

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 20th May, 2024

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOТЕLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Murray (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan); and
Councillors Bunting, T. Brooks,
Kelly, Lyons, McKay and McKeown.

In attendance: Mr. J. Girvan, Director (Operational) City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. S. Murtagh, Physical Programmes Portfolio Manager;
Ms. N. Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Ms. M. Wilson, Neighbourhood Services
Integration Manager;
Ms. E. Gowdy, Lead Officer OSS;
Mr. D. O'Kane, Acting Planning Manager, Plan and Policy;
Mr. C. Campfield, Acting Principal Planning Officer;
Mr. C. McCann, Lead Officer Community Provision;
Mr. S. Lavery, Programme Manager; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors McAteer and McDonough-Brown.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd April, 2024 were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Physical Programme Update

Given that a Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership meeting was due to commence shortly, and that some Members were also due to attend it, the Working Group agreed that the Physical Programme Update be considered first as the first item of business.

The Working Group was provided with a detailed report in respect of projects under a range of funding streams, including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), the Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF). The report also included information on projects which the Council was delivering on behalf of other agencies.

The Working Group noted the recently completed projects including the recently installed statues of Winifred Carney and Mary Ann McCracken within the grounds of the City Hall, the expansion of the Belfast Bikes to Drumglass and the Holylands Area Improvement Initiative under the LIF programme.

At the suggestion of officers, the Working Group agreed to remove the Belfast Islamic Centre from the BIF long list, as the project had since been completed with funding from other sources.

The Working Group was advised that an additional £53,893 had been reallocated to the South NRF and it was being asked to consider recommending allocating it to any existing projects which had already passed the threshold level or which had already been agreed at Stage 3 – Delivery.

Moved by Councillor Murray
Seconded by Councillor Lyons,

That the Working Group agrees to allocate £26,946 to the Redevelopment of Riddell's Warehouse and £26,946 to the Sólás New Build Project.

A number of Members stated that they felt that the funding should instead be split equally between all the Stage 3 groups.

A further Member stated that some of the projects at Stage 3 had already been allocated their full requested amount of funding and therefore did not require any additional money.

On a vote by show of hands, on the proposal standing in the name of Councillor Murray, four Members voted for the proposal and three against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Presentation from the Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. A. Walsh, Chairperson, Ms. B. McElhill, Secretary, and Mr. J. Pilcher, Botanist, to the meeting.

Mr. Walsh outlined that Belfast Botanic Gardens was the only of its kind in Northern Ireland, with a magnificent collection of trees and plants. It had been created on the current site in 1828 and, therefore, it would be celebrating its 200th anniversary in four years.

He explained that the Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens (FoBBG) was established in the 1990s and was a charity in law. The Working group was advised that they had a good working relationship with the gardeners and the Council Officers who managed the gardens. The charity actively promoted and raised the profile of the Botanic

Gardens, educated the public, helped to conserve the buildings and enhanced the plant collections by raising funds for investment in the gardens. He reported that the charity had contributed £25,000 towards the restoration of the Tropical Ravine.

The charity had curated a database of trees in the gardens and had created a Global Medicine Garden, a collaborative project with the Council and the Botanic gardeners. They had also initiated the new labelling of trees in the gardens, with the first batch of 200 labels having been completed.

Mr. Walsh outlined that, being the only Botanic Garden in NI and therefore a unique asset for BCC, FoBBG felt that the Gardens should be differentiated from other parks under the control of the Council. He stated that they felt that it deserved a masterplan for the development of the gardens and that there was a perceived lack of earmarked investment in the gardens. He reported that they felt that more staff with horticultural skills were required.

He stated that, with a renewed focus on looking forward to the 200th anniversary and beyond, the Botanic Gardens could be the jewel in the crown of the industrial and Victorian heritage of the city and rated as a world class destination to visit.

The Members were advised that FoBBG had had informal talks with Council officers to examine ways of improving the status of the gardens as a Botanic Garden. Mr. Walsh requested that the Working Group would consider formalising those talks and draft a terms of reference which would then form the basis for an independent report on the gardens. As well as looking at areas for improvement as a botanic garden, the report would also look at how the Botanic Gardens could meet the challenges of surviving in an uncertain period of climate change while also meeting key targets of the Belfast Agenda.

A number of Members thanked the representatives for their informative presentation and particularly for highlighting that the 200 year anniversary of the Botanic Gardens would take place in 2028.

In response to a Member's question as to any specific requests which they had for the Botanic Gardens, Mr. Pilcher stated that there was currently no budget line for purchasing plants and that was something which they would like to see rectified.

The Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that a draft Terms of Reference be drawn up to form the basis for an independent report on Belfast Botanic Gardens.

Local Development Plan - Local Policies Plan (Verbal update)

The Principal Planning Officer and the Senior Planning Officer provided the Working Group with an overview of the work which was ongoing in respect of the Emerging Local Policies Plan.

The Principal Planning Officer explained that the Plan Strategy was adopted in May 2023 and set out the Council's growth strategy up to 2035. The Working Group was advised that it mirrored the aims of the Belfast Agenda and set out operational policies against which all planning applications would be assessed. The LPP would set out development zonings and Key Site Requirements and other site specific proposals related to sites and allocations.

The Members were advised that a Call for Sites had closed on 1st March, 2024, which provided an early opportunity for engagement to suggest sites, for example, for housing or commercial retail. Belfast was the first authority to do this in Northern Ireland and it had provided an opportunity to draw in a variety of stakeholders, mostly targeting private land assets.

The Working Group was provided with an overview of Lands for Protection within South Belfast, including the Settlement Development Limit, Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character.

The Members were advised that officers would plan workshops to discuss the LPP with Members in more detail.

Noted.

Summer Scheme Funding (Additional Needs) - Verbal update

The Lead Officer (Community Provision) reported that the People and Communities Committee, at its meeting in February 2024, had agreed that £20,000 would be allocated to each of the four areas of the city for specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, with a view to delivering the additional schemes in summer 2024, one in each area of the City.

He explained that officers had attended a summer provision planning meeting organised by the Education Authority's Special Education team, involving Special Schools, Councils and charity and voluntary organisations. At that meeting, officers had been able to engage directly with the principals of Belfast Special Schools to understand the challenges and opportunities with which they were faced.

The Members were advised that, working with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's (BHSCT) Locality Planning Co-ordinator, officers had carried out an expression of interest exercise to all 470 members of the Belfast Locality Planning Group, sponsored Day Care providers and Special Schools. 22 organisations had replied to the questionnaire advising of their potential to deliver programming.

Council officers had attended the Belfast meetings of the Special Schools Partnership pilots, identified under Children and Young People theme within the Belfast Agenda. The Belfast schools involved were Glenveagh in south Belfast and Clarawood in east Belfast. Other organisations in attendance included the Education Authority's Special Education Team, Sólás, the Mae Murray Foundation, Guide Dogs NI, Middle Town Autism and Angel Eyes NI, to explore potential for collaborative approaches. That group had advised that the time frame required to pilot a safe and properly resourced holiday was too short for the summer of 2024, and they had committed to look at developing a model from September for a trial delivery during the Easter of 2025. Council officers would continue to attend that partnership.

Officers had met with the BHSCT staff to discuss the potential to extend funding through the Family Support Hubs. Due to time and resource pressures within the sector there was not capacity to extend delivery beyond the current planned programming.

Officers therefore requested that the Area Working Group would agree to support a recommendation to provide £12,480 for Sólás to provide a six week scheme and to give

permission for officers to continue to engage with the sector and source additional providers which had yet to confirm detailed proposals and summary costings.

The Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that £12,480 be allocated to Sólás, to provide a six week scheme in the summer of 2024, and also for officers to continue to engage with the sector and source additional providers.

Visit to Belfast Islamic Centre - date to be agreed

It was agreed that a number of dates would be circulated to the Members of the Working Group to determine the most suitable day for the visit to take place.

Request for a Special Meeting re: Citywide Strategic Site Assessments

The Working Group was advised that the reporting officers on the Citywide Strategic Site Assessments were out of the country and were requesting a Special meeting. A decision had been taken at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in September 2023 to outline emerging proposals on the strategic site assessment work to the Area Working Groups. The Place and Economy Department was keen to outline the strategic review of Council assets, on a citywide basis, for housing-led regeneration, which included Council assets, in conjunction with wider public and private sectors.

The Working Group agreed to hold a Special Meeting on Monday, 10th June, at 5.15pm.

Chairperson