

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 4th January, 2021

SPECIAL MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillors Bunting, Gormley, Groogan,
T. Kelly and Lyons.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mr. K. Sutherland, Planning Manager;
Mr. R. Connolly, Policy, Research and Compliance
Officer;
Mr. G. Dickson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor McKeown.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentation - Living with Water

The Director of Physical Programmes welcomed Mr. S. Richardson, Programme Director for Living with Water, and Mr. S. Wightman, Programme Manager, to the meeting.

Mr. Richardson advised that, in 2014, when it had become clear that the drainage infrastructure across Belfast was insufficient for the demands being placed upon it, the Northern Ireland Executive had approved the development of a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan (SDIP) for Belfast to protect against flooding; enhance the environment; and grow the economy. The Working Group was advised that major investment in the infrastructure was necessary, not only to protect against flooding, but also to enhance the environment and to enable the economy to grow.

He explained that the Living With Water Programme, an interdepartmental group, had been established in order to develop and deliver the Infrastructure Plan. He drew the Members' attention to the consultation document, "Living With Water in Belfast", the draft Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan for Belfast, which sought to address the inadequacies and to ensure that the city could grow in terms of business and residential development. He highlighted that the Plan had a significant strategic and operational impact for the Council.

He provided the Members a detailed overview of the existing drainage infrastructure, including rivers, culverts, sewers, wastewater treatment works and pumping stations, road gullies and drainage pipes, canals, lakes and loughs, reservoirs, green infrastructure and coastal and river flood defences. He also provided the LWWP approach to managing water through a catchment and the measures they could take to protect against flooding, to improve environmental and water quality and to enable the area to expand and develop.

The Working Group was provided with details of current drainage problems which affected the city, including agriculture run-off, erosion, surface water flooding, tidal, coastal and river flooding, and out of sewer flooding. He explained that, without addressing those problems, Belfast would continue to be prone to flooding, environmental problems would increase and the future development of the city could be hampered.

The Members were advised that four out of the twelve areas of Potential Significant Flood Risk in Northern Ireland were within the Belfast area. He explained that NI Water submitted negative consultation responses in respect of planning applications in areas of Belfast where there was insufficient wastewater system capacity.

Mr. Wightman provided the Working Group with details of a number of policy measures including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS); Natural Flood Management, whereby new policy and guidance would encourage public and private landowners to utilise their land for Natural Flood Management including tree planting, wetlands, flood storage and attenuation; and new arrangements for developing a catchment based approach to drainage and wastewater management, including centrally championing, coordinating and funding it within the Department for Infrastructure.

He provided the Members with a detailed overview of the Connswater and Lagan Embankment study Area. He explained that the catchment objectives included reducing the number of people and properties and infrastructure at risk of flooding in the area; contributing to achieving Good Ecological Potential in the Connswater downstream to the Belfast Harbour and to facilitate sustainable development in the sub-catchment area. He presented the pressures and issues within the area, as well as opportunity based solutions including the potential use of green spaces. He highlighted that in working in partnership with Belfast City Council, LWWP had identified a number of flood alleviation opportunities, and planned to undertake a number of pilot projects, including the possibility of extending the river floodplain through Ballysillan Playing Fields and the installation of leaky dams along the Forth River and at Belfast Castle.

Mr. Wightman outlined that it was currently estimated that £1.4billion could be needed to deliver the integrated drainage proposals in all four study areas over the next 12 years. He added that the figure did not include whole life costs, i.e. operational and maintenance costs. He advised that it was hoped that the investment in blue/green infrastructure would not only reduce the need for some of the hard engineered infrastructure but would also reduce those whole life costs.

In response to a number of questions from the Members, Mr. Richardson and Mr. Wightman advised the Working Group that:

- In relation to the Orchardville and Sicily Park area, a prioritisation process had been carried out to identify issues across Belfast and that Blackstaff had been identified as the main priority in Belfast;

- The plan would demonstrate the role of blue and green infrastructure and the integrated nature of the project, which was important in securing finance and that LWWP were working to appraise a range of benefits to all stakeholders.

Mr Wightman informed the Members that he would welcome input with regard to areas of green spaces in Belfast which had not yet been identified, that could potentially serve to alleviate flooding risks and that the solutions didn't necessarily need to be close to the problem areas.

The Director of Physical Programmes thanked the representatives for their informative presentation and they retired from the meeting.

Chairperson