

North Belfast Area Working Group

Wednesday, 6th January, 2021

SPECIAL NORTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Maskey (Chairperson);
Councillors Bradley, Ferguson, Magee,
McCullough, Murphy, O'Hara and Pankhurst.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Ms. K. Gilliland, Neighbourhood Services Manager,
Ms. M. Higgins, Neighbourhood Services Integration
Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Cobain, McAllister and Whyte.

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 Members with 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. Mr. Richardson 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. Mr. Richardson explained that NI Water submitted negative consultation responses in respect of planning applications in areas of Belfast where there was insufficient wastewater system capacity.

He provided an example of a best practice case study and highlighted the need for integrated catchment based solutions to alleviate the impact of rainfall.

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 Clowney Catchment area and advised that the catchment objectives included reducing the number of people and properties at risk of flooding within and downstream of the Beechmount, Glenbank Drive and Crumlin Road Areas; Contribute to achieving Good Ecological Status in the Forth River and Clowney Water and Good Ecological Potential in the Blackstaff River; and Facilitate sustainable development across the area and further downstream. 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 advised of a number of pilot projects which had been planned across the City and the overall Work Programme timeline.

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 anticipated 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 that:

- in respect of the Ballysillan Playing Fields, the Urban Villages proposals would not be compromised and explained how the Living with Water plans would be incorporated;

- planting at bus stops had been identified as part of the Rapid Transport 2 scheme;
- feedback in relation to segregated cycle lanes would be provided to their colleagues; and
- in respect of Boodle's Dam, advised that they were working with the Council to look at further enhancements.

During discussion, the representative's explained further sustainable drainage, the importance of tree planting and the materials used for roads, bio-diversity improvements, and the impact of planning applications on managing water.

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