

The Vennel Redevelopment – Report October 2020

On 6th October 2020 West Lothian Council Executive met to discuss the following proposals for the Vennel. The full report is available at

The following is an extract of the purpose and recommendations from the report:

The purpose of this report is to advise Council Executive of the outcome of a consultation on Planning Guidance for The Vennel, Linlithgow, and to consider a request from Linlithgow & Linlithgow Bridge Community Council's to make further representations on the guidance in accordance with an approved Participation Request.

It is recommended that the Council Executive:

1. notes the comments received on the draft guidance following consultation (Appendix 2);
2. approves the responses to the comments received during consultation on the draft guidance (Appendix 2) including the further submission from Linlithgow and Linlithgow Bridge Community Council (Appendix 4);
3. approves Planning Guidance for The Vennel, Linlithgow (Appendix 1);
4. notes that the guidance will be a material consideration in any future development proposals for the site;
5. approves the screening report for submission to the SEA Gateway (Appendix 5);
6. delegates to the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration to agree and conclude a SEA "screening determination" as to whether a SEA is required, having taken account of the views offered by the Consultation Authorities.

John Kelly presented a deputation as follows:

Good morning and thank you for allowing me to make this deputation on behalf of Linlithgow and Linlithgow Bridge Community Council. The first phase of the redevelopment of the Vennel Linlithgow as described in the Planning Guidance is a once in a lifetime major multi million pound development which will have a lasting impact on the Linlithgow heritage High St and significantly influence the further phases of the Vennel development whenever they occur. We understand that the proposal is for the first 3 stages of an 8 stage redevelopment to be undertaken over a number of years. In this deputation I wish to focus on the two options for pursuing the Vennel development in Linlithgow.

The two approaches to this first stage development are:

- Alternative 1, sell to a developer and control the project through the planning system. This is the alternative implied by the Planning Guidance.
- Alternative 2, retain control by appointing a project management and design team, evolving a brief and design in consultation with the community and adopting an appropriate procurement system with partners. This option will not cost the Council

one penny but to be fair may not yield a cash receipt. We have spoken with Wheatley Group who see great opportunities for mid market rent social housing in Linlithgow and we are currently making contact with Scottish Futures Trust who are working with the Scottish Government, the Building Scotland Fund and subsequently the Scottish National Investment Bank to contribute to the delivery of a pipeline of projects.

Alternative 1 to sell to a developer gives an immediate cash receipt but does not guarantee a best value solution for Linlithgow. Indeed it does not guarantee a development at all – we have two ugly gap sites in Linlithgow High St awaiting developer action, one from 2013. The developer is most likely to hold the investment until the optimal time to resell at a profit. The final outcome is most likely to be very expensive lochside flats and a commuted sum for social housing. Under alternative 1 the design for the following phases will be influenced by the design of this first phase.

Alternative 2 will not cost the Council but also may not yield a cash receipt. It retains control of the project briefing and design process and the achievement of a best value solution for Linlithgow. As stated in our letter of 6th September 2017 it is the wish of the Linlithgow Community to be actively involved in all stages leading up to and including the development of the brief for the redevelopment of the Vennel.

Please do not agree to sell to a developer.

I conclude by reading comment 73 from a member of the public. This is one of many comments appended to completed questionnaires in the 2017 consultation. This is the sensitive heart of the town; Council and planners got this badly wrong in the 1970s – don't repeat your mistakes. Focus on quality -- don't go for the best price to sell and poorest quality development.

John Kelly then answered several questions.

Councillor Tom Conn presented the following motion:

WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL LABOUR GROUP

Notice of Motion from Councillor Tom Conn for the Council Executive on 6th October 2020

Item 30 – Planning Guidance: The Vennel, Linlithgow

Council Executive notes the officer's recommendations.

However, given the time that has elapsed since the public consultation in 2017, Council Executive agrees to expedite any redevelopment of The Vennel area and instructs the Chief Executive to initiate a marketing exercise as part of a "Development Opportunity- mixed residential and commercial" project inviting potential partners to submit offers and details with a closing date of 31st March 2021.

Officers to submit a report thereafter to the Policy and Resources PDSP.

In the meantime, officers are also instructed to investigate with local community, voluntary and business groups the appetite for the development of a community/resource hub within the former library building. The aim to develop an innovation centre with flexible space for those home working/working from home providing hot desking with meeting space where under social distancing guidelines meetings where necessary couldn't be conducted within residential premises. Use by community groups as a drop in centre and focal point for joint working.

If successful a community innovation centre to be included in any new build final proposal for the redevelopment of The Vennel area.

Councillor Tom Conn
West Lothian Council Labour Group