Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Tourist Board Draft Corporate Plan 2008-2011
Date:	13 August 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

To provide members with details of the draft corporate plan 2008-2011 of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and to seek approval for a response on this document to be submitted to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

The NITB Draft Corporate Plan 2008-2011 sent out for consultation and was received by us on 19 June. The responses are required for 11 August. However, NITB has agreed that due to our Committee schedule it will accept our response on 14 August with a proviso that it is subject to final ratification at Council on 1 September.

This plan identifies the strategic direction and key priorities that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board will be pursuing over the next three years:

1. Developing and managing the Product
Brand identity
Signature projects
Tourism infrastructure
Developing the product portfolio

2. Developing Markets
Home/close to home – Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland
Great Britain and overseas
Key gateways to Northern Ireland – Belfast and Dublin
Looking after the visitor – visitor information

3. Delivering World Class Visitor Experiences
Quality and standards
Developing tourism capability and learning
Developing businesses

Belfast City Council's response to the draft Corporate Plan is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members consider the draft response at **Appendix 1**, that any amendments suggested by Members be incorporated and the response be submitted to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. To agree the aforementioned recommendation.

Key to Abbreviations

NITB – Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Documents Attached

Appendix 1   Response to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Draft Corporate Plan 2008- 2011

APPENDIX 1

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Corporate Plan 2008 – 2011
Draft for Consultation

Closing Date for Responses
Monday 11th August 2008

QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME:	Councillor Michael Browne

ORGANISATION: (if applicable)	Belfast City Council

ADDRESS:	Development Department Cecil Ward Building 4-10 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BP

TEL NUMBER or TEXTPHONE No	028 9027 0429

E-MAIL ADDRESS:	

Please return this questionnaire to:

Karen Feeney
Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Policy & Business Planning Unit
St. Anne's Court
59 North Street
BELFAST
BT1 1NB

or

Reply by fax on: (028) 9044 1634 or Text phone: (028) 9044 1522

or

E-mail: pcu@nitb.com.

Signed: _____   **Date:** _____

NITB welcomes comment on any aspect of the draft Corporate Plan 2008-2011 however, we would particularly value your comments on the following areas:

Section 3.3 'critical success factors as strategy drivers'

In Section 3 NITB has analysed key market trends to identify those areas that will be critical to developing Northern Ireland tourism.

Question 1: (a) Are there any *additional* success factors to those listed at the end of section 3 that you consider critical? **(b)** If yes, what are they and what strategies are needed to drive their success?

Unique Proposition – Further investment in product development, with delivery of the Signature Projects as a priority.   Whilst the Signature Projects should be a priority, this must not be at a cost to the development of a wider range of tourism products which are required to meet visitor expectations. In Belfast, there is a lack of tangible product - things that people can go and do, so investment in this is critical. Cultural Tourism, in particular museums, galleries, festivals, events and cuisine, is still the number one motivator for European tourism and **has now risen to 40% of all travel.** £4.5 million in product portfolio development is too small an allocation to resolve this both in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland. After the creation of the signature project, serious gaps will still exist if this is not addressed.

The trends identified are similar to those experienced in the greater Belfast area, however Belfast City Council would caution against setting a strategic direction based on one year's performance and would recommend flexibility in the strategy to allow for changes that might be necessary following longer term trend analysis.

Belfast City Council agrees that GB and ROI present substantial opportunities, however, we would draw attention to the fact that mainland Europe is also key and that close to home markets should not be prioritised over Europe, specifically in the current currency climate and with increased access.

The importance of differentiation is key and the new Belfast Brand will be central to this, alongside the Northern Ireland brand which is currently being developed.

The critical success factors are all relevant, however focus on new technology and its application in general across the wider NI tourism industry is essential in order to meet visitor expectations.

Section 4: 'strategic direction'

Section 4 outlines what NITB considers to be the strategic direction for tourism growth in Northern Ireland. We would welcome your views and comments on the strategies identified to deliver tourism growth namely:

Question 2 (a): The need for a more developed tourism infrastructure. (See 4.1 tourism infrastructure).

Belfast City Council welcomes and supports the outlined strategic direction based on:

- Brand Identity – which must include the Belfast brand as gateway to NI Signature projects
- Accommodation development – which must be supported by reviewed planning policy and fiscal incentives
- Golf Resorts - although development of Parkland golf resorts must not be at the expense of marketing the world class links courses that exist.
- Conference/exhibition competitive positioning – increased capacity needs to be supported in order to ensure NI continues to compete for conferences on an international level

Additional key themes that should be included as part of the tourism infrastructure are:

- Public transport - linkage of points of entry to city centre and then to tourism signature projects to deliver on regional spread.

- International standard facilities for events and quality events as attractors need to have sustained support and investment.

- Cruise market infrastructure at the Port of Belfast - needs to be upgraded, particularly since this market generates 60,000 visitors a year and quality of facilities will be key to it being sustained.

Question 2 (b): The appropriateness of the 4 key product areas as the focus for product development and marketing? (See 4.1 developing the product portfolio).

Belfast City Council agrees with the focus on the 4 key product areas of city breaks; culture and heritage; sports tourism activities and waterways; and business tourism. We would suggest that the role of Belfast in the areas of city breaks, business tourism, waterways and cruise tourism be emphasised in the corporate plan for clarity, focus and impact and to avoid any confusion or duplication. The role of local authorities in delivering on product development needs to be included/recognised and the opportunity to work in partnership with NITB on that delivery.

Belfast City Council believes that the development of city breaks, business, waterways and cruise tourism is key to the achievement of NI's growth targets and given that Belfast City Council is the key agency in the overall development, marketing and management of Belfast it would be more appropriate and accurate to state NITB's role in developing and managing city breaks and business tourism as that of leader, catalyst, enabler, facilitator and influencer rather than the lead agency.

Question 2 (c): The potential of the Republic of Ireland market as a major source of growth. (See 4.2 developing markets).

Belfast City Council agrees that ROI is a key market for NI and Belfast can be the driver of growth for this market with some focus on retail, however, the broader luxury product including boutiques on Lisburn Road, Howard/Queen Street and Bloomfield Avenue, together with the opportunity to purchase a range of art, etc must be promoted. Belfast City Council believes, however, that focus on ROI alone will not deliver the growth targets and plans for GB and Europe are key to achieving targets.

Belfast City Council would comment that "Belfast **is** Northern Ireland's key gateway" (rather than page 16 – "has the potential to be.."), and welcomes the commitment/statement of intent to support the marketing, partnership development and visitor servicing in the city, to encourage regional spread and dispersal.

Looking after the visitor – visitor information – Belfast City Council welcomes the recognition that ongoing investment is required in this field, however, it is difficult to see from the outline budgets (page 29) where provision is being made for this, particularly since it requires significant investment in order for it to be comprehensive and sustainable.

Question 2 (d): The need to offer a first class visitor experience through the range of product on offer and quality of service and standards provided. (See 4.3 delivering world class visitor experiences).

Belfast City Council supports the delivery of a world class experience to all of our visitors and welcomes the recognition that growing the evening and weekend economies will be key to achieving increased visitor spend. Belfast City Council has led on the development of the evening economy in Belfast, and this provides an excellent model which can deliver similar benefits to the rest of NI.

In addition Belfast City Council has commenced work on the provision of visitor experiences on Sundays and looks forward to working with NITB in developing and delivering on this in the next three years.

Quality and Standards - Belfast City Council agrees that quality and accreditation schemes should be developed in order to promote higher standards and consistency amongst service providers – these schemes must include visitor attractions, guides and tours.

The creation of destination management organisations may have the potential to bring business and local interest groups together to ensure high quality across the entire visitor experience; however, existing organisations may be appropriate vehicles to deliver this, rather than creating new ones. This needs to be thought through and quality scheme implementation will need financial support to ensure they are effective.

Tourism Capability and Learning - Belfast City Council supports the identification that tourism must be positioned as a premier career choice in the minds of young people and would suggest that this commences as early as from age 11. It must be supported with skills and development programmes that promote opportunity and commitment – this must include working with the industry to provide training & skills opportunities, ensuring that relevant skills are developed and that there are enough people available to work in the industry, particularly taking account of the skills gaps that exist, identified by the very recent People 1st report for DEL. Belfast City Council's has just commenced work on the HARTE project which aims to get new people into the industry over the next three years, however, there are major gaps and opportunities that need to be addressed and led by NITB which can be facilitated by the key agencies and the industry with the appropriate level of financial support. This needs to be provided for within overall revenue budgets.

Developing Businesses - Belfast City Council supports the need to excite current and potential visitors with innovation and new product and in particular showcasing our niche offerings, which in Belfast includes our luxury tourism product and our diverse cultural offering.

Belfast City Council welcomes the development of "city passes" and "dine around Belfast" and looks forward to working in partnership with NITB and BVCB in the delivery of these and other innovative ideas. The current work on Food Month with

BVCB and also Belfast City Council's networking events which encourage business to business working and development of ie: dinner/theatre, dinner/orchestra performance, etc has gone some way to delivering this experience, however, further work will ensure greater pay off.

Section 5: 'NITB's Corporate Priorities'

Section 5 outlines the core priorities for NITB that underpin our vision to build a sustainable tourism industry that will drive the Northern Ireland economy. We welcome your feedback on the following areas:

NITB has identified its role in the context of leader, partner and influencer. (See section 5.1 – 5.4).

Question 3 (a): Are there any additional areas within these roles that you consider NITB should undertake?

NITB has, as the strategic leader of tourism in Northern Ireland, a key role as enabler, facilitator, catalyst and influencer of other organisations to achieve their individual goals which feed into the higher national goals. It is difficult for NITB to "manage the product" as it does not create nor own the delivery of the product and therefore NITB's role must be to facilitate and influence other organisations activities to achieve common goals for NI.

Likewise in relation to marketing, NITB cannot physically deliver or fund all the marketing required. By facilitating/ influencing other organisations to deliver specific marketing activities, NITB marketing budgets will go further and NITB can accelerate the possibility of achieving NI growth targets.

NITB has set out its 10 priority areas and programme of work for the next three years at the end of section 5.

Question 3 (b): Do you believe that the priorities for NITB that are set out in this plan will help build a stronger and sustainable tourism industry in Northern Ireland?

Belfast City Council believes that the priorities set out in this plan for NITB will help build a stronger and sustainable tourism industry in Northern Ireland.

Delivery Mechanisms - The role envisaged by NITB for RTPs is only possible if the RTPs are adequately funded and they can deliver marketing activities for their areas which is the hook that encourages the private sector involvement.

The role of Councils must also be recognised here because the RTPs delivery capacity is limited and councils have a statutory responsibility under the Local Government (NI) Order 1972 for the development and marketing of tourism. Belfast City Council has only outsourced marketing and visitor servicing to BVCB and BWC at this time.

Key Priorities

1) Titanic (Maritime) Belfast

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to continue to be an active player in the development and implementation of an integrated tourism plan for the TSP. It also welcomes the development of a marketing communications plan for the Titanic Signature Project 2012 which BVCB will work in partnership with NITB to implement.

6) Product portfolio development and management

"Develop, cluster, package and promote product offerings including events in line with product portfolios" - Belfast City Council looks forward to working in partnership with NITB on this which will deliver increased revenue and length of stay for Belfast and NI.

Support implementation of an Integrated Tourism Development Plan for Belfast to be realised as a key gateway – Belfast City Council believes that NITB will not only support the implementation of an Integrated Tourism Development Plan for Belfast, but will also work with us on the development of the Plan and therefore would suggest that the "development and implementation" be included in its Corporate Plan.

Develop a minimum of 2 business tourism zones for Belfast - Belfast City Council will work with NITB on the development of these zones for Belfast.

Increase discretionary conferences to Belfast - Belfast City Council will work with NITB and BVCB on increasing conferences to Belfast and would encourage NITB to assist in identifying resources from a range of agencies/sources to ensure Belfast can be in a position to bid competitively against other UK cities for international conferences.

10) Industry Development Programme

Work is already underway in partnership with NITB, BVCB, Belfast City Council and Derry Visitor and Convention Bureau on a "code of conduct" for tours in NI and we would suggest that this should be included in this section, particularly since it will assist in the delivery of excellence in visitor servicing. This could possibly be the non-accommodation accreditation scheme.

Question 3 (c): How might these programmes facilitate your own business plans in order to contribute to the targets set out in the Programme for Government for tourism growth? (See Annex 2 for targets).

The key programmes for Belfast are those that relate to city breaks, conference and cruise ship development and marketing. Belfast generated 60% of NI out of state visitors and as a result Belfast City Council looks forward to working with NITB in the development of the action plans that flow from this corporate plan that relate to the development and marketing of Belfast as a city break, cruise and business tourism destination in order to deliver Belfast's contribution to the achievement of the NI growth targets.

Question 3 (d): Can you foresee any further priorities for NITB as an organisation which have not been included in this Corporate Plan?

> - Funding for Events – particularly international events as attractors
>
> - Direct support in winning international Conferences for Northern Ireland
>
> - Quality accreditation systems
>
> - Promotion of tourism as a career and direct work on assisting with the gaps in skills and training within the industry.
>
> - Building of strategic partnership/relationship with key agencies, including local authorities

The following are questions about the Corporate Plan overall and is your opportunity to add any additional comments:

Question 4: Does the plan provide you with clear information as to what NITB aims to achieve over the next three years?

> Belfast City Council welcomes the 3 year corporate plan and believes it gives clarity of NITB's plans for the next 3 years. Belfast City Council would welcome the opportunity to continue the discussion created by this consultation process and to build a partnership with NITB which will ensure that there is a sharing of expertise and regular communication in both directions. We believe that we can work together to ensure Belfast is key to the achievement of NI growth targets.

Question 5: Do you believe the plan will help spread the economic and social benefits of tourism across Northern Ireland promoting equality of opportunity and a balance between rural and urban areas?

> Belfast City Council believes that the growth of tourism in Belfast has not been at the expense of tourism to rural areas; rather it has been additional and therefore has increased tourism to NI. To talk about a balance between rural and urban tourism can be misunderstood as it can create the idea that Belfast's success is not beneficial to rural areas but rather detrimental. This in turn can lead to strategies that might inhibit the growth of tourism to Belfast which will not be beneficial to NI. Rural tourism and urban tourism are complementary and success in one, benefits the other.

Question 6: Finally, do you wish to add any further comments or views on the plan?

Belfast City Council welcomes the identification of cities as a product development priority within the product portfolio and looks forward to working in partnership with NITB in developing and delivering on an outstanding visitor experience in Belfast. In addition through our gateway role we look forward to delivering visitor spread to all areas of NI.

Belfast City Council believes that it would be useful if the linkage between the government targets, corporate plan priorities and the budget allocation was clearer for example; the highlighted signature projects will not all be completed during the life of this plan and therefore will have no impact on visitor numbers or spend over the next 3 years.

Whilst signature projects should be prioritised, this should not be at the expense of addressing the lack of tangible product, ie: things that people can go and do in Belfast, and investment in this is critical. Cultural Tourism, in particular museums, galleries, festivals, events and cuisine, is still the number one motivator for European tourism and has now risen to 40% of all travel. 4.5 million in product portfolio development is too small an allocation to resolve this - after the creation of a signature project serious gaps will still exist if this is not rectified.

Key products gaps identified in NITB visitor surveys as to why Southern visitors do not come here, are either not covered or not emphasised in the report ie: Sundays, evening economy, cultural animation, summer programming. Creating products ie: music tourism, literary tourism, which reflect indigenous culture and can satisfy a 24 hour society and the experience economy – these need to be highlighted in the plan.

Overall the draft Plan does not clearly take cognisance of the Review of Public Administration which will be implemented by 2011. Albeit that this plan is up to 2011, there will be a transition period and the additional functions that will transfer to local government are important, particularly

- **tourism** – small scale tourism accommodation development; local tourism marketing and product development; visitor servicing; providing business support; and providing advice to developers on tourism policies.
- **others** – local arts, sports and leisure; EU Rural Development Programme; spot listing of buildings; local listing of buildings of architectural and historic interest; Armagh County Museum; local water recreational facilities; local sports; functions of the NI Museum Council; local arts; local festivals; and Donaghadee Harbour.

It is essential that this is included in the Plan at this stage and the role of Councils is taken account of and included in all plans for the future development of tourism in NI.

General – strengthening of relationships and engagement with Councils as key partners is essential to the delivery of national growth targets.

Thank-you for taking the time to complete and return your response.