

Park and ride at Kirknewton railway station to be appealed

Plans to create a commuter park-and-ride site on green fields near a village railway station may yet go ahead despite being thrown out by the local council over safety fears.

Stirling Developments have appealed to The Scottish Government to overturn West Lothian's rejection of their plan for a 50 space car park near Kirknewton railway station.

Stirling Developments are building the Calderwood Core Development Area in East Calder, and Kirknewton – just over two miles south – is the nearest railway station. Four attempts have already been made to produce viable park and ride plans, but all have either been rejected by councillors or failed to make it off the drawing board.

The latest plan – much reduced from earlier proposals to only 50 spaces- foundered earlier this year because no safe pathway could be made connecting the station to the car park site in what is an open field a few hundred yards away.

The site is bounded by a dangerous road junction and a narrow but busy B-road, including a level crossing alongside the Victorian station.

The A71 into Edinburgh is already busy with commuter traffic.

Many of the new home owners already living in Calderwood have come from Edinburgh and commute into the city, and there were letters of support for the park and ride from Calderwood. Villagers claimed that newsletters by the developers suggested that the future build-out of Calderwood would not be viable if the Kirknewton facility did not go ahead.

A park and ride was a condition of the original consent for the Calderwood Development which will eventually see 2,300 homes on the eastern fringe of East Calder. While the plans have been developed Stirling has been running buses from Calderwood to the station for commuters.

More than 90 objections to the park and ride plans were raised by Kirknewton residents and the local community council however.

The July meeting of the Development Management Committee was given notice that an appeal had been submitted to the Scottish Government's Division of Planning and Environmental Appeals, DPEA.

Already this year several high profile planning applications have won on appeal to the DPEA. July's meeting of the DMC was also given formal notification of the controversial plans to extend the Glen Turner Distillery building an additional 23 maturation warehouses on its site between Bathgate and Livingston had been approved by the DPEA despite comprehensive rejection by West Lothian councillors.

If the DPEA finds in favour of the plan the council would face hefty legal costs to challenge it.

Stirling had worked with planning officers, tweaking the proposals to make safer footpaths but, crucially, nothing could be done with the most dangerous and narrowest 45 metres of pavement, still leaving the footpath as narrow as 4ft – barely wide enough for two people to pass each other – in places. Only 60m of pavement could be improved.

Councillors on the DMC also fretted about the future. Only 900 homes have been built in Calderwood so far. Tom Kerr, the then Provost, speaking at the meeting which rejected the proposal, warned a park and ride could never be big enough whether it was for 50 cars or 500.

Villagers argued that adequate park and ride facilities exist at neighbouring stations including Livingston South – four miles and a ten-minute drive from East Calder. The Kirknewton site would also generate more short journey car traffic other Government policies are determined to discourage.

Linlithgow Councillor Tom Conn was critical of Network Rail's refusal to engage with the developers to find a solution. The company, which manages the railway infrastructure, is determined to retain part of the site at Kirknewton station as a maintenance yard. Councillor Conn argued that the yard could be incorporated into the existing station car park.

A decision on the appeal is expected before the end of the year.

**by Stuart Somerville Local
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