Subject:	Belfast Stories Update
Date:	14th June 2023
Reporting Officer:	Wendy Langham, Programme Director
Contact Officer:	Eimear Henry, Strategic Lead

Restricted Reports
Is this report restricted?   Yes ☐   No ☒
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision ☐
          After Council Decision ☐
          Sometime in the future ☐
          Never ☐

Call-in
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?   Yes ☒   No ☐

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: - Update Members on the Belfast Stories programme as part of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) including the findings of the public consultation exercise. - Outline activity to support the next development phase up to the end of RIBA Design Stage 2 and the submission of the Outline Business Case.

2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to:
	- Note the contents of this report and update on progress against the delivery of the Belfast Stories programme.
	- Note the findings of the public consultation exercise, the Equality Impact Assessment and the Rural Needs Screening as summarised in the report and detailed in Appendices 2 & 3.
	- Agree the actions as set out in the Engagement Plan detailed in Appendix 4 and summarised at 3.38 to 3.43.
	- Note the findings of the Stories Audit detailed in Appendix 5 and summarised at 3.50 to 3.52.
	- Agree the actions as set out in the Stories Action Plan detailed in Appendix 6.
	- Agree to set up a Members' Working Group to provide advice and oversight on the progression of Belfast Stories as set out in the draft Terms of Reference included in Appendix 7.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Members will be aware that Belfast Stories is the Council's flagship project under the Belfast Region City Deal and is due to open in 2028/29.
3.2	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed at its meeting on 19th November 2021 to progress a number of key pieces of work, in order to ensure we meet the 2028/29 anticipated opening date including: the appointment of the integrated design team; the appointment of the exhibition design team; and commencement of the stories collection. In May 2022 City Growth and Regeneration Committee agreed to undertake the first public consultation exercise on proposals to date.
3.3	Since then, several important milestones have been achieved and are included in the updates provided below. Activities included in the next stage of development are set out for agreement and detailed in Appendix 4: Engagement Plan and Appendix 6: Stories Action Plan.
	Programme Update
3.4	Progress against the agreed programme is ongoing.

3.5	*Site Acquisition* Members will be aware that the majority of the site (95%) was secured by Belfast City Council for Belfast Stories in 2021 with site assembly now complete with the acquisition of the remaining two smaller properties on the site since the last Committee update in May 2022.
3.6	*Business Case* An interim Outline Business Case was completed in 2020 in advance of the purchase of the site. This work is now being updated to reflect progress and project development with an updated Outline Business Case due to be submitted for approval in 2024, when concept designs will have been further developed to RIBA Stage 2. At this stage the project will then move to departmental casework review with Tourism NI and the Department for Economy. If successful a contract for BRCD funding will be issued.
3.7	*Design Teams* Work is progressing with Council's physical programmes department to appoint the design teams to enable the project to move to the next phase of development. The procurement of these professional services is ongoing with appointments anticipated in Autumn 2023 of the following teams: - Integrated Design Team - Interpretative Planning and Exhibition Design Team - Project Management and Design Assurance Team.
3.8	*Net Zero Carbon Ambition* To align with Belfast City Council's Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast and the Resilience Strategy, a feasibility study was commissioned to assess the viability of using geothermal technology to meet the building's heating and cooling requirements. The study concluded that geothermal energy is a viable option for the site to be considered alongside other sustainable energy solutions. The scope of works for the design teams has included requirements to meet our ambitions including BREEAM 'Outstanding' sustainability standard to be obtained for the whole project and CEEQUAL 'Outstanding' sustainability standard for the civil/public realm aspects of the scheme. In addition, the building is to be designed to require low energy demand for heating and cooling, as well as utilise onsite renewables. The building design is required to meet Passive House 'Plus' standard to support this need. Further design work will be

	undertaken by the design teams to determine how these ambitions will be met. Members will be updated in due course.
3.9	*Benefits Realisation* A Benefits Realisation Framework for Belfast Stories has been developed to define and refine the range of benefits and outcomes linked to the project investment spending objectives and BRCD requirements. A key objective is "to create and sustain a diversified, vibrant city – an attractive place to live in, invest in and work in" and within this objective we have been examining the potential impacts on the city centre and neighbourhoods, local communities, local residents and the local economy. Crucial to realising the impacts will be identifying the enabling mechanism(s) to deliver against the expected benefits.
3.10	An important aspect of the wider benefits of Belfast Stories is the social value opportunity, including better jobs and skills, building ethical and resilient supply chains and promoting wellbeing for citizens. An independent evaluator will support the Belfast Stories team to ensure ongoing review of the benefits and outcomes with an evaluation report due by the end of 2024 to coincide with development of designs to RIBA Stage 2, submission of the outline business case and completion of the second public consultation.
3.11	*Inclusive Growth* An Inclusive Growth group has been established to ensure that the breadth of opportunities during pre-construction, construction and post opening are maximised. Skills audits considering opportunities in construction, tourism and hospitality, and creative and digital technologies are being completed by the BRCD team and officers will work to ensure these are aligned to corporate priorities across Council including the culture and tourism functions within economic development to support areas such as neighbourhood tourism capacity building.
3.12	It is important in the development of the outline business case to be able to demonstrate delivery against social value outcomes. As part of the consultation and engagement process the work strands of the Engagement Plan (Appendix 4) have been developed to ensure all opportunities are maximised that in turn will feed into the overall project Benefits Realisation Framework. This approach will be embedded into all aspects of the programme including opportunities through gathering of stories.
	Public consultation
3.13	

3.14	Belfast City Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework describes a broad spectrum of two-way communication (from consultation to engagement to involvement) between the council and its residents and stakeholders. It recognises that effective dialogue helps make decisions, policies and services that are better suited to the people they are intended to benefit. It is in line with this that Belfast Stories seeks to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are at its core, supported by a co-designed and inclusive process.
3.15	Belfast City Council appointed Smith and Kent Consulting to provide specialist guidance and support, to plan and assist with Belfast Stories consultation and engagement including the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA).
3.16	The overall approach seeks to build long-term relationships while using a variety of methods to engage people on the terms they want to be engaged. There are two broad strands to engagement between May 2022 and September 2024. The process includes public consultations at the beginning and end of this development phase with the first of these now being complete with key findings detailed below. The second strand is ongoing engagement with stakeholders including priority groups and the general public.
3.17	As an initial step it was agreed at City Growth and Regeneration Committee in May 2022 that a public consultation would be carried out early in the process.
3.18	*Public Consultation* The first public consultation on Belfast Stories was delivered from August to November 2022 running for 14 weeks The consultation focused on: - Raising awareness of Belfast Stories so that people are excited and want to continue to be engaged in its development. - Making sure that Belfast Stories can be a positive experience for everyone, including consultation on the EQIA, RNIA and Story Collection Framework. - Asking people how they would like to continue to be involved in the ongoing engagement.
3.19	The Belfast Stories Public Consultation document is included at Appendix 1.
	Consultation tools and tactics Consultation activity was delivered using different tools in different settings and with different audiences and interest groups. Stakeholders were asked for information that was relevant and

	useful to the decision-making process. This included the Your Say Belfast online consultation hub that hosted:
	- Online survey
	- Polls
	- Downloadable consultation documents
	- ISL and BSL videos
3.20	
	Overall, the online consultation hub welcomed 2,755 visits and 2,495 unique visitors. The documents and videos were downloaded or viewed 234 times, and 149 responses were received to the online survey and two online polls.
3.21	
	Equality, diversity and inclusion
	In August 2022, the Belfast Stories equity steering group was set up comprising of 10 experts by experience including: people from Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, inner city, working class and LGBTQ+ backgrounds; older and younger people; disabled and neurodiverse people; and people with caring responsibilities. Two representatives from Belfast City Council's Belfast Stories and Good Relations teams also joined. There were 4 equity steering group meetings during the public consultation, which were attended by an average of 8 people.
3.22	
	Working through the equity steering group, Belfast City Council and other networks, Smith and Kent facilitated 16 workshops with people and groups who are generally more at risk of missing out. These were attended by 136 people. Smith and Kent also carried out 10 one-to-one meetings with organisations representing or advocating for people and groups at risk of missing out.
3.23	
	Engagement with sectoral stakeholders
	Belfast Stories team ran 31 workshops with the film, tourism, arts, heritage, the voluntary and community, Irish language and public sectors, engaging 238 representatives, including consultees previously engaged by Lord Cultural Resources in the development of the Stories Collection Framework.
3.24	
	Engagement with the general public
	Five public meetings took place across the city with information boards also displayed at Clifton House, Girdwood Community Hub, Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre, Crescent Arts Centre, Ulster University, Spectrum Centre, EastSide Visitor Centre and the James Connolly Visitor Centre.
3.25	

3.26	*Creative Engagement* In August 2022, Belfast City Council appointed thrive, the audience development agency for NI, and Daisy Chain Inc., a creative practice, to help raise awareness and build excitement for Belfast Stories using an innovative and participatory approach to engagement.
3.27	Between September and November 2022, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. engaged a total of 683 participants through a range of creative tools including on-street interviews, street portraits, events and workshops and physical and pop-up consultation hubs in the city centre and surrounding locations.
3.28	**Summary of key performance indicators** <table><tr><td>What we did</td><td>How well we did it</td></tr><tr><td>- 2,755 visits and 2,495 unique visitors to Belfast Stories online consultation hub - 234 unique visitors viewed or downloaded the consultation documents and videos - 149 responses to online survey and polls - 65 consultation workshops - 1,148 participants engaged through consultation workshops and events</td><td>- 100% of workshop participants surveyed enjoyed the consultation - 96% of workshop participants felt listened to - 60% of survey respondents were female - 21% of survey responses from LGBTQ+ community - 20% of survey respondents had caring responsibilities for an older person or disabled person</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">What difference it made - 82 per cent of those completing the survey or responding at consultation and engagement events are now excited by the concept of Belfast Stories - In the survey, 58 per cent of respondents offered stories, experiences, knowledge and networks they could share to help develop Belfast Stories</td></tr></table> **Feedback** The consultation exercise was also an opportunity for Belfast Stories to better understand what works well and where there are ongoing challenges in engaging with groups and individuals. Lessons were learnt on the consultation tools that were most effective and where a revised approach should be applied in future. The public consultation produced a wealth of useful information that will be carefully considered to inform the development of Belfast Stories and the next stages of consultation and engagement.
3.29	

3.30	The full details of feedback received are included in Appendix 2. A summary is outlined below presented in line with the three consultation strands of: *Building excitement*; *Making sure Belfast Stories is for everyone*; and *Continuing the conversation*.
3.31	*Building the excitement* Across all engagement strands, there was remarkable excitement about the concept of Belfast Stories. For example, in survey responses, 81.6 per cent of survey respondents said they were excited about Belfast Stories. However particular areas of feedback focused on: - Positive feedback on regeneration and restoration of the heritage building - Concerns over divisive 'us' and 'them' perspectives on one hand or the 'sanitisation' of the city's stories on the other hand - Concerns over displacement and/or lack of investment in existing infrastructure.
3.32	*Making sure Belfast Stories is for everyone* Responses to these questions indicated that the main barriers that would stop people enjoying Belfast Stories included: concerns over the experience not being considered inclusive; potential to be politically partisan; or lack of trust in how the stories would be represented.
3.33	Specific barriers in relation to using the building included: - Cost - Feelings of it 'not being for us' - Specific design considerations - Lack of interest/ relevance - Duplication with what is on offer elsewhere.
3.34	The role of the community and voluntary sector as trusted intermediaries to engage people was emphasised throughout the consultation, to ensure that people most at risk of missing out were engaged with and barriers to access were addressed.
3.35	Over two thirds of survey respondents (68 per cent) agreed that the right people had been identified to be part of the equity steering group.
	The majority of people (7 out of 10) agreed that the themes developed as part of the Story Collection Framework are a good foundation for gathering stories. Feedback in this area included:

	- Themes considered most resonant were Authentic, Home and Place.
	- Potential barriers identified included lack of authenticity, trust, unconvinced by concept and not inclusive.
	- Importance of prioritising the role of local people in collecting stories.
	- In practice high levels of willingness to share personal stories.
3.36	- A substantial number of consultees raised questions relating to the ethics of story gathering, preservation and presentation.
	Continuing the conversation
	The information published about the consultation emphasised that this was only the first step in six years of planned engagement. For some people, this early stage made engagement difficult with uncertainty over what could meaningfully be fed back at this stage. However, the final question of the public consultation survey asked, "What stories, experiences, knowledge and networks can you share to help us develop Belfast Stories?" Seventy-three substantive responses were received, equating to nearly three in five respondents (60 per cent) who offered a suggestion for the next stage. This information has informed the actions set out in the
3.37	Engagement Plan detailed in Appendix 4.
	Recommendations
	The Public Consultation Report made a number of recommendations in relation to ongoing
3.38	engagement. These are summarised below and detailed in Appendix 2.
	Recommendation 1: Publish findings and set out details of next stage of engagement informed
3.39	by consultation.
	Recommendation 2: Continue breadth of engagement with stakeholders however ensure specific activities are delivered that address:
	- Communities – building trust and relationship with particular actions to reach geographic communities on the outskirts and in the immediate vicinity.
	- Sectors – moving beyond silos to engage on different terms that focus on specific expertise for example interest in or contribution to Belfast Stories – story gathers, tellers, curators etc.
	- Tourism sector – need to have specific engagement actions to ensure Belfast Stories can support the overall visitor experience and enhance existing products and providers.

3.40	- Commitment to Irish Language and Ulster Scots engagement to explore good relations opportunities, story collection and themes, representation within the building with the option to consider a language policy for the project and specific EQIA if required.
3.41	**Recommendation 3:** Not all planned activity to raise awareness was able to go ahead during the public consultation. A Communications Plan should be developed and integrated with the Engagement Plan. This should include: - Key messages and a consistent identity with signposting to an updated Belfast Stories website and engaging social media. - Potential to embed Belfast Stories activity in the calendar of events and festivals across the city.
3.42	**Recommendation 4**: There are a number of suggestions of platforms to support ongoing engagement. These have been considered against current resources and it is proposed that the following are established at this stage of the project with a commitment for further review at the end of this design stage: - City Stakeholder Forum. This has been revised and it is proposed that this should be a Stories Network to ensure a clear focus to engagement. It is also proposed that within this Network a user panel and/or inclusive design group could be established. Further consideration will be given to this following the appointment of the design teams. - Equity Steering Group (to continue). The equity steering group has provided vital insight into equality, diversity and inclusion including facilitating conversations with individuals and groups that would otherwise not be known to the Belfast Stories team. The membership of the equity steering group should be reviewed and refreshed to ensure that we are hearing from voices that may otherwise go unheard. - Stories Panel with a remit to include ethical framework. This would ensure that the Council accesses the necessary expertise and specialist advice to integrate an ethics function into the story gathering processes and tools. **Recommendation 5**: There are plans to start gathering stories in 2023. The Engagement Plan includes recommendations for engaging around story gathering. This should focus on active learning by testing processes and tools with groups that are less likely to share stories (because of their culture, identity or circumstances), in particular older people and the very elderly, whose stories are otherwise at risk of being lost. It should also: - Build on best practice that currently exists, in particular in relation to safeguarding and ethics.

3.43	- Uncover the stories and archives that already exist, including at community level.
	- Bring different sectors and stakeholders together to share knowledge and experience and build a community of practice through a conference or event.
3.44	**Recommendation 6**: There is a need to ensure that the project team continues to evaluate the effectiveness of its ongoing engagement by adhering to the evaluation framework and using tools.
3.45	Details of actions against each of these recommendations are included in Appendix 4: Engagement Plan.
	Stories Audit
	The collection of Belfast's stories underpins the Belfast Stories concept and is key to the success of the project in meeting its ambition and delivering the benefits. To support this work, Council commissioned Lord Cultural Resources to develop a Stories Collection Framework. The purpose of the Framework is to support the development of the Belfast Stories project and delivery of Council's wider ambitions as set out in the *Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy*, the *Belfast Agenda*, the ten-year cultural strategy *A City Imagining* and the recently finalised tourism plan, *Make Yourself at Home.* This will provide a Framework for future
3.46	plans and recognises the important role that many city partners representing the community, cultural and tourism sectors have in telling Belfast stories across the city and throughout the year.
3.47	Members will be aware that the Belfast Stories project seeks to strengthen existing structures and networks to ensure that the benefits of the project are realised on multiple levels. The initial concept for Belfast Stories identified the opportunity for a significant new anchor in the city centre that would not only deliver regeneration in the immediate area but also act as an anchor that would help establish a hub and spoke model to strengthen connectivity and flow of visitors across the city.
	Working in collaboration with key stakeholders and subject matter experts across the city we developed the Stories Collection Framework (SCF) in 2022. The Stories Collection Framework outlined the proposed direction on a number of areas including:
	- Guiding principles – programmes such as the Decade of Centenaries have established good practice in setting clear guiding principles that inform Council's position and partnership approach.

	- Ethical parameters – there are important ethical considerations that must be assessed, and necessary processes put in place to ensure best practice is reached across engagement, collecting and telling of Belfast stories. - Themes – the purpose of the thematic framework is to assist in what will be a considerable undertaking to collect and arrange stories. This is an organisational tool and is not how the stories will be presented or told as this will be addressed at the next stage when the curatorial approach will be developed as part of public engagement and design processes. - Partnership approach – this sets out a phased approach to a wider programme and partnership model to support cultural and tourism development in relation to collecting and telling Belfast stories. Whilst this will in turn support the building project, the potential benefits are much wider.
3.48	- Governance – Council is not a collecting organisation. This requires significant infrastructure and expertise. The governance is linked to the partnership model that locates Council within a wider stories ecosystem for the city and acknowledges the considerable expertise that exists in partner organisations.
3.49	The Stories Collection Framework is a flexible tool that will evolve over time. It is critical to ensuring the authenticity and diversity of the stories represented in Belfast Stories and across multiple initiatives. In its present form, the framework seeks to: - Explore new ways and perspectives of telling the stories of the people of Belfast. - Bring the people of Belfast into the heart of the initiatives. - Increase accessibility of existing collections across the city and beyond. - Identify and address gaps in stories that have not been collected or that lack visibility. - Encourage long term active engagement with partners creating a network across the city and beyond that will increase opportunities to participate in the cultural life and support neighbourhood tourism. - Identify efficient and sustainable ways of sharing and putting collections to their best use. One of the key recommendations from the Story Collection Framework as agreed by City Growth and Regeneration Committee in May 2022 was to undertake an initial Stories Audit to better understand what stories have been collected and current levels of access to these collections. The scope of the audit was to: - Complete an audit of stories, archives and collections relating to the city of Belfast in line with the mapping tool developed as part of the Story Collection Framework.

3.50	- Analyse findings including identification of trends and gaps. - Identify any access issues or barriers to partnership working. - Recommendations and roadmap for ongoing story collection and partnership programmes.
3.51	The detailed audit is included at Appendix 5. The research began with sector mapping to identify the range of organisations and bodies involved in collecting. A series of discovery conversations with stakeholders and experts in the field were held, revealing a wide variety of specific collections to be audited and highlighting the depth of knowledge and insight to be gained from collection holders, community representatives and subject matter experts. These complemented the extensive engagement already undertaken as part of the development of the Story Collection Framework and on an ongoing basis by the Belfast Stories project team. Drawing on these discovery conversations four story collection case studies were developed with each one highlighting important considerations for ongoing partnerships, including ethical considerations, accessibility, representation, rights and preservation of collections that can be applied across the audit.
3.52	The report presents key findings, an initial analysis of the catalogue of story collections, highlighting collections by sector, overarching themes and content tags to provide a sense of the variety of story collections, their context and contents. Finally, the report considers barriers to ongoing partnership working and accessing collections and offers several key recommendations to overcome these. It also proposes a roadmap for ongoing story collection partnership programmes.
3.53	The roadmap for ongoing story collection partnership programmes is included in Appendix 5 with further detail on the actions to be delivered against this roadmap as part of the Stories Action Plan detailed in Appendix 6. These include: - Establishing a Stories Panel to include relevant expertise and specialist advice. - Deliver a pilot programme for gathering stories. - Work with the culture and tourism team to embed a partnership approach to heritage and neighbourhood development and investment in the city. - Support the creative and engagement programme of Belfast 2024 in the role of Strategic Delivery Partner. **Next Steps**

3.54	It is proposed that the actions set out in the Engagement Plan (Appendix 4) and the Stories Action Plan (Appendix 6) are delivered in line with the next project development stage that will culminate in a second public consultation, completion of RIBA Design Stage 2 and submission of the Outline Business Case to the Department for Economy. An update will be provided to Committee later in 2023 with detailed engagement with Members throughout 2024.
3.55	Given the strategic importance of the Belfast Stories project, the level of investment and the range of benefits to the city, it is proposed that a Belfast Stories Members' Working Group is established. This group would support regular engagement between Members and the Belfast Stories team and provide advice and oversight as the project develops. Draft Terms of Reference for the group are included in Appendix 7.
3.56	**Financial & Resource Implications** There are no new financial implications to this report. The budget for the delivery of this phase of development was approved by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in November 2021. **Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment** An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is included in Appendix 3. A Rural Needs Impact Assessment was completed, and it was identified that the programme would be unlikely to impact people in rural areas. People in rural areas were invited to consult during the public consultation. The Engagement Plan (Appendix 4) supports ongoing engagement to ensure that Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs implications continue to be addressed and includes integration of mitigating actions identified in the EQIA.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents attached**
	Appendix 1: Belfast Stories Public Consultation Document Appendix 2: Public Consultation Report Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment Appendix 4: Updated Engagement Plan Appendix 5: Stories Audit Appendix 6: Stories Action Plan Appendix 7: Draft Terms of Reference Members' Working Group