

# Woman's Aid charity given go ahead to move into former nursery despite objections from neighbours

A local women's aid charity has been given the go ahead to move into a former childrens nursery despite objections from neighbours, including a former council leader.

Women's Aid East and Midlothian wanted to create a new centre on a residential street in Dalkeith but faced protests from residents who said it would impact on house sales and was not suitable for the conservation area.

Midlothian Council planners recommended the change of use of the nursery for approval after pointing out it had been operating as a commercial business in the street until its closure last summer.

However they received 16 objections from locals concerned about the impact on the street.

Among them was Dr Lisa Beattie, whose garden backs onto the nursery.

Dr Beattie, who was briefly council leader in 2012 and is married to Midlothian North MSP Colin Beattie, said they had 'endured' antisocial behaviour and vandalism since the nursery which was initially run by local volunteers was taken over by a commercial company.

She said the additional traffic had made the surrounding streets dangerous for families and urged the council to reject the plans.

Other objectors argued the best place for the charity

considering the 'sensitive nature of the clientele' was in a town centre or business site.

However the report from planners said: "The nature of the use, which provides support for vulnerable members of the community, is considered to be best sited in a quiet, discreet residential area and not on an alternative business/industrial estate."

Their report said the building had been used for around 27 years as a business with planning permission for a children's nursery.

They said Women's Aid had been looking for 10 years for an appropriate site to bring around 16 staff together in one place from other office locations which were no longer suitable.

The new centre will not provide any accommodation or overnight stays and will run during the week during the day.

The planners report said: "The number of people using the facility is significantly less than the previous nursery use.

"The representations raised concerns about the negative impact on amenity, noise created and overall disturbance from the proposal. However, the proposal does not raise any significant impacts on residential amenity as compared to the building's former use. Furthermore, the use comprises internal office-based activity."

Councillor Stewart McKenzie, local ward member, called in the application to be considered at today's meeting of Midlothian Council's planning committee.

He told the committee: "In the interest of transparency a number of the constituents and complainers are known to me as are women's aid so I feel those two items balance themselves out.

“Women’s Aid have been in Dalkeith for many years and fell they need to move premises. It has raised concerns from some local constituents.”

The planning committee unanimously backed the recommendation to approve the application from officers without debate.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter