

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 26th October, 2020

SPECIAL MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

- Members present: Councillor McAteer (Chairperson);
Councillors Bunting, Gormley, Groogan,
T. Kelly, McKeown, Nicholl and Spratt.
- In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Ms. D. Smith, Neighbourhood Services Integration
Manager;
Mr. M. Doherty, Project Manager;
Ms. S. Murtagh, Programme Manager; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.
- Also Attended: Dr. G. Busby, General Manager, (Belfast South
Community Resources)
Ms. L. Farrell, Programme Director of Urban Villages
and Communities in Transition; and
Mr. C. McGurk, Urban Villages and Communities in
Transition.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Kelly reported that her husband was a member of Belfast South Community Resources (B.S.C.R.). The Director confirmed that a decision had been taken previously, by the Area Working Group, in respect of an overall funding allocation for the area which had been endorsed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. She stated further that, as the Working Group was being asked to consider projects within the original allocation of funds, it was considered therefore that, under those circumstances, there was no conflict of interest in respect of the Member.

Site Visit to Sandy Row

The Democratic Services Assistant reminded the Working Group that, at its previous meeting, it had considered undertaking a site visit to the Sandy Row area in order to view the development proposals under consideration for that area. The Working Group agreed that, since it was being provided with a presentation on those proposals and the fact that Covid-19 restrictions had been enhanced since its last meeting, it would no longer be appropriate, or safe, to undertake the aforementioned site visit.

Update on Sandy Row Projects

The Director provided the Working Group with an overview of B.I.F. funding which had been agreed previously in June 2012 regarding the allocation of £1.35m in respect

of the Gilpin's Project. She stated that as that project was no longer viable, due to the lands being sold, it had been agreed by the Area Working Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the original allocation of funds would be ring-fenced to other projects within the Sandy Row area.

The Director referred to a number of emerging development proposals in relation to the Sandy Row area, including the Open Spaces and Sensory Garden projects. She referred also to the Coffee Culture and Social Enterprise projects, delivered in partnership with Urban Villages and which incorporated "Wee Ruby's" as part of that development proposal. The Director stated that the Council was involved already with the Coffee Culture project and that it had invested £100,000 provided under the Social Outcomes Fund (S.O.F.) The Members were informed that they would be provided with an update on the Exam Centre proposal undertaken by Belfast South Community Resources (B.S.C.R.)

The Project Manager provided the Working Group with a detailed map, outlining the proposed development plans for the Sandy area in respect of the Open Spaces project. He referred to a specific area of work which was included within the proposal, including the identification of pedestrian connections, the removal and replacement of neglected fencing including, amongst other things, the creation of green spaces and biodiversity enhancements. The Members were provided with an overview of how the area would potentially look like, after the development of the area was completed and informed that the approximate cost associated with the development proposal was £344,000.

In response to a question from a Member, in respect to the current stage of the project, the Director stated that the Working Group was being asked to consider that the development be agreed as an emerging project and, if endorsed, would proceed to a consultation stage with local residents, stakeholders and community organisations.

The Urban Villages Programme Director highlighted a number of investments, both long and short term, which was being proposed for the Sandy Row area, including some projects which had already been invested by Urban Villages. She reported that the investment total in the area, to date, was approximately £550,000 and included Blythfield Playing Fields, the Eco-Garden at Blythfield Primary School, an outdoor classroom including, amongst other things, an indoor parent meeting space and enhancements to the school entrance.

Cafe Culture Training Café

The Working Group was informed that the Café Culture project had been promoted by B.S.C.R and would require the purchase and re-development of a derelict building, as part of the project proposal. The Members were informed that the project included also the development of private let apartments which would be located above the cafe and that the estimated cost of the development proposal was approximately £988,000, of which the Council had committed expenditure to the value of £100,000. The Working Group was informed that the project currently had a deficit in its funding to the value of £387,000, and that the Council was being asked to make an additional contribution towards that funding deficit.

The Ulster Villages Programme Director referred to a number of benefits which would emanate from the development proposal, including hands-on employability training and work-based training programmes. She highlighted the prospect of undertaking shared events and the potential to undertake cultural awareness training. The Members

were informed of the potential for the café to be a hub for Community integration in the area and to provide a tourism stop for such events as, historical walking tours. In relation to the development of the private apartments, she stated that the occupancy of the apartments would assist with the issue of vacancy and dereliction and that the café would provide a central focal point, inhibiting such issues as social exclusion.

The Director confirmed that the Council was acting as the delivery agent for the projects referred to and had been working closely with Urban Villages on the Café Culture project, which was at a more advanced stage than the other development proposals referred to. She stated that the Council had allocated £100,000, in principle, subject to other factors, including a due diligence exercise being undertaken. In response to a question from a Member, she confirmed that the Working Group was being asked to consider funding the project deficit from the B.I.F. fund allocation of £1.35m. She stated also that the Members might wish to agree funding, in principle, in respect of the Open Spaces proposal and agree to add this as an emerging project.

It was

Moved by Councillor Bunting
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and

Resolved - That the Area Working agree to meet the funding deficit in regard to the Café Culture project as outlined, out of the ring-fenced B.I.F. allocation for projects, within the Sandy Row area.

The Working Group agreed also to allocate funding, in principle, to the Open Spaces development proposal, out of the ring-fenced B.I.F. allocation for projects, within the Sandy Row area.

Mr. McGurk stated that it was hoped to have approval of the business case, in respect of the Cafe Culture project, within the next two weeks and a subsequent letter of offer to the Council, as the delivery partner, prior to the appointment of a design team.

Belfast South Community Resources (B.S.C.R.)

Dr. Busby provided the Working Group with an overview in regard to the background and establishment of B.S.C.R. He stated that B.S.C.R. had been established in 1997 as a volunteer group and had now a compliment of twelve employed staff, within its own premises. He provided an outline of the key objectives of that organisation including, amongst other things, to tackle educational under-achievement and barriers to reduce skills deficit for young people, thereby making them more attractive to the labour market. He referred to other key aims including, dealing with ant-social problems, economic decline and physical dereliction in the Sandy Row area.

Dr. Busby stated that B.S.C.R. had been funded under Economic Renewal and provided the Working Group with an overview of the outcomes attributed to B.S.C.R. since its creation. He referred specifically to the number of people, in the previous year, who had gained employment, including the numbers provided with career advice. He referred to the support given by that group to a number of local businesses, including the number of individuals who had attained formal qualifications through its education programme.

The Members were advised of some of the social enterprises undertaken by that group including, the sourcing and distribution of food parcels. He referred to the cross-community work undertaken as part of the Transitions Project, working with eight schools on such topics as mindfulness and a G.C.S.E. support programme. He referred also to the work undertaken in partnership, with other city-wide organisations.

Dr. Busby referred to the need for young people in the area to enhance their I.T. skills to allow them to compete for jobs which were available in, for example, the Weaver's Court commercial complex. He highlighted also the possibility of the South Belfast area becoming a future digital hub. Dr. Busby specified the close links which B.S.C.R. had formed with "Jam Media" and the success attained by the Exam Centre, in the delivery of formal qualifications, on behalf of a range of external organisations. He stated that the Exam Centre had provided local employment, within Sandy Row, and that its profits had been directed back to B.S.C.R. to permit future investment opportunities to be undertaken.

The Members were informed that the success of the Exam Centre, in securing additional clients, had created a capacity issue and referred to the possibility of extending the Exam Centre by utilising two vacant shop units, situated below the current premises. He stated that the Exam Centre was a self-funding social enterprise and that profits generated were invested back into the community. Dr. Busby informed the Working Group that the future expansion of the exam centre had been calculated at approximately £100,000.

A Member referred to the activities of B.S.C.R. in its attempts to deal with the issue of dereliction in the Sandy Row area and of its social enterprise credentials since its formation, in 1997. Dr. Busby highlighted the cross-community work which that organisation had undertaken with St. Malachy's school, in regard to its M.B.A. programme. The Area Working Group paid tribute to the work undertaken by B.S.C.R. in its endeavours to enhance the development and employment prospects for people, within the Sandy Row Community.

The external representatives from Urban Villages and B.S.C.R. left the meeting to permit the Area Working Group to consider the development proposals as presented.

The Area Working Group considered the proposals as presented. The Director confirmed that the Council was not being asked to fund the "Wee Ruby's" Social Enterprise Project" which was being taken forward by Urban Villages. She recommended however that, if the Area Working Group agreed to add the Exam Centre proposal as a Stage 1- Emerging Project, this would allow officers to work up the proposal in further detail. She recommended also that the Coffee Culture and Open Spaces proposal be added as Stage 1 - Emerging Projects, in line with the three stage approval process

After detailed discussion, it was

Proposed by Councillor Spratt
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and

Resolved - That the Open Spaces Strategy, Coffee Culture and Exam Centre projects, be permitted to progress as Stage 1- Emerging Projects.

The Director agreed further to provide regular updates, to the Working Group, on the progress of the relevant projects.

ILAB Update

The Neighbourhood Services Manager reminded the Working Group that, at the Special meeting of the People and Communities Committee in 2019, the Lower Ormeau and wider University area had been designated as, a special action area, under Community Planning. He stated that it had been agreed that, the Council would engage with relevant stakeholder and external organisations, in order to assist with the regeneration of that area. He informed the Members that the Department for Communities (DfC) had agreed to fund an I.L.A.B. to assist with the identification of problems, including, opportunities to regenerate the area referred to as being a special action area.

The Members were informed that it was the intention of the I.L.A.B. team to meet with the Working Group in order to agree what actions the Council considered to be a priority for the area and the actions which required to be undertaken, as part of that process. The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided the Working Group with information in respect of the I.L.A.B. structure and the processes involved to achieve the desired outcomes for the area. He referred to the fact that the process was independent, to ensure that all relevant stakeholders could participate and engage with the programme.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager referred to differing stakeholder views in regard to the future development of the area and cited the virtual I.L.A.B. challenge event, as a means to identify and resolve those competing views. He stated that the priorities, identified, from that process, would be submitted to the Strategic Insights Lab. He referred to the meeting, scheduled to take place on 30th November at which, the Working Group would be asked to identify its key priority issues. He stated further that, Council officers would feed into the 2 day Strategic Insights Board and that, following completion of the I.L.A.B. process, an action plan would be produced, which would identify the key priorities emanating from the consultation and stakeholder process. He confirmed that the I.L.A.B. team were committed to attending a future meeting of the Area Working Group, to provide feedback on the outcomes of the 2 day Insights Lab.

A Member raised the issue of a time -frame , in respect of completion of the I.L.A.B. process, and an assurance that the all relevant stakeholder and external participants would be permitted to engage in the process. The Neighbourhood Services Manager stated that, extensive efforts had been made to ensure that all interested parties had been invited to take part in the process. He stated further that, he would be happy to liaise directly with the Member, in order to address any representation concerns she might have. In response to a further question, he stated that the I.L.A. B. team were aware of previous studies undertaken in respect of the Lower Ormeau and wider University area. The Neighbourhood Services Manager stated also that, he would liaise with the I.L.A.B. team in regard to an implementation time-frame, but asked the Members to note that the time-frame might change, depending on Covid-19 restrictions.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Monday, 30th November at 5.00 p.m.

Chairperson