

Committee Application

Development Management Officer Report	
Committee Date: 09 December 2025	
Application ID: LA04/2025/1454/F	
Proposal: New community wellbeing centre and cafe extension to existing lockhouse building	Location: The Lockhouse 13 River Terrace Belfast BT7 2EN
Reason for Referral to Committee: Amendment to previous Committee Application.	
Recommendation:	Approval with conditions
Applicant Name and Address: Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group 97 Balfour Avenue Belfast BT7 2EW	Agent Name and Address: Taggarts 23 Bedford Street Belfast BT2 7EJ
Date Valid: 29 th August 2025	
Target Date: 31 st December 2025	
Contact Officer: Ciara Reville, Principal Planning Officer (Development Management)	
Executive Summary: This application seeks full planning permission for the construction of new community wellbeing centre and cafe extension to existing lockhouse building	
Background: Previous planning approval has been granted on this site for a similar development (ref. LA04/2022/1499/F) approved 8 th October 2024; survey works prior to commencement of development found a sewage pipe previously unknown. To overcome the issue of the sewage pipe, the proposal was redesigned with the extension rotated 90 degrees as detailed in the plans in this report.	
The main issues relevant to consideration of the application are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The principle of development• Impact on the character and appearance of the area• Impact on the setting of a scheduled monument• Impact on residential amenity• Access and parking• Environmental Considerations - Drainage, Waste-water infrastructure and Ecology	

NI Water and Historic Environment Division have offered no objection. DfI Roads seeks additional information. BCC Environmental Health, NIEA, SES and Rivers Agency were also consulted; Planning Service is currently waiting responses. The application has been brought before committee before the completion of the consultation process due to a funding deadline.

One representation letter has been received from a third party; issues raised include development on green space and potential contamination of the land.

The site is within the development limit of Belfast and the principle of development is considered acceptable.

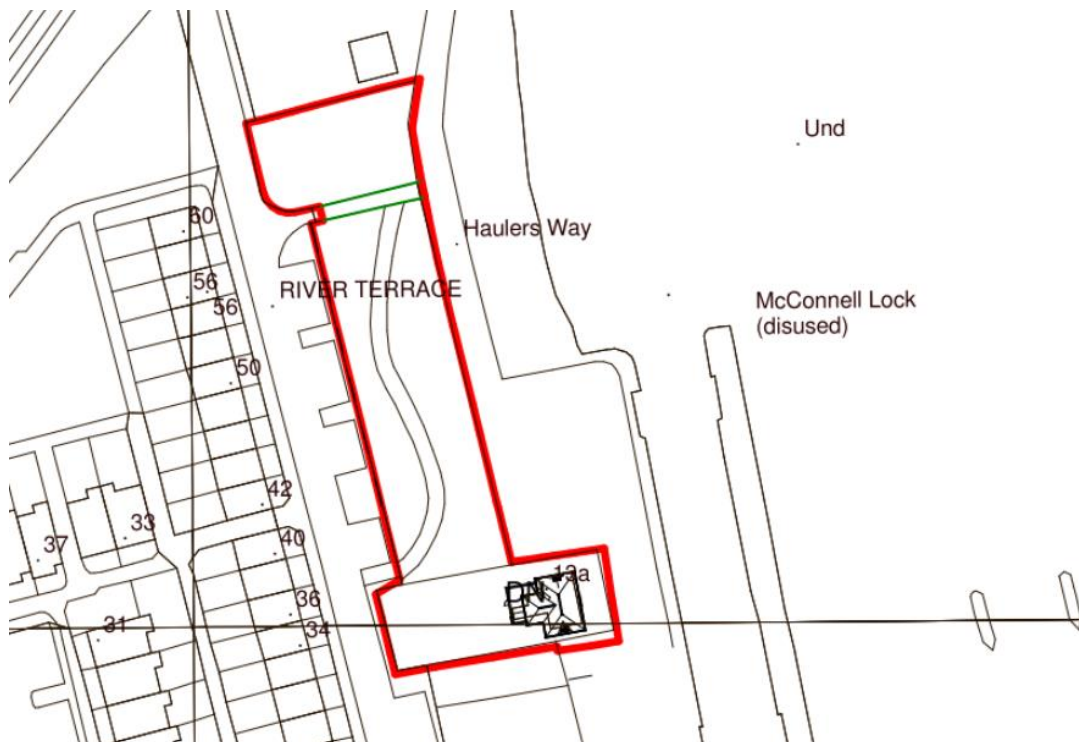
The design of the proposed extension and the proposed use to the existing building is acceptable. The changes to the existing open space, as previously approved, are considered a betterment creating features of interest and additional seating. HED offers no objection there would be no harmful impact on the setting of the scheduled monument.

Recommendation:

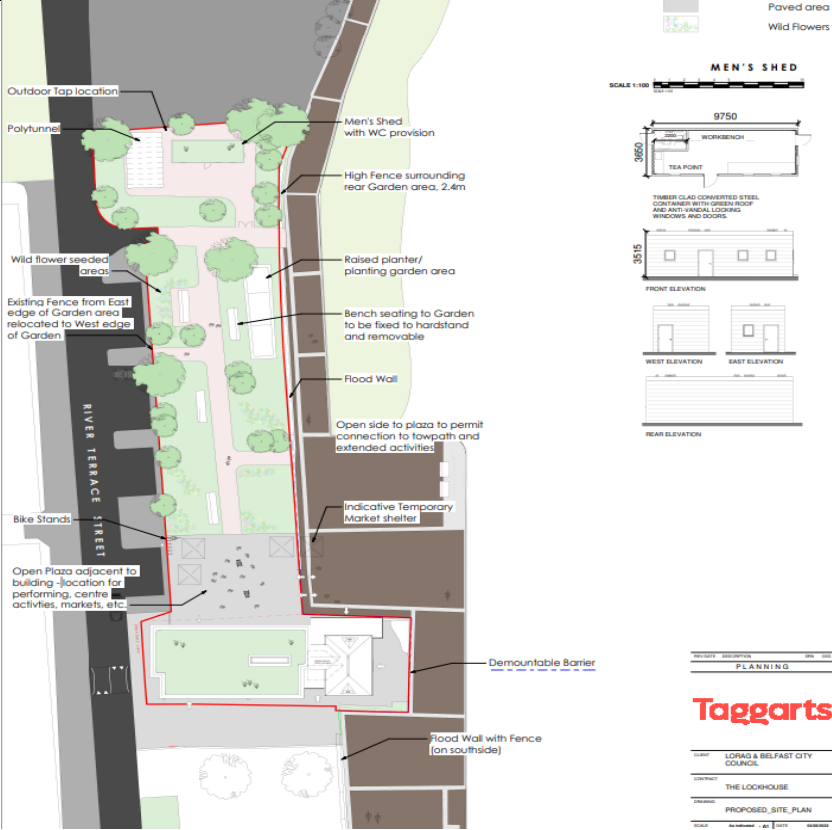
It is considered that the proposal is acceptable having regard to the Development Plan and relevant material considerations. It is recommended that planning permission is granted with delegated authority sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of conditions, and deal with any other issues arising as long as they are not substantive.

Case Officer Report

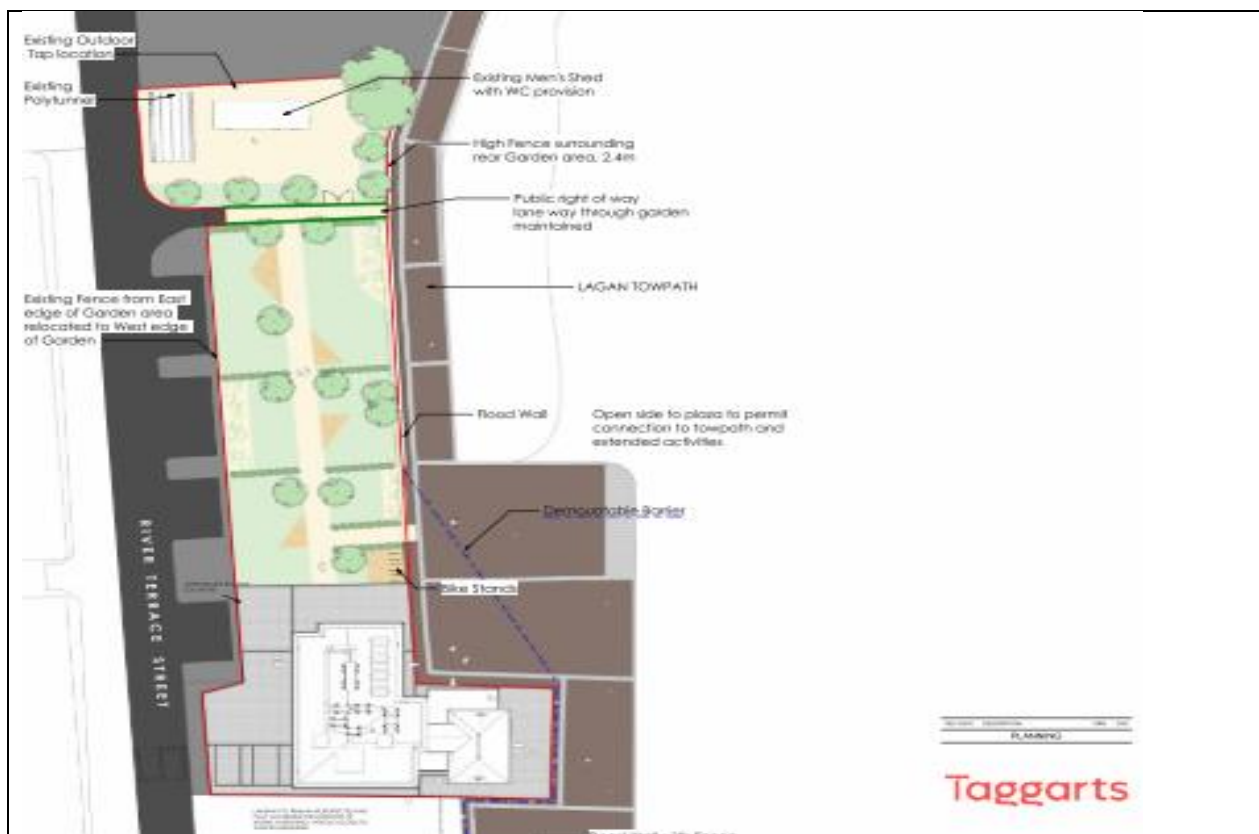
Site Location Plan:



Previously approved site layout plan



Current site layout plan



CGIs





Characteristics of the Site and Area

1.0	Description of Proposed Development
1.1	This application seeks full planning permission for the construction of new community wellbeing centre and cafe extension to existing lockhouse building
2.0	Description of the Site and Area
2.1	The site is made-up of two distinct plots, one is a two-storey detached dwelling finished in a painted render, the building sits within its plot with well defined boundaries of fencing and mature hedging. The second plot is an area of open space currently laid out in grass and public pathways forming part of the Lagan walkway. The surrounding character is mixed, with the east side of the road having community buildings - a recreation centre, youth club and nursery school. Whereas the west side of the road is characterised by residential use, dominated by two-storey red brick terrace housing.

Planning Assessment of Policy and other Material Considerations	
3.0	Site History
3.1	LA04/2023/1499/F - Construction of new community wellbeing centre and cafe incorporating refurbishment and change of use of existing house, with a new adjacent community garden and men's shed facility. Approved 18 th April 2023
4.0	Policy Framework Section 6(4) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
4.1	Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 (BUAP)
4.2	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (v2004 and v2014) (dBMAP) <i>Following the Court of Appeal decision on dBMAP (2014), the extant development plan is the BUAP. DBMAP (both v2004 and v2014 versions) are material considerations. The weight to be afforded to dBMAP is a matter of judgement for the decision maker. Given its advanced stage in the Development Plan process, it is considered that dBMAP (v2014) carries significant weight.</i>
4.3	Belfast Local Development Plan – Plan Strategy Policy HOU3 Protecting of existing residential accommodation Policy CI 1 - Community Infrastructure Policy DES1 - Principles of Urban Design Policy BH5 - Archaeology Policy ENV2 - Mitigating environmental change Policy ENV3 - Adopting to environmental change Policy ENV4 - Flooding Policy ENV5 - Sustainable drainage systems Policy TRAN8 - Car parking and servicing arrangements Policy TRE1 - Trees
5.0	Statutory Consultees Responses DfI Roads Service – seeks additional information Historic Environment Division – no objection NI Water – no objection NIEA – awaiting response SES – awaiting response
6.0	Non Statutory Consultees Responses BCC Environmental Health – awaiting response
7.0	Representations
7.1.	The application has been advertised in the press and neighbours have been notified. One third-party representation of objection was received. Issues raised include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development on green space <i>The proposal is considered to be a betterment for the open space providing more facilities for the local community (Officer response)</i> - Contamination of the land.

	<i>The land contamination issue was resolved within application LA04/2023/1499/F and it is considered a solution can be found following consultation with BCC EHO and NIEA (Officer response)</i>
9.0	Key Issues
9.1	<p>The main issues relevant to consideration of the application are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principle of development • Impact on the character and appearance of the area • Impact on the setting of Scheduled Monument • Impact on Open Space • Impact on amenity • Access and parking • Flooding • Waste-water infrastructure
9.2	<p>Principle of Development</p> <p>The site is located within the existing settlement limits for Belfast and within the BUAP and the dBMAP, the presumption is therefore in favour of development. The BUAP has no land use designations for the site. dBMAP designates the north section of the site, outside the confines of the existing building plot, as open space.</p>
9.3	<p>The SPSS advises that planning permission ought to be granted for sustainable development that accords with the area plan and causes no harm to areas of acknowledged importance.</p>
9.4	<p>Impact on the character and appearance of the area</p> <p>River Terrace and Balfour Avenue run in parallel to the west bank of the river Lagan. There is a clear distinction in land uses along the road frontage, to the west side of the road it is residential with two-storey dwellings being dominant. Within the residential use there are clear period differences Balfour Avenue being of old traditional styled Belfast housing, red brick terrace with no front amenity space. The housing between Shaftesbury Avenue and Cooke Steet, has the rear of the housing projecting onto the road frontage and from Cooke Street onwards, the housing is more modern dating circa 1970's/80s fronting onto the road with front amenity space.</p>
9.5	<p>To the east side of the road the main land uses are community buildings and open space amenity. This side of the road contains Shaftesbury Recreation Centre, a large leisure complex with outdoor play facilities. Proceeding on towards the site, the next building is single storey St. John Youth Centre followed by another single storey building St. Malachy's Nursery School followed by the site, currently a two-storey dwelling and open space (policy HOU3 will be considered below).</p>
9.6	<p>The site building is positioned at a greater distance from the road than the other community buildings, these buildings are positioned at various distances from the road edge ensuring no uniformity of building-line. The proposed extension will bring the building closer to the road edge which will make a significant change to the existing character when looking south, the proposed building obscuring the existing single storey neighbouring buildings with the creation of a large block extension. However, within the wider context, the proposal can be seen as book ending the community developments along this section of road with Shaftesbury Recreation Centre to one end and the proposal at the other. Furthermore, it is noted that the extension is not as deep as that previously approved under ref. LA04/2022/1499/F.</p>
9.7	

9.8	<p>The existing building retains the rendered finish, however the proposed extension is designed with grey brick interlaced with brick panel work design of the same-coloured brick. The design includes a flat roof which will be a green roof. Although the materials are not common to the area, which is mostly red/brown brick and slate the materials proposed will offer a contrast to the wider and will not be too dissimilar to Shaftesbury Recreation Centre which is finished in a grey steel cladding. Officers are content that the proposal will not significantly detract from the surrounding character having regards to the community buildings already located along this section of road frontage and the materials offering an acceptable contrast.</p>
9.9	<p>The current open space provides access to the Lagan walkway; the proposal is designed to retain this public access to pathways. Officers are content that the proposal will not impinge on the current level of public access ensuring the open character is maintained.</p>
9.10	<p>Impact on the setting of Scheduled Monument</p> <p>The application site consists of the John Murray Lockhouse and its immediate vicinity. John Murray Lockhouse is included in the Industrial Heritage Record for McConnell's Lock (IHR 02680:081:00) and is associated with it. McConnell's Lock (ANT 061:500) is a Scheduled Monument, scheduled for protection under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. DFC Historic Environmental Division (HED) was consulted and indicated that the proposal was acceptable.</p>
9.11	<p>Impact on Open Space</p> <p>The proposal will not result in any significant loss of open space due to the erection of the extension; it is noted that the groundworks and man-shed approved under LA04/2022/1499/F have been commenced. The extension will partly occupy an area of ground previously approved as hard-standing patio area, with the area previously earmarked for the extension now proposed as hardstanding.</p>
9.12	<p>Impact on amenity</p> <p>The adjacent nurse school is located to the south of the site and has a play and garden area between the school building and site. Having regard to the separation distance between the school building and proposed site, and also the sunpath direction, officers are content there will be no impact on the school. Those properties immediately fronting onto the site at No. 30 to 36 River Terrace will have a change to outlook with the extended building being closer to the front of these properties, however the redesign results in the extension being further from the housing than that previously approved under ref. LA04/2022/1499/F. The height of the building is quoted at 7.2m from ground level to top of parapet; it is also proposed that a perforated screen will be erected at roof level to obscure roof plant. The separation distance will ensure that there will be no impact on neighbouring properties regarding loss of light. Officers explored with the agent ways to reduce the scale of the roof plant to make it less intrusive on the wider visual amenity. The agent advised there was no scope to reduce the size of the roof plant following discussions with the M&E engineers. Screening of the roof level plant was accepted as an alternative to conceal plant to reduce the impact on the wider amenity. Several designs of screening were submitted for discussion, including part enclosure and consideration of different materials and colouring to match the main building. Officers considered that most of the suggested alternatives increase the impact on the wider amenity but believed the proposed perforated screen was the best option available offering screening of the plant but having a reduced impact due to the perforated design.</p>
9.13	<p>Access and Parking</p>

	Dfl Roads Service was consulted and advised that additional information was required Planning Service is currently waiting a resolution of this issue.
9.14	Environmental Health issues A Noise Impact Assessment, Odour Impact Assessment and Contaminated Land Assessment were submitted in support of the proposed development. Planning Service is awaiting response from BCC Environmental Health.
9.15	Flooding A Drainage Assessment was submitted in support of the proposed development. Dfl Rivers Agency was consulted Planning Service is waiting response
9.16	Environmental issues A Biodiversity checklist, Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Bat Emergence survey, Contaminated land assessment and Environmental management plan were submitted in support of the proposed development. NIEA and SES were consulted, and their response are currently outstanding.
9.17	Officers are content given previous approval on site that no significant issues should arise from outstanding consultation responses that cannot be resolved with the imposition of planning conditions.
9.18	Residential use The application form for the proposal indicates that the last use of the building is residential dwelling, policy HOU3 is considered applicable. The policy seeks to protect existing residential use and cites there will be a presumption in favour of retention of residential use. Subsection (b) of the policy allows deviation from the policy restriction if the proposal is for community infrastructure considered necessary within the residential area. Officers are of the opinion that the proposed community use is a necessary beneficial use for the wider community and, as such, the change from residential use to community infrastructure is acceptable. It is also noted by Officers that previous planning permission LA04/2022/1499/F, currently partly implemented, also changed the status of the building from residential use to community infrastructure.
9.19	Community Infrastructure Having regards to the comments above, it is considered by Officers that the proposal complies with Policy CI1, in which it is stated that planning permission will be granted for new community infrastructure at appropriate and accessible locations where there is no unacceptable impact on residential amenity and natural heritage assets. The proposal is a redesign of a previous approval that sought to provide indoor space for a variety of community-based activities for residents. Officers consider the site to be an appropriate location which is highly accessible to the public and will provide additional community infrastructure to the surrounding area.
9.20	Environmental / Trees Policies ENV2, 3, 5 and TRE 1 are satisfied. The proposal makes use of an existing building therefore avoiding demolition, it is intended to use high efficiency insulation and low energy lighting within the building. PV panels are proposed to be installed to the roof. Natural ventilation is proposed for the cafe area, reducing the needs for mechanical ventilation, thus reducing the carbon footprint of the building. The upgrade to the grounds around the site reduces surface water runoff into the current drainage system and the proposed open space area will benefit with the planting of 21 additional trees.
10.0	Summary of Recommendation:

10.1	Having had regard to the development plan, relevant planning policies, and other material considerations, it is considered that the proposal should be approved.
10.2	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 wording of the conditions.
11.0	<p>DRAFT CONDITION:</p> <p>1. The development hereby permitted must be begun within five years from the date of this permission.</p> <p>Reason: As required by Section 61 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.</p> <p>Other conditions to be imposed following completion of consultations process</p>