

Extract from Minutes of:-

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY
GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 9th November, 2022

Cultural Mapping for Culture, Arts and Heritage

The Committee was reminded that, as a key action of Belfast's ten-year cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, the Culture Unit, in partnership and the Department for Communities, had jointly commissioned a report on Belfast's cultural infrastructure. The aim of this report was to analyse what physical space was available for residents to experience culture, and to examine current physical resource allocation for the cultural sector across the city.

The Director of Economic Development advised that the overall cultural mapping project was key to the delivery of the city's cultural strategy and the city's community plan (the Belfast Agenda). He described the significance of the research, and the requirement for a whole city approach in terms of a critical analysis of physical resources for cultural activity, identifying gaps and models of good practice – starting with a study of the physical resources for culture. He pointed out that the Culture Team were committed to delivering a cultural mapping of the city within A City Imagining implementation plan 2020-2023.

He explained that the Cultural Mapping project addressed the existing and future needs of Belfast's cultural and creative industries sector by ensuring that policy was informed by up to date and accurate data whilst also providing a valuable resource for the public to increase engagement and participation. Furthermore, this data had the potential to be utilised by residents, visitors, artists, cultural and creative organisations, funders and planners. This Cultural Mapping Report was Phase One of a major cultural mapping project which included the following phases:

- **Phase One** - A review and analysis of Belfast's hard cultural infrastructure;
- **Phase Two** – Study and Scoping of the soft infrastructure, identifying cultural resources, networks links and patterns of cultural practice. Research with partners and community networks, wide-reaching public engagement and cluster engagement, crowdsourcing ideas; and
- **Phase Three** – An interactive digital cultural map product that would allow residents to browse the city's cultural offerings. This would be similar in concept to Dublin's 'culture near you' project.

The Cultural Mapping report (copy available [here](#)) provided strategic recommendations for improving Belfast's creative provisions in the short and long term and could be seen as a tool that could inform broader plans for the city alongside other areas, including, but not limited to, regeneration, heritage, and economic development.

He outlined the recommendations within the Cultural Mapping Report as follows:

- A key recommendation in this phase one report focused on addressing the shortage of affordable artist studio space in Belfast. Members would

be aware that, at a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2022, it had been agreed to open a new funding scheme for artist led organisations to provide financial and development support for this sector. As part of this support, members also agreed a strategic review of artist studios and maker-spaces in Belfast which would identify examples of best practice and potential solutions to this issue. This research would be conducted over the coming months, with a number of long-term recommendations presented to Committee in March 2023;

- The report identified 2 Royal Avenue as a space which could accommodate artists. On 15th April, 2022, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had approved the proposal around *Meanwhile Use* until the end of 2023 at our recently acquired 2 Royal Avenue building, with a focus on cultural, animation and creative activities. The proposal was to create a non-commercial space in the heart of the city and provide citizens and visitors with a free and accessible place to relax and enjoy arts programming and a cultural offering, whilst developing long term strategy use. In July 2022, the Council had submitted an application to the Levelling Up Fund, proposing a 'Creative Hub', for the building at 2 Royal Avenue. The concept was based on a mixture of complimentary commercial, creative and cultural activities across the building to create one holistic offer;
- Recommendations in this Cultural Mapping report also focused on Cultural Entrepreneurship as it related to physical space. As members would be aware, The Vacant to Vibrant, 2 year pilot, Capital Grant Scheme had allocated £1m to seek to support local independent businesses and SME's, social economy businesses and creative and cultural organisations that would provide a unique or distinct offer for the city centre and transform vacant spaces to become vibrant. This scheme had garnered interest from the cultural sector. At the Expression of Interest stage, approximately 33% of the submissions by businesses/organisations were from cultural sector. Many from the cultural sector Eols have indicated that they were seeking maker space and their property requirements also might not align with the parameters of this grant, which would primarily seek to occupy and activate vacant ground floor space in prominent areas of the city centre; and
- Long term recommendations in the report included a hotel levy. As members would be aware, this was considered in the tourism plan for Belfast, "Make Yourself at Home", presented to the Committee on 6th April 2022. Within this plan, it was acknowledged that, while areas like passenger duty and visitor levies were not within the remit of the Council, we would adopt policy positions based on up-to-date research, consultation and evidence.

The Director of Economic Development informed the Committee of the next steps in the Cultural Mapping Process. Phase Two of the Cultural Mapping work would delve deeper into research and scoping of the infrastructure identified in this initial phase. The phase would create a holistic view of the cultural sector and identify networks and artistic and cultural practice patterns. This would also include looking into public participation, cluster interaction, research with partners and community networks, and the people and groups that use these spaces as their workplace. He advised that his work was due to be commissioned in November 2022, with a report presented to the Committee in May 2023. The overarching

objective of this work was twofold, firstly, to increase and understanding of cultural infrastructure, drive use and participation and, secondly, to seek to agree long term remedies with partners in areas where gaps in provision were demonstrated. He pointed out that the Team would also continue to work with organisations across the city to locate and source suitable properties where there was an immediate or emergency need.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the methodology of the report and the engagement with the Arts Council and other cultural bodies. Members raised the issue of some research gaps in the Cultural Mapping report, in that not all Musical Venues and Theatres had been included from across the City and some venues needed to be defined further. The Director advised that the report was not a complete list of cultural venues, however, Members could submit any additional prominent cultural venues to be included in the audit for consideration.

One Member also pointed out that the Balmoral DEA needed to be included in the illustrative maps of the city.

The Committee noted the contents of the Phase One report on Cultural Mapping and that Members would submit any additional prominent cultural venues to be included in the audit to the Director of Economic Development for consideration.
