

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 4th February, 2021

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

Members present: Alderman Copeland (Chairperson);
Aldermen Haire, Rodgers and Sandford;
The High Sheriff, Councillor Long; and
Councillors Brooks, Flynn, Howard, Hussey, Kyle,
McReynolds and Newton.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes,
Ms. C. Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager,
Ms. S. Kalke, Project Sponsor Officer,
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Services Integration
Manager,
Ms. M. Bagnall, Programme Manager,
Ms. C. Persic, Regeneration Project Officer,
Ms. K. McCrum, Democratic Services Officer, and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Dorrian and Councillors de Faoite, Hanvey, M. Kelly, McMullan, Mulholland and Smyth.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 5th January were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentation - Proposed Sydenham Greenway

Mr. J. Hobbs, N.I. Greenway, Ms. C. Bloomfield, Director of Sustrans, and Mr. A. Grieve, Head of Walking and Cycling Unit, Department for Infrastructure (DfI), attended in connection with this item and were welcomed by the Chairperson.

Mr. Hobbs stated that the Sydenham Greenway Plan formed part of a 1000 km network and referred specifically to the proposed link between the existing Belfast Greenway paths network and the proposed link between that network and the North Down Coastal Path, travelling in an eastward direction, towards Hollywood.

He referred to the challenges associated with creating linkages which connected communities along the Greenway cycle path and the fact that the proposed development, along the Sydenham By-Pass, presented considerable challenges in that regard. He referred also to the proposal to extend the Greenway at Inverary Drive and to deal with some of the issues associated with access and commuter parking blight in that area. Mr. Hobbs highlighted collaborative work which could be undertaken to engage with other

external stakeholders, including landowners, such as the Harbour Commissioners in terms of land acquisition, and Ikea in the pursuit of the promotion of cargo bike travel to and from its retail establishment. Mr. Hobbs referred to the interest which had been generated previously, in response to a survey, in regard to the proposed introduction of a park and ride scheme at the Tillysburn roundabout. He stated that the response had been positive and presented an opportunity to incorporate a potential Belfast bike dock station as part of the proposed Sydenham Greenway project.

Ms. C. Bloomfield addressed the Working Group on how Greenways in general and, in particular, the proposed Sydenham Greenway project could contribute towards a green recovery. She referred specifically to the health benefits of active travel in the reduction of, amongst other things, heart disease, including the social, economic and environmental benefits of walking and cycling as opposed to using vehicular transportation. She stated that one of the major impediments, acting as a deterrent to cyclists engaging in that mode of transport, was safety. The Working Group was provided with information on other Greenway success stories and highlighted the Waterford Greenway project, which had facilitated the development of a social corridor along its route. She stated further that the Waterford Greenway project had resulted in the creation of a café culture along its route and had proved a particular attraction for visitors and tourists.

Mr. Grieve informed the Working Group that the current Minister for the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) was supportive of the idea associated with the development of active travel infrastructure and, in so doing, the provision of safe and secure pathways to enable people to become more active and reap the health benefits associated with active travel. The Members were provided with details of the DfI's proposals to develop and extend its Greenways proposals and of the importance in ensuring that communities and destinations were connected. Mr. Grieve stated that the department's priority was to incorporate its development proposal to link with existing retail, community and transport facilities as a means to ensure wide participation in the use of the walking and cycling routes, segregated from vehicular traffic. He stated that a meeting was due to take place between Council officers and DfI representatives, to ascertain how the Sydenham Greenway proposals and the Infrastructure requirements might be progressed. He stated further, that a consultation exercise would be required, prior to agreement being reached on a preferred route in respect of the Greenway. He reported that it was anticipated that, once agreement had been reached with the various stakeholders, including landowners, it was anticipated the construction work would commence on a phased basis.

In response to a number of questions from a Member in relation to funding for the project and of the need to invest in changes to certain recreational facilities and transport links to facilitate the development proposals associated with the Greenway, Mr. Grieve stated that the proposals would not require structural changes to the Sydenham Bypass. He stated also that use could be made of the existing old Tillysburn roundabout to reduce interchange costs and that the Park and Ride facility at Tillysburn would have no direct bearing on the construction of the Greenway. In terms of costs associated with the project, Mr. Grieve stated that the Greenway would be funded from the Department's Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund. He stated also that, because some of the Greenway route would be using existing Council owned land, it was hoped that the Council would be in a position to assist with some of the costs associated with the Greenway proposal.

In response to a further question from a Member on which phases would commence first as part of the development proposal, Mr. Grieve provided an outline of a potential phased approach, associated with the Greenway development proposal, which would be subject to consultation with other relevant stakeholders, including Belfast City Council. A Member raised the issue of lighting and gritting services provided by the department in respect of the proposed Sydenham Greenway and other Greenway routes, including the Comber Greenway. In response, Mr. Grieve stated that the Sydenham

Greenway would be able to utilise existing lighting provision along the majority of its route. He stated that gritting was somewhat problematic in that, given that it was a perennial issue and under discussion currently, the operation of gritting on Greenways was subject to available financial resources. He stated that, in respect of lighting relevant to the Comber Greenway, it was anticipated that a consultation process would commence in the Spring of 2021, with a view to the installation of bat-friendly lighting along the route of that particular Greenway.

He stated also that trunking along the route of the Comber Greenway had been installed previously and, as a consequence, the erection of lighting along the route would have less cost implications than otherwise would have been the case. A Member asked if a consultation had taken place between the Department and Ards and North Down Council in undertaking collaborative work to extend the Greenway into that Council area and what safety issues could be incorporated, within the plans, to ensure the safety of both cyclists and pedestrians. In response, Mr. Grieve stated that Ards and North Down Council were supportive of the proposals on the understanding that linkages outside the Belfast local authority boundary, would be incorporated with the existing Belfast Greenway path of which the development proposals would address those concerns. In terms of safety, Mr. Grieve stated that the Tillysburn roundabout provided for cyclist and pedestrian separation from vehicular traffic and that traffic light sequencing was such that it provided adequate time for both cyclist and pedestrians to cross safely at the various traffic interchanges. A Member referred to the potential link of opening up East Belfast to Hollywood and the wider Ards and North Down area. He stated that he raise with departmental colleagues the issues raised in respect of the rail network, including connections from the George Best, Belfast City Airport to the city centre, for both rail passengers and those opting to cycle to and from the airport to city centre destinations.

A Member requested if it might be possible to secure private sector investment to assist with the costs associated with the development proposals and it was agreed that all options in relation to financing should be looked at.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager stated that her department was working on signage to improve relationships between cyclists, pedestrians and other Greenway users, to ensure that all participants were respectful of using a shared space, for both transport and recreational purposes. She stated that the development of a communication plan, incorporating artwork and animation, was being considered as an option to encourage Greenway users to embrace and develop an understanding of the needs and aspirations of all participants, utilising Greenway cycle paths.

The Area Working Group thanked the participants for their detailed and informative presentation and acknowledged the potential benefits for East Belfast, including the possibility of developing neighbourhood tourism as part of an interconnected Greenway network.

After further debate and after the participants had left the meeting, it was

Moved by The High Sheriff, Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor Newton and

Resolved - That the AWG was fully supportive of the proposed project and that development of the Sydenham Greenway should be progressed as a priority initiative and that given the potential benefits of the project in terms of active, green and sustainable transport and connectivity that the Council should consider match-funding for the project if this was required, subject to capital financing and subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as required in the future. The AWG also agreed to continue to receive updates from DFI/Council officers on the project.

Update on Physical Programme

The Director of Property and Projects submitted the undernoted report in respect of an update on the Council's Physical Programme:

"1. Introduction

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, LIF, BIF, Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the projects that the Council is delivering in behalf of other agencies.

This report outlines the status of a number of BIF/LIF projects following recent presentations to the AWG in November and correspondence issued to groups as per AWG recommendations.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- *LIF: Westbourne Church / Titanic People:* note the update on this project and to agree to invite the group to the next meeting of the AWG to give an update on the project
- *BIF: Strand Arts Centre, Bloomfield Community Association Project and Castlereagh Presbyterian Church:* note the updates provided and agree to the commissioning of an updated Economic Appraisal for the Bloomfield Community Association project

3. Westbourne Church / Titanic People

ELIF002 Westbourne Presbyterian Church – This project received an in-principle commitment of £250,000 on 21 September 2012. Titanic People is currently at *Due Diligence Stage* of the LIF Programme.

Background

The project at Westbourne Church/Titanic People was one of the first LIF projects to gain approval as part of the first phase of the programme in 2012, with the maximum LIF allocation of £250,000. The project proposed the refurbishment and regeneration of Westbourne Church, which is a landmark building on the Lower Newtownards Road and presently in a state of disrepair. The scheme would see the Church developed as a tourist attraction, which would build on the areas links to the building of the Titanic and the fact that many of those working on the ship used the Church for worship and community activities.

Since 2012 a significant amount of work has been completed by the group, Council and partner organisations, however to date progress has been stifled by a number of factors including the projected budget requirement. Originally, the Executive Office (as part of the Social Investment Fund initiative) had developed a business case for the project that proposed a mix of funding from

central government, the NI Tourism Board and the Council. This work resulted in the Executive Office allocating approx. £440,000 to the project under SIF to add to the Council's allocation. A proposed investment from the NI Tourism Board was never formalised and work progressed with a design team supported by SIF.

The design team progressed a detailed design for the proposed scheme that resulted in a cost for all required works of approx. £1.7m with a modern extension costing approx. £0.5m and with associated fees, this would have resulted in a project cost of over £2.2m. This total is well in excess of what had been allocated to the project and as a result, SIF withdrew their funding offer. In October, Members were advised that the Executive Office had recently written to the Council to advise that the Letter of Offer under the SIF programme to the Titanic People Project was being withdrawn due to the escalation in costs. As per the recommendation of the AWG, officers formally wrote to the Westbourne Presbyterian Church – Titanic People project, to seek an update on the plans and to confirm whether they still wished to be part of the LIF programme. The group has since responded to this correspondence to confirm their interest.

Since that time Council officers have continued to engage with potential project partners and expend time, working with the group on issues related to the Council's due diligence requirements. This has resulted in a potential partnership with the Urban Villages (UV) programme at The Executive Office, however even at a scaled back level, making the Church safe and improving the external public realm, (with associated fees) the project is estimated at £1.1m.

The current cost estimate of £1.1m exceeds the potential funding from the Executive Office under Urban Villages and would not deliver a tourism attraction as outlined in the project business case. At present the Council allocation of £250,000 is the only funding secured for the project and it is unlikely that the full £1.1m required to deliver the reduced scheme (if deemed acceptable) will be secured in the near future.

Members are asked to note the update on Titanic People and to consider the ongoing viability of this project. It is recommended that the AWG request the promoters of Titanic People to attend the next meeting of the AWG and provide an update on their project.

4. Strand Arts Centre

BIF12 Strand Arts centre is currently at *Stage 3 – Committed* under the BIF Programme with an allocation of £1.8m. The project was moved to Stage 3 - Committed in October 2016.

In November, the AWG received a presentation from the group and agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on the issues that had been raised in respect of the project, including an update from DfC in relation to when they would make a funding decision.

Match funding from DfC has been secured in principle, a commitment of funding is anticipated on completion of a revised design report for £4.6m preferred option. The revised report is based on a growing demand for more performing arts-related activities and entertainment in Belfast and an element of conservation that needs to be enacted during the design of the refurbished building. The current fit-out and condition of the building significantly restricts the extent and quality of the entertainment services that the Strand can offer as a community asset. Significant investment is required to improve the aesthetics of the building and update the internal design and layout as well as the M+E systems to ensure the building is flexible to the range of potential users. As such, the refurbishment to the Strand Arts Centre will focus on extensive alterations and upgrades to bring the building up to a suitable standard and increased level of accessibility.

Since the last AWG meeting in November several meetings with DfC, ACNI and SAC have taken place. SAC is updating the business case according to requests from the DfC Economist, including a benefits realisation plan, lease arrangements and revenue income calculations; this will be forwarded to the Arts Council NI at the start of February and the Arts Council is submitting a bid to DfC. DfC requested a meeting with BCC to discuss the budget position and outcomes. Officers have submitted the costings and amended drawings to DfC.

On 1 February 2021, BCC Officers met with representatives from DfC and SAC and the following issues were discussed:

- Funding update – Strand Arts Centre is further developing their funding strategy to address the shortfall in budget; SAC advised they submit the funding strategy to DfC; DfC would like to see Letters of Intent from other potential funders.
- Status of ownership/length of lease – the building is owned by a private landowner; currently SAC is paying peppercorn rent however is negotiating a longer term lease with the building owner; the longer term aspiration is to buy the building, however the business case is based on 99 year lease as requested by DfC.
- Business case – the final requirements for the Business case were discussed. The Business case will now be submitted to ACNI as IPDSU does not have the required policy background.

DfC updated on recent meetings with their DSO (who raised the lease, charge and control period queries that were discussed) and Economist. The Departmental Economist was positive about the business case that was submitted to date however stressed that a funding strategy and letters of intent were needed, as DfC only commit to fully funded projects. DfC has advised it is not prepared to provide any Letter of Offer until all funding is in place.

Members are asked to note the update in relation to the Strand Arts Centre Project.

5. Bloomfield Community Association

BIF13 Bloomfield Community Association is currently at *Stage 3 – Committed* under the BIF Programme with an allocation of £440,000.

In November 2020, the group presented current proposals and discussed how additional funding for the project will be secured. The Working Group agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting on the issues that had been raised, including an update from DfC in relation to when they would make a funding decision, and in respect of other possible funding streams for the project.

This project was committed in principle in September 2016, with the aim of sourcing match funding. The groups preferred design option indicates a funding shortfall of approximately £178,000. At present, the project requires an updated business case to be produced in order to formally approach partner funders who could potentially include DfC, The Executive Office, Big Lottery etc. It is recommended that officers proceed with updating the project business case in the coming months and formalise bids to potential funders thereafter.

Council officers have also reopened discussions with DFC on potential match funding for the project. Previous discussions had stalled due to the lack of an Executive at the time. However a meeting is being arranged for the Council, DFC and the Group to progress.

Members are asked to note the update in relation to Bloomfield Community Association and approve the updating of the Business Case for the project.

6. Castlereagh Presbyterian Church

BIF38 Castlereagh Presbyterian Church is currently at *Stage 3 – Committed* under the BIF Programme with an allocation of £382,000.

The group gave a presentation to Members in November and the Working Group agreed a report would be submitted to a future meeting in relation to whether the other funding streams raised were viable options, the project outcomes and community benefits and whether the congregation would be fundraising further amounts towards the project.

Castlereagh Presbyterian Church (CPC) are proposing refurbishment and extension works to their Church Hall community facility on Church Road, Belfast, to provide additional space to accommodate demand for increased community programmes and activities, as well as energy efficiency improvements. The proposed works are estimated to cost £559,000 (i.e. £177,000 funding gap) and include: extension of entrance hall (incl. toilet refurbishment) and minor hall; improved insulation and new storage in main hall; improved insulation and new roof in kitchen; and demarcation of parking spaces and pedestrian walkway. CPC deliver a range of community activities/programmes in their facility including: youth club,

parent and toddler group and events for the Indian community. The group has links to three adjacent schools: Leadhill P.S, Loughview Integrated P.S. and Lagan College. The community facility is located towards the edge of Council's boundary, with its users and project's beneficiaries primarily being Belfast residents from the Upper Castlereagh Road catchment area, with demand for community programme/activities increasing further with the 800 house Castlehill Development under construction on Ballygowan Road and further land earmarked for housing on Church Road itself.

The business case highlighted floor-space and energy efficiency issues with the facility and identified the proposed extension and refurbishment project as the preferred solution to address these and meet additional community need by allowing simultaneous use by groups, as well as ensuring the building's long-term sustainability. Project outcomes set out in the project's business plan include: providing a fit for purpose main hall and large room facilities; delivering a range of activities each year engaging the community to accommodate at least 120 children, 90 youths, 100 adults and 100 older people; and delivery of a range of additional youth activities facilitated by the additional space and ability to run simultaneous activities

The group aim to contribute towards the current £177,000 funding gap themselves. CPC have been exploring other funding opportunities and have had a positive response from Garfield Weston Foundation who support organisations working in the areas of Welfare, Youth, Community, Arts, Faith, Environment, Education etc. To make a formal application the project must secure planning consent. The group are also engaging with both DAERA and DfC. The group's intention is to take forward the project as a whole rather than phased delivery.

To allow the project to advance through Due Diligence the group are required to provide a number of internal church approvals (project brief; consent to carry out works; contribution of own funding). Internal governance is complex with the Presbyterian Church's Constitution requiring authorisation by the congregation, the Presbytery and the Linkage Commission. Due to illness and COVID 19 restrictions the necessary meetings have not yet taken place and with the demography of members and varying degrees of computer literacy, virtual meetings has not been an option to date. With the potential lifting of lockdown restrictions in the coming months CFC are confident that the series of meetings required will take place allowing the project to progress.

Members are asked to note the update in relation to the Castlereagh Presbyterian Church Project."

Westbourne Presbyterian Church/Titanic People

The Area Working Group noted the update provided in relation to the Westbourne Presbyterian Church project and the substantial shortfall in funding associated with its completion, allied to the escalation in costs, following an extensive survey of the building. She highlighted that the original match-funding offer from the Executive Office had been withdrawn owing to a lack of progress on the development proposal. She stated that,

despite potential funding being made available by Urban Villages, this funding would not meet the costs associated with the original development proposal.

The Working Group noted the lack of progress in relation to the development proposal and the fact that £250,000 had been ring-fenced by the Council since 2012 towards the cost of the original development proposal.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers and

Resolved – that Titanic People be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group, with a view to providing an update on their intention to progress with the work outlined in their original development proposal, in respect of Westbourne Presbyterian Church.

Strand Arts Centre

The Director stated, that following discussions with representatives from the Strand Arts Centre (SAC), the Arts Council and the Department for Communities (DfC) in respect of its future development proposal, given that the Council had ring-fenced £1.8 m towards that project in 2016, DfC was in the process of providing an update on its funding strategy to address the gap in their financial resources in order to support the development proposal. The Director stated that progress was being made to secure an extended lease agreement on the premises which was part of the funding requirement.

In response to a question from a Member as to whether finance might be available from the Heritage Lottery Fund (H.L.F.) in support for the development proposal, the Director stated that the building was not listed. She stated that she would enter into discussion with HLF to ascertain whether post Covid-19 recovery resources might be available to assist with the costs associated the development proposal.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor Newton and

Resolved - that the Strand Arts Centre be invited to the April meeting of the Working Group to provide an update on progress and their funding strategy.

Bloomfield Community Association

The Working Group was reminded of its previous support in respect of this development proposal and the importance that the Members had recognised that the project provided for the local community. The Director explained ,however, that there was a shortfall in funding associated with the project, which had been highlighted in the aforementioned report. The Director requested authority from the AWG to update the business case for the project, given that the original business case had not been updated since 2016. The Director referred to the geographical location of the Community Association which, despite sitting marginally outside the boundary of the Inner-East neighbourhood regeneration area, had made a positive impact, through the delivery of its services, to the inner-east area. She stated that it was her intention to raise that particular issue with DfC and explore the possibility of securing additional resources to address the deficit in funding.

The Working Group agreed that the Director be authorised to update the business case for the project and to undertake discussions with DfC. She agreed also to include the Neighbourhood Manager and her team in any discussions.

Castlereagh Presbyterian Church

The Director reminded the Working Group that £382,000 had been ring-fenced towards its proposed development, which had an estimated a deficit of £177,000 and that, at a previous presentation by that group, the Members had raised questions as to how they aimed to address the funding deficit. The Members requested information in relation to the phasing of the work, associated with the project, and queried whether the group itself intended to provide some of its own financial resources to address the funding deficit.

The Area Working Group, after discussion, noted the potential outcomes associated with the development project and recognised that, to date, no letter of offer had been received by any of the external funders which the group had approached for financial assistance. It was reported that the church group had stated also that they had, as yet, not been in a position to consult with their congregational committee to address some of the issues raised by the Area Working Group.

After discussion it was

Moved by Alderman Rodgers,
Seconded by The High Sheriff, Councillor Long and

Resolved – that members of the Castlereagh Presbyterian Church be invited to the April meeting of AWG to address the issues raised, including providing information on the funding deficit and the benefits to the community upon completion of the project.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on a date, as yet to be agreed, in April, to invite the aforementioned project groups to make representation to the Area Working Group, in terms of addressing their respective funding deficits. The Working Group agreed also that its next scheduled meeting would be held on Thursday, 6th May, 2021 at 5.00 p.m.

Chairperson