

Growing campaign to oppose Gorgie student flats

A community campaign opposes the building of a student accommodation block on Westfield Road in Gorgie opposite the Sainsbury's store. The campaigners say their campaign is gathering steam as residents log objections against the proposed build on The City of Edinburgh Council's planning portal.

At present there are 28 objections currently registered and so far no comments of support.

Planning [permission](#) is being sought from the council to build a new 289-bed block of student accommodation on a former office site in Gorgie at 36 to 44 Westfield Road. The [site](#) is located just a few hundred metres from another 400-bed student development, due to open in September 2022.

Community housing activist and former councillor, Ashley Graczyk, has joined forces with tenants' union Living Rent to campaign against the new development. Ms Graczyk successfully led campaigns to oppose all-student residences in Gorgie and Dalry during her tenure as councillor for the Sighthill-Gorgie ward.

She said: "The situation is now spiralling completely out of control and Edinburgh Council need to get a handle on this. A

400-bed student megablock has just been built on this very street. It is outrageous to propose building another 300 student beds a stone's throw away. We need to build social and affordable housing for local people."

The campaigners point out that development already under construction has permanently changed the demographics of the local area, increasing the proportion of the student population in the local area from 11% to 43%. The addition of a further 300 student beds would take this percentage to 56%, or well over half of the total community. They say that this is a completely unsustainable proposition and that since students do not pay Council Tax, it will place a massive additional strain on essential local services such as doctor's surgeries and transport without any additional resources.



Ashley Graczyk continued: "The reality is that cynical developers simply want to exploit this community for their own private gain. I'm calling on Edinburgh Council to start enforcing their own policies and protect the balance of our

communities. They should be approving applications for the social housing so sorely needed in our community, not lining the pockets of millionaires living in Monaco”

According to Ms Graczyk’s enquiries the applicant, McKay Limited, is a company owned by former car dealer turned property developer, Iain Dewar, who gives his residential address on Companies House records as Monaco.

Ms Graczyk previously championed the case of local pensioner Anna, 67, who was served with an eviction notice from her cottage located on the site. She had failed to secure alternative accommodation despite making over 70 housing applications. Ms Graczyk describes the developer’s approach as “heartless”. The timeline for the eviction was extended after local media reported on her plight.

The local Gorgie branch of tenant’s union Living Rent is also highly critical of the proposals for an additional all-student residence in the area.

A spokesperson for Living Rent said: “Anna being kicked out of her home and community for purpose-built student accommodation demonstrates what members of Living Rent have known for some time, that the levels of Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) are at crisis point, and is forcing residents of communities away from their homes, jobs and lives. Students need better options as well as PBSA is often extremely expensive and out of reach of most students. Competition for rental properties is extremely high and PBSA occupies space we could use for affordable housing for all the community.

The campaigners say that Gorgie/Dalry has the fourth highest number of student beds, and over the past decade, planning permission has been obtained for more than 1,000 student units. In that same period, the local population has doubled, but only 85 affordable homes have been built.

Ms Graczyk said: “Local residents have had enough, we need our

communities back. The City of Edinburgh Council has to start putting residents' needs before that of big-money developers. We call on them to stand up to the developers; to find Anna a suitable place to live; to pledge to halt the building of yet more PBSAs, and to commit to more social housing in Gorgie/Dalry and throughout Edinburgh."

Documents registered at Companies House show a security in favour of Tiger Developments the company which was at one stage involved in obtaining planning permission for The Haymarket, a £350 million development next to Haymarket Station.

The proposal for the site at 36-44 Westfield Road is open for comment [HERE](#) on Edinburgh Council's planning portal until Tuesday 21 June.



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