

Leisure centre will be lost in development of new school

A plan to demolish an Edinburgh village's leisure centre so that a new school can be built to cope with the hundreds of new homes built there is "not ideal" but there is no credible alternative, councillors have said.

A failure to "get this done" and progress proposals to replace Kirkliston Leisure Centre with a secondary school for 600 pupils could leave the council being unable to tell parents "where their children are likely to go," one warned.

Extending Queensferry High, which pupils from from Kirkliston currently attend, was overwhelmingly rejected by both communities in a previous consultation to establish views.

Most who replied supported the move to instead build a standalone facility in the village but "just not on the leisure centre site".

Key concerns about the plan were that it would add to congestion, impact on local residents, reduce greenspace and sports provision, and that the overall site would be too small. This was disputed in a report which said studies showed there was enough space for a high school, which could be extended to have 1,200 pupils in future if needed, along with replacement "publicly accessible leisure facilities".

The City of Edinburgh Council's Education Committee approved a statutory consultation on the establishment of a new secondary school at the Kirklands Park Street site on Tuesday.

Initial considerations about where it could be built in 2018 suggested that youngsters could attend a new school being built in Winchburch in West Lothian but this idea was scrapped due to concerns about the "complexities" of crossing into a different local authority area, local councillor Kevin Lang said.

"A whole host of options have been reviewed," he told councillors.

"People in Kirkliston have been clear, they believe the village needs and deserves a local school."

"Put simply, I don't think there is an easy answer to this.

"I've got concerns about the leisure centre site, I think there are lots of issues that do still need to be worked through including parking for staff and ensuring leisure facilities continue to be provided to the community of Kirkliston."

He added: "I keep asking myself the question 'if not this site, then where?'

"So far, I've not been given a credible, feasible or deliverable alternative option.

"The serious risk now is that without decisions being taken, and with hundreds of new houses being built and occupied right now, and with Queensferry High to reach soon its absolute maximum, I do not want to get to a point where there is simply no place for pupils to be educated."

Cllr Euan Davidson said it "isn't an ideal site" but added the council could "build support" by working with the community.

Lewis Younie, local councillor for the Almond ward, said: “We’re on a tight timeline here as an education authority, even if we pick the leisure centre site, unless we revisit extending Queenserry High School – an option overwhelmingly rejected consultation by consultation of both communities – I seriously doubt meeting those statutory obligations.

“Any other site will simply not allow us to meet the timeline.

“This isn’t theoretical – we won’t be able to tell parents where their children are likely to go if we don’t get this done.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

