

# Developer retreats as villagers lay siege to castle plans

Mike Wade

A contentious proposal to build a housing estate in front of a castle in a historic village has been withdrawn following an outcry by local residents and conservationists.

Cala Homes had submitted plans to construct 36 houses in Dirleton, East Lothian, but was bitterly opposed by residents, who said the developer had shown scant respect for the village and had failed to consult properly with the community.

Following a report in *The Times* last month — in which housebuilders were accused of “suburbanising” rural Scotland — the plan was removed from the planning process and will now be amended.

John Finlay, of the campaign group

Dirleton is Special, welcomed the move. “What we are hoping is that we can work with Cala in developing a design which is appropriate and sensitive to the village, rather than something which is formula-led,” he said.

“People aren’t against development, far from it. The idea of new blood, new families coming in, is a good one, but it has to be in the context of designs that are relevant and sensitive to what is a very important and historic village.”

The decision will give hope to residents in nearby Gullane who have campaigned to have their village removed from East Lothian council’s local development plan.

The Dirleton scheme was proposed for an area called Castlemains, adjacent to the medieval castle, which was the scene of a siege by Oliver Cromwell’s

army, led by General Monck. He bombarded the castle with cannon fire, leaving it badly damaged, and it was never inhabited again.

Campaigners against the housing project have received a letter from APT, a planning consultancy involved in the scheme, saying that the developers had reassessed its impact.

APT said: “We will be withdrawing the current planning application at Castlemains, holding a second consultation event and submitting a fresh application. The consultation event will specifically address the issues raised (by local campaign groups).”

Cala Homes confirmed that it would submit amended proposals to East Lothian council, following feedback from Historic Environment Scotland, local residents and the council itself. In



Dirleton village is famous for its castle

a statement, Cala said it would “ensure that the development complements the historic village and the design is in keeping with its features”.

The company added: “Included in the resubmission will be a partial height reduction as well as additional planting so that the setting of the village’s historic castle is maximised. Some

small design changes have also been included, with the bespoke development reflecting a natural expansion to the historic village.”

Alan Stewart, partner at JTP Architects, designer of the development, said the housing “takes design cues from local buildings”. He added: “We have ensured that the setting of Dirleton castle is retained.”

In Gullane, the nearby seaside village famous for its golf links and beach, hundreds of people have supported efforts to stop three proposed housing estates from going ahead, saying they would put unsustainable pressure on local schools and roads.

A fourth site, at the former Scottish Fire Services College, already has planning permission for about 120 homes, but no developer has come forward.