

High school plans halted to further explore greenbelt site

Edinburgh Council's plans to bulldoze a village leisure centre to make way for a school have been halted after councillors called for alternative sites on the greenbelt to be explored.

A new high school for Kirkliston is needed to cope with hundreds of new homes being built in the area.

Officials had recommended the authority press on with the controversial project despite local objections, however a knife-edge vote in the City Chambers – which was rerun after an initial miscount – has now seen it put on hold.

The option to extend Queensferry High, alongside a slew of other ideas, were previously rejected in consultations, leaving the site of the village's leisure centre as the proposed location.

But raising concerns over the site being too small, the impact on local traffic and the school's single feeder status, nearly two thirds of Kirkliston residents who responded to the latest survey opposed the plan.

Local councillor Kevin Lang told councillors on Thursday (February 8) there was "at least one land owner" who was open to discussing selling nearby land "for the sole purpose of a new high school".

He said: "We think that needs to be explored and pursued.

“There are of course significant planning issues. All the land around Kirkliston is designated greenbelt – it’s why we wrote to the Scottish Government to ask for a change to national planning framework so schools were included on the list of essential infrastructure which can be built on greenbelt land.

“The minister made no firm commitment to change the framework but did say this is ultimately a matter for the council. That’s why it would be wrong to agree to the leisure centre site at this stage today.”

Cllr Lang’s Lib Dem group tabled an amendment not to proceed with officers’ recommendations, instead calling for a report to be brought forward detailing the potential cost of building on protected greenbelt sites previously mooted and the implications of submitting a pre-planning application.

Going up against a move by the Labour administration to agree the school “could be established on the site of the existing Kirkliston Leisure Centre” while continuing to explore other options, councillors were told the Labour amendment narrowly passed by 29 votes to 28.

However shortly after it emerged council clerks had incorrectly tallied the votes cast.

A recount by roll call saw proposals tied 29 to 29, with the casting vote falling to Lord Provost Robert Aldridge who backed fellow Lib Dem councillors.

Labour councillor Tim Pogson said: “We should consider other sites that would allow for a bigger school and that would help with better educational outcomes and deal with any further and much needed housebuilding growth.

“It should certainly not be discouraged at this stage.”