

Belfast student accommodation block proposed for “sensitive” location

Belfast councillors are to make a site visit to the city centre location earmarked for what could be the largest student accommodation project ever seen in the city.

The proposals, which have been brought forward by Mandeville Developments NI, would see 862 units constructed close to Ulster University’s campus on York Street.

The development site currently comprises a vacant brownfield site used for car parking behind Belfast Central Library at lands bounded by Library Street, Stephen Street, Little Donegall Street and Union Street. Currently, the largest scheme in Belfast to have been granted the green light is a 774-unit scheme under development by Student Roost on Nelson Street.

The Mandeville application also involves plans for additional use of accommodation by further or higher education institutions outside term time, communal facilities, an internal courtyard, cycle stores, active ground floor uses including cafe and retail, and associated bin stores and plant and public realm improvements to surrounding footpaths.

It is the latest application in a raft of student accommodation projects across the city designed to serve the long-delayed new Ulster University campus, which opened to 15,000 students and staff in September.

At this week’s meeting of Belfast City Council’s Planning Committee, elected members agreed they would have a “pre-emptive committee site visit” before the application hearing.

A council officer told the committee that the major application was in "quite a sensitive location within the city centre" and added there were issues of "scaling and mass" in relation to nearby listed buildings. The application has yet to be scheduled and the officer said the site visit would "probably be in the next month or two".

The plan is already facing opposition from Northern Ireland Water, who have recommended the council refuse proposals because the existing water infrastructure has "insufficient capacity." NI Water told the developer there was "no available headroom" at the Belfast wastewater treatment works but added it could revise its response following a positive wastewater impact assessment and a resolution to "storm discharge issues".

In March 2008, Straben Developments Ltd submitted a planning application for the site proposing a mixed use development comprising 253 apartments, retail units and associated basement car parking. This application was approved in June 2009 but never came to fruition.



A CGI of the student block seen from Library Street

In June 2015, Northside Regeneration Ltd made a planning application proposal for the site involving a mixed use regeneration scheme comprising community, residential, commercial, local retail, leisure and managed student accommodation uses, and areas of public realm. This £300meillion redevelopment project was known as “Northside” and focused on an area between Royal Avenue and the Westlink.

Northside Regeneration Ltd was selected by the Department for Social Development to deliver the project in 2014, but two years later the Stormont department pulled out after the project was refused outline planning permission.