

Students to protest about lack of affordable places to stay in the capital

Furious students are set to protest against the lack of affordable accommodation available to them in Edinburgh.

Edinburgh University's Students' Association have filed an application with the council's licensing board to hold a march through the city's Old Town.

Initially due to take place at the beginning of February, the group has postponed the event due to uncertainty around Covid-19, but say they will announce an alternative date for the rally "later in the academic semester".

The demonstration, which will start from Bristo Square and finish outside The Scottish Parliament, will aim to highlight the "availability, quality and cost of housing available to Edinburgh Students".

The City of Edinburgh Council has granted permission for many new student developments in recent years to handle an influx of people from all over the world enrolling at the city's colleges and universities.

Around 130 per 1000 people in Edinburgh are in higher education – the second highest rate of any UK city – with this figure projected to rise over the next decade.

Figures released by the local authority in 2020 revealed there

are 30,000 student beds in nearly 100 different establishments.

Since then, the council has received a further ten applications for new student housing developments, including one to convert the former Tynecastle High School into a 545-bed block and one to build 153 luxury student apartments at Haymarket Yards – which planners approved last week.

So while there is no shortage of rooms to be had, the protest will focus on the **affordability** of student accommodation in Edinburgh.

Research by Oxford Royale named the capital as the fourth most expensive UK city to study in, with the cost of housing averaging at £159 per week. Furthermore, international accommodation provider UniAcco advises Edinburgh students need a monthly budget of £1,200 (not including tuition fees) to 'live comfortably'.

Edinburgh University's Students' Association estimate that between 25 and 70 people will participate in the protest, with eight stewards attending to ensure the demonstration is peaceful and in line with council guidelines.

From Bristo Square, protesters will march across George IV Bridge, along the Royal Mile, Canongate and will come to a stop outside The Scottish Parliament.

A report to members of the Licensing Sub-Committee noted that the council has "limited powers available" regarding the control of marches, however any making use of the Royal Mile are required to be considered by the committee.

City of Edinburgh Council's Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Convener, Cllr Kate Campbell, said: "Rents are just too high in Edinburgh. We agree with this, that's why we're taking so many different steps to try to make housing more affordable. But it is really challenging, and I totally

appreciate how much this impacts on students, alongside all residents who just want a home they can afford.

“One of the issues is the loss of homes to Short Term Lets and we’ve been at the forefront of pressuring the Scottish Government to change the law so that we can regulate them. These changes are happening and we hope that will see many holiday lets return to use a full time homes.

“The Scottish Government are currently consulting on the private rented sector, including rent controls. I personally want to see Edinburgh at the forefront of this change in legislation too, and I will be working towards making Edinburgh the first city in Scotland to implement rent controls.

“We’ve also put forward a local development plan that recommends an increase in the percentage of affordable housing on any new development from 25 per cent to 35 per cent. And of course we have ambitious plans to build 20,000 homes over ten years to increase the number of social and mid-market homes in the city.

“I hope together these actions will start to effect positive changes that make our city more affordable for everyone who wants to live here.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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