

Holiday let owner claims objectors show “ill will” to visitors

The owner of a holiday let flat in a popular beach town has claimed objectors who complained about rubbish created by visitors were ‘blame-shifting’.

An application by Lisa Hall-Baillie to turn her ground floor flat in North Berwick’s Balfour Street into a short term holiday let was among the first to be considered by East Lothian licensing chiefs after changes to the law this week.

But while the council received eight objections from local residents who pointed to antisocial behaviour, noise and dumped barbecues caused by holidaymakers, Ms Hall-Baillie hit back, claiming the allegations were made with “ill will”.

Speaking to the council’s licensing sub-committee, she argued that people who used short term lets did not generate a lot of waste because they “eat out a lot”.

And she said: “With regard to a lot of mess and disregarded barbecues in the street, I believe that is blame shifting and misplacing to create ill will towards visitors who stay in holiday lets.

“I have never seen that at all on that street, is it not possible misplaced rubbish is blown in given we are adjacent to East Beach.”

Ms Hall-Baillie argued claims there were too many holiday lets on the street were not true because many had shared access and stairwells and at least two were no longer operating.

Changes to the law mean Scottish owners of properties used as short term holiday lets now require to apply for planning

permission for a change of use as well as a license to operate it.

Recent months have seen East Lothian planners refuse to grant permission for holiday lets which share communal areas with residential homes because they say it damages the amenity of those who live there permanently.

Ms Hall-Baillie said her ground floor flat with its own entrance was a welcome addition to holiday letting in the popular beach town as it gave people with mobility issues the chance to visit.

She said: "I have heard people say why is it not offered as a long term let as it is on the ground floor but it is for that very reason we want to offer it as a holiday let, for people who have mobility issues who want to have a seaside retreat holiday, that want to have accommodation on one level and use the bathroom which is a wet room."

The meeting heard from several objectors, including Steven Colvin who lives on Balfour Street.

He told the committee that it was not just issues with noise and rubbish, insisting discarded barbecues were often found left on neighbours' walls.

He said: "It is the loss of community spirit. I have lived here for two years and this street has been amazing. Everyone on it has been so welcoming, we meet up regularly, do Christmas carols and have get togethers.

"That is the kind of street we want but we feel it is being lost. It feels like less than 50 per cent now are permanent residents and it feels it is being degraded."

Alison Clark from North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust told the meeting it received numerous contacts from residents concerned about the high number of short term holiday lets in

the town.

And she said residents living in Balfour Street and connecting Melbourne Road, which shared garden space with the property involved were 'overwhelmed by the negative impact' another holiday let would have.

The trust recently called on East Lothian Council to hold an independent review of all holiday lets across the county to establish the density of them and real impact on the communities they are in.

She said the trust was objecting to the licence on behalf of those affected.

And Balfour Street resident Natalie Pereira also urged the committee to reject the application adding: "Short term lets do benefit the economy of the town, but it is the long term residents who invest in the town."

The committee heard the objections but unanimously agreed to grant the licence with no comments from councillors on it.

by Marie Sharp, Local Democracy Reporter

