

Anger over plans to build on field dedicated to fallen heroes of the First World War

Plans to build on a field dedicated to the fallen heroes of the First World War have been backed by the Scottish Government.

The site where many former soldiers had their ashes scattered had been gifted to the people of Bathgate – but can now be redeveloped for housing once the Reporter's decision has been finalised.

The decision by the Holyrood appointed planning appeal Reporter provoked fury from the local Labour councillor Harry Cartmill.

TM Land Purchases had their application for planning permission in principle to develop the site on the fringe of the Bathgate Hills rejected by the Development Management Committee in January.

Councillor Cartmill told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that granting planning permission could see “more than fifty homes” crammed onto the hillside site which used to be home to the town's war memorial next to Napier Avenue.

He said: “The application should never have happened as the Council sold off this land gifted as “ common good” by the Churches in 1924 to the WW1 injured veterans.”

Veterans Cottages and adjoining streets were built to house

First World War veterans as part of the memorial site. The war memorial stood overlooking the town until the mid 1990s when it was moved to a site next to St John's Church in the town to make it easier to visit.

Councillor Cartmill branded the Reporter as having the powers of a dictator and the Scottish Government acting like an authoritarian state.

He added: "It will be environmental vandalism in the extreme with the foxes , bats, deer and badgers with their sets on Badger Knowe located slap bang in the middle of this area – now facing their habitat being destroyed forever .

"The site is grossly inadequate for development in so many ways – entrances and exits are far too narrow and housing / Napier and Academy place will now be blighted by traffic causing serious road safety issues."

The hillside memorial site was brought into use during the Second World War as the site for a searchlight.

The Division of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) confirmed: "The Reporter is minded to grant permission subject to a legal agreement being reached. The final decision has therefore been deferred for the period detailed in the Notice of Intention to allow the conclusion of that agreement."

In his findings the Reporter, Gordon Reid said that the number of homes built could be conditioned by West Lothian Council. He did not believe that access to the site, up steep narrow roads, would be problematic.

Mr Reid added: "Concerns are raised by the council and in representations in relation to the over-development of the site based on the number of units shown on the appellant's illustrative layout. Whilst the appellant has submitted an illustrative layout, the description of the appeal proposal does not include and therefore seek approval for a specific

number of units for the site at this time.”

He added: “A total of 67 representations including one from Bathgate Community Council were received to the appeal proposal raising concerns in terms of it not being in accordance with the LDP site capacity/density; loss of green space and environmental impact; impact on wildlife; traffic, access, road safety and parking; impact on education provision; drainage impacts; and, impact on healthcare facilities.

“I am satisfied that these matters have been appropriately addressed in my above consideration of the appeal proposal against the relevant provisions of the development plan.”

Mr Reid said the issue of Common Good was not something he could consider and added: “I note the concerns raised regarding the land related to the former site of the Bathgate World War I memorial and the issues of common good and ownership. Whilst I recognise these are important matters for the local community, they are not valid material planning considerations. Therefore, it is not possible to take these matters into account in the determination of this planning appeal.”

By Stuart Sommerville, LDR