



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	New York – New Belfast Conference
Date:	14 April 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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Relevant Background Information

Belfast City Council received an invitation from the Belfast Media Group (see Appendix 1) to participate in two conferences in Belfast and New York aimed at showcasing the new Belfast through its Quarters. The first conference took place in Belfast on 24 and 25 March and the second will take place in New York on 9 and 10 June 2010.

Members will be aware that at a meeting of the Development Committee held on 10 February 2010, approval was given for the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Development Committee, or their nominees, plus two officers, to attend the City of Quarters Conference and to sponsor a dinner for conference delegates on 26 March at a cost of no more than £3,000. The conference explored 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.

Members agreed in principle on 10 February 2010 to participation in the New York conference pending further investigation of costs and potential opportunities for Belfast.

Key Issues

Following on from the City of Quarters Conference in Belfast, the Belfast Media Group and their sister paper the Irish Echo are convening a conference in New York under the title of 'New York – New Belfast'. The purpose is to forge links between commerce, culture and education as well as profile key developments created through cultural quarters and other opportunities to an influential US audience as well as through the media.

Proposed Programme

The conference will open on 9 June in Fordham University, Manhattan and move to the Ritz Carlton Hotel on 10 June for further plenary sessions. This will be followed by the 3rd annual Ireland-US top 30 companies' awards sponsored by KPMG. Through Ulster University's links with Fordham University, students on an entrepreneur's programme from University of Ulster will be in New York on those dates and will be linked into the conference.

Participants at the conference confirmed by Belfast Media Group include the following:

Christine Quinn	Speaker of New York City Council
Rob Walsh	Commissioner of Small Business Services New York City Council
John Connorton	Head of Friends of Belfast in New York
Niall Gibbons	CEO, Tourism Ireland
Gary Hanley	Senior Vice President Invest NI, New York
Terence Brannigan	Chairman of CBI/NI MD of Resources
Len O'Hagan	Chair of Belfast Port Authority
Mark Finlay	President's Club, Belfast
Paul McErlean	Chair – Cathedral Quarter Steering Group
David Lyle	Lyle Bailie International & Board Member of Tourism Ireland
Patrick Loughrey	Founder of Connect Centre in North Belfast Forward Emphasis
Michael Sorkin	Author of '20 Minutes in Manhattan' and President Emeritus of George Washington University DC (growing relationship between UU & George Washington University)
Fr Joseph McShane	President of Fordham University

Commissioner Walsh will also lead a site visit to Myrtle Avenue in Brooklyn, New York as part of the conference. Members may recall in earlier years BCC met Commissioner Walsh both in New York and in Belfast when he led a trade delegation to Belfast.

Representatives from Strategic Investment Board, Cathedral Quarter, Gaeltacht Quarter, the President's Club, Linen Hall Library, have also indicated their support for the conference and will participate in some form.

Sponsors of the conference include the President's Club, Belfast Strategic Investment Board, Belfast Port Authority as well as US side partners of Irish Business Organisation of New York, Irish Business Association of New Jersey, Irish Network – New York City.

Patrons include Shaun Kelly, Vice Chair of KPMG in USA, Brian O'Dwyer of law firm O'Dwyer and Berstein who advise New York City Comptroller, Liam Lynch of the \$400m company Broadway.com, John O'Reilly of Squire Saunders (32 offices worldwide), John Connorton of Hawkins/Head Friend of Belfast in New York and Delafield and Wood.

The objectives of the conference are:

- To attract sustainable investment to Belfast by highlighting its many assets including access to European markets, highly educated workforce, rich quality of life and its beautiful setting.
- To encourage Irish Americans to deepen their understanding of their heritage by visiting and by learning more about Ireland's culture and history through its colleges and courses.
- To encourage partnerships of mutual advantage between businesses/organisations in New York and Belfast.
- To reignite the Friends of Belfast model and develop ways to keep Irish Americans in the New York region informed of developments in Belfast.

Up to 100 civic and business leaders in New York are the target audience.

It is the intention of the conference to reach out also to all those who have an interest in Belfast, whether as a tourist destination, a place to attend university, trading partner or potential investment location. The conference will tap into the Scots-Irish diaspora through the exhibition planned in conjunction with the Linen Hall Library.

On 8 June, as a prelude to the conference, an exhibition by the Linen Hall Library on the Ulster Scots/Scots-Irish emigration to New York will open. This will take place at the prestigious Fifth Avenue headquarters of the American Irish Historical Society which is partnering the exhibition.

The Belfast Media Group and the President's Club, Belfast also intend to work with the 'Friends of Belfast' to facilitate meetings around the conference. They are seeking the support of Council to revitalize this grouping which was set up in late 90's under the leadership of Belfast City Council.

The format for the conference being organized by the Belfast Media Group is based on a similar programme which took place last year between Derry/Londonderry and Boston comprising representatives from local Chamber of Commerce, City Council and a range of businesses. The conference aimed to re-ignite relationships with Boston which for several years has had a business development relationship with Derry/Londonderry.

Assessment of Proposal

Belfast City Council over the past 15 years has engaged in international relations activity with USA including a number of significant relationships with New York.

Following on from the peace process in the mid 1990's, Belfast City Council took the lead in capitalizing on goodwill and economic prospectors in USA by establishing the Friends of Belfast network. At its peak the network comprised upwards of 350 high profile individuals from the fields of business, academia and politics. John Connorton, an eminent lawyer in New York was and remains the Chair/Head Friend of Belfast in New York. The Friends of Belfast network in the early days took the lead in facilitating targeted initiatives within their respective cities including New York and made significant business introductions which led to new investment in Belfast. John Connorton and other key Friends of Belfast instigated contacts for the Belfast trade missions and assembled high profile audiences for Belfast's presence in New York.

A number of trade missions were also undertaken between cities including New York with the most recent in 2005 where 10 companies from Belfast working in the digital media, television and film sectors participated with the outturn of 32 new business leads identified and over \$500,000 secured for new film and television projects.

Following 2005, Council's focus on international relations through the Friends of Belfast shifted due to budgetary pressures and a reprioritisation of economic development initiatives. Given the wealth of contacts made by Belfast City Council and shared with the business community in Belfast over the years, business people in Belfast have made their own contacts with Friends of Belfast in recent years and pursued collaborative activity with them.

In light of recent announcements from US Government through Declan Kelly the Economic Envoy and Government Departments in Northern Ireland, regarding the renewed commitment to economic investment from USA in NI, this would appear to be an opportune time for Belfast City Council to review its linkages. Both the Belfast Media Group and the President's Club, Belfast are keen for BCC to re-connect with the Friends of Belfast network by giving it new civic endorsement. Naturally BCC will need to consider the resource implications of supporting the Friends of Belfast network in any labour-intensive way however a positive signal by Council to the network may be most easily achieved by backing the business to business relationships that currently are being promoted by the private sector.

Potential Benefits

Council is not being asked to specifically fund the conference although formal endorsement is being sought by Belfast Media Group. There are options for Council to fund and lead on specific elements as part of the programme which are of particular relevance to Council's agenda.

Should Committee be interested in renewing links with New York and capitalizing on the US economic interest in Belfast/region at this point, the conference in New York provides a cost-effective opportunity for Council engagement. Potential opportunities/benefits could include:

- Profiling of key Belfast development and city regeneration initiatives to a US audience.
- Using conference as preparatory ground for future business to business mission in conjunction with Invest NI.
- Re-connecting with senior contacts in the Friends of Belfast network to encourage new investment opportunities.
- Option of hosting of an industry seminar/exhibition on Belfast's key economic sectors.
- Option of undertaking a parallel 'tourism' promotion campaign including sales calls and media/conference market presentations.

Resource Implications

A budget of up to £25,000 is available within the Department's budget towards forging international linkages for business development which would cover the costs of the New York New Belfast Conference including a bespoke seminar/exhibition on Belfast's key economic sectors as well as tourism sales and promotion programme in conjunction with BVCB.

Within this sum, up to £1,400 per person is required for each Council participant to cover travel, accommodation and subsistence.

Recommendations

Members are asked to consider the contents of the above report and to indicate whether they wish to participate in the New York New Belfast Conference. Should Committee be minded to participate in the Conference, Members are asked to consider which, if any, of the following options they wish to support.

1. Participation in the Conference through the attendance of the Lord Mayor, Chair and Deputy Chair of the Development Committee or their nominees along with up to 3 officers at a cost of £1,400 per participant (Note date of conference 9-10 June 2010).
2. Council to host a seminar/exhibition as part of the Conference on Belfast's key economic sectors as a fore-runner to a potential trade mission for small companies from Belfast.
3. Council in conjunction with BVCB to be asked to undertake parallel sales programme and media launches on the Belfast product.

(options 2 and 3 combined equate to £16,600)

Decision Tracking

Further to agreement an update report with itinerary and programme in relation to New York will be brought to Committee.

Timeframe: May 2010

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key to Abbreviations

BVCB – Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Letter to Belfast City Council from the Belfast Media Group