



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Ulster Hall Refurbishment – Removal of Canopy at Main Entrance
Date:	11 June 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Tim Husbands, Managing Director, Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Halls, ext 1400

Relevant Background Information

The Ulster Hall was completed in 1862 to the designs of the Newry architect, WJ Barre, as the result of an architectural competition. The entrance porch, fronting Bedford Street, was originally a Porte-Cochere, allowing access for carriages and the glazed canopy was added in 1882. The present canopy is a modern replacement of this canopy, following a bomb explosion in 1994.

Phase one of the refurbishment works, carried out in 2005, began the process of restoring the front elevation with the opening up of the five large arched windows lighting the Minor Hall. The current refurbishment works include the repair and redecoration of the front façade and the creation of screen walls to unify the elevation and mask the new fire escapes and service areas located off the two main corridors. In addition, a new glazed entrance porch to the South side of the building will be constructed to permit level access to the Ground Floor level and Main Hall. The new entrance porch has been designed as a lightweight, contemporary structure, which will not compete with the original classical detailing. It is envisaged that this entrance will become the principal point of entry for patrons thus removing the need for the canopy at the front porch and, consequently, removal of the glazed canopy is recommended.

Key Issues

Removal of the canopy is recommended for the following reasons:

- It is not an original feature of the Barre design;
- The current canopy is a replacement built in 1994 and based on WJ Lynn's design and detailing is of its time and not particularly fine;

- The current canopy clutters the front elevation of the building. This may be exacerbated by the addition of the new glazed entrance porch to the South side of the building which is necessary to accommodate disabled access;
- With the creation of the new entrance to the South side the need for the canopy in its current location is removed;
- The existing canopy encourages loitering at the front of the building – especially smoking when it is raining and anti-social behaviour at night including drinking and over-night sleeping;
- The Listed Building Branch of the Environmental and Heritage Service has approved the removal of the canopy;
- The Planning Service has approved the removal of the canopy; and
- Dawson Stelfox from Consarc Conservation has indicated that the removal of the canopy would allow the original classical proportions of the Hall to be seen and provide a more welcoming and unified frontage.

Photographs of the original Porte-Cochere, the Lynn canopy of 1882, the replacement canopy of 1994 and a photograph which has been altered to indicate the possible effect on the elevation of removing the canopy are attached for information at Appendix 1.

Resource Implications

There are no resource implications as an item has been included in the tender for removal and reinstatement of the existing canopy and a minor saving is expected.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee approve the removal of the canopy on the Bedford Street elevation of the Ulster Hall and for the façade to be returned, as far as is practical, to the original 1862 design.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Series of photographs indicating the history of the canopy