

Council urged to step in amid serious concerns over dilapidated warehouse

Edinburgh Council is being urged to step in amid serious concerns over a dilapidated warehouse in Leith which locals fear could collapse “at any moment”.

The roofless Georgian-era building on John’s Lane has been on Historic Environment Scotland’s register of ‘at risk’ structures for more than 30 years.

Now community councillors are calling on officials to serve the owners with a ‘dangerous building notice’ requiring them to make safety improvements.

Leith Links Community Council (LLCC) has written a letter warning the local authority the outer wall facing the Lane is “now leaning dangerously,” adding that with “obviously eroded mortar a high wind could cause a collapse”.

They also fear falling masonry could injure passers by and people visiting the garage opposite the former warehouse.

“I believe this qualifies as a Dangerous Building and that the owner should be required to make it safe – not demolish it, but make safe and repair,” community council chair Jim Scanlon MBE said in his letter to planning chiefs who have the authority to issue a notice.

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, LLCC

secretary Sally Millar said: “[Our] main concern is that this wall is dangerous and seems quite likely to collapse at any moment and it could easy fall on somebody because there’s a working garage opposite it with people coming and going all day.

“I’m not aware of any official architectural appraisal having been done, certainly not in our name but what we’ve noticed is since the roof came off – there was a roof originally – it’s visibly more dangerous because it’s started to lean and when the heavy rains were on people were seeing water cascading down. A combination of that heavy rain and high winds, which we’re getting more and more of these days – it’s just visibly more dangerous.

“It’s primarily a public safety issue and risk to life.

“If we’ve understood it correctly, the primary responsibility is on the owner to repair it and make it safe, but they might need a nudge from the council to do that.

“And as far as we know the council has been aware of this for at least 10 years but has done nothing at all to contact the owner about making it safe or about looking at ways of making it safe or doing a detailed appraisal of its safety. So it’s definitely time for the council to make an appraisal and either ask the owner to make it safe themselves or if they can’t, then it’s up to the council to do it themselves.”

A number of planning applications have been lodged in a bid to redevelop the listed building whilst retaining some of its historic elements. In 2015 previous owners Consensus Capital Ltd had plans to turn it into 30 flats refused.

It was then sold to the Akbar Mir family, who run a string of hotels and bed and breakfasts across Edinburgh. They have reportedly been used by the council to provide homeless accommodation in the last decade.

Since acquiring the crumbling warehouse, they have made various applications to transform it into residential developments, most recently for student flats which has been appealed to the Scottish Government after the council failed to issue a decision on time.

Ms Millar said: "The community council approved of an earlier application and that's going back quite a few years now which was for a small-ish number of flats with a main entrance from Constitution Street.

"That application, although it was approved, that building was never built and since then the applications that have been going in have been more and more geared towards very small apartments – too small arguably, certainly for families – and possibly it would breach all regulations except the very minimal regulations that there are for student flats."

Edinburgh Council was contacted for comment.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter