



Mr David Flinn
Chairperson
Belfast Civic Trust
Bryson House
Belfast

24th October 2010

Peter McNaney
Chief Executive
Belfast City Council
Belfast BT1 5GS

Dear Mr McNaney

Re: Deputation request by Belfast Civic Trust

The Belfast Civic Trust would ask the Development Committee to receive a deputation from the Trust in order to inform its members of our proposal to establish a Belfast History Centre and Ulster Provincial Art Gallery.

The Trust had a meeting with Nelson McCausland MLA, Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure at Causeway exchange in Bedford Street on Tuesday 6th July 2010 and it had been suggested that we write to you as Chief Executive of Belfast City Council as the proposal should be of interest to the members of the Development Committee who may also wish to support the proposal.

The issue of a Belfast History Centre has been kept alive within the Belfast Civic Trust for many years and our members and supporters are convinced more than ever for the need to have a centre that would be fully dedicated to telling the story of Belfast. We would like to see a Belfast History Centre become a reality before the centenary of the granting of the Charter to Belfast by King James 1 on 27th April 1613.

We understand Belfast City Council is planning events to mark this very special event in the history of our city. A Belfast History Centre would be in our opinion be a great way to mark this event. We will also have the general interest in the Titanic and signing of the Ulster Covenant centenary events in 2012, bringing hopefully many more visitors to Belfast.

I have attached our submission which we made to the Minister so that the committee can be better informed about our proposal.

The Belfast Civic Trust is very keen to meet the Development Committee as the support of Belfast City Council is vital if the Belfast History Centre is to become a reality.

Yours sincerely,

David Flinn

enc:

Proposal for a Belfast History Centre & Ulster Provincial Art Gallery by Belfast Civic Trust

Meeting with Nelson McCausland MLA, Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure at Causeway exchange in Bedford Street on Tuesday 6th July 2010

- 1) Belfast Civic Trust met with Mr. Edwin Poots, the then Minister for the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure on Thursday 20th December 2007 to discuss our proposal for a Belfast History Centre. Since then the Civic Trust kept the proposal very much alive and our members and supporters are convinced more than ever for the need to have a Belfast History Centre. **We would like to see it become a reality before the centenary of the granting of the Charter to Belfast by King James 1 on 27th April 1613.** We understand Belfast City Council is planning events to mark this very special event in the history of our city. A Belfast History Centre would be in our opinion be a great way to mark this event. We will also have the general interest in the Titanic and signing of the Ulster Covenant centenary events in 2012, bringing hopefully many more visitors to Belfast.
- 2) Belfast Civic Trust believe it is necessary to have a Belfast History Centre in order to **tell properly the story of Belfast** and to make available objects of historic importance seldom or never seen by the public.
- 3) The story of Belfast has been told in a number of fine exhibitions throughout the years. Among the first was in old Belfast Museum situated at College Square North which was opened in 1831 by the Belfast Natural History Society. A more recent exhibition was held in the Ulster Museum. We also have many excellent books on the history of Belfast.
- 4) Our museum history has focused on the world and the Ulster Museum is part of a success story in bringing the knowledge of world cultures to Belfast. However in many ways this has been to the expense of promoting our own Belfast history and even Ulster art to a degree that would do justice to our great city.
- 5) The point has been well made that the Ulster Museum does not have sufficient space to exhibit a permanent Belfast history exhibition.
- 6) Many Belfast historical items still continue to lie in Ulster Museum stores and most of them will never be seen by the public. Some important items like the date stone and two Keystones from the old Long Bridge, transferred to the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery in 1929 from the old Museum in College Square North have never been put on display.
- 7) We are very pleased that the Ulster Museum is presently displaying the Belfast Castle Stone taken from the foundations of the old Belfast destroyed by fire in 1708, the O'Neill Chair and other important items. We congratulate the Ulster Museum in putting these items on display.

8) We would also congratulate the Belfast City Council in contributing to the Belfast Story with displays in the City Hall and Ulster Hall.

9) Belfast related items and collections can also be found in many places including private collections, the Linen hall library, Belfast War Museum, Harbour Office, Belfast Charitable Institution, Belfast City Council and Arts Council.

10) The Civic Trust believes strongly that now is the time to have a History Centre to promote Belfast and the story of Belfast. To this end we have been **looking for a building in which we can tell the Belfast Story**. This has taken a lot of our time and hopefully we might be in a position very soon to obtain premises. We are also working on information panels which should be ready soon.

11) We have many difficulties to overcome including the manning of the Belfast History Centre and we would ask the Minister to give the proposed Belfast Civic Trust his support in helping to **arrange a meeting with the Ulster Museum management** to discuss how best the museum can assist the proposed Belfast History Centre. We would also ask for support in **convening a conference**, bringing together all interested parties to discuss the proposal to have a Belfast History Centre.

12) We in the Belfast Civic Trust realize that without the support of the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Belfast City Council, Ulster Museum and Northern Ireland Tourist Board that we could not possibly make any progress in creating a successful Belfast History Centre.

13) We have attached some examples of Belfast history items in the Ulster Museum collections which are seldom or ever seen by the public

Proposed Ulster Provincial Art Gallery

On a separate issue we would ask that at a **future date**, the Belfast Civic Trust will have the opportunity to discuss with the Minister, the best ways to **promote Belfast and Ulster Art** and to consider our proposal of creating an Ulster Provincial Art Gallery which would be Ulster's equivalent of Dublin's National Gallery of Ireland in Merrion Square. We would see the gallery displaying many of the works that are more or less permanently archived in the Ulster Museum, as well as paintings and sculptures that are held by the Arts Council.

David Flinn (Chair)
Billy Dickson
Fergus Bell
John Smylie

Deputation Team, Belfast Civic Trust