



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Feasibility Study – Gilpins Site, Sandy Row
Date:	24 January 2012
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

Relevant Background Information	
1.1	On 26 October 2011, the Director of Development met with the Assistant Regional Director of Regeneration Services of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). The meeting was held at the request of NIHE who had been approached by Belfast South Community Resources regarding the funding of a feasibility study for the redevelopment of the former Gilpins site in Sandy Row.
1.2	Following on from the meeting, NIHE have now written to Council offering to provide match funding of up to £10,000 towards such a feasibility study should the Council be prepared to undertake such a project.

Key Issues	
2.1	Gilpins Store was for many years a major retail outlet on Sandy Row trading in furniture and a wide range of household goods and services prior to its closure in 2007.
2.2	The site, which extends to 2.3 acres and 45,000 square feet of retail space, has a substantial frontage onto Sandy Row. It currently lies vacant and is frequently the target of vandalism and a location for anti-social behaviour.
2.3	In 2008 the site was acquired by a private sector developer and plans were drawn up for residential development. These plans were the subject of significant objections from within the local community and with the onset of the recession the proposed development has never taken place.

2.4	Belfast South Community Resources have indicated that the current owners of the site have now abandoned their original plans for residential development and would be willing to dispose of part, or all of the site if a suitable social enterprise could be developed. It was on this basis that an approach was made to NIHE and BCC to finance a feasibility study for the redevelopment of the site.
2.5	The Department for Social Development (DSD) Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) are currently in the process of procuring consultants to produce a masterplan for Shaftesbury Square and those areas connecting to it. Sandy Row will be included within the masterplan area.
2.6	BRO had also been previously approached by Community representatives in the Sandy Row area regarding funding of the Gilpins site but decided that it would prefer to await the outworkings of the masterplan before deciding how it would prioritise feasibility work in the greater Shaftesbury Square area. It is anticipated however that the Gilpins site will be included in any list of priorities given its critical location and scale in Sandy Row.
2.7	Members will also be aware that the Council is currently undertaking its own regeneration project in Sandy Row as part of the Renewing the Routes project. Given that two of the objectives of the programme are to improve the physical environment and to make areas more attractive to investors, a feasibility study into the future uses for this key site would complement the Council's ongoing work.
2.8	As stated previously, the NIHE Regeneration Directorate have expressed an interest in conducting a feasibility study and would be keen to do this in partnership with BCC. A similar approach was taken in 2011 in developing a feasibility study for the Tunnels project in the Markets area of the city.
2.9	Within the Departmental budget for 2011/12, a budget of £60k was allocated to the SNAP Unit to match fund community based pilot projects promoted by DSD as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal programme. Due to the fact that Neighbourhood Renewal partnerships have been asked to review their programmes, no such projects are likely to materialise in the current year. As a result of this, the cost of a study could be met from this budget line.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	It is envisaged that the cost of such a study to include an economic appraisal would not exceed £20,000.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations Implications attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are requested to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. note the content of this report and

	2. accept the offer of financial support in the sum of £10,000 from NIHE and agree to the Council undertaking a feasibility study of the Gilpins site.
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6	Decision Tracking
6.1	There is no decision tracking attached to this report.

7	Key to Abbreviations
	NIHE – Northern Ireland Housing Executive DSD – Department for Social Development BRO – Belfast Regeneration Office