

Edinburgh Council to licence short term lets

The City of Edinburgh Council decided today to take steps to cracking down on Airbnbs and other short term lets in the capital.

In the last five years there has been a significant rise in short term let (STL) properties in Edinburgh, particularly using the Airbnb platform.

According to council officers, more than a third of Scotland's STL properties are believed to be in the capital, particularly in Leith and the city centre, causing shortages in the property market and forcing residents out of their communities.

This has led to the council to propose a citywide "control area" – where property owners must acquire planning permission to operate an STL.

At a meeting of the council's planning committee on Wednesday, councillors voted to launch a consultation for the city's residents on the scope of the proposed control zone, with the results set to be reported back to the council, before a final proposal is sent to Scottish Government ministers.

Previously, it was thought too costly to crackdown on short term lets but now council officers believe planning and licensing fees can be used to cover enforcement costs.

During the process, council officers and elected members will be able to determine whether a short term let is suitable

based on density, residential amenity and housing shortages in the area.

The control area would be citywide, as opposed to focussing on the city centre and Leith, where the majority of STLs are situated, because of fears this would lead to a high concentration of STLs in neighbouring areas.

Under the proposals, if a home has been continually operated as an STL for more than 10 years before a STL control area is designated and no enforcement action has been taken during that time, planning permission would not be required.

Renting out a room in your house or letting your property while on holiday would also still be allowed even if Edinburgh becomes an STL control zone.

Separately, the Scottish Government is currently consulting on legislation to introduce a licensing scheme for STL operators.

According to PLACE, a grassroots network of Edinburgh residents fighting back against short term lets, those who remain in areas with high concentrations of holiday lets are faced with antisocial behaviour, increased rent, and the dissolution of their communities.

A spokesperson for PLACE said: "Neighbours of short-term lets are almost guaranteed to experience anti-social behaviour from customers.

"Alcohol is a regular contributing factor which makes these situations particularly unpredictable and intimidating to deal with.

"Members of the PLACE network regularly describe issues relating to waste disposal, parking issues, noise, people returning late at night or arriving early in the morning, customers ringing the wrong doorbells or trying to enter the wrong doors, banging on doors, setting off fire alarms,

barking dogs when animals are not allowed, friends of “guests” attending the property, parties, over-occupation, verbal abuse, damage to property, intoxication, intrusion into private space, drinking and smoking in communal spaces, and tampering with residents’ property.”

The decision has been met with dismay by an industry body which represents STL owners.

Fiona Campbell, chief executive officer of the Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers, said: “Edinburgh Council’s draft proposals for a short-term let control zone covering the entire city are wholly disproportionate and lack an empirical evidence base to substantiate claims that such accommodation has reduced housing stock.

“Furthermore, their proposals appear to rely on pre-pandemic listings from one online platform only and this does not provide an accurate reflection of the situation.

“Self-catering properties have been a long-standing presence in the capital for decades, enhancing the tourist offering and boosting the local economy, and should not be used as a convenient scapegoat for policy failures elsewhere.

“Communities are being hoodwinked into believing that regulating short-term lets out of existence will act as a panacea when in reality, we have failed to build enough affordable homes or bring large numbers of empty properties back into use.

“Last year, self-catering generated £50 million for Edinburgh’s economy. For a city that is renowned for its hospitality, it is very disappointing that local policymakers are looking to solve multifaceted housing challenges in Edinburgh by concentrating on tourist accommodation and damaging small businesses in the process.

“The ASSC looks forward to supplying evidence to the upcoming

consultation by the Council and highlighting the need for balanced, targeted and proportionate regulation for the benefit of all concerned stakeholders in the city.”

by Joseph Anderson Local Democracy Reporter

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency : funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.