

Title of Report:	Correspondence Report
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure and Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	18 th February 2020
For Decision or For Information	For Decision / Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Leader and Champion
Outcome	Establish Key relationships with Government agencies and potential strategic partners.
Lead Officer	Director of Leisure and Development

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	n/a
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	n/a
Code	n/a
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present correspondence for Members consideration.

2.0 Mary Peters Trust

Correspondence has been received from The Mary Peters Trust requesting a financial contribution from Council to help maintain their funds used to help young people achieve excellence in sport.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Leisure and Development Committee consider this request.

3.0 Coleraine BID

Members are asked to note the correspondence received from a selection of local businesses in Coleraine expressing their discontent with the concept, operation and benefit of Coleraine BID.



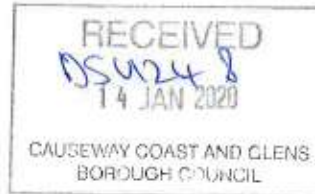
Mary Peters Trust

Funding Northern Ireland's Future Sporting Champions

marypeterstrust.org

6th January 2020

Mr David Jackson
Cloonavin,
66 Portstewart Road,
Coleraine,
BT52 1EY,
Northern Ireland



Dear Mr Jackson

Over the years you have assisted the Mary Peters Trust (we are a charity administered voluntarily by Directors) by providing encouragement and financial support. We invest our capital and the interest is distributed in the form of sporting awards to upcoming athletes.

In the year 2019 the Trust disbursed over £80k to 200 young people representing over 50 sports.

We are seeking your support to help maintain our capital base to ensure the level and value of awards continues to grow. We need the support of Local Authorities, commercial organisations and voluntary bodies in order to help achieve this target. A number of fundraising events are also being organised.

We ask you to forward this letter to the relevant Council Committee and respectfully request they join in our work of helping young people achieve excellence in sport, by making a contribution for the financial year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Best wishes and many thanks for your continued support.

Lady Mary Peters CH DBE RNR
President

Mary Peters Trust, 54 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast, BT9 6AZ Telephone: 028 9068 6730 email: info@marypeterstrust.org

The Mary Peters Trust is a registered charity: NIC100236 Companies House: NI617518

introduction

Perhaps at this time of the year we need, with calm and cool heads, to reflect on BID and what it has done for our town and the business community.

BID changes the whole fabric of the business and retail community of Coleraine. It has destroyed the community spirit, caused deep divisions, and has taken the heart and soul out of the small hard working, independent business people who make up the backbone of our once great town.

One year on from its inception, there has been no marked difference, no increased footfall in the town and no increased profitability to the businesses.

With all the money spent, that is not a great return for all the effort the Management Team of BID has put in.

There is a downturn in the number of people visiting town centres for various reasons of which buying online is one. Non-accessibility is another, and all the efforts of BID will not reverse the trend at present.

Perhaps the time has come for Council to re-think BID.

What is Bid

A Bid is a partnership between the local authority, i.e. Council and local business.

The intended purpose is to provide additional services or improvements to a specified area. It is agreed upon by ballot and is funded by a levy on those liable for non-domestic rates. The council is responsible for billing and collection of the levy.

Bids originated in Canada and North America and in 2001 Tony Blair announced that the government of the UK had decided to introduce legislation to create districts, they really only commenced in 2004 in the UK. The Bid Levy operates for a maximum period of five years and needs to be voted upon again for its continuity and focuses on a defined area, e.g. Town Centres. It is strange that the Coleraine Bid extends to the Lodge Road roundabout to include Asda and the Lodge Hotel, which is definitely not town centre and there is an extensive residential area between them. No doubt this was designed by someone to ensure a high monetary value.

High streets are at the heart of many communities throughout Northern Ireland and they have been suffering severe body blows over the past few years.

In 2019, information published in the Guardian revealed that on average 16 stores had closed their doors in the first six months of 2019 whilst only 9 were opening. This resulted in a net decline of 1234 chain stores in Britain's top 500 high streets, (analysis by PWC). This decline did not take account of independent retailers. The result has been the loss of tens of thousands of jobs and Government needs to address the growing crisis in our High Streets, (but then in this province we don't have a Government and this has allowed the economy to slide and stagnate - our politicians

should be ashamed of themselves, no work and still getting paid - where else does this happen whilst others are losing their jobs?).

A complete overhaul of property taxes is required to help fight off competition from the big online operators. We have an outdated business rate system which is hindering investment by small niche shops which would bring life back into our failing, floundering town centres, but they just cannot afford to set up business as the rates are crippling.

Government needs to introduce much needed reform before more stores close and more jobs are lost. But there is no direction from Government and Local Government. No one seems to care about the small traders who make up the fabric of the town. Coleraine is a shadow of what it was. It is sad to see the state and condition it has sunk to.

Many of the independent retailers are struggling to make ends meet, pay their rates, pay their staff, try to remain competitive and are now asked to pay a levy towards BID which only benefits those premises on The Diamond, Church Street and Kingsgate Street, and to be told by the Manager of the Bid, "it is only the price of a year's cup of coffee", is to say the least, unprofessional and degrading. Many of the small retailers would love to be on his salary.

The amount of the levy is 2% of the rateable value of the premises but as rates rise the amount demanded will rise and also there is no guarantee that the Bid Levy will stay at 2% and businesses are tied in for 5 years.

Bid – How did it come about?

Bid had to be proposed in Council by someone (not sure who yet). Then the Council had to carry out a Feasibility study in relation to setting up this Bid area and process. The report clearly defines "the spine of Coleraine" as Church Street, Kingsgate Street, Bridge Street and The Diamond.

This study was produced at a significant cost to Council (rate payers' money) but regrettably significant sections of this report and shadow Bid were ignored when it came to the implementation of the Bid in Coleraine.

The study recommends that a crucial element should be face to face discussions with potential levy contributors which whilst time consuming, experience shows that these discussions are essential. It is imperative to ensure every opportunity is utilised to raise awareness of the need for business to exercise their vote, and they to be informed of what they are voting for and if they don't vote what is the consequences (see study).

Many business owners were not made fully aware of the process and were not informed of what was going on. There may have been a few public meetings but the attendance at those meetings was very poor which should have been an indicator to those in Council that they were not getting the message across to the business community at large in Coleraine.

A survey of businesses in Coleraine has been taken by ourselves and the reoccurring theme was that many were not informed of what was going on; they were kept in the dark.

We have taken the time to walk the streets of Coleraine, visit the owners, listen to them unburden their hearts to us about the cold facts of business, how difficult it is to survive. Many had received no communication about the Bid process, they were not informed, they saw no face, heard no voice from anyone in Council and an email is not enough.

Perhaps if Council officers and those who were responsible for trying to implement the Bid had taken the time and energy (as recommended by the shadow Bid) as many of us have done and listened to the majority of traders, we would not be in the situation we find ourselves in today.

Jamie, the Bid Manager, claims to speak for 600 businesses in Coleraine which is a considerable number – these cannot all be located within the Bid area. We have carried out a study of all streets and premises within the Bid area and have not found 600. When we asked for information to be supplied to us of the number of businesses in the designated area and the number of voting papers that were sent to those who were eligible to vote on the process this has been denied to us. Also, within that area 11 Council properties were also eligible to vote – we wonder what way they were advised to vote as were many other local businesses.

We have to date 183 signatures of independent traders who are in agreement that the Bid process is not the correct vehicle in this present climate for a variety of reasons and is very unpopular with the majority of independent traders.

Before we had the Bid we had a town team within Council and it was their responsibility to run and have those events in the town, is the introduction of a Bid an admission of failure by them. Perhaps we should ask what legacy have they passed on to us and what have they created in Coleraine Town Centre? We believe that we are now seeing in part the failure to allow investment in the town over many years, we believe this is a failure by Council and the town team.

Coleraine – What Next?

The Bid at present has not delivered for Coleraine Town as a whole. All the activities by BID are located in The Diamond and Church Street. Their plan clearly states that they seek to build up the Town Centre and we have no problem with that but yet the businesses on the fringes of the Bid area are asked to pay exactly the same percentage and yet they receive no direct benefit. A sliding scale would have been better and fairer but we believe when this was suggested by someone on the Bid Team at its inception, they were not listened to and were voted down. They withdrew from the Team – perhaps realising then it was unfair and would cause problems.

From its inception Bid has been fraught with inconsistencies, problems and difficulties and now heavy handedness is being shown by threatening to take to court the businesses who have not paid, many of whom cannot afford to pay and may have to close their doors.

