

Historic East Lothian pub wins solar panel fight

An historic pub which attracts visitors from around the world has won a fight to put solar panels on its roof in a bid to keep it operating in the future.

Staggs, in Musselburgh, has been owned by the same family for more than 150 years and is a category C listed building, but when Nigel Finlay applied to put 27 panels on its roof, East Lothian Council planners objected.

Planners said the plans would 'harmfully alter' the pub's traditional slate roof and damage the 'special architectural interest' of the building.

However a meeting of the council's planning committee heard from Mr Finlay's daughter Katherine McKenzie that without the change the pub could find itself struggling with hefty electricity bills.

And she said the pub was listed more for its internal decor, which has been retained since Victorian times, than its exterior.

She told the meeting: "The Volunteer Arms, known as Staggs, has been in our family for 150 years and we recognise the importance of preserving its historic character but we also have to protect its future."

Mrs McKenzie said that the solar panels would be embedded onto the roof with the Scottish slate removed to make room kept by

the family for future repairs in a sustainable measure.

And she added the solar panels were expected to generate enough power to run the pub at a time when electricity bills were soaring.

Planning officers had recommended refusing planning permission and Listed Building Consent for the panels to be introduced.

However councillors took a different view after hearing Mrs McKenzie's appeal to be allowed to make the change.

Councillor Andy Forrest, local ward member, said he had drunk in the pub which attracted visitors from "around the world" and wanted to ensure future generations could drink there as well.

He said: "The listed building special interest of Staggs is mainly its interior and down to it being in the same family, and cared for, over generations.

"It is a well-respected, well-run and well loved pub and I want to ensure its future."

Councillor Norman Hampshire said: "This is a pub which attracts visitors from around the world and probably one of a few left in Scotland which has remained in the same family's ownership."

And councillor Shona McIntosh added: "I would rather have a functioning pub at the heart of the community than an empty building. I don't think if it was closed and boarded up people would pass and remark "look at its traditional slate roof"."

The committee unanimously agreed to go against officers recommendation and grant planning permission and Listed Building Consent for the solar panels.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter