

Development Management Report

Summary	
Committee Date: 10 th March 2026	
Application ID: LA04/2025/0837/F	
Proposal: Demolition of Mount Masonic Hall, erection of 35 no. social housing units in 2 no. blocks with associated private, shared, communal, and public space, 29 no. private car parking spaces, vehicle and pedestrian access from Park Avenue, improvements to pedestrian steps linking Strandburn Drive to Sydenham Park, and demolition of 1 no. garage.	Location: Land of the former Mount Masonic Hall, 45 Park Avenue Belfast BT4 1SH
Referral Route: Scheme is for over 12 units and objections have been received which conflict with the officer recommendation to approve.	
Recommendation: Approval subject to conditions and Section 76 planning agreement.	
Applicant Name and Address: S. Johnston Newpark Homes (N.I.) Ltd 72-74 Omagh Road Dromore Omagh BT78 3AJ	Agent Name and Address: Jack Davidson Pragma Planning and Development Consultants Limited 7 Donegall Square W Belfast BT1 6JH
Date Valid: 13 th June 2025	
Target Date: 26 th September 2025	
Contact Officer: Lisa Walshe, Principal Planner (Development Management)	
Executive Summary: The application proposes the construction of 35no. residential units, comprising a mix of 22no. 3p/2b apartments and 13no. 2p/1b apartments within two separate blocks. The proposal is for 100% social housing and intended to provide Category 1 (over 55s) accommodation. The proposed development would comprise two detached blocks, Block A is 4 storeys and Block B is 3 storeys. The scheme includes 21 no. resident parking pays and 8 no. visitor parking bays amenity provision, landscaping, cycle parking and associated works. The key issues for consideration of the application are set out below. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle of housing in this location • Housing density • Affordable housing 	

- Housing mix
- Adaptable and accessible accommodation
- Design and Placemaking
- Impact on amenity
- Flood risk and drainage
- Waste-water infrastructure
- Climate change
- Access and transport
- Health impacts
- Environmental protection
- Natural heritage
- Trees and landscaping
- Waste management
- Section 76 planning agreement

In the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 (BUAP 2001), the site is un-zoned “white land”.

In the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (dBMAP) (versions 2004 and 2014), the site is also located within un-zoned “white land”.

The application has benefited from a detailed PAD under reference LA04/2023/3910/PAD.

The site is considered a suitable and sustainable location for housing; the proposal would make effective use of previously developed land for residential use in an accessible location.

The provision of 35 social housing units that respond to local housing need is welcomed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

The proposed access and parking arrangements are acceptable.

NI Water objects to the proposal on grounds of insufficient network capacity. A final NIEA: NED response is still outstanding, and further information is to be sought to address Belfast City Council Tree Department most recent comments. No objections have been received from other consultees, subject to conditions, informatives and Section 76 planning agreement.

Following advertisement in the local press as well as neighbour notification, 3 no letters of objection have been received from local residents raising issues which are detailed in the main report and 3 no representations with general queries have been received.

The Section 76 planning agreement required to secure the development as 100% social housing, travel plan and green travel measures has been agreed in principle.

The Committee undertook a pre-emptive site visit on 3rd March 2026.

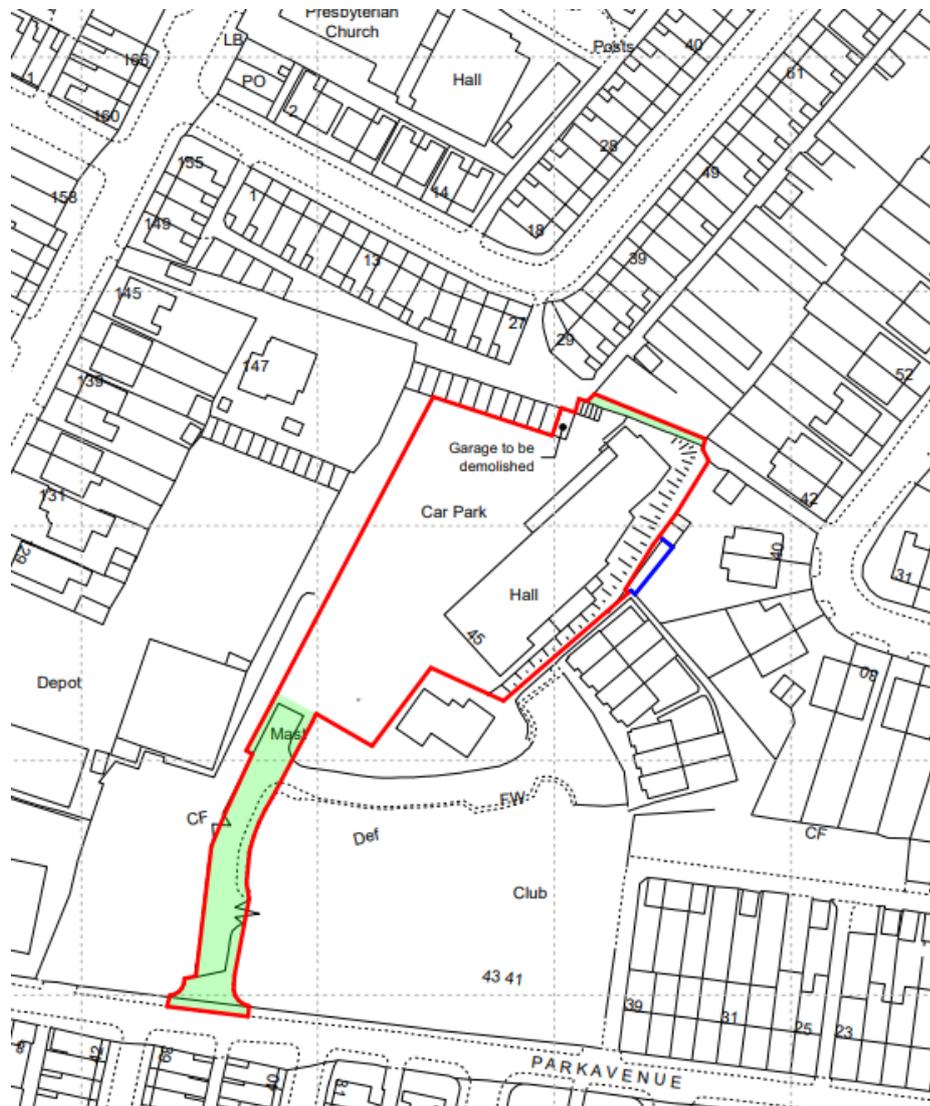
Recommendation

Having regard to the Development Plan and all other material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement.

Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and deal with any other matters that arise including resolving final responses from NIEA: NED and Trees provided that they are not substantive.

DRAWINGS AND IMAGERY

Site Location Plan:



Proposed Site Plan:



Block A:



Block A West Elevation 1:100



Block A South Elevation 1:100



Block A East Elevation 1:100



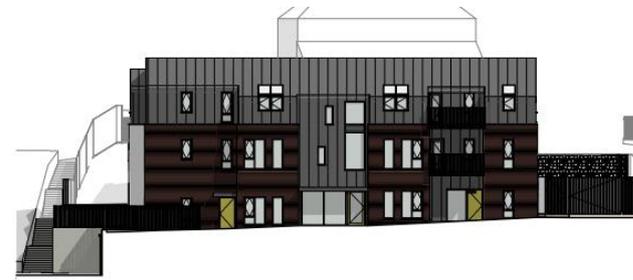
Whole Site - 3D Image



BUILDING FABRIC FINISHES:
 Walls - Red Brick, Render (White), Blue Brick slips
 Pitched Roof / Cladding - Aluminium Standing Seam, Dark Grey
 Windows - PVC, Dark grey
 Doors - Dark grey frame, coloured leaf
 Gutters/Roofs - PVC, Dark grey



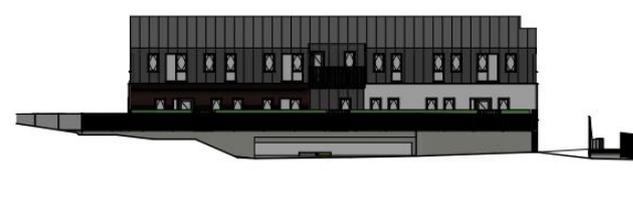
Block B:



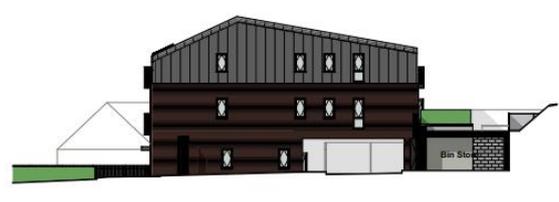
Block B West Elevation 1:100



Block B North Elevation 1:100



Block B East Elevation 1:100



Block B South Elevation 1:100



Whole Site - 3D Image

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<p>1.0</p> <p>1.1</p> <p>1.2</p> <p>1.3</p> <p>1.4</p> <p>1.5</p>	<p>Characteristics of the Site and Area</p> <p>The site is located at 45 Park Avenue and was previously occupied by the Mount Masonic Hall and associated surface level car park which has been vacant for a number of years. The site is approximately 0.42ha in size and the topography falls steeply towards the southern part of the site, falling by 4m over a 10m distance measured from the paved boundary of the carpark to the site boundary and retained through the use of a structural retaining wall. The west side of the site falls 4m over a 15m distance measured from the western boundary of the site to the centre of a HGV retail business located off Connsbrook avenue. Park Avenue Heights is the section of road that provides access to the proposed site. The site is defined by a mix of fencing and mature trees.</p> <p>The surrounding area comprises terraced houses to the north on Strandburn Drive, to the east is housing and apartments at Park Avenue Heights approved under reference LA04/2015/0052/F, to the west is a commercial HGV business and the south is vacant land.</p> <p>Description of Proposed Development</p> <p>The application seeks full planning permission for the demolition of Mount Masonic Hall, erection of 35 no. social housing units in 2 no. blocks with associated private, shared, communal, and public space, 29 no. private car parking spaces, vehicle and pedestrian access from Park Avenue, improvements to pedestrian steps linking Strandburn Drive to Sydenham Park, and demolition of 1no. garage.</p> <p>The proposal is for 100% social housing.</p> <p>The Committee undertook a pre-emptive site visit on 3rd March 2026.</p>
<p>2.0</p> <p>2.1</p> <p>2.2</p>	<p>Relevant Planning History</p> <p>LA04/2015/0052/F Lands to the north of 41-43 Park Avenue and to the South of 45 park avenue Belfast - Erection of 13no. social/affordable housing units (7no, 2 bed townhouses & 6no. 2 bed apartments) with associated parking, landscaping and road works, with access from Park Avenue via adjacent approval Z/2010/1434/F including provision for revised access/parking to masonic hall. Approved 22 September 2016.</p> <p>LA04/2021/1749/F Mount Masonic Hall, Park Avenue Heights, Belfast BT4 1PU - Demolition of existing hall buildings and ancillary facilities with the construction of 32no. social housing units in 5no. blocks (to include 2no. wheelchair accessible apartments, 8no. general needs apartments, and 22no. category 1 (elderly apartments) with associated car parking, site works and public (landscaped) open space. Application Withdrawn.</p>
<p>3.0</p> <p>3.1</p>	<p>PLANNING POLICY</p> <p>Development Plan – local development plan</p> <p><u>Belfast Local Development Plan, Plan Strategy 2035</u></p> <p><i>Strategic Policies:</i></p> <p>Policy SP1A: Managing growth and supporting infrastructure delivery</p>

	<p>Policy SP2: Sustainable development Policy SP3: Improving health and wellbeing Policy SP5: Positive placemaking Policy SP6: Environmental resilience Policy SP7: Connectivity Policy SD2: Settlement Areas</p> <p><i>Operational Policies:</i></p> <p>Policy HOU1: Accommodating new homes Policy HOU4: Density of residential development Policy HOU5: Affordable housing Policy HOU6: Housing Mix Policy HOU7: Adaptable and accessible accommodation</p> <p>Policy DES1: Principles of urban design Policy RD1: New residential developments Policy TRAN1: Active travel – walking and cycling Policy TRAN 2: Creating an accessible environment Policy TRAN4: Travel plan Policy TRAN6: Access to public roads Policy TRAN8: Car parking and servicing arrangements</p> <p>Policy ENV1: Environmental quality Policy ENV2: Mitigating environmental change Policy ENV3: Adapting to environmental change Policy ENV4: Flood Risk Policy ENV5: Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)</p> <p>Policy HC1: Promoting healthy communities Policy OS3: Ancillary open space Policy TRE1: Trees Policy NH1: Protection of natural heritage resources</p> <p><u>Supplementary Planning Guidance</u></p> <p>Affordable Housing & Housing Mix Residential Design Placemaking & Urban Design Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems Transportation</p> <p>3.2 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>3.3 Regional Planning Policy Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)</p> <p>3.4 Other Material Considerations Developer Contribution Framework (2020) Belfast Agenda (Community Plan)</p>
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4.0	CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS
4.1	<p>Statutory Consultees</p> <p>DFI: Roads – No objection subject to conditions NI Water – Water objects to the application on grounds of network drainage capacity concerns. DfI: Rivers – No objection DAERA: NED – Response outstanding DAERA: Ground Regulation Unit – No objection subject to conditions Northern Ireland Housing Executive – No objection</p>
4.2	<p>Non-Statutory Consultees</p> <p>Environmental Health – No objection subject to conditions. BCC: Tree Officer – Amendments requested BCC: Waste Management – No objection BCC: Urban Design – Some concerns with proposal Shared Environmental Services – No objection subject to conditions</p>
	<p>Representations</p>
4.3	<p>The application has been advertised in the newspaper and neighbours notified. 3 letters of objection have been received from local residents and 3 representations with queries. The following issues have been raised (summarised):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Overbearing scale and loss of privacy b) Loss of daylight and overshadowing c) Inappropriate density and overdevelopment d) Noise, disruption and construction impact e) Lack of sufficient separation distances f) Height of fencing g) Parking pressure h) Trees i) Structural concerns j) Alleyway and access clarification k) Loss of existing views
4.4	<p>Issues a) to i) will be considered within the main assessment below.</p>
4.5	<p>Regarding issue j) the alleyway and access, the agent provided a letter addressing this query and is available on the public planning portal. It discusses how the improvement works are confined solely to the staircase connecting Strandburn Drive to Sydenham Park. The improvement works to the pedestrian steps along the alleyway will be discussed within the ‘Trees and Landscaping’ section of the report.</p>
4.6	<p>Issue k) is not a material planning consideration in that there is no legal right to a view.</p>

5.0	PLANNING ASSESSMENT
5.1	<p>Main Issues</p> <p>The main issues relevant to consideration of the application are summarised below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle of housing in this location • Housing density • Affordable housing • Housing mix • Adaptable and accessible accommodation • Design and Placemaking • Impact on amenity • Flood risk and drainage • Waste-water infrastructure • Climate change • Access and transport • Health impacts • Environmental protection • Natural heritage • Trees and landscaping • Waste management • Section 76 planning agreement
5.2	<p>Development Plan Context</p> <p>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>
5.3	<p>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>
5.4	<p>The Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) when fully completed will replace the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 as the statutory Development Plan for the city. The Belfast LDP will comprise two parts. Part 1 is the Plan Strategy, which contains strategic and operational policies and was adopted on 02 May 2023. Part 2 is the Local Policies Plan, which will provide the zonings and proposals maps for Belfast and has not yet been published. The zonings and proposals maps in the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 remain part of the statutory local development plan until the Local Policies Plan is adopted.</p>
5.5	<p><u>Operational Polices</u></p> <p>The Plan Strategy contains a range of operational policies relevant to consideration of the application.</p>
5.6	<p><u>Proposals Maps</u></p> <p>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</p>

	<p>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>
5.7	<p>In the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 (BUAP); and both version of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (v2004 and v2024), the site is within the development limits of the city and is un-zoned “white land.</p>
5.8	<p><u>Principle of housing in this location</u></p> <p>The site is located within the development limit in the various relevant Development Plans. The site is surrounded by residential properties and would therefore be in keeping with the immediate character of the area.</p>
5.9	<p>The site is a sustainable location for new housing. It is located close to Hollywood Road which is an arterial route and Connsbrook Avenue which both have main bus routes providing the site with ten highly accessible (within 400m) public transport connection routes. The Sydenham halt is a 15-minute walk away and the Glider service is available a 17-minute walk away to the Upper Newtownards Road.</p>
5.10	<p>In respect of the above, the site is considered a suitable and sustainable location within the development limits and suitable in principle for housing. Suitable infrastructure is in place and no additional measures would be required.</p> <p>The principle of residential development of the site is considered acceptable and in accordance with Policies HOU1 and HOU2 of the Plan Strategy, and SPPS.</p>
5.11	<p><u>Housing density</u></p> <p>Policy HOU4 seeks to promote appropriate housing densities to ensure effective use of land, a finite resource, in sustainable locations. The application site is located within an inner-city Belfast band, with Policy HOU4 recommending an average density of 75-150 dph.</p>
5.12	<p>With a site area of approximately 0.42 hectares, the proposed density equates to 83.3 dwellings per hectare (dph) and falls within the recommended density band. The proposal is therefore compliant with Policy HOU4.</p>
5.13	<p><u>Affordable housing</u></p> <p>Policy HOU5 of the Plan Strategy requires housing schemes of 5 units or more, or sites of 0.1 hectares or greater, to deliver a minimum 20% affordable housing. The proposed scheme is for 100% social housing in the form of CAT 1 over 55s apartments with Alpha Housing acting as the partner Housing Association. NIHE has confirmed it is supportive of the mono tenure scheme in line with Policy HOU5, SPG and the SPPS. They state that ‘This proposed development is located within Middle East Housing Need Area which has an unmet need of 558 housing units for the 2024-29 period. At March 2025 there were 762 first preference applicants in Housing Stress’.</p>
5.14	<p>NIHE advises that the surrounding area is predominately owner occupied and market housing and there is a lack of existing social housing in the vicinity, which means the ability to address social housing is limited. Due to high need and a lack of available housing sites in this location we believe that this site could provide 100% social housing</p>

	units. This would help to address the current imbalance of housing tenures in the locality and would increase the ability to address the housing needs of all.
5.15	The provision of social housing will be secured by way of a Section 76 Planning Agreement however the subcategory of the housing is not secured, simply the delivery of social housing
5.16	The proposal accords with Policy HOU5.
5.17	<p><u>Housing mix</u></p> <p>Policy HOU6 requires that provision should be made for small homes across all tenures to meet future household requirements and that the exact mix of house types and sizes will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. The requirement for a mix of house types will not apply to single apartment developments such as this proposal, and in such cases, the housing mix will be considered acceptable through greater variety in the size of units.</p>
5.18	The scheme proposes a range of apartments consisting of 20no. 3p/2b, 2no. 3p/2b WC, 11no. 2p/1b and 2no. 2p/1b WC. The proposed mix is considered to provide a satisfactory range of size and type and is targeted to meet social housing need, particularly for CAT 1 over 55s. The proposed housing mix is considered acceptable having regard to Policy HOU6.
5.19	<p><u>Adaptable & accessible accommodation</u></p> <p>Policy HOU7 requires that all new homes should be designed in a flexible way to ensure that housing is adaptable throughout all stages of life. Policy HOU7 sets six criteria (a.) to (f.) to be met in order to help deliver adaptable and accessible homes. The policy also requires that at least 10% of units in residential developments of 10 units or more to be wheelchair accessible and provides an additional nine criteria (g.) to (o.) which these units must meet. With the scheme proposing 35no. units, 10% would equate to 4 accessible units (rounded up), which the proposal provides.</p>
5.20	‘Lifetime homes’ standards are a nationally recognised set of criteria to make new dwellings adaptable enough to accommodate a household’s changing lifetime needs and enable them to be lived in and visited by a wide range of people. All units have been designed with flexibility in mind for various stages of life. Criteria (a) to (f) of Policy HOU7 has been met in that all parking spaces are on a firm hardstanding surface which is either level or gently sloping. All main entrances feature a recessed entrance and the communal entrance features a projected canopy for those waiting to enter the building. Each apartment is fully contained at the same entrance level with open plan kitchen / dining across a single storey. There is outlook from the main living spaces and an accessible bathroom is proposed on the same floor as the principle bedroom for each unit. Each wheelchair accessible unit is then designed to comply with criteria (g) to (o) of Policy HOU7 also.
5.21	<p><u>Design & placemaking</u></p> <p>The proposal has been assessed against Policies SP5, DES1, and RD1 of the Plan Strategy, the SPPS and Creating Places. Policies SP5 and DES1 promote good placemaking, high quality design and the importance of proposals responding positively to local context addressing matters such as scale height, massing, proportions, rhythm, and materials avoiding any negative impact at street level. Policy DES1 states that planning permission will be granted for new development that is of a high quality,</p>

	sustainable design that makes a positive contribution to placemaking and goes onto list 11 criteria, (a.) to (k.).
5.22	As proposed, the scheme consists of two individual blocks, Block A which is to the front of the site comprises 23 apartments in an L-shaped layout and is 4 storeys measuring approximately 13m in height. Block B is located to the rear of the site and comprises 12 apartments over a 3-storey block measuring approximately 10m in height. There is a significant change in levels across the site as shown on the sections provided.
5.23	Two retaining structures will be developed as a result, one retaining wall will be located at the north side of the site where the proposed green open space falls onto Strandburn Drive. The second retaining wall will be located on the east side of the site, alongside block A, which will replace the existing retaining wall already in place. A condition requiring details of all hard landscaping will be included to ensure an appropriate level of detail of the retaining structures.
5.24	Topographical changes across the site enable three and four storey development to be introduced without causing harm to adjoining properties. As shown on the sections, Block A shall only be slightly higher than the existing two-storey development at Park Avenue Heights and Block B sits substantially below nos.38 and 40 Sydenham Park by approximately 24m. The majority of the proposed parking is to the west side of the site which is covered by approximately 1230sqm of hard surfaced car parking and the remaining to the east of the site with undercroft parking to the rear of Block B. Plans show soft landscaping and open space throughout the site. Park Avenue Heights is the section of road that provides access to the site with a new private vehicular and pedestrian access created. A condition requiring SUDS will be included.
5.25	The orientation of fenestration and separation distances are acceptable and this is explored in more detail when assessing the impact on neighbouring amenity.
5.26	The proposed external materials include red brick and white render walls, aluminium dark grey cladding on the roof and dark grey windows, doors and rainwater goods which are acceptable for the site and surrounding area.
5.27	BCC Urban Design Officer was heavily involved with the PAD application and as a result, many of the initial design and layout concerns were resolved. The response to the current scheme raises no concerns in relation to Block B however does raise concerns with dominance and outlook over Block A. They state that ' <i>It is appreciated that the windows on the side elevation of Block A serve internal corridors and overlooking may not be a major concern. Nevertheless, the overall visual relationship presents a poor outlook for existing residents and risks creating a sense of over-dominance</i> '. It is acknowledged that in the previous layout there was potential for limited overlooking between upper floors, specifically from the kitchen/dining areas of the existing apartments towards the principal bedroom of Apartment 01 within the proposed Block A. However, it should be noted that this overlooking relationship originated from the existing apartments at Park Avenue Heights rather than the proposed development. The existing apartments have been constructed less than one metre from their boundary. Nonetheless amendments were sought and an amended layout has been submitted which relocates the primary bedroom windows from the eastern elevation (facing the existing apartments) to the southern elevation. This amendment effectively removes any potential for direct overlooking between the two blocks. In terms of dominance, as stated above, Block A sits below the adjacent apartment scheme due to the topography of the site and whilst it is acknowledged it is quite a large block, the site is of a sufficient size to accommodate this scale within a built-up urban context and is considered on balance acceptable.

5.28	Overall, it is considered that on balance, the scale, massing and design of the building are appropriate to the site and surrounding buildings and the proposal accords with RD1 and DES1 of the Plan Strategy.
5.29	<p><u>Impact on amenity</u></p> <p><i>Open space and amenity space:</i></p> <p>Policy OS3 requires that all new development proposals make appropriate provision for open space, including hard and soft landscaped areas and outdoor amenity areas, to serve the needs of the development. The precise amount, location, type and design of such provision will be negotiated with applicants taking account of the specific characteristics of the development, the site and its context and having regard to a) the normal expectation will be at least 10% of the total site area; and b) complementary and ancillary equipment and facilities, including for active or passive enjoyment of residents or occupiers, should be incorporated into the design of the development.</p>
5.30	<p>The site measures approximately 0.42ha, meaning 420sqm is required. The proposal provides 345sqm of open space falling short of the requirement. However, para 10.1.18 of the Plan Strategy states that '<i>in cases where private communal gardens are proposed as an integral part of the development, separate provision of public open space may not be required</i>'. In this proposal, additional private amenity areas including a 250sqm courtyard and 105sqm terrace is included which allows for the slight shortfall of 10% open space. It is also acknowledged that the site is located within a tight urban grain and is in close proximity to Victoria Park Belfast. BCC Landscape team were consulted and are content with the overall provision. <i>Creating Places</i>, published in 2000, recommends that private communal open space should range from 10 sqm to around 30 sqm. There are also balconies and private gardens for some apartments included within the proposal. It is therefore considered that on balance, the requirement of Policy OS3 are met.</p>
5.31	<p><i>Impact on neighbouring amenity:</i></p> <p>The Council's SPG 'Residential Design' states that suitable separation is required between properties to ensure all residents benefit from adequate daylight and sunlight, and to achieve sufficient outlook and privacy.</p>
5.32	<p>It is noted a number of concerns have been received regarding neighbouring amenity. The separation distance between existing Park Avenue Heights apartment block and the rear of the proposed Block A is between 18.8 and 20.4 metres however the building does not interfere with the 45-degree angles from inhabited rear room windows on the existing building. While the proposal is located immediately adjacent to the side of the existing apartment block, with the buildings approximately 5.3m apart at their closest point, the windows on the first to third floor will be from internal corridors which are not considered habitable. At ground floor a single instance of reciprocal overlooking remains between the secondary bedroom window on the upper floor of the existing apartment building and the secondary bedroom of Apartment 02 within the proposed scheme at ground floor level; however, this is considered acceptable within the context of a compact inner-city brownfield site, where a degree of close relationship between buildings is both expected and typical. Timber fencing will also help screen any potential overlooking at ground floor level.</p>
5.33	<p>Block B sits substantially below Sydenham Park by approximately 24m and will be separated by a planted embankment, the level changes also mean there will be no direct overlooking to the rear of those dwellings. Between Block A and Block B there is</p>

	a separation distance of approximately 10.2m which is considered acceptable within the development. It is considered that on balance, there will not be any unacceptable overlooking to existing neighbouring amenity or between both the new apartment blocks.
5.34	In support of the planning application, a comprehensive Sunlight and Shadow Study was submitted to the Council. This assessment specifically considered potential effects on neighbouring properties, including the three-storey apartment block at Park Avenue Heights. The study confirms that the proposed Block A will not result in any additional overshadowing or reduction in daylight beyond what already occurs under existing conditions. The study concludes that the majority of additional shadowing resulting from the proposed development will fall within the development site itself and the adjacent industrial yard to the west. Importantly, the proposal will cast minimal additional shadows over nearby residential properties that would negatively affect their amenity.
5.35	The floorspaces of each of the apartments meet the minimum space standards set out the Belfast Local Development Plan 2035.
5.36	The proposal would not cause an unacceptable degree of overshadowing to neighbouring dwellings, unacceptable loss of outlook, overbearing or other harmful impacts on amenity.
5.37	In these regards, the proposal is considered to satisfy Policies DES1 and RD1, and relevant provisions of the SPPS.
5.38	<u>Flood risk and drainage</u> The location is not within an area subject to flood risk and is not at risk of flooding under Climate Change as assessed using Flood Maps NI
5.39	DfI Rivers has reviewed the Drainage Assessment, and states that they require confirmation of consent to discharge storm water to an approved discharge location. This will be conditioned.
5.40	As such, the proposal complies with Policy ENV4 and relevant provisions of the SPPS.
5.41	<u>Waste-water infrastructure</u> Policy SP1A requires that necessary infrastructure is in place to support new development. NI Water objects to the application on grounds of network drainage capacity concerns. It advises that the downstream catchment is constrained by overloaded sewage infrastructure including one or more downstream “Unsatisfactory Intermittent Discharges “(UID's) which are causing a negative impact on the environment. These are located at (1) Sydenham Park Avenue TPS. (1) Discharge to Belfast Harbour. This part of Belfast catchment is constrained by lengths of downstream sewer operating above capacity. NI Water suggested the applicant should liaise directly with them on this issue.
5.42	Importantly, officers advise that allowance must be made for existing significant committed development across the city including extant planning permissions. It is highly unlikely that all such development, which includes unimplemented permissions for over 20,000 houses and significant levels of commercial floor space across the city, will come forward at once, if at all. In practical terms it would be unreasonable for the Council to withhold planning permission given the fall-back of the need to connect those developments to existing waste water infrastructure.

5.43	Having regard to the above, it is considered unreasonable to refuse planning permission on grounds of insufficient network drainage capacity and condition is recommended.
5.44	Shared Environmental Services were consulted in order to ensure the proposal would not impact negatively on protected sites. They prepared a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). Belfast City Council in its role as the competent Authority under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), and in accordance with its duty under Regulation 43, has adopted the HRA report, and conclusions therein, prepared by Shared Environmental Service, dated 17/07/2025. This found that the project would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.
5.45	<p><u>Climate change</u></p> <p>Policy ENV2 states that planning permission will be granted for development that incorporates measures to mitigate environmental change and reduce greenhouse gases by promoting sustainable patterns of development. Policy ENV3 states that planning permission will be granted for development that incorporates measures to adapt to environmental change.</p>
5.46	The location is not within an area subject to flood risk and is not at risk of flooding under Climate Change as assessed using Flood Maps NI. Since a large area of the site was used as a car park, the proposal increases active amenity space as well as grassed areas reducing the amount of hard landscaped that there was previously, therefore reducing the amount of the surface water run-off.
5.47	Existing Trees within the site will be removed and replaced where adequate, as well as the addition of planting to areas that will increase the physical & non-physical qualities of amenity spaces i.e. sight, sound, atmosphere etc, as well as increasing biodiversity in the area. The new apartments will have high energy performance standards in compliance with the latest building regulations.
5.48	The existing Mount Masonic Hall has already been demolished. The building is not protected therefore demolition of it does not require permission. The Climate Change statement states that the retention and adaptation of the existing hall would involve more carbon expenditure than it would to construct new accommodation for the area. In line with Policy ENV2, the existing masonry materials from the demolished building will be reused as backfill behind new retaining walls and as hardcore to make up levels under the new roads and floor slabs. Additionally, the natural slate roof and decorative terracotta ridge tiles will be carefully removed prior to demolition, stored, and reused as architectural salvage to repair other buildings. As a result, the proposal is considered to be policy compliant in respect to policy ENV2.
5.49	The proposal is considered to accord with Policies ENV2 and ENV3.
5.50	<p><i>SuDS:</i></p> <p>Policy ENV5 states that all built development shall include, where appropriate, SuDs measures to manage surface water effectively on site, to reduce surface water run-off and to ensure flooding is not increased elsewhere. The application proposes suitable landscaped and open space and the soft and hard landscaping including SuDS will be conditioned. The proposals are considered to satisfy Policies ENV5.</p>

5.51	<p><u>Access and transport</u></p> <p><i>Accessibility and parking:</i></p> <p>The site benefits from a highly accessible location by public transport and is close to a range of amenities given its location along the Holywood Road, a key arterial route. Secure cycle parking is provided in 2 no. storage areas. The site is accessible and provides good opportunities for active travel, including walking and cycling, through excellent linkages with the City Centre and its shops, services and amenities. Policy TRAN 8 states that development proposals will be required to provide adequate provision for car parking and appropriate servicing arrangements. The proposal contains 29 parking spaces including 4 disabled spaces, and the application is supported by a parking survey which demonstrates sufficient on street parking within the vicinity to accommodate the requirements of the development during its peak periods of parking demand.</p>
5.52	<p>Parking and traffic are concerns raised by an objector. DfI Roads Service are the authoritative body to advise on road safety and traffic and they responded to consultation with no objection subject to conditions should approval be granted.</p>
5.53	<p>The access to public roads would not prejudice road safety or significantly inconvenience the flow of road users in accordance with Policy TRAN 6.</p>
5.54	<p>A Travel Plan and Parking Survey has been submitted and found to be acceptable by DfI Roads; it will further promote alternatives to the private car (car club, travel cards and Belfast Bikes to be secured by Section 76 Planning Agreement).</p>
5.55	<p>The scale of development and transport implications of the proposal were assessed by DFI Roads and considered to be acceptable. The proposal is considered acceptable having regard to Policies TRAN1, TRAN2, TRAN6, and TRAN 8, and relevant provisions of the SPPS.</p>
5.56	<p><u>Health impacts</u></p> <p>Policy SP3 requires new development to maximise opportunities to improve health and wellbeing. Policy HC1 seeks to ensure that all new development maximise opportunities to promote healthy and active lifestyles. New developments should be designed, constructed and managed in ways that improve health and promote healthy lifestyles. This will include supporting active travel options, improving accessibility to local service centres, reducing the use of private car travel, adequate provision of public open space, leisure and recreation facilities, high quality design and promoting balanced communities and sustainable neighbourhoods.</p>
5.57	<p>The site is a sustainable location with good access to public transport. The proposed buildings are considered to be of a high-quality design with good quality hard and soft landscaping. This will provide a pleasant and attractive environment for prospective occupants of the building and people in housing need. The proposal would promote green travel. It is considered compliant with Policy HC1 and SP3.</p>
5.58	<p><u>Environmental protection</u></p> <p>Policy ENV1 states that planning permission will be granted for development that will maintain and, where possible, enhance environmental quality, and protects communities from materially harmful development. The proposed development has</p>

5.59	<p>been assessed by Environmental Health in terms of contaminated land, construction, and noise.</p> <p><i>Contaminated land</i></p>
5.60	<p>BCC EHO has reviewed the submitted contamination reports and has determined that there are no potential contaminant linkages. They offer no objection and recommend a condition.</p>
5.61	<p>NIEA Regulation Unit have reviewed the GQRA which states that no unacceptable risks to environmental receptors have been identified for the development. Regulation Unit Land and Groundwater Team have no objections subject to conditions.</p>
5.62	<p><i>Construction</i></p> <p>BCC EHO states that they note the objections which include concerns regarding impact from the construction of the proposed development including noise, dust and vibration concerns. They advise that Belfast City Council have powers under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 or the Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 to investigate problematic impact from construction and in their initial response the applicant was directed to the BCC Construction Advice Note for guidance.</p>
5.63	<p><i>Noise</i></p> <p>A Noise Impact Assessment was submitted and BCC EHO have no concerns regarding the impact of noise, subject to the inclusion of a condition stating that alternative means of acoustically attenuated ventilation shall be installed within habitable rooms of the development and retained at all times.</p>
5.64	<p>Having regard to the advice from Environmental Health, the proposal is considered to accord with Policy ENV1, and relevant provisions of the SPPS.</p>
5.65	<p><u>Natural heritage</u></p> <p>A Bat Survey and Biodiversity Checklist were submitted as part of the application. NIEA NED response is still outstanding and delegated authority is sought to deal with this.</p>
5.66	<p>Shared Environmental Services were consulted in order to ensure the proposal would not impact negatively on protected sites. They prepared a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). Belfast City Council in its role as the competent Authority under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), and in accordance with its duty under Regulation 43, has adopted the HRA report, and conclusions therein, prepared by Shared Environmental Service, dated 17/07/2025. This found that the project would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.</p>
5.67	<p><u>Trees and landscaping</u></p> <p>Hard and soft landscaping is proposed to enhance the overall quality and character of the space around the buildings and boundaries of the site. A proposed fencing and boundaries plan has been submitted which shows the fencing type and height around the site. One representation was received stating why the timber fencing is only 1.8m rather than 2m or higher for privacy purposes. 1.8m fencing is a standard, typical height for privacy fencing and is considered adequate for the western boundary of the site.</p>

5.68	Structural planting is proposed throughout the site and towards the boundaries to integrate the development into its context.
5.69	A landscape management and maintenance plan has also been submitted which sets out the landscape approach to show how proposed landscaping features will be monitored to promote landscaping within the site which offers amenity value and promote opportunities for local biodiversity and wildlife to thrive within the site.
5.70	To the north of the site is a public right of way connecting Strandburn Drive and Sydenham Park. The pedestrian steps are significantly dilapidated and are proposed to be refurbished as part of this application along with new galvanised steel handrails. A public steps method statement has been submitted which discuss the improvement works. There is no direct pedestrian link between the alleyway and the proposed development, all resident and visitor access to the development will be via Park Avenue exclusively. The improvement works to the steps are intended solely to benefit existing users of this route and will not generate any additional footfall associated with the proposed development.
5.71	An objection which has since been formally withdrawn, raised concerns relating to the loss of trees on the eastern boundary of the site. Three trees which were to be removed are now being retained. Existing trees on the northern boundary are required to be removed to enable the improvement works to the pedestrian steps.
5.72	The Council's Tree Officer was consulted and provided feedback throughout the assessment. They state that the eastern boundary should be replenished with additional proposed tree cover of suitable species, at present there are 8 x proposed trees to be planted of various species, this should be increased to help promote aspects of future screen and privacy concerns whilst also helping contribute to future visual amenity offering as the trees establish over time. They also state that additional planting should also be proposed to the northern boundary.
5.73	The agent has indicated willingness to address the comments positively and so delegated authority is requested for this matter to be dealt with following Committee so that the proposal can fully comply with Policy TR1 of the Plan Strategy.
5.74	<p><u>Waste management</u></p> <p>In accordance with Policy RD1, new residential development should be provided with adequate space for daily segregation of recyclable materials and waste before it is moved to the communal waste storage area. The application is supported by a Waste Management Plan (WMP) which outlines the operational waste management measures, and the council has consulted with BCC's City & Neighbour Services Department, which has confirmed that they offer no objection.</p>
5.75	On balance therefore, it is considered that as proposed, the waste management plan and arrangements are acceptable, and in accordance with Policy RD1.
5.76	<p><u>Section 76 Planning Agreement</u></p> <p>If the application is approved, it should be subject to a Section 76 planning agreement to secure the following planning obligations. These are considered necessary to make the proposed development acceptable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social rented housing – all 100% of the residential units constructed at the property shall be occupied as Social Housing Units;

5.78	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green travel measure – secure implementation of Travel Plan and green travel measures (car club, travel cards and Belfast Bikes). • Open Space Management Plan – The housing association will appoint a management company for the management and maintenance of the open space and any unadopted roads or streets. <p>The Section 76 planning agreement has been agreed in principle.</p>
6.0	<p>Recommendation</p>
6.1	<p>Having regard to the Development Plan and material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement.</p>
6.2	<p>Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and deal with any other matters that arise including resolving final responses from NIEA:NED and Trees provided that they are not substantive.</p>
7.0	<p>DRAFT CONDITIONS</p> <p>Time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The development hereby permitted must be begun within five years from the date of this permission. <p>Reason: As required by Section 61 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.</p> <p>External materials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. No external materials shall be constructed or applied unless in accordance with a written specification and a physical sample panel, details of which shall have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Council. The sample panel shall be provided on site and made available for inspection by the Council for the duration of the construction works. The sample panel shall show the make, type, size, colour, bond, pointing, coursing, jointing, profile and texture of the external facing materials. The bricks shall be constructed from clay. <p>Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of the area.</p> <p>Climate change:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The development hereby approved shall not be occupied unless the climate change measures described in the application have been implemented. The climate change measures shall be retained in accordance with the approved details at all times. <p>Reason: To mitigate and/or adapt to climate change.</p>

Waste management:

4. The development shall not be occupied until the refuse and recycling storage area have been provided in accordance with the approved plans and shall be retained as such at all times.

Reason: To ensure adequate provision of refuse and recycling storage in the interests of the amenities of the area.

Trees, landscaping and SuDS:

5. Notwithstanding the submitted details, no development shall commence on site (other than site clearance, site preparation, demolition and the formation of foundations and trenches) unless details of a surface water drainage scheme, which shall incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) principles, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Council. The scheme shall include a programme for implementation of the works and proposals for future maintenance and management. The development shall not be carried out unless in accordance with the approved SUDS scheme, which shall be retained as such thereafter.

Reason: To ensure sustainable drainage of the development, having regard to Policy ENV4 of the Belfast LDP Plan Strategy 2035. Approval is required upfront because the design of the drainage is an integral part of the development and its acceptability.

6. No development (other than site clearance, site preparation, demolition and the formation of foundations and trenches) shall commence on site unless a hard landscape scheme has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Council. The scheme shall include details of existing and proposed walls, fences and other boundary treatment, ground levels and hard surface treatment of open parts of the site which shall be permeable or drained to a permeable area; and a programme of implementation.

All hard landscaping works shall be carried out and retained in accordance with the approved details. The works shall be carried out prior to the occupation of any part of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Council.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of the area, and to promote sustainable drainage. Approval is required upfront because the hard landscaping is critical to the acceptability of the proposal.

7. All soft landscaping works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. The works shall be carried out prior to the occupation of any part of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Council. Any existing or proposed trees or plants indicated on the approved plans which, within a period of five years from the date of planting, die, are removed or become seriously damaged, diseased or dying shall be replaced during the next planting season with other trees or plants of a location, species and size, details of which shall have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Council.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of the area.

8. All trees and planting within the site shall be retained unless shown on the approved drawings as being removed. Any retained trees or planting indicated

on the approved drawings which become seriously damaged, diseased, or dying, shall be replaced during the next planting season (October to March inclusive) with other trees or plants of a location, species and size to be first approved in writing by the Council.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity.

9. Prior to any work commencing, protective barriers (fencing) and ground protection shall be erected and installed as specified in British Standard 5837: 2012 (section 6.2) on any trees / hedging to be retained within the site and must be in place before any materials or machinery are brought onto site for demolition, development, or soil stripping. The protective fencing must remain in place until all work is completed, and all associated materials and equipment are removed from site.

Reason: To ensure the protection of, and to ensure the continuity of amenity afforded by any existing trees to be retained within the site and on adjacent lands.

10. No storage of materials, parking of vehicles or plant, temporary buildings, sheds, offices or fires within the Root Protection Area of trees within the site and adjacent lands during the construction period.

Reason: To safeguard trees of amenity and biodiversity value.

Noise:

11. Prior to occupation of the development, the alternative means of acoustically attenuated ventilation (in addition to that provided by open windows) specified within the RPS clarification letter titled 'Park Avenue Noise Impact Assessment', reference: 794-NI-HCT-00942, dated: 20th January 2026 shall be installed within habitable rooms of the development and retained at all times.

Reason: To safeguard the amenity of occupants of the buildings hereby approved.

Contamination

12. If during the carrying out of the development, new contamination is encountered that has not previously been identified, all related development works shall cease, and the Council shall be notified immediately in writing. No further related development works shall proceed until this new contamination has been fully investigated in accordance with current Environment Agency and CIRIA guidance and British Standards. In the event of unacceptable human health risks being identified, a Remediation Strategy shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Council. The Remediation Strategy shall be implemented and subsequently a Verification Report shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Council prior to the development being occupied or operated. The Verification Report shall be completed by competent persons and demonstrate the successful completion of the remediation works and that the site is now fit for end-use. The Verification Report shall be in accordance with current Environment Agency and CIRIA guidance and British standards.

Reason: To ensure that any contamination within the site is appropriately dealt with, in the interests of human health.

Transport:

13. The vehicular access shall be provided in accordance with Drawing No.14A uploaded to the Planning Portal 3rd February 2026, prior to the occupation of any other works or other development hereby permitted.

Reason: To ensure there is a satisfactory means of access in the interests of road safety and the convenience of road users.

14. The vehicular access hereby permitted shall be formed by lowered kerbs at the carriageway edge and associated re-grading of the footway to the satisfaction of the Department for Infrastructure.

Reason: To ensure there is a satisfactory means of access in the interests of road safety and the convenience of road users.

15. The access gradient shall not exceed 4% (1 in 25) over the first 10m outside the road boundary. Where the vehicular access crosses a footway or verge, the access gradient shall be between 4% (1 in 25) maximum and 2.5% (1 in 40) minimum and shall be formed so that there is no abrupt change of slope along the footway.

Reason: To ensure there is a satisfactory means of access in the interests of road safety and the convenience of road users.

16. The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until hard surfaced areas have been constructed and permanently marked in accordance with Drawing No.14A uploaded to the Planning Portal 3rd February 2026 to provide for parking within the site. No part of these hard surfaced areas shall be used for any purpose at any time other than for the parking and movement of vehicles in connection with the approved development.

Reason: To ensure adequate provision has been made for parking within the site.

17. The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until sheltered cycle parking facilities have been provided in accordance with Drawing No.14A uploaded to the Planning Portal 3rd February 2026.

Reason: To promote the use of alternative modes of transport in accordance with sustainable transportation principles.

Drainage:

18. Notwithstanding the submitted details, no development shall commence on site (other than site clearance, site preparation, demolition and the formation of foundations and trenches) unless details of foul and surface water drainage, including a programme for implementation of these works, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Council. The development shall not be carried out unless in accordance with the approved details, which shall be retained as such thereafter.

	<p>Reason: To ensure appropriate foul and surface water drainage of the site, in the interests of safeguarding the environment integrity of Belfast Lough. Approval is required upfront because the design of the drainage is an integral part of the development and its acceptability.</p>
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