



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Royal Exchange Regeneration Project
Date:	13 th October, 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development ext. 3470
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Relevant Background Information

The Committee will recall that, at its meeting on 15th September, it had been advised that the Minister for Social Development had agreed to meet with an All-Party Deputation from the Council to discuss the Royal Exchange Regeneration Project.

The meeting took place on 30th September and was attended by the following:

Belfast City Council representatives:

Councillor C. Maskey (Chairman, Development Committee); and Councillors Jones, Mullaghan, J. Rodgers and Rodway.
John McGrillen and Pamela Davison, Development Department, and Jim Hanna, Democratic Services.

Department for Social Development:

Minister Alex Attwood, MLA, Jackie Johnston, Director of Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Carol Ramsey, Project Manager, Royal Exchange Scheme for Belfast City Centre Regeneration

Key Issues

The Members put a number of questions to the Minister specific to the Royal Exchange Scheme, such as a formal method of engagement between the Council, DSD and the developers on the project; the key points of the Development Agreement; the phasing of the development and its impact on existing tenants and landowners; the Minister's position on the DSD's retail sequencing policy; and how cuts on the Department's budget would impact upon regeneration schemes in the city centre.

The deputation also discussed a number of other issues with the Minister, for example, when the masterplans for the North West and South West Quarters of the City are to be taken forward; the Streets Ahead Project; and the opening up of Berry Street to facilitate the redevelopment of Bank Square.

The key points which arose from the meeting were as follows:

- The NI Executive is currently working to develop spending plans for the years 2011-12 to 2014-15 as part of the Budget 2010 process. The Minister has submitted a bid for £110m funding for the scheme for Year 3 of the next Northern Ireland Executive Budget, that is, for 2013/14. The draft budget is scheduled to be announced at the end of October;
- The Minister expressed his support for the Department's policy on retail sequencing and does not share the view of the Council that this should be abandoned and the development be led by market forces;
- Information contained within the Development Agreement was commercially sensitive and the Minister did not feel that it would be appropriate to issue this to the Committee;
- Westfield, the owners of CastleCourt, have continually indicated to DSD that it had evidence that the 3 major schemes for the city centre, that is, Victoria Square, Royal Exchange and an extension to CastleCourt, could be progressed together but despite a number of requests had failed to furnish his Department with the information;
- Perhaps, most significantly, the Minister has agreed to meet a Deputation from the Committee on a biannual basis to discuss issues of mutual interest. However, due to the Elections scheduled to be held in May, 2011, he could give no commitment beyond the current term of office. The Minister suggested that the next meeting be scheduled for January/February, 2011 before the election purdah period; and
- The planning application for the Royal Exchange Scheme is due to be submitted by 31st October 2010 and the Minister was not aware of any reason why the developer would not make the submission. When the next meeting with the Minister is held, the actual boundary of the development scheme will be known and those whose properties are involved, together with the amount of funding to be committed by DSD to the scheme.

Resource Implications

There are no resource implications associated with this report.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- (I) note the information which has been provided;
- (II) agree that a further report in relation to the Royal Exchange Regeneration Scheme be submitted to the Committee for consideration following the publication of the draft Northern Ireland Assembly Budget; and
- (III) agree that officers, at the direction of the Members, identify which issues the Committee would wish to be brought to the attention of the Minister at the next meeting.