

Development Management Report

Committee Application

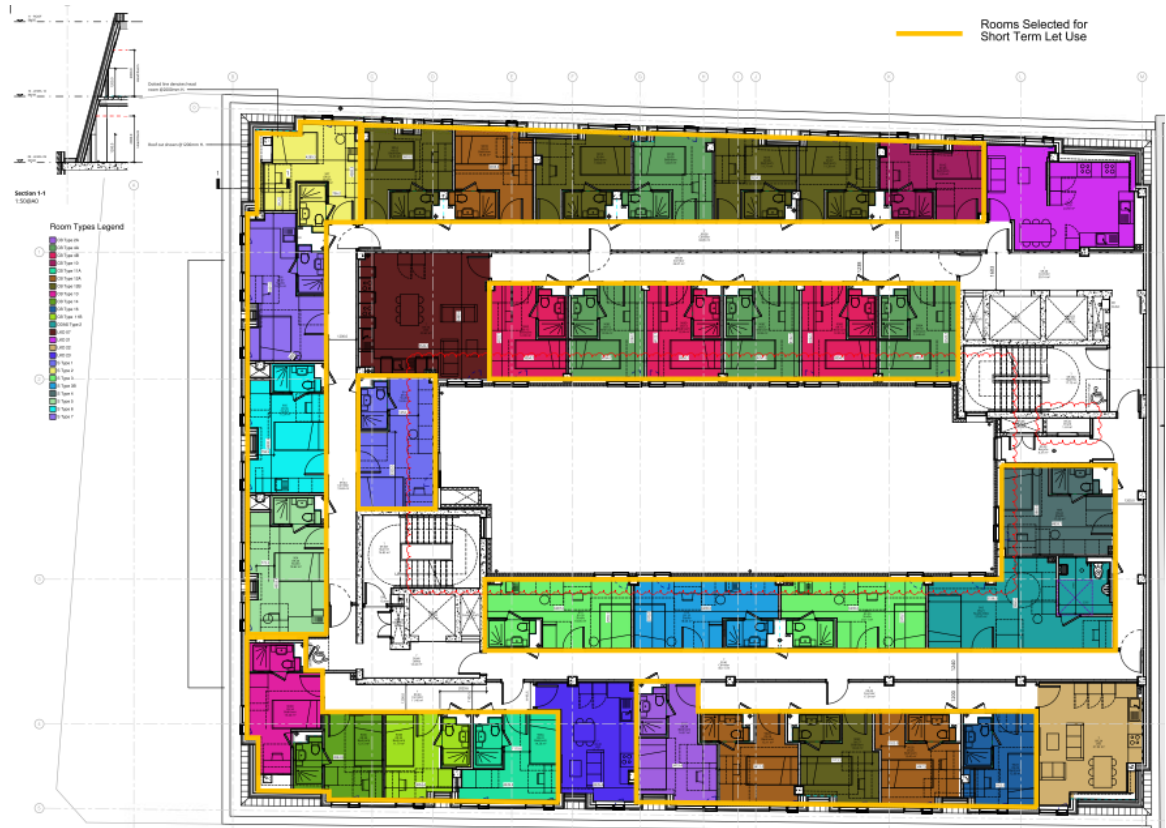
Committee Meeting Date: 16 th June 2026	
Application Ref: LA04/2026/0716/F	
Proposal: Proposed change of use of 342 no. Student rooms to short term let accommodation outside of term time (July & August).	Location: Alma Place, 16 Library Street, Belfast, BT1 2JB
Referral Route: Paragraph 3.8.2 (d) of the scheme of delegation – change of use application involving student accommodation	
Recommendation: Approval subject to conditions	
Applicant Name and Address: Bluesky Student Alma Place Limited 52 Grosvenor Gardens London SW1W 0AU	Agent Name and Address: Clyde Shanks Ltd 2nd Floor 7 Exchange Place Belfast BT1 2NA
Date Valid: 13.04.2026	
Target Date: 27.07.2026	
Contact Officer: Ciara Reville, Principal Planner (Development Management)	
Executive Summary: The application site is situated at Alma Place, 16 Library Street, Belfast, BT1 2JB. Permission was granted under LA04/2015/0676/F for Demolition of existing warehouse and construction of Managed Purpose-Built Student Accommodation comprising: 78 Apartments containing 408 en-suite Bedrooms with shared living rooms and kitchens and 10 Studio Apartments containing 36 self-contained Studios on ground and 10 upper storey. The key issues for consideration of the application are set out below: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Principle of the proposed change of use outside of term time• Access, movement and parking Four letters of representation have been received. Their concerns are set out below with response. DFI Roads were consulted and had no objections to the proposal. Recommendation Having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal is considered acceptable. It is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions. Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions, and deal with any other issues that arise, provided that they are not substantive.	



Second Floor Plan



Ninth Floor Plan



2.0	Characteristics of the Site and Area
2.1	The site is a multi-story purpose-built student accommodation on Library Street. The surrounding area is mixed in character with surface level car parks and terrace housing, as well as a number of commercial units.
3.0	Description of Proposal
3.1	Proposed change of use of 342 no. Student rooms to short term let accommodation outside of term time (July & August).
4.0	Planning Policy and Other Material Considerations
4.1	Development Plan – Plan Strategy Belfast Local Development Plan, Plan Strategy 2035
4.2	<i>Strategic Policies:</i> Policy SP2 – sustainable development <i>Operational Policies:</i> HOU13 – Short-term let accommodation TLC1 - Supporting tourism leisure and cultural development

	<p>TLC3 - Overnight visitor accommodation</p> <p>TRAN 8 - Car parking and servicing arrangements</p> <p>Policy ENV1 – Environmental quality</p>
4.3	<p>Development Plan – zoning, designations and proposals maps</p> <p>Belfast Urban Area Plan (2001) BUAP</p> <p>Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (v2004)</p> <p>Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (v2014)</p>
4.4	<p>Regional Planning Policy</p> <p>Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS)</p> <p>Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)</p>
4.5	<p>Relevant Planning History</p> <p>LA04/2015/0676/F - “Demolition of existing warehouse and construction of Managed Purpose-Built Student Accommodation comprising: 78 Apartments containing 408 en-suite Bedrooms with shared living rooms and kitchens and 10 Studio Apartments containing 36 self-contained Studios on ground and 10 upper storeys” at Land bounded by Library Street Stephen Street and Kent Street Belfast. Permission Granted at appeal 27th February 2017</p>
5.0	Consultations and Representations
5.1	<p>Statutory Consultations</p> <p>DFI Roads – No Objections subject to conditions</p>
5.2	<p>Non-Statutory Consultations</p> <p>Northern Ireland Tourist Board – Only comment on major applications.</p>
5.3	<p>Representations</p>
5.3.1	<p>The application has been advertised and neighbours notified. Four letters of objection have been received raising concerns regarding the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on residential amenity: particularly in relation to noise disturbance and inappropriate use of the building’s fire exit area. Increasing turnover and occupancy during July and August will intensify the frequency and scale of disturbance. <i>The proposed use is not considered to impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties due to a robust short term management plan has been submitted and will be conditioned to ensure appropriate management of the property.</i> • Impact of the proposal on Parking in the Area. The proposed change of use to short term let accommodation outside of term time (July & August) is not considered to significantly impact on parking in the surrounding area.

Given the City Centre location the site is highly accessible by a number of public transport options. DFI Roads have been consulted and offer no objection to the proposal. A Travel Plan has been submitted with DFI Roads offering no objections to the proposal.

- **Lack of Clarity regarding the definition of ‘term time’.**
This is defined as July and August as stated in the description for the application and supporting information.
- **Conflict with intended use and approved consent:** The approved consent for this development was for purpose-built managed student accommodation (PBSA) to serve the needs of Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University students. The proposed change to short-term lets, even if limited to July and August, represents a significant departure from that approved use and creates a precedent for non-student occupancy in PBSA buildings. This undermines the clarity and purpose of the city’s student accommodation strategy.
The proposal will be restricted to July & August months only, a period when the universities are in summer recess. Therefore, the proposal will not significantly impact approved PBSA use. The units to be used are limited to a corner of the building which has controlled access.
- **Impact on the hotel and regulated accommodation sector:** The objection states that allowing PBSA stock to convert to short-term lets adds quasi-hotel capacity into an already competitive city-centre visitor market without equivalent regulatory burden, standards, or tax treatment. Hotels operate under strict regulation, incur higher operating costs, and contribute substantially to employment and tourism infrastructure. Introducing additional short-term let supply erodes this regulated framework and risks financial displacement during peak trading months. This accommodation will compete with other certified products including, hotels, hostels, guest accommodation and self-catering accommodation.
The tourism policies within the Plan Strategy 2035 seeks to extend the offer for day and nighttime tourism facilities within the city centre boundary. The proposal complies with policy, financial impacts on existing tourism provision is not a determining factor in assessment.
- **Impact on local housing market and student accommodation stock.** Allowing a major development to pivot its use into short-term lets sets a precedent which may undermine the supply of dedicated student housing and may misalign with the intended purpose of the original approval.
The proposal is solely for the use as short term lets during the months of July and August. A condition will be placed on the decision to restrict the use to these months, therefore will not set a precedent which may undermine the supply of dedicated student housing.
- **Viability and threat to tourist development.**
As stated above the tourism policies within the Plan Strategy 2035 seeks to extend the offer for day and nighttime tourism facilities within the city centre

boundary. The proposal complies with policy, financial impacts on existing tourism provision is not a determining factor in assessment.

- **Precedent and policy alignment.** Granting this application may create a precedent for other large student housing developments to seek flexible change to tourism use, thereby eroding the supply of student accommodation and undermining local housing policy. The application appears to conflict with the original planning intention (student use) and may not align with strategic objectives for housing mix, neighbourhood.

Any future applications would be assessed on their own merits. The current proposal does not undermine or erode the supply of student housing as the proposed change of use relates solely outside of term time which is defined as July and August.

- **Policy precedent, compliance concerns and the integrity of PBSA planning.** The conversion of student accommodation to short-term visitor use undermines the city's ability to ensure an adequate, predictable supply of student housing. With growing undergraduate numbers and pressure on the private rented sector, safeguarding PBSA for its original purpose is essential.

As stated previously the proposed use will be limited to July & August only when the PBSA will not be in use as student accommodation.

- **Monitoring and enforcement issues.**

An updated short term let Management Plan has been submitted which details the monitoring and enforcement of those using the short term let. The approval will be conditioned to be in accordance with the submitted management plan. In relation to the enforcement and monitoring of the planning approval, any potential breaches of either the original planning approval LA04/2015/0676/F or that approved under this application would be a matter for the Belfast City Council Planning Enforcement Team.

- **Neighbourhood amenity and local infrastructure.** The objection stated the conversion of significant numbers of student rooms into short-term lets has the potential to change the character of the local neighbourhood.

The proposal relates solely to the Months of July and August, therefore is not anticipated to have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the area.

- **Amenity, management and neighbourhood impact** Short-term-lets operate with higher turnover, differing visitor behaviour, and reduced stability. This can lead to noise, disturbance and increased comings and goings, which are not consistent with the controlled management protocols typically required for PBSA. The applicant has not demonstrated how they will maintain equivalent standards of oversight during short-term visitor use.

An updated Short Term Let Management Plan has been submitted with the proposal that details how matter such as these may be dealt with and enforced if they arise. This has been conditioned to the approval.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and Enforcement <p>1) Who will have responsibility for monitoring and verifying that this property operates solely during July and August?</p> <p><i>It is the responsibility of the developer/operator to operate in accordance with planning permission, any reported breaches of planning are the responsibility of Planning Enforcement to investigate in line with its Enforcement Charter. .</i></p> <p>2) Does the Council have the required resources and statutory powers to effectively monitor and enforce compliance with the two-month change-of-use restriction?</p> <p><i>Yes, a planning enforcement team is in place.</i></p> <p>3) Which agency will be designated as the enforcement authority, and how will breaches of this planning condition be investigated and addressed?</p> <p><i>The planning enforcement team are responsible for investigating any complaints relating to breaches of planning control.</i></p>
6.0	PLANNING ASSESSMENT
6.1	Development Plan Context
6.1.1	Section 6(4) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 states that in making any determinations under the Act, regard is to be had to the local development plan, and the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
6.1.2	Section 45(1) of the Act states that in determining planning applications, the Council must have regard to the local development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations.
6.1.3	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 (“Departmental Development Plan”) until the Local Policies Plan is adopted.
6.1.4	Operational policies – the Plan Strategy contains a range of operational policies relevant to consideration of the application, which are set out in the following section of this report.).
6.1.5	Proposals Maps – until such time as the Local Policies Plan is adopted, the Council must have regard to the land-use zonings, designations and proposals maps in the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001, both versions of the draft Belfast

	Metropolitan Area Plan (v2004 and v2014) (draft BMAP 2015) and other relevant area plans. The weight to be afforded to these proposals 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.
6.1.6	Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 - The site is located within the settlement development limit in the BUAP and is not zoned for any use.
6.1.7	Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (2004 and 2014) – The is located within the city centre and is unzoned whiteland.
6.1.8	Key Issues
6.1.9	The key issues to be considered in this application are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle • Access, movement and parking
6.2	Principle of the proposal
6.2.1	Policy HOU13 relating to short term lets set out a number of key criteria which must be satisfied.
6.2.2	Criterion a. requires that the proposal <i>strengthens and diversifies the range of short-stay visitor accommodation in the city</i> . As of December 2025, short-term lets comprise 23% of Belfast City Council’s tourist accommodation. The proposal is for additional rooms outside of term time which would strengthen and diversify the range of short-term visitor accommodation in the city.
6.2.3	Criterion b. requires that the proposal <i>is accessible by public transport</i> . The site’s city centre location is highly accessible by public transport, therefore the proposal meets this criteria.
6.2.4	Criterion c. requires that the proposal <i>is sited within an existing tourism cluster or in close proximity to a visitor attraction</i> . The site is within the city centre with several visitor attractions in close proximity. City Hall, University of Ulster, the MAC and St Annes Cathedral are all within walking distance.
6.2.5	Criterion d. requires that the proposal <i>has appropriate management arrangements in place to ensure a positive and safe living environment whilst minimising any potential negative impacts</i> . The applicant has provided an appropriate management plan to the council for consideration, which will be conditioned. The management plan also addresses the property security, management, booking and vetting and the key operational policies including noise / anti-social behaviour, waste disposal and transportation.
6.2.6	Criterion e. requires that <i>the site is not located within a designated HMA (see policy HOU10), unless it can be demonstrated that the development is needed to</i>

	<p><i>meet a specific demand in that location.</i> As the site is not located within a designated HMA, this criterion is not applicable.</p>
6.2.7	<p>Criterion f. requires that <i>in the case of a change from permanent residential use, part of the property must be retained as permanent residential housing.</i> The existing building is a PBSA therefore this criterion is not applicable.</p>
6.2.8	<p>Policy TLC1 states that the Council will seek to support tourism, leisure and cultural development that contributes to extending the offer of these forms of development across daytime and nighttime for the visitor. It is also expected that the proposal will lead to improving the quality and accessibility of tourism, leisure and cultural assets to support the city's reputation as an attractive tourism destination.</p>
6.2.9	<p>Policy TLC3 states that planning permission will be granted for tourism development for new overnight accommodation within the city centre boundary. Although the policy advises that short-term lets are considered under policy HOU13, nonetheless it demonstrates that there is a thrust for tourism development to be located within the city centre.</p>
6.2.10	<p>Car Parking Policy TRAN8 seeks to ensure that there is sufficient car parking and servicing arrangement for all developments. The development has parking for 18 cars in the basement, 7 motor cycles and 112 bicycles. This was approved under application LA04/2023/2936/F. Also, Beryl bike docking stations are located on Royal Avenue and at Ulster University that are a short walk from the site. Short-term guests will therefore be encouraged to use more sustainable means of transport, such as cycling, walking or take advantage of regular local transport facilities. For short-term guests who do need parking, there is on-street paid parking within the general area of the site.</p>
6.2.11	<p>Whilst the approved scheme is not subject to a Travel Plan, a Travel Plan was submitted for this application. The Travel Plan supports the proposal and outlines all travel options available to staff, guests and visitors to the proposed short-term let units i.e. multiple forms of public transport such as Metro, Glider, and Ulsterbus bus services alongside Translink Train services, as well as the pedestrian and cycle infrastructure in the surrounding area. It also addresses private car usage in that it will still be a mode of travel to some, with street pay and display parking and other longer duration car parks.</p>
6.2.12	<p>DFI were consulted and offered no objection to the development's Travel Plan.</p>
6.2.13	<p>Conclusion The proposal is, on balance, an appropriate form of development within the city centre, it will provide additional visitor accommodation within the city centre outside of term time, adding to the diversity of visitor accommodation on offer, during peak times. It will also assist with vacancy rates within the building. Approval is recommended.</p>

7.0	Recommendation
7.1	Having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal is considered acceptable. It is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions.
7.2	Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions, and deal with any other issues that arise, provided that they are not substantive.

DRAFT CONDITIONS:

1. The development hereby permitted must be begun within five years from the date of this permission.

Reason: As required by Section 61 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

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

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

3. The short-term let use hereby permitted, shall only operate between 1st July and 31st August each year. Accordingly, the short term let use will cease on the 31st of August and not recommence until the 1st July the following year.

Reason: To ensure the premises are retained as permanent student accommodation during the academic year, 1st September to 30th June.

4. The development shall operate in accordance with the Travel Plan dated April 2026 and uploaded to the Planning Portal.

Reason: To encourage alternative modes of transport to the private car.

5. The Development shall operate in accordance with the Short Term Let Management Plan dated May 2026 and uploaded to the Planning Portal

Reason: To ensure appropriate management of the short term let and protect neighbouring amenity