

Plans to retain ponds at Western Harbour 'no compromise'

Campaigners concerned about the loss of green space on wildlife say the ponds would be "glorified, sanitised water features"

Developers looking to build hundreds of new homes at Edinburgh's Western Harbour have proposed retaining two large ponds after locals raised concerns about the impact on wildlife. The latest plans by FM developments show some of the wetlands on the waterfront site would not be cleared to make way for flats – but campaigners say this is not an acceptable compromise.

New blueprints shared at a consultation event include "substantial loss" of woodland where many birds nest, as well as loss of the smaller of the three ponds, founder of the Save Western Harbour Ponds group Isa Masapero said.

"As a campaign our position remains that any development on any of the sites wouldn't be acceptable to us because it fragments that space and the unity of the green space," she told the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

She said the remaining ponds would be "glorified, sanitised water features".

Construction of apartments on site was abandoned around 15 years ago amid the financial crash, with the plots since blossoming into a wildlife "haven" now home to insects, bats and waterfowl including breeding swans, moorhens, goldeneyes, herons and kingfishers, according to recent surveys.

In December councillors voted in favour of making

'preservation orders' for some trees in the area, which means any future proposals to cut them down will need to be carefully considered by the council.

And although the site remains allocated for housing, the council's 'City Plan 2030' noted that "further assessment of these ponds is required given the nature of the ponds has progressed over time". Furthermore Scottish Government officials have visited the woodland and ponds as they consider whether the space should be officially designated as green space.

FM Developments remain in talks with land owners and is aiming to submit a full planning application this summer. It is understood the most recent plan would deliver around 650 homes.

Ms Masapero said: "For us it's no compromise at all and it's not acceptable.

"Yes, in theory it is keeping the two main ponds but as glorified, sanitised water features. By the time they've finished building there won't be any nesting bird activity because the impact of construction so close would mean it will be two little glorified, sanitised water features.

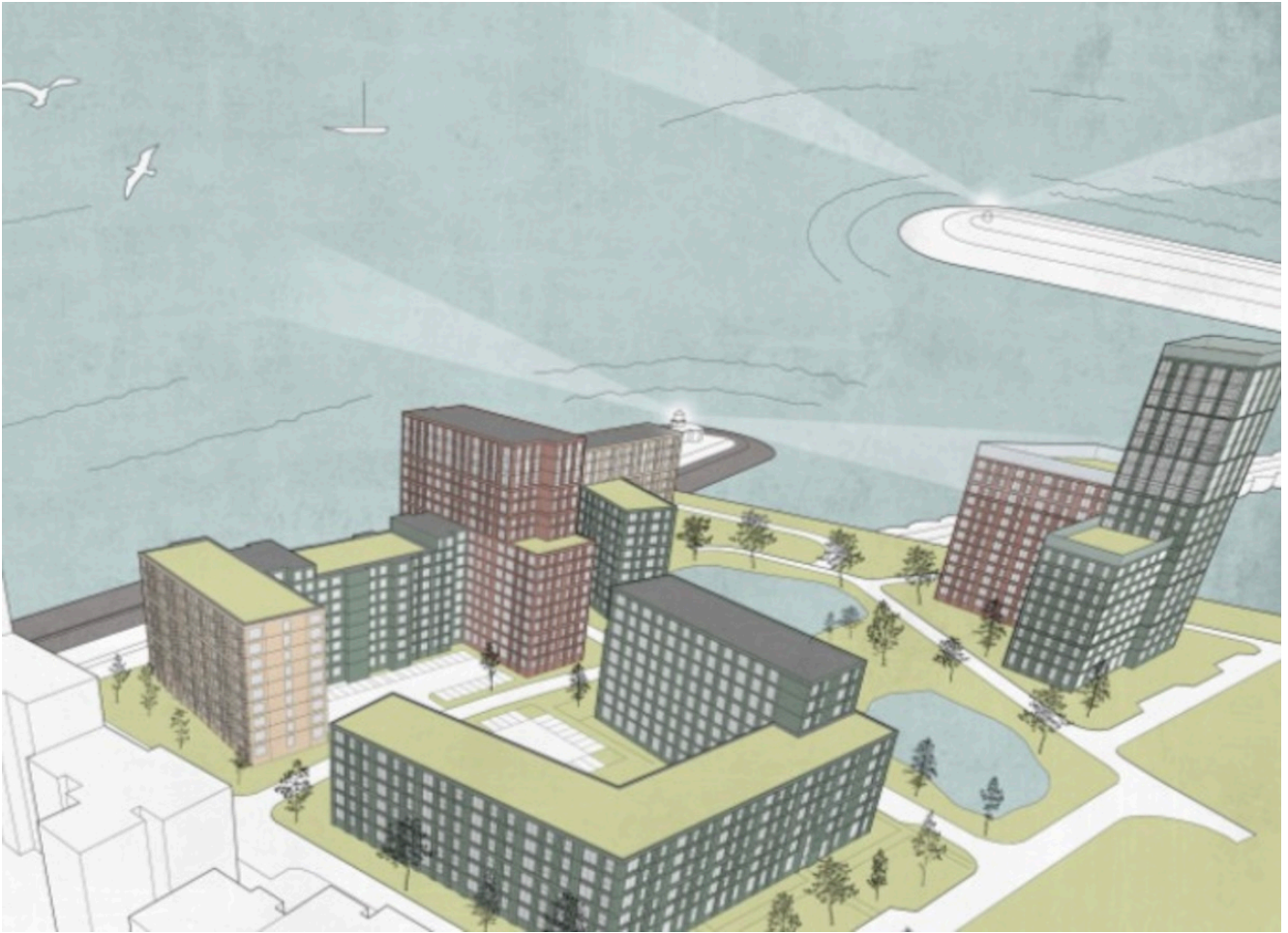
"It is about the interplay between the wetland and the woodland. If you say it's okay to lose the woodland or some of the wetland, it's the patch work and diversity of habitat that been allowed to form there that makes it such a rich place and by removing any of that you do reduce the value of it."

She added: "They've not bought the land yet. Should they decide to walk away, then as part of looking at the long-term future – and mainly because our supporters have asked so many questions around this – we're looking at routes to community ownership of some form. But we can't move on anything as long as this process is going on."

Another consultation event is planned on Thursday, May 2 from 4pm to 8pm at the Heart of Newhaven community centre.

FM Developments was contacted for comment.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



Latest Plans. Image; FM Developments