

Concerns over plans to convert former offices in Bathgate into 25 short term let flats

Concerns have been raised over plans to convert former offices in the centre of Bathgate into 25 short term let flats.

The town's community council and a local councillor expressed concern that this is third similar development in the town inside a year.

Councillor Pauline Stafford said planners had backed the proposals "without any discernible uptick in demand from tourists and leisure visitors to the town", and voiced fears that the building would become homeless accommodation.

AhA Units 2let Ltd asked for planning permission for a change of use of office buildings to form 25 short term let flats and 1 unit for storage and distribution use with associated alterations to buildings at the former Dacoll Computer Distributors Ltd, in Gardners Lane, Bathgate.

A report to this month's Development Management Committee said: "The former offices are to be converted into 25 self-contained flatted units over four floors, each with en-suite facilities and kitchen facilities.

"The short term let apartments will be booked via an online application and access to them will be via a keyless entry

system. The operator will provide a professional housekeeping service including cleaning of apartments, providing fresh bedding and towels between apartment bookings, including any necessary repairs and maintenance.”

Planners said the proposal was within planning framework and would support development in the town.

A report to the committee added: “The proposal would attract visitors to the town centre and surrounding area. This, in turn, would help support local businesses and enhance the town centre and local area by tourism.”

At the meeting Councillor Stafford echoed concerns of the community council that this would be the third similar development “within a stone’s throw” of others in the town recently.

Former flats above the 1912 cafe bar in South Bridge Street were granted permission for conversion into short term let rooms earlier this year. Last year plans were granted to convert the former Social Work Headquarters in Whitburn Road into basic hotel accommodation for homeless people.

Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick told the meeting: “Taking on board Councillor Stafford’s points I think we should include in the planning conditions that if any of these dwelling moved to mainstream lets a planning application would be required and also that a log should be kept for occupants and their length of occupancy with the council having rights to inspect that paperwork on demand.”

Councillor Stafford said: “I was going to say the same thing so we could agree on that. It is an unused building at the moment, and it will be good to see it come back into use, but I am concerned that we have had three similar applications of the same nature concentrated within a literal stone’s throw of each other and one of which openly said it probably would be used as homeless accommodation.

“My concern is that there’s becoming of a concentration of this in Bathgate town centre. If we could have some assurance through a log about its use. That would be great and if there is a boom on Bathgate’s tourism industry and we need these short term let apartments that would also be great so I’d like to see that being promoted.”

In their objection Bathgate community Council said: “There has been a number of similar type facilities set up in Bathgate as described above and we believe that this represents a clustering of non-retail uses which will adversely impact on the wellbeing of our community.”

After the meeting Councillor Stafford told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “We would be delighted to see the demand for leisure and tourism accommodation increase in Bathgate.

“However, the reality is that much of the accommodation capacity in recent years has been used as homeless accommodation and I wanted assurances that there would not be a concentration of this in Bathgate town centre which would undermine its post-covid recovery.”

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter