

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE: 4 MAY 2004

NEWMILNS TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE : STUDY UPDATE

Report by Executive Director of Development and Property Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1** To update the Committee on the progress with the feasibility study into the development of a business centre at 47-51 and 57-59 Main Street, Newmilns and to seek to vary the remit of and secure additional funding for the study.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Development Services Committee of 26 August 2003:-

- (a) noted the progress that has been made with the NTHI
- (b) lent its support to the preparation of a further application for funding to HLF and other funders to build on the success to date; and
- (c) allocated the NTHI £5,000 to undertake a feasibility study on the development of a business centre at 47-51 and 57-59 Main Street.

3. THE NTHI FEASIBILITY STUDY

- 3.1** The NTHI sought these funds for a feasibility study into the development of a business centre on the basis that:-

- (a) it had already established that funding for a further round of building restorations was unlikely to be available for housing.
- (b) local opinion is that there is an unmet demand for suitable business premises in the Irvine Valley.

- 3.2** The NTHI understood that a proposed study to be commissioned by the Irvine Valley Regeneration Partnership into the feasibility of various projects, including a business centre, would have undertaken the basic groundwork, enabling its own study to develop the idea in more detail. However, the IVRP Study was delayed, as detailed in Section 4 of this report.

- 3.3** A brief for the NTHI study was prepared on the basis of the Committee agreement. Following a meeting with Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, they agreed to match the EAC funding to enable the study to be extended to include other vacant/derelict properties in the centre of Newmilns and to address the possibility of other uses.

- 3.4** A condition of SEA funding was that EAC funding should be committed before the end of the financial year 2003/2004. Thus despite the delay with the IVRP Study, it was necessary to proceed to tender for the NTHI Study.
- 3.5** Tender documents were issued to nine consultants in February 2004, detailing the requirements of the study to be completed within two months and placing a ceiling of £10,000 on the cost. At the closing date no tenders were received. Whilst some parties were too busy to take on the work, others expressed the view that the timescale was too short and the tender ceiling too low.

4. THE IRVINE VALLEY REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP STUDY

- 4.1** During the autumn of last year, the IVRP issued a consultants' brief, with the overall aims of examining the feasibility of establishing a community enterprise micro brewery, a business centre and a visitor centre within the Irvine Valley. However, the consultant was unable to meet the original completion deadline and it was subsequently extended by the IRVP to the end of March 2004. The final report of the study was presented to the IVRP Board Meeting on the 24 March 2004.
- 4.2** In respect of the business centre, the consultants carried out a survey among local property agents to identify whether there was a demand for such a facility. This indicated that:-
- There was no sustainable demand in evidence with the level of enquiries consistently low
 - Existing business units and facilities were accessible in near by locations and communities that satisfied current demand as close to the main customer base
 - There was no real enthusiasm from public agencies who gave the concept a low priority
 - As yet, there was no clear evidence of public sector need as a result of DDA access requirements
 - They found some outline interest from a private developer and suggested that IVRP might pursue this
- 4.3** On this basis they advised the IVRP against a specific business centre development in the short term. However, they suggested that in relation to the IVRP's other aspirations, it might consider combining projects into a unique centre providing arts facilities, business services, heritage information and local community services under one roof.

5. HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND ADVICE

- 5.1** HLF had previously advised that any second THI application to extend the current project be confined to the existing NTHI boundaries, (with the properties at either side of 53-55 Main Street being accorded the highest priority). However, it would appear that they may now be prepared to consider a wider scheme. It is therefore suggested that any study should

begin by looking at all the problem buildings in the centre of the town and then refine the list thereafter in conjunction with the development of suitable and viable restoration proposals.

6. IMPACT ON NTHI STUDY

- 6.1** The outcome of the IVRP Study does not support the Council funding a specific study into restoring and converting the properties at 47-51 and 55-59 Main Street into a business centre. Nevertheless, these two properties are the most prominent derelict/vacant properties that are not being treated by the current NTHI project and there remains a need to find suitable proposals to secure their improvement.
- 6.2** It is therefore suggested that the remit of any study should be revised to find a viable set of proposals for these properties, without specifying that it should be for business purposes. The key is the availability of funding and it will however be recalled that it is unlikely that further housing funding will be made available.
- 6.3** The NTHI's principal purpose has been to secure the restoration and re-use of vacant and derelict historic buildings in the centre of Newmilns. It is therefore suggested that any study should begin by looking at **all** the problem buildings in the centre of the town and then refine the list thereafter in conjunction with the development of suitable and viable restoration proposals.
- 6.4** Such a study would be viewed as a fundamental requirement of any applications for external funding for a new THI.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The NTHI continues to operate within the contract with HLF and to meet the obligations contained therein.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** The lack of response to the tender for the NTHI business centre study, as detailed in paragraph 3.5, suggests that it is likely that the study suggested in paragraph 6.3 will cost in excess of £10,000. An increased allocation of funds will therefore be required to improve the chances of a response to any tender issue.
- 8.2** The sum of £5,000 was agreed at the Development Services Committee on the 26 August 2003. This sum has been carried forward to enable the study to proceed during the new financial year if approved by Committee. As noted in paragraph 3.3, it has been matched by £5,000 from Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire.
- 8.3** Additional funding up to a ceiling of £5,000 can be made available from an existing Departmental Budget. Once again, it should be noted that Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire are prepared to match this sum.

9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Newmilns Townscape Heritage Initiative (NTHI) contributes to the “Improving the Environment” Action Plan within the East Ayrshire Community Plan. The NTHI is identified in Aim 1 “To protect and improve the natural and built environment.”

10. RECOMMENDATION

10.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (a)** notes that it would be inappropriate to undertake a feasibility study into the development of a business centre at 47-51 and 57-59 Main Street, in the light of the outcome of the IVRP Study
- (b)** agrees to reallocate the funds to a wider study to find viable proposals to treat the remaining vacant buildings in the centre of Newmilns
- (c)** allocates a further sum to a maximum of £5,000 to secure the satisfactory completion of the study, subject to match funding being provided by Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire.

James Lavery
Executive Director of Development and Property Services Department

26 April 2004
(MFM/SA)
FV/SA

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

For further information on the report contact Alan Neish, Head of Planning and Building Control, on 01563 576767

Implementation Officer: Alan Neish

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