

Plans for Linlithgow's Vennel 'don't go far enough'

by Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter

New guidance for any potential redevelopment of the Vennel in Linlithgow is set to be approved.

But the proposals don't go far enough say the local community council, which has called for the entire Vennel site to be redeveloped. This is the 1960s housing and retail development which sits on the bank of Linlithgow Loch and on the High Street close to Linlithgow Palace.

Local member Tom Conn called for West Lothian Council to be bolder in actively seeking developers to work on plans.

The Development and Transport Policy and Development Scrutiny Panel supported submitting planning guidance for the Vennel to Council Executive for final approval.

The opening of the Linlithgow Partnership Centre saw a number of properties in and around the Vennel area becoming surplus to requirements and they now lie vacant.

The guidance sets out potential uses for the site and a number of matters which would have to be addressed in any future redevelopment. Uses could include a mix of residential, retail, hotel, restaurants and/or business use, such as office space.

The area up for redevelopment potential are the buildings closest to Linlithgow Cross, on the eastern side of the 1960's development.

Councillor Conn told a meeting of the PDSP: “ We are talking about soft marketing of a site which is very prominent . What is the difference between soft marketing and the hard sell to see if developers come forwards. We seem to be dragging our feet.”

He highlighted that one of the largest retail units had recently been vacated by M and Co, which gave new impetus to act.

Craig McCorrison, Head of Planning, stressed that discussions were taking place with colleagues in the council’s Property Services department but decisions on marketing would be for the Council Executive to make.

The town’s community council was allowed to take part in the preparation of the planning guidance and it surveyed local people. The community council drew up its own redevelopment plans two years ago and continues to lobby for a much wider redevelopment of the Sixties buildings. This would be complicated by many of the flats now being privately owned.

Executive councillor for development and transport Cathy Muldoon said: “The Vennel is a high-profile area at the heart of Linlithgow, and it’s important that careful consideration is taken over its future.

“The planning guidance produced will assist any marketing of the site and inform any development going forward.”

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