

# **Student flats approval on old pub site 'a mistake' says councillor**

**The controversial approval of student flats on derelict Edinburgh land previously earmarked for homes flies in the face of local opinion, a councillor has said.**

Plans to redevelop the site of Willowbrae's now-demolished Radical Road bar were 'flipped' by developers last year and approved by the Scottish Government this week.

Danny Aston, who represents Craigentiny-Duddingston where the fenced-off plot on the corner of Willowbrae Road and Northfield Drive has sat empty for six years, said the decision was a "mistake".

The SNP councillor admitted planning applications were "not determined by public opinion, rightly".

But he but said nobody in the local area wanted student accommodation instead of a mix of private and affordable housing, which developers already had the green light to start building.

835 Student Residence Limited were accused of trying to "pack in students like sardines" after a new application for a 138-bed purpose build student accommodation (PBSA) block were lodged just three months after securing planning permission for 48 flats on the site last September.

Edinburgh Council officials did not support the revised plans, which attracted 128 objections and 57 letters of support. However as they failed to put them before councillors in time the applicant was able to appeal straight to the Scottish Government for a decision.

Council planners had argued the site was too far away from university and college campuses and had inadequate public transport links to justify PBSA being approved.

Keith Bray from the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) said the accessibility to sustainable transport in general was "not of concern".

He said the policy which had been cited to back up the council's view did not refer to education but rather local shops and services.

"In terms of walking for local living, there is one small Tesco shop opposite the appeal site which I entered on my site visit and found it to cater for daily needs.

"I confirmed there are also other shopping options (e.g. a post office, small Co-op supermarket, Morrisons supermarket, and pharmacy), other parks, sports facilities, health services and Portobello town centre all within a 20-minute walk (one way)," Mr Bray said.

Cllr Aston said: "This decision is a mistake by the Reporter. Planning applications are not determined by public opinion, rightly.

"But it's telling that you won't find a single person in the local area who wants student accommodation there rather than the mixture of ordinary private and affordable housing that the developer already has permission for.

"Folk know there's a housing crisis in Edinburgh and decisions like this make it worse."

835 Student Residence Limited was contacted for comment.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter