

The pros and cons of student flats at Jock's Lodge

A public meeting was held last week when a planning application for student flats at Jock's Lodge was the main topic of discussion.

The campaign group, Save Jock's Lodge, came to a conclusion with most people saying they are against the student flats development by developers Alumno – who have responded below.

The meeting attracted around 100 local people to express their concerns about the plans to demolish the Willow pub and the other businesses at Jock's Lodge to make way for the flats. The numbers swelled and the meeting had to be moved to the biggest hall in Northfield Community Centre.

Cllr Danny Aston set out the Save Jock's Lodge campaign's likely grounds for objecting. He explained the overconcentration of student accommodation in the area, the impact on the historic listed buildings at the crossroads, what he considers the excessive height of the planned student block, and the damage it will do to Jock's Lodge (the closest the area has to a high street) by removing a pub and other local businesses. He also highlighted transport concerns with a major development being built at the busy junction.

Cllr Aston listed the eight student accommodation developments already within a mile of Jock's Lodge which are already built or have planning permission and which will provide over 1,800 student bedrooms. The audience was shocked to hear that this development would bring that number to more than 2,000.

Another member of the Save Jock's Lodge committee read out a written statement from the developer Alumno, who the campaign group said had been invited, but who were unable to attend.

The developers indicated that they have received a lot of feedback from local residents from their consultation and would probably revise their design to lower the height slightly, from seven storeys to six.

There were many questions from the floor asking how best to oppose the plans, how to get involved in the campaign and whether a positive counter vision of the site could be put together, led by local people. Many local people signed up at the end of the meeting, volunteering their time and expertise, including one architect.

Two other local councillors, Joan Griffiths and Iain Whyte, also attended the meeting, contributing their experience on the planning process but not expressing a view on this application. (If a councillor says they support or oppose an application ahead of it being considered at committee, they are then not allowed to take part in making a decision on it.)

Cllr Aston said: "It was a really huge turnout of local people. It clearly shows that there are very strong concerns in the area about this proposal. It's a shame Alumno weren't able to make it as they would have heard those concerns loud and clear and they would have been there to answer some of the many questions the community have.

"There was enormous positivity in the room alongside those concerns. There are lots of ideas about the positive changes that could be made to Jock's Lodge, keeping what's best about it and improving it in a way that really benefits the local area. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with Save Jock's Lodge campaign to flesh out those ideas."

THE CASE FROM ALUMNO

David Campbell of Alumno, the developers, said: “We would have liked to have attended the meeting on Jock’s Lodge on Monday, but were only invited at 5pm the previous Thursday. It therefore presented a challenge to attend this given the extremely short notice provided.

“By way of an update on the development, we are looking to make a number of positive revisions to the proposals, including lowering the height/massing of the building in response to the community feedback. These design changes are now progressing and we will feedback on this in due course.

“We thought it also worthwhile to reflect on a number of issues, including the above, and address some of the local disinformation.”

The Willow

Mr Campbell continued: “We are aware of media reports relating to the closure of The Willow, but would like to reiterate that prior to taking on a temporary management agreement of the pub, the current operators were advised of the planned sale and of their limited tenure and opted to take it on that basis while the negotiations to redevelop the site were finalised. They currently operate on a very minimum rent/utility-free basis.

“As owners, The Heineken Group have been liaising and working with the operators to find them an alternative pub to run and we understand this is now progressing in a meaningful and cooperative way. The Willow will continue to trade as normal in the meantime.

“Alumno’s plans are to create a new community local pub in place of the neighbouring Limelite, which will have the same ownership, but will be enhanced and will provide continuity

and a pub for the community to come together and socialise in. The Limelite owners have high aspirations for refreshed and improved facilities, which are to include gourmet food and a beer garden,

“It should be recognised that the existing local businesses on the site all agreed to the sale and are committed to this as the current facilities are not sustainable. Indeed, we understand one of the units was under a recent police investigation. Neighbouring businesses (namely the snooker hall) have indeed welcomed the proposals and the increase in revenue it may bring.”

Student accommodation

The main objection of the campaign is that part of the development will comprise student flats. Mr Campbell explained: “We have noted concerns relating to there being an overconcentration of student accommodation in the area and that should this site be developed it should be for social, not student housing.

“The constraints of what is a tight site, the open space/amenity requirements, together with likely car parking and cycle standards required by City of Edinburgh Council for mainstream residential proposals, would likely make this site difficult to deliver for that purpose.

“Edinburgh is a university city, and the number of students in Higher Education has risen by almost a third since the start of the century to more than 69,500 in 2020/2021.

“Council guidance points to the delivery of purpose-built student accommodation to accommodate an increasing student population, serving to free up much-needed homes for families who would either be currently occupying these or potentially occupy these in future.

“Overall, there is not a significant number of new purpose-built student accommodation in this area when set against an Edinburgh context, and the supply and demand dynamics of the city.

“If approved, the eight developments that are within a mile radius of the site (including Jock’s Lodge), will amount to 1,663 bedrooms, not the “more than 2000” as highlighted in the media. The first of these developments had planning granted in December 2013.

“Given a total resident population of 39,544, from the 2021 National Records of Scotland Small Area Population, this gives a student population of 4.3 per cent in purpose-built accommodation in that location. Combined with other students i.e. those not living in purpose-built accommodation, this results in a total of 3,520 students or 8.9 per cent of the population.

“In addition, if approved, the number of full-time students living in the Craigentenny/ Duddingston ward (in which the Jock’s Lodge site sits) will only rise to 10.1 per cent of the resident population if all of the accommodation that is currently in use, has been approved, or is at application stage, is delivered.

“This level would still be significantly lower than the proportions of full-time students living in the Southside/Newington, City Centre, Meadows/Morningside and Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart wards.

“It is also anticipated that spending in the local area by the students living at the Jock’s Lodge development is estimated to be more than £875,000 per year, and at its peak it is estimated that the site will employ a workforce of up to 40.

“We are working on an updated economic study to highlight the micro and macro benefits the scheme will bring and we remain open to discussing other local benefits that the scheme could

contribute towards and are committed to being a good neighbour.”



Artist's impression of the junction at Jock's Lodge with the new flats on the left.