

DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL
PLANNING GUIDANCE: THE VENNEL, LINLITHGOW
REPORT DATED 4 SEPTEMBER 2020

Notes of the meeting

JK was allowed to attend as a panel member for the one item relating to the Vennel.

An introduction was given by Craig McCorriston who answered the five points put forward by the Community Council in Appendix 4.

1. *Despite the clear support demonstrated by the consultation process, we are unhappy that the option of extending the development area to include the flats facing The Cross has been rejected as 'inappropriate' without clear justification. This is particularly disappointing as eventual redevelopment of that block on its own would make it much more difficult to retain residents and businesses through the regeneration process and much more difficult to achieve high building quality without 'subsidy' from the rest of the site. We note that currently a significant proportion of the retail floorspace in the block is now vacant.*

Answer: A significant proportion of the Cross flats are in private ownership which would make development difficult.

2. *Similarly, we are disappointed that there is no explanation as to why the development area has been reduced from 1.10ha to 0.60ha, particularly as there is no indication or justification for this through the results of the consultation process.*

Answer: This is the area which is indisputably owned by the Council.

3. *Our meeting of 26 March 2019 was informed that " West Lothian Council have identified eight development parcels on the area of the Vennel which are essentially potential pieces of land that could be developed. What could be achieved is a programme that is based on any combination of these parcels. The complexity of the programme increases depending on how many parcels are included. WLC are going through process of costing out these options on an opportunity basis (not a financial basis) Finance are looking at the likely return on all of these options. Once all of these considerations have been made, a proposal will go to Council Executive, outlining the planning factors that need to be considered.". It would be useful at the PDSP to know whether the eight parcels are constituents of the original 1.10ha and which parcels have been dropped and for what reason.*

Answer: the 8 parcels of land relate to the entire Vennel area including the three blocks of flats. The current 0.6 ha comprises 3 parcels.

4. *Errors should be corrected such as reference to views of the Palace from the High St of which there are none in the area of the Vennel. Only the spire of St Michaels church is visible from one point across the existing Vennel (see photo) and this could be preserved and enhanced through architectural solution. There is no reason to restrict the development height below that of the surrounding buildings.*

Answer: agreed that this be reworded to omit reference to the High St. Much was said about views from Strawberry Bank. Note: the recent electrification work and the raising of the wall adjacent to the railway precludes any view to the North from Strawberry bank or Victoria Terrace. It is self-evident that views can only be affected from publicly accessible positions west of the proposed development.

5. *It was confirmed and recorded at our meeting of 26th March 2019 that the Planning Guidance was an introduction to an opportunity and not a development brief. The Planning Guidance states that the redevelopment will be subject to the normal requirements of the statutory planning system but does not make reference to the Scottish public sector procurement process which we assume will be followed. We would expect to be involved as stakeholders in the subsequent development brief process.*

Answer: once the Executive have accepted the principle of development a decision will be made on how this might proceed.

The chair asked for questions:

Councillor De Bold asked whether a masterplan for the whole of the Vennel area would be prepared and also of the condition of the Vennel flats. *Answer: a considerable investment has been made in order to maintain the flats in good order.*

Councillor Kerr asked why it had taken so long to reach this point and whether councillors could expect to see a project brief. Finally, what was expected of the Executive Committee when this paper is presented. *Answer: the consultation was extended to accommodate the Community Council, processing of the consultation responses took longer than anticipated, dealing with the Participation Request made by the Community Council impeded progress plus an error (highlighted by the Community Council) in presenting the paper to the Executive before going to another PDSP which is not normal procedure. Covid has delayed the PDSP until today. The paper presented to the Executive will be substantially as that considered today. The Executive will be asked to approve the Planning Guidance.*

Malcolm Hill talking on behalf of the Joint Forum asked detailed questions on the option appraisal. *Answer: this is a document prepared by the Community Council. Note: this is the document prepared by the Community Council in 2018. Although sent to officers it was never included in any consultation report (the consultation period ended in September 2017). At a meeting of the Joint Forum it was suggested that this document be circulated by the Joint Forum to all councillors.*

JK was invited to ask questions of Craig McCorrison. JK stated that most questions had been asked by Councillor De Bold and Councillor Kerr but asked whether the Vennel was to be sold to a developer as implied by the report and the planning guidance. The appropriate sentences were read out. **Answer: The decision to dispose of the site or the decision to engage in a development was outside of the remit of [Craig McCorrison] as a regulator of the process. This was a decision of the Executive and subsequently [those delegated to manage project procurement].**

The chair asked for comments:

Tom Conn stated that the Council could not afford to undertake such a development.

JK's final statement was that nowhere in the report is there a statement of the benefits to the Linlithgow Community. JK said that the Community Council was opposed to an asset sale: the asset sales of Clarendon House and Gardens, Annet House and the British Linen Bank brought no benefit to the Linlithgow Community.

Tom Conn immediately replied at length about the benefit to Linlithgow of the new Partnership Centre funded in part from the sale of Annet House.

The chair did not allow a response and JK was disconnected from the meeting.

John Kelly
4th September 2020.