



CONSULTATION REQUEST: URBAN DESIGN

To be completed by Case Officer

Case Officer	Michael McErlean
Date of request	06 Jan 2023

Application ref no.	LA04/2022/1284/F		
Site address	Lands bounded by Library Street (to south); Stephen Street (to west); Little Donegall Street (to north); and Union Street (to east)		
Proposal	Erection of Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA) development comprising 795 units with additional use of accommodation by further or higher education institutions outside term time, communal facilities, internal amenity courtyard, cycle stores, active ground floor uses including cafe and retail, and associated bin stores and plant and public realm improvements to surrounding footpaths.		
Applicant	Agent	Mandeville Developments NI Ltd	Turley
Recent site history	LA04/2022/0633/PAD, LA04/2022/0541/PAN, LA04/2017/0536/F, Z/2008/0655/F		

Areas requiring comment	Scale, height, massing and design considerations
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To be completed by Urban Design Officer

Urban Design Officer	Gavin Shivers
Date of response	12 Jan 2023

Submission details

Comments are provided in response to revisions discussed at a meeting held with the applicant, agent and consultant team on 22 Dec 2022. Actions arising from this meeting resulted in a suite of information being submitted to the council on 06 Jan 2023 which include a site plan, revised floor plans, revised roof plan and revised elevations/contextual elevations. Supporting information also includes the original Design and Access Statement (DAS) dated June 2022, alongside a more recent supplement to the DAS dated Jan 2023.

Overview and recommendation

Considering recent revisions received, no objections are raised from an urban design viewpoint. Should a recommendation for approval be made I would suggest that appropriately worded condition(s) are included which require the prior approval of materials (preferably on site) covering aspects such as proposed brickwork across both primary/secondary elevations and setback upper floors), window/door details, treatment at GF level (including BOH services) and any hard surfacing. A condition is also suggested in relation to any required rooftop plant.

Detailed Comments

The proposal relates to the construction of Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA) development comprising 795 units, communal facilities, internal amenity courtyard, cycle stores, active ground floor uses including cafe and retail, and associated bin stores and plant and public realm improvements to surrounding footpaths. The site is bounded by Library Street, Stephen Street, Little Donegall Street and Union Street and was formerly used as a surface car park and storage area.

(a) Scale, height and massing

In relation to context, this area relates to an historic mixed use part of the city located on the fringe of the main central retail area. The area is densely developed with several nineteenth century buildings including warehouses and smaller commercial properties alongside several razed/vacant sites (including the application site). Buildings in the area are generally three to five storeys in height with a mixed grain of subdivision within a network of narrow and intimate streets. It is noted that the tallest neighbouring development is the nine storey residential building at the junction of Kent Street/Union Street with a building of similar scale under construction on the adjacent site. A six storey residential building (which steps back on the upper two floors) is immediately north of the site on the opposite side of Little Donegall Street, while on the opposite side of Union Street the rear of the listed Frames building is five storeys in height. In the assessment of scale, height and massing, due consideration must therefore be given to the setting of the immediately adjacent B1 listed Frames building (1900-1919). PPS6 (BH11) states that development proposals will normally only be considered appropriate where the detailed design respects the listed building in terms of scale, height, massing and alignment and where the works proposed make use of traditional or sympathetic building materials. Any building on this site will provide an important backdrop to the Frames building, particularly for those views NW along Little Donegall Street and Library Street as well as the key view NW from Royal Avenue towards the front of the listed building.

During the numerous meetings held with the applicant team, the council placed emphasis on the appropriate distribution of height and massing across the site to introduce a degree of hierarchy to its various components and in turn promote a legible environment that responds positively to surrounding context, result in a strong urban image and promote way finding and orientation. Variation in the scale, height and massing would also allow for the maximisation of sunlight to the internal courtyard, as well as providing an interesting variety of building forms and heights and avoid a large monolithic mass.

At the workshop/meeting held on 22 Dec 2023, key areas of discussion pertaining to scale, height and massing resulted in the following revisions.

- *Stephen Street* - considered that 11 storeys presented an overly dominant edge when considered against the domestic scale of the largely two storey built form along Carrick Hill (around 40.0m away). Reduction of two storeys was requested across the central section with the reduced nine storeys including a seven storey shoulder height with two setback floors retained above.
- *Little Donegall Street* - reduction in the shoulder height from nine to eight storeys with two setback floors retained above.
- *Stephen/Library Street* – reduction in the height of the corner element by one storey.

The four elevations overleaf compare the revised scheme (dotted outline) to the previous scheme.

REVISED SCHEME – JAN 2023



Stephen Street



Little Donegal Street



Library Street



Union Street (remains unchanged)

PREVIOUS SCHEME



It is noted that while the shoulder height has been reduced along the Little Donegall Street elevation, the angle of the roofline on the taller corner element is now less pronounced (see red dotted line on the comparative Little Donegall Street elevations on previous page). This is presumably a design change to introduce additional rooms at 10F level to partially recoup for rooms removed because of requested revisions elsewhere (addition of five rooms). While this small increase does not raise undue concern, it does result in a less dynamic roof form in this location and is a design change that was not discussed or agreed during the meeting held on 22 Dec 2022.

It is considered that the revised scale, height and massing which includes three taller corner elements ranging from 8 storeys at Union Street/Little Donegall Street to 10 storeys at Stephen Street/Library Street and 11 storeys at Stephen Street/Little Donegall Street, with lower central sections ranging from 5 to 7 storeys with setback upper floors above, is on balance appropriate to surrounding context. It is noted that the revised building form does not have a detrimental impact in relation to the backdrop of the listed Frames building, as demonstrated by key VU.CITY/CGI views west from both Royal Avenue and Library Street as included within the DAS supplement.

(b) Façade articulation

Facades visible from streets play an important role in contributing to the amenity and attractiveness of an area and should be designed to have an attractive scale, appearance, proportion, rhythm, solid-to-void relationship and be articulated in a contextually appropriate way including the selected palette of materials. It is essential that all building elevations are considered and designed as an integral part of the overall development. Compared to earlier iterations, consideration has been given to breaking down what were viewed as long and largely uniform elevations, which is welcomed. This has been achieved through the application of two contrasting façade treatments around all four elevations, alongside a series of vertical and horizontal shifts in form. These two façade treatments comprise in the first instance planar areas of brickwork with inset windows at taller corner locations with a second treatment applied in between, in the form of lower and more regular framed brickwork sections with inset panels. Vertical shadow gaps of a bay's width have also been utilised to create discernible visual breaks between both treatments.

This approach is welcomed and provides a notable yet complementary contrast between both approaches that is considered successful in helping to break up longer facades, resulting in a series of refined, yet interlinked elements that nod to the tighter urban grain across this area. Those more central framed brickwork sections allow for the establishment of shoulder heights that speak to the lower heights of adjacent buildings, as demonstrated in the CGI below and the relationship between the proposed building and existing buildings opposite along Little Donegall Street.



A tripartite arrangement of building form has been applied across all elevations, which at base level has defined a series of single and double height GF elements, with the latter largely applying to the taller corner elements. Horizontal shifts within those central framed brickwork sections allows double height upper floors to be setback above reduced shoulder heights, which assists in reducing their visual impact when viewed from the street. This method is particularly effective in this case due to the oblique viewing angles presented by the narrow street widths. The treatment of upper floors takes the form of an articulated rhythm of expressed brick fins, with narrow vertical spacing which results in a ribbed texture and in turn a finer contrasting texture (exemplar imagery included below right). The dynamic sloped roof profiles at the taller corner locations, provide another contrasting element within the overall composition that adds to visual interest and nods to the varied and dense industrial roofscapes that were once a common characteristic of this historic area.

Care has also been taken along the Union Street elevation where the building sits directly opposite the rear of the listed Frames building. Here a lower five storey shoulder height extends along a substantial section of the Union Street façade, returning onto Library Street. This five storey shoulder height relates sympathetically to that of the listed building opposite, as can be seen in the CGI below with the upper two floors incorporating a meaningful setback, as illustrated in the plan extract below, helping to minimise their visual impact when viewed from street level.



While no objections are raised in relation to the proposed palette of materials as depicted on the recently received elevations and as prescribed within the DAS (including exemplar imagery), the revised elevations do not refer/cross-reference a specification of materials. In this regard, it is recommended that this aspect of the proposal is covered by way of a condition.

(c) Ground floor animation/activity

The proposed GF plan includes a range of active frontages along the full extent of Union Street and Little Donegall Street, which are welcomed. These uses take the form of a large café/retail unit (272m²) and a double storey angled, recessed building/courtyard entrance along the primary Union Street frontage. A range of internal break out, study spaces and kitchen area extend along the length of Little Donegall Street, allowing for multiple views into and out of the building.

The café/retail unit on Union Street extends along Library Street and to the rear along a dedicated pedestrian access to the central courtyard and together with a gym and cycle store further west, will collectively help to animate this secondary street. The tertiary Stephen Street caters for the majority of 'back-of-house services' which include two large bin stores, a plant switch room, a generator room and plant/commercial sprinkler. While this will represent the weakest of the four elevations from an active frontage viewpoint, a second sizeable café/retail unit proposed at the corner of Stephen Street and Little Donegal Street will help to provide a degree of activity/amination.

Those active uses along Little Donegall Street incorporate a dual aspect layout which allows for activity to be extended onto the sizeable internal courtyard/event space. This communal area also includes measures to protect the amenity/privacy of those GF units proposed around its edges with direct level access to the three cores that serve the building.

(d) Proposed roof plan

An error seems to have occurred in the recent submission of revised plans whereby the proposed roof plan appears to be a repeat of the 10F plan. In these circumstances, I am unable to ascertain the extent (if any) of any rooftop plant/equipment that may be proposed. From experience, a building of this scale would normally include a substantial degree of associated rooftop plant/equipment. These elements, alongside any mitigating screening that may be required, can often result in additional massing being added to the building and have the potential to introduce visual impact concerns. This issue has been raised previously in relation to this scheme with advice provided that any rooftop plant should be discussed and catered for early in the process to avoid potentially having to introduce these elements retrospectively. Given the circumstances and the scale of the building in question, it is suggested that this aspect of the scheme be covered by condition.