



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Shadow Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	North Foreshore
Date:	20 March 2015
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Estates Manager, Property & Projects

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Council is currently leading on a number of significant regeneration projects within the city as part of its Investment Programme. The North Foreshore Giant's Park represents a major regeneration opportunity for the City of Belfast with the potential for significant economic, environmental and social benefits. Members will be aware that the North Foreshore Giant's Park is the former Dargan Road waste landfill comprising 340 acres. Whilst the site has many benefits in terms of location, planning designation, scale of opportunity etc, as a former landfill site it does however present a number of challenges in terms of development.
1.2	The Council had previously agreed that the North Foreshore should be developed as an Environmental Resource Park with potential for a 'Cleantech Business Cluster', as well as for recreational uses. The vision is to create opportunities for sustainable development and to bring significant economic, environmental and social benefits to the city. The Council's Investment Programme 2012 – 2015 identified the development of an Environmental Resource Park at the North Foreshore as one of the key strategic projects.
1.3	Members will be aware that the Council submitted a £8M European Regional Development Fund Application for identified infrastructure works for an Environmental Resource Park. These infrastructure works comprise new access roads and identified services and site preparation works to provide sites that can be offered for disposal (by way of lease) on the open market. The Council has recently received a Letter of Offer for this funding, based on £4M from ERDF, £2 million from INI with the remainder to be funded by BCC.
1.4	A report was brought to the Shadow Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on 16 January 2015 and approval was given to progress with the tender for the infrastructure works. This tender has been issued and is due to be returned on 2 April 2015. Subject to the Council agreeing to progress with the project and signing the Letter of Offer, it is intended to simultaneously run a marketing campaign for the disposal of the development sites whilst the infrastructure works are being developed.
1.5	Best practice study visits were recently undertaken by a number of Elected Members, MLA's and officers to Metabolon (Germany) and VITO (Belgium) and to Eden (Cornwall). A copy of a report is enclosed at Appendix 1, presenting the key findings and actions from these study visits in relation to the North Foreshore.

1.6	Following these study visits, a follow up meeting was held with the Elected Members who attended the visits. The feedback from Members at this meeting was that they considered that development of the North Foreshore was a significant and important project for the Council, given its potential to have a major impact on the economy as well as the environmental and social outcomes.
1.7	It was recognised however that there will need to be strong political support to champion and drive the project forward, give full consideration to development proposals as they emerge from the private sector or elsewhere, consider resources and resolve any issues with government departments.
1.8	The Council's prior experience in regenerating the Gasworks for example showed that strong political leadership was crucial in terms of maximising the economic and social benefits of this major regeneration project. The Gasworks site was developed in a similar way whereby the road and services infrastructure were put in at the start and development sites were then disposed of by the Council by way of long lease. Aligned to the physical development element there was also a focused economic initiatives strand that considered local employment initiatives etc
1.9	The Gasworks is now a very successful Business Park which has won a number of major regeneration awards, particularly in terms of the development of a former Brownfield site. The Gasworks has an estimated 4,000 people employed (2010/11) and the Council receive an annual equity rent (i.e. a percentage of the occupational rents) from the completed developments. They also received upfront capital premiums from a number of the developers.
1.10	Members will also be aware that Balmoral and Duncrue Industrial Estates were previously developed in a similar manner by the Council. It is worth noting that a previous Economic Impact Study undertaken by IPSOS Mori back in 2007 in relation to Balmoral and Duncrue Industrial Estates highlighted the important role that they played in supporting the continued urban and social regeneration of Belfast, as well as contributing significantly to employment. In 2007 the total turnover in Balmoral and Duncrue was estimated at £680M p.a. employing circa 6,500 people.
1.11	The total rental income to the Council from its leased assets is currently circa £6.75M per annum and this is primarily from the Gasworks, Balmoral and Duncrue. There is also significant rates income from the occupiers within these estates. The vision for the North Foreshore is that it will similarly provide a return on investment in future years in terms of capital or rental returns to Council, rates income, private sector investment and jobs. There are also important environmental benefits and, dependent on the nature of future occupiers, this could also contribute towards the NI renewable energy and recycling targets

2	Key Issues
2.1	A North Foreshore Members' Steering Group was established in December 2010 to drive and direct the development of the overall site. The remit of the Group was to champion and oversee the management of the North Foreshore, especially with regard to policy, resources and future development options for the site. Following a more recent decision to limit the number of Steering Groups and Steering Group meetings, the North Foreshore Steering Group as previously established has not met on a regular basis.

2.2	At the recent follow up meeting with those Members who had attended the study visits they expressed the view that it would be important to re-constitute the North Foreshore Steering Group and that the Group should continue its work to champion and oversee the delivery of the North Foreshore Regeneration Project. Members attending this meeting were from four of the main political parties. They suggested that the Steering Group could be made up of a representative from each of the six main political parties as well as local councillors from the Castle area, subject to the agreement of Committee.
-----	--

3	Resource Implications
3.1	Future resource implications for the development of the North Foreshore will depend on the future disposal and development options. The number and frequency of working group meetings will have an impact on Member and officer time.

4	Recommendations
4.1	Members are asked to: (i) note the above and the update report (enclosed at Appendix 1) in respect of the recent study visits. (ii) agree to the reconstitution of the North Foreshore Members' Steering Group (iii) consider the political representation on the Steering Group as indicated above.

5	Documents Attached
Appendix 1: North Foreshore: Study Visits Report- Metabolon; VITO and Eden Projects	

APPENDIX 1