



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Bank Square – Forum for Alternative Belfast, Proposals
Date:	13 January 2010
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay Acting Director of Development ext 3459
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Relevant Background Information

In October 2009 the Chairman of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee Councillor Tom Hartley called a roundtable meeting of interests regarding Bank Square at the request of a number of the business people located in the Square.

The key issue discussed was that notwithstanding the medium term proposals from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to undertake a master-planning exercise and then hopefully a refurbishment of the Square, there were a number of immediate actions that might help retrieve this Square from its current decline.

The roundtable meeting was attended by a range of interests from across the Council, DSD, local businesses, Police Service of NI (PSNI), Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) and the Forum for an Alternative Belfast (FAB).

A number of actions were proposed within existing budgets and approvals and BCCM undertook to follow these up as best it could within available resources and, in addition, further meetings were sought with welfare agencies regarding the problem of homeless people in the Square.

Key Issues

At the above meeting FAB, who are a group of concerned citizens from the Planning and Design fraternity with a passion for a better designed City, provided a detailed critique of the DSD medium term proposals for the Square.

In essence FAB make a strong argument for the re-opening of Berry Street and a reduction in the size of the current Castlecourt service yard, which unless addressed, may mean any money spent on the Square may be nugatory.

FAB have since followed up their proposals with Westfield the owners of Castlecourt, in their London headquarters.

In addition to the above, the Lord Mayor was requested by the Ulster Reform Club whose premises back on to the Square to come and see some of the current problems. The anti-social behaviour is at such a level that the Reform Club has postponed further planned development of their premises until something serious is done about the problems in the Square, which is only 50m from Royal Avenue.

At the meeting, the Reform Club mentioned that it was impressed with the proposals from the FAB for addressing the Square and asked for the Council's opinion.

The Lord Mayor suggested the proposals be presented to the Development Committee for consideration, and undertook to raise the issue with the Chairman of the Committee and obtain a Council view of the proposals.

In late December, the Chairman and Director of Property & Projects undertook a site visit and discussed a number of issues with the Reform Club and agreed to raise the matter at Committee.

Resource Implications

There are no major resource impacts regarding this report.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee agree to hear a brief presentation from FAB on their alternative proposals for Bank Square at a future meeting.

Decision Tracking

Further to agreement and ratification, FAB to present to the Development Committee in February 2010.

Timeline: February 2010

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations

Department of Social Development (DSD)
Police Service of NI (PSNI),
Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM)
Forum for an Alternative Belfast (FAB).