television industry, to meet with key domestic local producers to participate in a series of one-on-one meetings and participatory workshops over two days. It was envisaged that that project would not only provide new contracts and business leads for the participating business, with the aim to increase profitability and company growth, but would provide creative companies with the opportunity to gain a unique insight into the world of film and television production, with the focus on children's television, animation, visual Facts and music licensing and production. As part of that initiative, the Council had been allocated four places for Cinemagic's 20th Anniversary Celebrations Dinner and Awards in the City Hall on 26th November, which was on the same date as the Go Belfast event. There would be no financial cost to the Council of attending this event.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that and that approval be granted for four Councillors, together with two members of staff, to attend the Cinemagic's 20th Anniversary Celebrations Dinner and Awards.

Chairman