

Planning Committee

Monday, 27th June, 2022

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

Members present: Councillor Whyte (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers;
Councillors Bower, Carson, Matt Collins, Douglas, Garrett,
Hanvey, Hutchinson,
Maskey, Murphy and Spratt.

Also present: Councillor McAteer.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager (Development
Management);
Ms. N. Largey, Divisional Solicitor;
Mr. P. Fitzsimons, Principal Planning Officer;
Ms. L. Walshe, Senior Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillor Groogan.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Whyte (Chairperson) declared an interest in that he was a shareholder in the Applicant's company and would leave the meeting while the item was under consideration.

Pre Determination Hearing in respect of LA04/2021/2856/O - Mixed use regeneration development comprising office, residential apartments (including affordable), retail, hotel, leisure public realm, active travel uses, cafes, bars and restaurants, and community uses, on lands surrounding the new Belfast Transport Hub and over the Transport Hub car park, to the east and west of Durham St and south of Grosvenor Rd.

(The Chairperson, having declared an interest in the item, left the meeting while the item was under consideration.)

(Deputy Chairperson, Councillor Maskey in the Chair.)

The Senior Planning Officer reported that the application proposed a mixed use regeneration development which would comprise office space, residential apartments, retail, hotel, leisure, public realm, active travel uses, cafes, bars and restaurants, and community uses on lands surrounding the new Belfast Transport Hub and over the

**Planning Committee,
Pre Determination Hearing,
Thursday, 14th April, 2022**

Transport Hub car park, to the east and west of Durham Street and south of Grosvenor Road.

She referred the Committee to a site location plan and explained that the project proposed to redevelop lands which would be freed up by the future closure of the existing Europa Bus Station and Great Victoria Street train station and other vacant lands in the ownership of Translink, to the west of the Belfast Transport Hub development. She pointed out that it was an outline application and that the following matters would be reserved for subsequent approval:

- Siting;
- Design;
- External appearance;
- Means of access; and
- Landscaping.

She explained that, whilst the above matters were reserved, a series of parameters plans had been provided which would limit the scope of the development.

The Committee was shown the vertical and horizontal parameter plans for the site and the Senior Planning Officer outlined the key design principles, which included:

- Site wide public realm;
- Active frontage;
- Green travel/infrastructure and landscaping;
- Public square;
- Landmark building and Saltwater Square;
- Appropriate mix of uses; and
- Distinctive character drawing on industrial heritage.

She outlined the next steps and stated that amended and additional parameter plans and the submission of a draft Section 76 planning agreement had been requested. She advised the Members that a Committee site visit was expected to be arranged in August and that, on completion of consideration, a recommendation would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. B. Dickson, Mr. D. Hill and Mr. B. McMahon to the meeting, who were attending in objection to the application. Mr. Hill informed the Committee that urban design was about the space between buildings and public health and that Belfast was built upon simple urban design principles in the layout of Donegall Place, Royal Avenue, Fountain Street and Arthur Street, where the space between buildings equalled half the height of opposite buildings. He stated that, at a pre-application consultation organised by Juno, he had become aware of the height of the proposed buildings and lack of space between which would create a bleak environment in Belfast. He stated that he was asking the Members to defer the decision for a period of three months to allow for the plans to be amended and a series of three workshops, to be chaired by the Paul Hogarth Company, to develop the design and visit the Kemp Street

**Planning Committee,
Pre Determination Hearing,
Thursday, 14th April, 2022**

station in Cork, where a large-scale development had been underway around the railway station. He concluded by stating that Belfast and its visitors deserved better than what was being proposed by Translink.

Mr. McMahon advised the Committee that he was a member of the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation and had worked for over thirty years had been involved in traffic management and engineering. He stated that he was in support of the concept but had concern for the safety of users of the proposed transport hub. He outlined his concerns with regard to the entry and exit locations and the implications of the location of pedestrian crossings. He informed the Committee that to maintain the existing bridge and upgrade the pedestrian walkway would be a safer option.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Dickson and Mr. McMahon for their contribution.

He then welcomed Mr. L. McComb, Ms. H. Harrison and Mr. C. Bennie representing the applicant and agent, to the meeting.

Together they advised the Committee that the scheme had a number of benefits, namely, that:

- It was a once in a generation opportunity for regeneration through connection;
- It would significantly rebalance the city centre;
- Grand Central Station was a flagship project acting as a catalyst for regeneration of the area;
- The development would assist Translink in achieving its commitment to net zero emissions by 2040;
- Weavers Cross would deliver considerable economic and social value to the city;
- The development was intended to sit within the already approved road layout; and
- Consultation had been ongoing, with over 80 percent of responses having been positive from respondents.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the connectivity of the proposal, the Senior Planning Officer stated that it was an outline application and that there was an indicative scheme that provided to show one way in which the future development could be envisaged, and that the application will not grant permission for a particular block layout and would only set out the principles by which the reserved matters must comply.

The Chairperson referred to the following late items for the Committee to note:

- letter of support from NI Hotels Federation;
- letter from Donaldson Planning to withdraw a previous objection;
- letter of objection from the County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast; and
- letter of support from City Centre Management Company.

**Planning Committee,
Pre Determination Hearing,
Thursday, 14th April, 2022**

The Chairperson thanked the speakers for their contributions.

Chairperson