

Development Committee

Monday, 21st June, 2010

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor C. Maskey (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Humphrey); and
Councillors Campbell, Ekin, B. Kelly, Mallon,
Mac Giolla Mhín, Rodgers and Rodway.

In attendance: Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Kyle, Lavery, Mhic Giolla Mhín and Mullaghan.

Royal Exchange Regeneration Project – Deramore Property Group

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 12th May, it had agreed to receive from representatives of the Deramore Property Group a presentation in relation to the Royal Exchange Regeneration Project.

Prior to the deputation being received, the Director of Development submitted the undernoted report which provided the background to the company's proposed scheme:

“Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that at the meeting of 12 May, it was agreed to receive a presentation from Deramore Property Group (Deramore). Deramore are the owners of 41-51 Royal Avenue and 27-31 Rosemary Street, Belfast.

Deramore have submitted a planning application to Planning Service to redevelop their premises. The application is currently going through the consultation process. The application is to provide 20,000 sq ft of retail floor space over ground and three upper floors. The intention is to provide accommodation for a single multiple operator similar to the New Look operation in Donegall Place where a completely new shop was built behind the original front façade.

The Deramore property has a double frontage on Royal Avenue and Rosemary Street and has been planned to compliment any future Royal Exchange Schemes.

Key Issues

On 2 December 2009 Margaret Ritchie MP, then Minister for Social Development, announced the timetable for submitting the planning application to take forward the Royal Exchange Regeneration Project.

The developer of the project, a consortium known as Royal Exchange (Belfast) Ltd comprising William Ewart Properties Ltd, Snodden's Construction Ltd and ING, are to submit a planning application approved by Department for Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Environment Planning Service by 31 October 2010.

On 25 May 2010 DSD Minister Alex Attwood announced that £11 million allocated to the Royal Exchange Scheme had been surrendered by the Department to the Northern Ireland Assembly Executive. Uncertainty now remains as to when and if this money will be reallocated to the scheme.

Councillor William Humphrey, then Chairman of the Development Committee, received a letter on 26 May 2010 from Nick Reid of Leaside Investments Limited (William Ewart Properties Limited) regarding the press speculation and Ministerial announcement.

DSD will not at this stage confirm to Deramore that their premises will be excluded from the development scheme for the Royal Exchange Project.

Deramore are seeking confirmation from the developer and DSD that their premises will not be included in the scheme and therefore not at risk from vesting, giving them the security to attract quality tenants to their redeveloped premises.

The leases in their existing premises all terminate by July 2012. Currently their tenants, who include Harry Corry, have all indicated they are unlikely to renew their leases due to the uncertainty surrounding the Royal Exchange development and the ongoing vacancy and dereliction in the area. Many landlords are not carrying out much needed refurbishments to their property and investment is largely deficient in the area.

Deramore have advised BCC officers that they have the funding in place to carry out their development once planning permission is granted. However the scheme can only be commenced once the uncertainty regarding the future of their premises is resolved. Deramore have requested a meeting with the Development Committee to present their development proposals and advise Members of their concerns as to when any redevelopment of the North East Quarter will be advanced.

Members have still not received a date for a meeting with the Minister for DSD to discuss the Royal Exchange Scheme. Two previous meetings were cancelled by the DSD.

Decision Tracking

There is no decision tracking attached to this report as it is for information only.

Key to Abbreviations

Deramore – Deramore Property Group
DSD – Department for Social Development”

It was reported that Messrs. A. Carleton and R. Faloon were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Carleton advised the Members that the Deramore Property Group was seeking to deliver local investment in Belfast City centre by obtaining support for the removal of 41-51 Royal Avenue from the Royal Exchange Masterplan. If the company's proposed development at that location were to proceed, it would result in short-term employment of approximately 80 till 100 construction jobs over a twelve month period and sustained employment of 60 till 80 full and part-time jobs in the retail industry when the project had been completed. He outlined the history of the company including its assets, its development portfolio and provided details of some of the schemes which the company had delivered.

Mr. Faloon explained that the Group's planning application, which sought to conserve the integrity of the existing building, met the requirements of the Environment and Heritage Service, would create an opportunity for a single let retail unit, complement the Royal Exchange Masterplan and promote regeneration in the City through the use of a private local company. He reviewed the background to the company's planning application and its current status and stated that the Department for Social Development would not, at this stage, confirm whether or not the premises would be excluded from the overall Royal Exchange development scheme. He concluded by outlining the impact the Royal Exchange Scheme was having on the City centre, that is, the prevention of complementary private regeneration, an increase in the risk of compulsory vesting being necessary, uncertainty among current tenants and the creation of a high level of vacant properties.

The deputation then answered a number of questions from the Members and indicated that the Deramore Property Group was seeking the Committee's support to have its building excluded from the Royal Exchange Masterplan in order to allow it to develop its own scheme. In addition, it would like to meet with the other parties involved in the Royal Exchange Scheme to ascertain why they had changed their views in so far as they would not allow 41-51 Royal Avenue to be developed on its own.

The deputation then thanked the Committee for the receiving them and retired from the meeting.

After discussion, it was agreed that:

- (i) the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), together with one representative from each of the Party Groupings on the Council, facilitate a meeting between representatives of Royal Exchange (Belfast) Limited, the consortium which would be undertaking the Royal Exchange Regeneration Project, and the Deramore Property Group in order to ascertain whether a solution could be arrived at which would facilitate all parties; and
- (ii) a further letter be forwarded to the Minister for Social Development requesting that he meet with an All-Party deputation from the Council to discuss the Royal Exchange Scheme.

Culture Night 2010 – Presentation

(Councillor B. Kelly declared an interest in this matter in that her brother was a member of the Belfast Cultural Night Committee, which had submitted a request for funding, and took no part in the debate nor the subsequent vote.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that at a meeting of the Development Committee on 12 May 2010, Committee agreed to defer the consideration of a report in relation to Culture Night 2010 to enable a special meeting to be held. Culture Night organisers have been invited to provide details of how they intend to deliver the 2010 programme, particularly along the city's arterial routes.

Members will also be aware that at the Development Committee meeting on 13 May 2009, approval was given to provide match funding of £25,000 to support a pilot Belfast Culture Night 2009.

Culture Night 2009 far surpassed expectations, with 100 galleries, artists studios, venues, cultural organisations, historic buildings, churches and creative businesses providing over 100 performances, talks, tours, presentations, films, exhibitions and workshops for audiences of all ages. This promoted the Cathedral Quarter as a thriving cultural hub, giving the public the opportunity to meet artists and learn about what cultural organisations have to offer throughout the year.

To complement the core activities programmed by participating organisations and businesses, and to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere, the Culture Night organisers animated the streets and public spaces of Cathedral Quarter with live music, walk-about performers, exhibitions, circus performances, giant puppets and more. An estimated 15,000 people attended.

The concept of Culture Night fits well within Belfast City Council's current strategies. Under the theme of Good Relations, the one-night event promotes a unique opportunity of shared cultural space within the city centre, attracting a broad mix of audiences (in 2009, the event attracted a large number of families with young children). The final draft Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework for Belfast 2010–2014 identifies culture and arts as the 'essence of Belfast' and one of the main priorities is to explore ways in which to engage with the sector and develop greater visitor access to culture and arts activities. Culture Night provides a unique opportunity to showcase Belfast's culture and arts product not only to local citizens, but to visitors. The current Integrated Cultural Strategy for Belfast, produced in partnership with the Arts Council for Northern Ireland, identifies that the culture and arts sector can often be fragmented. However, key events such as Culture Night develop partnerships across the sector, promoting cross-selling and strengthening its overall capacity to deliver. Culture Night also contributes to the general development of the City's Evening Economy.

Culture Night 2010 will promote Belfast as a vibrant cultural space, welcoming and accessible to all. The event will coincide with a series of Culture Nights taking place in other European cities.

Key Issues

Culture Night brings together arts and cultural organisations, the hospitality industry and local businesses to provide a free, family-focused arts and cultural event. The Cathedral Quarter will host the core of activities, with satellite events taking place throughout the city.

Following discussions with Councillors, Council officers and key stakeholders, Culture Night organisers have recruited partner organisations in the Shankill and in North, South, East and West Belfast who will showcase the rich cultural diversity of these areas and the city as a whole. Culture Night organisers will also continue to seek additional arterial partners in the run up to the event.

Events in these areas will be programmed so that they will not compete with each other or dilute the impact of the city's cultural offering. The organisers will also ensure that audiences from the widest geographical area of Belfast have every opportunity to access core activities by brokering new relationships with transport providers such as Translink.

Should the Committee agree to provide funding towards Culture Night, the Council's Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit will work with Culture Night organisers to ensure that the Council's objectives to deliver on arterial routes are met as a condition of funding.

As in 2009, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland has been approached to match the request of £25,000 to Belfast City Council.

Resource Implications

Financial

Match funding of £25,000 has been included and approved within the Departmental budget for 2010–11.

Human Resources

This will be covered within the work programme of the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee consider match funding of no more than £25,000 towards Culture Night 2010.

Decision Tracking

Further to Council ratification, payment will be made towards the cost of Culture Night 2010.

Time line: July 2010
Reporting Officer: Kerry Sweeney"

It was reported that Ms. L. McElvanna and Messrs. S. Kelly and C. Shields, representing the organisers, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

With the assistance of visual aids, Mr. Shields reviewed the previous year's event and its success in expanding the culture experience in Belfast. He explained that, for the 2010 event, the Cultural Night Belfast team had been working towards developing a network of partners from Belfast's key arterial routes who were committed to supporting a concentrated core event in the Cathedral Quarter as well as showcasing the rich cultural output from other areas of the City.

In response to a number of questions, Ms. McElvanna reviewed the outreach work which had been undertaken in various areas of the City in order to extend the event, including the Titanic Quarter, the Shankill Road and North, East, West and South Belfast, and the representatives and organisations with whom they had discussed possible ways of including the arterial routes. In addition, she pointed out that discussions were ongoing with Translink to ascertain how that organisation could support Cultural Night Belfast both as a potential sponsor of the entire event and in determining ways of linking the arterial routes with one another and the City centre. The nature and scale of that partnership would be confirmed in the coming weeks.

She pointed out that, to date, the organisation had received a total of £19,000 in funding from the Departments for Social Development and Culture, Arts and Leisure. In addition, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland had indicated that it would match fund the £25,000 which had been requested from the Council. She accepted that there was other work to be undertaken in relation to the inclusion of the arterial routes but pointed out that this could not be done without the required funding. If that funding were to be provided then events on the arterial routes could be further developed.

Mr. Kelly indicated that the event was only in its second year and for it to have expanded it as far geographically in that time was an excellent achievement given that a similar event, which was held in Dublin, had taken five years to achieve that position. It had been intended that the Cultural Night Belfast would be rolled out even further over a three to five year period.

A Member questioned how much work had been undertaken with organisations such as Orangefest, the Orange Order and the Ulster-Scots Agency in order to include their heritage and culture within the event. In response, Ms. McElvanna indicated that she had commenced discussions to examine the possibility of developing exhibition opportunities within the Cathedral Quarter. Whilst these discussions were only at an initial stage, any proposals could be developed further.

The Chairman thanked the deputation for attending and they retired from the meeting.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Ekin,
Seconded by Councillor Mac Giolla Mhín,

That the Committee agrees to provide funding of up to £25,000 towards Cultural Night 2010.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Rodgers,
Seconded by Councillor Campbell,

That, since the organisers had made limited progress to deliver the event across the City and, in particular, on the arterial routes, the Committee agrees to provide funding of up to £15,000.

On a vote by show of hands four Members voted for the amendment and four against. There being an equality of votes, the Chairman exercised his second and casting vote against the amendment and it was accordingly declared lost.

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Ekin and seconded by Councillor Mac Giolla Mhín was thereupon put to the meeting when four Members voted for and four against. There being an equality of votes, the Chairman exercised his second and casting vote in favour of the proposal and it was accordingly declared carried.

Chairman