

Ulster Hall – Provision of Catering and Licensing Services

It is envisaged that for a mixed use venue, like the Ulster Hall, hosting a range of events the proposed catering arrangement would require provision for:

- Daytime Coffee Outlet / Café
- Small Meeting Catering
- Gala Dinner Catering
- Confectionary Provision
- Entertainment Event Food & Beverage

Proposed Catering Options

- Retain Status Quo: External catering and beverage suppliers at client / promoter discretion. Client / Promoter responsible for licensing.
- Exclusive Catering Franchisee: All catering provision to be provided by contracted caterer. Franchisee undertakes licence / co-signatory with BCC on license.
- Mixed Provision: Separate Café, Bar and Auditorium Catering providers. Bar provider undertakes licensing requirements.

Industry Consultation

- Broadly favourable attitude both towards the redevelopment of the venue and the incorporation within the new Ulster Hall of a dedicated catering provision.
- Belief that from a business perspective the venue represented a viable opportunity given the range of events and anticipated level of occupancy.
- Firm expressions of interest from within both the contract catering and licensed trade sectors.
- Some reservations existed about the catering space available and the subsequent implications on the nature of the service provision.

Discussions regarding the proposed redevelopment, reviewing plans and site visits produced the following specific observations:

- The bar provision was the economically most desirable aspect of the franchise.
- That the size limitations imposed on the proposed Café area would have implications on the viability of this aspect of the franchise.
- The size and service limitations of the Group kitchen space would impact on the range of catering available.
- That any franchisee would have to significantly invest in equipment to upgrade the existing facilities.
- Lack of permanent facilities in the main kitchen area significantly restricted the number of potential users.
- Potential of the Group balcony space as a pre/post show VIP reception area.
- Implications of separate Main Space catering and bar provision.

Licensing

Following discussions with BCC Licensing and Legal Services it is proposed to apply for a Conference Centre license which would allow the Ulster Hall to operate in the same way as the Waterfront and most other similar buildings in the industry. This is conditional to Northern Ireland Tourist Board approval of the proposed facilities. The successful franchisee would then undertake and operate the license.

Catering Provision Recommendation

After consideration, the recommendation is to tender for one catering provider who would operate both the Café and Bar provision. This franchisee would be the licensee for the venue.

Secondly, it is proposed that catering in the Main Space is not part of the core catering franchise.

The recommendation is based on the following considerations:

- It is felt that it is operationally unfeasible to accommodate more than one franchisee within the venue, given the limited space and facilities available.
- To ensure a uniform and consistently high level of quality and customer service it is preferable to work with one catering partner.
- The division of the catering provision was unsustainable from a business perspective. One franchisee also offered potentially greater income for the venue.
- A mixed franchisee arrangement created unnecessary complications around the issue of licensing.

- Omitting Main Space catering from the contract would allow for a freedom of choice sought after in the marketplace, for major event catering, and also maintained the multipurpose nature of the kitchen area

The tendering procedure would seek to ensure that following core values and operational goals would be underlined.

- A commitment to the ethos of the Ulster Hall and to creating and maintaining a *niche* cafe space which reflected this brand.
- A commitment to high levels of customer service in all areas of catering and beverage provision.
- A level of flexibility and innovation in service provision compatible with the requirements of high profile, city centre, mixed use venue.
- To ensure a high level throughput of people and events

Café Service - Starbucks

- **Starbucks 'We Proudly Brew' proposal**

It is proposed to implement in the venue's café, a 'We Proudly Brew' Starbucks coffee programme.

The 'We Proudly Brew' programme works in partnership with franchisee's to provide Starbucks coffee outside the traditional store based environment. In addition to serving to serving a range of Starbucks beverage products the programme also includes branded signage and paper products (including cups), promotions and point of sale materials.

In addition to the supply of coffee and branded material the programme also provides staff training and regular quality control inspections by Starbucks staff.

Starbucks already have a number of 'We Proudly Brew' outlets in the marketplace in Northern Ireland and are seeking to expand. Current venues include corporate sites such as Ulster Bank Headquarters, Northern Ireland Science Park and a number of Civil Service sites. They also have a public concession at W5 as well providing coffee at the Holiday Inn in the city centre. Across these venues they work with a range of catering franchisees including Mountcharles and Sodexo.

- **Contract & Costs**

Starbucks enter into a non-binding contract with franchisees. The start-up costs for the operation, fundamentally to provide the required equipment, are the responsibility of the franchisee.

- **Starbucks in the Ulster Hall**

The 'We Proudly Brew' programme and in particular the Starbucks brand provides significant benefits to the proposed catering provision in the refurbished Ulster Hall. Analysis of the Starbucks proposal and site visits to some of their venues would suggest the following benefits:

- Provides a niche product and internationally recognised brand which would appeal across a range of demographics and customer markets.
- Significantly increase the Ulster Hall's presence on Bedford St as a café destination.
- Potential to significantly increase revenue from catering contract. Starbucks claim a 30% increase over market rivals.
- Safeguards quality of provision with high quality products and equipment, Starbucks staff training and external inspection.

Further to these broad benefits significant aspects of the operation of 'We Proudly Brew' programme would work alongside other key features of the Ulster Hall vision.

- An appropriate level of branding and installation space required given the architectural limitations inherent within the Ulster Hall.
- The ability to, in consultation with the Hall's catering provider, set our own price for a premium product.
- The association with a brand that fits with many of the USP's of the Ulster Hall, in particular music.

In conclusion it appears that incorporating the Starbucks 'We Proudly Brew' programme within the catering franchise for the refurbished Ulster Hall would offer significant benefits. Most crucially this partnership would offer a globally recognised product, provide high levels of customer service and increase the potential income from our catering provision.