



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Tourism Unit Update
Date:	14 May 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459 Pièr Morrow, Acting Tourism Development Manager, ext 3582

Relevant Background Information

Conference Subvention

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council has a Conference Subvention policy which is utilised to secure and support national and international conferences to Belfast and to build the City's profile as a conference destination. One request has been received and the proposal has been assessed against the funding criteria and it meets the category for financial support as detailed below:

British Association of Critical Care Nurses Annual Conference 14-16 September 2008 - it is anticipated that the economic impact from this conference will be £29,100 and will create 1650 bednights for BVCB members. This is the first time the conference will be held in Belfast and will be attended by both national and international delegates. Funding of £1,000 is recommended towards this conference.

First Thursday Initiative

Members will be aware that the Cultural Tourism Strategy entitled 'Developing Belfast's Opportunity' highlights the aim to support and develop cultural tourism product development and the need to develop communication between the cultural sector and the cultural tourist. A number of cultural tourism initiatives, which are designed to make specific areas of culture more easily accessible to both domestic and out-of-state visitors, have been developed. This includes a comprehensive city-wide Art Guide that not only promoted public art, but visual art by detailing public and private galleries, workshops and historical details of blue plaque artists. At a Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee meeting on 11 April 2007 Members approved working in partnership with galleries in order to establish extended opening hours on Thursdays and walking tours. Successful pilots in 2007 proved that galleries can increase audiences and profile by working in partnership.

Public galleries now have committed to extend their opening hours to 8.30pm on the first Thursday of each month from June – December 2008. This will complement evening economy activity and capitalise on momentum and interest created by the Belfast Art Guide. The initiative will be co-ordinated by culturenorthernireland.com which will dedicate a section of their website to Belfast's public and private galleries and include a monthly e-bulletin, podcasting, virtual tours, reviews and a self-guided gallery tour to download. A media partner will promote 'First Thursdays' each month to their readers and the initiative will be marketed by BVCB and Belfast Welcome Centre.

Evening Economy Update

Lobbying Retail Sector –

The Evening Economy initiative has successfully secured budget for 2008/09 from the Brighter Belfast Initiative, the all party working group aiming to ensure that Belfast is a vibrant, clean and attractive city for residents and visitors. The Evening Economy has developed significantly since it was launched in April 2006 and the campaign 2008 is to establish late nights of trading to 9pm – Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. CastleCourt, Victoria Square and following a major lobbying campaign, the key multiple retailers including M&S, Bhs, Primark, Next, HMV, Top Shop and many more have now signed up to the campaign. A strong Evening Economy Retail Steering Group meets on a monthly basis to ensure that infrastructure is in place and that 3 late nights are viable for customers and ultimately successful for business.

Marketing –

A wide range of marketing tools will be deployed including radio advertising, extended opening to 9pm leaflets, branded promotional teams, outdoor media and advertising in City Matters. The 6th spring/summer edition of MORETIME will be published in May 08.

Evening Economy Conference –

An Evening Economy Conference is being organised for 23 September 2008 at the Waterfront Hall. The purpose of the conference will be to:

- Showcase successes of the Belfast Evening Economy initiative
- Stimulate debate and further interest in the development of the Evening Economy
- Debate key issues with relation to developing a vibrant evening economy

The conference programme will be designed to attract a high level of interest and participation from a local, regional and national audience. The Belfast Evening Economy Campaign has achieved major benefits for the city and the timing is opportune to host a conference which will highlight and showcase these successes.

Lagan Corridor Navigation Initiative Update

Members will be aware that funding of £1million has been made available by Ulster Garden Villages Limited towards the reopening of the gateway Lock number one at Stranmillis and the resourcing of an officer position on a fixed term contract. An action plan which outlined the proposed activities to be developed in relation to the key aspects of the project, including identifying funding, stakeholder engagement, creating awareness of the Lagan Corridor, sustainability and examining best practice, was approved at the Development Committee meeting held on 12 September 2007. Approval was also given at a meeting of the Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub Committee held on 7 February 2007 for an initial two-year funding commitment to the Lagan Canal Restoration Trust.

As part of the work plan and consultation process, discussions have been held with a number of key Lagan Corridor stakeholders including the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL), Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI), Department of Social Development Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate (DSD), Northern Ireland Planning Service, Ulster Waterways Group, Waterways Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Lagan Valley Regional Park and Scott Wilson Consultants.

As part of the consultation process, a Lagan Corridor Steering Group has been established and a seminar took place in November 2007. It is anticipated that further research and stakeholder consultations will include discussions with Members and other key public, private and community representatives. Further developments include:

- A Scoping Study defining the Lagan Canal Restoration project lock number one at Stranmillis is being finalised and will be available for report to June Committee.
- A new web page has been added to Belfast City Council's website www.belfastcity.gov.uk/lagan which highlights the Lagan Corridor Navigation and the proposed development at Lock 1 at Stranmillis.
- A three dimensional model of the proposed development at Lock 1 Stranmillis has been completed.
- A number of funding applications are being explored and an application for funding to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) for capital funding towards the development of Lock 1 Stranmillis.
- A virtual (computer generated) model has been commissioned which will allow detailed examination of the project through 360 degrees. This interactive 3D environment will allow a user to navigate around in real-time and assess views from any location. It will be compatible with use on the Council Website and will also be used as a marketing and promotional tool.
- Interpretative signage has been commissioned, which will be sited close to Lock 1 and include interpretation of the Lagan Navigation, the history of the area, the river and canal. It is anticipated that this signage will dovetail with DSD signage that aims to link areas along the Lagan from Belfast Harbour to Stranmillis.
- Ms Cathy Burns has recently been appointed as Lagan Canal Restoration Trust Manager. Ms Burns is based in Craigavon and is currently undertaking familiarisation with the key partners including Belfast City Council and she is exploring options for the establishment of the Trust.

Lagan Weir to Shaw's Bridge Site Visit

Members are advised that the Chairman has agreed that a site visit be held on Wednesday 4 June 2008 departing at 2.00pm from Lagan Lookout to Locks 1, 2 and 3 via the Tow Path and returning by bus from Malone House for approximately 4.15pm. The site visit will be by bicycle and will be led by the Lagan Corridor Officer.

Belfast Tourism Development Analysis

Following on from the successful Renewing Communities initiative, a Belfast Tourism Development Analysis has been commissioned in partnership with NITB to identify gaps in provision and opportunities for community tourism across the city. TTC International has been commissioned to carry out this work and wishes to consult with all Members to seek their input to the study. It is proposed that TTC International set up meetings with the Party Groups at their earliest convenience.

Resource Implications

Conference Subvention

British Association of Critical Care Nurses Annual Conference 14-16 September 2008
£1,000

Evening Economy Conference

£20,000 has been assigned from the Brighter Belfast budget to finance the conference.

Lagan Corridor Navigation Initiative

Cost for bicycle and helmet hire and refreshments will be no more than £250 which has been provided for within the 2008/2009 tourism budget.

Recommendations

Conference Subvention

It is recommended that, given that the economic impact is substantial and that the conference will assist in enhancing the image of Belfast as a conference destination on an international platform, funding of £1,000 is allocated to the British Association of Critical Care Nurses Annual Conference 14-16 September 2008.

Cultural Tourism

It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

Evening Economy

It is recommended that Members note the above update and are invited to attend the conference on 23 September 2008.

Lagan Corridor Navigation Initiative

It is recommended that Members note the update and that the site visit from the Lagan Weir to Shaw's Bridge will be held on Wednesday 4 June 2008, and agree to incur expenditure relating to hire and refreshments.

Belfast Tourism Development Analysis

It is recommended that Members meet with TTC International to provide their input to the Belfast Tourism Development Analysis.

Key to Abbreviations

DCAL - Department of Culture Arts and Leisure
IWAJ - Inland Waterways Association of Ireland
DSD - Department of Social Development
TDS - Tourism Development Scheme
NITB – Northern Ireland Tourist Board