



**To/
Councillor Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Culture,
Tourism & Major Projects**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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SPC/2017-18/5

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism & Major Projects following the meeting of the Committee on 17 October 2017. It is about Castle Square Regeneration.

Dear Councillor Francis-Davies,

**Pre-decision Scrutiny of Cabinet Report:
Castle Square Regeneration**

The Scrutiny Programme Committee met on 17 October to consider the report that you are presenting to Cabinet on 19 October, and give a view on the proposed decision.

This follows consideration of your two preceding reports on development opportunities concerning Castle Square, most recently in March 2017.

You will recall that, although supportive, the Committee wanted Cabinet to carefully consider a number of issues in particular concerns about possible impact on public access / events and future capacity, and the Council's control over such issues.

We thank you and the Leader for attending our meeting, along with the report author Gail Evans, to present the report and answer our questions. We noted that this new report states that recommended development options would retain the same amount of public space currently enjoyed (with no net loss), but transformed into a greener, more vibrant space; and will support the continuation of public events in the Square. Furthermore, the Square will

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remain in public ownership. Also acting as developer will give the Council control over the design of the enhancement scheme, letting and future management.

Overall the Committee understands the rationale behind, and remains supportive of the desire to seek interest in the development and improvement of Castle Square. We agree that things need to change. The Committee therefore does not object in principle to the proposed decision, which Cabinet is being recommended to take.

However, acting as a 'critical friend', the Committee agreed that Cabinet should carefully consider the following important issues before proceeding:

- **Is the timing right?** – The Committee felt that there is a danger that the Council is trying to develop too much at the same time. We would challenge the need to get on quickly with this scheme when there are bigger plans in place for the City Centre (Swansea Central), where it would make more sense for proposals for Castle Square to fit within the bigger scheme (e.g. St David's), once that has been delivered; and possibly then make the Square an even more attractive proposition for commercial interest. We would ask Cabinet to think about the strategic planning and what urgency there is about developing Castle Square.
- **What about the financial risk?** – The Committee is concerned that the Council could be saddled by the capital costs (estimated as £7-8M) which it will have to meet from unsupported borrowing to fund site development. There will be a funding gap, pending future income streams. Cabinet should be aware of the risk that this presents to the Council's revenue budget, and consider how confident it is of success. There should also be caution given the extent of other borrowing in relation to other development schemes (including the City Deal), which this will add to. Cabinet should consider how the public would view this additional spending.
- **Are comparisons with elsewhere correct?** – The Committee did not feel that the Square was comparable to destinations such as Oyster Wharf, Knab Rock, and the 360 along the Bay, and guaranteed to mirror the success seen in these places. There is a lot more competition in the City Centre and it is going to be critical to land the right tenants.
- **Have you identified the best commercial use?** – We felt that the establishment of a mix of smaller cafés would likely be more of draw to the public and successful than a large restaurant, a number of which can already be found within close proximity to the Square. It is also important that the café 'culture' being sought for the Square does not over time in reality become an extension of Wind Street and drinking space.
- **How much public space will be retained?** – Whilst you confirmed that there will be no net loss of public space, it is unclear from your report whether the 1800 sqm quoted in the draft marketing brief (para 5.1), as being the minimum area to be retained for public space (for events and activity), is equal to currently available open space. Furthermore it is not

clear whether outside seating is being counted as part of the retained public space. There is still some concern amongst members about the possible negative impact of development on the ability to use the Square for events, including marches, demonstrations and vigils.

- **What will this guarantee about the future maintenance of Castle Square?** – Cabinet should be clear exactly what can be realistically achieved from commercial development in terms of enabling funds for the future maintenance of the Square, and what such hypothecated / ring-fenced / sinking fund could be used for.
- **Are you dealing with anti-social and other behaviour?** – We understand that there have been incidents of anti-social and other unpleasant behaviour within Castle Square, which is part of the reason to improve things. However rather than moving the problem on the Council needs to deal with and reduce such issues, which members felt also affected the High Street.
- **Will movement routes around the Square be improved?** – As the Square is developed a solution to existing areas of pedestrian and vehicle conflict should be found.

The Committee will continue to follow the regeneration of Castle Square closely and it is our intention that future cabinet reports will be subject to pre-decision scrutiny.

Your Response

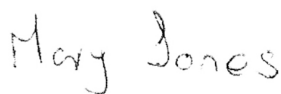
We would be grateful for a written response to this letter so that the Committee is informed of the decision taken by Cabinet and its consideration of the views expressed by the Committee, whether accepted or rejected.

We would like confirmation about the area that will be retained for public space and how that compares to currently available open space; and whether areas of outside seating would be separate to the retained public space.

It would be helpful to receive your reply to this letter by 8 November. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available committee meeting.

Finally, we look forward to further discussion within scrutiny about the future of Castle Square.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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