

Urgent need to replace public toilets in Gorgie

A failure by developers behind new offices and a hotel in Edinburgh's West End to replace public toilets demolished for the scheme has been called "an absolute scandal".

City councillors have called on the firm behind Haymarket Yards to honour a previous commitment to build new facilities.

It comes as Gorgie residents demand action on public toilets in the area, which has been without any for eight years.

A petition which received 578 signatures lodged by Living Rent's local branch was considered at the council's transport and environment committee on Thursday.

Oli Brown, from the group, argued a new, 24-hour accessible toilet needed to be built in Gorgie, citing concerns over "frequent public urination in valued green spaces".

Land on Morrison Street which included loos was sold off by the council to make way for Haymarket Yards, with Gorgie's remaining facility at Ardmillan Terrace subsequently shut in 2015 due to local authority cutbacks – one of ten closed across Edinburgh to save £300,000 – with these later knocked

down.

SNP councillors said at the time of the sale a burden was put on the title that “any development on this land would provide replacement public conveniences”.

An addendum tabled by the group at the meeting said this was “not just a contractual agreement but forms a burden registered in the Land Register of Scotland” but this had “not been enforced”.

Cllr Finlay McFarlane said it was “an absolute scandal” that the toilets hadn’t yet been replaced. “It’s just outrageous,” he added.

Mr Brown said: “Having access to public toilets is a basic human need and a vital necessity for public health and hygiene.

“These facilities serve our community ensuring residents and visitors can enjoy their streets, neighbourhoods and cities with ease.

“The lack of accessible toilets is felt particularly strongly in Gorgie-Dalry, the area is densely populated, bustling streets attract high footfall throughout the day.

“Most significantly the two stadiums of Murrayfield and Tynecastle – with capacities of 67,000 and just under 20,000 respectively – draw in huge numbers from across Scotland and beyond.

“On match days local residents have been subject to frequent cases of public urination in valued green spaces.”

Cllr Dan Heap said the nearest public toilet available was two kilometres away at Saughton Park.

“There have been opportunities for better public toilet provision in the past but they have been missed,” he told the

committee.

He added: "We can't be a 20 minute neighbourhood if the nearest loo is 25 minutes away.

"I hope Gorgie-Dalry can be prioritised for future public toilet provision."

Transport and environment convener Cllr Scott Arthur said there had been "some uncertainty" about what had happened with the previous agreement between developers and the council.

He suggested a "deliberate decision" may have been taken "just to close that off" but could be "still hanging somewhere".

A future report to committee will set out potential options for opening new facilities in the area. Councillors also requested legal advice on the agreement relating to former Morrison Street toilets.

Cllr Ross McKenzie said: "I'm delighted that the Gorgie Dalry Living Rent petition has successfully pushed the council to explore options for a public toilet in the area. If we're serious about creating 20 minute neighbourhoods, we need accessible public toilets to be part of that."

