

Council gives £150m Caltongate development thumbs up



The council's Development Management Committee decided to approve the £150m planning application to redevelop the gap site at Caltongate on Wednesday morning, despite vocal objections from local residents. The public gallery was full to overflowing, with some interested parties unable to get into the Dean of Guild Court Room.

Julie Logan representing the Old Town Residents made a strong statement against the proposals lodged by developer Artisan REI.

Ms Logan said that the plans proposed were so complex it made the whole scheme difficult to assess. She added that from what she could see the so-called civic square would only be a private area much the same as Multrees Walk where photography is banned, and the area can be closed off to the public.

She explained that the Old Town Community Council resigned over this matter in November 2013, such was the feeling in the area. She concluded:-“The developer has the option to acquire a piece of ground here for a peppercorn rent for 100 years, but our application to get this piece of ground to use it for much needed recycling containers was rejected.

“The plans are not of high enough standard. The master plan was flawed when written in 2006 and is now significantly out of date; the needs for housing have to be recognised.

“The Caltongate Master plan should be referred to the Planning committee for revisal.

“Our MSP Marco Biagi says:- “The final proposal is a piece of identikit architecture. In 20 years people will look at Caltongate in the same way as people regard St James Centre and wonder who gave it permission.”



Councillor Nigel Bagshaw a member of the Development Management Committee opposed the application. After the meeting he said:-“I’m appalled at this decision. No only does it give the people of the Old Town and the city as a whole a set of bland, uninspiring buildings which do not meet their needs, it also demonstrates once again the lack of consideration given in the planning process to the views of local people. No matter how well they structure and present their arguments, no matter how passionately they argue their case, their concerns are rarely addressed. For the sake of credibility and democracy, we need a system of third-party appeal, so that communities can challenge decisions in the same way that developers already can.”

Sheila Gilmore MP was not personally in attendance at the meeting, and the appearance of a representative to speak on her behalf was criticised by Councillor McVey who thought that this approach was a waste of the committee’s time since they could not question the MP directly on her thoughts.

Speaking after the decision to grant plans to redevelop the Caltongate site had been made, the Labour MP said:-‘Twice in two weeks a vote at the council’s planning committee allowed developers to prevail over the wishes of local communities. The Caltongate site will be built into a bland haven for office workers and tourists staying at budget hotels delivering shortlived bursts of vitality before they all head off home.

‘Old Town residents wanted more housing, to see the community grow and take ownership of any new district. A vibrant,

prosperous Old Town has thrived when permanent residents build stable communities. With only 185 apartments being built on a 5 acre site means that any growth in the community will be minimal.

'Development at this site is much needed, but these plans have been waved through regardless of the fact it is within our World Heritage Site. Bland, square blocked building with flat roofs, the offices and hotels will bear no likeness to the organic medieval architecture of the Canongate and could be any site, in any city across the country.

'It certainly seems current planning policies fail to serve local communities.'



Euan Leitch formerly of the Cockburn Association said:-“I fear that without sunlight the square will be a failure. A double height pend will not allow enough light in.

“This is a brilliant opportunity and a brilliant site but what you are being offered is not really architecture. The buildings will look like Edinburgh Park and are not appropriate for the Old Town. I strongly urge you to refuse the application.”

Neil Simpson of Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust commented on the proposals for the old arches in Jeffrey Street:-“The glass fronting on the arches is designed by the same architect behind the Omni Centre and I think it is uninteresting.

“As for the hotels the pods will just be big enough for a bed in these hotels and we have no doubt they will be used for stag and hen parties.

“The question we should ask is would I want to walk along here and would I want to stop and linger? New Street is a crucial Walkway to Leith Street but there are only fire doors, garage doors and ventilation grills interrupting the facades. At

least the small business units in the previous scheme would have resulted in shop fronts with doors.”

Lukas Nakos the Chief Executive of Artisan REI addressed the meeting and explained the plans. He confirmed that in the square alone £6.5m will be spent on realm improvements. He continued:-“Our company has over 20 years experience in creating this type of space. Artisan will clean and maintain it and also provide security there but we want residents and visitors to occupy this inviting space. Retail such as food and beverage offerings would attract people to enjoy this space morning through till evening.”

Councillor Karen Doran then voiced her objections to the plans. “It is our duty to ensure that Edinburgh remains a World Heritage city. Small guest houses in the south of the city have already had to close. These hotels will make it worse.”

Councillor Maureen Child said:- “There are improvements in the plans, but it is just not good enough. In the future if we reject this application then the master plan should also be rejected. One architect being used is not a good idea. It does not create diversity.”

Councillor Cameron Rose confirmed he would vote for the proposal and said:-“ It will not give us the jobs and shopping that the locals want here. We will not get the perfect development. I would like something brave bold iconic and big, but we have to be realistic. It has to be doable and viable. We do not want this gap site to exist in 10 years time.”

After the meeting the local residents who had objected left the City Chambers to go straight to a debriefing meeting at a nearby pub.

The details of the Caltongate Master Plan can be found [here](#).

Aerial Image courtesy of RCHAMS