

# **Rural houses will bring nearly 2,000 new trees near Penicuik**

**Plans to build two new homes next to a peat moss in the Midlothian countryside have been approved on appeal after developers revealed they would be planting nearly 2,000 new trees on the land.**

The application for the two homes adjacent to Springfield Moss, near Penicuik, was referred to Midlothian Council's Local Review Body after planners failed to make a decision in time.

However a meeting of the review body today heard objections from its own officers who said the homes would be too big and did not do enough to improve the land despite the trees pledge.

And they heard there were concerns raised by National Gas Transmissions that the tree planting would be too near a high pressure gas pipe which runs through the site.

Andrew McCafferty representing the applicants said the land had been identified in the council's own Local Development plan for two homes of lower rural density.

He said his client's plans included planting 1,797 trees on the wider land as well as an additional 28 on the new properties grounds.

Planning officers said that while a low rural density policy allowed for two houses on the site “at least 50 per cent of the site is required to be retained or created for the intention of nature conservation.”

Speaking to the review body one officer said the policy was clear the new houses should not have a floor plan of more than 150 square metres adding the new homes, with floor plans of more than 250 square metres fell ‘far below’ policy requirements.

She said: “The proposal is for two large houses which are not traditional in form or design and have a floor plan much in excess as stated in the policy.”

The review body heard the houses would be built far enough away from the gas pipeline to meet concerns raised by the energy body and the number of trees to be planted may be reduced to meet their demands.

However Councillor Russell Imrie, review body chairperson, said improving biodiversity was not “always about trees”.

Councillor Imrie said: “I think we go crazy about trees as the answer. There is a girl in Pathhead who has rented fields and has created wildflower meadows and is harvesting it and it is going into perfumes and some even into gin.

“She reckons that wildflower meadow is doing more for biodiversity and helping to save the planet than trees so it is all about balance.”

The review body unanimously agreed to grant planning permission for the homes with additional conditions to ensure biodiversity was maintained on the wider land.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter