

# **Plans to flatten Edinburgh sports bar to make way for student flats thrown out**

**Controversial plans to flatten an Edinburgh sports bar to make way for student flats have been thrown out by the Scottish Government.**

Concerns about the proposed six-storey block not being safe for occupants in the event of a serious flood were upheld, temporarily saving Gorgie's much-loved Murrayfield Sports Bar from demolition.

However views from the community that an additional 87 rooms would cause an "excessive" student population locally were not shared by a senior planning official tasked with reviewing the case.

Gorgie and Dalry Community Council argued the area – which has seen several similar developments given planning permission the last few years – was "already saturated saturated with Purpose-Built Student Accommodation" (PBSA).



Plans. Image: Fletcher Joseph Associates.

They said in one of 57 objections sent to the council giving the Westfield Road project the green light could lead to a “doubling of the student population since 2011 excluding those living in normal flats or HMOs”.

Independent councillor for Sighthill-Gorgie Ross McKenzie agreed there had been “too much student accommodation approved in recent years without proper scrutiny”.

Cllr McKenzie welcomed the news and attacked “dodgy developers” EH1 students (Gorgie) Ltd who he said were “looking to make a quick buck”.

Last year he criticised the company behind the plans after it was reported two board members were involved in the collapse of Tayside Aviation school, which resulted in students paying for qualifications they didn’t receive and estimated debts of £2.5m.

Planning agents working for EH1 students (Gorgie) Ltd were contacted for comment.

The council's development management sub-committee originally refused planning permission in February after the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) objected on the grounds of flood risk.

Planning officers said if a serious flood occurred it would block safe access to the building which "in effect would become an island".

Councillors voted to reject the plans, although views on the flooding risk differed. Some worried residents, particularly those with disabilities living on lower floors, could be put in danger.

Others suggested the building may be "safer" than neighbouring ones and vulnerable occupants "would be safe while the flood waters came and went".

Upholding their decision following an appeal, planning reporter Ailie Callan said there was a "lack of demonstrable design solution to achieve safe exit from the building" in the event of a 1 in 200 flood event, with climate change impacts factored in.

In the decision issued on Tuesday, July 16, Ms Callan said: "A number of objections were made, including from Gorgie and Dalry Community Council, relating to potential detrimental impacts in the area that could result from the proposed increase to the student population

"There is some disagreement between parties with regard to the proportion of student population in relation to overall population, ranging from 19% up to 45%.

"I accept that an increase in student population has taken place within the locality, and that this proposal would add to it. However, I do not consider that the proposed additional student numbers would make such a significant contribution that it would result in the student population of the area

becoming excessive or dominant.”

Cllr McKenzie said: “I’m delighted that this appeal has been dismissed.

“From the outset, it was clear that this was a lazy application by dodgy developers looking to make a quick buck in Gorgie.

“The area has seen too much student accommodation approved in recent years without proper scrutiny. In some cases, local councillors have actively pushed through developments against the recommendation of planning officers and in the face of strong local opposition. That has stopped now.

“Since being elected, I have sought to represent the views of the local community, not the interests of student housing developers. I hope the outcome of this case will give residents hope that sharing their views on planning applications is a worthwhile exercise.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter