

Plans for wizard theme holiday flats rejected

A wizard-themed holiday let above the café where JK Rowling famously wrote Harry Potter has been rejected despite claims it is the only way to bring the building back to life.

Edinburgh resident Sam Zawadzki wanted to renovate the property which suffered extensive fire damage several years ago, using the theme to attract short term guests.

And it was argued that without the funds from the holiday lets the flat, which had been residential before the blaze, would not be able to be brought back into use with the café below also affected.

A meeting of City of Edinburgh Council's Local Review Body heard that the building on Merchant Street in the Capital had been uninhabitable since the fire in August 2021.

The Elephant House Café below was closed and temporarily moved to a new location because of the impact of the blaze on the building structure.

Appealing against a decision by planners to refuse permission to change the flat from residential to a short term let, the owner said the proposed theme was the only way to find funds to carry out the work.

They said: "Renovation costs are substantial, and insurance

funding has not been received. Only the higher revenue from short-term lets can provide the necessary level of income to make renovation viable.

“Current long-term let domestic rental rates cannot fund restoration of the property. There is also no evidence to indicate that future long-term let domestic rental rates are remotely likely to cover or match the rebuild funding required.

The city’s planning department had refused permission because the flat was operating as a house of multiple occupancy and the loss of residential accommodation is against policy unless there are unique benefits that can be proven.

The owner said the cultural significance of the building made it an exception.

They said: “Located above The Elephant House café, famously known as the “birthplace” of Harry Potter, the property has a unique connection to global literary history.

“The proposed ‘wizarding accommodation’ theme for the short-term let will honour this legacy, which attracts tourists from around the world and enhances Edinburgh’s cultural tourism features.”

The review body was split over their decision with Councillors Amy McNeese-Meechan and Joanna Mowat arguing the unique circumstances surrounding the property meant it should be allowed to over ride policy and become a short term let.

However review body convenor Councillor Alys Mumford disagreed, along with fellow member Councillor Tim Jones, saying the owner’s claim the property would not be repaired without allowing the themed holiday let was not acceptable.

Councillor Mumford said: “I don’t believe we have been given

sufficient evidence that the only way this renovation could happen is with a short term let that is going to be very profitable and bring in money.

“The owner has very elaborate plans and wants to turn this into an attraction which I have some sympathy with.”

The review body recorded a split decision with two for and two against upholding the appeal with Councillor Mumford casting the deciding vote to reject the appeal.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter