



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	An Update on Belfast City Council's State of the City Initiative
<b>Date:</b>	10 November 2010
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### Relevant Background Information

Members will remember that a paper on the revised State of the City Initiative was agreed at Committee on 9 December 2009. At that time it was agreed to re-launch the State of the City (SOTC) Initiative by offering a better value for money series of seminars and briefings. It was agreed to move away from a single annual conference to four seminars (State of the City Development Debates) and four Development Briefs a year.

More specifically it was agreed that the initiative will maintain its name and will consist of:

- 4 Seminars (Development Debates) per year (3 in the first year): Over one year BCC would hold four quarterly seasonal breakfast seminars that would take place in City Hall.
- Publications:
- 4 Development Briefs per year (3 in the first year): This is to raise the debate and provide 'food for thought'. The briefs would focus on the main areas covered in previous seminars in order for participants to be 'reminded' of what was discussed earlier.
- One major research paper per year – Development's PBDU proposes to publish one research paper per year to support the SOTC seminars.
- Magazines – City Matters and Intercom would be used to communicate the information both internally and externally.
- Web Page: The Council's website will be regularly updated to ensure that stakeholders are well informed. The existing corporate Facebook and Twitter would also be updated to disseminate information on the upcoming events, sharing ideas, documents and feedback on the events.
- Belfast Policy Portal: The development of a policy 'portal' was one of the key recommendations of the 2005 conference - a web-based service which will bring together content from the seminars and make connections back into Council work.

This ensured that the Development Department would generate a large series of products for the agreed budget, rather than only one conference.

This report now proposes the first three speakers for the State of the City Development Debates.

### **Key Issues**

At that stage, it was proposed the first year of SOTC focus on how Belfast is recovering from the recession from different development points of view i.e. business, social, cultural, physical and environmental. It was proposed that the seminar series could be entitled 'Belfast Bounces Back'. However, Members noted that given the challenging economic climate for citizens of Belfast, this might not be the most appropriate branding. It was agreed that the Head of Economic Initiatives (who presented the paper as acting Director) would reconsider this matter. This issue was reconsidered within the Department and by Chief Officers and it was proposed that a more effective approach would be to focus on key concrete areas of work of the Council that were realistic given the economic climate, namely the Integrated Economic Strategy, the review of the Masterplan and the City Investment Framework, all of which have been agreed by Members as offering key opportunities to influence the Regional Economic Strategy and other attendant debates on resource allocation.

It is proposed therefore that the Development Debates arising from the key speakers' input and engagement with external stakeholders will directly contribute to the development of the Integrated Economic Strategy, the City Investment Framework and the Masterplan through the topics it will cover and development briefs it will produce. These elements will include city design, regeneration and economic competitiveness.

These topics and speakers will emphasise the key role of the Development Department in influencing the economic and social development of the city.

#### Proposed provisional speakers and dates

It is proposed that the SOTC initiative will be officially re-launched at the first breakfast Development Debate on 25 November 2010 in the City Hall at 8am. Professor Niall G. Kirkwood, from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and visiting Professor at the University of Ulster has provisionally agreed to be the keynote speaker at this first seminar. He is an international urban design and architecture expert who is currently advising the Government of Korea. His expertise lies in a range of subjects, from landscaping, brownfield development, regeneration to Masterplanning.

Prof. Kirkwood will bring a fresh and innovative approach to the public conversation about city design and in particular add to the Council's review of the Masterplan. Professor Kirkwood is willing to, apart from speaking at the SOTC seminar, spend some time with the interested Council's officers to provide guidance and steer on the council's Masterplan and City Investment Framework. The proposed itinerary would be:

- 24 November dinner with Chair and Deputy Chair of Development Committee
- 25 November 8 – 10am SOTC Development Debate in the City Hall. The Chair of the Development Committee will welcome the invitees and the Chief Executive will introduce Professor Kirkwood and chair the question and answer session.
- 25 November, after the SOTC seminar, it is proposed to organise a meeting (short workshop style) with interested officers and finish with lunch.

We propose that the second Development Debate will take place in February 2010. The Director of Development was contacted by the US Consulate re the visit of John Palmieri, the Director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Mr Palmieri will be visiting in February (as yet more detailed dates have not been confirmed). We propose that he is invited to be the second speaker for SOTC and that this be combined with other stakeholder engagement initiatives proposed by us and the US Consulate. In Hartford, Connecticut, since 2004, Palmieri served as the City's first director of the Department of Development Services, overseeing all aspects of planning, economic and real estate development. While in Hartford, he partnered with the local chamber of commerce to develop a strategic plan and marketing program for the city, established a tax increment financing district for a major mixed use development at the site of the historic Colt Firearms factory, and re-organized the City's core development functions. Some of the major projects that the Boston Redevelopment Authority is working on include the development of the South Boston Waterfront, the revitalization of Downtown Crossing, the growth of the Longwood Medical Area, the implementation of the Crossroads project, and the expansion of academic institutions. Throughout all these projects, the BRA is charged with ensuring development that works for the benefit of Boston's residents.

[http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/?\\_height=738&\\_width=1024](http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/?_height=738&_width=1024)

The third SOTC Development Debate is proposed to take place on the 24th March 2010 in the City Hall with Bruce Katz, Vice President and Director, of the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings Institution, a non-profit think tank based in Washington. Bruce Katz regularly advises national, state, regional and municipal leaders on policy reforms that advance the competitiveness of metropolitan areas. Members may remember that Bruce Katz visited Belfast in 2005 and spoke at the SOTC Autumn Seminar which was very well received and is still mentioned by our stakeholders.

In order to get the most out of Mr Katz's visit there is an opportunity to connect it to a Belfast workshop that the London School of Economics' City Reformers Group wishes to hold with 20 participants from various cities across Europe (for example, Bilbao, Saint Etienne, Leipzig, Glasgow and Milan). We propose to work in partnership with them to organise and deliver this workshop. The workshop would take place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2010 in the City Hall. The city participants would arrive in Belfast on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March and a study tour of the city would be organised by Belfast City Council. Combining these two events would not only provide economies of scale, but also provide an opportunity to learn from wider European examples on city competitiveness. As previously noted the SOTC Development Debates will help us to build capacity, knowledge, understanding and agreement for future joint or synergetic/integrated action in the main areas of city development. It is a key opportunity for the Development Committee to influence city development, particularly in the key areas of city design, regeneration and competitiveness.

#### **Resource Implications**

The Development Department has already allocated an existing budget of £35,000 to cover one financial year's spend in 2010/11 which will cover three seminars and three development briefs.

#### **Key Abbreviations**

SOTC – State of the City  
POG – Policy Officers Group