

Controversial 'monolith' student flats in Canonmills refused for second time

Plans for the redevelopment have received hundreds of objections from locals. They were rejected again after councillors said the revised proposals were almost identical to the ones refused earlier this year.

A fresh bid to redevelop the former builders yard at Eyre Place Lane with 139 student beds and seven townhouses was thrown out by the council's planning sub-committee, following a three-hour hearing – despite the plans being backed by planning officials.

Councillors cited over 450 objections, including concerns over loss of daylight and privacy, the 'overbearing' scale of the proposed building, as well as late-night noise from its roof terrace. Another objection stated, in the context of the council's recently-declared housing emergency, it "fails to provide sufficient residential housing".

However representatives for applicants said the housing crisis would "not go away any time soon" if the council continued to oppose student developments.

Locals living around the Canonmills site have rallied against the plans since they first emerged two years ago, but they were denied the opportunity to have their voices heard when

the initial (unsuccessful) application came forward, due to the council leaving it too long before making a decision. This allowed the developer to appeal to the Scottish Government Reporter.

In response to the Reporter's refusal of the initial proposal, on the grounds of design, amenity, scale and the impact on the area's 'sense of place', the student block's height was reduced from six storeys to five, while two fewer townhouses were included in the revised proposals which went before the planning sub-committee on Wednesday (December 6).

However local Conservative councillor Max Mitchell said changes were "so slight that it's almost like nothing has changed at all". He said: "It doesn't for me change the decision that was taken earlier this year by the Reporter."

Similarly the committee's Convener Hal Osler, Lib Dems, said: "I don't think the actual issues have been addressed. The best was done to make this acceptable. But I don't think it was good enough."

Richard Price from New Town and Broughton Community Council said CA Developments' "very similar" and "slightly rushed application" for the revised scheme had "ignored concerns expressed by objectors".

Speaking on behalf of Eyre Place Lane residents, Scott Baxter said the community felt the site was "not appropriate" for a large student block. Mr Baxter said the new plans "reduced internal and external amenity space by 37 per cent from the previous application". He said: "This is a very unpopular proposal with over 450 objections. Many of the objections to the proposal are about its excessive height compared to adjacent buildings, its monolithic scale and proportion and its insensitivity to the overall character of the area

Mr Baxter said the community was not opposed to the site's redevelopment but added it was "more suited to sustainable

family homes that serve the Canonmills community”.

Chris Edwards, who lives on Rodney Street adjacent to Eyre Place, said: “Compared to the previous design, little has changed from our point of view. It’s five storeys rather than six, but still vastly larger than anything previously on site. And with only a small reduction in units from 142 to 139 it has a larger footprint sprawling further down the lane.”

“A roof terrace as a social space would be new to the area and is a huge concern for locals. Noise at higher levels travels and so any noise nuisance would be far reaching.”

Addressing the committee, Green Inverleith councillor Jule Bandel said the city “desperately needs more affordable residential housing”.

Cllr Bandel said: “Only last month this council declared a housing emergency and for this reason I think councillors on this committee should take it very seriously that this application fails to provide sufficient residential housing.” She added the development would also “fail to create a good place to live for students”.

Appearing on behalf of CA Developments, planning consultant Paul Scott said: “If there is continual resistance to this type of application which delivers a specialist form of housing – but it is a form of housing – then that housing emergency will not go away any time soon”.

He highlighted the Scottish Government was “supportive of the principle of purpose built student accommodation and housing in this location”. He said previous plans were refused due to “modest infringements in terms of scale”.

Meanwhile SNP Inverleith councillor Vicky Nicolson said the plans could negatively impact The Yard, a neighbouring charity which supports disabled children and young people through adventure play.

Cllr Nicolson said: "As someone that came from a social care background, I have had a lot of involvement with The Yard over the years. It has been there since 1986 providing services to children, some with very complex needs. Many of these children and young people arrive in adapted transport and minibuses because of their access requirements and this place offers a unique opportunity in the city, and indeed in Scotland, to children and parents. I think it would be utterly unacceptable for this application to negatively impact the wonderful work done by The Yard."

Councillors unanimously refused the plans and developers now have the option to appeal again to the Scottish Government Reporter.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



Plans for Eyre Place Lane Image: CA Developments



The site at Canonmills.



Townhouse Plans. Image CA developments.