

# **Almost 1,000 West Lothian homes built on appeal to Government**

**Almost 1,000 new homes will be built on open fields in West Lothian thanks to the Scottish Government overturning decisions taken by locally elected councillors.**

The Local Democracy Reporting Service can reveal that 25 appeals have been made to the Division of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) in the last five years.

In a majority of communities, a Reporter appointed by the DPEA has backed house builders and rejected objections of local residents and the council who say existing services and road infrastructure cannot cope.

West Lothian's Labour council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick this week called on the Scottish Government to "accept that local councils be left to make their own decisions."

Councillor Fitzpatrick spoke after the latest decision by the DPEA to overturn the council's rejection of plans to build on the riverbank of the Almond in the last open space in the village of Mid Calder.

A DPEA Reporter last month gave Robertson Homes permission to develop the site at New Calder Mill Road building 125 homes.

The LDRS has found that 25 appeals have been made against refusal of planning permission for housing development of ten or more homes. In the majority of cases developers were looking to build more than sixty, and sometimes up to 250 homes in specific developments.

The DPEA said: "Since 1 January 2020, there have been 25 planning appeal decisions for proposals for 10 or more houses in West Lothian. Fourteen (56%) of these appeals were allowed, with planning permission granted. Eleven (44%) of these appeals were dismissed and planning permission refused."

Notable among the housebuilding which was backed on appeal were Easton Farm in Bathgate, Cannop Crescent in Stoneyburn and Brotherton Farm in Livingston – eating up the last few fields between the new town and the village of Polbeth on the busy A71.

The DPEA also backed housebuilding on Hen's Nest Road in open countryside between Whitburn and East Whitburn. Large scale developments are coming in most communities, with almost 1,000 new homes built after successful appeals.

Councillor Fitzpatrick told the LDRS: "The council has identified sites for 17,000 houses but are only required to have a land supply of 9,850 houses.

He added: "The Scottish Government must rapidly revise its planning legislation which recognises the climate and nature emergency and accept that local councils be left to make their own decisions without interference."

"There have been a number of occasions in recent years where the Scottish Ministers' reporters have granted housing developments in West Lothian against strong opposition from the council and our communities."

Referring to the January decision on Mid Calder Councillor Fitzpatrick told the LDRS: "A total of 50 individual

objections and two community councils were all in firm agreement that developing this beautiful countryside site bordering the River Almond should be refused.

“There’s no justification for building on this cherished space of countryside which is critical habitat for red listed ground nesting birds including skylark, lapwing and otters.

“It is essential to safeguard our open spaces along the River Almond corridor as an important natural resource. The Reporter acknowledges that the development is not accordance with our approved development plan but granted the appeal anyway.”

Councillor Fitzpatrick added: “The Reporter is totally out of touch in stating that two Health Centres are within a 2-kilometre walking distance from the site. Fact – East Calder Health Centre services Mid Calder patients. East Calder Health Centre was built for an estimated 7,000 patients and is rapidly accelerating to serve 20,000. The local populace has waited 15 years for a new Health Centre and there is still no money.”

A Scottish Government spokesperson told the LDRS: “The right to appeal certain decisions made by local planning authorities is an important part of the planning system.

“The vast majority of appeals are decided by independent reporters who are required to make their decision on the planning merits of the case, taking full account of submissions made by all parties, including those from members of the local community.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter