

# Church applies to install solar panels

**A landmark village church built to support a growing mining community more than 80 years ago is fighting to have solar panels installed on its roof despite plans being rejected by council officers three times.**

Newtongrange Parish Church, in Midlothian, was built in the early 1940s on land provided by Lothian Coal Company and is undergoing extensive refurbishment including proposals to place 30 panels on the roof to provide more sustainable energy.

The plans have been backed by the local community council and the National Mining Museum which says it will help protect a 'valuable' part of the community.

The church, which is at the centre of the village of Newtongrange was made a Category C listed building because of its prominence as a landmark feature.

Two applications for planning permission for the panels have already been rejected by Midlothian Council planners. A third application was set to be refused before it was called in by local councillor Douglas Bowen.

It will now go before elected members at the council's planning committee next week after Councillor Bowen said

support from the community council should be considered before a decision is made.

The application for planning approval will be considered alongside an application for Listed Building Consent, both on behalf of the Parish of Newbattle, at the meeting.

Mhairi Cross, chief executive of the National Mining Museum has written a letter of support for the work saying the museum "recognises this project is valuable to the community as it should revitalise the church building".

Newtongrange Community Council said it could "only see positive in the church redevelopment" adding the use of the solar panels was being done in a sensitive way on the listed building.

However planners are calling for the panels to be refused permission.

They said: "The proposed solar panels are on a highly publicly visible elevation which makes a significant positive contribution to the character and appearance of the church and the wider street-scene and adjacent conservation area.

"The site is a landmark building at the centre of Newtongrange and has a significant presence on Main Street. The installation of these solar panels would seriously diminish the special architectural interest of the church."

The committee meets to consider the application next Tuesday.

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

