

Student housing refused by planners at Jock's Lodge

Edinburgh councillors have voted to protect the Jock's Lodge site, refusing the application for student accommodation after local residents feared the development would "change the nature of the community".

A plan to build a 191-bed block with ground level commercial spaces attracted more than 1,000 objections. The application was thrown out after a three hour hearing at the City Chambers when locals, councillors and applicants all made their case.

Campaigners staged a rally before the meeting began on Wednesday morning and said afterwards they "had won the battle but not the war" as an appeal to The Scottish Government was now anticipated.

But a local councillor said developers "sound like they might be open to having a proper open and constructive dialogue with the local community".

The bid, which involved demolishing six "run down" commercial units – half of which are currently empty – was refused due to the height of the proposed seven-storey building and the impact on the setting. There were other concerns that the application did not comply with many planning rules.

The decision, backed by seven councillors to four, was arrived

at despite developers winning the support of council planners.

Applicants Alumno and local business owners argued that traders were struggling to survive in the area which was in need of “major modernisation”.

They disputed the opposition to the plans that the new flats would result in loss of the area’s ‘local centre’ – arguing they would instead secure its future.

The two bars on the site, Limelite and the Willow, plus Chennai’s Marina takeaway, would be knocked down under the proposals, however Limelite’s owners were offered an opportunity to move into a new bar and restaurant on the ground floor of the new development once it was built.

Planners said: “There are currently six commercial units on site and they would be replaced by one – but the one that is replacing the existing is considerably larger in floor space. It takes up the space of three of those units, so there’s a net loss in the number of units.

“But in terms of actual commercial frontage floorspace about half the space is lost.”

Jock’s Lodge was once home to a coaching inn as it was the first place to change horses on the Edinburgh to London stagecoach.

A report said the area “is recognised as a local landmark in Edinburgh’s historic landscape”.

It added: “Some of the existing buildings on the site date from the 19th century.”

The council’s archaeologist said the “complete demolition of the buildings as proposed would be regarded as having a significant archaeological and historic impact”.

Shane Donnellan, from the Save Jock’s Lodge campaign, said the

block would “overwhelm the junction” due to its height.

Another representative from the group, Kirsty Pattison, highlighted to the meeting the plans to build nearly 700 new homes nearby at Meadowbank. She said: “This new proposed build offers an exciting opportunity for the existing retail units at Jock’s Lodge.

“Given the number of new residents at the Meadowbank Development, as well as St Margaret’s House which is an other student accommodation, we believe that the destruction of these individual retail units will have a lasting and detrimental impact on the attractiveness of the area for future generations.”

Taking the opposite view, Limelite’s landlord Andy Currie expressed his “wholehearted support” for the application.

He said: “I know it will change our community, I know there are mixed views across our area but I also know our area and our current venue must change. And without that change Limelite will find it increasingly difficult to survive.

“Our community is changing and we need to change to meet local demands.”

Samantha Robertson, who owns a waxing salon at Jock’s Lodge, said: “I’ve run my businesses in the area for 15 years and have seen many changes and many businesses come and go in the dilapidated buildings.”

She welcomed the plans for a “beautiful, brand new building”.

She added: “Given the current housing crisis and many students not able to find accommodation, this is a very necessary and needed development.”

Agent for the developers Colin Lavety said: “The proposal not only represents a chance to contribute towards unmet need for student accommodation but also to redevelop an undefined

corner, providing a highly sustainable and well-designed development."

Architect Paul Stallan argued further that the current arrangement of buildings was a "layer cake of historical development".

He said the "unapologetically modern" student block would bring a "stylish and popular destination" to a street which was "not in a good shape" .

However none of the three local councillors for Craigentinny/Duddingston who attended the meeting offered their support for the application.

Cllr Iain Whyte said many residents living in the area had been in touch with fears the "nature of the community" would be changed.

He said: "I think the local community view, as expressed to me very directly, is that this probably isn't the right site for student accommodation."

SNP councillor Danny Aston said there was "no basis" to support claims the existing units were not fit for purpose.

He said: "The bottom line is that there are two pubs on the site now, there would be one. Both pubs are very different, both are doing very well.

"In the place of six commercial units – including the two pubs – there will only be the one pub and the common room of the student accommodation which doesn't contribute to the local area.

"We're talking about losing more than a third of the commercial floorspace."

The Greens' Alex Staniforth said: "If we create a very tall, imposing building on another corner here it takes away that

openness of this junction, so it destroys the character of the junction at Jock's Lodge.

"It takes away from that good city design of giving people a space that opens out and instead moves towards a development idea that tall buildings and tall buildings only are good for this area.

"It does not represent the character of this junction."

He added having a "liminal space where you can see" was "good for the mental health of the people living there".

Committee members agreed the application was "finely balanced" and that strong arguments were made on either side.

But convener Cllr Hal Osler said on balance it should be refused due to some "major concerns".

Cllr Chas Booth similarly said there were a "very significant number of problems" including the impact on setting, height of the development and impact on amenity.

Conservative councillor Tim Jones, one of the four councillors who voted to grant planning permission, said the proposals had been "well thought out".

He said: "I do think that this is an improvement on what is here and I would say that I've passed the site on a regular basis every day almost and the business units are dilapidated – it's been like that for a long time."

Cllr Aston said after the meeting that developers "sound like they might be open to having a proper open and constructive dialogue with the local community on this, rather than rushing straight to appeal, to reach a positive and collaborative future for Jock's Lodge that benefits people who live in the area".

He added: "If that is the case, I very much welcome that and

look forward to seeing what happens next.”

Jim Sneddon, from Save Jock’s Lodge, said: “I thought the arguments on both side were very good.

“I say we’ve won the battle but not the war because obviously it could be taken to appeal to the reporter at the Scottish Parliament.

“Or maybe there’s room for some exchange with the developer, the developer’s not wrong – the site is running down and work could be done to it.”



by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency. It is funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector (in Edinburgh that is Reach plc (the publisher behind Edinburgh Live and The Daily Record) and used by many qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover

news about top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.