

Development Committee

Monday, 23rd September, 2013

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairman);
the High Sheriff (Councillor Kingston);
Councillors Convery, Garrett,
Hussey, Mac Giolla Mh n, Maskey,
  Donnghaile and Reynolds.

In attendance: Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Ms. A. Doherty, Planning and Transport Officer; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported from Alderman Ekin and Councillor Austin.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Dublin Bike Hire Scheme

The Committee was reminded that, in August, 2012, the Council had secured funding in the sum of  698,700 from the Department for Regional Development towards the provision of a Belfast Public Bike Hire Scheme. It was anticipated that the first phase of the project would see the establishment of a number of stations at key locations in the City and that the scheme would be extended to additional areas following an initial evaluation. In accordance with its decision of 4th June, the Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. J. Frehill, Project Manager of Dublin City Council's bike hire scheme, who was in attendance to provide an overview of that project.

Mr. Frehill explained that the Dublin scheme, known as 'dublinbikes', had been established in 2009 as part of a joint partnership between Dublin City Council and the French company JC Decaux. The initiative was considered to have been a success, with each bike undertaking an average of 2,200 journeys during the first year. He suggested that three factors had contributed to that success, namely, the demand for the service which had been created by the general public in Dublin; the extensive research which had been undertaken in choosing the locations for the bike stations; and the cost effectiveness and quality of the service which was provided.

He explained that users of the scheme could sign up for an annual subscription at a cost of  10, or users could take out a three-day subscription at a cost of  2, which was aimed specifically at tourists. In addition, he explained that 97% of journeys undertaken in Dublin were within the thirty minute threshold and, therefore, free of charge. Thereafter, small incremental charges were incurred. To ensure that bikes were returned to their stations, users were required to enter into an agreement which enabled a fee of  150 to be charged to their credit card should they breach their hire agreement. He added that the annual subscription charge would increase to  20 as part of a phased expansion of the scheme.

Mr. Frehill reported that, at present, there were 550 bikes, located at 44 stations, available for hire within Dublin. Those stations were located in close proximity to areas of high employment, amenities and other transport services. He outlined the plans which had been formulated to extend the scope of the scheme and he answered a range of Members' questions in relation thereto.

In terms of the plans for the Belfast Bike Hire Scheme, the Planning and Transport Officer reported that procurement documents were being drafted for the design, build, operation and maintenance contract for the project and that work was ongoing on sponsorship and advertising options which would be associated with the scheme. She added that it was anticipated that a tendering exercise would be initiated in November and a report on its outcome would in due course be submitted for consideration by both the Strategic Policy and Resources and Development Committees. She indicated that companies submitting a tender would be required to include a range of pricing options which would take into account any proposed future expansion of the scheme. She added that a further report, which would outline the costs associated with the construction phase, operation and ongoing maintenance costs for the scheme, together with the details of any sponsorship secured to offset the Council's costs, would be submitted for consideration prior to its commencement.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Frehill for attending and, after discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Forum for an Alternative Belfast

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 17th September, it had agreed to extend an invitation to representatives of the Forum for an Alternative Belfast to provide an overview of the findings of its 2013 Summer School. Accordingly, the Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. D. Hill and Mr. P. Mullin and they provided an overview for the Committee in this regard.

Mr. Hill indicated that the event, which had taken place in the City Hall in August, had examined the implications arising from the lack of trees within the inner city of Belfast. He pointed out that, whilst there existed many well-established and mature trees on Belfast's traditional arterial routes, housing estates, which had been built particularly since the 1960s, had been notable for their lack of trees. He added that the absence of trees, which, he suggested, could be considered as a contributory factor towards health inequalities, was most acute within the Lower Shankill and Falls areas, Carlisle Circus and the Tigers Bay and New Lodge areas. He suggested that that one of the challenges for Belfast's future town planners would be to address the issues raised and to establish schemes which would enhance connectivity between the inner City and Belfast's outlying greenbelt. The deputation then answered a range of Members' questions and the Chairman thanked the representatives for attending.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Chairman