

# Quiet East Lothian street has become 'like a war zone', residents claim

## Council brings in letting restrictions after a surge in anti-social behaviour in a formerly quiet area of Prestonpans

Residents in a quiet East Lothian town have complained they are living in a 'war zone' after their street saw a surge in antisocial behaviour.

East Lothian Council has had to take action after Middleshot Square, in Prestonpans, suddenly became a hot spot for antisocial behaviour.

Before the trouble started there hadn't been a single complaint in the street for a decade.

And locals living on the square, where just over half the housing is council-owned, say they feel the local authority has 'dumped' troubled tenants on their doorstep.

One granddad, who has lived on the street for nearly 20 years, said the last two years has seen a string of incidents from threatening behaviour, cars being damaged and violent arguments breaking out which have been linked to the social housing.

A report on the situation produced by council officers revealed some of its own tenants, who have lived there for years, were now demanding a transfer out of the area because of the trouble.

The granddad, who did not want to be identified, said: "It has been like a war zone some nights, particularly at the weekend. It's alright for the council tenants not involved, they can

ask to be move to another house.

"Those of us who own our homes are stuck here and don't feel safe."

East Lothian Council has now introduced a Local Letting Plan for the square, which is split into 53 council properties and 40 'right to buy' privately owned homes.

The plan states future vacancies in the street will not be given to tenants who are unemployed or have a history of antisocial behaviour or drugs or alcohol misuse.

A report on the introduction of the restrictions said: "Since February 2022 Middleshot Square has become an area that requires a bit more attention and resource from a housing management perspective.

"There has been a notable increase in ASB (antisocial behaviour) complaints and requests for transfers."

It added: "There are three properties that continually attract complaints in respect of condition and antisocial behaviour including drug misuse.

"Prior to February 2022 the area was stable, and the last recorded complaint was 2012. Tenants and residents are now complaining on a regular basis.

"There have been two serious assaults over the past few months. Tenants who have lived there for years now want to move because of the antisocial behaviour."

Police reports on incidents in the street revealed they had increased from 50 recorded in 2021/22 and 2020/21 to 85 in 2022/23.

They included three drugs incidents in the most recent year recorded compared to none in the previous years and 19 domestic incidents compared to just six in 2020/21

One female council tenant living on the street said she had asked to be moved out of the area because of the problems.

She said: "Many of us have lived here happily for years and thought this would be where our kids would grow up, it was so nice. But now we just want out.

"It feels like the council has dumped the worst tenants they have on us."

A spokesperson for East Lothian Council said tenants at the centre of issues in the square were being dealt with through its antisocial behaviour policy and the local letting plan was brought in to improve the street for other residents. The said: "The benefit of this plan is to ensure going forward any vacancies will be allocated to applicants with no history of ASB, dependency issues and who are economically active, which should prevent an increase in complaints and increase demand for this area.

"The lettings plan will operate alongside other initiatives such as upgrades to the communal stairs in our blocks that will make the area more attractive and appealing to current and future residents."

***by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter***



Middleshot Square, Prestonpans