



Subject:	Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme
Date:	14th June 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Kerry McMullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme (the "Programme") and to seek Members' approval of the proposed funding model and next steps.
1.2	In April 2022 Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee approved the draft tourism plan, <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> together with the Year 1 2022/2023 Action Plan of priorities. This included a commitment to developing a Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Fund for local tourism, recognising this as one of 3 catalyst projects alongside Belfast Stories and Year of Culture 2024. <b>Catalyst 1 - Our Place - Developing Local Tourism:</b> the Tourism

	<p>Plan recognises that Regenerative Tourism is driven by the relationship between people and place, with an emphasis on uplifting the importance of community in the context of tourism and in particular, the relationship between the visitor and the host.</p>
1.3	<p>The Programme provides an opportunity to support the development and roll out of <i>Belfast Stories</i> and align with delivery of the <i>Tourism Plan, Cultural Strategy</i> and Tourism NI's <i>Embrace A Giant Spirit</i> brand and values, to deliver enhanced experiences for visitors and act as a catalyst to support the social, economic and physical regeneration across the city.</p>
1.4	<p>It is envisaged that this will be an iterative, phased programme. Significant work has already been undertaken by the Tourism Development Unit on the initial phase of the Programme (Phase 1: Development), in collaboration with the Belfast Stories and Culture Unit teams.</p>
1.5	<p>In order to maximise synergies and outcomes across key programmes, it is anticipated that the second phase of the Programme (Phase 2: Implementation) will launch once <i>Belfast Stories, the Heritage Audit and Development Plan and the Visitor Experience Action Plan</i> have progressed to a more advanced stage.</p>
1.6	<p>Since 2017, Council has supported 2 neighbourhood tourism organisations (EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar) to deliver a <i>City Connections</i> programme which promotes cohesion between cultural tourism offers in the east and west of the city. It is anticipated that <i>City Connections</i> will be replaced by the proposed investment Programme, which will be open to organisations across the city. To facilitate the transition, it is proposed that Council continue to support both organisations in this interim period and provide financial assistance to the end of this financial year (31<sup>st</sup> March 2024).</p>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>To progress development of Phase 1 of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme, we request Members' consideration of the following:</p>
2.2	<p>Members are asked to approve investment in independent sectoral facilitation to conduct developmental engagement which will identify needs, gaps and opportunities, alignment of the City Connections programme and further inform and the parameters of the Programme (Phase 2).</p>

2.3	Members are asked to approve investment in a 2-year programme to develop and enhance tourism products and experiences across the city, sharing and distributing the benefits of a vibrant tourism sector throughout local neighbourhoods.
2.4	Members are asked to approve interim funding to continue support for the City Connections programme until the end of current financial year.
3.0	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<b>Strategic Context</b>
	To ensure that an investment programme is developed in a robust and cohesive manner to meet sectoral needs, the Programme will be informed by key interdependent strategic priorities and projects, including <i>Visitor Experience Action Plan</i> , the <i>Cultural Strategy</i> , <i>Heritage Audit and Roadmap for Development</i> , and <i>Belfast Stories</i> , as detailed below.
3.2	Through investment in the development of high-quality tourism products aligned to our core strategic objectives, visitors may be drawn to neighbourhoods beyond the city centre delivering authentic experiences, promoting increased dwell time and spend, uplifting economic growth and capacity in local communities.
3.3	Further opportunity has been identified to enhance and extend the visitor experience and promote a cohesive, expanded visitor journey of exploration beyond the city centre. Creating a regenerative tourism offering that takes into consideration the appeal of neighbourhoods in delivering authentic experiences and the benefits of regenerative tourism.
3.4	As Members will be aware, <b>Belfast Stories</b> aims to create a unique visitor experience that captures the city through its powerful stories. Offering visitors, a new way to see and understand Belfast, it will generate authentic experiences that engender a greater sense of connection and belonging, both for local people and visitors to our city.
3.5	The offer will become the “go to” first stop for visitors to Belfast and the wider NI region, orientating visitors and linking them to other city-based / regional visitor attraction.

3.6	<p>At the current time, the hierarchy of stories / stories framework is still at a developmental stage, however in time and when fully developed this will become intrinsically linked to the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme parameters. The development phase will enable industry to fully understand the opportunity presented by Belfast Stories and consider experiences that will enhance and support interconnected Visitor experiences and the role that communities can play in the overarching visitor experience.</p>
3.7	<p><b>Cultural Strategy</b></p> <p>The ten - year Cultural Strategy for Belfast, <i>A City Imagining</i> states that in order to truly engage with our visitors and ultimately grow market share, Belfast needs to ensure that visitors connect strongly with the city’s people, culture, places and heritage. To help give focus to the challenge of creating unique destination experiences which meet visitor need, the strategy identifies four themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tell me more (A city of stories)</b> e.g. character and charm of Belfast, make the visitor feel at home</li> <li>• <b>Not what it seems (A city of contrasts)</b> e.g. intriguing and complex history of Belfast, character of the place</li> <li>• <b>Hidden depths (A maritime city)</b> e.g. waterways, rivers, loughs and shores</li> <li>• <b>Homespun (Made in Belfast)</b> e.g. industrial heritage, cultural venues, innovation, creativity.</li> </ul> <p>The proposed Programme will be developed in cognisance of these themes to shape immersive and engaging tourism experiences across the city.</p>
3.8	<p><b>Heritage Audit</b></p> <p>It is also envisaged that the Programme will be shaped in alignment with the <i>Heritage Audit and Roadmap for Development</i>, aligning investment that recognises, promotes and protects the city’s cultural heritage in all its dimensions, both tangible and intangible including the plurality of the city’s cultural narratives. Work on this development plan is currently underway and will provide additional understanding of enabling infrastructure and assets that will support the success of Belfast Stories and visitor engagement.</p>
3.9	<p><b>Tourism Strategy</b></p>

	<p>In April 2022, Council approved the 'Make Yourself at Home' 10-year Tourism Plan for Belfast, recognising the importance of tourism to the city's economic growth. The <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> Tourism Plan places community at its heart. Respect for the local context, to ensure tourism-derived benefits are shared and inclusive, is evident in all four of the strategic themes - Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain.</p>
3.10	<p>Need has been identified for a specific programme to support the development of neighbourhood-based tourism experiences. Work to date has demonstrated that some areas of the city are more advanced than others in terms of neighbourhood tourism and leveraging the opportunity it presents. Whilst some areas have organisations undertaking work on visitor servicing and tourism development, it is clear that many neighbourhoods currently lack the capacity to bring forward strong proposals that would appeal to visitors.</p>
3.11	<p>The development of a suitable investment programme would be further strengthened by independent engagement with a range of organisations across the city to identify sectoral needs and opportunities and to support and inform future Programme phases.</p>
3.11	<p>Benchmarking research work has demonstrated that neighbourhoods are uniquely positioned to offer the visitor the immersive, authentic experiences they are seeking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrating local culture, heritage and enterprise.</li> <li>• Accessing open and green spaces.</li> <li>• Co-creating authentic Belfast experiences, linked to the city's key stories.</li> <li>• Enjoying day to night food and hospitality.</li> <li>• Amplifying and extending the impact of the city's main existing visitor attractions.</li> </ul>
3.12	<p>Cities across Europe (of comparable size to Belfast) have successfully implemented ambitious programmes which place communities at the heart of regenerative tourism. Research highlights the importance of uplifting capacity, quality of product and visitor experience in local neighbourhoods beyond the city centre and considers how San Sebastian, Ljubljana, and Berlin have employed local tourism initiatives to develop sustainable growth in visitor numbers and product development (<i>Local Tourism in Belfast: Developing the Offer, Deloitte 2018</i>).</p> <p><b>Visitor Experience Action Plan</b></p>

3.13	<p>At the current time, the <i>Visitor Experience Action Plan</i> is at a developmental stage, with a view to driving the effective implementation of the actions set out in the <i>Visitor Experience Plan</i>, which identifies neighbourhood tourism as one of six specific gaps in the city's current visitor experience offering. Once fully developed, the Action Plan will prioritise development activity linked to the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme parameters to address identified need and drive economic growth, sharing the benefits of the tourism sector with communities across the city.</p>
3.14	<p><b>Purpose of The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme</b></p> <p>The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in facilitated dialogue with sectoral and community partners across the city to identify needs, gaps and opportunities for tourism offers to drive increased visitor footfall, dwell time and spend in local neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Provide short term support (over a maximum period of 2 years) to develop authentic and financially sustainable new cultural tourism products, or enhancements to existing offers, which will bring vitality to local neighbourhoods, local residents and visitors.</li> <li>• Encourage the development of plans which build capacity for city neighbourhoods to connect to the broader tourism offer, enabling local communities to become part of the Belfast visitor experience.</li> <li>• Promote enhanced visitor dwell time in the city and extend the economic benefits beyond the city centre.</li> <li>• Extend the journey of visitors to <i>Belfast Stories</i>, encouraging further exploration of its narratives across wider city neighbourhoods.</li> </ul>
3.15	<p><b>Programme Focus and Scope</b></p> <p>The Programme will facilitate funding of priority outcomes linked to the Tourism Plan and support actions set out under the four strategic themes contained within the <i>Make Yourself At Home</i> Tourism Strategy - Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain. It will also provide a flexible approach to Neighbourhood Tourism within the City, while recognising the differing stages of development and capacity across the city. While it is envisaged that the investment programme may be extended beyond the initial two year period, the first two programme phases will have specific areas of focus:</p>

### **Phase One - Programme Development**

3.16 In this first phase, significant focus will be placed upon scoping and benchmarking work to inform and define programme parameters, aims and projected outcomes, in alignment with interdependent projects. This work has already been progressed by the Tourism Development Unit, in collaboration with the Belfast Stories and Culture teams.

To further shape Programme parameters, we will prioritise the procurement of independent facilitation services to conduct developmental and engagement activity with the sector and across neighbourhoods in the North, East, South and West of the city. This work will include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Conducting a needs audit and gaps analysis within neighbourhoods.
- Identify visitor needs and opportunities to increase dwell time and spend in neighbourhoods.
- Engage with sectoral stakeholders to build confidence in neighbourhood tourism offers and explore the development of new products and experiences, or enhancements to existing offers.
- Facilitate sectoral dialogue around issues relating to connectivity, sustainability, accessibility and capacity.
- Advise on potential programme linkages to Council's strategic priorities and Tourism NI's Embrace a Giant Spirit brand values and themes.
- Outline opportunities for the alignment and integration of the previous support delivered via City Connections.

3.17 Awareness of the initial phase of the programme will be raised via messaging across the council website and digital channels. Active participation will be sought through an open call to potential partners, stakeholders and collaborators from the city's tourism and community sectors. An audit process will also identify appropriate groups and organisations to shape, inform and benefit from the proposed programme.

3.18 It is envisaged that the engagement activity will achieve the following benefits for participants:

- Promote a greater understanding of the economic and social value of neighbourhood tourism to both communities and tourism businesses.

- Enhance understanding of the opportunities presented by *Belfast 2024* and *City Deal* programmes to promote economic growth, build capacity and connect communities into the emerging broader tourism offer.
- Enable local communities to become part of the Belfast visitor experience
- Foster collaborative partnerships and networking synergies to promote the development of clustered tourism offers.

3.19

The work outlined above will further inform the Programme to ensure it is robust and fit for purpose when it is opened during Phase 2 of the proposal. Committee will be updated on the outcomes and learnings resulting from the facilitation work in advance of the programme progressing to Phase 2.

Within this first programme phase, we also propose to continue support for the City Connections programme until the end of this financial year in its current format.

3.20

### **Phase Two – Programme Implementation**

Phase 2 will be scoped in response to the work undertaken in Phase 1, with focus placed upon an open call for projects aligned to council's *Visitor Experience Framework, and Action Plan*, which will provide a co-ordinated approach to product and experience development in the city. Phase 2 will also prioritise the development of high-quality tourism products linked to Belfast's key narratives, which encourage visitors to continue their journey beyond the *Belfast Stories* attraction and extend their experience across the wider city.

3.21

### **Investment Priorities**

The investment priorities for this programme are:

- **Product Development:** development of new, high quality local tourism products and experiences or enhancements to existing high-quality offers across the city.
- **Capacity Building:** in collaboration with teams across the Economic Development Unit, the Programme will invest in projects to strengthen community capacity to shape, deliver and contribute to visitor experiences. The ambition is to ensure all parts of the city have the opportunity to benefit from tourism investment.



- It is envisaged that applications will be considered for investment in products at one of three distinct phases; concept, planning, operational.

3.22

**Anticipated Programme Outcomes:**

The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme will, in the long-term, support the delivery of the Visitor Experience Framework through the development of financially sustainable tourism products which draw visitors into local neighbourhoods, immersing them actively in the locale, promoting increased dwell time and spend in the area and uplifting skill, capacity and confidence in local communities.

It is anticipated that the parameters and outcomes of the programme may evolve throughout the lifetime of the *Make Yourself at Home* Tourism Plan in response to challenges, opportunities and needs identified across the city.

3.23

A post-programme evaluation report will be brought to Committee, incorporating lessons learned and recommendations to shape future funding initiatives in response to programme outcomes, opportunities and sectoral needs.

**Timeframe**

Phase 1 (research and development) of the project is currently underway, with facilitation and engagement activity to commence once investment is approved.

It is anticipated that work will continue until March 2024, with a view to Phase 2 (implementation) commencing from April 2024.

Further progress reports will be provided to Committee in due course.

3.24

**Financial and Resource Implications**

Approval of the Committee is sought for a total investment of £500,000 to support the ambitions of this Programme across a two year period.

It is anticipated that budget will be sought from City Deal reserves for the 2023 – 24 and 2025 periods of activity.

**2023 - 24 (Research and development phase)**

City Connections current funding	£50,000
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3.25	<p><i>Committee meeting on 5 April 2023 approved £25k each to Fáilte Feirste Thiar and EastSide Tourism to support City Connections programme of work, 1 April to 30 September 2023.</i></p> <p>City Connections extension of funding, 1 Oct to 31 March 2024 £50,000</p> <p>Independent facilitation services £50,000</p> <p><b>2024 – 25 (Implementation phase)</b></p> <p>Investment programme £350,000</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>The Tourism Plan: <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EAIQ) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNS). Any issues raised during the public consultation have been addressed in the final plan, which was approved at committee meeting on 6 April 2022. No further public consultation will be required for this investment fund.</p> <p>Neighbourhood tourism is one of the outputs of the Tourism Strategy, promotion of opportunity for all Section 75 groups to be celebrated within the programme is important to it's success.</p>
4.0	<b>Appendices – Documents attached</b>
	None