



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Pilot proposal to display historical material in public locations in the city
<b>Date:</b>	17 September 2013
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	Discussions have been held over a period round the idea of displaying museum collections in non-traditional, publicly accessible locations. At present it has not been possible to progress this project. A report was taken to Committee in November 2012 on the project and current report provides an update and suggested ways forward.
1.2	Between 1981 and 2008, 98 archaeological excavations were carried out in Belfast, and a substantial number has occurred between 2008 and 2013. While many of the excavations were passive monitoring of construction works, others have recovered interesting material, with a particular concentration in Cathedral Quarter. Most of the artefacts remain either with the excavators or in Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) stores, with a very small proportion on display in NIEA offices at Hill Street.
1.3	The artefacts tend to have modest commercial value but provide real insights into the way people lived in Belfast from the seventeenth century forward. Initial discussions have suggested that there would be little opposition to making them available for display.
1.4	It appears that there would be scope during a pilot stage possibly to mount up to four displays in Cathedral Quarter, one in Culturann, another in the Spectrum Centre and one in the new Welcome Centre.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	As part of museum accreditation and general professional standards, there are understandably rigorous loan conditions to safeguard the museum collections, including provisions regarding security, insurance, environmental conditions and access. This makes it difficult for non-traditional venues to meet loan conditions and also certain organisational structures need be in place.

2.2	In the short term, however, there are strong arguments for progressing the making of the physical evidence for Belfast's history more accessible in public spaces, which include education, tourism and social inclusion. The new Welcome Centre has been designed with a display case already which could be used for changing displays of small objects.
2.3	Currently, most of the material recovered from excavations is in inaccessible storage. The book 'Hidden History Below Our Feet: The Archaeological Story of Belfast' in which Council was a partner, demonstrated both the richness and relevance of the archaeological heritage
2.4	Each display could consist of a simple, though robust case with integral lighting to hold one or more small objects, with appropriate labelling. There would also be an associated interpretative display panel to give the wider context. Displays would be in publically accessible places, which could either be commercial or publicly-owned premises, but either case visible from the street.
2.5	Beyond the pilot phase, if the approach is demonstrated to be viable, there may be opportunity for sponsorship and partnership support. The project might be suitable for a small-scale Heritage Lottery Fund application.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	<u>Financial</u> A maximum budget of £10,000 is proposed for the pilot phase.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Implications</b>
4.1	The material to be displayed will be selected to ensure that it represents our shared history and efforts will be made to maintain as far as possible a gender balance. Displays will be produced to follow best-practice accessibility guidelines.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	It is recommended that Members agree: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– That suitable objects for display be identified and loans agreed</li> <li>– That four locations are agreed with the Cathedral Quarter Trust, and that further sites in Culturann and the Spectrum Centre and the feasibility of using the same approach in the new Welcome Centre be investigated.</li> <li>– That a maximum budget of £10,000 is made available from the Tourism, Culture, Heritage &amp; Arts Unit existing budget.</li> </ul>

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
6.1	A progress report will be brought back to Development Committee in January 2014.  Timeframe: January 2014 <span style="float: right;">Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay</span>