



East Lothian Council
Community Asset Transfers
John Muir House
Brewery Park
Haddington
East Lothian
EH41 3HA

Dear East Lothian Council,

Asset Transfer Numbers 1357 and 1359
Former Council Depot at Lime Grove, North Berwick, East Lothian.

We write to make representation about the above Community Asset Transfer request. Before detailing our concerns, we would like to state that we appreciate the amount of effort that the North Berwick Community Development Company has put into their transfer request. It is a significant amount of work, by volunteers, and we believe that the NBCD Co. has good intentions in trying to acquire the land and provide something good for the community of North Berwick.

1. In terms of location, the plans as proposed would bring a significantly larger volume of traffic through Lime Grove. This is a narrow residential street, with a lack of private parking and significant amount of on-street parking. We are concerned that the traffic generated by the community hub would be unsafe, cause congestion and increase noise and pollution. The activities proposed by the business plan would result in traffic during the day, in the evenings and at weekends. This would have a significant impact on local residents through the entire week.

The site is also over a mile from the town centre and is not easily accessible unless you have a car. This would impact on people with a low income and older individuals, whom the hub is trying to support.

2. With regards to environmental impact, the development plan acknowledges the potential harm to native animal life, including newts, bats and owls, but we do not believe the suggestions for managing this go far enough to protect habitat or preserve species. In particular, the current plan shows that the part of the land that

is currently under the protection of a National Trust covenant will be developed to make an open-air amphitheatre and provide planting, paths and seating. This will involve significant alterations to this area of this site, both during construction and the design and will permanently alter this natural area and compromise the newt population and other wildlife.

3. We are also concerned about the financial sustainability of the community hub. The proposal is relying on funding from a number of sources and then by self-sustaining finance once established. A concern is that if the community hub becomes financially unsustainable and the site is left undeveloped or underused, that significant alterations will have been made to the site and unused buildings will remain. This would be an eyesore and have a negative impact on the local area.

There are also now facilities at the Lighthouse including rehearsal studios, dance spaces, hot desking and offices for local businesses which will reduce the demand for the community hub.

4. With regards to the historical significance and character of the area, the business plan states that “there is little merit in retaining any of the buildings on this site”. Whilst these buildings are in poor condition, they do form part of the setting of Rhodes Farmhouse, a Grade B listed building. The guidance document, “Managing Change in the Historic Environment” (Historic Environment Scotland, 2016) states that, “Setting often extends beyond the property boundary or ‘curtilage’ of an individual historic asset into a broader landscape context.” As set out in the Historic Environment Scotland document, it would be usual for planning authorities to determine whether a proposed development would affect the setting and character of a historic listed building and how that would be managed.

We did not see any reference to this process in the NBCD Co. documentation, with an emphasis being placed on economic and practical priorities and the complete removal of all the buildings.

On page 64 of the Lime Grove Business Plan, the site is described as ‘iconic’ and yet the proposals are to remove all the existing buildings and to put an amphitheatre, planting, paths and seating on a piece of land that is considered to be of environmental importance to protected animals. The site will be unrecognisable should all these changes take place.

We are therefore concerned that the proposed development will have a negative impact on the historical character and ecology of the area.

5. We commend the NBCD Co for the openness with which they have conducted their meetings, and we have attended several of these over the last few years and have been able to express many of our points of view regarding the suitability of the site. Despite our expressions of these concerns, on several different occasions, each time we raise them it feels as though the committee are hearing them afresh for the first

time. We have not yet had an explicit approach from the NBCD co. as their potential new neighbours to discuss with us our views of the practicalities and the specific details of the development. We believe that as the closest neighbour to the site, it would have been helpful to have had detailed conversations with the committee to discuss specific aspects of the proposals that will impact on the immediate environment and how they could be addressed.

In summary, we believe that there are a number of grounds upon which the plans need significant detail to be developed and we have concerns that these have not been adequately attended to in the CAT process.

Yours faithfully,

