



**Report to:** Development Committee

**Subject:** Visual Arts Infrastructure

**Date:** 17 June 2014

**Reporting Officer:** John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470

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<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	Members will be aware that at a Development Committee held on 4 September 2012 approval was given to support a feasibility study into visual arts infrastructure in the city. This research was jointly commissioned with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) and examined a proposal to relocate a number of independent organisations in one building creating a hub and contemporary gallery space for Belfast.
1.2	<p><u>Cultural Framework for Belfast</u></p> <p>As Members will also be aware, the Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012–15 was agreed at September 2012 Development Committee and published in October 2012. Its vision is that:-</p> <p>‘By 2020, everyone in Belfast experiences and is inspired by our city’s diverse and distinctive culture and arts. Arts and heritage are valued for enriching quality of life and creating wealth, and the city’s culture and creativity is renowned throughout the world.’</p>
1.3	<p>The Cultural Framework complements the Investment Programme, which recognises arts and heritage as key drivers of the city’s economy. It was developed in consultation with the arts and heritage sectors, and the Council’s approach has been cited as best practice. It’s aims are arranged under four themes – Distinctly Belfast, Inspiring communities, Attracting audiences and Strengthening the sector – and its targets include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increasing audiences from Belfast by 10 per cent</li> <li>- growing visiting audiences from 15 to 25 per cent</li> <li>- establishing a strong, skilled, multifaceted arts and heritage infrastructure</li> <li>- generating £8 in income for every £1 invested in the sector</li> </ul> <p>As part of an ongoing commitment outlined within the Framework, Council has</p>

1.4	undertaken a leadership role on the strategic alignment and co-ordination of the culture and arts sector, providing opportunities for organisations to develop and diversify their income streams and promoting partnership working and collaboration.
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<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	The initial feasibility study has now been completed and has recommended that the proposal for a contemporary visual arts hub and gallery proceed to economic appraisal.
2.2	Following comparative analysis with UK cities, it has been identified that Belfast needs to look at the future provision of visual culture in order to compete nationally and internationally, including options of a hub and flagship venue. Work to date has identified these developments as critical drivers for culture, tourism and regeneration in the city.
2.3	This economic appraisal would respond to the city's need for destination venues and the sector's need for shared resources to best use funding available. The aim is not just to provide a world class visitor destination, but also to represent the artists, creative industries practitioners and craftspeople living and working in Belfast as well as addressing the shortage of temporary exhibition space in the city that currently limits opportunities to attract international events.
2.4	It is anticipated that the economic appraisal will focus on establishing a business case that would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The relocation of Golden Thread Gallery</li> <li>- A large-scale contemporary art gallery</li> <li>- A permanent collection of Art from the late 1960's to the present</li> <li>- A mixed-use space: community and outreach</li> <li>- Cultural Cinema: 4 screen art-house cinema</li> <li>- Café/bar</li> <li>- Retail space</li> <li>- Office accommodation external use</li> <li>- Office accommodation internal use</li> <li>- Storage</li> </ul>
2.5	<u>Artist Studios</u> A separate challenge to the future of visual arts in Belfast has been identified as the state of artist studios and one of the city's current studio providers, Flax Arts has approached Council for partnership funding to support a feasibility study. Funding from ACNI has been secured to examine the shortage of studio provision in the city with existing studios offering poor working conditions and long waiting lists. The study would respond to the city's need for self sustaining fit for purpose artist studios. Flax Art Studios would act as the lead organisation working in partnership with potential stakeholders including: Orchid Studios, University of Ulster and other studio providers. The feasibility study will identify the need for the best solution and future sustainability for the city and examine potential options across Belfast focusing on the regeneration of existing sites and buildings.
2.6	Initial research has been conducted into best practice studio provision examining comparative models in Dublin, Glasgow and London. The study will build on this

