

# **Armadale has more derelict sites than any other community in West Lothian**

## **Armadale has more derelict sites than any other town or village in West Lothian, a survey has found.**

Tackling these eyesore sites, even with simple measures, is one of the first steps to improving the look of the town.

That was the message from the community at an open day organised by West Lothian Council this week.

Most sites remain in private ownership and while the largest has already been earmarked for redevelopment it is the lack of public knowledge about the others- including one on West Main Street- that irritates locals the most.

That was one of the key findings from the well-attended open day set up by council's regeneration team as part of their looking for ideas and feedback to help improve the town.

The event was one of the first set up as the council starts work on its Locality Plan which aims to work with community groups on practical ways to tackle poverty and encourage community wealth building.

Michelle Murray, the town's Regeneration Officer told a meeting of the local area committee: "We have a high proportion of the population living near derelict sites. A key thing is informing the community. They look at these sites and ask why nothing is happening with them."

Councillor Lynda Kenna said: "The stats are very high. Is there anything being done to address these derelict sites? I know we were looking to see if some of these sites could be taken up for housing."

Mrs Murray explained that the figures are skewed by the size of the former brickworks site in the south side of the town.

The percentage of the population of Armadale living within 500m of a derelict site is 77.1%, this rises for those in Armadale South to 88.4%. The West Lothian average is 16.2%.

There are plans to come to build housing on the brickworks site. Mrs Murray added: "This one site is extremely large, so if that site is developed the stats would drop significantly."

Mrs Murray said that regeneration officers working on the development of the Locality Plan to help improve the town were engaging with site owners to see what potential for development there is. In the meantime the survey gives the community a chance to look at ways of improving the townscape.

She added: "The community doesn't like these sites being left the way they are. While we may not get rid of sites, we can improve the sites that are there."

One option being explored is community hoardings. A project to erect decorative hoardings around some of these sites involving local youth groups and schools has been identified and cash allocated through the Covid Recovery monies to support this.

The Community Regeneration Officer is currently exploring the feasibility of this by organising a meeting with the Town Centre Manager, Police Scotland, relevant departments of the council and the local community council. However, because the locations identified are privately owned there needs to be

clarification before being able to move forward. Sites being considered include a former garage in the centre of Blackridge.

The partnership community engagement took place on Monday in the Dale Hub. This session was led by the Community Regeneration Officer with support from Play Works Armadale, Public Health Scotland and Architecture and Design Scotland. The day gave the community the chance to air concerns and ideas with services and allowed the services to directly provide information to the community. It also gave the groups taking part positive feedback on what the community would like to see improve in the town.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter