

West Belfast Area Working Group

Tuesday, 5th January, 2021

SPECIAL WEST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

- Members present: Councillor Corr (Chairperson);
Alderman Kingston; and
Councillors Black, Carson,
Donnelly, Garrett, Heading, Hutchinson,
Magennis, McLaughlin and Walsh.
- In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mrs. A. McGlone, Neighbourhood Integration Manager;
and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Canavan and McCabe.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentation – Living With Water

The Chairperson 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 Black Staff study Area, which included 6 sub-catchments. As an example, he explained the pressures of the Ballymurphy sub catchment area, he advised that the catchment objectives included working towards trying to connect Bog Meadows to the rivers network which would provide additional storm storage. This would involve linking in with the Council's Peace IV proposal as it was felt that an opportunity existed to extend the Community Greenway proposals to accommodate works to reduce flood risk and free up capacity within the downstream Blackstaff Culvert. He also referred to Whiterock/Falls Parks and for potential opportunities within this area to create a number of offline storage ponds as well as additional restoration works which could help to reduce the flood risk in the area. In addition, there was also the potential for river restoration works to the Ballymurphy Stream which could tie into the development of Council owned green space and help facilitate the enhanced biodiversity and use of the area. In relation to Falls Parks, he stated that opportunities existed for the creation of online and offline storage ponds and also additional storage around the existing football pitches through regrading of the area. He also explained the opportunities based solutions available which had been identified as part of the delivery plan and highlighted the importance of increasing the capacity of Wastewater Treatment Works across the city.

The Working Group was then advised of a number of pilot projects which were planned across the City.

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:

- at the request of a Member, the representatives from LWW agreed that Distillery Street would be incorporated into the final plan. The Director of Physical Programmes advised that she would also suggest this area as an additional pilot project within the corporate response to the plan;
- the representatives noted the benefits of joined up working with other statutory agencies to identify issues and find solutions (Distillery Street being an excellent example);
- the requirement that all new developments in the future take into considerate potential flood and sewerage risks to ensure that the problems do not worsen in the future as a result of inappropriate development, any new development had to meet certain standards to ensure no flooding issues would arise, similar to greenfield runoff;
- the impact of dumping and the potential that this could have on flooding and the need for the statutory agencies and communities to work together to try alleviate the problem; and
- the Living With Water programme was a key priority for the Executive at the time of the “New Decade, New Approach” publication.

The Director requested that any Member would contact her directly, in respect of any other points that they wished be included as part of the Council’s corporate response to the Living With Water in Belfast Consultation and agreed to e-mail the Members a copy of the presentation following the meeting.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their informative presentation and they retired from the meeting.

Chairperson