

Bangour housing plan decision delayed for a month

Plans for the future of historic buildings at a former West Lothian hospital have been delayed for a month.

SNP councillors on the Development Management Committee voted as one saying they needed more time and more information on the proposals.

The proposals cover the largest part of the site including the former Bangour hospital buildings which are to be converted into homes.

Asked what specifically he wanted more information on, Councillor Willie Boyle replied: "Everything".

Councillors had been given a nine-page summary on decisions taken so far for the massive hospital site near Dechmont- with references to other documents available in the council's planning portal.

SNP members complained that they had not had enough time to research copious amounts of documents before being asked to make a decision.

The papers- as is standard practice- were made available to members of the committee a week before Wednesday morning's meeting.

Councillor Willie Boyle told the meeting: "I would like to move that this is continued. We hear the complexities and the

amount of work that has gone into this and yet we are presented with it all in nine pages and left to rake through the council planning portal.

“The information required properly for us in the few days that we have had these papers is unacceptable. This needs to be continued and we need a full appraisal of the information that should be in front of us. I think this is dire.

“I don’t think I have had justifiable time to look at this in detail given the size of this development.”

Planning officer Gillian Cyphus acknowledged the size and complexity of the proposals.

In her opening remarks she told the committee: “This is a joint report which covers six planning applications which together covers the construction of 395 houses, 82 flats and the conversion of four listed buildings to form 63 flats all on the site of the Bangour Village Hospital site near Dechmont.

“The hospital site has an extensive planning history; the most relevant applications are planning permission in principle which was granted in June 2022 and the first detailed application which was granted in July 2023.”

Councillors visited the site on Monday. The complexity of the proposals is reflected in the need to preserve the listed buildings and their surroundings and in the geography. The land rises steeply from south to north

Mrs Cyphus said the key issues included design and layout, impact on listed buildings and impact on trees and ecology.

She added: “Balancing all of those things on a site of this scale is very challenging. Officers have spent considerable time studying proposals and negotiating changes with the developer.

“The developer has engaged with the officers and with Historic Environment Scotland about the impact on the listed buildings and has provided adequate justification for the amendments and demolitions which are proposed.”

Councillor Pauline Stafford, the deputy group leader, said “ I think we got these papers at the end of last week and we have really struggled to get through the documents on the planning portal. I don't think I'm in a position to make meaningful contributions to the complexity of this application so I would really appreciate an extension.”

Labour Councillor Tom Conn said: “I'm a bit concerned if we continue this, we need a definite end otherwise it just floats around in the ether.

Chairing the meeting, Labour Councillor Tony Boyle said: I'm going to move so that we don't delay.”

Councillor Pauline Clark said: “I think, just looking at the planning portal, there is a lot to go through. I have pages of questions I was going to ask but I think it's much better to have that information in front of us.

“We would have the hours that we need to wade through this information to make a decision that is the right one.”

A vote the motion to delay a decision for a month was won by the SNP by three votes to two.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter