Student flats developer says council is wrong about flood risk

The developers of the Murrayfield Sports Bar site in Gorgie say the council's concerns over the flood risk are wrong, and run contrary to other applications already approved in the same area.

The planning application for Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) is on the list to be considered for the third time by the committee next Wednesday with a recommendation from officers that it should be refused partly on the basis of flood risk.

The report states: "The proposal for purpose-built student accommodation is at risk of flooding in a 1 in 200-year flooding event when climate change allowance is considered, and it is not compliant with the requirements of NPF 4 policy 22 as it cannot be considered as safe and flood-free and the development would create an island during such a flood event."

The council officers are also accused of using the wrong data and ignoring a detailed ground survey which was carried out by developers.

Changes have been made to the plans which the developer says are "major improvements". And EH1 Students Gorgie, who plan to create the student flats on the site once it is cleared, say

that the previous plans had less effective flood control measures.

In the case of a separate site at 495 Gorgie Road, EH1 says the flood control measures were not as good as those proposed for the Murrayfield Sports Bar site, and that the flooding in that case was described as "dangerous".

The developers have also pointed out technical errors to the Head of Planning in the report by officers which they take issue with. One significant demand is that Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) ask for a wall to be included as a flood wall (contrary to their own guidance). This would demand planning for a "one in a thousand year river flow event".

Maurice McCann Development Manager for EH1 Students Gorgie said: "We were initially encouraged by our engagement with council officers who seemed to welcome the enhanced flood protection included in our new application, indeed we would not have made a planning application if they had responded negatively.

"After the application was submitted the attitude changed and we found we couldn't get a meeting with the council's Flood Team to address any concerns. The work we have done on this application shows very clearly that we can provide safe access and egress for what would currently be a one in a thousand-year flood event.

"We have written to the Head of Planning to point out that an appropriate and policy compliant flood solution can be found, and that the information in the council report is demonstrably wrong. We have asked that the item be withdrawn from the agenda in order that more accurate information can be considered.

"We have a proposal that was recommended for approval when the flood management issues were not policy compliant, but now we

have compliant proposals the recommendation has been changed. All we're looking for is for fair treatment and common sense. These proposals can help shift students out of flatted accommodation to free up much needed housing during a 'Housing "Emergency'.

"Our proposals deliver flood safe facilities for a what is currently a one in a thousand-year river flow. Nobody should be asked to go beyond that as it would frankly be bonkers. We all want to see 'climate resilient' developments – and our proposals are climate resilient and we're building this to last. We're confident this can last for hundreds of years, but nobody knows what might happen in a thousand years. I don't want to trivialise the debate – these are serious issues, but there's every bit as much chance of there being student housing on Mars in a thousand years' time. This is just ticking the wrong policy boxes, without regard to common sense.

"My team stands ready to engage with the council's planning team to work through the details and deliver proposals that meet the council's policy objectives and help tackle the housing emergency."

The council report is below:

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