

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 12th August, 2020

REMOTE MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson);
Alderman Kingston; and
Councillors Beattie, Donnelly, Dorrian, Ferguson,
Gormley, Hanvey, Heading, Lyons, Maskey,
McAllister, McMullan, Murphy, O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

Also attended: Councillors de Faoite and Flynn.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager - Economy;
Ms. E. Henry, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism;
Mrs. C. Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager (East);
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Councillors Howard, T. Kelly and McLaughlin.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Beattie, Lyons and O'Hara declared an interest in relation to item 3(b) UKRI Strength in Places Funding, in that they were members of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Request to Present

Translink - Central Area Track Renewal

The Committee agreed to receive a written presentation from Translink in relation to the Central Area Track Renewal project, in the first instance, with a follow-up presentation at a future remote meeting, if necessary.

Growing Business and the Economy

Belfast Castle and Malone House Potential Re-opening date

The Committee was reminded that Belfast Castle and Malone House were currently closed as a result of Covid 19 regulations and all staff had been furloughed with

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the exception of the operations managers for each building who returned to working part time hours from 6th July in order to manage customer enquiries and bookings.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager (East) advised that management had reviewed the diary bookings for use of the two venues. She explained that officers had considered a range of options for the reopening of Belfast Castle and Malone House taking into account the number of staff currently on furlough, the small number of diary bookings which could be honoured either on grounds of capacity or as a result of the embargo on conference events, the impact of wedding cancellations on the customer and the resulting financial modelling. She concluded that the full reopening of the buildings at this time for normal business was not financially viable.

In liaison with the catering provider, French Village, Neighbourhood Services Manager recommended that a phased reopening of both venues for pre-existing bookings for weddings and catering and to accommodate new permissible bookings focusing on Friday, Saturday and Sundays only, during September and October 2020, and were currently working with the catering provider to put in place a new retail offering in the current context.

She explained that, to ensure the protection of both staff and customers, each venue would have significant Covid-19 Health and Safety measures in place. There would be changes to the numbers of people that can be accommodated in each venue and staff would engage with customers over the coming weeks to support customer understanding of the impact of the Covid risk assessment on their event planning. She confirmed that health and safety measures would be implemented, which included essential signage, one way systems established where necessary, hand sanitising stations, deep cleaning and other necessary arrangements.

She informed the Committee that the situation would be kept under review as circumstances of furlough and NI Executive restrictions on events and gatherings change and it was anticipated that the reopening of the venues would increase the overall deficit by £100k approximately depending on the uptake of new bookings and the success of the retail offering.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the reopening plan for Belfast Castle and Malone House from 1st September, 2020 on a phased basis, subject to business demand.

UKRI Strength in Places Funding

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on a successful collaborative bid by the Belfast Maritime Consortium which has been awarded £33m from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under their ‘Strength in Places’ funding initiative. The report seeks approval for Belfast City Council to**

formally engage in the consortium to bring the project to fruition.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the work undertaken to date as part of the Belfast Maritime Consortium to secure £33m from UKRI's Strength in Places Funding and the potential impact the project will have in the Belfast City Council area
- Note Belfast City Council's engagement on the project to date as part of the consortium and agree to the commitment required to support the delivery of the project to bring it to fruition.

3.0 Main report

3.1 UK Research and Innovation's Strength in Places Fund is a competitive funding scheme that takes a place-based approach to research and innovation funding to support significant regional growth. It works in partnership with universities, research organisations, businesses, charities, and government to create the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish. Since 2017, Belfast City Council has been engaging with Artemis Technologies on their work to bring forward a funding proposal to UKRI. This support has included providing a letter of support for a NI consortium bid (Belfast Maritime Consortium) to develop zero emission maritime transport in Belfast.

3.2 The Belfast Maritime Consortium, which is led by Artemis Technologies (ATL), consists of a number of industry, academia and local government members including Bombardier, Stena Line, Harland and Wolff, Belfast Harbour, Creative Composites, Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University, NIACE, Belfast Metropolitan College, Belfast City Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Catalyst Inc and Invest NI.

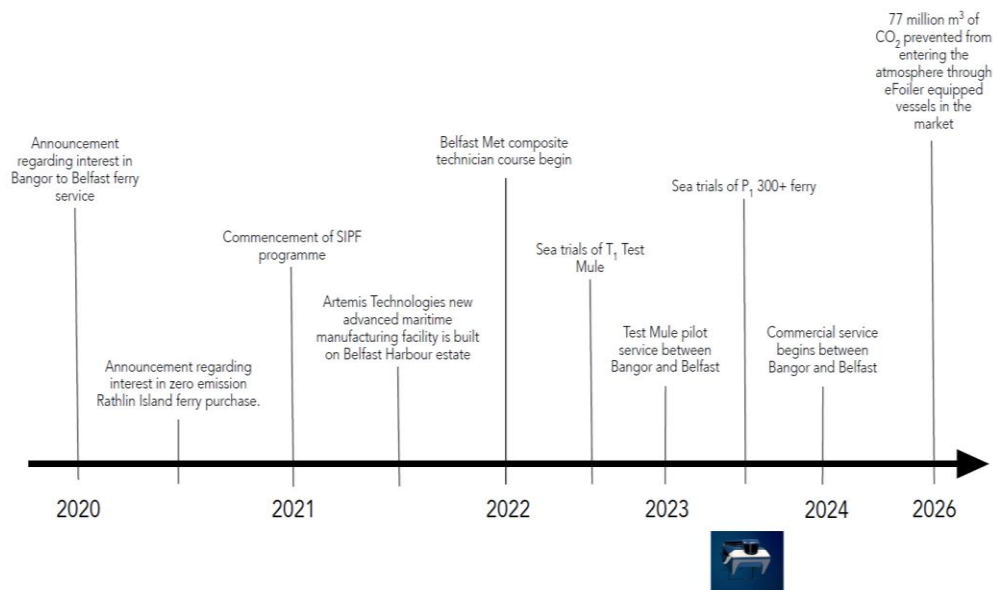
3.3 The project has successfully secured £33m from UKRI for development and delivery work over the next 4 years. It aims to exploit and develop Belfast's expertise in advanced composites to help reinvigorate past maritime leadership in innovative shipbuilding technologies. It will develop an education programme and a route to highly skilled jobs in the Belfast area and will enhance Belfast's environmental credentials with developing niche specialisms in zero carbon maritime transport. The project will ultimately deliver a new

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class of zero emission maritime transport vessel design and build capability that has numerous commercial applications. All of this work will combine to establish, in Belfast, a world class maritime capability and deliver a high value product for export.

3.4 The Belfast Maritime Consortium will work with the local supply chain to produce the world's first autonomously controlled 'fully submerged' electric hydrofoiling vessel, and develop the technical and operational requirements for a maritime transport system of the future. The project will not only create new commercial opportunities, but also help tackle major environmental challenges in line with wider government policy, which calls for all new vessels to be designed with zero-emissions capable technologies by 2025.

3.5 The key stages project milestones are as follows:



3.6 To enable the project to commence, Belfast City Council along with each of the other consortium members, is required to enter into a formal collaboration agreement. This agreement outlines the commitment of each of the parties to the project and the terms of engagement. For the council, this includes:

- **Contributing to the project working groups when they are established to inform and shape the project**
- **Supporting the development of a pilot scheme between Belfast and Bangor by establishing, upgrading and otherwise ensuring that all or any infrastructure owned or controlled by the council is available for use.**

This element of the project may require a financial commitment from the council of up to £250,000. However this will be subject to future scoping of the requirement, availability of funding and approval from this committee at a later date and will be a commitment in principle only at this point

- Providing marketing support for the pilot scheme when it is live including engaging with customers to undertake research and insights into customer preferences.

3.7 This project has the potential to realise a range of economic benefits across the city including the creation of one of the UK's most advanced composite design and manufacturing facilities, in the heart of Belfast Harbour. The project will also have a significant impact on achieving the council's inclusive growth ambitions by undertaking school engagement projects, delivering apprenticeship schemes, and implementing new courses in advanced composites at Belfast Metropolitan College as well as creating employment opportunities in the city, estimated at 165 highly skilled jobs initially, increasing to 400 as it develops.

3.8 Financial & Resource Implications

At this stage of the project, Belfast City Council is not required to make a financial contribution. As the project develops any funding requirements will subject to approval of this Committee and available budget.

3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

Equality and good relations implications will be considered as the project progresses. Partners beyond the Belfast City Council area are involved in the project.”

During discussion, Members raised the importance of the long-term sustainability of the project, the potential use of apprenticeships, community opportunities and the involvement of local supply chains.

After discussion the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Tourism Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

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1.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in April 2020 the work programme to support tourism development was agreed. Given the current circumstances and the specific ongoing challenges for tourism, the purpose of this report is to update Members on:

- The current status of the work programme relating to tourism development in the city.
- The early forecast relating to the short, medium and longer term impacts of Covid-19 on tourism.
- The initial response and emerging priorities to help stabilise and grow tourism in the city.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and the contribution that the work programme for 2020/21 will make to supporting the recovery of the tourism sector.
- Approve the development of a ten year tourism plan for Belfast and agree to receive a draft of this plan in November 2020.
- Approve participation in the Global Destination Sustainability Index led by Council in partnership with Visit Belfast.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will be aware that at a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in August 2019 the new ten year cultural strategy for Belfast, *A City Imagining 2020-30* was agreed. This was further supported by implementation plans for the period 2020-23 and a work programme for 2020-21. Included in each of these documents was a series of priority actions relating to tourism support and development. The intention was that this would be developed out into a specific tourism action plan. It is now necessary to re-examine these priorities in light of Covid-19.

Tourism Growth Pre Covid-19

3.2 In August 2019 Belfast City Council agreed a new ten year cultural strategy, *A City Imagining 2020-2030*, to drive transformation in the city. For the first time, the scope of this strategy brought together under one compelling vision a number of areas including tourism, culture, heritage, arts, events and festivals.

- 3.3 ***A City Imagining*** acknowledges that whilst Belfast has enjoyed relative growth in tourism over recent years that in turn has supported regional development, it is necessary for the city to push the development of tourism on to the next level. Belfast's first community plan, the ***Belfast Agenda***, also articulates the importance of delivering a culturally vibrant city both for residents and visitors as well as acting as an attractive driver for inward investment. It is anticipated that citywide investment in a culturally vibrant place will support changing perspectives of Belfast as a place to visit, live, work and invest. In order to continue to build on the value of out-of-state tourism and welcome more overnight stays in our visitor accommodation it is essential that we collaborate with our tourism sector to evolve, broaden, deepen and expand the tourism offer currently available in Belfast.
- 3.4 Despite significant growth and the success of flagship projects such as Titanic Belfast there is still a gap in scale and maturity of the local industry when compared with other regions. Notably, Northern Ireland lags behind UK regions and Republic of Ireland with respect to tourism as a driver for Gross Value Added. However the positive trajectory in place before Covid-19 had identified tourism growth as both feasible and a necessary part of inclusive economic growth.
- 3.5 It was in this context that Tourism NI set the ambitious target of doubling the value of the tourism industry to £2 billion by 2030. A key element of opportunity further reinforced by ambitions of the Belfast Region City Deal was getting a bigger share of the international visitors coming to the island of Ireland to travel to Belfast and the Belfast region.

Impact of Covid-19

- 3.6 While the full impact of Covid-19 is as yet unknown what is clear is that recovery will require new and innovative approaches in an increasingly competitive market. As the regional driver, Belfast will be hugely significant to this growth ambition, both in terms of visitor spend and the creation of new jobs. It is therefore imperative that our city break destination is developed in a strategic way which maximises the economic benefits which can be derived from tourism for local industries, businesses and communities, as well as increasing visitor numbers and spend and improving overall satisfaction levels.
- 3.7 An initial report on the impact of Covid-19 on Belfast has been commissioned from EY which has made a number of key observations as summarised below. These are important to

consider when seeking to understand the potential level of impact on the city and how the response should be a strategic and sustainable approach to recovery.

Belfast's role in regional tourism

- Belfast is an important attractor for international, high value tourists to the region.
- Belfast's share of out of state tourism spend has been significantly higher than the NI-wide share (83% v 72%).
- Spending by tourists in Belfast has outpaced the NI average, growing by 20% year on year compared to 4.5% regionally.
- Belfast has grown at a faster rate than the rest of NI mainly because of its attractiveness in two high value markets – city breaks and business tourism.

Covid Impact

3.8 As a result of the dominance of these two high value markets, Covid could have a stronger impact on the tourism and hospitality sectors in Belfast for 4 reasons:

1. Belfast tourism relies more heavily on overseas tourism than on domestic staycations.
2. City breaks are less attractive than rural tourism during a sanitary crisis.
3. Cruise tourism is likely to be very adversely affected by Covid.
4. Business tourism is a key driver for Belfast and likely to take longer to recover.

3.9 The recovery forecast for tourism is based on 3 scenarios:

1. **Slow and steady:** Under this scenario, Covid is considered primarily as a health crisis with underlying economic implications. A phased reopening with restriction measures in place until early 2021. By this date the hospitality industry would be in a position to be fully operational. International travel restrictions would mean reliance on RoI and GB markets. Even in this optimistic scenario, Belfast's tourism market is significantly affected due to the reliance on the international market for growth in recent years.

2. **Extended health crisis:** Under this scenario restrictions on the hospitality sector continue for longer than in scenario 1. By virtue of restrictions, there is even more focus on an all-island and domestic market. Under this scenario the all-island spend is predicted to rise from 26% (2019) to 37% (2020). In this scenario GB tourism is not predicted to recover its 2019 level until 2022 with spending falling by 41% in 2020.
 3. **Structural health, economic and tourism crisis:** This scenario considers a continued health crisis with a second wave in the pandemic. This would result in a period of further closure of tourism and hospitality industries. Travel by plane or cruise ships would not be permitted. This represents a year on year loss of over £31M to the tourism industry in Belfast. This scenario would disproportionately affect Belfast which is more dependent on out of state tourism than the wider region. The UK and RoI markets would be a key driver of demand for the foreseeable future. The crisis will have led to behavioural changes with consumers opting for safer staycations which align to their values (sustainability, authenticity, local values).
- 3.10 Regardless of which of these scenarios play out, what is clear is that the response must be phased recognising short, medium and longer term priorities within an overall recovery plan. A multi-layered approach will be required that builds on the city's strengths and successful growth in recent years whilst recognising the need to adapt existing models where required as well as introducing new innovative and at times disruptive solutions.
- 3.11 The report sets out a number of recommendations and next steps including the need to target the right market at the right time in order to support tourism demand placing a short term focus on domestic tourism.

Immediate steps

- 3.12 What is emerging is a clear need to support the stabilisation of tourism up to 2022 with a need to then plan for longer term sustainable growth including the recovery of the two priority markets for Belfast, business tourism and city breaks. Council will be working in partnership with TNI and VB to develop and implement a new hybrid business tourism model to secure Belfast's future in a competitive market through combining digital capability with onsite offer.

3.13 Work to develop local tourism continues as a priority and is critical to supporting inclusive growth. This includes a significant programme of capacity building and information sharing to improve the quality of existing products, bringing forward new products and helping develop coherent packages and experiences that are aligned to visitor needs.

3.14 It is proposed that the focus of activity for 2020-21 continues as:

- Use of local conduits where possible to increase engagement and promote the benefits of participation as well as identifying new and emerging partners.
- Capacity building and development work on cluster approach, in conjunction with Tourism NI - involvement of industry experts and practitioners who have first-hand experience of this activity.
- Supporting and commissioning robust evidence base to increase understanding of the market.

3.15 As well as these immediate steps it is also necessary to plan for the future. It is therefore recommended that two longer term pieces of work are initiated. These are:

- Ten year tourism recovery plan
- Global Sustainability Index

10 year tourism recovery plan

3.16 Following the completion of the ten year cultural strategy a detailed tourism action plan was due to be developed. It is recommended that this work proceeds with a focus on tourism recovery through identifying key actions that will support stabilisation, innovation and sustainable growth. This plan will be developed in partnership with key stakeholders including the establishment of a strategic oversight group. A draft plan will be presented to Committee in November 2020.

Global Destination Sustainability Index

3.17 The Global Destination Sustainability Index is the world's leading benchmarking and performance Index for cities, their events and their visitor economy. Its purpose is to engage, enable and inspire cities to become more sustainable places to visit, meet and thrive in. In addition to benchmarking a city's environmental strategy and social sustainability performance, the GDS-Index assess criteria that are industry specific: industry supplier support (restaurants, hotels, conference centres) and convention bureau strategy and initiatives.

Alongside benchmarking it helps destination management organisations, convention bureaus, key industry associations suppliers and clients to develop effective strategies and practices in support of sustainability goals.

3.18 Since 2019, over 60 cities have started the process of benchmarking and assessment. The goal is to have 300 cities collaborating by 2023. The Index is based on 69 Indicators broken down into four categories:

- City Environmental Performance
- City Social Performance
- Supplier Performance
- Destination Management Performance

3.19 Once the initial benchmarking is complete – Belfast will receive a detailed report with performance improvement recommendations as well as a ranking; however, it should be noted that the first year’s ranking will not be publicly released, giving the city a full year to review and implement initial recommendations.

3.20 It is also recommended that Belfast develops a tourism supply to foster a sustainable economic model creating jobs and improving local quality of life with specific actions including:

- Launch a wide consultation with key stakeholders and locals regarding the role tourism can play in a city like Belfast (e.g. urban regeneration, housing, sustainability, jobs, social inclusion, international attractiveness)
- Focus on the development of resilient tourism attractions (e.g. mix of outdoor and indoor spaces, online content, attractive to locals)
- Identify ways for Belfast or some specific attractions within the City to be distinguished internationally in order to remind domestic tourist about the attractiveness of the region (e.g. awards, UNESCO, travel guides)

3.21 Given the need to differentiate the Belfast offer it is also important to consider key strategic opportunities that could bolster investment in the sector in order to support recovery and future growth. These will be given full consideration as part of the ten year plan and could include:

Strategic Initiatives and Campaigns

3.22 Commitment to long-term initiatives contained in cultural strategy with additional consideration including 2023 and UNESCO City of Music.

Infrastructure

3.23 Delivering tourism pillar of the Belfast Regional City Deal including Destination Hub focusing on:

- Commitment to inclusive growth, ensuring the economic benefit of the Belfast Destination Hub development is spread across and connected into the rest of the city.
- Commitment to the creation of secure and sustainable employment and skills development.
- Commitment to local engagement and participation to ensure that Belfast residents are actively engaged and supported to access opportunities throughout the development and realisation of the project.

Integration and connectivity

3.24 Delivering a long-term fully integrated tourism development model for the city that includes:

- Adopting a place-based approach to the development of our neighbourhoods through local tourism framework and investment that supports product development, jobs creation and destination management.
- Enhancing civic pride and cultural vibrancy to attract locals and visitors.
- Developing a marketing and communications approach that recognises the breadth and authenticity of the city's tourism offer.

3.25 The success of tourism in the city is interdependent on the resilience of the city's culture, arts, heritage and events. A report will be presented to Committee in September to update Members on the impact of Covid-19 on these sectors with proposals on how Council can work with other funders and stakeholders to support recovery.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.26 There are no new financial implications. The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2020/21 budget for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy Departmental budget in line with existing approvals.

All existing programmes are subject to ongoing review with cost savings identified where projects cannot proceed due to Covid-19.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.27 The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Any further investment or significant programmes will include equality screening as appropriate including a new tourism recovery plan and the recommendations set out in the Global Destination Sustainability Index.”**

In response to Members questions regarding local and neighbourhood tourism, the Senior Manager – Culture and Tourism highlighted the multi-layered and phased approach to market recovery, and explained further the short, medium and longer term priorities within the overall recovery plan.

The Committee adopted the recommendations and noted that a report would be submitted to a future Committee in relation to how Belfast’s tourism offer was being represented in city and regional campaigns.

**Economic Recovery Work - Collaboration
with other Local Authorities (SOLACE)**

The Committee was provided with an update on the recent establishment of a working group to support economic recovery, involving partners from all councils, and to set out the high level work programme for the group.

The Senior Manager – Economy advised that, as part of the local government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly its impact on local economies, SOLACE had agreed to establish a number of working groups to take forward collaborative thinking and actions on areas of mutual and collective interest.

She pointed out that two working groups would be established to focus on distinct areas of work: Council Recovery (internal) and Regional Recovery (external). She highlighted that the Regional Recovery working group would be chaired by Mrs. S. Wylie, and comprises economic development representatives from across the 11 Councils.

The Senior Manager explained that the purpose of the group and the work that it would undertake was to:

- Build an understanding of the scale of the recovery challenge in local council areas across Northern Ireland as well as the impact of global economic changes, including the impact of the EU’s exit from the European Union;
- Identify a series of key short, medium and long term interventions that could contribute to economic and social recovery, thereby stabilising local economies and building local resilience;

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- Act as a conduit for engagement with relevant statutory agencies and key decision makers within relevant government departments in order to ensure a collaborative approach to working and to secure additional support for relevant interventions;
- Further the position of local government as a key delivery partner and support the ongoing dialogue around further devolution of powers to local level and the need for place-based responses to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth; and
- Position Local Government as a key player in co-design of a new economic strategy for NI where place based approaches and sub-regional economies were recognised.

She informed the Committee that, since its establishment in May 2020, the group had met on a number of occasions and the work to date had focused on a number of key issues including:

- Sharing information on town and city centre re-opening and recovery plans;
- Identifying key tactical and strategic engagement opportunities to ensure that local government was represented in and able to influence significant investment decisions relating to economic recovery; and
- Engaging with Invest NI to explore opportunities for accessing additional ERDF resources to support business recovery.

She explained that some of the emerging priority areas of work included securing council-level input into regional recovery plans, leveraging access to additional government resources to support recovery work and building a case to argue for additional ED and regeneration powers for councils – with associated core funding models (evolving from the City Deal approach).

She confirmed that as these work packages emerge, officers would report back to the Committee as appropriate, identifying the specific impact and opportunity for the Council.

The Committee noted:

- the establishment of the SOLACE District/Regional Recovery Group; and
- the key areas of collaborative work as agreed with all council partners.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Update on Future City Centre Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

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1.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- Advise Members on the pending review of the Future City Centre Programme in light of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Update Members on the progression of a number of key projects within the ‘Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements’ work stream of the Future City Programme.
- Note that scheme design options are being developed for the Frederick St /York St junction,
- Update Members in relation to the adoption of the Inner North West Masterplan.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are requested to:

- i. Note that the Future City Centre Programme is being reviewed in light of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy, businesses and the City Centre,
- ii. Note the progress of key projects within the ‘Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements’ work stream of the Future City Centre Programme, notably the Entries and Lanes Initiative; the Public Realm Catalyst Projects; the pop-up park at Cathedral Gardens, and pilot lighting projects developed alongside the emerging Lighting Strategy for Belfast.
- iii. Note the development of design options, in collaboration with DfC and DfI, for the Frederick St /York St junction and adjacent streets, with proposals to be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.
- iv. Note that the DfC Minister has approved the adoption of the Inner North West Masterplan.

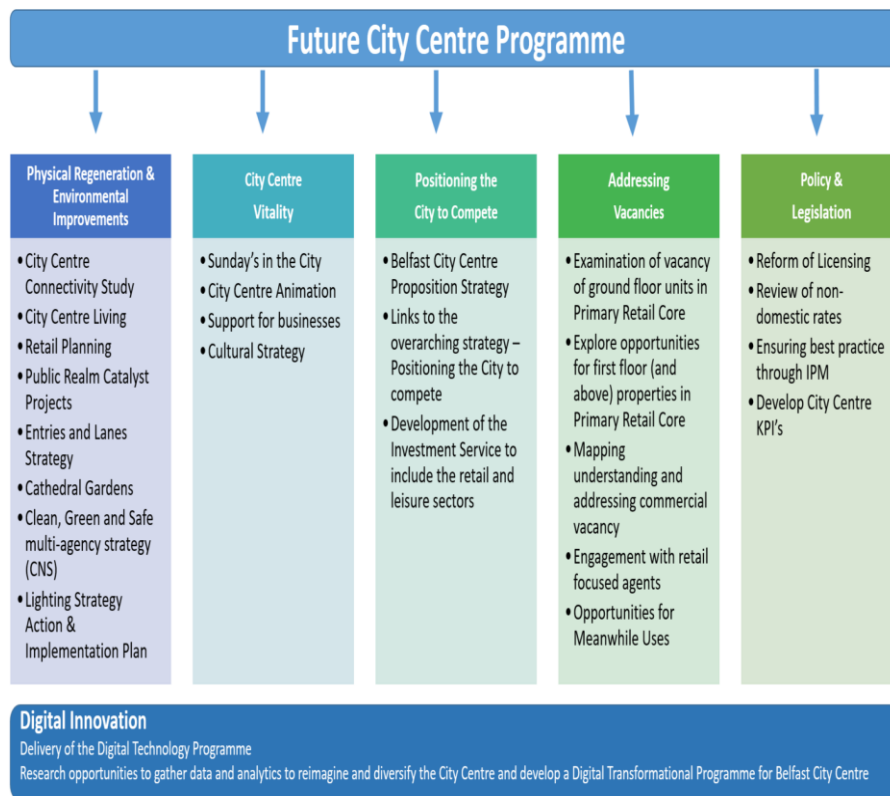
3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2020, Members received the Executive Summary of the Belfast City Centre Retail Analysis as developed by Pragma Consulting Limited. The Retail Analysis identified the challenges facing Belfast’s retail sector and provided recommendations on how best to address these challenges to ensure the City offers a dynamic and experiential destination.

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- 3.2 At the same meeting, Members were also informed of the emerging ‘Future City Centre Programme’ (FCC), which builds on the key findings and recommendations outlined in the Pragma report. The FCC Programme has been developed in line with the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan, the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Cultural Strategy (A City Imagining), and has been informed by the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy.**
- 3.3 While many of the priorities set out in the February report remain valid, there is a need to recast the focus of the Programme in the context of COVID-19 and the significant adverse impact on the City Centre. It is difficult to predict the future trends and challenges that will be faced as the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the City Centre emerges but it is critical that the FCC Programme remains agile in order to respond to rapidly shifting local, national and international factors that will continue to shape the role and performance of the City Centre.**
- 3.4 As previously reported to Committee, within the current FCC Programme, the key areas of work fall into five priority pillars and with a further cross-cutting theme of ‘Digital Innovation’ underpinning these pillars, as set out below. The project elements within each of the pillars are not exhaustive.**



- 3.5 Members will be aware that the Council recently obtained partner membership with the Institute of Place Management (IPM). The IPM is an international professional body that supports those committed to developing, managing and making places better. IPM have been appointed by the UK Government to lead the High Streets Task Force in England and deliver support to local authorities and communities working to transform their high streets. They have also developed a COVID-19 Recovery Framework to guide recovery for town and city centres. Officers are currently working with IPM to arrange an independent review of the FCC Programme to ensure its focus is relevant, particularly during these challenging times, and to incorporate best practice and identify priority actions to help address the challenges of the City Centre.
- 3.6 'Addressing Vacancies' is one of the priority work streams within the FCC Programme and will be a key component of short and longer term recovery in light of growing pressures on numerous sectors occupying space within the City Centre. A number of recent high profile closure announcements including Easons and Tesco Metro highlight the challenges faced by city centre businesses including, but not limited to, the retail sector. In this context, the review of the FCC Programme will place particular emphasis on developing a range of options for intervention to tackle the issue of vacant premises in the City Centre. Given the complex range of factors that can lead to vacancy ongoing engagement with a range of City Centre stakeholders will be particularly important.
- 3.7 **FCC Programme: Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements**
- A number of physical projects are currently underway within the City Centre, and while delivery timescales have been impacted by Covid-19, significant progress has been made in recent months. Clearly these initiatives were developed pre-Covid, but are very much in line with short term reopening and longer term recovery measures aimed at improving sustainable movement and connectivity, enhancing streets and spaces, creating multi-functional places of interest, and growing the recreation function of the City Centre for residents and visitors. A brief progress update is noted below with images included at Appendix 1.
- 3.8 **Public Realm Catalyst Projects**

Historic developer contributions have been aligned with DfC funding to develop and deliver a programme of public realm improvements in 5 City Centre streets: Chichester St; Callendar St; College Ct; College St and College Avenue. The '5C's' scheme has an estimated value in the region of £2m, with c£750K from developer contributions and remainder DfC funding, and will include resurfacing, lighting, street furniture and soft landscaping. The design team have commenced engagement with key stakeholders, and will be facilitating further consultation with Elected Members in relation to emerging concept designs during August, prior to public consultation planned for September.

- 3.9 Other potential public realm catalyst projects are being developed in a number of locations, including the Fredrick Street /York Street Junction to address the lack of cycling and walking provision at this key node. Officers have met with DfC and DfI officials who have engaged consultants to develop high level design options for this junction. Further collaborative work between Belfast City Council, DfC and DfI will be required to fully develop design information for both the junction and adjacent streets, which will define the scope of improvements that can be delivered using historic developer contributions in this area, alongside potential DfC and DfI contributions. Details of this scheme will be brought to a future meeting of Committee.

3.10 **Belfast Entries and Lanes**

Work is continuing to transform a number of City Centre pedestrian links. Phase 1 of the Entries and Lanes scheme includes seven entries: Castle Arcade; Winecellar Entry; Crown Entry; Wilson's Court; Joy's Entry; Pottinger's Entry and Cole's Alley. The project involves general repair work, repainting, enhanced lighting, new signage, planting and bespoke artwork. Initial works commenced on-site in July (photographs attached at Appendix 1).

- 3.11 The scheme applies a bespoke place-making approach to transform each entry, making them more welcoming and vibrant as pedestrian links that provide enhanced permeability and connectivity, and act as places of interest and activity in their own right. There is also potential to accommodate the use of external space by businesses in line with wider recovery initiatives. Through increased footfall, a further aim is to reduce instances of anti-social behaviour.

- 3.12 Included at Appendix 1 are some of the painted murals installed to date. Also included is a visualisation of the scheme proposed in Castle Arcade. A hand painted mural will accompany a large

lighting feature that is programmable with music for special events. Officers are working to secure permissions for these elements, with installation planned during early September. While the design response in each entry is bespoke and reflects unique spatial and historical characteristics, a consistent design ethos has been applied across the scheme as a whole, with unifying elements such as signage and interpretation.

- 3.13 Officers have received positive feedback in relation to Phase 1 and have received requests from property owners, business tenants and residents for similar work in additional entries and lanes. Early engagement has shown that there is significant potential to develop a further phase of work, and officers have developed design concepts and are exploring potential funding opportunities. A further report will be brought to Committee as the first phase of work concludes, setting out options for additional work pending any future funding opportunities.

3.14 Cathedral Gardens Pop-Up Park

Work commenced in March 2020 and while there have been programme delays due to Covid-19 restrictions, the expected completion date is now mid-August 2020. The project will deliver a multi-functional family-friendly space that is expected to be in place for approximately 2 years, while a permanent park and public realm scheme for Cathedral Gardens is developed.

- 3.15 The scheme includes resurfacing and installation of play / parkour equipment, electricity points to facilitate events, and enhanced lighting. Fitting of artificial grass (at play equipment), painting of hard surfaces, additional street furniture installation and soft landscaping / planting will also be carried out during August. Appendix 1 includes photographs of work on site as of 27th July.

3.16 Lighting Strategy- Pilot Project

Following on from earlier lighting pilot projects (a temporary neon artwork installation at Castle Arcade and a large scale Xmas 2019 animation (images at Appendix 1), a further lighting installation has been completed in Castle Street. This pilot consists of a series of interactive projector units, installed along a stretch of hoarding to create an image controlled and manipulated by pedestrian movement. The technology has been developed specifically for this project and is designed to provide reflected light while dealing with the issue of dead or closed frontages through visual and audio animation. The creative content for the projectors has been developed by a local visual artist and the two 'animations' are themed on the

rivers that run beneath the city, and the starling murmurations that are seen over the River Lagan. Three units have been installed in Castle Street, with a further six to be located elsewhere in the city centre during September/October 2020. The units are a platform which can be used to upload new content in the future themed to city events, festivals etc. Images are included at Appendix 1.

- 3.17 The learnings from the pilot projects have shaped the considerations and guidance within 'Luminous City, A Lighting Strategy for Belfast', which is currently being drafted. An action plan detailing future short and longer term lighting projects is currently being developed and it is proposed that a full report, with presentation, will be brought to September's CGR Committee.

3.18 **Masterplan Adoption**

Members will recall that the delivery of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy includes the development of a number of more detailed Masterplans to help support and shape city centre developments. The Inner North West (INW) Masterplan comprises a critical part of the city centre and is intended to guide the development of a mixed use, city centre neighbourhood including residential, commercial, retail and leisure functions, fully connected by high quality public realm. Following a 12 week public consultation the City Growth and Regeneration Committee approved the updated INW Masterplan in December 2018.

- 3.19 There is a significant amount of publicly owned land in the area which provides the opportunity for the public sector to influence and drive development in a co-ordinated manner. The Masterplan was produced in consultation with the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) with a view to close collaboration to support delivery. Council and DfC have subsequently worked jointly to develop the INW Action Plan which provides further detail on the initial proposals set out in the INW Masterplan, and identifies a number of short, medium and long term priorities and projects.

- 3.20 In June 2020, DfC confirmed Ministerial approval of the Inner Northwest Masterplan. This is a significant step in establishing a joint BCC/DfC delivery framework for the regeneration of this part of the City and provides certainty in terms of statutory commitment to the Masterplan, which supports associated work including the ongoing Strategic Site Assessments.

3.21 Finance and Resource Implications

Any costs associated with the development of the Future City Centre Programme and progression of design options for the Frederick St / York St junction will be brought forward within existing CRD budgets.

**3.22 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

The Future City Centre Programme is a high level regeneration plan. The significant projects taken forward within the plan will be screened in their own right by the lead delivery division.

All emerging work strands will be individually screened for Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment.”

During discussion, one Member raised some concerns in relation to the walking and cycling connectivity of the proposed Shankill Gateway Public Realm Scheme.

Members also raised concerns in relation to the provision of Public Convenience Provision in the City and requested an update on the matter.

In response to Members questions, the Director of City Regeneration and Development provided further information on art work and the Belfast Entries Project. In response to a query raised by a Member, she also advised that further updates would be submitted to the Committee regarding City Centre Living.

The Committee:

- i. Noted that the Future City Centre Programme was being reviewed in light of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy, businesses and the City Centre;
- ii. Noted the progress of key projects within the ‘Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements’ work stream of the Future City Centre Programme, notably the Entries and Lanes Initiative; the Public Realm Catalyst Projects; the pop-up park at Cathedral Gardens, and pilot lighting projects developed alongside the emerging Lighting Strategy for Belfast;
- iii. Noted the development of design options, in collaboration with DfC and DfI, for the Frederick St /York St junction and adjacent streets, with proposals to be brought to a future meeting of this Committee;
- iv. Noted that the DfC Minister had approved the adoption of the Inner North West Masterplan;
- v. Following an issue raised by a Member regarding the enhancement of junctions and improving walking and cycling connectivity as part of the Shankill Gateway Public Realm Scheme, it was agreed that Officers

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- would engage with the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure on these matters; and
- vi. Following issues raised by Members in relation to the provision of Public Conveniences in the city centre, it was agreed that officers would liaise with Community and Neighbourhood Services and an update report would be brought back to Committee in the near future.

Connectivity and Access

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the current status of the 'Bolder Vision Connectivity Study for Belfast', together with an update on the York St Interchange review and proposals for a framework for community consultation on planning decisions.

A Bolder Vision for Belfast

The Director of City Regeneration and Development reminded the Committee that in August 2019, Council, the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) agreed to jointly commission a three-phased City Centre Connectivity Study, a 'Bolder Vision for Belfast'.

She advised that Phase 1 had been completed and 'A Bolder Vision for Belfast' was ratified by Council in March 2020. In June 2020 the Committee had noted that the Ministers for DfI and DfC had been asked to endorse the Bolder Vision and commit to progressing the future phases and seek to embed the Framework in the Programme for Government.

She informed the Committee that, for the next phases, the intention was to develop an action plan to outline scenarios, projects and delivery options based on the Future Vision. This would be used to inform further discussion with key civic partners, businesses, communities, Third Sector organisations, interest groups, statutory authorities and city leaders.

She recommended that the Committee noted that the Bolder Vision for Belfast had now been formally endorsed by both the Ministers for DfC and DfI, along with a commitment to working together collaboratively to consult widely with the public and other stakeholders to agree on a final Vision which would help guide future infrastructure investment decisions. She highlighted that it was proposed to formally launch the Vision jointly with DfI and DfC in the near future and discussions were ongoing with DfI and DfC in terms of progressing with the next phases.

She reported that, as the City begins its recovery post-Covid, and with the challenges that would remain in the coming months, there was renewed emphasis on how we use our City Centre spaces safely, whilst also promoting active travel. Some of the interventions coming forward to help address these challenges align with the ethos of the Bolder Vision and there was an opportunity to build on these, subject to stakeholder support and resources.

York St Interchange

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The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that the DfI Minister had announced that an external review would take place to future proof the York Street Interchange Project in advance of moving to the procurement phase of the project through discussions with specialists and stakeholders. She recommended that the Chairman of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee formally writes to the Minister to welcome the proposed review, and to offer an opportunity for the Committee to engage with the process during the external review.

Ulster University Partnership Project

The Director of City Regeneration and Development reported that Ulster University had been selected to be a part of the UK wide Connecting Communities for Quality of Life Project, which would develop a framework for community consultation on planning decisions, supporting the development of community empowerment and paving the way for more resilient developments in the future. She advised that, as a key city stakeholder, the Council had the opportunity to partner with the Ulster University on this 30 month project. The Project would offer a framework to gain an improved understanding of what communities want, and how best to gain this information through the planning consultation process whilst enhancing social value and an improved process for joined up, long term consultation with communities on planning issues. She highlighted that it was proposed that new formats would be developed based on a review of best practice in community consultation in collaboration with CaCHE - the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (www.housingevidence.ac.uk). As part of the Project the emerging framework would be tested and refined through pilot consultations which would take place in Reading, Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh. She confirmed that further details would be brought back to Committee as the work progressed.

The Committee:

- Noted the DfC and DfI Ministerial endorsement of the Bolder Vision for Belfast;
- Agreed to write to the DfI Minister to support the external review of the York Street Interchange, and to offer an opportunity to engage with the review process; and
- Agreed to support a partnership project with Ulster University and other stakeholders in relation to a UK-wide planning community consultation research project.

**Department for Communities Access
and Inclusion Programme 2020-2021**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 Belfast City Council is invited to administer the Department for Communities’ (DfC) Access and Inclusion Programme 2020/21 on behalf of Belfast based arts, cultural and active recreation**

venues. This Programme supports small-scale capital investments of up to £30,000 and aims to improve access to arts and cultural activities and active recreation facilities, by people with disabilities. Council departments can also apply to this Programme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

- **Agree to Council's role in promoting, assessing and managing DfC's Access and Inclusion Programme 2020/21 and supporting organisations and Council departments to access the funding.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Department for Communities are inviting all local councils to administer their Access and Inclusion Programme 2020/21 within their respective local council areas.

The Council managed the 18/19 and 19/20 Access and Inclusion Programme within Belfast and received support for 24 projects with total value of £412,554, of which five were Council projects. These have included improved access to City Hall and the Tropical Ravine, and specialised playground facilities.

DfC will formally launch the programme as a competitive process on 3 August 2020 with a closing date of Friday 11th September 2020.

3.2 The Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Programme aims to:

- i. **Improve access to arts, culture and active recreation venues across NI for people with disabilities;**
- ii. **Make arts, cultural and active recreation venues more inclusive across society;**
- iii. **Increase participation in arts, culture and active recreation activities by people with disabilities.**

3.3 Council owned venues and facilities are eligible to apply for support as well as relevant independent organisations. The Council oversees the assessment and recommendation of projects via an open call, and is responsible for delivery of all projects in receipt of funding.

Active recreation projects can include public walkways, cycle paths, forest trails, children’s playparks and similar outdoor recreation sites. The programme is not designed to support the development of sports grounds, but where sports grounds can demonstrate that an application to develop infrastructure is aimed at increasing participation in active recreation by people with a disability, it may be considered.

- 3.4 Capital works and equipment costs are eligible under this programme but funding will not be provided to part fund larger projects. Applicants must confirm that projects will complete on or before 31 March 2021.**

3.5 Financial and Resource Implications

Council funding is not a requirement this year but DfC has indicated that a contribution from Council will be required in order to participate in the Programme in future years.

TCHA unit have experienced staff resources available to oversee this Programme.

**3.6 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

TCHA will work closely with the Council’s Equality Unit and DfC to ensure positive equality implications which is the central component of the Programme.

There are no rural needs or good relations implications.”

The Committee agreed to the Council’s role in promoting, assessing and managing the Department for Communities Access and Inclusion Programme 2020/21, and supporting organisations and Council departments to access the funding. Following a suggestion from a Member, it also noted that the Council’s Disability Advisory Panel would be included in the consultation process.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Update on Motion - EuroPride (Councillor O’Hara to raise)

Councillor O’Hara provided an update in relation to his engagement with Belfast Pride and their bid to host EuroPride in 2023.

During discussion, Members raised concerns in relation to communication issues they had experienced with Belfast Pride, together with the potential for capacity building and support for the Bid.

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After discussion, the Committee agreed to invite Belfast Pride to its meeting in September to discuss the EuroPride bid.

The Committee also noted that an update report would be submitted to a future Committee in relation to funding opportunities for culture and arts in addition to cultural multi annual grants (CMAG).

Economic Impact of Retail Unit Closures and Job Losses
(Councillor Heading to raise)

Councillor Heading outlined his concerns in relation to the economic impact of Covid-19 on retail unit closures, redundancies and job losses in the City. He suggested that analysis of what the City might look like in the next one to five years would be helpful to progress the recovery of the City.

The Committee noted that analysis was being undertaken in relation to retail unit closures and vacant buildings in the city and an update would be brought to a future Committee.

Chairperson