



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Bringing Our Heritage to Life
Date:	20 November 2012
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officers:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	At the Development Committee of 18 September 2012, as part of the discussion on the new Cultural Framework 2012–2015, Councillor Kyle proposed that a letter be forwarded to National Museums of Northern Ireland requesting that representatives attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the feasibility of identifying additional space within the City where artworks currently in storage could be displayed in public.
1.2	Furthermore, Bill Wolsey, Merchant Hotel, in discussions with the Deputy Chair of Development, considered opportunities to display local artefacts in public spaces. During the excavation of the site for the Merchant Hotel, 30 ceramic eggs were found which are now on display in the entrance to the Merchant Hotel. Mr Wolsey believed that this theme could be expanded further across the city.
1.3	To explore this further, Cllr Ó Muilleoir has facilitated two exploratory meetings between Members, National Museums staff, Belfast City Centre Management, and Tourism, Culture and Arts staff. The discussions have focused on investigating the possibility of placing artefacts from the collections of the National Museums Northern Ireland in accessible contexts, such as shops and hotels across the city. A pilot area was discussed at the meetings including the city centre, Gaeltacht Quarter, Cathedral Quarter and North Belfast Cultural Corridor. Approximately 12 artefacts would be displayed across these areas.
1.4	The concept of displaying local artefacts could support the Belfast Story initiative, agreed through the Tourism and Cultural Frameworks as well as the Belfast 400 programme (subject to Committee approval).
1.5	An indicative list of objects in the museum collections has been provided by National Museums (see attached Appendix 1). Belfast City Centre Management

	circulated this to their commercial members and a number, including Victoria Square and Castle Court as well as some individual shops and hotels, expressed interest in displaying objects.
1.6	The overall aims and objectives for the project, as discussed by the stakeholder group, would be to promote shared culture amongst Belfast citizens and create interesting talking points for visitors.

2	Key Issues
2.1	National Museums are keen to make their collections accessible and the number of loans agreed annually is one of their key performance indicators. However, loans are governed by nationally agreed procedures set out within specific agreements and associated documentation.
2.2	A major issue may be the identification of organisations with appropriate structures, able to carry the required insurance and manage the security and environmental conditions necessary to safeguard material from the national collections. Objects will require museum-standard cases which are inevitably expensive. A six month lead-in is required for loans and facilities reports from the office of the National Security Advisor are usually needed. Loans are for renewable one year periods with a yearly check, which may incur a cost, before repeating. Designed for accredited museums, it is difficult for other organisations to meet these conditions and there is a requirement that objects be displayed in places fully accessible to the general public.
2.3	The nature of the material available also means that associated interpretation and, in many cases, lighting will be needed, all adding to the cost of displaying single items.
2.4	An alternative source of objects which speak to Belfast's past is the extensive series of pre-development archaeological excavations which have taken place over recent years. Some of these objects are held by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, others by the commercial companies which undertook the work. They range in date from prehistory through to the more recent past. Still requiring interpretation, in most cases the standards of casing and protection will be less than those required for museum objects and the administrative requirements are not as burdensome.
2.5	A further option may be the installation of visually-based interpretation, using the wealth of old maps, topographical views, photographs and maps available. This could be used in panel displays, suitable for installation in shopping centres across the city. In the case of Castle Court and the Victoria Centre, which have already expressed interest, there is certainly material relevant to those exact sites. The centres have high footfall, attract a genuine cross-section of the population and can be used as places in which the story of their districts can be represented.
2.6	There is, however, an opportunity for Council to work with a number of external stakeholders, including National Museums Northern Ireland, Belfast City Centre Management, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Built Heritage, community organisations and commercial organisations.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	There are a number of cost options, depending on the specifics of objects displayed and the locations used. The cost of display cases will be the major element: it would be reasonable to allow an average of £5,000 each and £600 for related display, giving a total of £67,200 if 12 locations were used. At present there is no provision for this expenditure in the 2013/14 budget estimates.

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

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to recommend that a stakeholder group is set up and options be explored further, with a more detailed report presented to Committee in January 2013.

6	Decision Tracking
Subject to the above recommendation being agreed by Members a more detailed report will be presented to Committee in January 2013.	
Timeframe: January 2013	
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7	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 - list of objects in the museum collections	