

Latest in a series of overturns on West Lothian housing development brings anger

**The Scottish Government has backed
an appeal by house builders to
redevelop a wildlife-rich riverbank
site in a West Lothian village.**

Plans to squeeze 125 homes onto the banks of the river Almond would destroy the habitat of otters and the ancient landscape of a drovers' road, residents warned when the proposal was first aired in 2022.

Now the open space in Mid Calder looks set to be built over following the decision by the Reporter appointed by the government's Division of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) .

A councillor branded the decision as "democracy trashed".

The Reporter granted permission for the development against the recommendation of West Lothian Council's planning officers and the formal refusal decision of the council in February 2022 .

The Reporter said: "While the proposed development does not accord overall with the relevant provisions of the development plan, granting planning permission is still justified."

West Lothian Council (Planning Committee) voted to refuse the

application from Robertson Homes to develop the site at New Calder Mill Road.

Permission was refused for being contrary to planning policy in ten different areas, mainly related to the site being an open space, countryside area which is not allocated for housing.

It is the latest incidence of the council's planning decisions against housing development being overturned in recent years. Almost a dozen large and small housing developments, from Armadale to East Calder and Linlithgow, including Bathgate, Whitburn and West Calder have been granted by DPEA reporters.

Hundreds responded mostly in anger when the news was released on the council's social media. One echoed many, writing: "soon there will be no countryside left".

Bathgate's Labour councillor Harry Cartmill, who has long been a critic of the DPEA appeals system, branded the decision as: "democracy and environmental protections trashed again".

He added: "Another denial of democracy- these Scottish Government appointed Planning Reporters have powers that belong in North Korea not Scotland."

The land lies on the south bank of the Almond to the east of the Lizzie Brice Roundabout. It is open country, with a line of mature trees and the land slopes gently down to a stretch of the Almond.

In 2022 West Lothian's Planning Committee heard the proposals faced more than 50 objections including from Mid Calder Community Council as well as neighbouring Howden Community Council in Livingston.

There were concerns that the housing would not only destroy wildlife but would crowd already busy roads and put increased

pressure on local infrastructure services such as the local doctors' surgery.

Many of the written objections echoed those of Vivienne Kelly who wrote: "This field is used by the otters who come over from the Weir to Lord Torphican's pond and back. It is also an area heavily used by Tawny Owls and Deer, other wildlife and migrating birds."

Another objector said: "The village aspect does seem to be disappearing. Road quality and condition is really poor in the village."

"Local facilities are already under pressure; there simply isn't enough in the village to sustain more development."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter