

Planning permission granted to convert former bowling club into home on appeal

An Edinburgh couple's controversial plan to turn a former bowling club into a family home has been given the go-ahead after a planning row with furious neighbours who wanted the space to become a community garden.

The bid to re-purpose Pilrig's Tramways Bowling Club was turned down by the council twice – but has now been granted planning permission by The Scottish Government on appeal.

Terrance Anthony, one of several locals who fought for the space to be kept public and used for a gardening project, complained that the wishes of the community had been overridden by “one bureaucrat in the government”.

Admitting defeat after the three-year planning battle, he said members of Tramways Community Garden – who maintained the green after the club closed due to a fall in membership in 2019 until its controversial sale by Lothian Buses the following year – had “won all the arguments and lost the battle”.

Applicants Dominic Pearce and Katherine Ross saw two separate bids seeking change of use of the site refused by the local authority amid fears ‘designated open space’ would be lost.

They said community groups would still have access for up to three days a week and aimed to transform the green into a “self-perpetuating, perennial greenspace filled with native species and amenable to community and social engagement”.

In an appeal letter they said: “As owners, we could live on-site and provide stewardship of the green whilst facilitating community-orientated groups to use the green free-of-charge.

“We make no apologies that the success of this application would be transformative for us as a family, providing a family home that would otherwise be wholly unattainable.”

The couple has signed agreements with two ‘collaborators’, Kin Collective Family Wellbeing CIC and Arbor Green Nursery in Stockbridge, two miles away.

Mr Anthony said his group met with them to discuss coming to a similar arrangement but they “didn’t move an inch”. He said: “They’re sticking with their two groups.”

In a letter urging The Scottish Government to refuse the planning appeal he said the pair were trying to “leapfrog the property ladder by hijacking a leisure site and turning it into a residential property”.

He added: “The plans for the house and garden are not credible.

“The building needs far more work done on it than is proposed to make it environmentally sound.

“The green has been there practically untouched since they bought it despite their assurances that they would improve it come what may.

“Issues of biodiversity are tossed around as tempting sweeties but the green would be better served by being turned into a community garden.”

Planning reporter Christopher Warren ruled that as no development was proposed on the green itself there would be no loss of open space, as had been argued by the council.

He said the site was previously “not publicly visible” or “publicly accessible” there was “no policy basis to require its use to now be for a community purpose”.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

