

Development Management Officer Report

Committee Application

Summary	
Committee Meeting Date: 16 th June 2026	
Application Ref: LA04/2026/0066/F	
Proposal: Erection of 2.4m high perimeter fencing around 1 No. existing soccer pitch and internal 1.2m high spectator rail. Additional tree planting (Amended proposal)	Location: Existing soccer pitches at Wedderburn Park Playing Fields (approx. 20m east of Orpen Ave. and 10m west of Wedderburn Gdns), Belfast, BT10 0BT
Referral Route: The application is made by Belfast City Council and on lands to which the Council has an estate (as per the Scheme of Delegation paragraph 3.8.5 (a) and (b))	
Recommendation: Approval	
Applicant Name and Address: Michael Small Cecil Ward Building 4-10 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BP	Agent Name and Address: Michael Small Cecil Ward Building 4-10 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BP
Recommendation Approval	
Date Valid: 21/01/2026	
Target Date: 06/05/2026	
Contact Officer: Ciara Reville, Principal Planner (Development Management)	
Executive Summary: <p>The application seeks planning permission for the erection of a 2.4m high fence around 1 No. existing soccer pitch and an internal 1.2m high spectator rail. There will be 2no. trees removed and 7no. trees will be planted.</p> <p>It is an amended scheme from the initial proposal for a 2.4m high fence around 2 No. existing soccer pitches, 6m high ballstop fencing behind each goal unit and fencing, including pedestrian and vehicular access gates.</p> <p>The site is located within Wedderburn Park Playing Fields, accessible via Orpen Park and Wedderburn Gardens. The playing fields are a Council operated site with two grassed soccer pitches, within a larger area of open space. The wider Wedderburn Park includes a large area of open space, bowling pavilion and clubhouse, gravel tennis courts, playground and car parking. A car park is adjacent to the pitch in this proposal.</p> <p>Wedderburn Park is surrounded by residential development. There are dwellings to the north of the proposal site, at Orpen Avenue and Orpen Drive. A fence and hedge marks the boundary between the pitch and these dwellings. Dwellings at Rathmore Gardens and Wedderburn Gardens are</p>	

adjacent to the southern boundary of the wider Park. A line of trees marks the southern boundary of the Park.

The site is within the Hunterhouse/Wedderburn/Rathmore Local Landscape Policy Area and is situated within the development limit as designated under both versions of dBMAP (2004 & 2014).

The Key Issues relevant to consideration of the application are:

- Principle of Development
- Impact on amenity
- Impact on the character and appearance of the area
- Impact on trees and landscape
- Other considerations

Belfast City Council Trees requested surveys in relation to the mature trees adjacent to the southern pitch. However, the proposal has been amended to omit fencing around this pitch. These trees will be unaffected. There were no objections from other Consultees.

There have been 262 representations received in respect of this application – 89 objections and 173 letters of support.

Recommendation

Having Regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal is acceptable.

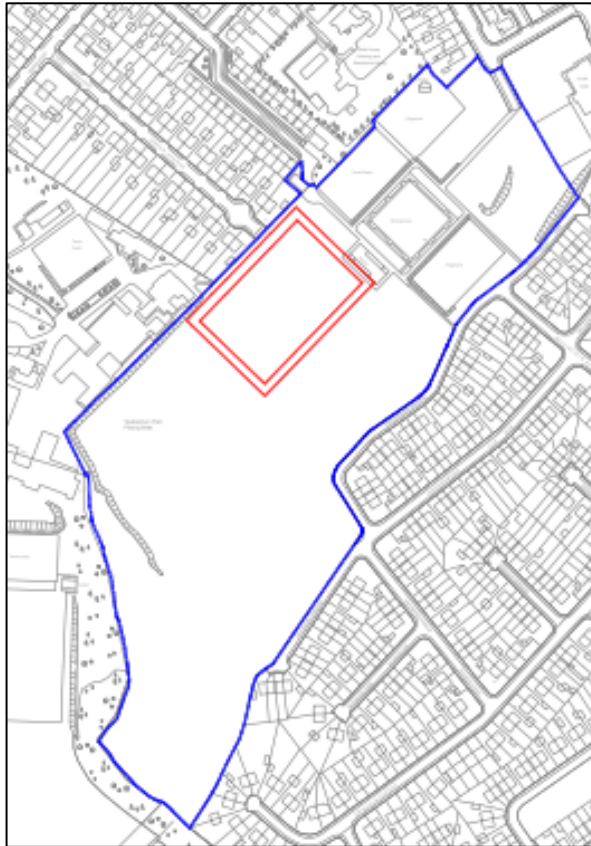
It is recommended that planning permission is approved. Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the approval reasons and deal with any other issues that arise, provided that they are not substantive.

Case Officer Report

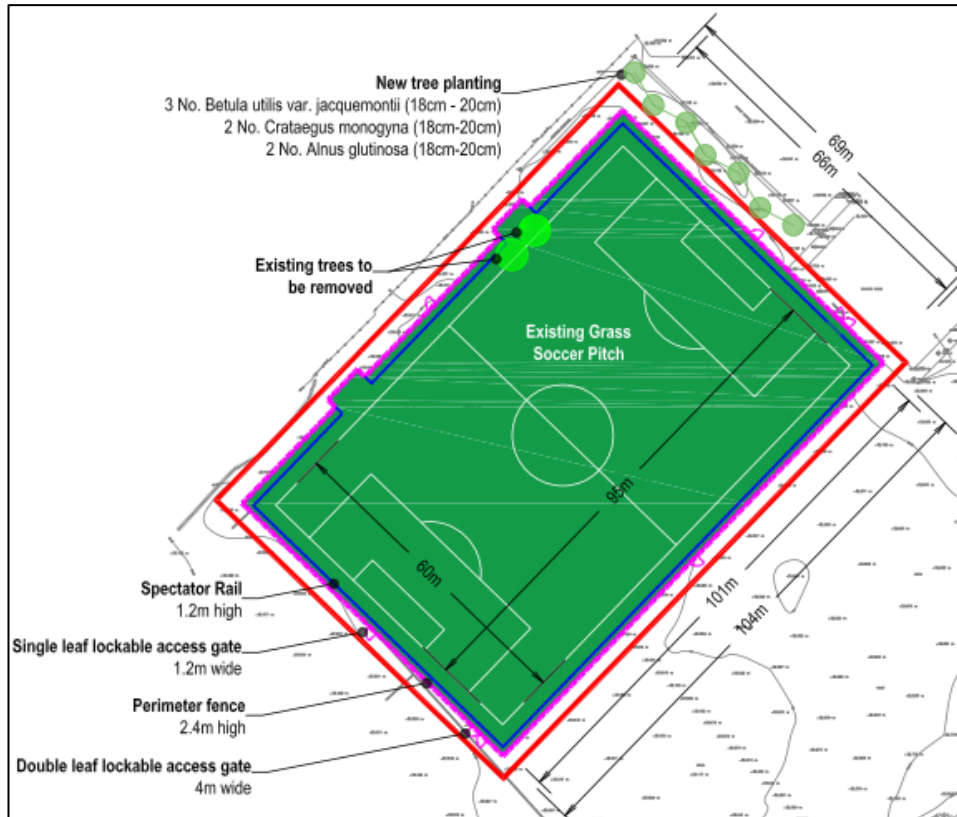
1.0

**Drawings
Site Location**

1.1



Block Plan



Proposed Elevations	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Perimeter Fence - Section / Elevation</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1:20</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Spectator Rail - Section / Elevation</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1:10</p>
2.0	Characteristics of the Site and Area
2.1	The site is located within Wedderburn Park Playing Fields, off Finaghy Road South. The playing fields are a Council operated site with two grassed soccer pitches, within a larger area of open space. The wider Wedderburn Park includes a large area of open space, bowling pavilion and clubhouse, gravel tennis courts, playground and car parking. A car park is adjacent to the pitch in this proposal.
2.2	The site is approximately 0.8 Hectares (Ha). The wider Park site is 7.6 Hectares (Ha) and relatively flat. The area of the pitch site represents approx. 10.5% of the overall park.
2.3	Wedderburn Park is surrounded by residential development. A fence and hedge marks the boundary between the pitch and dwellings to the north. Dwellings at Rathmore Gardens and Wedderburn Gardens are adjacent to the southern boundary of the wider park. A line of trees marks the southern boundary of the park.
2.4	In dBMAP 2015 and v2004, the site is designated as Local Landscape Policy Area. The site is designated a Landscape Wedge in Belfast Urban Area Plan (2001) (BUAP).
3.0	Description of Proposal
3.1	The planning application is seeking permission for the erection of a 2.4m high perimeter fencing around 1 No. existing soccer pitch and internal 1.2m high spectator rail. Additional tree planting (Amended proposal).

4.0	Planning Policy and Other Material Considerations
4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5	<p>Development Plan – Plan Strategy Belfast Local Development Plan, Plan Strategy 2035</p> <p>Policies in the Plan Strategy relevant to the application include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy GB1 - Green and Blue Infrastructure network. - Policy HC1 – Promoting Healthy Communities - Policy CI1 – Community Infrastructure - Policy TRE1 – Trees - Policy LC1 – Landscape - Policy LC1C – Local Landscape Policy Areas - Policy LC1A – AONBs - Policy LC1D – Landscape wedges - Policy OS1 – Protection of Open Space - Policy OS5 - Intensive Sports Facilities <p>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>Regional Planning Policy Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) Edition 2</p> <p>Relevant Planning History Z/2008/0644/F - Replacement fencing and gates at Orpen Park and Orpen Drive. Address: Wedderburn Playing Fields adjacent to 39 Orpen Park, Ballyfinaghy, Finaghy, BT10 0BN Decision Approval Date: 11/08/2008.</p> <p>Z/2007/0301/F- Alterations to vacant garage/machinery store to provide disabled staff shower, changing and kitchen facilities and a smaller machinery store. Address: Wedderburn Park, Adj 53 Orpen Drive, Belfast, BT10 0BT. Decision Approval Date: 22/05/2007.</p>
5.0	Consultations and Representations
5.1 5.2 5.3	<p>Statutory Consultations DFI Roads – No objection.</p> <p>Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Natural Environment Division) – Requested that the NI Biodiversity Checklist is completed, and if the Planner considers that surveys are to be carried out, the applicant should be referred to the relevant up to date survey specifications. From the checklist, Planning has determined that Designated Sites, Priority Habitats, and Protected and Priority Species will not be affected by the proposal and no surveys are to be carried out. NIEA NED were not reconsulted.</p> <p>Non-Statutory Consultations BCC Trees – Requested surveys of the existing line of mature trees on the southern boundary of the park, details of construction measures, a Landscape Plan and a Tree Protection Plan. However, the proposed scheme has been reduced. The line of mature trees will be unaffected. Just 2 no. semi-mature trees are to be removed to facilitate the fence under the amended proposals. However, 7 no. trees will be planted, resulting in a net gain of trees under this proposal.</p>

	<p>Representations</p> <p>5.4 The application has been advertised in the newspaper and neighbours notified. A total of 262 representations were received, 89 of which were objections. The following issues were raised (summarised):</p> <p>5.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on character of the area / visual impact <p>It is considered that the proposed fences would have a negligible visual impact on the locality. Public views of the fences would be screened by existing planting and development. New trees are proposed to the east which will aid integration.</p> <p>5.6 The structures are of a scale and character that would be reasonably expected at a sports pitch. The proposed scale, form, massing, design and materials are considered acceptable and will not adversely impact on local character. On balance, the proposal would not result in adverse impact on the character of the area.</p> <p>5.7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on public access and community use <p>The area of the pitch site to be fenced off represents approx. 10.5% of the overall park. An adequate provision of recreational and open space remains in the park that is accessible to the public, and can be used by the community.</p> <p>5.8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss or reduction of open space <p>The proposal does not result in a loss of open space. The proposal seeks to enhance the existing recreational use in terms of managing the pitch. The proposal retains the use as existing open space and supports the continued use as a pitch as per Policy OS1. The principle of use is therefore acceptable.</p> <p>5.9 Fencing off the pitch will not negatively impact the availability of public open space to a great degree – approx. 89.5% of publicly accessible open space remains.</p> <p>5.10 Policy OS5 relating to intensive sports facilities states that planning permission will be granted for the provision of new and extended intensive sports facilities where it is located within settlement limits, is accessible and there are no unacceptable impacts on the amenity of people living near-by.</p> <p>5.11 The proposal complies with this policy, it is located within an accessible location within a settlement and will not impact on the amenity of near-by residents as for the reasons previously stated.</p> <p>5.12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on traffic and parking <p>The proposal was assessed by DFI Roads and considered to be acceptable. There are 2no. existing car parks accessible to the east of the site. There are approx. 64 existing spaces, 4 of which are for disabled parking. It is also noted the proposal does not change the nature of the existing use as a football pitch.</p> <p>5.13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise <p>Policy OS5 (intensive sports facilities) requires proposals to ensure there is no unacceptable impact on the amenities of people living nearby by reason of the siting, scale, extent, frequency or timing of the sporting activities proposed, including any noise or light pollution likely to be generated.</p> <p>5.14 There should be no unacceptable impact on the amenities of people living nearby by reason of the siting, scale and extent of the proposal. The pitch is already in use. The proposal will formalise the current situation.</p>
--	---

5.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on wildlife <p>An NI Biodiversity Checklist was completed in respect of the proposed development, concluding that Designated Sites, Priority Habitats, and Protected and Priority Species will not be affected by the proposal and no surveys are to be carried out. Following review, NIEA NED were not reconsulted.</p>
5.16	<p>Furthermore, a number of representations stated they were opposed to the proposal but did not outline specific reasons why.</p>
6.0	PLANNING ASSESSMENT
6.1	Development Plan Context
6.2	<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>
6.3	<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>
6.4	<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 (“Departmental Development Plan”) until the Local Policies Plan is adopted.</p>
6.5	<p>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.).</p>
6.6	<p>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.</p>
6.7	<p>Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 - The site is designated as a Landscape Wedge in the BUAP.</p>
6.8	<p>Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (2004) - The site is located within the settlement development limit and is zoned as Local Landscape Policy Area.</p>
6.9	<p>Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (v2014) - The site is located within the settlement development limit and is zoned as Local Landscape Policy Area.</p>
6.10	<p>Key Issues The key issues to be considered as part of this assessment are the following:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle of Development • Impact on amenity • Impact on the character and appearance of the area • Landscape Designations • Other considerations
6.11	<p>Principle of Development</p> <p>The principle of open space / recreational development has already been established and is deemed acceptable at this location. The proposal retains the use as existing open space and supports the continued use as a pitch as per Policy OS1. The proposed ballstop system supports the continued use of the site as an intensive sports facility under Policy OS5. The principle of the development is acceptable subject to further considerations below.</p>
6.12	<p>Impact on Amenity</p> <p>The proposed ball stop fencing is around the perimeter of the northernmost soccer pitch. The closest residential dwellings are at Orpen Avenue, 25m to the north. There is intervening planting at the boundary of the park here. The residential dwellings at Wedderburn Gardens are 80m to the south, accessible by crossing the lower grassed pitch.</p>
6.13	<p>This pitch with the proposed fencing is adjacent to a carpark to the east. There is also a larger carpark within Wedderburn Park 80m further east, accessible by foot.</p>
6.14	<p>The proposed structures are 2.4m (boundary fence) and 1.2m (spectator railing) in height. It is considered that the separation distances to existing residential properties assist in mitigating noise impacts. Officers consider that noise levels will not increase as there is already a football pitch in situ.</p>
6.15	<p>There are no concerns regarding light, shadow, privacy etc.</p>
6.16	<p>In summary, the proposal would not have an adverse impact on amenity of the existing residents in the area.</p>
6.17	<p>Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area</p> <p>The proposal is incidental to an existing use within an area of open space. The proposed ball stop fencing is considered appropriate for the operation of this pitch. The design of these structures will result in limited visual impacts. Public views of the ball stop fencing would largely be limited. Near distance views from Orpen Avenue will be limited due to boundary planting. Long range views from Wedderburn Gardens to the south, 80m away, will be limited due to a line of trees at the southernmost boundary of the Park. It is also considered that the existing trees around the Park will filter views of the fencing and on balance, the proposal would not result in detrimental visual impacts.</p>
6.18	<p>Landscape Designations</p> <p>The site is within the Hunterhouse/Wedderburn/Rathmore Local Landscape Policy Area and is situated within the development limit as designated under both versions of dBMAP (2004 & 2014). The site is located to the north of the designated Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (BMAP v2004 & 2014). It is not within or adjacent to a designated Landscape Wedge in either version of BMAP.</p>
6.19	<p>Policy LC1 of the Plan Strategy (Landscape) states that new development should seek to protect and, where appropriate, restore or improve the quality and amenity of the landscape. The policy goes on to say the council will adopt the precautionary approach in assessing development proposals in any designated landscape and lists eight policy considerations/requirements. The proposed fence is considered to not adversely impact</p>

6.20	<p>on landscape character and visual amenity of the area due to its small scale, particularly considered within the wider Park context. New trees will be planted and there will be no adverse impact on natural heritage and biodiversity, due to the scale of the proposal. The 173 letters of support clearly show that the proposed fence (which will formalise an existing pitch), will bring substantial community benefits that outweigh any potential landscape impacts. For these reasons, the proposal complies with Policy LC1 of the Plan Strategy.</p> <p>Policy LC1C of the Plan Strategy (LLPAs) states that development proposals that have a significant adverse impact on the amenity, character, environmental quality or natural, built & cultural heritage features (including their settings and views) of LLPAs will not be supported by the LDP. The small scale of the proposed fence around 1 pitch, with existing and proposed screening from hedges and trees, will not have an impact of the features listed above.</p>
6.21	<p>The proposal will not have an adverse impact on the character, quality and natural & built heritage value of the Lagan Valley AONB and will integrate with this sensitive landscape, for the reasons stated in para. 6.19 & 6.20. The proposal complies with Policy LC1A of the Plan Strategy (AONBs).</p>
6.22	<p>Policy LC1D of the Plan Strategy (Landscape wedges) does not apply as the proposal is not within the Colin Glen Urban Landscape Wedge.</p>
6.23	<p>Other Considerations</p> <p>The proposal necessitates the removal of 2 no. trees, however 7 no. additional trees are proposed to be planted. The proposal would result in a net gain in tree numbers, therefore is compliant with policy TRE1.</p>
8.0	Recommendation
8.1	<p>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.</p>
8.2	<p>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.</p>
<p>DRAFT CONDITIONS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 5 years from the date of this permission. <p>Reason: As required by Section 61 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.</p>	