



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Special Development Committee Meeting
Subject:	DSD Retail Sequencing Policy
Date:	27 th October 2008
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Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that at the Development Committee meeting on 11th June 2008 it had deferred consideration of a report regarding the Department for Social Development Retail Sequencing Policy to enable a planning advisory report entitled Major Retail Led Redevelopments Proposals for Belfast City Centre which had been prepared by Braniff Associates on behalf of the Council to be circulated to the Members.

The Braniff report concluded that Council review the situation of major retail-led regeneration schemes in three years time in 2011. By this time, the after shocks from the opening of Victoria Square will have passed and the Royal Exchange project will hopefully be at an advanced stage. The firm recommendation of the report is that Council should withhold its proactive support for Westfield's proposal to accelerate the sequencing process at this particular time.

The report had been prepared to assist the Committee to consider its response to a request from Westfield Shoppingtowns Limited for the Council to support the company's proposal to bring forward the project for the extension of Castlecourt within the Department for Social Development's Sequencing Policy on retail led regeneration in the city. Westfield made a presentation to Committee of their proposals for the Castlecourt area on 15th October 2007.

Committee agreed at their meeting on 13th August 2008 that a special meeting be held to enable it to be provided with an update regarding the situation and to receive presentations from Westfield, Ewarts the developers of Royal Exchange and the Department for Social Development.

Presentations will be received at meeting from Westfield and Ewarts and representatives of the Department for Social Development will be in attendance.

Key Issues

The Planning Advisory Report concluded that there will be capacity for another substantial retail development in Belfast City Centre some time in the future. This scheme will be in addition to the Royal Exchange scheme selected by DSD as the next major retail led regeneration scheme in Belfast City Centre. The analysis conducted for the Council would suggest that all spare capacity for additional floor space in Belfast City Centre has been exhausted by the opening of Victoria Square and the commitment to Royal Exchange. The evidence suggests that there will be no extra income in the population for retail expenditure until 2015.

The key statutory bodies are agreed that there is a need to encourage mixed – use development in the North West Quarter that is sympathetic to the historic streetscape and which enhances the permeability of the area. Westfield's previous presentation to Committee recognises the need for high levels of design within any future scheme. Westfield have not yet submitted a planning application based on the presentation to Committee and are reluctant to commit to the expenditure on the fresh application without the certainty that DSD will set aside the sequencing of major retail led regeneration schemes. Westfield could extend and refurbish Castlecourt now by private land acquisition and submission of a planning application rather than wait for the support of the DSD's land assembly powers.

DSD have informed BCC officers that they would consider bringing forward a scheme at the Castlecourt site if it represented a major change in the retail offer in the city centre and created a significant point of difference for example similar to the John Lewis proposals for major new development stores in the city centres of Cardiff and Dublin. Westfield had a meeting on the 18th June 2008 with the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie and Jackie Johnston of Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate. At a meeting with BCC officers on 9th July 2008 Cherton who act on behalf of Westfield advised that the meeting with DSD was not progressive.

Resource Implications

Asset

The Westfield Proposal will involve the relocation and disposal of the existing Smithfield Market.

Financial

The Westfield proposal is a £150 million development in the North West Quarter of The City.

Recommendations

Members are asked to move to make a decision as to whether or not in the light of the evidence and presentations received Belfast City Council can support Westfield's request for an acceleration of the sequencing of major retail-led regeneration schemes in Belfast City Centre.

Abbreviations

Department - Department for Social Development
Westfield - Westfield Shoppingtowns Limited