

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 4th November, 2021

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

Members present: Alderman Sandford (Chairperson),
Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Haire and Rodgers;
The High Sheriff, Councillor Long; and
Councillors Brooks, Flynn, Hanvey, Howard,
Hussey, M. Kelly, McMullan, McReynolds,
Mulholland, Newton and Smyth.

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

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was reported from Councillor Kyle.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 2nd September were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentation

Portview Trade Centre

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. G. Neill, Portview Trade Centre, to the meeting. He provided the Working Group with an overview of its recent redevelopment. He explained that, when completed, it would comprise a living museum and tourism destination, an events space, state of the art co-working spaces with up to 100 Small and Medium sized Enterprises, a rooftop venue and an innovative training hub.

He advised the Members of the history of the site as a former linen mill and outlined the story behind the name of the "Banana Block" element, so-called due to bananas having first been grown in East Belfast in 1911.

He outlined that they had undertaken in-depth research as to how heritage spaces could become carbon neutral and embedded with social value through innovative ideas, upheld through social clauses within the occupier's tenancy agreement.

In response to Members' comments, Mr. Neill explained that the premises were owned by a charity and that the companies within the space were on social tenancies. The Members were advised that the block on the Newtownards Road would be a hub for creative industries.

In response to a Member's question regarding car parking in the area, he explained that they were highly conscious of their carbon footprint and that the location was highly accessible, on a main arterial route, with excellent pedestrian and public transport links.

He advised the Working Group that the training programme would be aimed at inspiring young people to think dynamically and to problem solve within an industry environment, particularly in respect of digital and advanced manufacturing trends.

A number of Members thanked Mr. Neill for his informative presentation and advised him that it was one of the most exciting developments in the east of the City.

Physical Programme

TAGIT

A Member stated that the TAGIT boxing facility had a funding shortfall of £9,000. He explained that the money was required in order to purchase equipment for the venue. The Director of Physical Programmes advised the Members that the East Area Working Group had £50,000 remaining in its Local Investment Fund (LIF) and that it could be used for such purchases.

Moved by Councillor Hussey
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers and

Resolved – that the Working Group agrees to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that £9,000 of LIF funding be allocated towards the purchase of equipment by TAGIT, in order to complete the project, and that the Working Group would undertake a site visit to the facility at a future date.

Physical Programme Update

The Director of Property and Projects presented 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.

Members of East AWG have carried out site visits to a number of proposed LIF and BIF funded projects on 19 and 20 October in order to understand the challenges to date and future plans. This report outlines the status of these projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the updates in respect of each project as outlined in this report. In considering the detail in this report Members may wish to consider if they still wish support the current status of each project under the relevant funding stream .

- **Strand Arts Centre – BIF Stage 3 – Commitment £1.8m**
 - Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
 - Note the increase in costs estimates following the RIBA Stage 2 Design Report, consider if they wish to move the project to the next stage and to submit a Planning Application in December 2021
 - If agreed in terms of ongoing support, consider timebounding the project for next stages

- **Bloomfield Community Association – BIF Stage 3 – Commitment £440,000**
 - Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
 - Note updated cost estimates and cost deficit
 - If agreed, to endorse officers to continue the discussions with DfC and other partners to bridge the funding gap/ shortfall of £305k

- **Castlereagh Presbyterian Church – BIF Stage 3 – Commitment £382,000**
 - Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
 - Note revised revised/ scaled back project scope
 - If agreed, approve the project to proceed to due diligence.

- **Westbourne Presbyterian Church - Titanic People – LIF Commitment £250,000**
 - Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
 - Note revised proposed project scope
 - If agreed, to endorse officers to continue working with Urban Villages and report back once the business case is complete with Urban Villages.

- **Lagan Village Youth and Community Association – BIF Stage 2 – No commitment**
 - To continue working with project and bring it to due diligence.

3. **Strand Arts Centre**

Date approved:	October 2016	Funding allocation and stage:	£1.8m Stage 3
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The proposed 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. The development of revised Stage 1 design report has highlighted the preferred option overall costs of £4.6 million in September 2019. The match funding commitment from DfC is secured in principle, awaiting for committed funding based on final decision from ACNI. The project progressed to RIBA Stage 2 and the updated costs include the already carried out surveys and inflation.

The Stage 2 Design Report has now been finalised. It identifies the works that have been carried out to date as well as works planned in RIBA Stage 3. Building inspections have been undertaken to establish necessary ground investigation works. A specialist geotechnical contractor has been appointed and commenced excavating trial pits. A CCTV survey to inform the design and modifications for a new foul drainage connection is underway. M&E site survey has been carried out to establish necessary work to bring the services to comply with latest standards and ensure energy efficient sustainable and environmentally friendly service installations. All work required to lodge a Planning Application has been carried out and the project is ready to be submitted for Planning in December 2021.

The Stage 2 Budget Cost Estimate amounts to £4,857,000 plus £463,000 Optimism Bias at 12% of construction costs (a sum of £5,320,000). This cost estimate includes Construction Costs, Main Contractors Preliminaries, Overheads & Profit and Optimism Bias incorporating Development Contingency. Further allowances have been identified for Professional/Project Fees, Provisional Sum allowances for Theatre/Cinema Specific Installations and Construction Inflation. Stage 2 Budget Costs are based on competitive pricing levels prevailing in Q4-2021. An allowance for Construction Inflation has been identified separately at £213,000 that has been included in the overall cost estimation.

The Stage 2 Budget Cost Estimate has increased by £550,000 from the Stage 1 Indicative Budget Cost Estimate, prepared in September 2019. This cost increase is primarily due to inflation increases; 2021 has seen unprecedented material price increases within the Construction Industry affecting almost all elements.

In discussion with the Group it is suggested to take provisional allowances for theatre/cinema specifics out at this stage as they can apply to specific funders for these elements at a later stage – this will be a deduction of £450,000 and would bring the total project budget excl. inflation down to £4,657,000. It should also be noted that the costs estimate include a standalone inflation allowance of £213,000 and a separate Optimism Bias of £463,000.

The Group has made several applications to different potential funding organisations (incl. HLF Development Fund and Project Fund).

East Belfast Councillors received a tour through the building 19th October and could see the work already been undertaken to date including:

- remodelling to the first floor due to flood damage (has allowed for further design development to give maximum flexibility of space and therefore create a better offer)
- lift installation and restructuring of the south wing to get accessibility sorted (SAC secured funding from accessibility fund)
- at the site visit Members were also updated on the current status of the funding strategy and ongoing discussions with other funders including HLF

Members are asked to

- Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
- note the increase in costs estimates following the RIBA Stage 2 Design Report, consider if they wish to move the project to the next stage and to submit a Planning Application in December 2021
- if agreed in terms of ongoing support, consider timebounding the project for next stages

4. Bloomfield Community Association

Date approved:	September 2016	Funding allocation and stage:	£440,000 Stage 3
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The project involves developing a fit for purpose community facility to meet the needs of the community association and futureproof their current role/ infrastructure within the community. This will include demolition of the existing premises and rebuilding to include community space, office facilities, multi-use hall and disability access. There has been no significant progress for more than 5 years now.

The project was discussed at East AWG on February 2021 and it was agreed to update the business case for the project and to undertake discussion with DfC. The business case has since been updated and reviewed with costs equating to £745,054 as of August 2021, which leaves a funding shortfall of £305,054. Discussion with DfC is ongoing and a funding application is being prepared by Council officers to cover the budget shortfall. This application will be reviewed by the group and issued to DfC in the coming weeks.

East Belfast Councillors received a tour through the building 19th October and were given an update on the works carried out by the Group who highlighted the vital role the Group played in the community infrastructure.

Members are asked to

- Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
- Note updated cost estimates and cost deficit
- If agreed to endorse officers to continue the discussions with DfC and other partners to bridge the funding gap/ shortfall of £305k

5. **Castlereagh Presbyterian Church**

Date Approved	August 2017	Funding Allocation Stage	£382.000 BIF – Stage 3
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Informed by a business case, the original project scope included extending the church hall and carry out energy efficiency improvements to the building to increase community usage and enhance the sustainability of the church hall. However, due to funding shortfall and construction cost increases, group have proposed a pared back option to suit the project budget and ensure deliverability.

The Group presented to the AWG in June 2021 on designs for a revised/ scaled back project proposal not dependant on additional funding- to address sustainability and energy efficiency issues with building (external doors, windows roofing, toilets) and meet related outcomes/ benefits. Church approvals for the revised works are now in place for this revised option and group collating final pieces of information required as part of due diligence.

Members are asked to

- Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
- Note revised revised/ scaled back project scope
- If agreed, approve the project to proceed to due diligence

6. **Westbourne Presbyterian Church – Titanic People**

Date approved	September 2012	Funding Allocation and stage	£250.000
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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. 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. The project was due to receive match funding support from the Executive Office via the Social Investment Fund (SIF). However the Executive Office subsequently withdrew the Letter of Offer under the SIF programme to the Titanic People Project was being withdrawn due to the escalation in costs.

There is a project now on the Urban Villages list. Members are asked to note that the scope of this project is different from the original proposals with the focus being the development of the outside space of the Church with public realm works which can be used as flexible/event space. There are also some works proposed to the entrance vestibule of the Church. However the scope of the project is no longer the refurbishment and restoration of the Church.

The Group have presented to East AWG on a number of occasions and it was agreed that the position would be reviewed again when the UV Business Case was prepared. Unfortunately the UV timescale has slipped with the business case due to be completed in the next few weeks. Discussions remain ongoing with the Group and additional funding options are being explored with DfC. The Council is waiting on detailed project proposal and business case from UV and will report back once this is completed.

Members are asked to note

- Confirm ongoing in principle commitment
- Note revised proposed project scope under the UV programme
- If agreed to endorse officers to continue working with Urban Villages and report back once the business case is complete with Urban Villages.

7. Lagan Village Youth and Community Association

Date Approved:	September 2016	Funding allocation stage:	No commitment
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Members will recall that the AWG agreed (in January 2017 and confirmed in February 2020) that Lagan Village Youth and Community Centre, currently at BIF Stage 2- Uncommitted, is the reserve project and would be considered first if any funding became available through the BIF Programme.

At the site visit on 19th October Members were updated by the Group that there is the opportunity to progress some internal renovation works to the building which cost approx. £300,000 which covers toilets upgrades etc.

Members are asked to note the update on the Lagan Village Youth and Community Association project

Members will also be aware that Lagan Village has received £15,000 funding under LIF for outside environmental improvement works. The group received match funding from DfC in the amount of £35k. The group are also in the process of submitting a funding application to Groundwork NI under the Alpha Fund.”

The Working Group considered each project in turn.

Strand Arts Centre

Moved by Alderman Dorrian
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – that a discussion be held with the Strand Arts Centre and the other funders to determine a timeline and to establish further certainty around the project. It was further agreed that the project should progress to the next stage with the planning application to be submitted.

Bloomfield Community Centre

The Working Group agreed to recommend the proposed course of action within the report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, namely, that it:

- confirmed its ongoing in principle commitment to the project;
- noted the updated cost estimates and cost deficit; and
- agreed to endorse officers to continue the discussions with the Department for Communities and other partners to bridge the funding shortfall of £305,000.

Castlereagh Presbyterian Church

A number of Members expressed concern that the Church had not confirmed whether it would contribute any funding towards the project and that they wanted to ensure that the facilities would be open for use by the wider community.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed to request additional information from the Church in respect of whether there would be any congregational funding or whether they had investigated other external funding streams; who the end users of the facilities would be; and that a further site visit be arranged to the Church.

Westbourne Presbyterian Church/ Titanic People Project

A number of Members expressed concern that the scope of the project had changed considerably since it had first been approved for funding in 2012.

Moved by The High Sheriff,
Seconded by Alderman Dorrian and

Resolved - that the Working Group agrees to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the project is no longer suitable to receive LIF funding and that it be removed from the LIF project list; and that, instead, it be considered for funding under other funding streams, such as the new Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, and that the project should also be looked at in the context of other proposed projects in the area including the regeneration of Pitt Park and the ongoing development of Templemore Baths to include the heritage/interpretative element.

Lagan Village Youth and Community Centre

Moved by The High Sheriff,

Seconded by Alderman Dorrian and

Resolved – that officers would engage with the Department for Communities in relation to the Lagan Village Youth and Community Centre to ascertain if there are any plans in terms of funding;

that a meeting be held, in December, between the Members of the East Area Working Group and the Director of Physical Programmes, to discuss the remaining funding which was available in LIF and BIF, and the potential projects which had requested funding; and

that a Special meeting of the East AWG be held in January, 2022, to discuss the reallocation of funding.

Chairperson