



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Collaboration between Belfast and Bilbao
Date:	9 April 2013
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alderman Gavin Robinson, has received correspondence from the Office of the British Ambassador to Spain based in Madrid, Mr Giles Paxman CMG LVO.
1.2	Mr Paxman has written to encourage collaboration between Belfast and the City of Bilbao. This is based on a recent proposal to the Ambassador by the Head of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), which is also based in Madrid.
1.3	The Head of the UNWTO, Mr Taleb Rifai, was recently on a visit to Belfast and was greatly impressed by the city, and in particular the Titanic Centre. He suggested to the British Ambassador that the authorities involved in tourism promotion in Belfast, including Belfast City Council, might benefit from exploratory discussions with the City of Bilbao Tourism authorities with regard to the city's synergy with Belfast.
1.4	He referred specifically to the prominence of both cities in the industrial revolution and developing strong industrial economies. Both cities have also emerged from a troubled city legacy and both are seeking to diversify their economies. He also referred to the synergy around centres for the arts and higher education, port city development and the role as business capitals and regional drivers.
1.5	In particular though, Mr Rifai and indeed the Ambassador have pointed to the potential for collaboration in the tourism sector and around iconic developments such as Titanic Belfast and the Guggenheim Museum.

1.6	Belfast City Council already has past relationships with the City of Bilbao through partnership in the 3 year 2008-2011 EU funded OPENCITIES project, which worked on integration issues in cities with regards to economic migrants. Belfast also hosted Bilbao in 2003 to speak at the City Cultural Tourism Experts seminar held at the Harbour Commissioners, working on the early development of cultural quarters in the city.
1.7	Developing tourism links with the City of Bilbao would fit strategically with the Council's emerging International Relations Framework which has Europe as one of it's target markets and tourism/leisure as one of it's target segments.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The British Ambassador for Spain, Mr Giles Paxman, and the UNWTO Head, Mr Taleb Rifai, have proposed that BCC consider sending a team to Bilbao to explore the possibility for mutual learning and collaboration, and indeed to consider involvement of the Lord Mayor of Belfast in this exploratory visit.
2.2	Mr Paxman has offered the support services of the UK Consul in Bilbao to assist BCC in planning such a visit, to involve relevant Bilbao authorities and local businesses as well as the Mayor of Bilbao, who has strong historical, industrial and commercial links with the UK.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	The cost of a study visit to Bilbao will be determined once BCC decides on the value of the visit and numbers to travel.

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 consider the request to undertake a study visit to Bilbao and determine who should attend.

6	Decision Tracking
There is no decision tracking attached to this report.	