

Permission for new chapel refused due to 'poor design'

A religious group's bid to build a new chapel in the garden of its existing place of worship in Edinburgh has failed after the council ruled part of it was poorly designed.

The Christian Community had hoped to get the go-ahead for the contemporary chapel in Merchiston after planning permission in principle was granted back in 2020.

The City of Edinburgh Council praised the proposed new church in the garden of the detached Victorian villa at 21 Napier Road – where the esoteric Christian group is already based – as having a “modern appearance”.

However it said plans for a two-storey building with priest's accommodation, offices and a community hall attached to it were “jarring and incongruous” with the appearance of a ‘conventional new build dwelling house’.



A refusal by planners led to the applicant lodging an appeal, which was considered by the council's Local Review Body on Wednesday.

The local authority received no letters of support and 35 objections in response. They ranged from neighbours' concerns about the existing place of worship being sold-off to an increase in traffic and parking problems in the area.

One said: "The revised plans show the design of the proposed new block to be of poor quality, and completely out of keeping with the remainder of the houses in Napier Road – which are mainly unaltered and retain the integrity of their garden areas."

Another added: "This land will be sold off to finance the new build and this will undoubtedly lead to more over-development of the site."

And writing on behalf of Merchiston Community Council, Dr Mairianna Clyde said: "Whilst the proposed church building exemplifies innovation in the local context with its unusual curved and sweeping roof line, timber materials and sedum roof, which blends with the context of the wild, informal, free-form wooded garden of 21 Napier Road, it does not relate sensitively to the Victorian villas in the surrounding streetscape."

She added: "The design of the accommodation and offices block is poor. The façade facing on to the street pertains to be of a traditional character yet it affords little visual interest and its blandness renders it out of character with surrounding area.

"Neither does it complement the design of the church. There is a visual disjunction in the contrast of styles which does not lend balance or coherence to the overall development."

In a letter submitted to the council the Christian Community hit back at neighbour's criticism of 'cheap looking' cladding proposed on the building.

The group said it was "strange coming from neighbours who have received planning consent to clad part of their building in charred timber cladding" which it said is "one of the cheaper ways to clad a building."

It added: "We therefore again ask the Appeals Committee to overturn our refusal and grant permission for the proposal."

Despite the plea, councillors unanimously voted to uphold planning officers' original decision.

Cllr Neil Gardiner, former convener of the planning committee, told the LRB: "I agree the design could be improved, it's not as good as it might be.

"The principle is decided that this garden is big enough to

hold a building, but this particular design isn't the right one and there's two elements to it: there's the chapel and the house that has meeting rooms on the ground floor and they did seem to just not work together.

"There's room to come back again with another application and make it better."

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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Proposals for this building were refused by the council