



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Tourism Update
Date:	9 December 2009
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay, Acting Director of Development, ext 3459
Contact Officer:	Kerrie Sweeney, Tourism, Culture and Arts Manager, ext 3586

Relevant Background Information

The Tourism update comprises the following:

1. Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework
2. Belfast Tourism Monitor
3. Tourism Innovation Fund
4. City Hall Tourist Information Point
5. Sister Cities International Conference 29 July to 1 August 2009
6. Blue Plaques

Key Issues

1. Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board are working in partnership to produce an Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework for Belfast. Tourism consultants, TTC, were commissioned to consult with key stakeholders, conduct a benchmarking and best practice exercise with other cities of a similar size and tourism offer as Belfast and produce a draft strategic framework for tourism development and marketing for the next 5 years. The study is now in final draft format for discussion by Members of the Development Committee.

The Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework is a partnership approach between Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. A steering group of representatives from both organisations and BVCB have been managing the process. It is important that the recommendations within the draft framework are now presented through the appropriate structures within both organisations, before going out to wider consultation. A request is made to hold a special Development Committee in January 2010 to brief Members fully on progress to date.

Resource Implications

There are no immediate resource implications with this request. However if approved, the Framework will assist Belfast City Council to prioritise and direct financial resources over the next 5 years.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members agree to receive a presentation on the draft Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework at a special meeting in January 2010.

Decision Tracking

Further to approval that a Special meeting of the Development Committee be arranged
Timeframe: January 2010 Reporting Officer: Kerrie Sweeney

2. Belfast Tourism Monitor

Members were updated at the November Committee 2009 that the current three year contract with Millward Brown Ulster will come to an end in December 2009 and gave approval to initiate the tendering process for a new research consultancy to undertake the survey work for the period 2010 – 2013.

Subsequent discussion with procurement has outlined a three month procurement process and approval is sought to extend Millward Brown Ulster's contract up to the end of March 2010.

The methodology of the Belfast Tourism Monitor includes conducting surveys with visitors to Belfast throughout the year. This research provides information in the number of visitors to the city, why they came, where they were from and how much they spent. The surveys are done on a month by month basis. The current contract with Millward Brown Ulster will undertake this research up to the end of December 2009. Due to the lengthy procurement process, the new contract for research will not be awarded until the end of March 2010 and therefore it is recommended that the current Millward Brown Ulster contract be extended to cover this period.

Resource Implications

The costs over the period January – March will be a maximum of £15,000 and is included within existing Departmental budgets.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members agree to extend the current Belfast Tourism Monitor contract until the new contract is awarded at the end of March 2010.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is accepted

3. Tourism Innovation Fund

At the September Committee meeting, Members were updated on BCC's applications to NITB's Tourism Innovation Fund. NITB received 110 applications in total from across Northern Ireland and has shortlisted 37 to the next stage of the process, including four proposals from BCC:

- Music Tourism
- Literary Tourism
- Delight in the Twilight (Food Tourism and City Animation) and

- Sundays .

BCC has prepared business plans for each project which are now being appraised by NITB. NITB have indicated that, if projects are successful, they will receive letters of offer in December 2009, however full spend and implementation is required by end of March 2010.

The Tourism Innovation Fund will provide financial assistance for non-capital projects such as creative interpretation initiatives and innovative presentation and showcasing of Northern Ireland's tourism offerings. The Fund aims to enhance the growth, quality, competitiveness and sustainability of tourism in Northern Ireland by stimulating product development and improving the visitor experience.

BCC's four projects shortlisted under the programme, worth £653,000 are now being appraised by NITB. A breakdown of costs is attached as Appendix 1. Members should note that the costs associated with these projects have been revised since the September 2009 report after discussions with NITB on eligibility of activity.

An additional £26,000 has been secured from DARD for the Delight on the Twilight project to support Belfast based catering and restaurant sector to use Northern Ireland produce.

Resource Implications

If BCC is successful in being awarded this funding, BCC's £191,000 match funding will come from existing Departmental Budgets. This activity had been planned for regardless of NITB support. NITB funding will provide an opportunity to deliver larger scale / greater impact projects.

The Tourism Innovation Fund has slipped a month from initial timelines discussed with NITB. The delivery of the projects by end of the March 2010 is challenging however staff resources will be realigned accordingly.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the content of the report and agree that the four projects proceed.

Decision Tracking

Further to approval and when NITB Letters of Offers are received, Members will be updated on any changes to the projects.

Timescale: January 2010

Officer: Kerrie Sweeney ext 3586

4. City Hall Tourist Information Point

At the September Committee, Members agreed that the possibility of locating a Tourism Information Point within the City Hall be pursued and that Council officials continue to assist the staff from the Belfast Visitor and Convention Centre to examine possible ground floor locations for the Belfast Welcome Centre, the current lease of which expires in July 2010.

Officers have met with Facilities Management regarding the opportunity to establish an information point at the City Hall. At present the most suitable location is the 'reception hall' at the front entrance to the City Hall (on right hand side). Working together with Facilities Management, the space can be designed to promote BCC facilities and the wider tourism product and services, including:

- Mainly interactive using 2 x 32" screens
- Limited multi-lingual facility
- Visitor information on the principal BCC attractions e.g. City Hall, Waterfront/Ulster Halls, The Zoo, Belfast Castle/Malone House, Parks
- Services information would include details such as the opening times of leisure centres, recycling centres etc.
- A 'What's On' facility would include details about upcoming events organised by BCC, this facility could be updated electronically by the Events Unit who organise these events

Capital fit out can be funded from existing City Hall refurbishment budget.

It would be important that the facility complements the role of the Belfast Welcome Centre and adds to the experience of the City Hall.

Resource Requirements

This space can either be a manned or unmanned facility. BVCB has looked at the option of the facility being manned for the key summer months (June – September) during City Hall opening times. The cost would be £7,500 per annum for one member of staff reporting to the Belfast Welcome Centre plus staff, equipment and design costs of £5,000. These would be additional costs and would need to be met from the 2010/2011 Development Departmental budget. There may be an opportunity for the Belfast Welcome Centre to be relocated even closer to the City Hall at ground floor premises in the vicinity of Donegall Place/ Donegall Square which may reduced the need for a manned facility.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members agree to establishing an all year information point at the 'reception hall' at the front entrance the City Hall and that it is staffed on a trial basis between June to September 2010. Once the relocation of the Belfast Welcome Centre is agreed, the staffing of the information point will be reviewed.

Decision Tracking

Information Point to be opened for summer 2010

Date: May 2010

Contact: Kerrie Sweeney ext 3586

5. Sister Cities International Conference 29 July to 1 August 2009

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council has a Conference Subvention Policy which is utilised to secure and support national and international conferences to Belfast and to build the City's profile as a conference destination. Belfast was successful in securing the Sister Cities International (SCI) Annual Conference at the Waterfront Hall and Europa Hotel from 29 July to 1 August 2009. This was the first time the event was held outside the United States

Members, at a Development Committee Meeting on 11 March 2009, approved a subvention of £23,000 for the Sister Cities International Conference. The bid was supported by the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB), Tourism Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC, Armagh and Down Tourism Consortium, other Councils and the Regional Tourism Consortiums in Northern Ireland. An organising committee was set up to manage the conference in Belfast comprising Belfast City Council, Armagh and Down Tourism, North Down Borough Council, BVCB, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, US Consulate and Tourism Ireland.

The contribution by the Council to bring the Sister Cities International Conference to Belfast assisted with a range of support functions, including the provision of conference technical support such as weblab, marketing of the Conference in NI, ROI & Europe to recruit delegates, provision of delegate conference materials, volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators and signage.

In total, there were over 800 visitors to Northern Ireland as a result of the Conference – many spending their 2 week summer vacation here. Over 20 countries were represented and almost 100 accompanying persons attended the Social Events at the Conference. Over 200 delegates attended the corresponding Youth Conference which took place in the Queen's University.

Among the delegates were elected and appointed city officials, senior business executives – including a number of high powered financiers, venture capitalists, entrepreneurs and investors – and representatives from the education, community and voluntary sectors. The Conference generated the equivalent of 4,500 bed nights for hotels in and around Belfast which generated an economic impact of £1,164,800.00

Resource Requirements

None

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the update of this report.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required.

6. Blue Plaques

Members are reminded that, at the Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee in August 2003, approval was given for the development of a number of cultural tourism product initiatives, one of which included the development of Blue Plaques. The Ulster History Circle is the only body that erects Blue Plaques and is run by volunteers in Northern Ireland.

The production of Blue Plaques aims to celebrate and highlight past citizens of note which in turn will add to the visitor experience in Belfast. It also encourages the distribution of both domestic and out-of-state visitors throughout the City and creates a critical mass of activities for the visitor to experience in Belfast.

The Ulster History Circle has identified the next phase of Blue Plaques to be erected and is seeking financial support from Belfast City Council. The Ulster History Circle has identified eight plaques for erection:

- James Bryce (Viscount Bryce of Dechmout), Academic and Diplomat
- Sir Joseph Larmour, Academic and Politician
- Thomas Russell, United Irishman and Librarian
- Mercy Hunter, Calligrapher and Designer
- Francis Joy, Newspaper Proprietor and Entrepreneur
- Patrick Neill and James Blow, Printers
- William Rodgers, Broadcaster and Poet and
- The Maritime Club, Birth of the Blues in Belfast.

Appendix 2 provides a brief biography and potential sites for these requests.

The Ulster History Circle is requesting financial support from BCC, there is a cost of £700 per Plaque.

Resource Requirements

The financial implications of this request is £5600. It is anticipated that costs would be spread over the 2009/10 and 2010/2011 periods. Costs incurred in this financial period are included in the existing Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit budget.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members approve the request for financial support from the Ulster History Circle.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is approved.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Tourism Innovation Fund Figures
Appendix 2: Blue Plaques

Key to Abbreviations

NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
TIF	Tourism Innovation Fund