



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Relocation of Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
Date:	10 November 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

Relevant Background Information

Members agreed at the Development Committee on 13 October 2010 to receive a presentation from ASM Horwath on the draft economic appraisal for the relocation of the Belfast Welcome Centre. This will provide an opportunity for Members to provide input before the appraisal is finalised.

Members attended a site visit on 24 May 2010 to the Northern Bank site, 8-10 Donegall Square North, Belfast and agreed that this option to relocate to the former Northern Bank be further explored through detailed and costed layout plans.

Members attended a site visit to Belfast Central Library on 4 November 2010.

Key Issues

Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) and BCC appointed Tourism Transport Consult in association with Allan Balnaves to assess the rationale for relocating the Belfast Welcome Centre (BWC). Their report examined three options, Northern Bank 8-10 Donegall Square North, Belfast Central Library and remaining at the current location in Donegall Place.

The Belfast Central Library, whilst an attractive building in an area with future tourism potential, would not attract the same levels of footfall as the other two sites and this therefore has an impact on the income generated and gateway role.

The current premises have issues around visibility, accessibility and the potential of the location may already have been maximised.

The Northern Bank site at Donegall Square North provides the report suggested the optimum location for the Belfast Welcome Centre. It ensures:

- A high profile central location exhibiting characteristics of the brand
- An accessible ground floor location
- High footfall of visitors and locals

- Close proximity to City Hall
- Rapid Transit System passing nearby and well connected to other transport hubs
- Good visibility for signage
- Good window display capability
- Box office maximisation of use
- Space for sub letting e.g. café
- Space for promotions
- Space to accommodate both BWC and BVCB administration and marketing

The potential relocation of the Welcome Centre has undergone a Strategic Review Starting Gate. Belfast City Council applies Gate Reviews to the procurement of infrastructure, information technology, property and goods and services. Through this, it aims to improve procurement discipline and outcomes by encouraging better performance in project planning, development and execution. The Strategic Outline Case have received an overall rating of Green for the project suggesting that successful delivery of the project to time and cost and quality appears highly likely subject to more detailed assessment and council approval. The detailed assessment requires an economic appraisal to be undergone for the options. ASM Horwath have been tasked with the economic appraisal and will present their draft report to Members of the Development Committee, the options which have been appraised are; remain in Donegall Place premises; relocate to either Belfast Central Library or 8-10 Donegall Square North. The options have been appraised against a range of financial factors including floor area, rental costs, income, increased footfall, income opportunities, fit out costs, partnership opportunities and opportunity to purchase. The sites appraised have also been assessed against non monetary factors including the gateway role of a Welcome Centre, acceptability, timelines, accessibility, minimise disruption and flexibility.

Belfast City Council's lease at Donegall Place ended on 31 July 2010. As no agreement was reached with the landlord prior to lease end (for an extension for a further year whilst consideration by BCC was given to possible relocation of the Welcome Centre), an application was made to the Lands Tribunal. The landlord has offered BCC a new lease for ten years commencing 1 August 2010 and currently discussions are ongoing with the landlord and Tribunal to reach agreement on the terms of the lease.

Recommendations

None.

Members are to be presented with the findings of the appraisal from the consultants ASM Howarth.

Decision Tracking

Economic Appraisal to be finalised.

Timeframe: December 2010

Reporting Officer: Kerrie Sweeney

Key Abbreviations

BCC – Belfast City Council

BVCB – Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau

BWC – Belfast Welcome Centre