

Homeless hotel in Leith refused bid for huge extension

The owner of an Edinburgh guest house used as temporary accommodation for homeless people has lost a bid to more than triple its number of bedrooms.

Plans to connect it to a disused garage in order to add 32 rooms were turned down by councillors following an appeal by K & S Mir Ltd.

It comes as concerns were raised over a “relentless attempt” by local property owners to “expand temporary accommodation space in an area already saturated with it” amid increasing demand.

Leith Links Community Council (LLCC) warned this was having a “big impact on the character, amenity and residential balance” of the area.

The proposed major extension to the John’s Place guest house would see a derelict rear garage on John’s Lane converted into residential units and the two properties joined by a link bridge, increasing the number of bedrooms from 13 to 45.

However in January planners refused permission, telling applicants the bridge would have an “unacceptable” impact on the listed Georgian townhouse and the “intensification of use” would “prejudice neighbouring amenity.”

The decision was upheld by the council's local review body (LRB) this week.

Appeal documents submitted on behalf of K & S Mir Ltd, operated by the Akbar Mir family who own a string of hotels and bed and breakfasts across Edinburgh used by the council to house homeless people, said they were given "no opportunity to respond to the issues" raised about the bridge by planning officials during the application process.

In a statement they admitted the development "will intensify the use of the area from currently" but added neighbourhood amenity "will not be prejudiced, as access to the hotel will be spread between John's Place, John's Lane and Constitution Street".

Upon reconsidering the plans at the LRB on Wednesday, August 14, councillor Hal Osler said: "I can understand in a way an individual wanting to intensify a usage . . . but this does look like over-intensification of a particular usage that will have a detrimental effect on the residential amenity."

She added: "I take on board the fact there's three different possible entrances but again that's still quite a large amount of movement in an area that's quite constrained."

"There is for me too much in this area."

Cllr Neil Gardiner praised efforts to reuse the garage but said overall he was "not convinced by the application".

LLCC say two other hotels just off Leith Links have been granted permission to double in size and others are currently looking to expand.

A community council spokesperson said: "We are very pleased and relieved that councillors sitting on the Local Review Body have supported the planners' decision to refuse this quite shocking application which would have increased the size of a

local HMO by almost 250%.

“We share the review body’s concerns that the applicant’s proposals would have resulted in a clear over-intensification of temporary accommodation units on the site, from 13 to 45 bedrooms.”

They said the applicant group owns “multiple properties in the immediate and near vicinity which are already in use as HMO or guest house establishments or are destined for such uses” and a “huge number of additional rooms” were in the pipeline.

“This is having a big impact on the character, amenity and residential balance of this part of the Leith conservation area,” they added. “We don’t think the council is yet fully aware of quite how big a problem this is in and around Leith Links and on to Constitution Street.

“And we believe the city council should be paying much closer attention to exactly what is going on around here – a seemingly relentless attempt to expand temporary accommodation space in an area already saturated with it.

“The council has for years acknowledged that this part of Edinburgh already has an ‘overprovision’ of such accommodation, mostly for the homeless and paid for by the council itself – and we think it is high time that this growing problem is addressed.”

Edinburgh Council and K & S Mir Ltd were approached for comment.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter