

Council approves holiday flats in city centre

The City of Edinburgh Council has approved planning applications for 20 new AirBnB-style holiday flats in the city centre, despite a pledge to limit the number of short-term lets in the capital.

Councillors granted permission to convert a former New Town language school into tourist accommodation at a meeting on Wednesday – without any debate about the proposals.

The planning sub-committee approved change of use of two adjoining townhouses on Albyn Place, which was occupied by Kaplan International Languages until the school moved into a new building on St Andrew Square last year.

The former classrooms and offices will be turned into a block of short-term lets (STLs), the proliferation of which is often blamed in part for the city's housing shortage.

The Labour group, which runs the local authority as a minority administration, promised in its 2022 manifesto to “limit the numbers of short-term lets”.

New powers allow the council to refuse holiday let applications in cases where there would be loss of existing housing or neighbours could be disturbed. However, neither policies were relevant to the Albyn Place application.

Officials said the plans would “preserve the special

architectural and historic interest” of the listed Georgian building.

But the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland took a different view, and said in an objection sent to the council the proposals “constitute over-development”.

The letter added: “The council’s guidance is clear that there should not be more than one flat per floor in a townhouse conversion. A lighter touch would have less impact on the fabric of the building.

“We believe that the proposals would result in unnecessary damage to the listed building.”

And residents also opposed the scheme, questioning how the plans matched up with the authority’s pledge to crack down on STLs.

One said: “This proposal flies in the face of ECC’s stated aim of reducing the extent of tourist accommodation in the city centre.

“This is a quiet residential neighbourhood where buildings back onto a square which accommodates Wemyss Place Mews. The proposal, with rear access to two of the units and, in effect, 24 hour access to car parking will result in an enormous increase in noise, which is funnelled upwards and magnified by surrounding buildings.”

Another added: “I find it hard to understand why this application is being made, considering the council’s purported objection to so many AirBnBs, and this proposal for short term lets is the same except in name.”

by Donald Turvill

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Buildings on Albyn Place