

# **Planners refuse permission for flats on St Crispin's site**

**Plans to demolish a former Edinburgh school and build nearly 50 flats in its place have been thrown out by councillors following a wave of objections.**

The decision came after more than 160 local residents opposed the application submitted by CALA Homes to redevelop St Crispin's School site on Watertoun Road. The school is moving into its new building just after half-term.

Neighbours said the proposed development – 49 units made up of 23 three-storey town-houses and three and four-storey blocks – would be “too dense” and complained the apartments would obstruct sunlight to their properties.

And with just 32 parking spaces available to new residents, it was also argued approval of plans would lead to increased traffic and parking issues on Watertoun Road.

Concerns were raised by users of the adjacent West Mains Allotments that existing problems with drainage from the site would leave some plant beds – as well as some nearby properties – at a higher risk of flooding.

Letters urging the council to reject plans were sent by local MP Ian Murray, ward councillors for the area Alison Dickie and Steve Burgess as well as Grange/Prestonfield Community

Council.

Staff and pupils at the additional needs school vacated the building in Blackford at the end of last week as they prepare to move to new premises built on the former site of Burdiehouse Primary.

In its application, CALA said the old site's redevelopment is "appropriate to the immediate site conditions and the surrounding residential neighbourhood".

Planning officers recommended that members of The City of Edinburgh Council's Development Management Sub-Committee granted planning permission, stating that there would be "no unacceptable impacts on residential amenity, road safety or flooding prevention", adding: "Mitigation will be provided to offset the impact on trees and biodiversity".

Conservative councillor Cameron Rose noted there was "quite a lot of local feeling about this".

He said: "160-odd objections to this, and the objections relate to the overlooking, the daylighting and the change in the character, the density – and changes in the density – of the development that's proposed.

"There's quite a bit of impact on one side in particular and there are also concerns about the drainage arrangements and the impact on the allotments nearby."

Cllr Alex Staniforth said: "I'd bring up not just the number of objections but the fact that we have objections from one of the local councillors, from the local MP and from the community council. It seems to me that when you have objections from people like that, it does behove us to hear their objections."

Addressing concerns about potential flooding issues, council planning Officer Alex Gudgeon said: "It's not [the

developer's] responsibility to alleviate existing issues on other sites.

"They're absolutely required to make sure they alleviate issues on their own site and also making sure they're not exacerbating issues in any neighbouring sites."

He added that flooding engineers implied that the impact of the works would provide a "25 per cent improvement over the existing situation" and would "have a significant improvement on all of the neighbouring sites on each side of it".

Cllr Rose pushed for a hearing on the application, saying the complexities of the site are "considerable on a number of different fronts".

He added: "I think there are issues with car parking and if you read the 160-odd representations which there are, many of them relate to an insufficiency of car parking in this location causing problems nearby.

The committee was tied four votes to four over whether to make an immediate decision on the plans or request a hearing, giving convenor Neil Gardiner the casting vote.

Cllr Gardiner voted in favour of determining the application and said: "I think we should make a decision today.

"There's always a balance in planning applications and I think the balance in this one is that it meets the criteria and the flooding issue which I was concerned about in terms of the allotments, I understand that the applicant is willing to engage with allotmentees.

"I think there's enough reasons to approve the scheme, it may not be everyone's cup of tea and it might not be perfect but we do need more houses, this is an urban site and there is a net betterment on the flooding issue."

He accepted there would be "some impact on lighting" to

neighbouring properties however added this would be “limited”.

Urging the committee to refuse the application, Cllr Rose said the three-storey block would obstruct houses to west of the site, adding: “They have been there for a long time and it will be a deterioration on their outlook. The land slopes down to their houses and so these three storey houses will be towering over them.

“The allotments have been there for a long time. There are measures we are told are satisfactory but they don’t include all the measures I thought had been agreed.”

Going to a final vote, the committee decided five votes to three in favour of refusing planning permission.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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