

Council orders removal of Festival Village within weeks after planning breach

The council has told the owners of the 'Festival Village' at Waverley Mall to dismantle the venue within weeks – and warned they could have to pay a huge £50,000 fine if they fail to do so.

The City of Edinburgh Council has served an enforcement notice ordering the bars, stalls and seating on Princes Street to be taken away by the end of October following a breach of planning regulations.

Bosses at Moolmoor (Waverley) Limited, which has run the pop-up beer garden, were contacted by council planners in April and told to clear the plaza after their bid to stay for another three years was refused. However, this was ignored and the Princes Street venue has remained open over the summer.

Councillors said the Festival Village is “not good enough for one of the number one cities in the world” and have repeatedly quashed requests for planning extensions.

Owners argued it keeps the area “vibrant” and contributes to the “life and economy of the city centre” by supporting hundreds of jobs.

But planning chiefs have set out several reasons why the structures need to go, including that they are “of a poor-

quality design", have a "detrimental" impact on the character and appearance of the New and Old Town conservation areas, and have an "adverse" impact on nearby listed buildings.

The local authority granted temporary permission for two years in 2017 and the attraction was able to remain open beyond that period as a result of The Scottish Government's rules for hospitality during the pandemic.

A bid to obtain planning consent for another three years was unanimously refused by councillors last December. They concluded any economic benefits provided "would not justify the harm being done".

The decision was upheld in April following an appeal and a letter was sent to operators requesting "the structures to be removed within four weeks," a report said.

It added: "The operator was informed that enforcement action would be initiated if this request was not complied with."

Despite the warning, new plans were lodged seeking permission to remain on the site until the end of September, which were also thrown out by councillors last month.

"Despite the refusals, the structures, café, bars, food and drink uses, toilets, seating and ancillary facilities remain in place and continue to operate," an enforcement notice sent to bosses at both Moolmoor and Waverley Mall said.

It added: "The continued use of the roof top of Waverley Mall shopping centre as pop up 'Festival Village' has an adverse impact on the setting of a number of nearby listed buildings, detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the New and Old Town conservation areas, the Outstanding Universal Value of the Edinburgh World Heritage Site and does not represent a high quality design that safeguards the historic environment or contributes to placemaking.

“In the circumstances, it is expedient to take enforcement action to secure the cessation of the unauthorised use and removal of the associated unauthorised structures.”

If the ‘village’ is not removed by the end of October then owners could face a fine of up to £50,000 and council staff may be forced to move in and dismantle the structures themselves.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

