

Development Management Report	
Committee Meeting Date: 17 th February 2026	
Application ID: LA04/2025/0288/F	
<p>Proposal: Retrospective change of use from ground floor taxi passenger terminal, cafe, office and newsagent to a Homeless Centre, Category D1(B). [The centre will provide meals, washing and changing facilities and an internal social amenity area for users. The centre will operate Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week from 4:00 pm up until 10:00 pm] (Amended Description)</p>	<p>Location: Existing taxi passenger terminal and former retail unit located within 35a King Street, Belfast, BT1 1HU</p>
Referral Route: Paragraph 3.8.7 of the Scheme of Delegation (discretion of the Director of Planning and Building Control).	
Recommendation: Approval with conditions	
<p>Applicant Name and Address: Belfast Homeless Services Charity No. 108018 35a King Street, Belfast, BT1 1HU</p>	<p>Agent Name and Address: Harry McConnell RPP Architects Ltd 155-157 Donegall Pass Belfast BT7 1DT</p>
Valid date: 11 th March 2025	
Target date (15 weeks): 24 th June 2025	
Contact officer: Ed Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management)	
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <p>This application seeks full planning permission for change the use of 35a King Street from taxi passenger terminal with café, offices and newsagents to a Homeless Centre, Category D1(B). The centre will provide meals, washing and changing facilities and an internal social amenity area for users. The centre will operate Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week from 4.00pm up until 10.00pm.</p> <p>The use has been operating since May 2025 and retrospective planning permission is sought.</p> <p>The key issues for consideration of the application are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle of the proposed use • Design and Placemaking • Health and Wellbeing • Access and Transport • Impact on neighbour amenity • Anti-social behaviour <p>The site is located within Belfast City centre and is designated as Primary Retail Core in both dBMAPs.</p>	

The proposal is considered to comply with Policies DES1, HC1 CI1, SP3, SP4, SP5, TRAN8 of the Belfast Local Development Plan Strategy 2035, the SPPS and Section 91(2) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.


Recommendation

Having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal is considered acceptable. It is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions.

Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the conditions, environmental health final consultation response and deal with any other matters which may arise, provided the issues are not substantive.

Officer Report

1.0	Drawings and Imagery
1.2	<p>A detailed site plan map of an urban area. The map shows several streets: Francis Street, Berry Street, Millfield, and Divis Street. There are multiple car parks labeled 'Car Park' and a 'Multistory Car Park'. Building footprints are shown with various labels including 'PH' (Public House), 'Grotto', 'St Mary's RC Church', 'Hall', and 'Hotel'. A red outline highlights a specific building footprint on Francis Street, which is the proposed development unit. The map also shows various lot numbers and addresses.</p>
1.3	<p>An architectural floor plan of the proposed development unit. The plan shows a complex layout of rooms, corridors, and structural elements. A red outline indicates the boundary of the proposed development unit. The plan includes various rooms, a staircase, and structural columns. A legend in the bottom right corner shows a red square representing the 'PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT UNIT'.</p>

1.4	 <p>EXISTING FRONT ELEVATION</p> <p>PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION - NO CHANGES TO BE MADE TO FRONT ELEVATION</p>
2.0	Characteristics of the Site and Area
2.1	The site is located at 35a King Street, which was formally a taxi passenger terminal with café, offices and newsagents.
2.2	<p>The surrounding area is predominantly commercial, with a residential apartment block and multi storey car park attached to the building.</p> <p>The site is located on the edge of the city centre boundary opposite the southern entrance to Castlecourt Multi Storey Carpark. There are hotels, bars, and retail offerings in the immediate surroundings of the site commensurate with its city centre location.</p>
3.0	Description of Proposal
3.1	The application seeks full planning permission for change the use of 35a King Street from taxi passenger terminal with café, offices and newsagents to a Homeless Centre, Category D1(B). The centre will provide meals, washing and changing facilities and an internal social amenity area for users. The centre will operate Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week from 4.00pm up until 10.00pm.
3.2	The proposed change of use relates to the ground floor of the premises only.
3.3	The use has been operating since May 2025 and retrospective planning permission is sought.
4.0	Planning Policy and Other Material Considerations
4.1	Belfast Local Development Plan, Plan Strategy 2035
4.2	<u>Strategic policies</u>
4.3	<p>Policy SP2 – sustainable development</p> <p>Policy SP3 – improving health and wellbeing</p>

	<p>Policy SP4 – community cohesion and good relations Policy SP5 – positive placemaking Policy SP6 – environmental resilience Policy SP7 – connectivity Policy SD2 – Settlement Areas</p> <p><u>Operational policies</u></p> <p>4.4 DES1 – Principles of Urban Design HC1 – Promoting Healthy Communities CI1 – Community Infrastructures TRAN8 - Car parking and Servicing Arrangements</p> <p>4.5 Development Plan – zoning, designations and proposals maps Belfast Urban Area Plan (2001) BUAP Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (v2004) Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (v2014)</p> <p>Regional Planning Policy Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) (Edition 2, 2025)</p> <p>Other Policies <i>Belfast Agenda</i> (Community Plan) Creating Places (DfI)</p> <p>Relevant Planning History</p> <p>The site and surrounding area do not have any planning history of direct relevance to consideration of the application.</p>
5.0	Consultations and Representations
5.1	<p>Statutory Consultations</p> <p>DFI Roads – No objection</p>
5.2	<p>Non-statutory Consultations</p> <p>Environmental Health – Awaiting final response PSNI – Comments (see main report)</p>
5.3	<p>Representations</p> <p>The application has been advertised in the press and neighbours notified.</p>
5.4	<p>67 objections have been received, raising the following concerns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour • Impact on residential amenity • Impact on community cohesion • Health and Wellbeing • Detrimental to placemaking <p>All issues have been addressed in the main body of the report.</p>

	<p>The council also note that there have been 149 letters of support received. The key points have been outlined below;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The scheme will help combat the homelessness problem withing Belfast - The centre was successful in other locations - Adequate anti-social behaviour policies - Zero tolerance drug and alcohol policy - Accessible city centre location - Provides a local need
6.0	PLANNING ASSESSMENT
	<p><u>Development Plan Context</u></p> <p>6.1 Section 6(4) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 states that in making any determinations under the Act, regard is to be had to the local development plan, and the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.</p> <p>6.2 Section 45(1) of the Act states that in determining planning applications, the Council must have regard to the local development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations.</p> <p>6.3 The Development Plan is the Belfast Local Development Plan, which replaces the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 as the statutory plan for the city. The Belfast LDP is in two parts: Part 1 is the Plan Strategy, which was adopted on 02 May 2023. Part 2 is the Local Policies Plan, which will provide the zonings and proposals map for Belfast and has yet to be published.</p> <p>6.4 Until such time as the Local Policies Plan is adopted, the Council must have regard to the land-use zonings, designations and proposals maps in the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001, both versions of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (v2004 and v2014) (draft BMAP 2015) and other relevant area plans. The weight to be afforded to these proposals maps is a matter for the decision maker. It is considered that significant weight should be given to the proposals map in draft BMAP 2015 (v2014) given its advanced stage in the development process, save for retail policies that relate to Sprucefield which remain contentious.</p> <p>6.5 Operational policies – the Plan Strategy contains a range of operational policies relevant to consideration of the application. These are listed in the report.</p> <p>Proposals Maps The site is located within the City Centre in both versions of BUAP, it also falls within the Primary Retail Core</p> <p><u>Key issues</u></p> <p>6.6 The key issues are in assessing the application are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Principle of the proposed use ● Design and Placemaking ● Health and Wellbeing ● Access and transport ● Impact on neighbour amenity ● Anti-social behaviour

6.7	<p>Principle of the proposed use.</p> <p>The council seeks to ensure that all new developments aid the needs of the community. Policy CI1 (Community infrastructures) seeks to protect and provide development opportunities for community, health, leisure, nurseries and educational facilities based on local need in line with the projected population growth. The proposal will provide an important support service for vulnerable people in a sustainable, accessible location close to public transport and local services. The use is similar to other community-type facilities. BCC Planning therefore believe the indoor facility will meet the needs of the homeless community in City Centre Belfast.</p>
6.8	<p>Belfast Homeless Services previously resided at another premises location on Amelia Street. However it is understood that the building was no longer safe due to its structural condition and therefore the charity had to find another building to reside in. The proposal will provide an important support service for vulnerable people in a sustainable, accessible location close to public transport and local services. The use is similar to other community-type facilities</p>
6.9	<p>It is noted that in Belfast, an average of 9,661 households with homelessness status were listed, according to data from Belfast City Council in February 2025. This number has shown a steady increase year-over-year, according to Homeless Connect. Additionally, at the end of 2023, there were 8,725 homeless households in Belfast, with North and West Belfast areas experiencing the highest concentrations</p>
6.10	<p>The site lies within a mixed use commercial and residential area within the Primary Retail Core of the City Centre. The principle of a change of use from a taxi passenger terminal with café, offices and newsagents to Homeless Day Centre is considered acceptable at this location.</p>
6.11	<p>Design and Positive Placemaking</p> <p>Policy SP5 of the Local Development plan relates to positive place making and Accessibility. The aim of this policy is to promote the principles of good design in the creation of buildings and spaces that strengthen civic pride, community ownership and stewardship. The built environment and its future development will have a substantial influence on the character and quality of Belfast. By way of scale, location and nature, there is no reason to suggest that the proposed use is conflicting which Policy SP5. BCC Planning service are of the view that the homeless centre is making use of a vacant city centre site and adding diversity to the area.</p>
6.12	<p>The proposed homeless centre is within an existing building designed in accordance with Policy DES1, ensuring that it responds sensitively to the character and context of the surrounding area. The scale, massing, and materials respect the local built environment, avoiding any institutional appearance. The layout promotes safety and privacy for users, with clearly defined public and private spaces and inclusive access throughout. The building integrates well with the street frontage while maintaining a discreet and welcoming entrance that supports social integration and reduces stigma.</p>
6.13	<p>The development also meets DES1 principles through its emphasis on sustainability, connectivity, and high-quality design. Located near public transport and key services, the centre supports active travel and accessibility for both volunteers and service users. The spaces have been designed to enhance quality of life, providing private accommodation and communal areas.</p>
6.14	<p>Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>The council seek to ensure that all new developments maximise opportunities to promote healthy and active lifestyles. New developments should be designed,</p>

	<p>constructed, and managed in ways to improve health and promote healthy lifestyles. Policy HC1 (Promoting Healthy Communities) aligns with the Belfast Agenda, which places an emphasis on healthy lifestyles, physical and emotional wellbeing, reducing health inequalities and better services for those who suffer poor health.</p>
6.15	<p>Policy HC1 states planning permission will be granted for proposals that help to sustain and improve neighbourhoods in all parts of the city. The homeless centre will be used to bring communities together by way of its accessible design, inclusive demonstrations, and educational studies, therefore complying with Policy HC1.</p>
6.16	<p>Policy SP3 of the Belfast Local Development Plan also relates health and wellbeing in that the council will support development that maximises opportunities to improve it. By introducing a day centre for the homeless in Belfast it will allow for social inclusion and enhance the daily living of its visitors.</p>
	<p>Access and transport</p>
6.17	<p>The site is highly accessible and benefits from the transport links within Belfast City Centre, therefore the council consider the proposal has met policy TRAN8 (Car parking and servicing arrangements) of the Belfast Local Development Plan. The application site is also accessible by foot due to its prime located on King Street. It is presumed that the vast majority of attendees will arrive on foot. The walking infrastructure in the city centre is of a high standard and promotes a sustainable mode of transport.</p>
6.18	<p>Impact on neighbour amenity</p> <p>The site is located in a mostly commercial area although the premises is part of a much larger building which contains apartments, as well as a retail store and multi-storey car park. Access to the apartment block is via a controlled door at the opposite corner to the centre.</p>
6.19	<p>BCC Planning note that the noise generated from the proposed use will be of no greater impact than the previous taxi passenger terminal with café, offices and newsagents. Therefore, the proposal will not harm the amenity of adjacent and nearby landuses by way of noise.</p>
6.20	<p>Environmental Health has been consulted and have raised no concerns with regard to impact on the amenity of local residents from the proposal.</p> <p>Any general disturbance in the area is for the PSNI to deal with accordingly.</p>
	<p>Anti-Social Behaviour</p>
6.21	<p>The daytime use of the centre minimises the potential for impact on residential amenity during antisocial hours, normally considered to be between 11pm and 7am.. A condition has been added to ensure that the day centre is only operated between 4pm-10pm.</p>
6.22	<p>The addition of the day centre to the city centre, will assist the issue of homelessness and ensure that there is a safe place to attend, which will be managed by staff at all times.</p>
6.23	<p>The agent has submitted a management plan to the council, section 4 covers anti-social behaviour. Please see below;</p>

6.24	<p>Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero tolerance for ASB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guests involved in ASB (inside or outside the Centre) are issued temporary exclusions. ○ Repeat offenders face permanent exclusions from the service. ○ All incidents are reported to PSNI when necessary.
6.25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nightly Guest Register with times and names. ○ Completion of Incident Reports as required. ○ Alcohol is strictly prohibited inside the Centre or outside the premises. ○ Protocols for safe litter disposal
6.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer presence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Three volunteers stationed outside the Centre during operating hours to monitor compliance.
6.27	<p>PSNI has been informally consulted on the application as a non-statutory consultee, and have advised:</p> <p><i>“The carefully considered opinion of my team is that it is probable there will be an increase in what is perceived as anti-social behaviour if this becomes a homeless centre. It is harder to confidently say there will be an increase in crime but again it is a potential outworking.</i></p> <p><i>While I have no doubt the venue will continue to be managed internally to a very high standard the staff and volunteers of Belfast Homeless Services can have little control over what will happen as persons make their way to and from the venue or if they are refused entry / removed due to how they are presenting. This will then be for the PSNI to manage.”</i></p>
6.28	<p>Whilst the proposed use has the potential for anti-social behaviour, the management plan proposed and to be conditioned, is considered sufficiently robust to deal with matters which may arise. Furthermore, the centre has been operational since mid 2025 and no evidence has been provided to show that the centre has had an unacceptable impact on the amenity of the local area.</p>
6.29	<p>On balance; it is considered that given the important and necessary support role the centre plays within the city, its daytime only use, alongside the appropriate conditioning of a robust management plan, it will therefore not significantly impact the amenity of the local area to an unacceptable degree and the application is recommended for approval.</p>
7.0	<p>Summary and Recommendation</p>
7.1	<p>Having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal is considered acceptable. It is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions.</p>

7.2

Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise conditions, deal with the final Environmental Health consultation response and any other matters which may arise as long as they are not substantive.

DRAFT CONDITIONS:

1. This planning permission has effect from the date which the development hereby approved was carried out.

Reason: As required by Section 55 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

2. The development hereby permitted shall not be operated unless in accordance with the approved management plan. (Insert name and date).

Reason: To ensure adequate management and in the interests of the amenity of the area.

3. The daytime homeless shelter hereby approved shall not be operational outside the following hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week from 4:00 pm up until 10:00 pm.

Reason: To safeguard the amenities of the area.

4. *Cooking on premises- awaiting EHO response.*

DRAFT INFORMATIVES:

1. Please make sure that you carry out the development in accordance with the approved plans and any planning conditions listed above. Failure to do so will mean that the proposal is unauthorised and liable for investigation by the Council's Planning Enforcement team. If you would like advice about how to comply with the planning permission, you are advised to contact the Planning Service at Belfast City Council at planning@belfastcity.gov.uk.
2. This decision relates to the following approved drawing numbers: 01,02,03,04 and 05 (Uploaded to the Public Planning Portal on 21/02/25 and 12/03/25)