

# Craighouse public meeting questions finances



by Tom McCallum

The financial case for building new houses on the site of the Edinburgh Napier University at Craighouse came under attack on Friday evening, as campaigners said that they still fail to get a clear answer from developers.

Rosy Barnes, from campaign group Friends of Craighouse, challenged developers, the Craighouse partnership, to back up their claim of the need for new-build homes by publishing their figures:-

*“The Craighouse Partnership’s financial argument has changed several times. First, they said they needed the new-build to get enough factoring fees for maintaining the buildings in the future. This didn’t stand up. Then, they said they needed it to maintain the grounds. But now they are talking of offloading some of that on the Council. So now they say they need it in order to undertake the renovation in the first place. They have consistently failed to release proper figures to evidence any of these positions. I think you have to forgive the local community for getting a little sceptical at this point.”*

William Gray Muir, representing the partnership at the recent community meeting, came under pressure when he said that he knew the figures “intimately” but claimed it would be foolish to share them:

“If I tell all of you what I expect to get for a given flat I’ve kind of given away my hand.”

He also said that he was “hearing loud and clear that everyone wants more clarity on the numbers.”



The Partnership, comprised of Sundial properties, Mountgrange and Edinburgh Napier University, insist that creating new-build properties on open space is the only way to fund the restoration of the grade-A listed buildings. Mr Muir said:

“The one thing I know for sure is that without enabling development these buildings will be lost. We’ve been through that in great detail with the council officials and the economic development team approved the plans.”

He said that campaign group, Friends of Craighouse, had, “a very unrealistic sense of what a sustainable future for the site could be.”

Some people were left standing at the public meeting held on Friday evening, so great was the interest from local residents. Ian Murray, MP for Edinburgh South, chaired the meeting and a number of local politicians were also present. Jim Eadie, MSP for Edinburgh Southern, said he was concerned that allowing new build on this site could endanger other protected sites around the city. Mr Eadie said:- “We could be setting a precedent if we allow new-build on Craighouse. What’s to stop new-build on other sites around Edinburgh?” Mr Eadie also spoke of his concern over “a lack of financial transparency.”

However Mr Muir remained confident in the partnership’s plans:-

“There’s going to be no salvation from the public purse, it has to be done through private means. We’ve put in an enormous amount of investment to try and find an answer for it and we think the answer we’ve come to is the best answer which balances certainty of outcome with least harm and most

enhancement to the things we're trying to protect."

He also said that proposed development was not only beneficial for the site but for the local area as well:

"If they're determined to prevent development of any sort, which appears to be the case, then it will be entirely counter-productive for them and the broader community."

While maintaining that new-build was needed, he said he sympathised with the objectors:

"I want to get the minimum amount of new build as much as you do."

The design of the new build element of the development has also caused concern in the local community. During Mr Muir's presentation a member of the crowd shouted out as a picture of one of the new-builds was displayed, showing their objection to the aesthetic qualities of the proposed development.

However, one of the local councillors stressed that any objections to the design of the buildings be kept to a minimum as the council's planning committee view objections of aesthetic qualities as subjective. He said instead that any objections should be based on the scale of the proposed new-build.

With the last of the Edinburgh Napier University students due to leave the current Craighouse campus next April, Mr Muir expressed his concern over the immediate future of the site without development:

"Whether they like it or not, in just over three months time those buildings are going to be vacated and you're going to start seeing them boarded up. You're going to start seeing people disappearing from the site and that's one thing that's absolutely crucial. If you look at a place like this that's had the people taken out of it, it's dying on its feet. This

is a place which needs people in it.”

[A planning application is currently in the hands of the council's planners](#), and Mr Murray urged those in opposition to focus on the new situation and make their voices heard before it is too late. He said:-

“Between now and the 21st of December is when the proper stuff starts. We’re trying to impress upon the Friends of Craighouse that they need to put everything they’ve been doing to one side and concentrate on what’s in front of them.”

For further information about the Craighouse Development you can access the [Morningside Community Council's website here](#). Craiglockhart Community Council also has information [on their website](#) about the planning position for the area.

Friends of Craighouse [have their website here](#) which has information for you should you wish to object to the planning application. Alison Johnstone MSP has written [on her website](#) about her objections to the planning application.

