



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Sprucefield Public Inquiry Update
Date:	9 March 2010
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Relevant Background Information

The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) announced the postponement of the Public Inquiry into the application for the Sprucefield retail development (including John Lewis Partnership) in October 2009. The reason for the postponement was that the applicant, Sprucefield Centre Ltd, had not submitted information on the Environmental Impact Assessment within the 3 month period following registration of the application. The PAC considered the application would be deemed a refusal by Planning Service with the result that it could not be considered at a Public Inquiry.

Sprucefield Centre Ltd resubmitted the application for the significant retail development at Sprucefield on 27 October 2009. The proposed scheme is unchanged from the previous application and will comprise:

- A John Lewis Department Store of 22,300m² (covering four floors);
- 19 individual retail units with a total area of 22,500m² (no more than four of the units to be less than 250m² and the majority more than 500m²);
- 7 food units totalling 1,580m².

The Department has declared the application an Article 31 and has formally written to all objectors and consultees in relation to the resubmitted application. The Council resubmitted the original letter of objection in November 2009.

Key Issues

The Council objection submitted to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) reiterates the previously articulated position that the application would be considered contrary to both the current (RDS) and the proposed planning policies (BMAP) by virtue of the adverse implications for the existing retail centres and the future regeneration of Belfast and other

adjoining centres.

The Planning Appeals Commission notified objectors on 8 February of the intention to conduct an Article 31 Public Inquiry for the purpose of considering the implications arising from the Sprucefield Centre Ltd application. The Public Inquiry is scheduled to commence on 7 June 2010. In advance of the Public Inquiry, the PAC informed objectors that they would be required to submit a statement of case by the 1 April 2010, outlining the basis of objections. Following the exchange of statements the Council will have the opportunity to comment on the opposing statements through the rebuttal process prior to 7 May 2010.

The Council's previous statement of case and rebuttal statement remain relevant as the details of the application remain unchanged, however minor clarification or updates may be required to take account of any changes to the information provided. The approach to preparation and participation in the Public Inquiry will also remain unaltered with representations coordinated by legal services using internal resources supported by Dr Tony Quinn, the retail planning expert previously commissioned by the Council to provide specialist evidence.

Resource Implications

Financial:

£8,000 for specialist retail planning assistance previously agreed by Committee.

Recommendation

Members are requested to

1. Note the update relating to Sprucefield Public Inquiry and the Council's resubmission of the statement of case in respect of the Sprucefield Centre Ltd application and proposed approach for participation in the public inquiry.

Decision Tracking

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

Key Abbreviations

DOE – Department of Environment
PAC – Planning Appeals Commission
RDS – Regional Development Strategy
NI – Northern Ireland
BMAP – Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan