



13 October 2014

The Development Planning
West Lothian Council County Buildings
High Street
Linlithgow
West Lothian
EH49 7EZ

Dear Sirs,

Comment on the Main Issue Report pertaining to Business in Linlithgow & Linlithgow Bridge

The Linlithgow Business Association welcomes the West Lothian Main Issues Report as a significant step forward in the development of West Lothian as a whole.

We are in broad agreement, as members of Linlithgow Planning Forum, with the 'Representations on Main Issue Report pertaining to Linlithgow & Linlithgow Bridge' submitted to you by Dr Kelly for the Community Council on 10th October 2014.

We have a number of specific comments in respect of business in Linlithgow. These we will incorporate into the overall Community Council's Master Plan.

As business in Linlithgow is scarcely touched on in the Main Issues Report (MIR) please consider our comments as a contribution to the final section of your MIR questionnaire – Additional Information.

Linlithgow has 6 distinct business sectors, these being retail, tourism, service sector, night-time, hi-tech and consultant business and the industrial estate. A laissez faire attitude from the local authority has created a false belief that local businesses need no encouragement, that they will always survive, and will always be a useful source of revenue for the public purse. In fact mere 'survival' isn't sufficient. Local businesses need good, nurturing, conditions around them so that they can thrive and grow.

1. The retail sector is under pressure from out-of-town retail parks, supermarket expansion and more recently online shopping. This sector is also under pressure from the reduction in footfall through the town stemming from the closure of large buildings on the High Street and the related relocation of large numbers of service-sector jobs (principally to Livingston) – we take this up below. Improving the prospects of independent retailers in the town is a Main Issue. Ways should be found to increase footfall throughout the working week and at weekends.
2. The tourism sector is focussed on the Palace, which draws 60,000+ visitors per year (though far short Stirling Castle's 411,000), on the Lowport centre and on the Union Canal. Visitors to these attractions generally add little to the town's local economy as visitors come, visit the attraction and leave – there is nowhere to park and browse. Adequate bus and car parking would help enormously; as would better advertising by Visit West Lothian of what Linlithgow has to offer in the round.
3. Service sector businesses perform well in Linlithgow (offices, personal grooming, cafes etc), but can have difficulty recruiting staff, particularly junior staff, because of the high cost of accommodation in the town. Affordable housing and affordable rent are therefore Main Issues in a business context.
4. Linlithgow's night-time economy (pubs and restaurants) is well provided for but could benefit from more support and wider publicity. As with the Service Sector issues of recruiting staff is a major headache also due to lack of affordable accommodation in the town.

5. Hi-Tech and Consultancy. Significant opportunity exists in Linlithgow for small consultant businesses to take up residence due to its very attractive town environment and ready and frequent access to Edinburgh, Glasgow and superb access to Edinburgh Airport. In our opinion West Lothian Council has concentrated too much business development of this nature in Livingston and insufficient in Linlithgow. Oracle has in the past provided very significant hi-tech business for the town but, with their retrenchment to software only, is looking for similar businesses to share the available space; this is ideal purpose built space for hi-tech and consultancy. The West Lothian Council could complement such business centrally by refurbishing the County Buildings, seeking occupants for the Procurator Fiscal's Offices and reconfiguring many of the Industrial premises in the Mill Road Industrial Estate – this is taken up next. The highest speed broadband is also essential for such occupants.
6. The Industrial Estate concentrated at the Mill Road continues to struggle to find occupants for premises remaining unoccupied from their inception. There is a need to reconfigure these premises to provide flexibility for use by a wider range of businesses.

Looking at some of the major contributors to the issues for these Sectors:

- Traffic movement, car parking, and traffic congestion are major issues for all day-time businesses, less so for night-time businesses. Creating additional parking spaces is not necessarily the answer, although an opportunity for coach and lorry parking was lost within the town centre with the development of more sheltered housing in place of the Bus Depot. Implementing a strategy for car parking in the town that is responsive to the needs of retail businesses (particularly allowing customers to 'browse' the street – linger longer) is a Main Issue. There is the need to cater for shop deliveries – Linlithgow has no back shop access. West Lothian Council should investigate with retail business the possibility of encouraging delivery to retail shops out of commuting hours and the impact on delivery costs. The loss of Parking Wardens and the proposed decriminalisation of parking in the town have further increased parking in the town by indiscriminate car parking. Some of these issues are taken up in the Community Council's Submission to the MIR and will be taken up in the Linlithgow Master Plan.
- The centralisation of county functions in Livingston has left major buildings empty on the south side of the High Street: the County Buildings, the Procurators Fiscal's Office and the Sheriff's Court. This loss has been exacerbated by the 100 or so staff working at the Bus Depot. Together, these have left a major hole in our business environment with loss of custom for the local shops.

On a positive note, Linlithgow has two Business Improvement Districts; one covering the High Street and one the Mill Road Industrial Estate; these will require a range of initiatives funded by local businesses rolling out from 2014 to 2019. Finding ways to encourage businesses into the town, to grow businesses and to increase employment in all sectors are Main Issues which need to be supported by the Local Authority.

Only with holistic action on these sectors in conjunction with those in the Community Council's submission will there be a real possibility that Question 1 of the Questionnaire 'Local Development Plan Vision Statement' can be answered affirmatively for business in Linlithgow.

Yours Sincerely


For The Linlithgow Business Association.