

Planning proposal to extend homeless hostel sparks concern

Plans to expand a homeless hostel in Abbeyhill have sparked concerns among locals who have argued the area is “already doing its fair share”.

Owners of the 21-bed guest house have bought up a derelict neighbouring property to accommodate a further 17 people experiencing homelessness.

Local councillor Iain Whyte said issues relating to the hostel have been raised by constituents, including “people’s gardens being invaded” and “minor violence, disorder and noise on the street”.

Cllr Whyte said people “obviously need housing” but warned that “putting lots of people with difficulties all in the same place can often exacerbate those difficulties”.

However homeless charity Shelter Scotland said that in the midst of a housing emergency – unanimously declared by councillors in November – it was vital the city did “everything possible to immediately alleviate the suffering of those living at its sharpest end”.

A planning application to “alter and extend” the Spring Gardens accommodation used by the council’s homelessness services is awaiting a decision and has been met with 23

objections.

A letter sent round addresses in the area recognised homeless people “need good, secure, temporary accommodation to help them get back on their feet”.

However the letter, signed from ‘concerned neighbours of Spring Gardens’, added: “As we already have 21 homeless people accommodated here, our neighbourhood is already doing its fair share. Another large homeless hostel will damage our neighbourhood and community.”

In documents submitted to the city’s planning department, applicants Akbar Properties said the buildings “suffered prolonged neglect prior to their acquisition”.

They said: “They now require significant refurbishment to make them suitable for continued use as residential accommodation.”

Contrary to the letter circulated in the area, they argued the plans “will not be detrimental to the neighbourhood amenity” as the use of the building “will not change from presently”.

Physical changes to the property include new and enlarged roof dormers, reconstruction of the existing two-storey outshot and new single-storey extensions to the rear.

Akbar Properties was approached for comment through its agent.

Cllr Whyte said: “Maybe the council has to look at – to my mind, living near hotels that are used as homeless hostels – the council has to look carefully at the concentrations it creates of what are very transient communities with a lot of problems.

“People obviously need housing, but putting lots of people with difficulties all in the same place can often exacerbate those difficulties.

“Really what we should be doing is providing people with

permanent accommodation and that means building more housing across all different tenures.

“Where people are put into temporary accommodation we need to provide proper support for them and for the communities who are living next to them where there are large concentrations of people with particular difficulties.”

Shelter Scotland Director, Alison Watson, said: “When Edinburgh’s councillors declared a housing emergency they also committed to co-producing an action plan to address it with the community and Shelter Scotland looks forward to the opportunity to take part in that conversation soon.

“The housing emergency is devastating lives in communities right across the city and while it’s important to do everything possible to immediately alleviate the suffering of those living at its sharpest end, ultimately the only long term solution is delivering more social homes.”

