



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast City Masterplan: Review – Appointment of Consultants
Date:	10 November 2010
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Relevant Background Information

The Council commissioned a Masterplan for Belfast in 2003 to provide a framework for the development of Belfast for the period to 2020. The Masterplan document proposed a framework for the revival of Belfast in the period to 2020.

In November 2009, the Committee approved a review of the current Belfast Masterplan to revisit the strategic vision for the City. This review, in addition to providing a clear strategic position, would provide opportunities for engagement with external strategies and stakeholders with regard to investment in the City. The review could also explore the potential for integration of work with future activity in relation to community planning and strategic Council objectives.

Following the approval from Committee, work has focussed on the potential for the revised Masterplan to be supported by and integrated with ongoing strategic Council activity on capital investment and economic development, including alignment with the City Investment Framework and the development of the Integrated Economic Strategy, which would in turn align with the ongoing development of the Regional Economic Strategy. In addition, the recent Comprehensive Spending Review and critical regional discussions on the budget and resources allocation, particularly with regard to capital investment, have generated a higher degree of urgency with regard to review of the Masterplan.

It is clear that there are going to be significantly fewer resources available in Northern Ireland as a whole and it is critical that Belfast seeks to take full advantage of any potential investment in the City. At Council, Members have supported a number of motions proposing that the Council takes a lead role in trying to mitigate the worst effects of the current economic downturn. The SP&R Committee has directed that some work is undertaken in relation to looking at alternative funding sources to undertake city development. This, in turn, suggests a more urgent need for an immediate review of the Masterplan so that, if additional funding is sourced, we have a clear, agreed direction

on key priorities.

This report seeks approval to appoint the original lead consultants for the Belfast Masterplan, to carry out the first stage strategic review.

Key Issues

This changing context and the emerging strategies for areas of the City have highlighted the need for the Council to have a coherent and up to date vision for the future development of Belfast. The ongoing internal work on the review of the current Belfast Masterplan highlighted the importance of influencing regeneration/development initiatives planned for the City and ensuring that there was mutually supportive integration with the City Investment Framework and Integrated Economic Strategy.

The current spending reviews and consideration of future strategic priorities for Northern Ireland have now reached the stage where it is important that the Council engages at a political level with the Ministers of relevant Departments. The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee has already expressed its wish to meet with relevant Ministers on a systematic basis to explore the current economic challenges facing the City, potential risks to future infrastructure investment and to discuss how delivery can be progressed.

The review of the Belfast Masterplan would provide an important focus for the articulation of the Council's broad approach to the continued regeneration of the city. The Belfast Masterplan approach recognises that in order to drive Belfast forward we need better partnership working and a strong, common vision of the future to which we can all contribute.

As noted above, the recent Comprehensive Spending Review and critical regional discussions on the budget and resources allocation, particularly with regard to capital investment, have generated a higher degree of urgency with regard to review of the Masterplan. At Council, Members have supported a number of motions proposing that the Council takes a lead role in trying to mitigate the worst effects of the current economic downturn. The early strategic update of the Belfast Masterplan has become an essential component for the articulation of a cohesive Council position on the future development of Belfast and will ensure that, if additional funding is sourced, we have a clear, agreed direction on key priorities.

Colin Buchanan and Partners were responsible for the development of the original Belfast Masterplan for the Council in 2003. This work included the commissioning of the specialist research, the coordination of the multi-disciplinary team and the production of the final plan.

The proposed review of the plan would necessarily draw on the original research and require reassessment of the changed context summarised above and outlined in previous reports. Colin Buchanan and Partners, by virtue of the research activity and knowledge from the consultancy for the original Masterplan, would be uniquely placed to carry out the strategic review both in terms of their experience and their capacity to deliver the work to a timescale that would enable effective engagement in the resource prioritisation processes outlined above.

The timescales for the comprehensive spending review and associated processes necessitates the timely appointment of specialist support to carry out a strategic review of the Belfast Masterplan. In recognition of the broader implications and the link to the City Investment Framework, the potential for the commission was considered on an

inter-departmental basis by the Assistant Chief Executive, the Director of Development and the Director of Property & Projects. Taking account of the urgent need for the completion of an effective strategic review which would provide a refreshed Belfast Masterplan as the focus for engagement and more effective partnership working towards a common vision, the proprietary appointment is considered to be the only practicable approach to securing experienced specialist consultancy support. The Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive has confirmed that he has no objection to this approval from a legal perspective and having reviewed relevant Standing Orders.

Therefore, following the internal consideration, it is recommended that, in recognition of the special circumstances and pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 62, the Committee endorses the appointment of Colin Buchanan & Partners to carry out the strategic review of the Masterplan on the basis that the costs would not exceed a budget of £30,000 and that a detailed costs proposal is submitted by them beforehand and approved by the Director of Development.

Resource Implications

Amounts are included in the approved Departmental Plan for the review of the Belfast Masterplan.

The budget will not exceed £30,000.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to note the contents of the report and to agree to the appointment of Colin Buchanan & Partners to carry out the strategic review of the Belfast Masterplan on the basis that the budget would not exceed £30,000.