

# Belfast Stories Working Group

Tuesday, 23rd January, 2024

## MEETING OF THE BELFAST STORIES WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND  
REMOVED VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Smyth (Chairperson); and  
Councillors Bunting and Maghie.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;  
Ms. W. Langham, Programme Director;  
Ms. E. Henry, Strategic Lead;  
Ms. M. Bagnall, Programme Manager; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer .

### **Apologies**

No apologies were reported.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

### **Progress since last meeting**

The Programme Director reminded the Working Group of its role to provide cross-party strategic advice to ensure that the programme vision, outcomes and objectives were realised, together with the Terms of Reference which had previously been agreed.

She highlighted that the areas which had been identified for perusal included:

- Inclusive Growth, including social value opportunities during design, construction and operations;
- Equality, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility;
- Ethics and approach to stories - gathering, holding and interpretation;
- Sustainable development, including net zero build aspirations;
- Stakeholder engagement, consultation, communications and PR;
- Linkages to the development and implementation of the Council's and city's key plans, strategies and programmes;
- Consideration of good practice and benchmarks from other relevant projects and/or cities;

- Emerging actions the Council may take to mitigate against any adverse impacts arising from the project and capitalising on any opportunities that may arise; and
- Monitoring of Belfast Stories programme and progress against key milestones.

She advised that the Integrated Design Team had been appointed and described the RIBA Project Stages, highlighting that the project was currently in stage 1 – Preparation.

The Programme Director explained that further key milestones to progress in 2024 included the development of the concept design RIBA 1 and 2 (Q1 – Q3 2024); the gathering of stories pilot (Q1 2024); Engagement and set up of a Stories Network and Stories Panel (Q1 2024); Development of the Outline Business Case (Q1 - Q3 2024); Consultation on the concept designs (Q3 2024); Submission of the Outline Business Case for the Belfast Region City Deal funding approval (Q4 2024).

Noted.

### **What is Belfast Stories?**

The Programme Director advised that officers had been exploring ways to collectively communicate the Belfast Stories project in a succinct way. She explained that, firstly, it was intended to be a shared civic space – a gathering place for everyone, helping to express our unique identities. Secondly, it was intended to be a visitor attraction where we could clearly communicate the spirit of the city, its past, its present and its future. Thirdly, it was intended to be a creative hub where writers, musicians, artists and film makers could meet to collaborate, developing stories to sustain us.

She summarised Belfast Stories as:

Shared Civic Space.	Gather.
Visitor Attraction.	Communicate.
Creative Hub.	Collaborate.

During discussion, the Working Group welcomed the succinct explanation of the project and suggested the need for a Members’ Toolkit or social media engagement notifications to help Members communicate information about the project to residents and businesses to reach a wider audience.

Noted.

### **Design update - outline of the RIBA 1 and RIBA 2 design process and Members' input**

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. P. Crowe representing TODD Architects and Mr D. Berlin representing Oslo-based, Snøhetta. The Programme Director advised that they would lead on the design, supported by a team of specialists.

The representatives described their experience in delivering major cultural and public realm projects and provided context behind the project and its intended design. They explained further the organisational structure of the project teams and how they would link together and collaborate.

Mr. Crowe described Stage one of the project timeline and advised that collaborative workshops would continue, with Stage 2 of the project to commence in March 2024.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

### **Belfast Stories - maximising the benefits for the city discussion**

The Strategic Lead outlined that the project would be a driver for a healthy visitor economy and the need to ensure the project was shared across the city for the people of Belfast with high levels of social impact. She described the objectives were to: Grow Belfast's economy through tourism led regeneration and support for screen-based creative industries; Create and sustain a diversified, vibrant city where people want to live and work, visit and invest; and Create a new shared space, to support a greater sense of connection and belonging.

She outlined the Benefits Realisation Plan, Monitoring and Evaluation model and explained further the Spending Objectives under the Belfast Stories Project Outputs: Stronger safer community; Economic Growth; and Improved Urban Environment, together with proposed measures and progress to date.

During discussion the Programme Director advised that further information on benchmarking of visitor numbers would be provided at a future meeting.

In response to a Member's question on how the project would link with neighbourhood tourism, the Strategic Lead advised that engagement was already underway with the Economic Development team as it was important that linkages and opportunities to maximise the relationship between Belfast Stories and the wider city visitor experience were developed at an early stage to ensure connectivity and delivery.

Noted.

### **Inclusive Growth - Stories pilot, 2024 opportunities, meanwhile use, social value**

The Programme Director outlined the importance of inclusive and sustainable economic growth of the project. She stated that the team were working with key stakeholders to see where they could support greater social mobility and opportunities for all, more inclusive labour markets and more inclusive places and services. She advised that the team were capturing a wide range of views to inform the investment, 'design-in' solutions to remove the barriers which would otherwise prevent those who were more likely to be economically excluded.

The Strategic Lead advised that the team was working with 'thrive and quarto' to deliver the Stories Collection Pilot Project and a diverse range of volunteers had been recruited to be trained.

She highlighted that Belfast Stories proposed to partner with the Belfast 2024 programme on a number of projects, including:

- Solab - North Star: engagement, stories collection and co-design
- Outburst and Kabosh – Are you on the bus? – stories collection and use of site
- Belfast Film Festival – Hearth – stories collection and use of site

The Programme Director also pointed out the interim uses of the space had been agreed under licence.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information provided and that further recommendations in relation to the Stories Pilot would be brought to the Working Group in due course.

#### **Date of next meeting**

The Working Group noted that the next meeting would be scheduled for April 2024.

Chairperson