

Council backing industrial estate on land set aside for homes

The City of Edinburgh Council has come under fire for backing plans to build an industrial estate on land earmarked for 500 new homes – just weeks after declaring a ‘housing emergency’.

An application to redevelop the 20-hectare Newbridge site for business uses will go before councillors this week.

City planners have urged them to grant planning permission and say there are “special circumstances” which justify not following the authority’s local development plan which has designated the land for an estimated ‘500 residential units’.

Local councillor Kevin Lang hit out at the recommendation, arguing the plot was needed to house “families, not forklifts”.

Cllr Lang, who leads the council’s Lib Dem group, said councillors’ recent formal declaration of a housing emergency in the capital “can’t just be about warm words,” adding: “We need to back it up with action too.”

Charity Shelter Scotland said that “business-as-usual isn’t going to cut it any more” and people in Edinburgh “expect action from their council”.

According to the council however it is “unlikely” the former tyre factory site would be used to deliver any new homes within the lifetime of its 10-year development strategy, City Plan 2030.

Among the reasons listed for this are “severe constraints on delivery” which include its proximity to the Edinburgh Airport, noise and odours from an adjacent factory and the presence of electricity sub stations.

A planning report said another issue at play was a “lack of commitment from housebuilders”.

It said the proposed development would also address a “major under supply of industrial space in Edinburgh,” whilst creating around 350 new jobs and contributing nearly £20m to the city’s economy.

GSS Developments wants to build 27 industrial units in total – with permission to proceed with the first phase of 17 small units being sought on Wednesday as well as planning permission in principle for the wider site masterplan.

The recommendation to councillors to give the go-ahead – which officials acknowledge is ‘contrary to the development plan in relations to its allocation for housing’ – has raised questions about the council’s commitment to tackling the housing crisis.

And it comes in the same month that councillors declared a housing emergency in response to a chronic shortage of affordable housing, rising homelessness rates and spiralling private rental costs – becoming the first city in Scotland to take such a step.

An emergency action plan to address the crisis is being drafted following the declaration. Labour housing convener Jane Meagher said this would include asking for “fairer funding” from the Scottish Government and “taking measures to

accelerate what we already do to make a difference”.

Cllr Lang, Almond ward councillor, said: “Just this month, each and every councillor voted to declare a housing emergency in Edinburgh.

“Three weeks on, we have a planning application for a site the council has designated for housing. But, rather than building a single new home, the application builds industrial units and a logistics hub.

“The proposals go completely against the current local development plan and the new CityPlan plan currently before the Scottish Government.

“This is a site designated for housing. It should be used to put a roof over people, not pallets. It should be used to house families, not forklifts.

“Declaring a housing emergency can’t just be about warm words. We need to back it up with action too.”

Alison Watson, Director of Shelter Scotland said: “In Edinburgh, rents are out of control, record numbers of kids have nowhere to call home and more and more people are becoming homeless.

“This has led to The City of Edinburgh Council recently declaring a housing emergency, including a commitment to developing a housing emergency action plan.

“But these extraordinary times need an extraordinary response. Business-as-usual isn’t going to cut it any more and the people of Edinburgh expect action from their council, and they need to see rapid progress. That includes building enough homes for people to live in. We are standing by ready to work with the City of Edinburgh Council on their action plan to deliver the homes needed in the capital.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

