

Extract from minutes of:-

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

20th October, 2017

**“City Centre Social Outcomes Fund Update –
Proposed Recasting to Support the City’s Growing
Tourism Infrastructure”**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues”

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on proposals to recast the focus of the City Centre Social Outcomes Fund to support the city’s growing tourism infrastructure.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- agree that the £4m City Centre Social Outcomes Fund, which was previously agreed by Committee in September 2015, is re-aligned to support capital tourism projects and/or social economy opportunities, with an emphasis on the development of community tourism.
- agree that investment under this fund is prioritised in the East and West given the substantial investment in the Belfast Rapid Transit network and the area surrounding the Transport Hub in the city centre which will act as the focal gateway for tourists arriving in the city.
- note that, if agreed, an outcomes framework will be developed and that this investment will also form part of the Council’s contribution to the City Deal.
- agree in principle the recommendations as laid out in the Table 1 below and to note these projects will be subject to the Council’s three stage approval process for all physical projects. It is therefore recommended that these projects are added as Stage 1 – Emerging Projects with further information to be brought back to Committee in due course.
- note that work is continuing on tourism opportunities in other areas of the city as outlined at 3.12 below and that the potential for a further phase of funding will be examined for similar projects in the other areas of the city as this work develops.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1** Members will be aware that one of the ambitions laid out in the Belfast Agenda is to increase the number of tourists to the city along with the amount of tourism spend. This is supported by the vision which is laid out in the Council's Integrated Tourism Strategy, which was approved by Committee in May 2015, to *'welcome the world and share its history by creating a destination that the world wants to experience first-hand'* and which sets a challenging target of doubling the value of tourism by 2020. One of the other facets of the Belfast Agenda is to grow the city's economy and to increase the opportunities in the city for social economy and entrepreneurship. The substantial investment which is either currently underway or planned in tourism infrastructure across the city including the £100m Integrated Transport Hub which will act as the gateway access point for visitors arriving in the city, the proposed new cruise ship terminal at the Belfast Harbour, the growing number of hotels and the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) system provide the opportunity to act as catalysts for a range of social economy opportunities related to tourism including cafes, walking tours, cultural and tourism trails, craft and art opportunities etc.
- 3.2** The majority of tourism at the moment is concentrated in and around the immediate vicinity of the city centre given the concentration of tourism products including the Titanic Visitor Attraction and the City Hall and the easy accessibility of the city centre from the airport/train station and cruise ship docking point. Members will also be aware of the work currently underway on the development of a City Deal that a key component of this will be the creation of a new regionally significant tourism attraction in the city centre – the 'Belfast Story'. This will help to reinforce the attraction of the city centre in terms of visitor numbers.
- 3.3** However, Belfast's unique and rich story extends past the city centre and there is a need to ensure that the benefits of tourism growth are felt right across Belfast.
- 3.4** Members, through the Area Working Groups (AWGs), have already recognised the potential of local tourism and under the Local Investment Fund(LIF) and the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF) a number of the AWG's have already prioritised investment in local tourism products for example the Eastside Visitor Centre in East and Faightle Feirste Thiar in the West. The AWGs have also regularly received presentations from community groups who have innovative ideas about ways to increase local tourism and this enthusiasm, new thinking and goodwill can now be built upon.
- 3.5** Members will also recall that the importance of local neighbourhoods in telling the rich story of Belfast has already

been recognised by Committee and is evidenced by the Committee approval in May 2017 for the delivery of this year's Tourism Plan which placed an emphasis on the development of community tourism. This outlined the aim of developing tourism infrastructure across the city, providing support to tourism related groups and enhancing the product offers. In August of this year Committee further agreed that the first stage of activity in respect of local tourism would be to prioritise work with partners in East and West Belfast with the introduction of the new BRT system.

- 3.6 Members back in September 2015 agreed the establishment of the £4m City Centre Social Outcomes Fund. However, as outlined above since this time the ambitions and the agenda of the Council have moved on with the finalisation of the Belfast Agenda and there is now an opportunity to re-align this fund to support in the first instance tourism initiatives and/or social economy initiatives which are developed to support the growing tourism infrastructure. It is also therefore proposed that its scope is extended beyond the boundary of the city centre.
- 3.7 Similar to the BIF/LIF it is proposed that this will be for capital projects only. All projects under this funding stream will be subject to going through the Council's three stage approval process for physical projects and will be subject to the same level of rigorous due-diligence as all LIF and BIF projects.
- 3.8 It is important for Members to also note that these projects funded under this stream will be more than just a capital investment. It is intended that the capital investment will act as a catalyst and that these projects will deliver wider social outcomes including employment opportunities and how we can work with partners to maximise these – e.g. the Department for Communities who are currently looking at neighbourhood tourism as the new basis for their regeneration activity under Neighbourhood Renewal. In addition, officers will work with the Groups to see how programming opportunities around these projects can be maximised – for example the development of tours, opportunities for co-events which will bring people across the city; opportunities for how these investments can enhance the work already underway on the Good Relations agenda, for example, bringing people to areas of the city they might not otherwise access.
- 3.9 Given this Members are asked to note that, if agreed, an outcomes framework will be developed and that this investment will also form part of the Council's contribution to the City Deal.

Projects proposals

- 3.10 As outlined above there has already been a range of work undertaken in respect of local tourism given the work to date

on the Integrated Tourism Strategy, the conversations around the Belfast Agenda and discussions and proposals which have been raised at the AWGs.

Through all these mechanisms a number of projects have already been identified as laid out in the Table 1. These projects are concentrated in the East/West and the area around the Transport Hub given the significant investment in these infrastructure developments.

Members are asked to note that these projects have synergies with other tourism projects in the areas as evidenced by the Map at Appendix 1 and that projects are being brought forward now due to the risk of losing additional match funding, potential to acquire buildings and/or the potential for future match funding. Members are asked to agree the projects as outlined in Table 1 below.

3.11 Table 1 Proposed projects

PROJECT	IMPACT AREA	DESCRIPTION	RECOMMENDATION
Shankill Mission	West	Development of a social economy training hotel	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £750,000
Eastside Visitor Centre	East	Development of a new Tourism exhibition space and extension of building at CS Lewis Square	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £700,000 <i>Potential match funding – UV</i>
Rock Centre	West	Development of new tourism visitor centre	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £200,000
Coffee Culture	Transport Hub	Development of a social economy café designed to support investment in tourism infrastructure including the Transport Hub and Gilpins	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £100,000 <i>Potential match funding – UV</i>
Assembly	Transport Hub	Exhibition and	Add as Stage 1 –

PROJECT	IMPACT AREA	DESCRIPTION	RECOMMENDATION
Buildings Conference Centre		Genealogical Research Space	Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £90,000
Sandy Row Community Forum	Transport Hub	Development of a Tourism Trail (with digital element) to complement the Transport Hub	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £80,000 <i>Potential match funding – UV</i>
Belfast Orange Hall Museum	West	Disability Access to Museum/ Renovation of frontage on the Cultural Corridor	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £80,000
James Connolly Interpretive Centre	West	Development of a dedicated interactive exhibition, study area, library of Connolly's writing and tourist facilities	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £1,000,000
Roddy McCorley Museum	West	Development of a modern interpretative museum and existing grounds	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging with an indicative ringfenced allocation of £1,000,000

* See Map at Appendix 1

- 3.12 The Committee is asked to note that these are ‘in-principle’ recommendations only at this stage and do not constitute final investment decisions in any project. As with all projects these will be required to go through the Council’s three stage approval process and Committee will be kept up to date of their progress. All projects will be tested against the Council’s 4 ‘investment abilities’ – feasibility/affordability/deliverability and sustainability. Other areas/initiatives**
- 3.13 Members will appreciate that there is a need to ensure that the benefits of local tourism are felt across the city and the Committee is asked to note that there are a number of other initiatives currently underway across the city which fall outside the prioritised area including –**

- North – Belfast Hills/Belfast Castle/Belfast Zoo/Cavehill Country Park and the north Foreshore (see Map at Appendix 1) – Members will be aware that it has been agreed to explore the future options in relation to Belfast Zoo. Work is also currently underway at looking at options for the ‘Old Zoo’ as well as the options for Belfast Castle. In addition, Members will be aware that the development briefs for the tourism/leisure uses at the North Foreshore have recently been returned and that there was a high level of interest in this and that these are currently being assessed. Council officers are also progressing discussions with the National Trust in respect of the Belfast Hills and how this significant natural asset can be fully utilised from a tourism perspective.
- South – Botanic Gardens (Tropical Ravine/Palm House)/Friar’s Bush/Lagan Corridor/Gatekeepers Cottage/Stranmillis Gateway – Members will be aware that the Tropical Ravine is currently undergoing a £4.2m redevelopment supported by Heritage Lottery funding and is due to re-open in February. Also, Members agreed last month that the Palm House was added to the Capital Programme and that conversations are initiated with HLF with the aim of carrying out a similar refurbishment on the Palm House. This could represent over £8m being invested in Botanic Gardens and will be a major step in restoring this park to its Victorian glory and creating a significant tourism and heritage offering. This is further supported by the historic Friar’s Bush Cemetery next door as well as the Ulster Museum and QUB. The South AWG also agreed to focus its attention on the Lagan as a significant tourism and leisure offering and commissioned the ‘Back to the River’ study as part of this. Works on the new £3.7m Stranmillis Gateway is due to commence early next year.

3.14 Officers are continuing to engage with relevant tourism organisations etc. in other parts of the city to see how local tourism initiatives can be developed in these locations.

3.15 Financial & Resource Implications

- *Financial* – £4m - the monies for this Fund have already been ringfenced – this is simply repurposing the Fund to allow for projects outside the city centre and to support projects with a focus on tourism. It is recognised that further support may be required for other initiatives in areas of the city as these further develop and it is purposed that this will be kept under review and further updates will be brought back as required for Members.

- **Resources – officer time to work with Groups to develop up projects.**

3.16 Equality or Good Relations Implications

The Fund will be subject to the Council’s equality screening process.”

Moved by Councillor McDonough-Brown,
Seconded by Councillor O’Neill,

That the Committee agrees that the £4m City Centre Social Outcomes Fund be re-aligned to support tourism projects and/or social economy opportunities, with an emphasis on community tourism but that the Committee does not agree to the projects at this time pending further assessment on which projects could be brought forward.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations as set out in the report but that other projects be allowed to be brought forward for inclusion on a reserve list.

On a vote by show of hands fourteen Members voted for the amendment and four against and it was declared carried.

The amendment was thereupon put as the substantive motion, when thirteen members voted for and five against and it was declared carried.”