

26 Feb 2006

CASTLEBAWN GETS GREEN LIGHT FOR WALL BREAK

Northern Ireland environment minister Lord Rooker has given the green light for an 8-metre break in the Bawn wall in Newtownards town centre following a meeting with Castlebawn developer Fearghal Eastwood.

Lord Rooker was shown plans for the proposed Castlebawn retail development by Mr Eastwood in which the need to link the development to the town centre by means of an 8-metre break in the wall was described as critical. Planning permission for a 1.8m break had been allowed earlier but this was felt to be too narrow for normal pedestrian flows.

Mr Eastwood says the meeting was very positive and he is confident that official approval for the wall will follow shortly.

“The plans we have for the shopping precinct within the Bawn wall enclosure will bring huge benefits to Newtownards through increased visitor numbers and shoppers. Newtownards needs an injection of new investment to keep pace with other provincial towns and that’s where Castlebawn comes in. The break in the wall provides straight-through pedestrian access which is critical to the success of this investment,” he says.

Mr Eastwood says Lord Rooker was satisfied that the wall break could be made as long as the development within the wall enclosure was attractive to the people of Newtownards.

“We reassured him that we are in consultation with the Newtownards Chamber of Trade to fine tune the shopping precinct details so I am confident that we will reach a mutually acceptable set of plans very soon indeed,” says Mr Eastwood.

The wall break has been a sensitive issue but the agreement is based on a compromise proposed by Castlebawn architect John Smylie of WDR & RT Taggart. Mr Smylie says the original consent to allow two breaks in the wall, one 24.2m wide for vehicle access, the other 1.8m for pedestrian access remains in place.

“But by reducing the 24.2m allowance to a manageable 18m and increasing the 1.8m break to 8m, we can make the development work for everybody,” says Mr Smylie.