

Student flats decision overturned in Newington

Developers won a planning appeal meaning that more student flats will be built in an area of Edinburgh where there are already fears it is already ‘excessively concentrated’ with university accommodation.

S Harrison Developments took its case to The Scottish Government after plans for a new 64-bedroom block in Newington were thrown out by councillors.

The site on East Newington Place – which sits directly beside existing flats for Edinburgh University students and is within a short walking distance from other halls of residence – is currently occupied by old garages which are set to be demolished as work begins.

In March an Edinburgh City Council planning sub-committee unanimously refused permission for the four-storey building, as members agreed it could result in an ‘excessive concentration of student accommodation’ locally.

The decision came despite officials advising councillors to give plans the go-ahead, with a report stating in areas where students make up over half the population there is “greater potential imbalance within the community”, but adding this is “very difficult” to measure.

“The council’s only real source of information of where students live (outwith purpose built accommodation) is from the 2011 census which is now over 10 years old,” it said.

“An analysis of data zones within 800 metres of the site indicate that students made up 46% of the resident population of these areas in 2011. If consented student housing schemes, since 2011, are added to these figures then students currently make up a maximum of 50% of the population of areas within a 10 minute walk of the application site.”

As part of its appeal the developer carried out its own research and claimed students make up around 47.4 per cent of the local population, rising by a further 0.15% per cent under the plans for East Newington Place.

Southside Community Council filed an objection with the Scottish Government soon after the planning appeal was lodged.

The group’s secretary Stephen Rodger said: “The local area has a very high student population, as indicated in the 2011 census. Taking the Southside and Newington Community council area overall, the student population was standing at 59%, over the 50% threshold, and many smaller areas within that had proportions over 70%.

“This was before the construction of further purpose built student accommodation in the area which will have only increased it.

“As to the claim that this would only add a small number of student residents to the local area, we don’t think this is relevant to whether the development should be approved.

“There is already an oversaturation of students in the local area, and while this particular development may not add many more accommodation units as a proportion it doesn’t change the point of principle that additional student accommodation should not be built in areas where the student population is

already so high. It would also remove a potential brown field site that could be developed for non-student housing.”

However, Government planning reporter Trevor A Croft was unconvinced and overturned councillors’ earlier decision.

He wrote: “Overall I consider there to be significant advantages in locating dedicated student accommodation with appropriate access to the University.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

