

Plans to demolish block on Dundas Street approved

Plans to knock down a huge office block in Edinburgh's New Town and replaced flats refused earlier this year have now been granted permission, after a threat of legal action against the council led to the meeting being rerun.

Developers kicked off after a councillor did not recuse himself from the committee despite previously having declared an interest in the application, it is understood.

A fresh bid to demolish Centrum House on Dundas Street was lodged last year after initial proposals were thrown out by both the council and Scottish Government over concerns about the new 49-flat block blocking neighbours views and sunlight.

The planning sub-committee refused the revised scheme in May, however it came before councillors again on Wednesday.

Cllr Alys Mumford said: "I wonder if anyone could just clarify for myself and particularly for folk watching why we're hearing this again so soon when it's not a standard re-hearing?"

Committee clerk Jamie Macrae replied saying the council was "given notice of a potential legal challenge to the committee decision which was made in May".

He added: "It was concluded that it would mitigate the risk of challenge if we re-run the item but given the potential for legal challenge we can't comment further."

Sources claimed the application had to be reconsidered after Cllr Tim Jones, who when plans first came to committee in March said he had a "personal connection with one of the residents in the building next door" and would not take part, did not make the same declaration or recuse himself when they returned for a hearing and final decision two months later.

The debacle saw the original vote undone and planning permission granted – with one councillor commenting this was "unheard of" during their time in the City Chambers.

The committee was urged to refuse the proposals again over local residents' concerns about the scale of the development.

Speaking on behalf of Dundas Street and Fettes Row residents Chris Day said the new building would "dominate the neighbourhood for decades in a way the existing buildings don't".

Representing Anne Russello, an artist who lives next to the site, planning consultant Nicholas Morris said she "extensively works from home relying on natural light from the south elevation," adding: "The proposal will seriously impact on her ability to undertake her work from the current position.

"Furthermore Anne is suffering from a great deal of stress and anxiety as a result of the potential impact on her life, both during potential construction phase and also impact and design on her privacy, loss of amenity going forward."

Mr Morris stressed his client "is not a Nimby" and had previously "taught architecture to students".

An objection was also sent by heritage watchdog the Cockburn

Association which said: "The proposals are of limited quality and interest and represent a dated architectural archetype without a clear 'residential' character.

"In line with Edinburgh's vision to be carbon neutral by 2030, we believe that demolition and redevelopment is not an appropriate response on this site."

Local SNP councillor for Inverleith Vicky Nicolson added: "I've met and corresponded with a number of local residents regarding this development and many of whom feel from an amenity perspective the new development will create significant additional noise in construction and impact the outlook enjoyed for many years to come, especially as a building of this size on this site has not been known by residents.

"People have expressed that they feel the height and scale of the proposed development will have a significant impact on the street scape.

"Given the climate emergency and our net zero aspirations it is felt that the carbon dis-benefits of demolishing and rebuilding compared to refurbishing need to be reconsidered."

However Councillor Neil Gardiner, SNP, said there would have to be "very strong grounds" to justify refusing the application.

He said: "I do appreciate when we go to change in the city there will be consequences for some of our residents and that's unfortunate and they have my sympathy with any change

"The first time this came to committee I moved against, it last time I moved for it and I'm looking at it again through fresh eyes and I think taking the reporter's report into consideration I think the issues that he raised have been dealt with.

“On balance I feel that I need to support this application today because there’s always a balance on planning applications but I think there’s more good with this than moving against it.”

Labour’s Lezley Marion Cameron said the development would “deliver a well-managed, sustainable, well-designed, predominantly residential scheme”.

She added: “Like others, I appreciate development brings change and for those perhaps closest to it as we’ve heard this morning, there are effects around that. However we sit here as members of the planning committee and we have to look at applications that are in front of us in detail.

“I will be wholeheartedly supporting this application for all and everything that it brings.”

The committee granted planning permission by five votes to three.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.



