

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 23rd May, 2022

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Groogan (Chairperson); and
Councillors Bunting, Gormley, Lyons, McAteer and Spratt.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager
(South Belfast); and
Ms Denise Smith, Neighbourhood Integration Manager;
Mr. S. Leonard, Programme Manager;
Mr. R. McLernon, Climate Programme Manager – City;
Ms. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Tracy Kelly.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 28th February were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McAteer declared that she had an interest in item 3 as she was on the Board of the Lagan Navigation Trust but there was no pecuniary conflict. She also declared an interest in item 4 as she was on the Board of Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Councillor Spratt declared an interest in item 4 as he was on the Board of the Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Councillor Lyons declared an interest in item 3 as he was the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Update on Physical Programme

The Director of Physical Programmes provided the Members with a brief verbal update on Phase 2 of the Lagan Gateway project and advised that she would report back to the Working Group with details around the proposed consultation on Phase 2 and the timescales.

Lagan Navigation Trust – Request for Support

The Director of Physical Programmes reminded the Working Group that, at its meeting on 22nd November 2021, it had received a presentation from Ms. Brenda Turnbull, the Chief Officer of the Lagan Navigation Trust during which she outlined the work which had been undertaken by the Trust and made specific reference to the primary objective of re-opening the Lagan Navigation from Belfast Harbour to Lough Neagh.

The Working Group noted the request of support from the Lagan Navigation Trust and agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that approval be granted for officers to approach DfC to discuss the potential for constructing a lock at Queen's Quays.

Lagan Valley Regional Park Presentation

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Sara McClintock, Chairperson, and Andy Bridge, Park Manager, from Lagan Valley Regional Park Ltd. S. McClintock advised the Working Group that the regional park's team was made up of 5 staff and a band of volunteers who were passionate about sustaining the uniqueness of the park for future generations. They informed the Members of the regional park's priorities in terms of biodiversity and heritage and its mission to protect and preserve the landscape and character of N Ireland's only regional park within a Council area. The Members heard how the 2000-hectare regional park had special designation and sites of scientific interest across a mix of council, private, farm and NGO land in both Belfast and Lisburn and Castlereagh Councils and that user numbers had reached 1.97m on the Lagan Towpath.

S. McClintock advised the Working Group that the Council had provided annual funding of £66,000, which was matched by Lisburn and Castlereagh. She thanked the Council for its continued support and added that, due to inflationary pressures (energy and wages increases), Lagan Valley Regional Park would be asking the Council for an inflationary increase in the funding. She also raised the matter of Brown's Bridge and the need to identify an asset owner to maintain the bridge going forward.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Members. A Member highlighted the regional park's tourism potential and added that Brown's Bridge could be identified as a future project. There was agreement that there was a need to keep the regional park on Belfast City Council's radar due to the importance of the asset. A Member added there was a need for more bins on the towpath and acknowledged the regional park was constrained by resource and could benefit from more investment.

A Member asked Lagan Valley Regional Park Ltd for reassurance in relation to any potential danger to the park in terms of planning applications. S McClintock advised that the organisation was a Statutory Consultee which advised agencies in this regard to support the protection of the regional park. She advised that keeping vigilant was important as well as working with partners to engage and react when required.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives from Lagan Valley Regional Park Ltd for their presentation and the Group noted the information which had been provided.

Update on PEACEPLUS Programme

The Programme Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the emerging development of the overall PEACEPLUS programme. He highlighted the need for external resource to support the Co-Designed Local Community PEACE Action Plan which had gone to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Working Group also received a presentation from the SEUPB appointed consultants, Blu Zebra (T Hogg and B Enslin) and Locus Management (C Boylan), which were currently supporting local authorities to develop the approach to submitting a plan for a Local Community PEACE Action Plan for Belfast.

T Hogg informed the Members that the PEACEPLUS Programme had received €1.4bn funding across 6 thematic areas and provided an overview of the Co-designed Local Community Peace Action Plans (priority 1.1). As with previous PEACE Programmes, one of the key investment areas for the Council was the development of a Local Community Peace Action Plan for the city. This programme was under theme 1 'Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities' with investment funding of €110 Million. T Hogg provided further details of the programme timeframe and reassured the Members that Section 75 groups and geographical community engagement was a key focus.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the contents of the report.

Update on Horizon 2020 Upsurge Project

The Climate Programme Manager – City, provided the Working Group with an update on a key project within the Climate Unit portfolio, namely, the Horizon 2020 UPSURGE project, a funded research programme up to August 2025. He provided the Working Group with details about the Natural Based Solutions (NBS) process, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and advised that Belfast was one of 5 demonstration cities across Europe with the Queen's University Belfast (QUB) as a research partner. The Climate Programme Manager – City, highlighted the boundary of the demonstration site and explained why it had been selected and provided detail around the contamination investigations that were underway. He advised the Working Group that he would provide regular updates going forward and proposals would be brought to Committee for approval.

The Working Group noted the update on the project and the forthcoming stakeholder workshop scheduled to take place on Friday 27th May from 12.30 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Riddell Hall, QUB.

Several Members requested that public engagement and consultation be built into the project.

The Chairperson thanked The Climate Programme Manager – City for his presentation.

Noted.

Update on Holylands Intervention Initiative

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the progress of the Holylands Intervention initiative.

The Working Group was reminded that, in November 2019, the Community Planning Partnership had agreed to give special focus to the Wider University and Lower Ormeau area and to adopt an integrated and sustainable approach towards its regeneration through the creation of a long-term vision and development plan. Within this context, Council officers were working closely with the Department for Communities and other Government departments to develop and resource an integrated inter-agency intervention to address deep rooted societal issues, particularly around crime, anti-social behaviour, community cohesion and well-being of residents.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that a Project Manager had been recruited and had been in post from 16th May 2022. The Project Manager was based in the Community Planning Unit and would lead the initiative and deliver on its priorities. The Chairperson requested that the Members receive frequent updates. The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that she would provide bi-monthly updates and other updates as they arose.

The Working Group noted the contents of the report.

Update on Alleygating Programme

The Working Group received a verbal update on the alleygating programme, namely, the decision made at the March meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to refer the long lists of potential allegation locations submitted to that Committee be referred to each AWGs for prioritisation. The Working Group was provided with copies of the original short lists approved by the working group and the long list provided to The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Group agreed to defer until its next meeting, consideration of a report on the Alleygating Programme.

In the meantime, it was agreed that a roundtable hybrid workshop would be arranged for the Working Group to gain further clarity and detail in relation to the programme.

The Working Group also received an update on additional monies from DfC for additional alleygates in the Holylands area and requested that the Neighbourhood Services Manager (South Belfast) bring further information in relation to the DfC Letter of Offer to the proposed workshop.

Request to Present

The Group was advised that representative of LORAG wished to attend a future meeting to provide an update on the development of the John Murray Lock House, Community Garden and Shed project.

The Working Group granted approval.

Any Other Business

A Member asked for an update on the Pilot project in the Balmoral area and relayed concerns. The Neighbourhood Integration Manager agreed to provide the Members with an update at the next meeting and took the Member's concerns on board.

The Chairperson proposed that the Pilot be a standing item on the agenda going forward.

Chairperson