

Plockton & District Community Council

David McGhie, Chairman.

David Goldie
Head of Housing and Building Maintenance

David,

Options Appraisal: 14 Harbour Street, Plockton

Thank you for your email of 30th March seeking the views of the Community Council (CC) on the options appraisal for the above property. We are grateful for this opportunity to express our views, as there are very strong feelings in the community that this traditional village house should be retained as a Council House. The CC seeks to support the views of the community in this regard, particularly in view of the scarcity of housing for local families in the village.

Having read the “background” in your appraisal we wish to ask the following questions:

- 1) Regarding your statement that demand is low (para 1.6), there was article in the West Highland Free Press on 9th December 2019, quoting 1300 on the Housing List for Skye and Lochalsh. We would therefore ask how many of those on the list are in Lochalsh/Plockton communities.
- 2) We were shocked to read in your appraisal (para 1.1) that the property was in such a poor state of repair, considering that it was tenanted until so very recently. We would therefore ask how long this property has been a Council House, what costs have been incurred by The Highland Council (THC) on maintenance, and when was the property last inspected during the recent tenancy?
- 3) We would further ask with regard to para 1.1, when it became apparent that a new roof and extension would be required? We find it hard to understand why the cost of bringing the property up to standard now, as estimated by SLHA, is so high. Not only because the Scottish Housing Quality Standard required compliance by 2015, but also The Highland Council’s 2019 annual assurance statement to the Housing Regulator confirmed compliance. We would ask if you could clarify this?

With regard to your “Option 1” we understand that THC has a Statutory Duty to make the best use of its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for all tenants, but is it not the case that THC also has a Statutory Duty to maintain its current housing stock? The latter appears to be confirmed in the THC Housing Repair

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Policy since 1999. It is understood that THC has a legal obligation to keep the structure in good repair. Regular inspection and maintenance of the property would have ensured compliance with both those obligations, using the rental income THC was receiving at the time. Given THC's apparent failure to carry out ongoing maintenance while the property was tenanted, we feel that to bring the property up to standard now would surely be the right thing to do and to ensure the property can be retained.

The Options Appraisal states in "Option 2" that while SLHA are interested and willing to take on the refurbishment, the anticipated costs greatly exceed what would be affordable. We would like to know what affordable and what grants would be available from the Scottish Government (i.e. what would be the shortfall?).

We are disappointed to see that this option appears to have already been dismissed without formal estimates being obtained or tenders sought for the work required.

With regard to Option 3, the Plockton Area Development Trust has not yet been formally constituted. It would therefore appear that at this stage Option 3 would be unlikely. It would also be unreasonable for such a body to have to make good a property left in such a state of disrepair by THC as stated in the appraisal.

With regard to Option 4 we feel it would be inherently wrong that the council would in selling the property be seen to profit from its apparent failure to properly maintain No 14, resulting in the loss of a home in the village. Housing in Plockton is a finite resource. There is no land available to build more houses yet there is a demand for affordable housing in the community.

There is a worrying trend where houses coming up for sale are regularly being bought by speculators who turn them into holiday rentals in the village. This threatens to destroy the community as local families and those seeking to work in the area cannot afford the inflated house prices. If No.14 were sold as proposed in Option 4, the council would be perpetuating this trend.

We would therefore strongly urge THC to further explore Options 1 and 2 to avoid the property being sold, as only those options would retain the house in the housing stock and fulfil the community's wishes. In retaining the property THC would also be complying with its legal responsibilities and with regard to Option 2 the LHSa complying with its "mission statement" of "contributing to the regeneration of communities

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We fully understand that due to the COVID-19 situation, it may take a while for you to reply to our correspondence and would appreciate a response at your earliest convenience.

Kind Regards

David McGhie
Chairman Plockton and District Community Council

April 22nd 2020