



Sheila Gilmore MP
Edinburgh East Constituency

By email and post - Marie.Buchanan@scot.gov.uk

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Our Ref: DR/GILM01002/01150231
Your Ref: PPA-230-2146
27 March 2015

Dear Ms Buchanan

PPA-230-2146 (Planning Permission Appeal)
Demolition of existing retail unit and redevelopment of site for student housing, class 1(retail) and/or class 2 (financial, professional and other services) uses with associated ancillary uses, landscaping and other associated development. At 102 St Leonard's Street, Edinburgh, EH8 9RD

Following receipt of an appeal notification from the City of Edinburgh Council dated 11 March 2015, I wish to submit further comments relating to the application by Unite Students to demolish a retail store and erect student accommodation at the above address, which is located in the Southside area within my constituency, Edinburgh East.

My previous submission to the City of Edinburgh Council called for the application to be refused on the ground that the plans did not meet City of Edinburgh Council Local Plan policies Hou 10 and Ret 11. That submission made clear local concerns the development would lead to an excessive concentration of students in the immediate locality and would lead to a qualitative deficiency in the retail offering in the local area.

I am pleased that the planning authority agreed with my objection in relation to Hou 10 and members of the City of Edinburgh Council's Development Management Sub-committee refused the application in line with its own policies.

The presentation made by the City of Edinburgh Council vigorously defended its own policy and took steps to ensure that the interpretation of it clearly and extensively considered before members determined the application. The report presented to members outlined clearly that the development proposes a substantial deviation from the local plan due to the number of student units already located in this area of the Southside, noting that the student population would exceed 60% should the proposal go ahead. That report, presented at the meeting of the Development Management Sub-Committee, outlined in detail the need for a proposal to be acceptable under both part a) and b) of Hou 10 in order for permission to be granted under that policy; the report confirms that the site is acceptable in terms of its



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location, while refuting that this site is adjacent, but due to the high concentration of student numbers the development would lead to it was deemed this proposal is not acceptable.

It is absolutely right that the planning authority is clear of the aims and purpose of the policy it has agreed, and it is important that it is allowed to maintain its policy as it sees fit, without hindrance or interference. At the time the decision was being made the Council was rightly continuing to defend its policy through the courts by supporting the statutory appeal action taken by local residents. That action, appealing the decision of a previous appeal, (reference: PPA-230-2122), sought legal remedy of the excessively broad interpretation of one word - "adjacent" - within the City of Edinburgh Council's Planning Guidance for Student Accommodation. In determining this the Council's officers and members sought to underline the fact that the policy identifies, in positive terms, that the Council supports development of purpose-built student accommodation in suitable locations, but will not do so without taking account of the full policy and the negative impact of the proposed development, i.e. to cause excessive concentrations of student accommodation in any one area, hence a very strong reason for refusal.

The purpose of the policy is to acknowledge the concerns that while students contribute to a strong, lively and vibrant place to live, with economic benefits, there can be a negative impact when numbers are too high. The policy discussion in the local plan makes clear that because students are a population which is growing but transient, they less likely to afford the pleasure of being involved in community life, and may only regard the area as home in the short term. This subsequently impacts on any involvement they may have to coordinate maintenance of gardens or common stairs, a job left to the declining number of long term residents.

As MP for a constituency which includes a large proportion of the central part of Edinburgh, along with more suburban areas to the east, I am keen to see that concentrations of student populations do not become too high in this part of the city. This appeal should be dismissed; however, I hold no objection to student accommodation per se. My constituents enjoy a pace of life in the busy and vibrant Southside to which students do make a contribution. The Reporter cannot ignore the extent of concern local residents have about these plans, and the passion and energy they have put into fighting these proposals, and their response must be taken into account when determining this appeal.

Having fought this and similar plans for over 18 months, residents have shown Councillors, officials and other local residents that they believe the decision taken by the planning authority is one which is right. They have set up a new community group and ensured have entered discussions with the University of Edinburgh which is now beginning to accept their arguments that overconcentration of student accommodation can be damaging for existing communities. This appeal must be dismissed. I hope that the Reporter agrees with residents, the planning authority and me, that this proposal is not acceptable in terms of policy Hou 10.

In my objection to that initial application I made clear my concerns at the potential loss of the retail store to local community, which is valued greatly. In an area which



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is dense with residential family accommodation, it is welcome that there is a store which provides 'DI Y' and gardening goods without having to leave the centre of Edinburgh. The size, offering and format of the premises are complementary to the town centre and promotes an overall vibrant shopping experience in the Southside adding amenity for existing residents. The loss of the retail store is not welcome, a matter which is now the subject of a local resident's petition calling on Homebase to stay in the Southside. They are asking that the company maintains its presence and does everything possible to keep trading here; in planning terms the loss of this retail space has to be considered as part of this appeal.

In the last few days I have had sight of communications from the University of Edinburgh which indicates that should this appeal be dismissed, they would be willing to walk away from this proposal and accommodate the students in alternative locations.

You will be aware that Parliament is due to be dissolved on Monday, however I am very keen to be updated with the decision that the Reporter comes to and trust that I will be informed of the decision in writing to the address in this letter.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Gilmore MP