

Development Committee

Thursday, 26th October, 2006

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCausland (Chairman);
the High Sheriff (Councillor Humphrey); and
Councillors Convery, D. Dodds, Empey, Hartley,
Kelly, Maginness, A. Maskey, P. Maskey,
Ní Chuilín and Stoker.

In attendance: Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives;
Mr. A. Hassard, Head of Environmental Health;
Mr. J. Hamill, Estates Manager;
Mr. A. Irvine, Markets Development Officer; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Outdoor Markets Feasibility Report

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 18th October, 2004, it had agreed that research be undertaken regarding the feasibility of an outdoor market being developed within Belfast City centre. She indicated that Ferguson and McIlveen, together with Osborne King, had undertaken this work and that officers from both the Development and the Health and Environmental Services Departments had assisted the Consultants with their report. In addition, widespread consultation had been undertaken. She advised the Committee that representatives from the Consultants were in attendance. Accordingly, Mr. Richard Bowman from Ferguson and McIlveen and Mr. Gareth Powell from Osborne King were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Bowman indicated that twenty-three potential areas in the City centre had been identified. From these, a shortlist of twelve sites had been examined further using accessibility for both customers and traders and the suitability of the areas for both weekend and weekday markets as the most important criteria. As a result of this process, the shortlist had been reduced to six sites. A quality assessment of these six areas had been carried out and discussions had been held with possible operators, Statutory Bodies, the landowners and adjacent businesses. Consequently, the Consultants had concluded that Custom House Square, Blackstaff Square and Bank Square were the preferred options to accommodate an outdoor market.

Mr. Bowman indicated that, of the three, Custom House Square was certainly the most attractive, with plenty of space and a high quality appearance. However, there might be some difficulties arising from other land uses at the Queen's Square end of Custom House Square and with other events held in the area but these problems,

he believed, could be overcome. Many of the consultees had indicated that the Square was too detached from the main shopping area of the City centre to be successful. However, one of the potential operators who had been consulted was confident that he could operate successfully on the site.

He indicated that Blackstaff Square seemed to be the obvious choice for a small weekday food market to cater for the surrounding office trade. He pointed out that it would be essential for the proposed market to also have the use of Amelia Street and for the existing street furniture and planters to be removed.

He stated that there was concern about the quality of the open space at Bank Square. However, its location, at the heart of the primary retail core, provided some confidence that it could work as a market location. Its disadvantages included poor image and incidents of anti-social behaviour but these could be eliminated through good design, a commitment to providing a high quality market and by putting considerable effort into promoting the site as a key City centre market location.

During discussion in the matter, several Members expressed the view that it would be important that the proposed markets did not adversely affect the traders who operated within St. George's Market. In reply, the Markets Development Officer indicated that it would be the Council's intention that the days during which the proposed markets would operate would be different to those on which St. George's Market was open. In addition, some traders would be operating at both markets. Accordingly, he was confident that the trade at St. George's Market would not be adversely affected by the proposals.

The Markets Development Officer indicated that, if Amelia Street were to be used and street furniture were to be removed from Blackstaff Square, approximately forty-five stalls could be located within that location and that it was envisaged that the market at Custom House Square would operate on one day a week only and would be specialist in nature. He pointed out that, although the proposed market at Custom House Square would not be operated by the Council, the operator would be required to sign a Management Agreement with the Council which would cover such issues as the cleaning of the area after use. In addition, as it was envisaged that the market would operate on one day a week only, it was unlikely that it would interfere with the other events which were held at the location.

He reminded the Committee that the report from the Consultants had concluded that:

- (i) the Council should permit a private company to operate a market at Custom House Square under a Management Agreement;
- (ii) the Council should operate and manage an outdoor market in Blackstaff Square; and
- (iii) subject to the success of the proposed Blackstaff Square market, the Council should consider operating and managing an outdoor market in Bank Square.

Following further discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided by the Consultants and the Council's officers, concurred with the findings of the report regarding the operation of outdoor markets at the three Squares and requested that the Council's officers undertake further work in that regard. In addition, the Committee expressed the view that Fountain Street and College Street might make suitable locations for individual street trading pitches and that the holding of art markets at certain locations, such as Botanic Gardens and Drumglass Park, might be appropriate and requested that the Council officers investigate the matter further.

Chairman