

Anger as community woodland is cut down

Campaigners who fought to save a community woodland have accused East Lothian Council of 'trampling over their pleas' after they started chopping down the trees.

The local authority is pushing ahead with plans for housing on the former Herdmanflat Hospital site in Haddington, which is being designed to provide homes for older residents.

However the site has become a popular green space with local families who called it their 'green lung' and hundreds have backed a move to have it handed over through a Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

Local charity Haddington Community Woodlands was established to fight to keep the land and joined forces with Friends of Herdmanflat Hospital to denounce the start of work on the site which they described as "the destruction of the heart of the cherished Herdmanflat Woodland."

A spokesperson for the charity said: "Our legally grounded pleas were not merely dismissed; they were trampled in a rush to rubber-stamp a decision that goes against the express wishes of the community.

"The fate of Herdmanflat Woodland appears to have been sealed in closed-door policy and strategy meetings long before plans were ever presented to the public.

"Several community members attending public meetings felt

disappointed and said the decision seemed to be a 'done deal'."

The charity said the CAT application which had been prepared arguing for the land was now expected to be dismissed 'out of hand'.

They said: "It is heartbreaking to think of the habitat that has been lost and for future generations. So many locals have a deep attachment to this site. This has been a green haven for over a hundred years – we have missed a rare chance to do something positive for the community."

A council spokesperson said: "East Lothian Council has carried out two periods of community consultation which included public events and direct engagement with community groups.

"The development supports the identified, urgent need for more affordable housing for older people in East Lothian.

"Health and well-being is at the heart of the redevelopment, with active travel being promoted. We will be preserving up to 60 per cent of green space, with tree loss kept as low as possible and additional planting taking place during the first phase of development, to enhance biodiversity across the site.

"It is very important to emphasise that the current tree felling works are being carried out in line with our planning consent and all relevant legislation. The works are being completed out with the bird nesting season (end of March) and licensed ecologists and arboriculturists will be on site to check for nesting birds and bats ahead of individual removals.'"

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter