

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 3rd February, 2022

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

Members present: Alderman Sandford (Chairperson),
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Alderman Haire);
Aldermen Copeland and Rodgers; and
Councillors Brooks, Flynn, Hanvey, Howard,
Long, M. Kelly, Kyle, McMullan,
McReynolds, Mulholland, and Newton.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Ms. S. Kalke, Project Sponsor Officer;
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Services Integ. Manager;
Ms. C. Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Ms. P. Conway, Strategic Sites Development Surveyor; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Dorrian, the High Sheriff (Councillor Hussey) and Councillors de Faoite and Smyth.

Minutes

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

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Kyle declared an interest in item 3, namely, BIF Update – Braniel, in that he was a Director of the Lagan Village Youth and Community Group, which was also being considered for potential funding through an Investment Fund, and he accordingly left the meeting and did not participate in the vote.

Presentation

DFI - Greenways

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. A. Grieve and Mr. R. McCullough, Active Travel Branch at the Department for Infrastructure.

Mr. Grieve advised the Working Group of three potential options for an active travel route between the Sydenham Bypass and Holywood/the North Down Coastal Path. He explained that the first option would go along the Holywood Road and would provide good connectivity to local communities and destinations along the Holywood Road and Knocknagoney areas. The route would be fully segregated from motor traffic, it would make use of an existing separated walking/cycling junction at Tillysburn and it would link with existing

shared cycling infrastructure on Parkway. He explained that it would provide an opportunity for a more direct link to Hollywood town at Jackson's Road. He explained that 15% of the route would be traffic free and that part of it would be adjacent to the A2 dual carriageway.

The second option would be to create a greenway and would be the shortest route to Kinnegar from Sydenham, and so a more direct route to Hollywood Exchange, Hollywood and the North Down Coastal Path. The Members were advised that the route would be fully segregated from motor traffic, with one road crossing at the end of the scheme, where it entered the Kinnegar access road. Mr. Grieve explained that there were limited opportunities for connections to schools and local destinations along that route. The Members were advised the 25% of the route would be traffic free and that it would be the most expensive option of the three.

The Working Group was advised that the third route would go predominantly alongside the Sydenham Bypass. The Members were advised that it would be a direct route from North Down into Belfast, which would be significantly improved by extending to the Titanic Quarter Station. Mr. Grieve advised that the route would be fully segregated from motor traffic and would make use of the existing separated walking/cycling junction at Tillysburn. He explained that it would provide an opportunity for a more direct link to Hollywood town, at Jackson's Road, and that it was also the cheapest option of the three options.

The Members were advised that they hoped to publish the consultation on the possible routes over the next couple of weeks and that it would be available via Citizen Space.

In response to a Member's query as to whether in-person consultation would also be taking place in respect of the routes, Mr. Grieve stated that it would require the appropriate clearance to be given by the Department in terms of Covid-19 safety.

A Member stated that the link between Sydenham and Belfast City Centre should be improved. A further Member added that the Sydenham Road, particularly between the Audi garage and the Lagan footbridge, was dangerous for cyclists. He added that the North Down Coastal Route was not really a cycle route. Mr. Grieve acknowledged the Members' points and added that the Harbour Commissioners owned the Harbour estate and that there was work to be done on the Sydenham Road.

A number of Members expressed concern about the proposed route which was proposed to go alongside the Sydenham Bypass, with a cycle lane in a style similar to that on Middlepath Street.

In response to Members' questions, Mr. Grieve confirmed that funding had not yet been agreed for the proposed scheme.

In response to a further Member's question, Mr. Grieve advised the Working Group that the DFI hoped to transfer ownership of the Comber Greenway to the surrounding local Councils within the year 2022.

A Member requested that Mr. Grieve and his colleagues would liaise with Mr. R. King MBE from the "20's Plenty for Us" campaign.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Grieve and Mr. McCullough for their attendance and the Working Group agreed to invite them to a future meeting, after the completion of the consultation process.

BIF Update - Braniel

(Councillor Kyle, having declared an interest in the item, left the meeting for the duration of the discussion on the item and did not participate in the vote)

The Director of Physical Programmes advised the Area Working Group that the Braniel Church project was a project which had received funding from the additional BIF funding which had been secured for the Outer East area following Local Government Reform in 2015. She explained that it was currently a Stage 3 “Committed” project. The Area Working Group, as agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, had awarded £390,000 towards the project in March 2018. She explained that officers had been working closely with the group to bring the project forward, including detailed designs and procurement.

The Working Group was advised that the wider Braniel area had a resident population of over 4,700 and that there was limited community infrastructure within the area. The Director of Physical Programmes explained that the proposed project was for an extension to the premises to enable enhanced community usage to include additional indoor and outdoor space with upgraded toilet and kitchen facilities, new heating system, new lighting and some internal refurbishment to include upgrades to the foyer/welcome area, new meeting rooms and external upgrades including enhanced lighting and provision of outdoor space for growing and planting.

The Director of Physical Programmes provided the Working Group with information relating to the tender process which had been completed for the project and the resulting funding deficit. She reminded the Members that prices within the construction sector had risen significantly over the past few years due to the pandemic and Brexit.

The Working Group was advised that the contractor would only stand over their price for a certain period of time and that it would expire on 24th March, 2022. If the contract was not awarded by that time, then that risked the Council having to go out to retender. She explained that the tender could not, however, be awarded unless the full funding package was in place. She advised the Members that, given current market conditions, it was likely that the overall cost would increase.

The Working Group noted that officers had approached the Department for Communities but unfortunately it had confirmed that it could not commit funding as Braniel was not within a Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

The Working Group was advised that officers had met with the group and had outlined the current position in relation to the project. The Director of Physical Programmes advised the Members that the Methodist Church Ireland Property Board was very committed to the project and had committed to securing up to £60,000 of the funding deficit themselves. She explained that the Group had been proactive in securing funding for other parts of the project, for example, they had secured a grant from the National Churches Trust to undertake works to the kitchen effectively freeing up financial resources within the overall construction budget.

A number of Members expressed their support for the project given the lack of community infrastructure in the Braniel area.

After discussion, the Area Working Group agreed that:

- match funding of up to £65,000 be allocated to the Braniel Church project, from the uncommitted allocations within the East area, provided that the Church would agree to commit £60,000 towards the costs of the project

and that the Church would confirm that to officers, in writing, by 25th February 2022;

- officers would accordingly follow up with the group;
- an update would be provided to the Area Working Group to note that all funding was in place before a final investment decision be taken and the contract awarded; and
- that a site visit be organised to visit the project.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised the Working Group that they would be keen to be included in the site visit in order to build a relationship with the Community team.

Lisnasharragh Schools Project

The Chairperson advised the Committee that he had been contacted by the Principal of Cregagh Primary School and that works were commencing on site with the Schools initiative. He had suggested that the Working Group might wish to visit the site in order to get a “before and after” impression of the project.

Alleygates Scheme - Phase V

At the request of a Member, the Working Group agreed to request an update from officers in respect of the Alleygates Scheme at the next meeting.

Chairperson