



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Special Development Committee
Subject:	Royal Exchange and Castlecourt Schemes
Date:	16 November 2009
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay and Tim Husbands, Interim Co Directors of Development
Contact Officer:	Pamela Davison Estates Surveyor Ext 3506

Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that the Development Committee on 16 September 2009 agreed to invite representatives from Westfield Shoppingtowns Limited and William Ewart Properties Limited to a special meeting in order to receive updates from both companies regarding their proposals to respectively extend Castlecourt and to construct Royal Exchange. In addition, the Committee agreed to seek a meeting with the Minister for Social Development to discuss the Royal Exchange scheme and to request information regarding the engagement which officials within the Department for Social Development (DSD) have had with Ewarts since the Special Development Committee meeting of 27 October 2008.

Key Issues

A formal request was issued to Minister Ritchie to meet a Belfast City Council delegation. A reply has been received stating that the Minister is due to make a decision on a related matter in the coming weeks and will, at that time, respond to BCC. Thus far the Minister has not agreed to meet the BCC delegation.

To date no planning application has been made by William Ewart Properties Limited for the Royal Exchange scheme as the development agreement for the project between Ewarts and the DSD has not been finalised. This agreement will provide the contractual basis for delivering the scheme between DSD and Ewarts and it will set out the timetable for taking forward the statutory approvals required for the project.

Members will recall that, at the Development Committee on 27 October 2008, Committee agreed to oppose the DSD Retail Sequencing Policy and requested that DSD adopt a position whereby, should William Ewart Properties Limited fail to submit its planning application for the Royal Exchange Scheme within nine months, Westfield Shoppingtowns Limited should be permitted to commence its scheme at Castlecourt.

During a meeting on 9 September 2009 between the Chairman of the Development Committee and DSD officers, it was ascertained that, if the Royal Exchange project did not come to fruition, DSD would seek expressions of interest from other developers for a scheme in the North East Quarter rather than enable the extension at Castlecourt to commence.

Lack of progress associated with the Royal Exchange scheme is resulting in further deterioration in the Donegall Street/Lower Royal Avenue/North Street area and businesses in that vicinity are concerned at the manner in which the area continues to be run-down.

Resource Implications

The Royal Exchange scheme is a £360 million development. The Westfield Castlecourt extension is a £200 million development.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the presentations from Westfield and Ewarts.
Members are also asked to consider what further action Committee wishes to accelerate development in this part of the City centre.

Decision Tracking

Committee to be updated regularly on progress with these schemes and on any announcements from DSD.
Date of meeting with the Minister for Social Development to be confirmed

Time line: February 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations

DSD - Department for Social Development
Ewarts - William Ewart Properties Limited
BCC - Belfast City Council