

Opposition group called for clarity on final cash sum the council will make from sale of pool site

Plans to sell the former Bubbles swimming pool site in Livingston to a housebuilder have been approved.

Up to 122 new flats could be built by Cruden on the site of the former Xcite Livingston leisure pool.

West Lothian Council's Executive approved plans to sell the land – with potential price tag of £3m – at this month's meeting despite a call from the SNP group demanding more clarity of the potential value of the site.

Pauline Stafford, the SNP group depute leader, said the sale should be stalled because there was: "insufficient detail on the proposed sale and without an assured sale value or an assured minimum sale value."

The opposition group's amendment added that the amount received by the council could be reduced if the projected housing density is not achieved. The eventual receipt would also be reduced by any Section 75 costs demanded as well as abnormal development costs, the SNP claimed.

Addressing officers Councillor Stafford added: "You said this represented good value for the council but as elected members we have no idea what that value is. There's nothing here to say what that value would be. As a group we can't agree to this sale without more information and some clearer

commitments from the developer on this.

“What we do know is that what was there before was a very valued leisure facility which had huge value to the community. This land is still public, and I think the public have lost trust in the administration’s stewardship of the public assets for the greater good.

“We are being asked to agree to something that we don’t know the terms of.”

Seconding the SNP amendment local councillor for the ward Moira McKee-Shemilt said the area of land was under scrutiny by her constituents.

“It’s very much on the radar of people because of the original Bubbles that people were discontented about losing. I agree with [fellow ward] Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick that there’s a need for social housing, we’re not saying that is unwelcome, but we need to know a wee bit more about what would be the income to the council and what’s the minimum accepted value, because we don’t know that. We have to be really transparent about what we are doing here.”

However, Labour’s Tom Conn rubbished the amendment. He said: “I’m really surprised by the posturing of the SNP group on this. They criticised the sale of the site and they seemed to forget that the UK government gave £63m to save swimming pools in England. The Scottish Government got £6.3m in [Barnett] consequential. Councils applied for that and not one penny was released to councils. This had the consequence of three swimming pools in West Lothian being closed.”

He added: “There’s a gross figure that’s been put forward and there’s negotiation to take place. We need to trust our officers.

“I think this is a stalling tactic of the worst order, and attention seeking. We all know what the standard practice is

for disposals.”

In a vote the amendment was defeated by nine votes to four.

A council spokesperson said later that the plans could – potentially – raise up to £3.1 million (less deductible costs), which would be fully reinvested in protecting and improving council services for the local community in the long term, such as improving the school estate.

They added that Cruden Homes Limited (CHL) is a large development company with a proven track record of delivering similar residential schemes in Scotland and plans to build a four-storey development of flats.

Planning permission would still need to be obtained, but the town centre location is seen as suitable for high-density and town centre uses, such as flats or shops.

David Baird, Property Services Manager told the meeting: “The offer from CHL of £3,116,248 is considered to be the best terms obtainable by the council in the current circumstances.”

There was anger earlier this year when council officials ordered the demolition of the pool on the advice from police and fire officers following vandalism and arson attacks on the building and the former swimming pool at Broxburn.

Original plans to sell the site for redevelopment as a filling station and shop fell through after the buyers refused to cover the council’s £180,000 demolition costs.

The council will move the public artwork called ‘Symbiosis’ on the site to an alternative location in Almondvale Park in the current financial year. The relocation will be carried out by council staff later this year will cost around £20,000.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter