

Councillor Mary Jones
Chair
Scrutiny Programme Committee

BY E MAIL

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Our Ref: RFD/CM
Your Ref: SPC/2017-18/5
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Dear Councillor Jones

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORT – CASTLE SQUARE REGENERATION

Thank you for your letter dated 18th October 2017 with regard to the Cabinet report on Castle Square Regeneration that was discussed at Scrutiny Programme Committee on 17th October 2017.

We thank you for your support with this important scheme for the regeneration of Castle Square. The questions set out in your letter raised some interesting and relevant points, and we have reflected and consulted further on these and our response is outlined below.

Timing of the Castle Square Project– Swansea's City Centre is at the start of a transformational period and new developments at Swansea Central, the Arena and the enhancement of Kingsway, are likely to significantly raise the profile and market interest in the City Centre. There is therefore an important opportunity now to ensure that the quality of public space and any proposed new commercial opportunity at Castle Square complements proposed new developments elsewhere in the City Centre and aligns with them in terms of quality and design. Comprehensive improvements in landmark locations such as Castle Square will contribute significantly towards the visitor experience, influence perceptions of the City Centre, improve dwell times, and enhance its overall attractiveness as a place for leisure and shopping.

Financial Risk – As the Cabinet report acknowledged, the regeneration of Castle Square could have a significant capital cost and will represent a significant investment in the heart of the City Centre. The necessary budget identified is a broad estimate, and the sum indicated is a reflection of the need for a high quality scheme which is well-designed, accessible and integrated with adjacent areas. It also is a reflection of how important the Square is in terms of public use and perceptions of the City Centre. Further public consultation and engagement will be undertaken in due course.

Nature of Commercial uses and Comparisons – The Council's consultants Cushman Wakefield have reviewed a series of development options for the Square and undertaken a high level appraisal of development viability of each of them. Their advice has concluded that there are viable development options within the Square, and that 200sqm would present the optimum footprint. However the consultants have advised that the development of a mix of smaller cafes in the Square may compete and have an adverse effect on existing food and beverage units within the City Centre, particularly within Swansea Market. As the developer and landowner, the Council will have more control over the future use of the future commercial occupier and activity in the Square. In the recent Scrutiny Committee meeting (17.10.17), comparisons were drawn with examples of food and beverage locations from elsewhere around Swansea such as Oyster Wharf and Verdis. Although these popular and successful leisure destinations have a distinctive site context, the objectives are similar and a new commercial development in Castle Square should be high quality, innovative and attract a broad range of clientele with a family focus. Castle Square is a landmark location with significant potential for a distinctive development and offer in the City Centre. The Development and Marketing brief for the site will draw on high quality precedent examples for both new buildings and public realm from other towns and cities across the UK.

Retention of public space – Current advice from the Council's Tourism, Marketing and Events team suggests that there is 1600sqm area of space available for events which increases slightly if the ramped areas are used. Further estimates undertaken suggest an indicative minimum figure of 1800sqm should be retained for public space (for events and activity). This is a measurement taken from the foot of the steps and incorporating at least part of the grassed areas adjacent to Princess Way and the area currently occupied by the fountain. It should be emphasised that is an indicative figure and guide to space requirements, which will need to be considered in the context of any emerging design solutions in due course.

Future maintenance of Castle Square – Future maintenance needs will be a fundamental consideration both in terms of the design and materials used in the construction of any buildings, new public realm and future maintenance regimes in the Square. Full consultation will be undertaken and further discussion and agreement on future maintenance requirements, and appropriate arrangements will be put in place to ensure these are effective.

Anti-social and other behaviour – Anti social behaviour particularly during the night time is a problem which affects many City Centres. The Council is working with partners through schemes such as the Purple Flag initiative a make Swansea's City Centre feel safer, cleaner, and more attractive and accessible during the evening and night time period. Given the function of the Square as a gathering place and its proximity to Wind Street, the design of any new public space will be the subject of specialist advice from the Police Architectural Liaison Officer and the Welsh Counter Terrorism Advisor.

Improvement of movement routes around the Square – Castle Square is in a pivotal location in the City Centre, at the intersection of a number of important pedestrian routes. The integration of Castle Square with adjacent areas is a key objective set out in the draft Development and Marketing Brief. This document highlights the importance of any future scheme integrating areas such as Wind Street, St Marys Church and the Castle, and addressing areas of potential pedestrian and vehicle conflict.

I trust the above responds comprehensively to the points raised in your letter and look forward to working with you as this important scheme for Swansea City Centre progresses.

Yours sincerely



COUNCILLOR ROBERT FRANCIS-DAVIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE, TOURISM AND MAJOR PROJECTS