

West Lothian councillors give cautious welcome to housing plan

Councillors have given cautious welcome to plans for more than 300 new homes on the edge of Bents and Stoneyburn which they initially rejected.

Plans to build on open fields off Cannop Crescent at the western end of Bents and Stoneyburn had been knocked back by West Lothian's Development Management Committee (DMC) in mid 2022.

The new, detailed plans for the housing had been met with 20 objections, but councillors accepted that the developers had proposals for the 44-acre site which would finance and spur on projects such as the cycle path to Fauldhouse – from what locals call an Island village because of its lack of footpaths to other communities.

Objectors had cited lack of amenities in the village, few shops, and the nearest medical facilities three miles west in Fauldhouse. There were also concerns about increased traffic on the narrow roads as well as over-development of the village and the potential construction noise.

An appeal to the Scottish Government saw the 2022 objection overturned in January last year. Keepmoat Homes presented detailed proposals for 332 new homes on the site to this month's meeting of the DMC.

Tony Irving, a senior planning officer with the council, told the DMC that a wide range of houses were planned as part of the development including a significant proportion of affordable homes- 33 affordable homes for social rent and a further 43 for shared ownership.

Mr Irving told councillors: "Overall it is considered that an attractive residential environment will be achieved."

David Howell, a planning consultant for the developers, told the meeting that a significant amount of time and effort has been spent working with the council's planners to deliver an "attractive extension" to Bents and Stoneyburn.

He said that the new housing would provide a range of styles including bungalows and many would be starter homes.

Local councillor Pauline Clark told the meeting she was pleased at the mix of tenure but urged the developers to look again at proposals for a retail unit on the northern fringe of the site which sits in the plans adjacent to existing homes.

She asked if the unit could be moved further west. Planning officers said that could be a delegated "design tweak" and Mr Howell said the consultants would accept such a change if it was conditioned.

Mr Howell said the development would contribute to future plans for cycle links onwards to Fauldhouse and added that he believed the new homes had the "potential to attract further investment to a community which has missed out in recent years."

It would bring, he added, an: "exciting new chapter for Bents and Stoneyburn."

Councillor Clark said: "All things considered; I would be happy to support this."

She added: "Back in the day I don't think the committee at that time were happy to support this as it was building in the countryside. I certainly think there are other opportunities for building in Stoneyburn, but we are past that now and we have been presented with what I think is a pretty good, proposed development. The planning tweak I would like to see in there. I think the good size gardens have been a good consideration and I hope that stays.

Fellow SNP councillor Willie Boyle said he was pleased with the detail of the development and added: "I know there was a lot of objections against this development, and I can understand a lot of the thinking behind it. But the principle I've held for a number of years is I think the development in our smaller settlements in West Lothian, off the footprint of the M8 corridor actually brings vitality and viability to a lot of these small settlement areas.

"I know a lot of people that originate from this area that have moved from this area because they couldn't get houses in this area, and I think that the concentration along the M8 corridor is doing no favours to the smaller settlements scattered around West Lothian.

"I hope that Bents will come to see the benefits of this development because I'm hoping that this development, as it matures, will draw additional services like doctors' surgeries and other things to the area and help with the viability and vitality of the place."

Chairing the meeting, Labour councillor Tony Boyle proposed granting the detailed permission with the condition of the design tweak of moving the retail unit. Members agreed.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter