



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Lagan Canal Restoration Update
Date:	13 August 2008
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Relevant Background Information

Lagan Gateway Project 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. 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. Further developments include:

1. Lagan Gateway Project Scoping Study A Scoping Study defining the Lagan Gateway Project has been completed, an Executive Summary of which is included in **Appendix 1**. Tourism Development in conjunction with Estates and Project Management units is now progressing towards a full Economic Appraisal of this project, whose remit will include an examination of the Lagan, Farset and Connswater river network, the development of the Canal and the linkages between them.
2. A Topographical and River Survey has been completed for Lock 1 Stranmillis .

3. A three dimensional model of the proposed development at Lock 1 Stranmillis has been completed.
4. 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.
5. Interpretative signage has been commissioned, 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.
6. A number of funding applications are being explored
7. As part of the COMET Multi-annual Plan (2007 – 2013) for the Comet Region being submitted to SEUPB for Interreg IV funding, Belfast City Council as a COMET partner along with Lisburn City Council has developed an application, the aim of which is to facilitate the development of a cross-border tourism product, in this case, the development of the Lagan Navigation. Restoration of the Lagan Navigation, along with the work already planned to restore the Ulster Canal, would provide a vital link from Belfast through to Lough Neagh the hub for the waterways of Northern Ireland and into the west including Co Donegal and Ballyshannon.
8. As part of the COMET bid, a workshop was held on the 6 June, at the Killyhevin Hotel Enniskillen the aim of which was to raise awareness of the potential to establish a single inland waterway with a maritime connection at either end linking the East and West coasts of Ulster to form new water based tourism product. The workshop in Enniskillen attracted support from Alderman Jeffrey Donaldson MP, MLA and Tánaiste, Mary Coughlan TD. The overall aim was to raise awareness and buy-in from stakeholders especially Central Government and Waterways Ireland and to look at formalising a Working Group to take the project forward.
9. A new web page has been constructed that highlights the Lagan Corridor Navigation and the proposed development at Lock 1 Stranmillis. This web page has been added to Belfast City Council's website www.belfastcity.gov.uk/lagan
10. A site meeting was arranged for members of the Development Committee, on Wednesday 4 June. Representatives from Department of Social Development Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate, Department of Culture Arts and Leisure, Lagan Valley Regional Park Board, Lagan Trust Manager and Belfast City Council Officers visited the Lagan Lookout to Locks 1, 2 and 3 via the Tow Path.
11. Waterways Ireland arranged a best practice visit for the Lagan Steering Group to Ballyconnell Lock in Co Cavan. The purpose of the visit was to view the operation of the lock and gain an understanding and insight into the benefits of canal restoration.
12. 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.

The Lagan Navigation Trust

Members are reminded that, at its meeting held on 27 November 2006, it had approved, in principle, a draft business plan for the establishment of a Lagan Canal Restoration Trust, with approval that the Council would contribute a sum of £14,500 per year, over the next two financial years.

Following the acceptance of a draft business plan it was decided that a partnership organisation should be established representing core funding bodies and relevant stakeholders. This would take the form of a not for profit company limited by guarantee which will apply for charitable status and its lifespan will be limited to the restoration of the canal.

Funding has been provided for the appointment of core staff for the initial three years and the Trust manager has been in post from February 2008. Progress to date has focused on the formal establishment of the Trust with agreement on the structure, membership and roles.

The next stage is the appointment of members to a Shadow Board with core funding bodies represented by two elected members from each of the four councils of Belfast, Castlereagh, Craigavon and Lisburn, and one advisor each from the Department of the Environment and Department of Culture Arts and Leisure. In addition key user group representation will be one member each from the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, the Lagan Branch of the Inland Waterways of Ireland, the Ulster Waterways Group and a further recreation user group representative. It is envisaged the Trust Board may meet every three months and at a separate AGM.

Resource Implications

- A sum of £14,500 has been included in the current Tourism Estimates towards establishing the Trust.
- The estimated total cost for the Belfast City Council Lagan Gateway Project is £7.9 million.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Members note the contents of the Lagan Gateway Project Scoping Study. (A copy of the full report is available in the Members Rooms)
2. The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Development Committee are appointed as the Belfast City Council representatives on the Shadow Board of the Lagan Canal Trust.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1. Executive Summary of Scoping Study

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