

Council misses deadline for decision on Ratcliffe Terrace student flats

Public views on plans for new student flats will no longer be aired in public, as the council has failed to determine a planning application in time.

The 138-bed crescent-style block on the corner of Willowbrae Road and Northfield Drive will now be decided directly by a Scottish Government planning reporter.

A local councillor called it “outrageous” that locals “won’t get to make their case against this development in a formal public forum”.

The city’s planning convener said the applicants were “within their rights to appeal”. This has happened on at least one occasion before at Eyre Place, when the developer appealed to the Government Reporter immediately on the deadline for a decision.

The company behind the redevelopment have been criticised for switching their plans for the former Radical Road bar site from 48 homes – approved by the planning sub-committee last September – to an application for student accommodation.

The developer – 83S Student Residence Limited – lodged revised proposals two months later – sparking accusations from a local MP they were trying to “pack in students like

sardines” in a bid to maximise their profit margin during a housing emergency.

However they have now lodged an appeal as the local authority missed the February deadline to issue a decision.

It means the application will no longer be scrutinised by councillors or members of the public at a council committee and the fate of the site is in the hands of the Government’s Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA).

In total 128 objections and 57 letters of support were received by the council.

A report drafted by planners recommended refusing the application, concluding that it would be located too far away from university and college campuses with inadequate public transport links. It also failed to include any mainstream housing on the site in accordance with student housing guidance for developers which on plots bigger than 0.25 hectares.

SNP councillor for Craigentenny/Duddingston, Danny Aston, said: “It’s outrageous that the council failed to bring this in front of councillors in time for a decision, meaning that local people, who objected in big numbers, won’t get to make their case against this development in a formal public forum.

“The Labour administration assured us after previous high profile failures like this that this wouldn’t happen again – yet here we are.

“I do welcome the eventual officer recommendation to refuse this application. Just a few months ago, this site was deemed suitable for mainstream housing, including 25 per cent affordable rent.

“Now the developer wants to flip the site to student accommodation despite the housing emergency in our city. I

urge the reporter to heed the officer report and to reject this application.”

The earlier application to the Reporter on the Eyre Place site resulted in any planning permission for student flats being refused in March this year, although a separate application for townhouses on the same site was allowed. There is a similar situation at the Gillespie Crescent site where local developers S Harrison plan to demolish a standalone building used by Sight Scotland and replace it with 156 student flats. This was appealed in January but is currently on hold for a second bat survey to be produced by the beginning of May.

Cllr James Dalgleish, convener of the planning committee, said that as the committee is quasi-judicial – meaning it has to make decisions based on policies and evidence as opposed to political positions – he could not comment or make commitments on live planning applications as that would be considered a conflict of interest.

He said: “However, I have every confidence in our officers to proactively engage with agents and applicants, and to assess and determine planning applications in an efficient manner.

“The applicant is within their rights to appeal and the final decision on the application now rests with The Scottish Government.”

Planning reporter Keith Bray, who has been appointed to consider the case is now set to visit the site in advance of issuing a decision, which is expected by June 26.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter.

