

Appendix 1

Background to Belfast Nashville Sister City Link

The connection with Nashville has a special significance because of the very strong links between Ulster and the Tennessee capital. The region's connection with Tennessee dates from from the Scots-Irish settlement of the area in the eighteenth century to the diverse relationships and cultural ties that link Belfast and Nashville today.

A Memorandum of understanding was signed by the Mayor of Nashville and the Lord Mayor of Belfast in 1994 to promote cultural, tourism and business development opportunities between the two cities. Prior to this a number of visits took place between the two cities under the Atlantic Bridges project. In the formative stages Ian and the late Katherine Brick originally from Belfast, fostered the link when they emigrated to Nashville. Over recent years the initiative has resulted in the exchange of people working in non-profit organisations and the cultural sector. A delegation visited Nashville in 1994 to strengthen the Sister City link and to develop a mutually beneficial and output orientated relationship between Belfast and Nashville.

A Sister Cities Conference took place in Belfast in April 2004 at which the current Sister City partnership was discussed and ideas formulated on progressing initiatives and an action plan. Research as to how other cities operate Sister City linkages, how they are funded and rules of operation was undertaken and organisations in Belfast & Nashville who have a shared link were identified.

In October 2004 the Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee approved an action plan which outlined a number of proposed projects in relation to cultural tourism, educational and regeneration projects. In order to co-ordinate and support activities, a Nashville Advisory Group with members of Belfast City Council and representatives of the entertainment, tourism and creative industries sector and the US Consulate was established.

Members will also be aware that new partnerships were formed to deliver the Belfast Nashville 2010 Action Plan, which has been greatly expanded to include not only culture and tourism, but education, economic development, genealogy, literary tourism, music tourism, international exhibitions, international marketing, creative industries, film and digital media and communications. Group membership was been expanded to reflect the new plan and to include formal partnerships with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Queen's University.

Belfast Nashville Sister City Advisory Group

The Sister City Advisory Group includes representatives from the leisure and cultural sector, historical groups, genealogy associations, community development, media, educational organisations. The group identified and implemented an action plan which includes projects in relation to tourism, media, education, culture and economic development. The group met on a bi-monthly basis in order to achieve tangible outputs and economic benefits from the Sister City relationship. The current make-up of the group is as follows:

Chair: Chair of Development

Deputy Chair: Deputy Chair of Development

Funding partners:

Tourism Ireland

Arts Council NI

Queen's University

US Consulate

BBC

British Council

Sister Cities Nashville

Mayor Dean's Office of Economic Development

Organisations who work with Nashville:

Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
Belfast Nashville Songwriters' Festival
Ulster Scots Heritage Council
Ulster Historical Foundation
Real Music Club

Feedback from Sister City Partners**Arts Council of Northern Ireland**

"The Arts Council is keen to raise the profile of Northern Ireland arts and artists on the international stage. The partnership with Belfast City Council and the Nashville Steering Group has proved to be one effective means of achieving this objective for the benefit of our thriving music sector."

Queen's University

"Queen's University welcomes the opportunity to develop its strong ties with Vanderbilt University at Nashville through its growing series of academic partnerships that bring together students and Faculty members across all of the academic disciplines represented in both educational institutions. Our association with the Sisters Cities committees offers an opportunity to expand and diversify such educational opportunities in a manner that can only be of benefit to Belfast as well as Queen's. We welcome the opportunity to work together in creating new international synergies in research and education for the benefit of our local communities."

Tourism Ireland

"Tourism Ireland is committed to working in partnership with organisations and agencies to raise the number of tourists coming from the US to Northern Ireland. The association of Belfast with Nashville at the level of the mayor's office and the Sister Cities committees has led to increased attention to Belfast by respected American musicians and broadcasters. These underpin our efforts to promote Belfast and Northern Ireland as a place with a great music tradition and vibrant live entertainment scene that is worth travelling the Atlantic to experience."

U.S. Consulate

"The United States Consulate is proud to acknowledge and support the unique links established between Belfast and Nashville. The historic connections between these proud Cities epitomize the deep genealogical and cultural bonds that exist between Northern Ireland and the United States. Those behind the Sister City partnership should be applauded for their achievements in building creative, mutually beneficial, and exciting partnerships in areas like music, education, and tourism. Relationships like these improve the quality of life of residents, they foster civic and community pride, and they help improve their respective economies. We wish those involved in the Belfast-Nashville initiative every success in their ongoing efforts".

BBC Ralph McLean

"Walk down the main thoroughfares and side streets of Belfast and just like Nashville you'll hear music, of just about every description, pouring out of just about every doorway. It's how we define ourselves and it's how we present ourselves culturally to the world. It's a legacy of great art that we are rightly proud of and when a musician from Belfast meets a fellow performer from Nashville they know they're talking to a like minded soul, an individual for whom the thousands of miles of separation mean nothing."