

Planning Committee

Tuesday, 11th November, 2025

PRE DETERMINATION HEARING HELD IN A HYBRID FORMAT AT 5.00 P.M.

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Aldermen Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers;
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bell, Brennan,
T. Brooks, Carson, Doran, D. Douglas,
S. Douglas, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey,
Magee, McCabe, McCann and Whyte.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning);
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager (Development
Management);
Ms. C. Reville, Principal Planning Officer;
Ms. L. Walshe, Principal Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brennan declared an interest in relation to item 2 - LA04/2024/0626/F, in that she had prior engagement with the developers, and she left the meeting while the item was being considered.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest in relation to item 2 – LA04/2024/0626/F, on the basis that he had previously worked with the Housing Association.

Pre-Determination Hearing in respect of
LA04/2024/0626/F - Erection of 104no. social
rented residential units (comprising a mix
of General Social Housing and Category 1
over 55's accommodation) across two
detached blocks [ranging between 3 and 5 storeys]
landscaping, communal and private amenity
space, ancillary cycle and car parking provision,
and other associated site works - 1 Havelock
House Havelock Place

The Planning Manager explained that the application for full planning permission had first been considered by the Committee at its meeting in December, 2024 when the Committee approved the application, subject to conditions, and on the basis that all

104 residential units would be provided as social rented housing, to be secured by a Section 76 planning agreement.

He reminded the Committee that a Pre-Action Protocol letter had been issued in February, 2025, that set out a range of concerns in relation to the decision making process, in that objections from local residents had not been adequately reported to the Committee and the Council's interpretation of planning policy and procedural matters. He reported that the application was again approved by the Committee at its meeting in March, 2025 where the Committee affirmed its decision of 10th December, 2025, to approve the application subject to conditions and on the basis that all 104 residential units be provided as social rented housing and that subsequently, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) issued a holding direction that prevented the Council from determining the application until it was further advised in writing by DfI.

He explained that DfI had released the holding direction on 3rd October, 2025, by way of letter, and advised that the application did not warrant the use of its call-in powers and the Council could continue to determine the application.

The Planning Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of housing in the location;
- Housing density;
- Affordable housing;
- Housing mix;
- Adaptable and accessible accommodation;
- Design and placemaking;
- Impact on heritage assets;
- Residential quality and impact on amenity;
- Community cohesion and good relations;
- Security and design;
- Open space;
- Space standards;
- Access and transport;
- Health impacts;
- Environmental protection and climate change;
- Flood risk and drainage;
- Waste-water infrastructure;
- Waste management;
- Natural heritage;
- Employability and Skills;
- Section 76 planning agreement;
- Pre-application Community Consultation; and
- Matters raised in representations.

He reported that a further Pre-Action Protocol letter had been received on 9th April, on behalf of a local resident which set out concerns with regard to the Council's application of Policy HOU5 (affordable housing) and Policy HOU7 (adaptable

and accessible accommodation) and that officers were satisfied that the issues raised had been considered.

He stated that it was recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement.

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. F. McGrath, NIHE, to the meeting, speaking as an objecting statutory consultee.

Ms. McGrath explained that NIHE was committed to working in partnership with the Council, developers, and housing associations to deliver high-quality, sustainable homes that meet the diverse needs of local communities, however, the NIHE could only support the provision of social housing on the Havelock House site on a mixed tenure basis.

She stated that whilst the NIHE acknowledged and respected the decision of the Department for Infrastructure not to call in the application, the Housing Executive strongly believed that the outcome could set an undesirable precedent and could risk worsening existing housing pressures. She added that it was vital that such decisions should reflect the strategic housing need and long-term community impacts.

She stated that the NIHE fully endorsed the original recommendation for a mixed tenure development—comprising 84 social rented units, with the remaining 20 units delivered through another tenure and that this position had been consistently communicated throughout the application process.

Ms. McGrath explained that, as the Strategic Housing Authority for Northern Ireland, NIHE had a statutory responsibility to ensure that housing delivery was balanced, sustainable, and aligned with established policy and stated that the current proposal did not comply with Policy HOU5 of the Belfast Local Development Plan: Plan Strategy 2035, nor with the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing and Housing Mix and that it was a mono-tenure scheme that did not reflect the mixed tenure approach, essential to building inclusive, resilient communities.

She advised the Committee that approving the application in its current form risked setting a concerning precedent that could undermine the integrity of both adopted and emerging Local Development Plans, not only in Belfast, but across other council areas, and could also compromise the implementation of affordable housing policy, which had been designed to promote tenure diversity and long-term sustainability.

She pointed out to Members that the NIHE data had shown that the Ormeau area already had a 35% social housing stock which was significantly higher than the Belfast average of 26%, and that the owner-occupied rate in the area stood at just 20%, compared to a citywide average of 51%.

She stated that the NIHE was not aware of any evidence submitted to substantiate concerns with regard to viability and that it was important to recognise that funding for the Social Housing Development Programme had not yet been fully secured and that the NIHE had been working closely with the Department for Communities through the monitoring rounds process to identify and secure the additional resources required.

She pointed out that the NIHE was proud to be a lead partner in delivering the Belfast Agenda's commitment to high-quality, sustainable homes and that tenure diversity and innovative housing models were required to address significant housing challenges.

She stated that the NIHE would urge the Committee to uphold the principles of the Local Development Plan and support a tenure mix that reflected the needs of the city and its communities.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. E. Purvis, Donegall Pass Residents Association, and Mr. P. McDonald, Donegall Pass Community Forum, to the meeting, speaking in objection to the application and in representation of local residents.

Mr. Purvis stated that he wished to convey to the Committee the strong opposition from the local community to the proposed development and pointed out that a petition in opposition to the proposal had been signed by 462 local residents.

He stated that two public consultation meetings had been held in January, 2024, but that no further engagement had taken place between the developer and the local community.

He stated that the proposed development potentially breached privacy entitlements under European Human Rights Legislation and was evasive and overlooking to existing traditional one-storey social housing in the adjacent Walnut Street and Vernon Street areas, and was therefore inconsistent with its surroundings.

He referred to a Policy Exchange housing report of January, 2013 which reported that multi-storey apartment blocks created crime, stress, delinquency and social breakdown.

Mr. Purvis provided a breakdown of points raised by the Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group (LORAG) to Clanmil Housing in December, 2024 and asked the Committee to give due regard to the concerns of the last remaining residents of the city centre communities in Belfast.

Mr. McDonald explained that the residents of Donegall Pass were in favour of social and affordable housing, however, the proposal was for purpose-built accommodation for profit.

He stated that the information provided to the Committee was flawed and misleading and he summarised statistics within the report which he felt had been cherrypicked to support the proposal.

He stated that the proposal was 400% larger than the previous building and would be visually intrusive on the landscape, he then quoted health statistics which supported his inferences that being surrounded by tall buildings produced a substantial negative impact on mood.

He concluded by outlining the following areas of major concern:

- Design and Placemaking Policy DES2;
- Residential impact on local amenities;
- Community cohesion and good relations;
- Transport; and
- Carparking.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. T. Stokes, TSA Planning, Ms. J. Sloan, Clanmil Housing, and Mr. A. Couston, the applicant, to the meeting.

Mr. Stokes highlighted key points he wanted the Committee to consider in addition to the detailed officer presentation. He stated that, following the refusal of a previous proposal from another developer, the applicant had acquired the site with the objective of taking forward a much more realistic and pragmatic scheme in conjunction with Clanmil Housing and had done so with the application before the Committee.

He stated that the proposal had evolved throughout the application process and had taken into account the input from interested parties. He explained that, initially, the suggested housing mix had contained a sizable proportion of one-bed units, however, through active engagement, it was significantly reduced through the design development.

He informed the Committee that the application site was on a prime city centre site on a key transport route and that the proposal represented a housing scheme that would cater for a mix of needs groups.

He stated that the proposal for 104 units within five distinct blocks and set within generous landscaped amenity courtyards for active and passive enjoyment of residents and sensitively addressed the adjacent resident areas through several key design features.

He explained that, in terms of density, the scheme was 142 dwellings per hectare which was lower than the target density as per the Local Development Plan for the area and was a further indication that the scheme had been sensitively designed.

He highlighted the extent of housing need in the area and stated that the applicant's intention to deliver the scheme as 100% social housing and represented an amazing opportunity to redevelop a key brownfield site during a time of chronic housing shortage.

The Chairperson asked the Committee if they had any questions for the speakers who had made representations.

A Member asked Ms. F. McGrath, NIHE, to explain her statement that approval of the proposal would be in breach of Policy HOU5.

Ms. McGrath explained that Policy HOU5 discussed 20% minimal affordable housing and that the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) advised against mono-tenure schemes over 12 units.

The Member clarified, in light of Ms. McGrath's response, that the application was therefore not actually in breach of Policy HOU5.

The Planning Manager clarified that there was no conflict with Policy HOU5 and that the Supplementary Planning Guidance did refer to mono-tenure, stating that large areas of mono-tenure social housing was not deemed to deliver sustainable and balanced communities, however, he informed the Committee that the SPG did state that, in all cases, whether or not a proposal for mono-tenure social housing was deemed to deliver sustainable and balanced communities would be assessed on a case by case basis, and he outlined the assessment factors.

In response to a question from a Member with regard to the large number objections from local residents, Mr. Stokes stated that the applicant felt that scheme was an appropriate response to the application site and whilst the views of the local residents was appreciated, the application site was a city centre site and the proposed development fell beneath the target density for the area. He added that the scheme had been sensitively designed, and it was hoped that the future residents would integrate with the local community.

The Chairperson thanked the speakers for their contributions.

Chairperson