

# Community plea to stop housing plans at woodland site rejected

Plans to build a housing estate in a popular woodland have been approved after councillors heard 1,300 people were on a waiting list for new homes.

Local people had launched a campaign against the proposed redevelopment of the old Herdmanflat Hospital site in Haddington to save an area of woodland which has become popular with families.

But a meeting of East Lothian Council's planning committee this week heard demand for the new, affordable housing for the county's ageing population outweighed the loss to residents.

And the town's community council said there was no lack of green spaces in and around the town which could be accessed just a short distance from it.

Hundreds of people signed petitions calling for a halt to the development of the site.

Campaigners described the land at Herdmanflat as a 'green lung' in their community and revealed they have launched a bid to have the southern part of the site handed over in a community asset transfer.

At a meeting today (Tuesday) representatives of the local groups said they accepted that the housing was needed but were

asking for a reduction in the number of homes to keep woods on one section untouched.

A spokesperson for the campaign group which is setting up charity Haddington Community Woodlands to apply for the asset transfer, said reducing the planned 145 homes by 53 would allow them to keep the land.

He said: "We are not opposed to the development but the local community values it as an open green space. The area we are talking about would have 53 housing units on it."

Haddington Central Tenants and Residents Association also opposed the plans, asking for a rethink to allow the woodland to remain.

They said: "It might not be a unique green space but it is a unique green space to the people who live there. It is where our children play and where we walk out dogs and spend time."

However Haddington and District Community Council said it had taken into account the benefits for the entire town and felt the advantages of developing the whole site for older residents took precedent."

Their planning spokesperson Morgwn Davies told the meeting: "To keep a bit of open ground when within five to ten minutes you can be in open countryside around Haddington, we believe (this application) will benefit Haddington as a community and a town.

The site was sold to the local authority by NHS Scotland after the services at Herdmanflat Hospital moved into the town's new community hospital with the understanding it would be used for older people.

The meeting heard that the new housing would be aimed at residents aged 55 and over and designed to allow them to adapt their home as they aged, living independently for longer.

Planners told councillors that the development plans had been revised to take into account community concerns and while overall there was likely to be the loss of 211 trees, including shrubs and young groups, there were plans to plant 1250 trees in their place.

Their officer said the plans for the site would create an 'exemplary' development and meet an overwhelming demand for housing.

Councillor Colin Yorkston supported the application saying: "I like the idea of housing that can be adapted. There are 1,300 people currently on the housing list that these houses would be suitable for."

And Provost John McMillan said he recalled growing up in Haddington when Herdmanflat was a hospital and there was a building on the land now claimed as woods.

He said: "It was not meant to be an open space, it is a man made space that was developed. We have to think about the whole community.

A total of 38 objections were lodged to the application however councillors unanimously backed the plans.

Councillor Jeremy Findlay urged officers to continue to work with the community and consider the asset transfer request when it came after being told approving the application would not rule it out.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter