

All Party Working Group on the City Centre

Friday, 2nd December, 2022

ALL PARTY WORKING GROUP ON THE CITY CENTRE MINUTES HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

- Members present: Councillor O'Hara (Chairperson); and
Councillors de Faoite, Long and McCann.
- In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. D. Kelly, Programme Manager;
Mr. D. Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services ;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Ms. N. Doak, Portfolio and Programme Co-ordinator;
Ms. K. Gilliland, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business and Research Development
Manager;
Mrs. D. Smith, Neighbourhood Service Integration
Manager;
Mrs. C. McKeown, Regeneration Project Officer; and
Mrs. G. Boyd, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was received from Councillor Hutchinson.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 2nd November were agreed.

The Chairperson asked for an update on stats around policing aspects in the City Centre. The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty agreed to get the information requested and circulate it to the Members of the Working Group. The Chairperson asked and it was agreed that officers include this item as a standard agenda item for future meetings.

Future City Centre Programme - Presentation

The Director of City Regeneration reminded Members of the Working Group of the strategic framework that shaped the focus of the work on the city centre. She highlighted that the footfall within the City Centre had increased by 40% on 2021 and she agreed to circulate a full update to Members of the Working Group. She advised that the Future City Centre programme was reimagining and revitalising the city centre to create a healthy, shared, vibrant

and sustainable environment where people want to live, work, visit and invest. The aim was to create a shared space that would intrinsically connect to, and support, surrounding communities, the wider city and region. She outlined the various elements that the team were focussing on, highlighting a number of 'game changers' that would help drive economic growth within the city centre. She reminded Members of the Working Group of the six pillar approach behind the FCC work and highlighted that behind each pillar were strands of work. She outlined a number of major developments within the City Centre that were in concept and planning stage. Members of the Working Group asked that officers differentiate planning approvals and work that had actually commenced on the ground. The Director of City Regeneration agreed to include this information in future meetings.

The Director then outlined the plans for Belfast's newest tourism destination, Belfast Stories, and reminded Members of the location for Belfast Stories and what the hub would contain. She went on to outline a number of strategic acquisitions that included the site for Belfast Stories and detailed some of the delivery highlights achieved to date, including new active travel enabling infrastructure, Belfast Entries projects, along with many of the projects undertaken as part of the Covid Recovery effort.

Noted.

A Bolder Vision

The Senior Development Manager recapped on A Bolder Vision for Belfast plans and on the visioning principles behind A Bolder Vision for Belfast. He outlined a number of key moves within the vision document – to reimagine the inner ring road, promote city centre living, embrace the river and create a civic spine that would help to connect key institutions, for example, the Ulster University and Queens University. He outlined the next steps for A Bolder Vision for Belfast and asked Members of the Working Group for their feedback. A Member of the Working Group raised a query in relation to residents' parking schemes within the city centre and asked if this was something that should be elevated and asked that this item be referred to the Climate and City Resilience Committee in due course. Officers agreed to circulate the presentation to Members.

Noted.

City Centre Living

The Senior Development Manager gave a brief update setting the context of the work around housing led regeneration and city centre living. He highlighted the scale of opportunity for living in the City Centre. He advised that this item would be discussed in detail at the planned City Centre Living workshop in January.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Vacant to Vibrant

The Senior Development Manager updated Members of the Working Group on the success of the Vacant to Vibrant project. He highlighted that there had been a 2% year on year rise in vacancy rates since 2019 and currently there was a 22% vacancy rate within the city centre and this equated to £7.85m in lost rates due to vacant units. He outlined that the Vacant to Vibrant scheme was helping to support the city centre's revitalisation. He explained the grants that were available through the vacant to vibrant scheme and the wrap around support available for those applying for the grants. The wrap around services included assistance with preparing business cases, social media and marketing training and match

making occupiers with landlords. He went on to outline the number of applications that had been received to date, the potential boost to the rate base, along with the potential for economic impact. Members of the Working Group asked for more detailed information in relation to the cluster of businesses in a particular area.

Noted.

Night Time Economy (Verbal Update)

The Director of City Regeneration gave Members of the Working Group a high level overview of work that was ongoing to assist the revitalisation effort of the night-time economy. Members of the Working Group asked and it was agreed that the next meeting of Working Group would be in person, to include representation from external bodies involved in the Purple Flag such as the BIDs and to focus solely on a detailed discussion about the night time economy.

Chairperson