

Calls for decision on number of holiday lets in North Berwick

The number of short term holiday lets (STLs) allowed to operate in an East Lothian town will need to be decided in the near future, a councillor has warned.

Councillor Jeremy Findlay was speaking as a meeting of the council's Local Review Body rejected appeals over a decision to refuse a change of use to two flats used as STLs in North Berwick last week.

A report on one flat's application said "There is an increasing number of overnight stays in East Lothian for work purposes (which is expected to increase over the next 10-15 years) such that the loss of short term accommodation is likely to have a significant negative impact on the local tourist economy in monetary and reputational terms."

Mr Findlay, who supported the change of use of the flat, on Forth Street, questioned the view of officers that a holiday let which shared a communal stairwell with residential properties led to noise from suitcases being moved up and down stairs regularly.

And he said the time was coming when the council would have to make a decision on how many holiday lets could operate in the coastal town.

He said: "We know North Berwick has a thriving tourism industry. I note the comment in the officers report that the reduction in STLs will at some point have an impact on the vitality of the area.

"At some point we are going to have to make a decision about how many STLs we have in North Berwick. At some point it is going to affect the vitality. It is something we as a planning authority and a council are going to have to start taking into account very soon."

Fellow review body member Councillor John McMillan, who voted against the appeal, said: "As economic development spokesperson I agree with Councillor Findlay and we are about a year into this legislation and I do think we are going to need to review it and give feedback to Scottish Government about its potential effect on tourism."

The change of use applications have been coming into the council since new legislations called for STLs to be licensed to operate, which in many cases requires planning permission to be in place.

There is no current policy in place within the council about STLs but in the majority of cases where they share a stairwell or entrance with other residential properties planners have tended to refuse permission.

Both the flat on Fort Street, and another flat on East Road, lost appeals against the refusal of a change of use over use as holiday lets.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter