



Subject:	Update on Bank Buildings: City Centre Recovery Programme
Date:	5th December, 2018
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

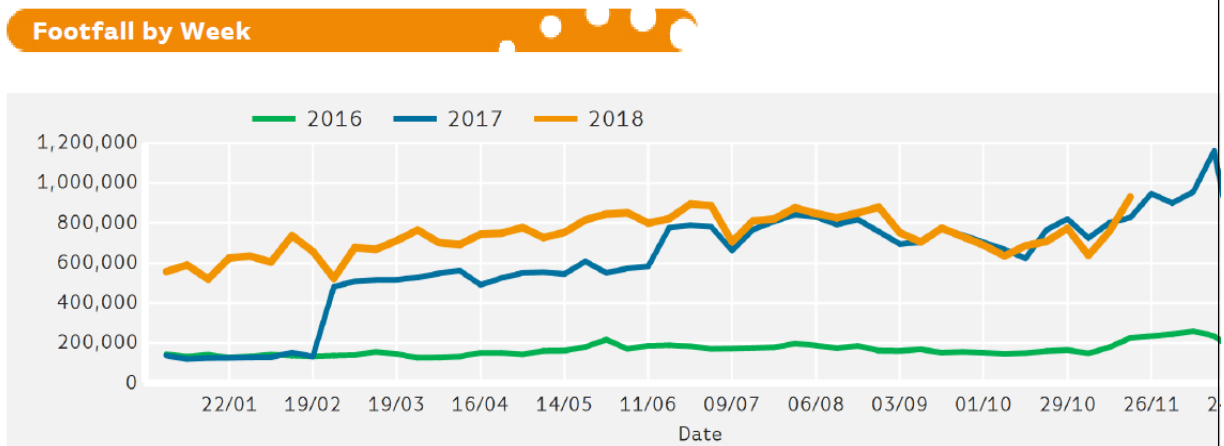
1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the activity under way to support the City Centre Recovery Programme, focusing on the period to end December 2018. A similar update report was brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd November.
2.0	Recommendations
	The Committee is asked to note: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the update on the construction work, the cordon and the protected walkway;• the update on the city marketing, street animation, major attractions and environmental improvements to enhance the vibrancy and increase footfall in the city centre;• the progress on the allocation of the funds from the Primark Business Support Fund; and• the update on the proposed incentive scheme, including the timeline for implementation.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that, following the fire at Bank Buildings at the end of August, the Council and partners have put together a significant programme of investment to secure and consolidate the city centre in the short term. In parallel, work is under way on a longer-term plan to secure the future viability of the city centre. There are a number of strands to this work, and details on the current position are set out below.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Update on Cordon</u></p> <p>Work on the container cordon is nearing completion and construction of the protected walkway has commenced. This walkway will allow pedestrian access between Donegall Place and Royal Avenue and is still on schedule to be open on Monday 3 December 2018. Once the walkway opens, 8 businesses that were inside the original cordon will be able to open and trade (Argento, Spar, Coffee Kiosk, Cookie Box, DV8, McDonald's, Skechers and Aldo). Discussions are ongoing with these businesses about access arrangements prior to 3 December and some started work to prepare for re-opening on 26th November.</p>
3.3	<p>Works to remove the most dangerous parts of the Bank Buildings continue with 2 of the chimneys now removed on the Castle Street elevation. Unfortunately, examination of the stonework has revealed that 80% of this is too badly fire-damaged to be able to be used in any reconstruction works. Props have been installed to the front of the building and work will commence this week when we expect that the clock will be next to be removed. Works are still on track to have the facade retention system in place by spring 2019.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Marketing and Communications</u></p> <p>All of the animation investment is being supported by a tactical and sustained PR and marketing campaign led by the Council and inclusive of all city partners. The Head of Marketing has advised that feedback via social media and other channels has been positive and a marketing summary is included below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each day there is a renewed effort to keep the media briefed – keeping the narrative on the city centre positive. Figures from 24th October to 21st November show 754 articles, the majority of them being positive. • On social #YourBelfast had organic reach of 13.5 million and a selection of positive social media anecdotal comments. • The 'Belfast Alive with Christmas' overarching marketing and campaign activities include print, digital, outdoor, TV – 10 second and 30 second ad and the reskinning/ redirecting of Belfast Wifi. This activity stretches to New Year sales.

- In parallel with this, each city event/ programme of activities has tactical PR and marketing campaigns to support it – sitting within overarching campaign.
- Business and support organisations have received a toolkit to help share city messages. The #YourBelfast toolkit can be used on social media to share updates from @BelfastCC, @VisitBelfast and @Translink_NI on Twitter. Details of all events and attractions are updated daily on Council and Visit Belfast websites.

Footfall Figures

3.5 While members will be aware of the challenges around footfall, figures from last week (week 47) do show some signs of recovery. Details are set out below:



Street Animation, Major Attractions and Environmental Improvements

3.5 Following approval by the SP and R Committee on 19th October, a programme of animation, major attractions and environmental improvements, supported by an enhanced marketing campaign has been developed in order to drive footfall into the city centre and support the economic recovery. Given the tight timeframes, and in the lead-up to Christmas, this has required a concerted effort to pull the programme of activity together, taking into account the need to obtain consents, procure, mobilise and deliver the activities, while undertaking engagement with all relevant stakeholders and putting in place an enhanced marketing campaign.

3.7 There has been investment in new feature lighting, planters, wayfinding and other environmental improvements and these are currently being rolled out. In addition, large scale family based attractions have been is aimed at attract visitors into the city to experience the Christmas offer.

3.8 A summary of the main elements include:

- Donegall Place: an astro-turf area is in place along with new planters and seating arrangements adjacent to the chalets as part of the extended Christmas Market. This area will be supplemented with additional seating following the removal of the trading locations to create a temporary area of green space within the city centre and to facilitate a 2019 animation programme. A large snow slide attraction has also been installed on Donegall Place adjacent to the cordon. This snow slide, alongside the other attractions, r and it has proven very popular to date.
- Castle Place: a new astro-turf area and image representing the location of the River Farset is in place alongside family based attractions, including a carousel, children's rides and a German bratwurst grill. Final work to complete this area is ongoing and the area will be supplemented with additional seating following the removal of the attractions to create temporary additional green space.
- Royal Avenue: an area for animation has been constructed outside the entrance to Castle Court as an attractor to Castle Court and the wider Royal Avenue area. Based on an astro-turf surface, a temporary pop up stage has been installed and operated by Cathedral Quarter Trust for choirs, brass bands and City of Music animation. The area has been further enhanced by large lighting attractions, planters and seating arrangements and will provide a focal point for a proposed lighting projection spectacle onto adjacent buildings. This complements a programme of animation and events being undertaken in conjunction with Castlecourt and BID.
- Fountain Street Area: a number of lighting features are already in place throughout the perimeter of the cordon area to improve safe access along the existing diversion routes. Canopy lighting has been installed to Fountain Lane, Fountain Street and Berry Street, with additional lighting schemes planned to be in place on Castle Arcade for the beginning of December.
- Bank Square/ Castle St Area -There were proposals to install environmental improvements onto Bank Square, including an astro turf and seated area. However, following concerns raised by some businesses relating to attracting antisocial behaviour to the area, it was agreed that animation and programming should be promoted in the area instead of the temporary environmental improvements. Following discussions with the traders, and in conjunction with DfC, we are currently exploring more permanent improvements that could

installed within the square including a potential canopy system that would enable the square to be better utilised by the traders throughout the year. A further report will be brought back to committee as cost and feasibility options are complete. Approval was also given by the SP&R Committee on 23 November 2018 on a potential public realm scheme in the Queen Street, King Street and College Court. This could provide improved connectivity to Castle Street and the surrounding areas and act as a catalyst for further environmental improvements in the area. In addition, a meanwhile use of the DfC site at 83-87 Castle Street is currently being explored to provide a temporary hub use of a derelict site, pending confirmation of a permanent development proposal. This concept is currently under design in conjunction with DfC. Further reports will be brought back to Committee as the scheme develops.

- Cathedral Gardens – Family based attractions including a 40m Observation Wheel and other rides. Work to provide dressing to this area is ongoing.
- Lighting features: Christmas-themed lighting features is being installed to the areas of animation on Castle Place, Royal Avenue, Cathedral Gardens and Donegall Place. The lighting features include 4m high ribbon towers of light and a 4.5m high Christmas Bauble archway that will be moved among the animation areas.
- City Dressing: with the construction elements of the animation areas now largely complete, additional dressing to these areas commenced from Monday 26 November. This will include Christmas themed wraps to the heras fence panels, lighting features to trees and planters, and dressing across areas of animation and market chalets.
- Wayfinding: an enhanced wayfinding system commenced installation on 26 November with an installation period of 1 week. These measures will include new easy-to-use maps for wayfinding around the perimeter of the cordon, an enhanced Yellow Dot Trail with the yellow dots lifted from the pavement and placed at strategic locations above eye line throughout the perimeter route. Key decision point totem signs will replace the existing heras fence panel arrangements at key junctions. The existing cordon fencing wrap will be replaced with bright messaging promoting the 'We Are Open' message at the cordon locations to ensure visitors are aware that the areas are still open for business.
- Cordon Dressing: Primark are currently installing the structural container cordon to Castle Place and the scaffold access walkway between Donegall Place and Castle Place, and between Castle Place and Royal Avenue with an opening date of 3 December 2018. The exposed surfaces of the containers and the access walkways will be dressed and there will be enhanced lighting. It is intended that this will be in place early December.

3.9	<p>In addition to the infrastructure and installations, there has been a significant programme of animation and activities underway. The programme of events started in early November with the Red Bull F1 event which attracted 35,000 people into the city. This was followed by the Christmas lights switch-on took place on 17 November 2018. This attracted almost 11,000 people into the city centre. It also marked the opening of the Christmas Market at the front of City Hall and this will remain in place until 22 December 2018. Given the challenging business environment this year, members will be aware that a number of chalets will extend on to Donegall Place. These will house a number of local businesses – including some who have been displaced or whose business has been adversely affected by the fire. These locations were operational by 23 November and will operate at this location until 6 January 2019.</p>
3.10	<p>Members were previously advised that the attractions were to be supported by a wider programme of animation, events and entertainment. The Council is working in partnership with the Cathedral Quarter Trust (CQT) who are responsible for the annual Culture Night event that is held in Belfast each September. CQT are working with other cultural providers across the city to put together a programme of animation and events with the aim of providing a vibrant city atmosphere with a diverse offering and experience for all. CQT's plans include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magical Musical Christmas Stage on Royal Avenue (adjacent to CastleCourt). This will be programmed every weekend and during the week in the run-up to Christmas and will feature a selection of local choirs, orchestras, performers and youth arts organisations • Big Belfast "Christmas" Busk Off on 15 December – performances will take place across the city, offering a platform to local talent • Caribbean Christmas on Royal Avenue on 16 December – working in conjunction with the African and Caribbean Society of Northern Ireland, CQT will present a unique experience of Christmas with a Caribbean twist • "Cinema on the Square" – pop-up cinema on Bank Square from 1-9 December 2018. The cinema will feature a number of popular Christmas classics and will include a signed performance and one performance specifically for those with autism. This event is being delivered in conjunction with Belfast One BID • Fire and Ice – this will involve an ice sculpture gallery on Royal Avenue/Bank Square. It will be complemented by spectacular performances by fire artists. This event will take place on the weekend of 7/8 December • Q-Con Christmas Bizarro – this is a gaming event that will attract young people and those interested in gaming into the city centre. It will be supported by retailers and specialist businesses in this field and will take place on 15/16 December

- “A Gift for All” sound and light spectacular – this is a six-minute light show which will run on repeat every quarter hour from 4.30-9pm from 17-23 December 2018. The show will take place on Royal Avenue, adjacent to CastleCourt.
- Elf workshops and Christmas walking tours at various venues across the city centre, running through to 23 December, as well as a Santa Post-box on Royal Avenue (operated by Belfast One BID) which will be available from 29 November 2018.

3.11 While the detail above focused on the activity up to the Christmas period, work is also under way to look at a programme of investment post-Christmas, in order to underpin the longer-term viability of the city centre. Further details will be brought back to Committee in the near future. .

Public transport offers

3.12 Translink has revealed its most extensive range of discount travel tickets and special services to attract more people to shop and socialise in Belfast during the festive season. The launch follows the recent Executive Office announcement that the Department for Infrastructure will provide extra funding to Translink to support delivery of a high impact festive travel campaign.

Starting from 17 November 2018, the package includes:

- Day travel across the city for just £2 (£1 child), a £5 family ticket and additional bus, coach and train services including midnight departures
- Ulsterbus or Goldline services incentives include day return travel for the price of a single ticket after 9.30am from across NI
- One third off NI Railways day return tickets after 9.30am on weekdays and all day at weekends until the end of December
- 50% off bus and rail single fares for yLink card customers
- Midnight departures on NI Railways, Metro and Goldline on Fridays and Saturdays until Christmas and main Park & Ride facilities will offer late night and Saturday services along with free parking at the Park & Ride sites.

3.13 Although it is too early to report on the impact of these incentives, Translink have indicated an increase of some 25% across the Glider network since the announcement, although the relocated northbound services continue to experience a diminished uptake. Translink will report uptake on the fare incentives on a weekly basis going forward.

Incentive Scheme

3.14 Traders and city centre partners have given feedback that, while they are supportive of activities that are taking place across the city, they were keen to consider how we could drive additional footfall to generate sales in the stores.

As a result of this feedback, officers have been working with partners to develop an app to support a City Centre Incentive Scheme, the Your Belfast Rewards app will go live on Saturday 1st December. It aims to drive the additional visitors into city centre businesses by providing a range of incentives and rewards for city centre shoppers and visitors. This will also offer the potential to profile local business.

3.15 When users download the app, they will be tasked with finding codes located in the premises of retailers in areas around the city centre, each retailer will have their own unique code. This location of these will be tactical based on footfall figures. Once they have collected the allocated number of codes, they will have to answer a quiz question to be entered into the daily / weekly draw. The winners will be selected at random and the rewards will take the form of vouchers from various retailers. An indicative promotional calendar has been developed; however, this is subject to change based on feedback and review of the weekly analytics. Through the app users will also be able to access a range of offers from city centre retailers and find out what events are happening throughout the city in the run up to Christmas.

3.16 To date 200 city centre businesses have signed up to the scheme. Officers are still engaging with businesses and further businesses are likely to get involved. The consultation on the app with partners and retailers has been extremely positive and they see the value of getting involved. The analytics on the app will enable officers undertake a weekly review to ensure that it is having an impact on those businesses most adversely affected and to flex the offers to ensure that these areas and businesses are benefitting from engagement.

Finance and Resources and Equality Implications

3.17 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at the meeting on 13th November, was provided with details of the full City Recovery programme budget, following confirmation of Treasury monies and funding from NI Executive departments. The Committee agreed the overall programme expenditure as set out in the report and was advised that further detail on expenditure to March 2019 would be brought to a future meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

3.18	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u> No specific equality or good relations implications associated with this investment.
4.0	Document Attached
	Animation Programme