



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Progress Report on Ulster Hall Refurbishment
Date:	13 August 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
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Relevant Background Information

The £7.5m refurbishment of The Ulster Hall began in June 2007 and the building is due for completion in December 2008. The main contractor, Grahams of Dromore, are working under the direction of local conservation architects Consarc. The project includes major rebuilding of the rear section to provide a suite of offices across two new floors to be leased to the Ulster Orchestra and two floors of multi-purpose rooms to be utilized as dressing rooms, education suites or meeting rooms. Decorative restoration, an extension of the stage, the installation of new stage technical systems and a new seating system will enhance the main space. Public areas will have underfloor heating installed and improved hospitality facilities. The civic re-opening is scheduled for March 6th 2009.

Key Issues

1. Construction progress

The project has now reached week 59 of a 73 week programme. The target completion date is Dec 19 2008. At the most recent site meeting on June 16 progress was reported by the contractor, as being 7 weeks behind schedule due to the impact of investigation and repairs to a structural crack in the rear of the north wall. The target completion date has not been adjusted and the main contractor is currently re-drafting a schedule of works to recover the time lost.

A detailed report on progress to date has been provided by the project management unit at **Appendix 1**.

2. Interior and exterior décor

Consarc, working under the guidance of decorative specialist Nathaniel Clements, have selected both interior and exterior decorative treatments. The interior scheme has been influenced by the intentions of the original architect as evidenced by his own illustrations, and by on site investigative work undertaken by paint specialists' examination of the layers of paint within the main space.

A colour illustration of the selected decorative schemes for the main space interior and Bedford Street exterior has been included in the report from the architect, as **Appendix 2**.

Details of an exterior architectural lighting proposal to complement the decorative scheme are included in **Appendix 3**.

3. Interpretative displays

Recognition of the significant value of the Ulster Hall as a heritage asset has led to the development of a methodology for making the building's heritage more accessible to a wide range of visitors.

The first method of delivery is to provide interpretation of the most significant aspects of the building's heritage through a range of media, including:

- Wall panels with text and images recounting aspects of the building's history
- A display of the newly restored Carey paintings including explanatory narrative panels
- DVD footage to explain the process of restoration which the Carey paintings have undergone
- Printed materials available as themed resource packs for tour groups and pamphlets for the casual visitor to pick up.
- Website materials giving a flavour of what is available on a visit to the hall and providing links to sites where specialist topics can be explored in greater depth.
- Audio tours on headset including music, personal reminiscence and narrative about key themes in the building
- A memorabilia time line with artefacts and reminiscences provided by the public
- Artwork installations in the form of archive inspired poetry etched on glass surfaces throughout the building

Appendix 3 details the individual themes which will feature in the displays and discusses the delivery mechanisms at length.

4. Education, Community and Heritage Outreach Programme

The second method for maximising access to the heritage of the hall is through the development and delivery of an education, community and heritage outreach programme (ECHO). The role of the ECHO programme, and associated staff, supported by existing staff elsewhere in the council with specialist expertise in tourism, heritage, youth work, ethnic minorities and cross community initiatives, will be to develop and deliver a range of products both generic and tailored to individual groups which maximises the value of the hall as a heritage resource.

Appendix 4 explains the objectives of the ECHO programme, and its means of delivery.

Resource Implications

The capital development of the Ulster Hall is a £7.5m project, funded by BCC, supported by ACNI, DCAL, HLF, and EHS.

Recommendations

That members note the contents of the report.

Key to Abbreviations

ACNI – Arts Council of Northern Ireland
DCAL – Dept. of Culture and Leisure
HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund
EHS – Environmental Heritage Service

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Ulster Hall Capital Works Project Update. Project Management Unit
Appendix 2: Ulster Hall Decorative Scheme Report. Consarc
Appendix 3: Heritage Interpretation Methodology: Tandem Design
Appendix 4: ECHO Strategy: Ulster Hall Project Delivery Manager

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