



<b>Subject:</b>	Castle Arcade – Environmental Improvements
<b>Date:</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> February 2018
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Siobhan Toland, Assistant Director City and Neighbourhood Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alison Allen, Safer City Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Some time in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	Members will recall Committee consideration in February 2016 of a request to commence the formal and statutory pre-consultation for possible alleygates in Castle Arcade. The purpose of the proposed alleygates was to address ongoing criminality and anti-social behaviour in Castle Arcade.
1.2	At that meeting, a number of Members stated that they felt the erection of alleygates at this location would not be an effective solution to the issue and whilst they recognised the ongoing concerns around crime and anti-social behaviour, concern was also expressed around the potential for displacement of vulnerable people who used the Arcade.

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>Members are asked to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approve the proposed regeneration and environmental improvement approach to increasing the footfall in Castle Arcade and reversing the physical decline of the area.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that Castle Arcade is a partially covered entry running between Castle Lane and the corner of Cornmarket and Castle Place. The Arcade is part of the wider Belfast Entries network of narrow alleyways in the city centre around which the city of Belfast developed and was an entrance in to the old Belfast Castle in the city centre. The Arcade has lost its historical character unlike some of the other entries in the city centre and in recent years the area has become disused by workers, tourists and shoppers.</p>
3.2	<p>The Arcade has also become associated with graffiti and criminal damage, drug related incidents, begging, assaults, street drinking, public urination/defecation, and rowdy behaviour. Additionally, a number of the individuals known to frequent the area are thought to be vulnerable due to being homeless and/or having addiction/mental health issues.</p>
3.3	<p>Police are called daily to the area with the calls ranging from low level ASB to serious assaults and the area is an ongoing priority for police in the city centre. Police do not report any difference in the number of calls they receive before and after the closure of the anchor tenant in the area British Home Stores (BHS), however, there is no doubt the closure of BHS has further reduced the footfall in the area and contributed to the overall feeling of degradation.</p>
3.4	<p>There is a sizeable cost to Council as part of its city centre street cleaning operation in attempting to minimise the issues in the Arcade</p>
3.5	<p><u>Stakeholders</u></p> <p>A significant lobby developed in 2015 from British Home Stores and Belfast City Centre Management around the cost of these issues to the economic prosperity and vibrancy of the area. This culminated in a proposal by British Home Stores to pay for the installation of dusk to dawn alleygates in the area and to take responsibility for opening and closing these alleygates.</p>
3.6	<p>At that time, Council People and Communities Committee did not consider alleygates the appropriate response to the issues in the area and that remains the position to date. The issues highlighted above remain with the solicitors' firm in the Arcade reporting a further deterioration in the seriousness of what is taking place in the area and pushing for action, despite Council's additional street cleaning efforts in the area.</p>

3.7	<p>Additionally, Outreach Services supporting vulnerable people in the city centre are aware of the challenges at this location and are committed to working with the Council to address these challenges in a constructive manner.</p>
3.8	<p>The Department for Infrastructure which owns the main thoroughfare and is responsible for street lighting in the Arcade is committed to working with Council as well as Department for Communities which has a statutory remit around the public realm in the city centre. It is within this context, that Officers were asked to consider what alternative measures (other than alleygates) may be appropriate.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Challenges</u></p> <p>There are a number of environmental, social and economic challenges contributing to the current situation in Castle Arcade. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing lighting not working well</li> <li>• Generally poor and inadequate lighting which does not create a feeling of safety or vibrancy</li> <li>• Broken windows theory which argues that if small events are ignored, the lack of care and ownership leads to an ongoing downward spiral of conditions and invites ever worsening crime conditions and opportunity</li> <li>• The practical challenges of maintaining the cleanliness of the Arcade when Council is only responsible for the main thoroughfare and not the buildings on either side</li> <li>• The loss of the anchor tenant in the main retail premises in the area</li> <li>• The lack of activity in the area and the wider city centre after 6pm</li> <li>• The vulnerability of the individuals known to frequent the area</li> <li>• The concentration of crime and anti-social behaviour in the area</li> </ul>
3.10	<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p>There are also a number of opportunities which if harnessed could provide a platform for gradual improvements in the appearance, footfall and overall vibrancy of the area. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Belfast Agenda and the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy which focuses on making the city centre a prosperous but shared and inclusive space</li> <li>• The central location of Castle Arcade and its proximity to large volumes of people on a daily basis</li> <li>• The historic nature of Castle Arcade which is largely unknown to the large volumes of people using the area</li> <li>• The opportunity to redefine the narrative and visual impact of Castle Arcade as a platform upon which to encourage new tenants to the old BHS retail space and to improve the wider area</li> </ul>

- The strong partnerships which exist between statutory organisations, businesses and voluntary organisations operating in the city centre

### 3.11 Risks

Police reports, feedback from elected members and businesses in the area, along with the continuing demands on Council's street cleansing operations indicate that some action is required to manage the following risks:

- Ongoing decline and impact of this on wider city centre
- Impact of decline on likelihood of new tenants for the old BHS retail space
- Risk of serious injury or fatality
- Risk of displacement of vulnerable people to other locations in the city centre
- Lack of agreement on way forward
- Reputational damage if any interventions are not managed sensitively

### 3.12 Status of Vacant British Home Stores Retail Unit

Officers met with the managing agents of the empty BHS Retail Unit in January 2017 who advised that the owner has authorised them to appoint contractors to take forward a strip out and refit of the retail units. That work is due to commence in Spring 2017 with a view to being completed in a maximum of 18 months ready for prospective tenants.

### 3.13

The managing agents have also appointed architects to work on the redesign of the retail unit and to work up some improvements to the façade of the building. The architects were present at the meeting with the managing agents and general commitment was secured from both parties to work with Council when developing and implementing plans to ensure they benefitted the wider Castle Arcade area and worked towards establishing a strong and vibrant identity for the area.

### 3.14 Regeneration and Environmental Improvement Plan

Actions to address the challenges, take advantage of the opportunities and minimise the risks are provided at Appendix 1 for Members consideration. The identified objectives are:

- To reverse the ongoing decline of Castle Arcade
- To increase footfall in Castle Arcade
- To re-define the identity of Castle Arcade as an asset

### 3.15

This Plan has been developed involving a range of Council services including Community Safety, Landscape Development, Property and Projects, City Centre Regeneration, Belfast Health Development Unit, Economic Development, Cleansing and Community Services.

	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.16 Initial costs associated with short and medium term actions are minimal and can be met from within existing revenue budgets and match funding will be sought from partners to support the longer term regeneration of the area.</p> <p>3.17 The action to improve the quality and effectiveness of lighting in the Castle Arcade on a temporary basis will cost a maximum of £10,000. This cost can be met from within existing departmental revenue budgets and Department for Infrastructure has agreed to provide access to power at no extra cost as their contribution to the short term improvements in the area.</p> <p>3.18 The Department for Communities, which owns the wall mounted historical murals in the Arcade, has agreed to remove and restore/replace the murals within its existing budgets as a contribution to the short term improvements in the area.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>3.19 There are no equality or Good Relations implication at present, however, this will be monitored on an ongoing basis as environmental improvement options are further developed.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1- Castle Arcade Regeneration and Environmental Improvement Plan