

Development Committee

Monday, 10th October, 2011

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

- Members present: Alderman Stalford (Chairman);
Aldermen Campbell, Ekin, Humphrey and Stoker;
Councillors Austin, Hartley, Hendron, Keenan, Kelly,
Kyle, Mallon, Maskey, McVeigh, Mac Giolla Mhín,
Ó Muilleoir, Reynolds, Robinson and Spence.
- In attendance: Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives;
Ms. C. Taggart, Community Services Manager; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apology

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 14th, 19th and 27th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd October, subject to:

- (i) the amendment of the minute of 27th September under the heading "2011 Christmas Lights Switch-On Event" to provide that the Council agrees not to erect an additional sign saying "Happy Christmas" in Irish and Ulster Scots.

Request for Deputations

The Democratic Services Officer reported that a request had been received from the Department for Regional Development's Rapid Transit Division to provide the Committee with an update on Department's proposals for the introduction of a Rapid Transit Network in Belfast.

The Committee agreed to receive the representatives of the Department at its meeting on 25th October.

Meeting with Minister for Tourism

The Democratic Services Officer reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 27th September, it had been advised that the Minister with responsibility for Tourism, Mrs. A. Foster, M.L.A., had agreed that she would meet the deputation from the Committee to discuss a number of issues pertinent to the development of tourism in Belfast. He reported that the Minister's office had confirmed that the meeting would take place at 10.45 a.m. on Thursday, 10th November at the Department's Headquarters in Massey Avenue.

The Committee noted that, in addition to the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, nominations would be sought from the Party Group Leaders of the Alliance Party, the Progressive Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Ulster Unionist Party in respect of the remaining Members of the Deputation.

Presentation from Lisburn Road Traders' Association

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 14th September, it had agreed to receive a deputation representing the Lisburn Road Traders' Association to discuss matters pertinent to business development within the area. Accordingly, it was reported that Messrs. P. Carrington, P. Greenwood, H. Finlay, L. McStravick, E. Seydak and U. Weir were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting.

Mr. McStravick provided an overview of the work of the Association and gave examples of initiatives which it had undertaken to promote the Lisburn Road. He indicated that the Lisburn Road consisted of four quarters, viz., an education quarter, an arts quarter, a village quarter and a residential quarter. He provided examples of how the business potential of the Lisburn Road could be regenerated through the improvement of the visual amenity of the road and the development of dedicated tourist attractions and the improvement of transport infrastructure.

Mr. McStravick apprised the Committee on the Association's plans in so far as they related to the utilisation of the Council's Drumglass Park. It was pointed out that a number of 'I Love Saturdays' events, which had attracted hundreds of visitors, shoppers and tourists to the area, had been organised by the Association using Drumglass Park as a focal point. He added that the events served to increase the appeal of the Lisburn Road as a vibrant shopping area and he then outlined plans which the Association had developed for the building of a purpose-built pavilion at Drumglass Park. He suggested that this development would serve as an additional visitor attraction and assist in the promotion of the business viability of the area. He indicated that the feasibility study would seek to promote and preserve the Lisburn Road's position as Belfast's most viable, vibrant and unique shopping thoroughfare. He concluded by indicating that, in order to undertake a feasibility study in respect of the establishment of a pavilion in Drumglass Park, the Association would in due course be approaching the Committee with a request for financial assistance.

A number of Members welcomed the contents of the presentation and indicated support in principle for the concepts outlined. The point was made that the Parks and Leisure Committee would ultimately be responsible for any matter relating to Drumglass Park and, as such, that Committee should be advised of the plans in the first instance.

However, the Committee felt that it would be beneficial in the short-term if the Development and the Parks and Leisure Committees worked with the Association to explore the proposals further.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and authorised the Director to undertake further discussions with the Lisburn Road Traders' Association in respect of its feasibility study. It was noted also that the plans relating to the development of Drumglass would be brought to the attention of the Parks and Leisure Committee at the earliest opportunity.

St. George's Market - Casual Traders

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Casual Traders/New Trader Business Venture

Currently St George's Friday and Saturday Markets are full with permanent traders, Sunday, as a new market continues to grow. When a vacant stall becomes available it is allocated to the next person/s on the waiting list as per the trader's category. Some traders on waiting lists for a permanent stall, in the interim, trade as casual traders. This means a casual trader arriving to use a stall that is not required by the permanent trader on that particular day.

1.2 The Economic Development Unit, in partnership with the Markets Unit and the National Market Traders Federation have been investigating how to entice new potential business entrepreneurs into considering and trying market trading as their first step into business.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Casual Trading/New Trading/Business Venture

The Economic Initiatives, Markets and Economic Development Units have been in discussions with the National Market Traders Federation (NMTF) to see how new traders could be attracted to market trading. NMTF, in partnership with Belfast City Council, wish to launch their NMTF First Pitch programme in Northern Ireland.

This programme has already been launched in mainland UK and has informed and successfully attracted new traders to market trading.

- 2.2 The Economic Development Unit (EDU) currently operate a number of schemes and programmes to assist people who are considering entering into new business. The EDU are currently investigating the possibility of potential clients considering market trading as their new business venture. The EDU reported to Committee on 15 June and 23 August 2011 outlining a range of activities and one of those was the opportunity for a Market Start up Programme, as part of their Economic Development Plan.
- 2.3 There is also a programme called NMTF First Pitch, operated by the National Market Traders Federation. This is a programme where new traders are offered the opportunity to trial trade at selected markets and has been very successful in Mainland UK. NMTF, in partnership with Belfast City Council wish to launch the programme in Northern Ireland.
- 2.4 Officers investigated what opportunities there are for new businesses in market trading and it was agreed that the Sunday Market would give the best opportunity as it was a new market, continuing to grow and give new businesses the opportunity to promote their products.
- 2.5 Whilst the Sunday Market continues to grow, there is an area where new traders and casuals do not wish to be located. The area concerned is at the May Street/Oxford Street end of the Market, near the fish stalls. Stalls in this area proved very difficult to fill as new traders tended not to like this area, some even refusing to take the stall. Those who did take the allocated stall immediately submitted a letter requesting a move. Most casual traders, rather than take a stall in this area, prefer to wait and see if any other vacant stalls become available. They feel the need to be closer to the centre of the market or in bays with the other traders.
- 2.6 Only a small number of traders use this bay. Following discussions with the traders concerned, a decision was taken to temporarily remove the small number of stalls from this area and put in an extra seating area. This has worked well, and to date Market staff have not had to turn away any casuals who have turned up on a Sunday wanting a stall. Nor has it hindered us in writing out to those casuals on the list offering them permanent stalls.
- 2.7 As part of the joint Economic Development/NMTF First pitch scheme for new traders we wish to introduce, as a pilot, six new traders to test trade at St George's Sunday Market. In the allocated space we can set out the required number of stalls to accommodate the new traders, and add a small amount more if required and this may then give this area a chance to build.

- 2.8 It is not envisaged that this programme will inhibit any casuals becoming new traders at the Sunday Market and we will continue to write out to those on the waiting list and offer them a stall when available.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Financial

EDU will cover the fees of trader costs from a budget of £13,500 agreed by Committee in August.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

European Regional Development Fund - Revenue Schemes

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members are reminded that, at the September 2011 meeting of Development Committee, a paper on potential European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) capital schemes was endorsed.
- 1.2 ERDF is one of the EU’s Structural Funds – alongside the European Social Fund – and is allocated through a range of measures within the Northern Ireland Sustainable Competitiveness Programme.
- 1.3 The programme can fund a range of capital and revenue-based economic development initiatives with the aim of promoting sustainable enterprise and entrepreneurship. These can include:
- Direct aid to investments in companies (in particular SMEs) to create sustainable jobs;
 - Infrastructure linked notably to research and innovation, telecommunications, environment, energy and transport; tourism development;
 - Financial instruments (capital risk funds, local development funds, etc.) to support regional and local development and to foster cooperation between towns and regions.

- 1.4 Projects are funded up to 50% of the overall costs. Project promoters then have to find 50% match funding from other public sources. Some of this money has to come from councils but there is also the potential to draw down match funding from other bodies. Where projects meet the objectives of these bodies – e.g. Invest NI – they can make available up to 25% towards the overall project costs. This can therefore reduce the council contribution to 25%.

As a result, a project costing £100,000 per annum might require a contribution of only £25,000 p.a. from Belfast City Council.

- 1.5 Belfast City Council – like other local authorities – continues to make applications for funding for its range of business support initiatives, as approved by this Committee. To date, 14 councils are in receipt of letters of offer totalling around €3.3million. Of this amount, Belfast City Council has 13 letters of offer totalling £1.4million ERDF, operating over a number of financial years and has four applications at economic appraisal stage for an additional £1million ERDF.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Successive discussions with elected members around the new corporate plan and the proposed stimulus investment package indicate a desire to ensure that communities across the city are supported at this difficult time. This means ensuring that our services are available and accessible to all, particularly those services which will help people find employment or help businesses face the current growth challenges that they are facing.
- 2.2 Under the Sustainable Competitiveness programme, there is now a potential opportunity to explore a number of locally-based, targeted enterprise initiatives which will maximise the reach of the council services and support bespoke initiatives. Invest NI have indicated that, where these initiatives can complement their offering, they too would be willing to make a financial contribution to the overall costs – should council develop and bring forward these schemes.

- 2.3 Members are reminded that the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has recently written to Councils setting a deadline of 30 October 2011 for applications to the European Sustainable Competitiveness programme which would require programme spend before December 2013. The letter requires proposals to be “clearly defined, robust and fully costed”. The letter also makes it clear that any deficit on the £11m profiled for expenditure in that period will be reallocated to other economic development activity. A similar deadline of 30 September 2012 been set for expenditure of £10m profiled for 2014 and 2015.
- 2.4 There have been an number of expressions of interest from local partnerships with a view to developing and delivering a range of locally based enterprise development initiatives. At present one draft proposal has been received from partners in the Shankill area and we are aware of some preliminary discussions in west Belfast
- 2.5 It is proposed that further exploratory work be undertaken of relevant enterprise development initiatives which could complement the offering of Belfast City Council and Invest NI in the neighbourhoods with a view to submitting feasible proposals before the October deadline.
- 2.6 Given the application timeframes, council match funding for these activities would not be required until the 2012/2013 financial year. Should they progress to application stage, account will be taken of them in the current estimates and upcoming business planning process and they will be brought back to this committee for endorsement and budgetary approval.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Financial

Until further scoping work is carried out on these potential projects, the financial implications are not clearly defined. However, should the projects also meet Invest NI corporate objectives, £1 invested by Belfast City Council would be sufficient to lever £3 from Invest NI and DETI EU programmes.

4 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- 4.1 **Note the availability of ERDF funding under the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for local enterprise development activity in neighbourhoods, to complement Invest NI and Belfast City Council offering.**
- 4.2 **Note that one draft proposal has been received from partners in the Shankill and preparatory work is being done on other schemes.**
- 4.3 **Agree to officers working with local partners to develop appropriate enterprise development initiatives and submitting feasible projects for ERDF funding by the end of October 2011-10-05.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

East Belfast Community Development Framework

The Committee was advised that the East Belfast Community Development Agency had requested that the Council endorse its new Community Development Framework for East Belfast. The Director provided an overview of the contents of the Framework and indicated that it sought to provide assistance to a range of individuals and community groups within the voluntary sector and sought also to work in conjunction with a range of statutory agencies to achieve the following aims:

- the creation of a strong, diverse and prosperous communities;
- to enhance the identities of communities and encourage them to play an active part in service delivery and governance;
- to improve quality of life in communities;
- to assist citizens and communities to create a healthy and sustainable East Belfast; and
- to provide community development support of the highest standard.

The Director reminded the Committee that the Council was currently undertaking a public consultation exercise in respect of its own draft community development strategy which sought to support existing arrangements and enhance relationships with communities throughout the City. He indicated that the East Belfast Community Development Framework would assist the Council to enhance its relationship with the East Belfast Agency since its key themes and objectives were in accordance with the Council's own policies on community development. He added that the Framework's assets-based approach, its focus on outcomes and performance measurement, together with its emphasis on joint working was in line with the Council's vision for community development within the City.

After discussion, the Committee endorsed the contents of the East Belfast Development Agency's Framework document.

European Knowledge Society Forum

The Director tabled for the consideration of the Committee a report outlining a request which had been received from the Eurocities network for the City to host the European Knowledge Society Forum Conference during 2012. He outlined the benefits which the City would accrue in agreeing to host the event, which included:

- the raising of the City's profile as an innovative promoter of the digital economy and the creative industries sectors;
- the economic benefit of attracting a wide range of international delegates to the City; and
- the provision of a valuable opportunity to establish new relationships and to build on existing relationships.

The Director pointed out that it was estimated that the costs associated with hosting the Conference, which would be attended by approximately one hundred delegates, would be £7,000, 50% of which would be met by Information Services Belfast. He added that the costs would be incurred in hosting planned meetings, providing audio-visual equipment, refreshments and the provision of a tour of the City. It was pointed out that a sponsor would be sought to offset any costs incurred by the Council.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to authorise expenditure in the sum of £3,500 to facilitate the hosting of the conference.

Chairman