

Former WASPs building in Dalry to become student flats

The building at West Park Place sold by the council for £1 in 2021, and used as an artists' hub for around 50 artists until 2023, will be turned into purpose built student accommodation when the new owners obtain planning permission.

"Boutique property company", Viridis Real Estate – <https://viridisrealestate.com/> has publicised its proposals to create new student homes – which means around 135 beds – at West Park Place in Dalry. This is the building previously occupied by Workshop and Artists Studio Provision (Scotland) (WASPS), the UK's largest provider of workspaces for artists and the creative industries. It lies on the same street as other student accommodation approved more than a decade ago.

According to WASPs this sale to Viridis, has allowed WASPS to purchase Riverside House – <https://www.waspsstudios.org.uk/2023/12/20/announcing-wasps-new-studio-provision-in-edinburgh/> – and will "support even more artists and the creative industries in much improved facilities".

As a local development, there is no requirement for public consultation, but Viridis is seeking to meeting with the community council on 4 November and also wants to meet local councillors. The directors of the company are all men,

Nicholas John Tucker, Omar Yousef Jamil from Saudi Arabia, James Allen Hilton, Christopher Cheah, Lord Rupert Francis John Carrington, and Ahmed Iqbal Bangee who has an address in Dubai. The company is registered to a business address in London's Berkeley Street.

The company will hold a public consultation event at the venue and will announce details in relation to this "in due course".

The company says a website will also be established, providing information on the proposals, and the opportunity to feedback, in addition to attending the consultation event.

Cllr Ross McKenzie said: "The story of the artists studios on West Park Place sums up the state of Edinburgh today. The value that student housing developers can extract from sites close to the City Centre means that locals are priced out of living and working in the area. In this case, artists have literally been evicted and it's no surprise to see multinational developers swoop in to take on the site soon after. WASPs will claim that the sale allows them to provide better accommodation for artists, but the new building is over 2 miles further out from the City Centre and the rents are significantly higher. I have met with artists who just can't afford these higher rents and are now looking to leave Edinburgh.

"I will be examining the planning application closely when it is submitted. In the past, the developers' PR man may have been able to schmooze local councillors into supporting proposals that don't comply with planning regulations, but that hasn't happened since I've been elected. If the proposals don't comply with the new City Plan and if they don't have the support of the local community then we will fight them and we will win."

A spokesperson for Viridis Real Estate, said: "We are pleased to be bringing forward proposals for high-quality new student

homes at West Park Place, delivering 135 much-needed bedspaces to address the current student housing crisis.

“A report from the Scottish Parliament cross party group on housing, among others, has identified such a crisis. Indeed, according to the National Union of Students (NUS), in 2023 one in 10 students reported having experienced homelessness in the past, and additionally this has affected more than a fifth of all international students.

“Insufficient housing supply has been exacerbated by increasing student numbers. Between 2016/17 and 2022/23, the number of full-time students at Edinburgh’s universities have risen by just under a quarter, and many of these are taking up homes that, in many cases, are more appropriate for families.”Our proposals will free up the equivalent of 45 three-bedroom homes, or at a minimum, ensure that students are not moving into these homes.

“A student concentration assessment is being prepared, but the concentration of students living in the area is below the 50 per cent capacity level outlined in the Council’s planning guidance, above which there is deemed to be a risk of there being an impact on the balance of the community.

“The building at West Park Place was previously owned by Working Artists Studio Provision Scotland (WASPS), a charity that is the UK’s largest provider of workspaces for artists and the creative industries.

“Due to significant structural deterioration, with safe use of the building becoming severely restricted and impractical, this led to unsustainable maintenance costs, and it was put on the market in 2023.

“Our purchase of the site has enabled WASPS to invest in much improved fit-for-purpose accommodation across the city.

“While not a statutory requirement, we look forward to engaging with the community on our proposals.”

The Edinburgh Reporter has asked Viridis for visuals of their proposed development but they do not have any images ready as yet.

