

No quick fix from marketing of the Vennel in Linlithgow

Hopes for the redevelopment of Linlithgow's 1960s Vennel building have been cast into doubt after a lack of interest from buyers.

A recent marketing exercise by West Lothian Council produced two offers for the site – but neither was as viable, or as valuable to the council as the existing car park which currently brings in £100,000 a year in rental.

Now the council has pledged to work with the community to improve the dilapidated buildings in the short term – and continue to look at long term solutions for the controversial, and in its time award winning development.

And senior Labour councillor Tom Conn criticised descriptions of the building as “a concrete colander”, urging that the language around the Vennel debate be toned down saying: “These are people’s homes.”

In a report to the council’s Executive David Baird, Property Services Manager, Finance and Property Services said: “Two offers were received by the council. Both offers included high level design proposals for the site. One of the submissions included a price offer, although it fell below the market value of the property, while the other bid omitted to include a financial offer.

“The offers received reinforce the principle established in the valuation, namely, that the current investment value of the assets on site exceed the development value of the land,

meaning the site is of more value to the council as a revenue generating asset compared to a capital receipt if sold for development.

“Given that neither offer met the Council’s requirements in terms of best value neither can be submitted for consideration.”

Mr Baird said limited funding is available from the Shared Prosperity Fund and it is suggested that this is used to develop a plan to address some improvement works.

Proposed works could include aesthetic improvements to the buildings. It is proposed this will include looking at alternative uses for the former public toilets, works to refresh the appearance of the façade of existing buildings along with public realm improvements to revitalise the area and enhance links to the Lochside while also creating a public space which would encourage visitors and residents to better use the area.

He concluded: “It is proposed that the Council will commission a feasibility study to improve the appearance and utilisation of The Vennel and retain its land and property holdings as income generating assets.”

Lib Dem Councillor Sally Pattle asked if the framework had changed so that the Town Management group was now considered the best group to act as contacts.

Mr Baird said there was no intention to exclude any particular community group in favour of the Town Management group. He stressed that Property Services staff were keen to speak to all in the community who could have an input.

Councillor Pattle also asked what the time-scale would be for work being carried out.

Mr Baird said he would be happy to have face to face meetings

in Linlithgow to discuss future short-term plans for the buildings.

Councillor Pauline Orr said: "I welcome the report. It is, as you know a fairly contentious issue. I think communication between all the parties needs to be looked at. There has been a lot of upset at the lack of communication so far that needs to be strengthened."

Councillor Conn agreed with Councillor Orr that communication needed to be improved but added: "I have to raise the issue where a local magazine portrayed the flats as being colanders. That doesn't come across terribly well that a community magazine is actually referring to resident's homes, and I emphasise the word homes, as colanders and they should be pulled down because of that. The language needs to be improved."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter