

Jock's Lodge business owners say they have agreed to sell up to developer

The proposed development at Jock's Lodge which will involve the demolition of existing buildings and their replacement by a seven-storey building for student accommodation continues its journey through planning.

The [planning application](#) for a "Student accommodation development including ground floor retail /commercial space (use Classes 1, 2, 3 or 4) with associated access, landscaping, open space and drainage" is open until midnight on Friday night for comments.

If it is ever approved, current businesses including the Willow pub would of course have to move from their existing locations.

The Save Jock's Lodge campaign group opposes the plans for more student accommodation and the group set up a [petition](#) which has now been signed by 3,709 signatories to save the local businesses at Jocks Lodge, Smokey Brae and London Road. The campaign group stated on their [petition](#) page: "The rejuvenated street is thriving with "The Willow", a hot spot for local, students, families and tourists alike. In combination with the Ball Room, this area is an attractive and lucrative hub for the community." Campaigners also say there

are already 600 student flats in the vicinity and more are simply not needed.

Now the owners of businesses at Jock's Lodge have issued a statement on their current position.

"We write as owners of our relevant establishments on the Jock's Lodge site and we have noted recent media attention focusing on the loss of these premises to the community.

"It should be noted that we have all come to an agreement with Alumno to sell our properties as part of the site redevelopment, should planning permission be granted for its proposals. Clearly it is disappointing to note that we appear to be being used as a means to try and prevent the site from being developed, when we want to sell.

"For those of us who own commercial property on the site, it has been a challenging experience to operate and manage in this location, exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. Many of the tenants have changed hands a number of times over the years, and this demonstrates that it is not a sustainable location.

"Alumno has a strong track record of developing on similar sites across the UK and particularly on challenging sites, such as Jock's Lodge. The overall plans for the site will see the delivery of high-quality purpose-built student accommodation, including ground floor commercial space. The intention is that a new community 'local' food/drink use will be created in place of the neighbouring Limelite, which will have the same ownership, providing continuity and a venue for the community to come together and socialise in.

“The Limelite owners have high aspirations for refreshed and improved facilities, which will include gourmet food and an outside space.

“We hope that this clarifies our position and our support and desire to sell can be respected.”

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In a separate announcement Star Pubs & Bars stated: “Following a chequered and difficult trading history, and a detailed review of the sustainability of the Jocks Lodge pub, Star Pubs & Bars identified The Barrelhouse for disposal, in lieu of this agreement to sell and recognising the timeframes required to go through the planning process. It was agreed to let the pub for a limited tenure/timeframe and on a below market, minimum rent/discounted below market rent basis. This was all agreed with the current tenant (The Willow), and they understood fully this arrangement. This is not a viable long-term agreement.

“The Willow have agreed to relocate to Musselburgh and on a more sustainable longer-term arrangement.”

Local SNP councillor for the area, Danny Aston, who supports the Save Jock’s Lodge campaign, said: “Alumno conducted what they termed a ‘consultation exercise’ last year where they asked for views from local people. I suspect they didn’t like what they heard in response. They’ve made minimal, superficial changes to their application. They have not tackled the underlying concerns of the community, which forces me to conclude it was always nothing more than a PR stunt.

“For instance, the simple reality is that Alumno’s application would reduce the number of pubs on the site from two to one, and the number of other commercial units from five to one. This would gut the Jock’s Lodge ‘local centre’ – the closest that we have to a high street in this area, where people come for shopping, a meal and a drink. The pub now called the Willow has been operating as a popular family venue since 2017, initially as the Barrelhouse.

“I wish the tenants of the Willow pub all the best with their new bar in Musselburgh. They’re clearly talented hospitality

operators and will no doubt make their new premises a success too. But how that benefits Jock's Lodge or the people who use its amenities is a mystery to me. Evidently, this has always been about Alumno maximising their margins, with lip service paid to the local community.

“Local people still have until 23:59 on Friday 10 February to get their comment into the Council's planning team and make clear why we need to save Jock's Lodge.”

