

East Belfast Area Working Group

Tuesday, 5th January, 2021

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

Members present: Alderman Copeland (Chairperson);
Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Rodgers and
Sandford; and
Councillors Brooks, Flynn, M. Kelly,
Kyle, McMullan, McReynolds,
Mulholland and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Howard and Newton.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Special Meeting

In response to a request from a Member, the Working Group agreed to hold a special meeting on Greenways, at a future date to be agreed with the Chairperson.

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 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.

The Working Group was 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:

- the pressures identified within the plan included the flood risk along the Connswater River which covered the Holywood Road/Newtownards Road junction;
- the impact of global warming, and the predicted increase in the sea level, had been taken into account within the modelling;
- in respect of the lower Sydenham area, Victoria Park had purposely been constructed within a floodplain, and that the railway line and the Sydenham Bypass would act as a protective barrier to the surrounding buildings in the event of a tidal surge;

- a tidal scheme was planned for other parts of Belfast;
- in terms of agricultural pollution, they had already presented to the National Farmers Union (NFU), in respect of potentially using land for possible water attenuation, and that they also wanted to developing policies to ensure agricultural practices did not contribute to the pollution of the water courses;
- any new development had to meet certain standards to ensure no flooding issues would arise, similar to greenfield runoff;
- the Living With Water programme was a key priority for the Executive at the time of the “New Decade, New Approach” publication, however, that they were mindful that was pre-COVID and there were many other competing financial pressures;
- the NI Housing Executive was engaged with the programme and that opportunities were available in Belfast;
- community groups would also be consulted in respect of the green spaces throughout the City; and
- the recurrent flooding at Clonduff near the Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre was on the radar of their DfI colleagues.

In response to further queries, the representatives agreed to circulate information to the Working Group in relation to whether the plan covered the flooding in the vicinity of the Hollywood/Newtownards Road junction, and whether the Sirocco Works and the former Knockbreda High School sites were being considered as opportunity sites.

In response to a Member’s query regarding the Ravenhill Flood Alleviation scheme, the Director of Physical Programmes advised the Members that she would circulate further information relating to it.

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.

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

Chairperson