

CastleCourt

S H O P P I N G C E N T R E

**Digital Pre-Application Public
Consultation Event**

Hello and Welcome

Introduction

Welcome to the virtual Pre-Application Community Consultation (PACC), this website forms part of the Community Consultation in respect of our proposals relating to Units 34, 61 and Mall 01-K9 Castlecourt Shopping Centre, Royal Avenue, Belfast.

The site is situated within a prime location along Royal Avenue, which was once the bustling shopping hub of Belfast City Centre. Over the last 10 years this area has seen a gradual decline in daytime/night-time activity, with many retail units lying vacant as consumers have shifted to online shopping.

The proposals comprise the change of use of part of the existing ground floor of Unit 34 from a retail unit to a coffee shop with an external seating area and a change of use of first and second floor levels of Unit 34, first floor level of Unit 61, and Mall 01-K9 to deliver a family entertainment centre which will include: crazy golf, lazer quest, indoor caving, escape rooms, bumper cars, virtual reality arcade, restaurants & bars and cinema with bar.

Consultation During COVID-19

In light of the current situation under COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing measures, temporary pre-application community consultation regulations were introduced. These removed the requirement for a public event but encouraged and provided guidance for alternative consultation measures. We are using a number of online, digital, and remote tools to help you provide feedback on our proposals.

Purpose of Consultation and Next Steps

The purpose of this webpage is to share our indicative proposals with the community and other interested parties, prior to the submission of a Full Planning Application to Belfast City Council.

We are committed to engaging with members of the wider community and are now undertaking a period of pre-application community consultation (PACC) on our proposals.

The feedback received will be shared with the design team and will help to shape our proposals prior to the submission of a planning application. We will prepare a Pre-Application Community Consultation Report, which will provide a summary of all feedback, our response and how we have incorporated any appropriate feedback into the final proposals for the scheme. This report will be submitted as part of the Full Planning Application to Belfast City Council.

How to Provide Feedback and Find Out More

This website is a one-stop-shop for all information on our proposals. Through this website you can browse our plans, view information documents, and complete an online feedback form. Alternatively, if you own or occupy premises, which directly adjoin the application site, and have received a hard copy notification leaflet, you can fill out and return the attached comment card to us using the pre-addressed envelope provided. Should you have any queries regarding the proposals please feel free to contact our project team using the below details.

Speak to Us

Our project team is available Monday-Friday 9am-5pm to discuss the proposals or respond to any queries you may have.

Contact: TSA Planning
Tel: 028 9043 4333
Email: info@tsaplanning.co.uk

Closing date for feedback – Monday 30th August, 5pm

Decline of the Retail Sector

Retailers

Over the past few years hundreds of high street names have closed their doors permanently, with Belfast losing Top Shop, Miss Selfridge, Burtons, Dorothy Perkins, Toys R Us, Mothercare, Oasis, Warehouse, DW Sports and Gap, amongst others. This list is not exhaustive and purely indicative of some of the more high-profile losses and struggles that our city has witnessed in recent years. According to new data from the Local Data Company (LDC), up to 18,000 more retailers, restaurants and leisure outlets could be left vacant in 2021 as high streets and shopping centres grapple with the collapse of major retailers and anchors.

Department Stores

The once-formidable department store is not immune to this with dire predictions of its complete disappearance from our towns and cities. The collapse of BHS in 2016 sent shock waves through the retail industry, and today 5 years on over 25% of the stores remain vacant (including the Belfast store). House of Fraser nearly collapsed in August 2018, before being bought by Sports Direct owner Mike Ashley.

Debenhams' share price plunged from 96p to 3p between 2015 and early 2019, before it entered pre-pack administration in April 2019 and its ultimate liquidation in December 2020, which had a direct implication on CastleCourt Shopping Centre and its other NI Stores.

Repurposing

Retail is no longer the driving factor bringing visitors into our city centres and high streets, and instead trends have shifted for younger generations to spend their money on experiences rather than goods. Downsizing the amount of retail space and repurposing upper floors of department stores has become a common occurrence across the UK in recent years.

Case Studies

Numerous department stores are currently being repurposed and reimagined to ensure their relevance and value add for the requirements of the immediate vicinity and its catchment, with notable examples such as:

- 1. Wandsworth** Gravity is taking the Debenhams' department store to create a new 80,000 sq ft multi-format leisure concept.
- 2. Leeds** Debenhams is being considered by a local further education provider, student residential and a boutique hotel.
- 3. London's West End** There are proposals on several major department stores with John Lewis announcing half of its 680,000 sqft store will be repurposed to offices.
- 4. Manchester** Planning is sought to increase the Debenhams space to create a 470,000 sqft office scheme.
- 5. Birmingham** L&G plans to redevelop the House of Fraser into a 1m sqft office and hotel scheme.
- 6. Edinburgh** The Fraser's building is being repurposed by Diageo as the Johnny Walker Whisky museum.
- 7. Sheffield** The former Co-op department store has been repurposed as co-working space.
- 8. Leicester** 300 build-to-rent apartments have been proposed for the Debenhams in High Cross shopping Centre.

Strategic Context and Site Location

Castlecourt Shopping Centre is located within the core of Belfast City Centre. As the capital of Northern Ireland, Belfast boasts excellent sustainable transport links and connections across the region.

The Shopping Centre is accessed directly off Royal Avenue and located approximately 430m to the north of City Hall, as shown within **Figure 1**.

Castlecourt Shopping Centre first opened its doors in 1990, and comprises a total of c. 330,000 sq ft of lettable retail space. Over the last decade the Centre has seen a gradual increase in vacant units due to the shift in consumers' preference to shop online. The departure of Debenhams in 2020 has solely resulted in the vacancy of 120,000 sq ft, equating to over a third of the total lettable retail space within the centre. The proposals seek to address vacancy issues through the redevelopment of vacant units, including relocation and consolidation of existing retail offering within Castlecourt, which will go some way to increasing the footfall within the Centre.

The site is bounded by Royal Avenue to the east, Gresham Street to the north-west and Berry Street to the south. Situated on a prominent location along Royal Avenue, and backing onto Smithfield Market, the Centre is within walking distance to Laganside Bus Station, Great Victoria Street Train/Bus Station, and the new proposed Weavers Cross (Transport Hub). With regards to parking accessibility, the Castlecourt multi-storey undercover car park is easily accessible from both the M1 and M2 motorways and has over 1,600 parking spaces.

The subject site measures a total of 0.4367ha, which encompasses 3 no. existing retail units within Castlecourt Shopping Centre providing direct frontage onto the main Royal Avenue elevation, see **Figure 2** below.

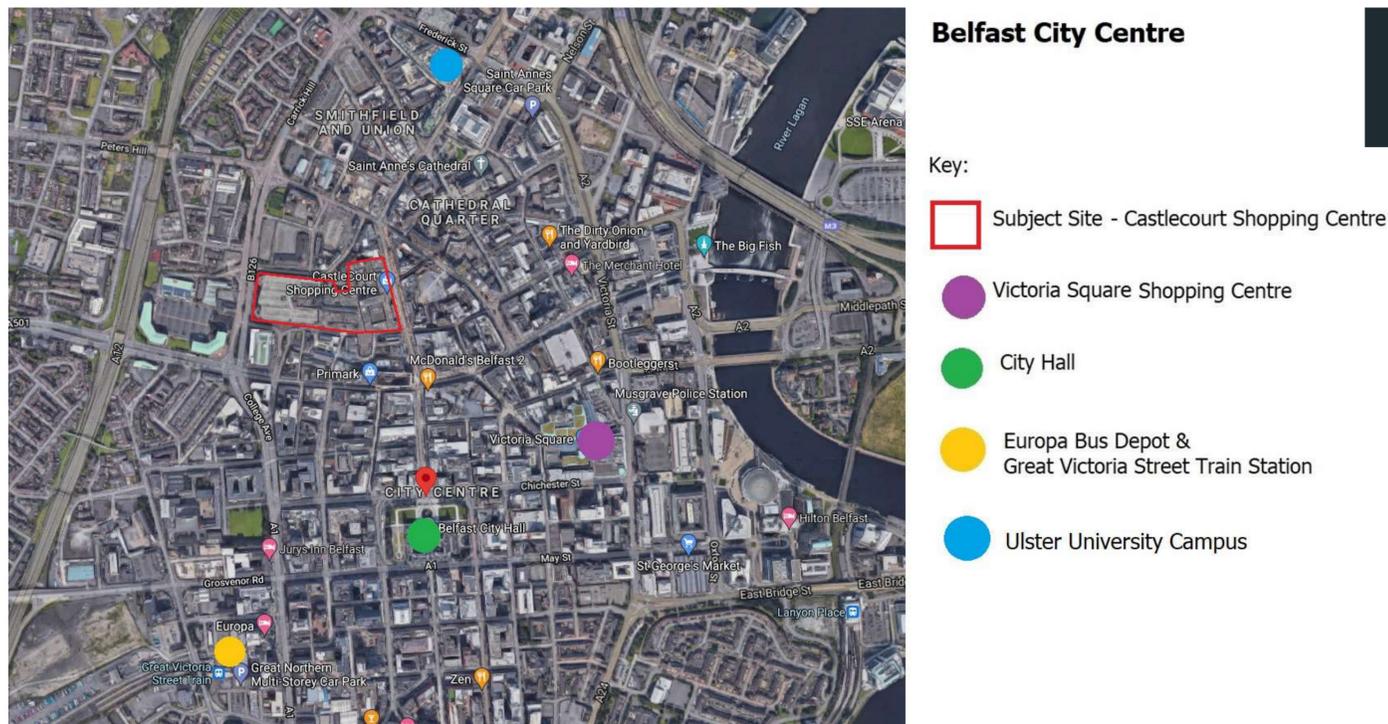


FIGURE 1 - SITE CONTEXT

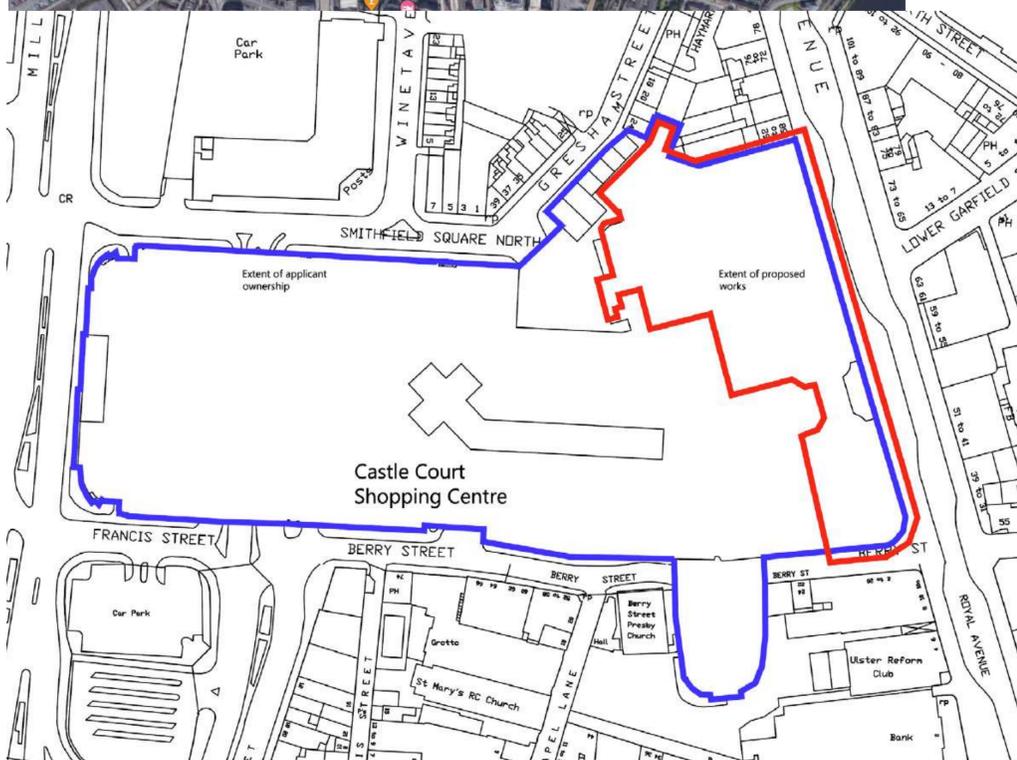


FIGURE 2 - SITE LOCATION

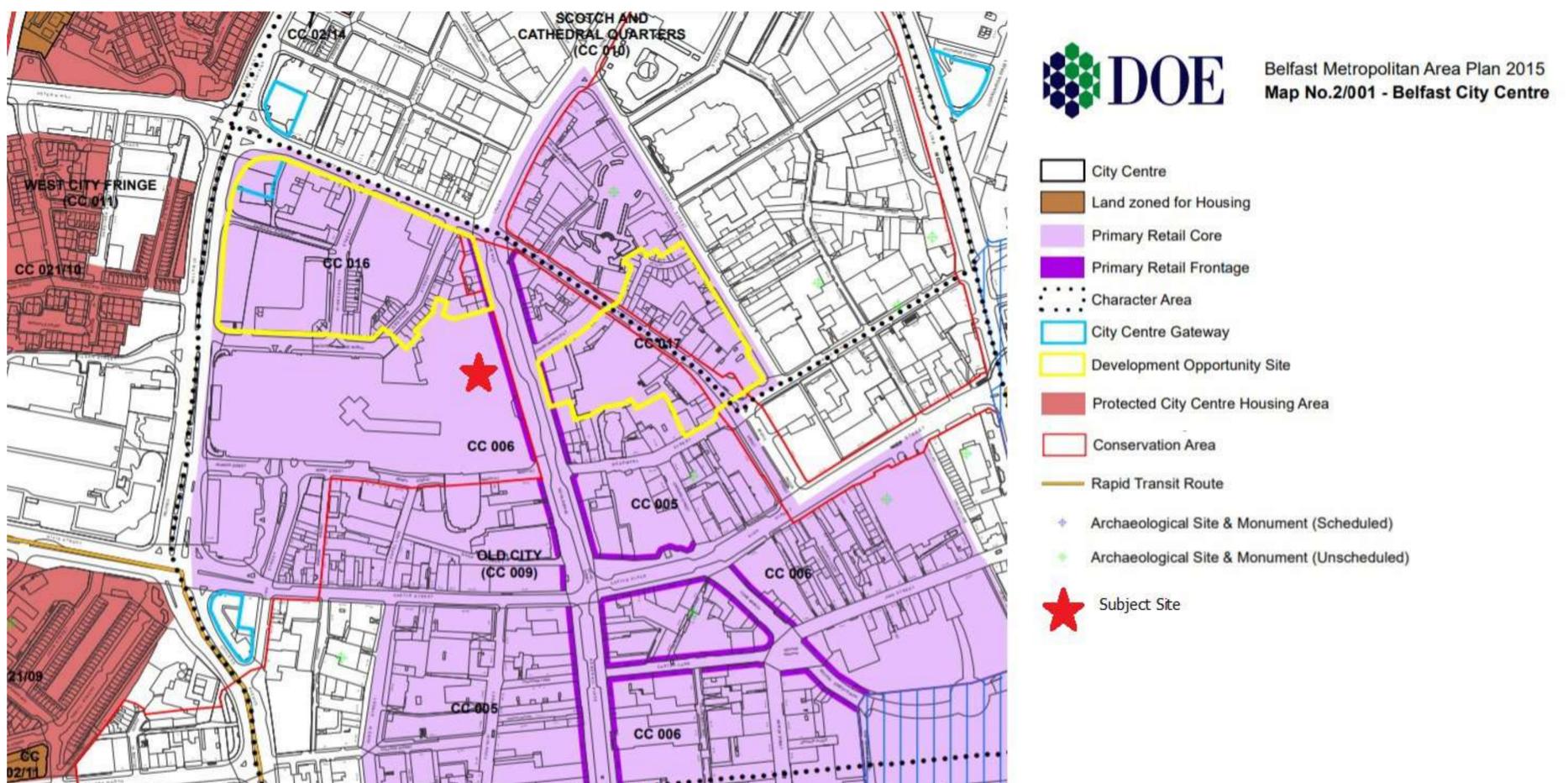
Area Plan Context

As the adoption of BMAP was found to be unlawful by the Court of Appeal on 18th May 2017, consideration therefore reverts back to the adopted Area Plan (BUAP 2001) and draft BMAP (published September 2014).

Within the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 (BUAP), the subject site is identified as being unzoned and within the development limit.

The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 (the version that was adopted and since quashed by the Court of Appeal), identifies the site as being designated as 'Primary Retail Core' (CC 005) and 'Primary Retail Frontage' (CC 006), within the 'Old City' Character Area (CC009), as shown at Figure 3.

FIGURE 3
BMAP (Published 2014)
Policy Map Extract



Site Proposals

Proposed Site Layout

Proposals for the relocation and redevelopment of a number of units within Castlecourt Shopping Centre to deliver a family entertainment and leisure space seeks to go some way to regenerating this section of Royal Avenue and diversifying the current retail/food offering within Castlecourt. This section of the city centre has seen an increasing decline in daytime/night-time activity over the last decade and the proposals will help to support future students and residents coming to the area.

The current consultation involves redevelopment proposals for Castlecourt Shopping Centre comprising the change of use of part of the existing ground floor of Unit 34 from Retail to Sui Generis Use, and the change of use of first and second floor levels of Unit 34, first floor level of Unit 61 and Mall 01-K9, to deliver a family entertainment and leisure space, which will comprise the following elements:

- Coffee shop with external seating area
- Crazy Golf
- Lazer Quest
- Indoor Caving
- Escape Rooms
- Bumper Cars
- Virtual Reality Arcade
- Restaurants & bars
- Cinema with bar
- Seated Terrace Area

Proposed Use	Indicative Area (Sq m/Sq ft)
Family Entertainment Centre (not including external space)	4,480 sq m / 48,226 sq ft
Cinema & Bar	2,774 sq m / 28,854 sq ft
Coffee Shop	219 sq m / 2,361 sq ft



Virtual Reality example

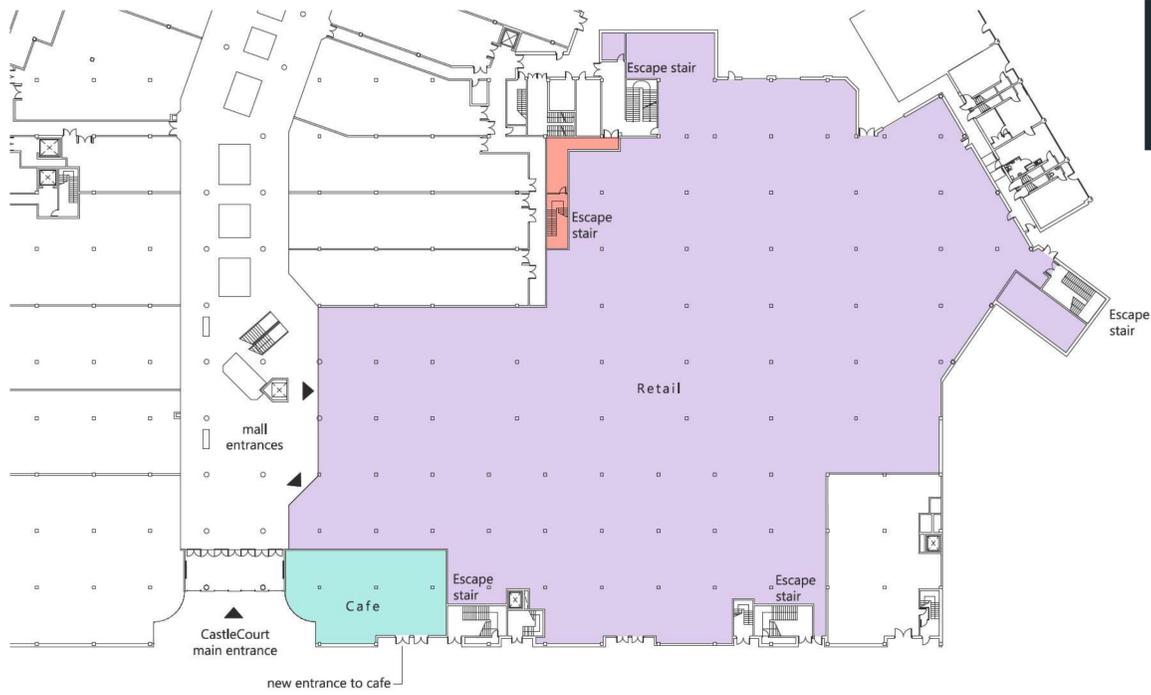
Cinema example



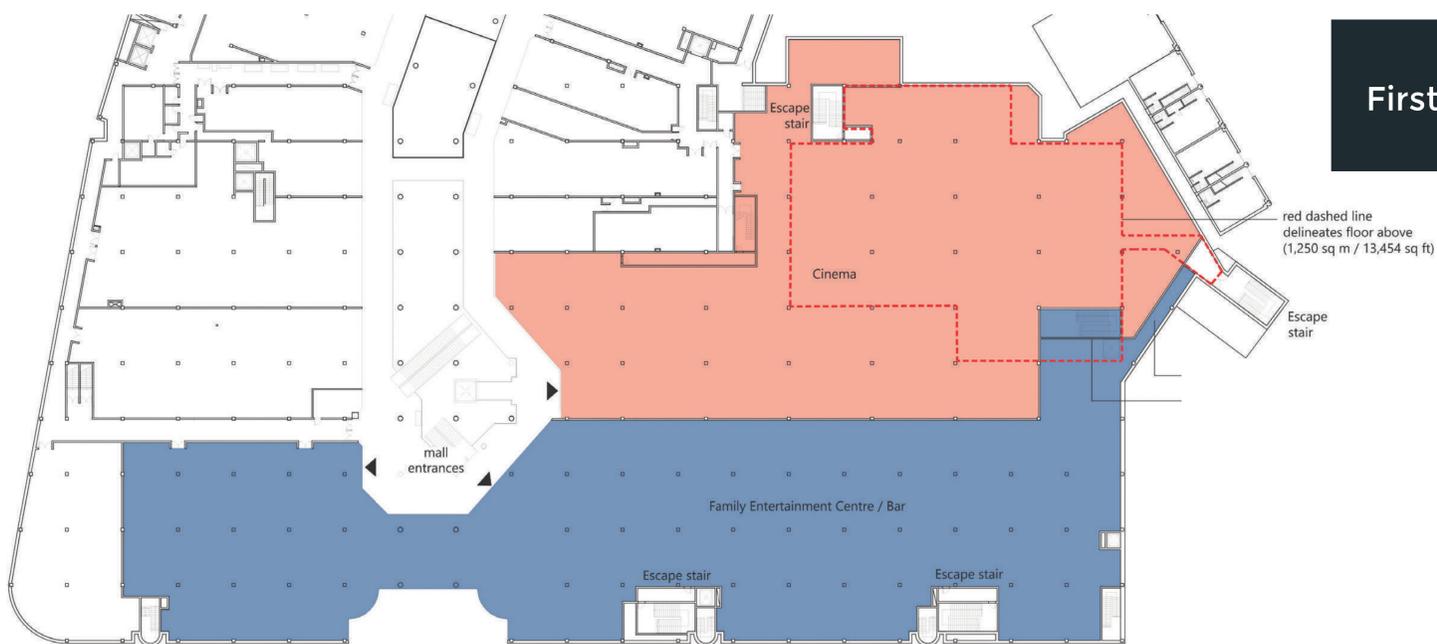
Site Proposals

Indicative Floorplans

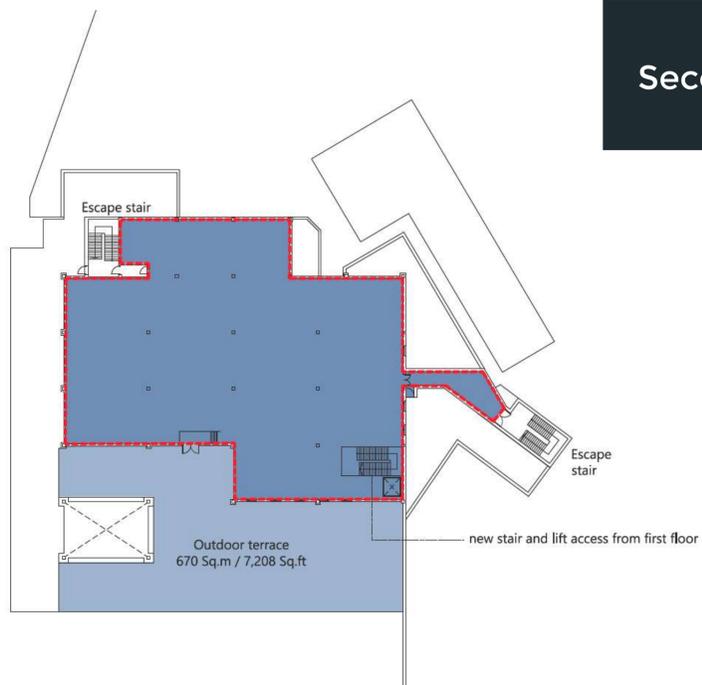
Not to scale.



Ground Floor - Indicative

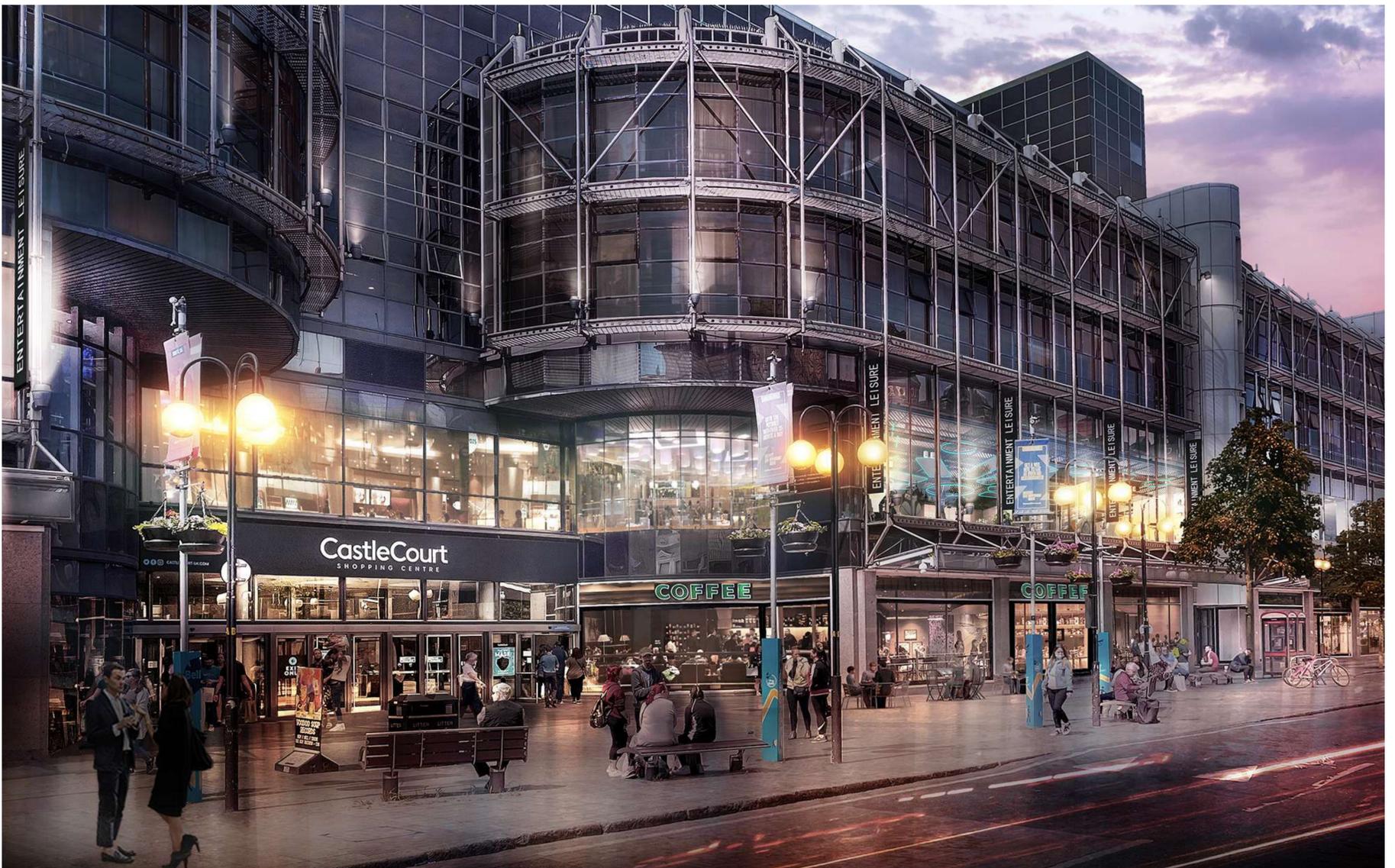
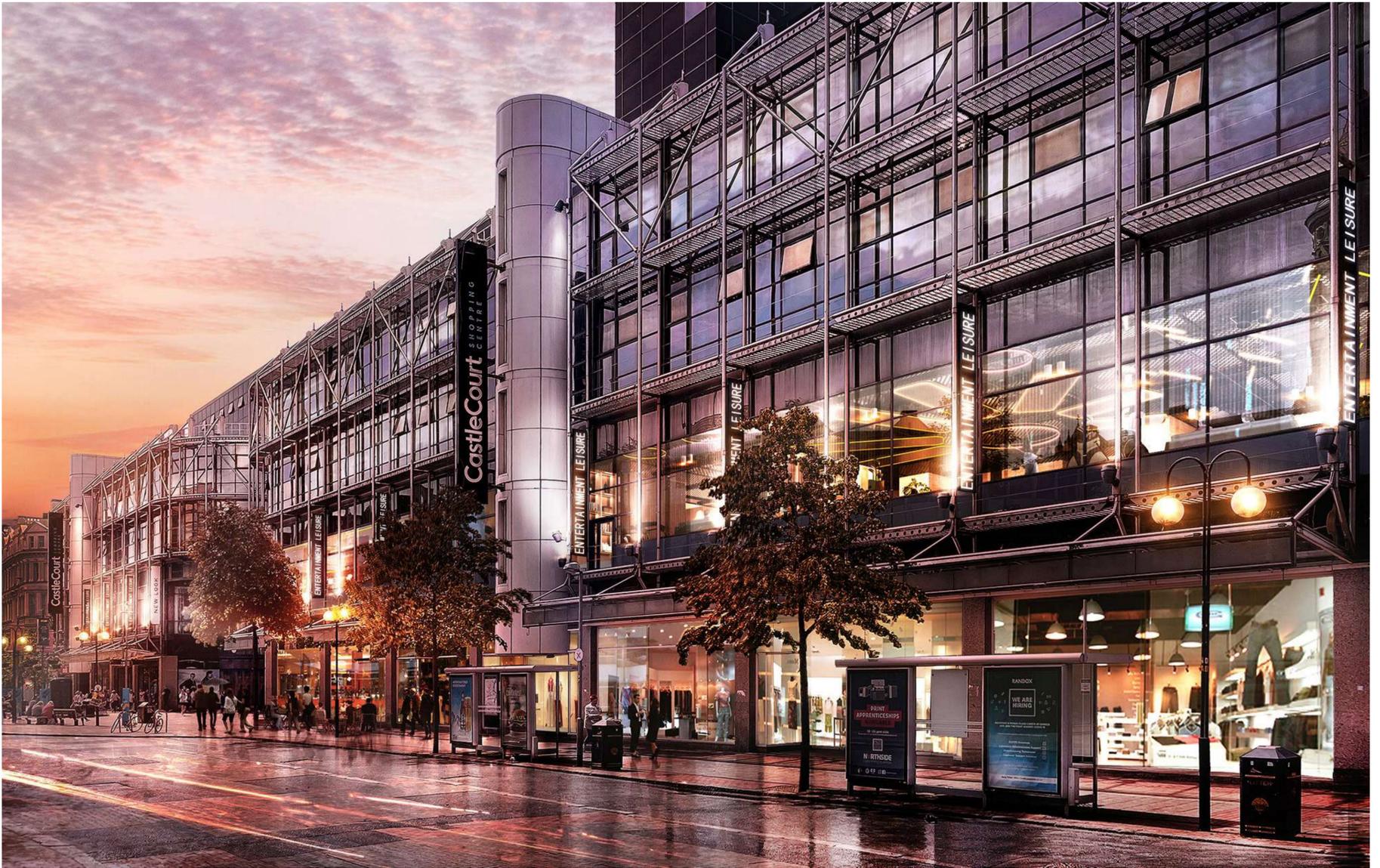


First Floor - Indicative



Second Floor - Indicative

Site Proposals



Community and Economic Benefits

Community and Economic Benefits

The new leisure proposals will deliver a number of community and economic benefits as outlined below:

- Regeneration of this key section of Royal Avenue within Belfast City Centre, seeking to breathe new life back into this once bustling shopping hub.
- The High Street Retail Sector has seen a gradual decline in the last 10 years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a consumer shift towards online retailing. This has led to department stores and shopping centres across Northern Ireland and the UK becoming vacant and defunct. The proposals seek to prevent Castlecourt falling into the same category by creating a viable use for these units, reducing the potential for increased vacancy rates within the Shopping Centre.
- Delivery of a wide range of leisure activities for young people and families to enjoy.
- The proposed diversification of uses within the Centre will help to drive footfall to other retailers.
- Represents an investment of £10.8m, at a time when the city is suffering so badly from the debilitating impact of COVID-19.
- Employment for up to 125 construction workers, and up to 130 full time and part-time jobs post completion.



Indoor Bumper Car example

Laser Quest example



Have Your Say

Get in Touch

Give Us A Call

If you would like a member of the team to discuss our proposals over the phone with you, you can call us on 028 9043 4333.

Write to Us

If you wish to make comments on the proposals, you can also do so in writing by sending a letter to:

TSA Planning
20 May Street
Belfast,
BT1 4NL

Complete a Comment Card

Comment Cards, along with a self-addressed envelope, have been delivered to all neighbouring landowners and occupiers of premises, which directly adjoin the proposal site.

These can be filled in and returned as directed.

Alternatively, electronic comment cards can be completed on the homepage of this website.

Closing date for feedback – Monday 30th August, 5pm