



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Health and Environmental Services Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Holyland Strategic Study – Approval to Initiate a Tendering Exercise</b>
<b>Date:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> April, 2010
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### RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Committee is aware of the issues in the Holyland area of the city in respect of over densification of housing units and high levels of antisocial behaviour.

The demographic makeup of the Holyland area of South Belfast has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. It contains around 1,500 households with a population of 9,000<sup>1</sup>. This is likely to be due to a number of reasons which include: the expansion in student numbers at universities, a subsequent insufficient availability of university controlled and/or regulated accommodation, significant investment by private landlords in multiple occupancy accommodation, development control policy at the time, an increasing transient population and the attraction to students of living in this area of south Belfast. Longer term residents in the area, who have been there for many years, are faced with continuing problems of antisocial behaviour and noise nuisance and other environmental issues.

A Holyland Inter-agency Group, led by the Council, was formed in 2005 to facilitate a co-ordinated approach to delivering services and interventions in the area, as well as to influence policy change. This Group has input to the Department of the Environment's HMO Subject Plan (2008), introduced the community safety warden service, encouraged increased enforcement of HMO standards and improved cleansing services in the area. In 2010, it also developed an inter-agency action plan for the area, which includes a series of interventions and commitments to investigate or take forward various policy and / or legislative changes. However, the Group accepts that its effect on the underlying problems is limited.

The events of St Patrick's Day 2009 and 2010 continue to focus attention on the range of issues that impact on the quality of life of those living in the Holyland area. They also highlight the disproportionate allocation of agency resources to dealing with the issues that arise. A full cost analysis is currently being prepared for the intervention work for St Patrick's Day 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> HMO Subject Plan 2008

In recognising the complexities involved in finding any longer term solutions to these problems, Belfast City Council passed a motion in December 2009 calling for a strategic study for the area, as follows:

*The Council is concerned about the problems in the Holyland area of the City which have been evident for a number of years. It recognises the work that its officers have undertaken in leading a multi-agency group to take forward interventions to deal with some of the issues which residents have to face.*

*The Council also welcomes the recent initiative led by the Minister for Employment and Learning, bringing together a Stakeholder Forum aimed at involving all groups in defining the problems and suggesting possible solutions.*

*To support this work and ensure a long term strategic approach, the Council supports the commissioning of a discrete study, led by Council officials in conjunction with other agencies, which specifically identifies the underlying causes of these problems and leads to the development of proposals for a long term strategic plan for the area.*

A project team has been formed to progress such a strategic study aimed at identifying longer term, more sustainable solutions to the underlying problems in the Holyland and wider university area. This team is led by Belfast City Council with representatives from SIB, NIHE, DoE Planning Service, QUB, UUU and BMC.

## **KEY ISSUES**

In responding to the motion passed by Council, the multi-agency project team has developed a specification for the strategic study on longer term solutions for this area. It is intended that the Council will commission this work on behalf of the project team.

The purpose of the study is to identify options to achieve a more balanced, mixed tenure community with low levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime and a good quality environment and housing supply. It will consider issues such as the population density of the area, any additional controls on properties of multiple occupation, innovative solutions regarding student accommodation, as well as potential possibilities for regenerating the area. To develop such ideas, a review of best practice elsewhere will be incorporated into the research.

The report will present a number of options, each of which will be economically appraised. It will take account of the wider strategic plans for the city and the impact that any longer term changes to the make up of the Holyland may have on other areas of the city. Engagement with key stakeholders, including residents, students, agencies and elected representatives, is critical and will be an ongoing process throughout this project.

It is likely that the study will cost in the region of £50,000, but that each of the agencies involved in the project team will make a financial contribution. The costs to the Council will be no more than £15,000. Obviously recommendations arising from the study may have significant cost implications. However the intention is that the report should be presented to government departments and the Assembly for consideration. The study is set to be completed by January 2011.

Submissions received in respect of the tender exercise will be assessed against detailed evaluation criteria based on both cost and quality, in line with the Council's procurement procedures. The most economically advantageous tender will be awarded the contract.

The attached appendix provides more detail on the specification.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial**

It is estimated that this proposal requires a budget of up to £50,000. The Strategic Investment Board, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and academic institutions are currently seeking approval to allocate a total of £35,000 towards the overall cost of the project. The Committee is, therefore, requested to commit the remaining £15,000 to progress this study in partnership with the other agencies. This will be funded from the departmental Revenue Estimates for 2010/2011.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committee agrees:

- To the commencement of the tendering exercise;
- That the tender can be awarded under delegated authority in line with the evaluation criteria; and
- To allocate a maximum of £15,000 to this study, subject to a further £35,000 being secured from the other agencies.

## **DECISION TRACKING**

The Head of Environmental Health will submit progress reports to the Committee as required in respect of the study.

## **KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS**

SIB - Strategic Investment Board  
NIHE - Northern Ireland Housing Executive  
DoE - Department of the Environment  
UU – University of Ulster  
QUB - Queens University, Belfast  
BMC - Belfast Metropolitan College

## **DOCUMENT ATTACHED**

Stages included in the Specification

## Stages of Specification

The proposed study will include the following stages:

### **Stage 1**

- Engage with key stakeholders and clearly identify their concerns/issues and solutions. This should include an assessment of the behaviours, social and attitudinal aspects of student culture in Belfast for now and in the future.
- Analysis of the nature and extent of the current issues/problems in the Holyland and wider university area and identification of the underlying causes.
- Identification of what issues can be better managed within the existing legislative and statutory frameworks and what problems can only be addressed in the longer term with changes to these frameworks, investment in the area or significant policy shifts.
- Analysis of the demographic and physical characteristics of the area, including future trends.
- Analysis of accommodation choices, needs, demands and future trends in the area.
- Review and analysis of the current investment and service provision in the area.
- Identification of the current gaps in relation to the current investment, service provision, legislative controls, policy positions and management arrangements in place.
- Review and analysis of best practice and case studies (both within Europe and internationally) of how:
  - student accommodation/HMOs (or high density housing) are managed effectively to ensure a more balanced approach from the perspectives of population mix, spatial planning and housing mix,
  - balanced / sustainable communities have been achieved when problems which could be correlated to this have arisen in other Cities.
- Recommendations / options for improvements for the Holyland and wider university area.

### **Stage 2**

- Exploration of the future opportunities and implications for developing/regenerating the area, taking account of the strategic, legislative and financial context. This should include:
  - Consideration of the possibility of innovative private sector incentives, for example, tax breaks, capital gains, public finance schemes etc.
  - Exploration of the viability of purpose built student accommodation in Belfast and if appropriate identify potential sites
- Exploration of future opportunities to implement a specific community development approach in the area.
- Engagement of key stakeholders.

### **Stage 3**

- Assess the positive and negative impacts of proposed options/models for developing the area, including the feasibility of regenerating the Holyland and wider university area.
- Carry out a full options appraisal, including an assessment of the monetary and non-monetary costs, benefits and risks for the various options for the future improvement of the area.
- Recommend the elements which should be incorporated within a long term strategy.