

# **Short term lets untenable in West Lothian housing crisis**

**The boom in short term let of homes has been branded a Wild West and is untenable in West Lothian during a housing crisis, a councillor has claimed.**

While local numbers remain small, the trend is upwards. There needs to be open debate in the council on a policy towards short term let said Bathgate's SNP member Willie Boyle.

It needs to decide the economic worth and social cost of short term lets in a housing market that cannot meet growing demand for homes.

The county has not seen anything like the number of applications dealt with by Edinburgh and East Lothian, where the tourist trade has driven the creation of many businesses built on multiple ownership of short term let properties. e

In East Lothian the growth of the short term let market is seen as a major economic driver for the county.

This calendar year shows West Lothian had had 18 planning applications for short term let use and seven applications for a certificate of lawful use as a short term let.

However, at a recent meeting of West Lothian's Development Management Committee a planning officer acknowledged: "I think we'll see more and more of these applications coming forward."

Councillor Boyle said: "I understand that there can be demand for short term lets for tourism and suchlike, and it is all very positive. It may even be positive short term as a temporary answer to some of our accommodation requirements, but in the long-term planning permission for short term lets rather than residential homes is untenable.

"As a local authority we need to look at the number of applications coming in and ask if we need to take a firm policy decision as to how we embrace, or otherwise short term lets."

A senior planning officer, Tony Irving told the meeting: "Short term lets over a number of years has been a bit of a Wild West really, with no real control over that. Obviously now there's planning control and there's also separate licensing control over short term lets.

"It's always a matter of fact and degree in every case as to whether there has been a material change of use from a house being used as a permanent home to being used on a short term let basis. In most cases it will require an application so you will start to see these coming through."

Mr Irving said there is a specific policy in new planning rules, NPF4, which refers to short term lets. It calls on councils to look at the impact of the use of a property as a short term let has on the amenity, ie on neighbours, through noise and disturbance. Secondly the presumption is not to support change of use from permanent home to short term let unless an applicant can demonstrate that there's economic benefits.

"Any loss of a permanent home would have to have significant economic benefit to get over that. The applications on the delegate listed are beginning to reflect that.", Mr Irving added.

West Lothian has seen few applications coming through – in

December there were only three applications for change of use on the delegated list- the list of planning applications decided by planning officers as per planning laws without being debated by elected members.

Chairing the meeting of the DMC, Councillor Tony Boyle suggested that a policy debate would be something for full council and more members to contribute to rather than only the members of the DMC.

Willie Boyle agreed: "I don't know if I should be for short term lets or against them, but I think it's something that it's something we should be discussing; whether we need a specific policy lead on it one way or another. Is there a debate to be had that short term lets because they don't help the housing crisis?.

"Given the number of applications that are coming through it is something we will need to look at as a council."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter