



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Visit of the Boston Bruins Ice Hockey Team
Date:	12 May 2010
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Relevant Background Information

In the last ten years, Belfast has built a strong reputation for hosting major events. Prior to 1999, the visit of the Tall Ships was perhaps the one stand out major event to be hosted by the City. However, with the changes in the political climate, the City has had a renaissance in major event management. It began with the World Cross Country Championships in 1999 and gradually bids for major events became more ambitious. The next eight years saw Belfast host many significant major events such as the World Irish Dancing Championships, the World Amateur Boxing Championships, the U19 European football Championships, the Special Olympics Ireland Games, and the U-19 Rugby World Cup and the return of the Tall Ships in 2009 – arguably the largest ever event on the island, with an estimated economic impact of £16m to the City.

An approach has now been made by the Belfast Giants, with the support of other influential stakeholders, to seek funding support from Belfast City Council to bring the Boston Bruins Ice Hockey team to Belfast to play an exhibition match on Saturday 2nd October 2010, as part of a longer term plan to bring National Hockey League games to Belfast, especially during 2012.

The Boston Bruins

Considered to be the equivalent to the Manchester United of hockey, the Bruins play in the National Hockey League (NHL) in the United States. Over the last 5 years, the NHL has sent teams to start the competitive season in Europe, to raise the profile of the league and allow the European fans to see their favourite players.

The Management of the Belfast Giants, have used their NHL contacts to secure the opportunity of a pre-season stopover in Belfast. The event will draw supporters from both the US and UK market. The longer term aim is to encourage the NHL to consider Belfast for future competitive games, at no cost to the City, potentially beginning during the 2012 Titanic celebrations.

While the hockey match will be the main event, it will also be the catalyst for other activities. Further information on the exhibition match, and other activities associated with the weekend of the main event, can be found in Appendix 1, under 'The Project'.

In summary, the core benefits of supporting the visit of the Belfast Bruins to Belfast in October would be to:

- Significant return on investment in the form of economic impact for the region. It is estimated that 4,500 visitors will visit Belfast from both the UK and USA. The estimated economic return on this is £870,000 with an estimated 18,000 bednights based on evidence from the organisers.
- Further develop sporting, tourism and trade links with the Boston area. It is anticipated that Invest NI will co-ordinate a trade visit to coincide with this significant sporting occasion. Delegates will be key business leaders from San Jose, Boston and New York. In addition, a group of prominent US political figures have agreed to visit Belfast.
- In partnership with the NITB, raise the profile of the region through major sports events within the media and visitor economy, particularly to the North American market.
- Increase the profile of Belfast as a first class venue for international sporting events.
- Assist with the longer term goal of hosting an NHL game in 2012 as part of a wider European league.
- The continued development of a sport which has already been positive for the City.
- To develop the expertise and capacity required to host major international and world class events in Belfast, particularly with the World Police and Firefighter Games in mind.
- The event will also attract significant television coverage locally and internationally.

Key Issues

The attached business case provides details on the sporting event, the wide range of potential benefits and expected media coverage of the event. This information has been provided by the Belfast Giants.

The weekend event, with a high profile hockey match at the core, will undoubtedly bring significant benefits to the City in terms of tourism, economic impact, and developing future relations, particularly in North America. The local organisers are confident that the event is financially feasible and could have returns in future years.

Resource Implications

The expenditure for the sports event and associated activities currently stands at £686,000. Projected ticket and merchandising income being in the region of £400,000. These figures have been determined based on previous similar events.

The remaining deficit of approximately £286,000 would be met by a cocktail of public and private sector funding. The Belfast Giants have not secured other private sector sponsors as yet, but with over £200k being secured during the last year; at least £50,000 private sponsorship is expected for such a prestigious event. It is anticipated that the hire charge for the Odyssey Arena (approximately £25k) will be waived or

significantly reduced.

A request for £100,000 has been made to The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Invest NI is committed to between £35-50,000.

Therefore, Belfast City Council has been approached to underwrite the remaining deficit of £50,000. However, a maximum figure of £40,000 is currently available within existing budgets, which has been allocated for bidding for major events.

Belfast City Council has benefited from such an arrangement in the past. For example, the Council had underwritten the Masters Tennis event at the Odyssey to £10,000. However, ticket revenue negated the need for this funding and the Council's contribution was zero, although benefiting from promotional materials.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to approve funding of a maximum of £40k towards the hosting of the Boston Bruins in October 2010.

Decision Tracking

Officers will monitor funding and evaluate outcomes post-project delivery. These outcomes will be presented to Members as part of the City Events Unit key performance indicators.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Business plan attached