

Holiday lets owners and operators stage protest at Holyrood

Short-term let owners and operators gathered in Edinburgh on Tuesday to rally against new rules they say will “wipe out” the sector and destroy businesses.

The demonstration took place less than a month before new legislation which will require all holiday lets to be licensed – and have planning permission if an entire property is being used – comes into force.

Pressure from within the tourism industry to seek another pause to the scheme has grown over recent weeks as the 1 October deadline by which time applications must be lodged with local authorities edges closer. Last week a cross-party group of 37 MSPs joined calls urging Humza Yousaf to announce another delay, however this was quickly ruled out by the First Minister. [The National newspaper reported](#) that a third of those MSPs who signed the letter “have interests in the housing and rental sector”.

“Save Scottish jobs” was chanted by the angry crowd on Tuesday as those affected by the regulations held placards with phrases including ‘destroying us will not fix the housing crisis’ and ‘are you a pogrom parliament?’

Linda McDonald-Brown, who manages 15 Short Term Lets (STLs) in Edinburgh and East Lothian through her business Edinburgh

Concierge Company, said she hadn't yet submitted licensing applications but would do so by the end of the month.

As of last week, only 278 had applied in Edinburgh.

Ms McDonald-Brown said she expected there to be "a flurry at the end of the month".

She said: "I think the council are going to go 'whoa'. They don't have the resources and I think they want to backtrack but they can't.

"Everything I own, my house and everything like that is totally built on my company."

However she said the council "are not giving licences" and that the real intention behind the legislation is to "destroy the industry".

She added: "They are literally banning people – they just want us gone.

"I don't think we ought to have planning in place, definitely not. They ought to just go for the licensing because many of us have been going for years so we don't need planning for a change of use."

Scottish Housing Minister Paul McLennan said 6,323 applications for the scheme had been made across the country, claiming just over half have been issued with a licence "but none have been refused".

He said: "Over the last decade, the short-term sector has grown significantly and changed the nature which has brought economic benefits but also raised concerns about consistency of quality and the impact on local communities.

"Following to public consultations and independent researchers, Parliament passed licensing legislation in January 2022.

"All existing properties will need to have their application in before 1 October to continue trading, having had 20 months to apply."

Debbie Klein, who owns one holiday let in Edinburgh, said she would be likely to get planning approval as she had run the property as holiday accommodation for over 10 years, but attended the protest "for everybody that isn't in my position".

She said: "This is unfair. I am a single parent with three boys. I downsized my own house in order to fund a short-term let in Edinburgh – my boys went without at the time in order for me to build up this business.

"The word pogrom means to destroy, to wreak havoc upon and to violently demolish.

"It's often associated with the Nazis and their treatment of the Jews, but if you look at the actual definition of the word, that is what they are doing to this sector.

"They are the parliament of pogroms. That is how I feel.

"Even if I wasn't a host, I would be here for my right to choice for my holiday and for everybody else's holiday.

"These are not second properties that sit empty for most of the year, these are businesses.

"My house was a product of right to buy from Margaret Thatcher which decimated our social housing stock.

"Every single council in the whole of the UK promised they would rebuild on the back of the money they made on that. They did not do that. It is not my problem, it is not anyone else's problem here to solve their housing problem.

"This is my pension, selling it is not a pension. And I will not sell."

Ms Klein said it took her “days” to get through the planning process.

“It’s extremely, extremely stressful,” she added. “I have filled out the licensing but have not submitted it yet, I’ll be hanging back to see what happens here because I feel as though there should be changes made.”

Mr McLennan recognised short-term let accommodation was “vital to Scotland’s tourism sector and wider economy” and said the regulations “aim to protect the reputation of responsible operators and ensure the sector is regulated in line with other accommodation such as hotels and caravan parks”.

He said councils were “working pragmatically to support new licensees through the application process”.

However property manager David Nicoll, who oversees 14 STLs in Edinburgh including one he owns, complained there was “no clear guidance” for operators who want to share their home with guests for part of the year and let it out entirely for the rest.

Mr Nicoll, 52, said: “I’ve asked many different people and they can’t give me a specific answer as to how many days they need to reside in the property and how many days they can let it out.

He said his clients were “spending a lot of money to potentially fall flat on their face” and there was a “good chance” every single one will leave the sector if the legislation is not changed.

He said: “Some [properties] are being sold, some are going onto the long-term rental market – there’s a mixture. Some owners haven’t decided so they may sit empty until they see what the landscape is, because it seems to be constantly changing.”

Sheila Averbuch, who owns and runs several holiday lets in the capital alongside her husband Ralph who was a party to the recent Judicial Review, said the new rules imposed on the sector had had a “horrendous” impact on her mental health.

She said: “I’m not sleeping, my husband is not sleeping.

“We have a couple of self-catering properties in the New Town and the Old Town. These are not places that people would want to have domestic housing – this is prime downtown tourist Scotland.

“As far as I’m concerned, there’s only question to be asked which is does The Scottish Government want to remove self-catering as an option for people to stay in Edinburgh or have a family holiday in Scotland?

“Unless they pause this legislation and talk to us we have to conclude that’s what they want – they want to wipe out this sector.

“We have not yet applied, we did apply for something called a certificate of lawfulness and we got those but that was a very expensive, lengthy, confusing process.

“We are afraid to apply for a licence because 98 per cent of people are being refused.

“Anybody who tells you this regulation is about health and safety are lying. This is not regulation, this is decimation of the sector.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



Linda McDonald-Brown



David Nicoll