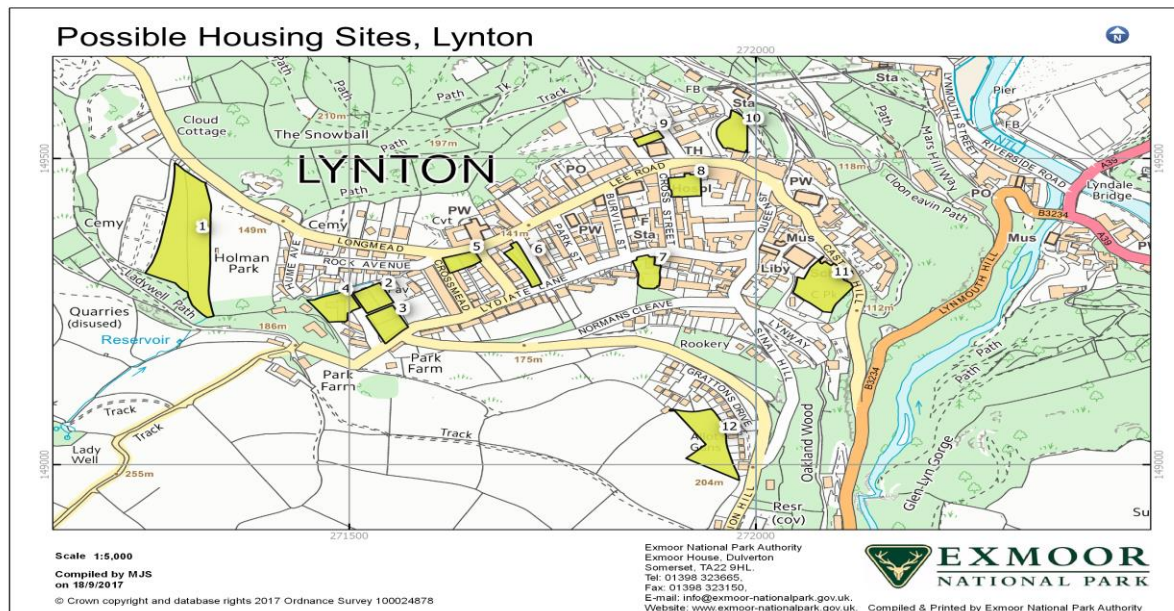


Lyn Community Development Trust (“LCDT”) Social Housing Project Briefing Note

Background

The then Mayor Chris Sleep started the project rolling back in 2017. The LCDT was chosen to be the vehicle used to take the project forward as being a Community Development Trust it is empowered to undertake social housing development in conjunction with a Housing Association. This overcame the fact that the Town Council is not able to manage a project of this nature. Indeed, the LCDT is targeted with the delivery of affordable housing in the Lyn area.

Back in 2016 a Housing Needs Survey was undertaken which identified the need for 13 homes for local people. The search for a suitable site then began.



After a full review which included bussing Councillors around the Town to view the sites, it was determined in 2019 that the chosen site should be the site of the Lynton Tennis Courts and the neighbouring grassed area. All other sites were discounted either as being too small, too expensive to buy, or in the wrong location. To be viable a site needs to be capable of holding a minimum of ten properties. The plans for the Tennis Court / Grass area show that a maximum of 14 home can be built, or 12 to 13 with an additional communal lawn area.

In 2020 the LCDT entered into an agreement (the “Heads of Terms”) with North Devon Council (“NDC”) to commence negotiations to develop this site. Importantly, NDC’s role is to help the local community develop a solution that meets local needs, its role isn’t to push or promote a solution. Unfortunately, after this agreement, Covid



intervened, and the project's progress slowed. Despite Covid in 2021 NDC made available funding to start the viability study, and two architects were invited to put forward plans as to where the houses could be built. One of these plans is attached (Previous page). This shows an attractive development of 13 homes with a communal lawn area in the middle. Parking spaces are included for each property, so this will not aggravate the town's parking problems. Each house has its own garden. Access is down the adjacent road owned by North Devon Homes. The Bowls Club, the separate pavilion and their existing access road will not be impacted.

In 2021 the project ground to a halt due to a lack of necessary funding at NDC to take it forward.

In 2022 discussions reopened and later stopped due to a reluctance from North Devon Homes to allow us access. I am now glad to say that North Devon Homes have agreed to us having the use of their access road subject to agreement being reached on maintenance charges etc..

In 2023 an updated Housing Needs Survey was undertaken, this time showing 16 households in housing need who could not afford to buy or rent in the open market and were not in adequate housing. This shows the scale of our local need. The makeup of the properties will be discussed with the selected Housing Association when known.

Social Housing is available at about 60% of the open market rent or sale price. In this project we are looking at just providing rental properties.

Current Situation

I took over from Chis Sleep as lead for this project. This followed Chris' withdrawal from both the LCDT and the Town Council last year.

The LCDT has undertaken another review of possible sites. These mirror the original sites with the area above Grattons Drive being altered to now be located directly behind the existing developments, and such that the allotments will not be impacted.

We considered constructing a two-storey car park in Bottom Meadow and building the housing on top of this. Not as silly as it first sounds, although the water reservoir below Bottom Meadow meant that it would be even more technically challenging. It would also significantly alter the view from the large number of houses currently overlooking this area.

Our conclusion was identical to the previous review, the Tennis Court / Grass area remains the only viable location.

NDC now have access to funding (Up to £100,000) that can be made available to us to cover the costs of the feasibility studies. Funding will be made available in tranches as

the feasibility studies progress. The work will cover the following areas

- Financial viability
- Re-Provision of Facilities
- Planning Approval issues (Pre application discussions)
- Access
- Off-Site Services
- Obtaining Vacant Possession
- A final planning application

NDC are requesting confirmation of support from LLTC. This needs to be in the form of a resolution to support the development project on the Tennis Court / Grass area, coupled with agreement from LLTC to allow the building of a new tennis court on its land in Lynmouth. (Adjacent to the existing Lynmouth Tennis court). If this confirmation isn't forthcoming there are several similar schemes across North Devon that need the financial support from NDC that would otherwise come to us.

The following resolution has been drafted:

- That LLTC welcomes a community led scheme to help reduce our severe housing problem and help stem the loss of population that threatens our vital local services.
- That LLTC welcomes any assistance that NDC can provide in helping to reduce our problem and recognise that this isn't a NDC proposal but one which is driven by our community.
- That LLTC will support a project using the NDC land currently used for the Lynton tennis courts and the adjacent grassed amenity area, provided that the project is shown to be viable, hence the feasibility study.
- That LLTC supports the necessary relocation of a tennis court to land owned by LLTC in Lynmouth.
- That LLTC defines exactly the scenario to be subject to the feasibility study, including the exact location of the relocated tennis facilities.
- That LLTC supports undertaking a public consultation exercise once the details of the project have been agreed following the feasibility study.

Public Consultations

The Housing Needs Survey conducted at the end of 2023 was itself a full consultation exercise with all residents in Lynton and Lynmouth being sent the form in the post for completion. The response rate was about 25% (Which is typical for a consultation exercise like this). Of those who responded twice as many people were in favour of there being more low-cost social housing compared to those who were against the idea. However, this exercise did not relate to any specific site. Indeed, feedback was sought from the public so that all possible sites could again be reconsidered. Whilst not a full public consultation, presentations on the project have been given at two Annual Parish Meetings and there was also a full presentation to Town Council by LCDT and Middlemarch in March when members of the public were in attendance.

NDC have advised LCDT not to undertake a full public consultation now because there isn't yet anything concrete to consult on. The project is in embryo form and will probably be amended. They also want to first have discussions with the Tennis Club in their capacity as their landlord. The fact that most of the public already know what is happening is not a problem; indeed, it is right that they are told.

A full public consultation will be held after the feasibility exercise has been completed and pre-app feedback obtained from the local planning authority. This meeting will be structured as a drop-in for the wider community over about four hours when an indicative design for the site is displayed and visitors have the chance to discuss the proposal with the architect, members of the LCDT, representatives from our Housing Association partner, and also NDC if they want to be involved. Visitors to the consultation are then invited to complete feedback forms and, following the meeting, the feedback is considered by the project team and used to improve or amend the design before a planning application is submitted.

Public participation when planning approval is sought will be in accordance with the usual procedures for considering planning matters. All members of the public will be able to write to ENPA Planning to make their views known. Indeed, if they wish they can attend the planning meeting.

Lydiate Lodge

These two words have plagued this project from the start. It is without any doubt the preferred choice in our community for the obvious reason that it is an eyesore sitting there and not being developed.

The land was bought by a developer when it was put on the market by Devon County Council following their closure of the care home. After a couple of planning applications approval was given for six houses plus three low-cost social houses. The owner has since then been seeking another buyer with a view to making a profit on disposal. Unfortunately, the nature of the site, coupled with high building costs (Always a problem in Lynton), and high demolition costs (believed to be iro £150,000), has meant that he has been unable to conclude a sale. Whilst his price expectations have fallen, the price which he has been seeking still puts it a long way out of the scope for a social housing project. He has already got planning approval for six houses at full market prices. This gives the site a value above what a social housing project can afford to pay. For this to be worth considering as a social housing development we need a benefactor to donate say something in the region of £300,000, or for the community to raise money from residents. We don't see either of these possibilities as being achievable.

It is also our current understanding that the owner of the site has now received two offers from other developers. One of these he has accepted, and they are moving towards exchanging contracts. The second offer is not believed to be a viable one at this stage. The current owner has also made it clear to the Town Clerk that should the offer which he has accepted fail to be concluded, he will then start developing the site himself based on the existing planning approval which was given.

NDC have made it crystal clear that they are simply unable to provide any funding to consider developing the Lydiate Lodge site for the reasons already given. We have asked that they review this decision, but we do not anticipate them changing their minds.

We need to move on from Lydiate Lodge.

Tennis Club

Throughout this project the LCDT have been wanting to secure alternative playing facilities for the tennis club. It was thought a suitable site had been identified at the back of Holman Park, but this area is not now considered to be suitable due to overhanging trees and generally shady conditions making the tarmac slippery.

Additionally using the site at Holman Park meant constructing two new tennis courts with an approximate cost of £250,000. Funding for this has not yet been identified, with the Tennis Club advising that large grants will be hard, even impossible to obtain.

The LCDT working with the Tennis Club have reviewed all alternative sites. If the existing courts are lost to this development, the best option is to provide two tennis courts in Lynmouth. This is done by building a second one next to the existing court on Mannor Green. The cost should therefore be roughly halved to approx. £125,000.

We are aware that ENPA are currently holding Sect 106 funds from Tors Park, which we hope will be available to cover a proportion of this cost.

There could however still be a requirement for the tennis club to raise further funding about which they have expressed concern, both in terms of human resource to drive the project and the limited amount of funding available for projects of this nature. The LCDT understands these concerns and the importance of alternative courts being provided. We therefore intend to work with the Tennis Club to seek necessary additional funding.

The Tennis Club also feel that it is essential that dedicated parking is provided for the tennis courts in Lynmouth. Currently they enjoy a significant number of free parking spaces next to their existing Lynton courts. Without similar arrangements in Lynmouth they consider that the future viability of their club will be threatened. The Tennis Club says that a minimum of six parking spaces are needed, ideally next to the courts.

It must be said that the Tennis Club have made it clear to us that given a choice they are not in favour of moving. They have worked hard to grow the club which now offers facilities to a wide cross section of our community. In moving the club from Lynton, where most members live, there is a possibility that some members will not be happy to play in Lynmouth; the impact will be much worse without parking being available. The LCDT does not want the move to Lynmouth to result in a decline in membership, as such we support their request for parking spaces. The Club considers that not having adequate parking spaces available, potentially places its future in jeopardy.

Building a second court in Lynmouth would necessitate moving the children's play area which is located where the second court will be positioned. The logical solution is to move the play area just around the corner where more space is available. This gives the Town Council an opportunity both to make the area safer (The current play area is not fenced in and is adjacent to a road, a potentially dangerous situation), and to make it larger and more exciting to the children using it. Being a seaside resort the provision of a pirate ship to play on is just one of many options that could be considered. This opens opportunities for the Town Council to consider.

The Team

A well-balanced professional Project Team will be put together to manage this project. Initially it will consist of the following personnel:

John Atherton (Project Team Leader LCDDT)
Kate Holland (Chair LCDDT)
David York (Trustee LCDDT)
John Patrinos (District Councillor)
Tim Hodson (Town Councillor)
Steve "Jumbo" Richards (Town Councillor)
We are also be seeking two Community Members

Summary

For at least the last fifty years the Town Council has looked on as our Town has slowly seen the size of its population shrink, and at the same time the age profile has moved towards more elderly and less children and young people. Families have moved out, and the elderly have moved in. The number of houses used by residents has reduced over time such that we now have a situation where almost a third of our housing stock is used for holiday lets or second homes.

The result of the above has been a consummate reduction in local facilities. We have lost our hospital, police station, butchers, bakers, banks etc. We only just managed to save the post office, and that is now a shadow of its former self.

Cllr Hodson circulated some figures on Monday which he obtained from the Primary School. These figures should shock us all. Over just a 25-year period the number of pupils in the primary school has reduced from 150 to just 62.

If this decline continues, we will inevitably lose our School and our Health Centre, and what remains of our Post Office.

We do not however need to be the victim of our circumstances if the Town Council can realise the problem exists and then draw up plans to do something about it. We need to reduce our reliance on tourism. We need to attract those younger people who typically work from home in IT or other similar sectors. After all, we can now offer them the fastest broadband speeds in the country.

Such a fight back strategy should include better marketing to get the message out there that Lynton is a good place to move to (Not a geriatrics graveyard). We need a Business Hub, but most of all we need HOUSING. As a key part of this strategy, we need more AFFORDABLE HOUSING. It is wrong that we are losing people from our town who have lived and worked here for so many years. Indeed, in many cases families have lived here for generations. What we are proposing will be for rental use only, for our long-term residents who otherwise could not afford the high rents in the commercial sector. There will be no Right to Buy, these houses will stay available to locals to rent. Time and time again our residents have told us that housing is their main problem. The Town Council declared a Housing Emergency, but after that did nothing about it. These were idle words with no meaning, we should be ashamed.

We are not alone here, most towns in North Devon (Indeed almost all coastal towns) are putting together new social housing developments. Why let Ilfracombe keep their families and long-term residents when we force ours out. We need this development as the start of our own fight back.

What are the drawbacks. We need to move a tennis court, but two courts will be retained in Lynmouth. Having tennis courts in both Lynton and Lynmouth always was something of a luxury. We want to ensure the future of our tennis club.

The other thing that we lose is the dog walking area. Yes, we lose a small area of grass where we currently exercise our dogs. But we are in North Devon, the most rural of counties. The Valley of Rocks and Hollerday Hill are just around the corner. There is no shortage of other options open to us to exercise our animals. The fundamental question that we must address is to ask, what is more important, providing new housing for people who otherwise could well have no choice but to leave, or preserving a dog walking area when the animals can still be exercised elsewhere. I think our community will never forgive us if we put the interests of dogs above solving the biggest concern that our community has.

Finally, there is no other workable alternative site open to us. We either do this development or we accept that we will never, certainly in the short to medium term, have a social housing development in Lynton. The choice is this or nothing. If we do not get a positive outcome the LCDT will have no alternative but to disband our team and cancel the project. The choice is yours.

John Atherton
LCDT
16/5/2025