

Council likely to approve City Plan 2030 before submission to Scottish Ministers

Claims that plans to build 37,000 new homes in Edinburgh over the next decade are unrealistic have been played-down by the council as it prepares to submit its blueprint for future development to The Scottish Government.

'City Plan 2030' sets out how land will be used to meet "ambitious" housing targets, reduce carbon emissions and expand public services and infrastructure to meet the needs of the city's growing population.

The 200-page report, which the council's planning convener called "a mammoth bit of policy" will replace the 2016 Local Development Plan (LDP) and will be debated again by councillors this week before it is sent to Scottish ministers for examination.

If approved, the plan will introduce a raft of new planning policies aimed at tackling Edinburgh's affordable housing crisis by cracking down on short-term lets and student developments, improving active travel links and ensuring developers work sustainably to build energy efficient homes as part of the council's 2030 net zero strategy.

A key commitment is to deliver 37,000 new homes across 117 sites in the next 10 years, with around 47 per cent of those affordable homes. Under City Plan 2030, developers seeking planning permission will be required to commit to making 35 per cent of all properties built affordable, which is an increase of 10 per cent.

And whilst the local authority remains confident it can meet this target, doubt has been cast over whether tens of thousands of new homes are realistically deliverable by 2032.

A recent study by planning consultancy Lichfields suggested that in Edinburgh there is an average period of two to three years between planning permission being granted and residents moving in with the length of time increasing with the size of a development.

The report also claimed that many of the sites earmarked by the council for new housing would face difficulties getting planning consent in time for the proposed completion date. It added this means there will be a “significant shortfall in homes against the housing land requirement identified”.

In light of the study, Nicola Woodward, head of Lichfields’s Edinburgh office, called on council planners to “be more realistic about delivery assumptions.”

But The City of Edinburgh Council played down the concerns and said it can’t propose a plan that won’t deliver.

Planning Convener Cllr James Dalglish said: “I desperately hope we will be able to meet these targets, because at the end of the day it’s homes for people. It’s a roof for someone to put over their head. So we’re going to try as hard as we can and I am confident we will be able to meet those targets.

“Edinburgh needs as much housing as we can deliver to help alleviate the housing crisis and to get people into good quality homes.

“They’re ambitious numbers but that’s what we need, a bit of ambition to get stuff moving in the right direction. You can’t make false promises when it comes to planning policy and the City Plan, you have to be credible, legitimate targets that we put in front of us.”

GREENBELT CHALLENGES

Another of the key promises contained within the plan – to protect the city’s green belt from any development – has also been met with challenge.

According to analysis by 4 Consulting, commissioned by the Edinburgh-based Holder Planning, the commitment to build new housing only on brownfield sites could displace up to 400 businesses, lead to the loss of over 3,000 jobs and cost the city’s economy £2.6 billion over the next decade.

The study also warned that land used by businesses could be reallocated for housing through the use of compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) and added the impacts are “likely to be most pronounced in the more deprived areas of Edinburgh, which are more reliant on the industrial and manufacturing jobs provided by the businesses which would be displaced”.

But the council insisted this research didn’t consider all elements of City Plan 2030 which it said was about making best use of sites in the city through development of mixed uses as opposed to changing designated employment sites to housing. It added CPOs are only used in specific circumstances and the council has no plans to use them ‘routinely.’

Cllr Dalglish said: “At the end of the day there’s been research done into this and we don’t see the urgent need to start working on the greenbelt and it’s a commitment from myself and the administration – and the various other political parties – that we don’t want to be going on the greenbelt.

“With such a big plan no one’s going to be 100 per cent happy but it’s about trying to listen to those concerns, act on them and try provide a plan that’s best for the city.”

As well as raising the minimum proportion of affordable new builds, plans for student housing on any site bigger than 0.25 hectares (around half the size of a standard football pitch) will have to comprise of at least 50 per cent residential housing. But the council said this will not apply in “self-contained campus locations”.

“With City Plan we’re getting a much better balance, we fully expect as a big city and the capital of Scotland that we’ll need to welcome students and we have some great universities here but at the same time we’ve got a real need for more housing,” Cllr Dalglish said.

CRACKDOWN ON SHORT TERM LETS

In addition the council will introduce tougher rules on short-term letting by way of a new planning policy which states that any proposals will not be permitted, which would “result in the loss of residential dwellings through demolition or a change of use” unless in “exceptional circumstances.”

It is hoped this will prevent more housing stock in Edinburgh being sacrificed for short-term lets (STL) of which it is estimated there are now 10,000 in the capital. From April next year, anyone operating a STL will need to apply for change of use of properties as part of a new licensing scheme being launched by the council. Hundreds of planning applications seeking approval of holiday lets in advance of the crackdown have already been refused.

The planning convener said it will help to “balance out communities.”

He added: “It’s a change going from having very little policy

and powers in terms of short term lets to being able to implement planning permission and licence policies – it's a big change and as a council we've had to adapt to that.

“The powers we've had from the Scottish Government – albeit not exactly the powers we would have wanted – are welcome.

“There is of course always going to be issues in setting up these big policies but we're working hard to make sure we get a fair and balanced approach.”

TRANSPORT AND THE 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Changes to the city's transport system to reduce congestion and increase bus, tram and train patronage whilst creating more active travel routes to encourage more walking, wheeling and cycling is a core part of the new City Plan.

Integral to this – and the wider goal to drive down carbon emissions – is delivering a “network of 20-minute walkable neighbourhoods.”

“This means you can get all the services that you would need within walking in a 20-minute radius of your neighbourhood,” Councillor Dalgleish explained.

“If you're walking, wheeling or cycling to work or somewhere in your neighbourhood that's much better than taking a car.

“Fundamentally, the plan wants Edinburgh to be net zero by 2030 and some of that will feed into active travel.”

He added: “I personally hope we'll have a better tram integrated system with our buses and hope we have buses and trams that are the most environmentally clean and safe.”

He said the 10-year transport plan will be about “connecting the dots” and creating a system that is more integrated.

“It’s just trying to think of new and innovative ways to get everything joined together and also to keep disruption for residents, especially businesses, at a minimum,” he added.

And Cllr Dalglish – who has been planning convener since he was first elected to the council in May – recognised significant investment in local infrastructure will be essential if the city is to welcome tens of thousands of new residents in the next decade.

He said: “We have all these plans – but the question is if we’re building new housing do we have a school for the children to go to, or a hospital to take care of elderly residents.

“So we’ve put in a lot of thought to asking if we’re going to expand stuff, do we have the infrastructure to support that expansion? That’s where developer contributions and all the rest come into it.”

The Planning Committee will meet to debate [City Plan 2030](#) on Wednesday and it is anticipated councillors will vote to submit it to the Scottish Government for examination.

by Donald Turvill

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City Plan 2030

Proposed plan

September 2021



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