

Homelessness charity 'hopeful' councillors will approve move to new site

A homelessness charity has said it is "hopeful" councillors will approve its temporary accommodation village moving to a new site, after council officers recommended the plans be rejected.

Social Bite Village, in Granton, has been preparing a move to a nearby site for months as its existing lease with Edinburgh Council has come to an end.

The charity's current site, adjacent to Granton Castle, is on property owned by the city. However, its lease has run out, and together with developers the city wishes to build a mixed-use development there.



If approved, the existing hub space – featuring showers, a common space and a kitchen – would be replaced

At present, 16 people live on the existing site – new

residents move in as existing ones transition to permanent housing.

But a report going before councillors next Wednesday has seen officers recommend that councillors refuse planning permission for the new site due to its being on the city's greenbelt.

The proposed new site, located about half a mile to the west, would sit adjacent to the Gypsy Brae recreation grounds. The charity is seeking temporary planning permission for the development, and most of the structures would be moved from their old site.

Social Bite founder Josh Littlejohn MBE said, "The Social Bite Village is an established, thriving community that has helped more than 100 people out of homelessness in Edinburgh since 2018.

"The proposed site is only a short walk from the village's current location, which residents have told us matters to them.

"We are hopeful that the councillors involved in approving the village's new location will recognise the value of the project in providing high quality, supported accommodation for vulnerable people in the midst of a housing emergency."

Council officers said in a report that the proposed site does not appropriately meet the city's development plan, as its use for housing would risk it losing its status as greenbelt land.

They also said that the 10 year occupancy that Social Bite was eyeing in their planning application did not qualify as 'temporary' – however, they did not cite this as a reason for rejecting the application.

If approved, seven new temporary single bed structures would be built, as well as a new hub, featuring kitchen, shower and laundry facilities.

Allotments for the temporary residents to maintain would also be built on site, replicating the arrangement of Social Bite's existing temporary development.

The site has expansive views of the Firth of Forth, as well as the Forth Bridges, and is surrounded on two sides by treelines.

At present, the land is used as an extension of the adjacent Gipsy Brae recreation area, and is also sometimes used by traveller communities.

Though it is owned by Social Bite, the day-to-day operations at the existing site are carried out by another homelessness charity, Cyrenians.

Social Bite, founded in 2012, provides meals to and fundraises for people who are homeless, alongside their operation of their Edinburgh housing development.

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter