



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	City of Quarters Conference
Date:	10 February 2010
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay, Acting Director of Development, ext 3459
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Relevant Background Information

Belfast City Council has received an invitation from the Belfast Media Group to participate in two conferences in Belfast and New York aimed at showcasing the new Belfast through its Quarters and an application to host a dinner for conference delegates (please see Appendix 1). The first conference takes place in Belfast on 24 and 25 March and the second in New York on 9 and 10 June 2010.

The aim is to create landmark events involving the burgeoning neighbourhoods of the City which are leading regeneration. The conference will explore flagship Quarters, asking how they can be linked to each other to create more than the sum of their parts and what is required to ensure that their economic benefits are felt in disadvantaged areas.

Speakers include senior representatives from Barcelona and New York as well as local political, business and community sectors. Howard Hastings, Chair of NI Tourist Board, Terence Brannigan, Chair of Chartered Business Institute NI, John McVicar, Managing Editor of Shankill Mirror, Geraldine McAteer, Chief Executive of West Belfast Partnership Board and Professor Richard Barnett, Vice-Chancellor of Ulster University, are some of the leading figures addressing the conference. Among the venues used will be the Cultúrlann in the Gaeltacht Quarter, the Presidents' Club in the Cathedral Quarter, the Harbour Commission Offices, the Ulster University campus in the Library Quarter and Titanic House in the Titanic Quarter. Please see Appendix 2 for full details.

Key Issues

Members will be aware that the Cultural Tourism Strategy, 'Developing Belfast's Opportunity', details the aim to develop clusters of tourism activity in Quarters. The draft Integrated Strategic Framework for Belfast Tourism emphasizes that there is much scope to continue with the development approach that is based on the concept of Quarters in order to achieve a much stronger range of attractions, activities, services

and facilities. The draft framework for the future of the Belfast's tourism identifies a spatial plan that deals with such issues as connecting different parts, encouraging movement, providing orientation, and creating quality places and lasting and positive images. A planned approach to the Quarters is crucial to achieving overall attractiveness of Belfast and spreading the benefits of tourism. They have potential to be attractions in their own right, building up the range of places to visit and experience in the City. They are also important for distinctive festivals and events.

For these reasons, it is recommended that it is appropriate for Belfast City Council to participate in the City of Quarters Conference by attending and by hosting a dinner for conference delegates.

Members will also be aware that, in 2005, Belfast City Council undertook a trade mission and showcase event in New York and Boston involving 10 creative businesses from Belfast. The programme was developed in conjunction with a number of key individuals within the Friends of Belfast network including Bob Johnson, John Connorton (Chair of the group in New York) and Mike Flannery. The Friends of Belfast's contacts with our City remain strong and many of the "friends" have developed their own direct working relationships with other organisations in the city e.g. Queen's University, the President's Club. These linkages have been facilitated by Belfast City Council.

A delegation from Derry City Council accompanied private businesses on a recent promotional visit to Boston. This was similar to the proposed New York event and was organised by the Council, the local Chamber of Commerce and individual businesses keen to develop further linkages with the city. In addition to individual business meetings, the group undertook a promotional event to which key business figures were invited.

The key Friends of Belfast contacts in each of the cities (New York, Boston, Denver and Pittsburgh) maintain good linkages with Belfast City Council while pursuing their own areas of interest in Belfast. As has been the case in the past, there is an opportunity to tap into the network and to access the expertise and contacts that they have. There is an opportunity, through the City of Quarters Conference to showcase the changing Belfast to an audience of key influencers. The Friends of Belfast contacts could be utilised to ensure that the event is promoted to the appropriate target audience and to ensure that key individuals and organisations are present to hear about a changing Belfast. If this is the case, consideration should be given to appropriate economic development and tourism promotion in order to ensure that the opportunity is not missed to promote the message to the key target audiences. It is therefore recommended that Members agree in principle to participation in the New York conference pending further investigation of costs in relation to sponsorship of a reception and the holding of an exhibition to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.

Resource Implications

A total of £3,360 to come from within the Tourism, Culture and Arts budget:

- £360 to enable two Members and two Officers to attend the conference
- £3,000 to sponsor a dinner for conference delegates.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members agree to;

1. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Development Committee, or their nominees, plus two officers, attend the conference at a cost of £90 each.
2. Sponsor a dinner for conference delegates at a cost of no more than £3,000.
3. It is further recommended that Members agree in principle to participation in the New York conference pending further investigation of costs in relation to sponsorship of a reception and the holding of an exhibition to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.

Decision Tracking

Further to approval, an update report with budget in relation to New York will be brought to Committee.

Timeframe: March 2010

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Letter to Belfast City Council from the Belfast Media Group
Appendix 2: City of Quarters Programme

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