

Historic Tranent pub wins fight to create a beer garden

An historic pub saved from closure by its local community has won the fight to create a beer garden on 'open space' behind it.

The Tower Inn, in Tranent, which first opened in 1902, was described as 'the hub' of its local community by local councillors during a meeting of East Lothian Council's planning committee.

The committee heard from owner Dominic McNeill how he, as a regular of the pub, and others came together to save it when it was threatened with closure two years ago, eventually leading to him taking it on.

Plans to extend an outside drinking area on decking at the back of the pub however came to a halt after council officers said it required planning permission.

But at today's planning meeting, councillors heard that while the land at the back of the pub was described as open space and used by the public it was privately owned – and the owner had given Mr McNeill permission to use it for the garden.

Mr McNeill told the committee the aim of the outdoor drinking area was to allow all people to come to the pub.

He said: "It is a community pub which was demonstrated by the campaign to stop it closing. The aim is to create a garden space for everyone to come."

Planning officers had recommended the application for the beer garden, along with a fence and gate, should be rejected as it is within Tranent Conservation Area .

Recommending the committee refuse planning permission officers said: "The change of use of the area of open space to a beer garden and its enclosure with a 1.8m high timber fence and gates would separate that area of land from the larger area of open space of which it is currently a part.

"This would harm the landscape setting of the area and undermine the contribution this area of open space makes to the visual amenity of the area."

However ward councillors said they had been approached by local residents who were concerned that the pub was facing refusal and wanted to see it thrive.

Councillor Lee-Anne Menzies said describing the land as 'open space' was not accurate adding: "It is just somewhere people let their dogs off."

Councillor Menzies called in the application for the committee to decide along with fellow ward Councillor Colin McGinn, after officers recommended it for refusal.

Councillor McGinn said: "We are losing good community pubs hand over fist across the county and this one would have shut without the intervention of Mr McNeill and another businessman and the community who supported them.

"He has brought it back to life and it is a focal point. I am really pleased to support this business."

The committee unanimously agreed to reject their officers recommendation and grant planning permission for the new garden, fencing and gate.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter