

# East Lothian Council refuses to reveal how many buildings have been closed

A council has refused to publicly reveal how many of its buildings are currently 'mothballed' amid growing concern one of its most popular venues is about to join the list.

East Lothian Council has this year alone temporarily closed two rural primary schools with the most recent, Saltoun, seeing pupils move to another school after the October holiday.

And there are concerns that a report due to go to elected members later this month will call for similar action at The Brunton Theatre, which has been closed since March last year after crumbling concrete was discovered in the venue.

While the local authority remains tight-lipped on the outcome of a report into options for the future of the theatre, which was opened by the late Queen in Musselburgh, in 1971, it is understood the cost of repairs is too expensive for the cash-strapped council's budget.

A public survey on how visitors to The Brunton feel about its current use of alternative venues which have included The Corn Exchange in Haddington and other Musselburgh locations, was carried out on East Lothian Council's consultation hub on

behalf of the Trust which runs it earlier this month.

East Lothian Council was asked by the Local Democracy Reporting Service for a list of all public buildings which are currently mothballed, including schools and community halls, but refused to release it instead saying a Freedom of Information request would be required.

That request was then classed as environmental information, under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and a fee of £191 asked for to cover the cost of a Grade 10 staff member at £38.20 an hour pulling to information together, before it could be processed.

The council does not charge for Freedom of Information responses, only EIR request. It currently has 14 outstanding appeals being investigated by the Scottish Information Commissioner over its responses to information requests – 11 related to EIR fees imposed.

A council spokesperson said: “Any request for information needs to be considered through the correct legislative pathway; depending on the nature of the enquiry this may be Freedom of Information or Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). The legislation that introduced EIRs enabled authorities to charge a fee for collating and providing the information requested.

“Given the potential for the request to be complex with information held in different formats meaning time and resource is required for collation, the council introduced a charging scheme as permitted by the regulations.

“Wherever possible we will direct enquirers to information that is already held in the public domain. There has been information relating to mothballed facilities shared through a number of channels including in public at council meetings, directly with communities and published online in our members’ library system.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter