



Belfast City Council

Report to: Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Subject: **Titanic Signature Project – Flying Theatre Alternative**

Date: 20 August 2010

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Relevant Background Information

Members are aware that the Titanic Signature Project (TSP) a flagship tourist attraction to which the Council has committed £10m funding is now under construction with a completion date of 2012.

Key Issues

As part of performance reporting it is intended to regularly update Committee on the progress of major projects which the Council are supporting via the City Investment Fund ie TSP, Lyric, MAC and Connswater Community Greenway. The first formal report on major projects is due in September. Members have also agreed to forming a Member stakeholder group for TSP and this will be detailed in the September report.

However an important issue has arisen in regard to the TSP which requires Council input this month.

First of all it is important to note that progress in terms of construction is well on target with no additions or omission to this contract sum and with £25m expenditure certified to date. **Appendix 1** contains up to date photographs of construction.

Harcourt Construction who are building the scheme and TQL who are now also responsible for operating the venue have over the past few months been considering an Immersive Theatre as opposed to the agreed Flying Theatre concept. Details of what this entails have been received this month.

Members will recall that the Flying Theatre is a thrill ride designed to take visitors on a dive to the Titanic or on a flight over Northern Ireland, using a combination of dynamic motion and cinematic production technology.

The Flying Theatre is part of the contract and any change will be a major variation to the contract. The Flying Theatre was broadly welcomed as part of the business case analysis for the project but was seen as separate from and not an integrated part of the main exhibition. It was also seen as offering a flexible multi purpose space for use for lectures and other one off events as well as playing a key role during festivals and other seasonal offerings.

As the design of the overall project and operating contract has progressed a number of drawbacks of the Flying Theatre have become more evident ie possible lack of interest to older people, height restrictions affecting young children and family groups and the cost of refreshing the film experience. While the Flying Theatre was believed to be the best option at the time TQL/Harcourt who are now the operator favour a change to an Immersive Theatre.

The Immersive Theatre proposal arose from discussions between Harcourt Construction and Professor Ballard, who first located the remains of Titanic. Discussions were confidential to begin with as the relationship with the Ballard team had to be nurtured to ensure the option was deliverable before raising expectations.

Wider stakeholders become aware of the concept earlier this year as options were discussed at the Storyline Group which is working on the details of how the Titanic story is told.

A detailed report from Harcourt was recently received this month and argues the case for change as detailed in appendix 2.

In essence the new Immersive Theatre overcomes the issue of a disconnected formal gallery but meets all the other performance criteria for the Flying Theatre. It also brings the unique Ballard asset base to Belfast and adds of course to the whole authenticity of the visitor experience. Included in this feature as an Ocean Exploration Centre allowing direct real time exchange with scientists on board Ballard's exploration vessels as well as linking to the universities and marine schools across Europe.

Current Position

Titanic Foundation the charity established to manage the project overall has recommended the Immersive Theatre proposals be accepted subject to:

- an assurance from Harcourt Construction that the capital costs are capped at £3.625m, the cost of the Flying Theatre to ensure that funders/doners are not exposed to a risk of further funding requirement.
- the capital costs be subject to a value for money assessment.

Titanic Foundation acknowledges that the emergence of the Immersive Theatre as an option has arisen late in the process with construction well advanced and creates

difficulties for stakeholders both in terms of perception and timescales for decision. However it is convinced that it is significantly strengthens the exhibition in terms of storyline and quality of visitor experience providing a more inclusive offering accessible to all visitors.

Accordingly Titanic Foundation would appreciate the views of funders.

Resource Implications

None.

Recommendations

- (i) The Committee is asked for its views on the proposed immersive theatre and to consider a further presentation from Titanic Foundation.
- (ii) The Committee considers a site visit before establishing a stakeholder group in September.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Photographs of Construction

Appendix 2 – Report from Harcourt