

**PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE PRE DETERMINATION
HEARING**

13 January 2020

ABERDEEN, 13 January 2020. Minute of Meeting of the PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE PRE DETERMINATION HEARING. Present:- Councillor Boulton, Convener; Councillor Stewart, Vice Convener, the Depute Provost; and Councillors Allan, Copland, Cormie, Greig and Malik.

Also in attendance: Councillors Delaney, Jackie Dunbar, Henrickson, Hutchison, Macdonald, Mason MSP, McLellan, McRae, Mennie, Alex Nicoll and Wheeler.

SITE VISIT

1. The Committee conducted a site visit prior to the Hearing. The Committee was addressed by Ms Lucy Greene, Senior Planner who summarised the proposal for the overall site.

The Convener explained that the Committee would return to the Town House to commence the Hearing.

RESIDENTIAL LED DEVELOPMENT FOR THE RETIRED/ELDERLY (INCLUDING AFFORDABLE HOUSNG), A 50 BEDROOM CARE HOME AND APPROXIMATELY 500 SQM OF ANCILLARY RETAIL/COMMUNITY USE, TOGETHER WITH PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE INCLUDING A LINK ROAD, AT LAND AT INCHGARTH ROAD, CULTS ABERDEEN - 181224

2. The Committee heard from the Convener who opened up the Hearing by welcoming those present and providing information on the running order of the Hearing. She explained that the first person to address the Hearing would be Ms Lucy Greene, and asked that speakers adhere to their allocated time in order for the Hearing to run smoothly and in a timely manner.

The Committee then heard from Lucy Greene Senior Planner, who addressed the Committee in the following terms:-

Ms Greene explained that the site consisted of a number of fields between North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road, with residential gardens bounding the site to the east and west. The land lay on a south facing slope and was crossed by the Deeside Way, a footpath and part of the National Cycle Network Route. There was also a steep slope with a change in levels of more than 20m across the site. North Deeside Road was supported by a retaining wall on the site.

Ms Greene also advised that the upper field was largely rough grassland with substantial trees along North Deeside Road and the Deeside Way and dense thicket in the upper east side, with trees along the east side. The lower three fields were less steeply sloped

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and contained a large number of self seeded silver birch, as well as trees along the Deeside Way. There were dry stone walls between the three southern fields, and there were stone walls along the street boundaries. There was also overhead power lines across the site, with a pylon just to the south of the Deeside Way.

In regard to the application, the proposal was for a link road between north and south, and 95 dwellings mainly of 2 bed flats. These were described as retirement homes. There was also a 50 bed care home proposed and a row of units to be used as shops and/or community facilities. The application stated that the buildings would be a maximum of 2 and a half storey in height.

Ms Greene explained that the plan was indicative and showed indicative changes in the ground levels that would be needed to create development platforms. The plans also indicated a ramped footpath which would provide access between the Deeside Way and North Deeside Road. Ms Greene advised this would need to be raised by approximately 13m over its length, which necessitated the indicative design shown, with the land raised to achieve a gradual rise. Ms Greene noted that to the west of the road would be proposed areas planted with wildflower grasses and trees, along with the existing woodland that was being retained in these areas.

In regard to representations, Ms Greene noted that there were a large number of representations received, 301 in total. This consisted of 22 letters of objection, 278 letters of support and 1 neutral.

Ms Greene highlighted that the application was accompanied by an EIA Report which covered various matters. The site was zoned within the Green Belt and Green Belt policy NE2 stated there should be no development for purposes other than those essential for agriculture, woodland and forestry; recreational uses compatible with an agricultural or natural setting; mineral extraction/quarry restoration or landscape renewal. Ms Greene noted that there were exceptions to the policy and this included proposals for development associated with existing activities in the green belt would be permitted but only if certain criteria were met. All proposals for development in the Green Belt must be of the highest quality in terms of siting, scale, design and materials and all developments in the Green Belt should have regard to other policies of the Local Development Plan in respect of landscape, trees and woodlands, natural heritage and pipelines and control of major accident hazards.

In respect of housing, Ms Greene advised that this would only be acceptable in principle where it involved the conversion of a traditional building or was necessary for agricultural reasons. The application site was not identified in the plan for transport infrastructure and the link road was not identified within the Local Development Plan as a project.

In relation to Green Space Network and Landscape impact, Ms Greene explained that the relevant policies were Policy NE1 and D2, which protected the green links for wildlife,

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access and recreation and considered the impact of development on the landscape setting of the city.

A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment had been prepared that provided analysis as well as photomontage showing the development from the immediate and longer distance views.

The site was covered by a Tree Protection Order and a tree survey accompanied the application. Policy NE5 sought to retain trees and woodland of value and the proposal would result in the loss of trees in particular where the link road crosses the site. The loss of 72 trees for development was identified in the tree survey. However, due to the level changes of 23 metres, level changes to create development platforms would be required. Ms Greene explained that submitted plans indicated level changes within root protection areas in a number of areas, and elsewhere retaining walls were proposed to protect roots.

In regard to ecology, Ms Greene advised that policy NE8 covered natural heritage and sought to protect designated sites and protected species. The Deeside Way was designated as a Local nature Conservation Site and a walkover had looked for signs of various protected species. This was reported in the Environmental Impact Assessment report. The conclusions in broad terms were that for species like badgers and red squirrel, the site was used for foraging, with no evidence of setts.

In accordance with Policy I1, in connection with a planning approval, contributions would be sought towards healthcare, core paths and open space where there was insufficient provision provided on site. Affordable housing would also be sought at 25%. As these are calculated in relation to retirement housing, a means of securing the housing for this use would be sought.

In regard to Policy D1, the policy sought to ensure high standards and create a distinctive sense of place in response to an appraisal of the context of the site. Detailed design would be the subject of further applications should the Planning Permission in Principle be approved, however, this policy would be relevant in considering the level of development indicated in the Planning Permission in Principle.

In terms of Heritage, Policy D4 was relevant and pointed towards national policy in terms of Conservation areas. These policies sought to preserve or enhance the character of conservation areas. Pitfodels Conservation Area Character Appraisal was also referred to in this policy. Aberdeenshire Council who provide advice on Archaeology had recommended the attachment of a condition to any consent granted, requiring a dig to take place before any works commenced.

In relation to noise, a noise impact assessment was carried out, which looked at impacts on existing and future residents. The Environmental Impact Assessment report concluded that there were moderate to large impacts. Mitigation was recommended and

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included sound insulating windows for the new residential units and acoustic barriers along the link road. These would consist of solid fences and would be a couple of metres in height.

The Convener then invited Mr Scott Lynch, Senior Engineer, to address the Committee.

Mr Lynch explained that roads had no major concerns with the proposed application but details would need to be ironed out, once they were submitted.

Mr Lynch advised that the current 40MPH speed limit on Inchgarth Road would need to be reduced to 30MPH. There would also be 184 parking spaces provided in the proposed development which was in line with parking standards, as well as the provision for disabled parking spaces, electric charging points etc, with all of the details to be included in the submitted application. Mr Lynch explained that it would be their preference not to have a mini roundabout, and the proposed link road would help the area in terms of traffic uses. Mr Lynch also indicated that the applicant had undertaken analysis in terms of the amount of traffic and the proposed new road would be robust.

In summary Mr Lynch explained that they did not have any major road concerns at present with the application, however when the full details were submitted, any details or concerns could be looked at and addressed.

Members then asked questions of Ms Greene and Mr Lynch and the following information was noted:

- It would be the intention to adopt the new link road, should the application be approved;
- The wildflower area would be maintained as part of the maintenance of open space, included in the legal agreement;
- The flooding team were content with the proposal and a condition would be included to mitigate flooding;
- There was flexibility in the numbers in relation to the types of property but at the moment 95 units were proposed which would be mainly flats; and
- There were no plans for a playpark in the proposal.

The Convener then invited the applicant to address the Committee, and the speakers consisted of Theresa Hunt, Burness Paull, Mark Peters, Fairhurst and Charlie Ferrari and David Suttie, Cults Property Development.

Mr Charlie Ferrari commenced the presentation for the applicant and noted that the south facing site with North Deeside Road to the north and Inchgarth Road to the south was formed by an area of land to the North of the Deeside Walkway of approximately 8 acres and a further area of land of approximately 16 acres to the south of the walkway.

Mr Ferrari stated that because of the 21metre drop between those two main roads it would be virtually impossible to see the development from North Deeside Road apart

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from the entrance/exit where the intention was to build a new link road to be funded by the development company at a cost in excess of £3 million.

Mr Ferrari advised that the link road would reduce the need to use Pitfodels Station Road, Westerton Road and Deevie Road South where it might be possible to consider closing some or all of those roads to through traffic with significant benefits to the local community. Mr Ferrari indicated that these three roads were extremely dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists and local vehicles and this was evidenced in photographs taken by the Westerton Road local action group which showed vehicles mounting pavements during peak school times.

Mr Ferrari advised that the proposal would encourage traffic to use the new link road linking North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road so that the existing sub-standard roads could be returned back to simple residential access roads rather than being used as rat-runs.

Mr Ferrari explained that in terms of pedestrian linkage there was a defined disabled-compliant walkway linking Inchgarth Road up to the Deeside Walkway then up to North Deeside Road exiting at the point of the existing field access and existing bus stop. The access had been designed to meander through the proposed Community Retirement Village.

Mr Ferrari also advised that there would be disabled access on to the Deeside Walkway which was now a well-used public walkway and this would materially improve public access to this area with a material benefit to the community. Currently access was via old and dangerous stairways which were not fit for purpose. Mr Ferrari also explained that the world population was growing at the rate of 90 million per year and people were living much longer, and this resulted in an ever increasing demand for developments for the elderly especially those that would give the opportunity to downsize and release their existing properties which could help the housing market. Therefore Mr Ferrari noted that if the proposal was approved the intention would be to construct an all encompassing community retirement village for the elderly and as part of that strategy the development had been designed to emulate individual house plots which were similar to the many existing house plots that existed on North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road.

Mr Ferrari explained that the homes would be largely south facing dropping down approximately 18m over an area to the east of the new link road and would consist of 2 storey high quality apartments in terms of design and build where there was a clear demand. The development would be set back from North Deeside Road by more than 20 metres.

In regard to the retail units they would consist of a central coffee meeting store/newsagent / hairdresser / chemist and nail/podiatrist unit. They had designed the space above the 5 shops to create areas for a physiotherapist / dentist and doctors' surgery and these would all be accessed by lift. The development would have to satisfy the conditions

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imposed by the Care Inspectorate for the elderly plus the many other departments in respect of this retirement village.

Mr Ferrari further advised that they had paid particular attention to minimise noise in respect of traffic from the new link road where both sides of the road would have fast growing willow hedging with a water supply / drainage system, plus sound insulation panelling behind.

In conclusion, Mr Ferrari explained that if approved this development would provide a substantial number of jobs during the lengthy construction phase as well as jobs in the commercial units, and jobs for the extensive care staff required to satisfy the Care Inspectorate for the Care Home. Mr Ferrari noted that if approved, it was hoped that a start on site would be January 2021 with a completion date of Jan 2025.

The Committee was then addressed by Theresa Hunt, Burness Paull, who was acting as the legal planning adviser to the applicant.

Ms Hunt explained that in determining the application, members would be required to assess whether the development accorded with the relevant provisions of the Local Development Plan, and if not, whether there were material considerations which would justify approval.

Ms Hunt advised that a detailed analysis against the relevant planning policies was set out in the supporting Planning Statement lodged with the application and this was based on the material submitted with the Planning Application, including the Statutory Environmental Report and Design and Access Statement.

Ms Hunt highlighted that there were no specific plan policies for this type of retirement development and noted that it had been demonstrated that the proposal accorded with the technical policies on design, cultural and natural heritage, open space, flooding and drainage, transport and affordable housing.

Ms Hunt explained that there was a need for housing specifically designed for the elderly and retired community, and the benefits this would deliver to the wider housing market were summarised in the Report undertaken jointly by Legal & General and The Centre for Economics and Business Research, April 2018.

Ms Hunt also highlighted that the proposed link road was identified in the Council's Strategic Infrastructure Plan as a measure that would help improve access from the south of the City and a public consultation undertaken both for this proposal and in other studies concluded that there was strong public support for the provision of the link road, and this was seen as an important piece of transport infrastructure.

Ms Hunt went on to advise that the site was currently located in an area designated as greenbelt and greenspace network. The provision of transport infrastructure in the

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greenbelt was supported by Policy NE2, where there was no alternative to provide that infrastructure development outside the greenbelt. In this case, to perform its function, the proposed link road would need to be located on land within the greenbelt. To this extent, the proposed development accorded with greenbelt policy NE2. Ms Hunt highlighted that whilst the site was within the greenbelt, it did not perform the functions of greenbelt land. The Site was also within the greenspace network, and was a recognised linkage but currently provided very limited recreational opportunities and there was no access to the Deeside Way. The proposed development would provide pedestrian and cycle provision and a new access to the Deeside Way to the wider core path and national cycle network. This would provide a benefit not only to residents of the new development, but the wider community.

Ms Hunt also noted that the proposed application was also supported by a number of relevant material planning considerations. The proposed development also accorded with national guidance on planning and sustainable urban drainage systems, planning for transport, planning and archaeology and planning and noise.

The representations submitted in response to the application also constituted a material consideration, and although it was accepted that the application had generated a number of objections, Ms Hunt highlighted that there were far more letters of representation in support of the development than against it.

Ms Hunt concluded that the site had been promoted through the emerging Local Development Plan review. Out of a total of 633 responses to the Council's Main Issues Report for the whole city, 320 responses expressed support for the Inchgarth site. Just over half of all of the responses for the whole city were in favour of the site coming forward for the development proposed. Ms Hunt highlighted that this was a substantial body of support which should be taken into account in determining this application.

Mr Peters, Fairhurst, then highlighted photographs of the current inadequate standard rat runs on Pitfodels Station Road and Westerton Road. He advised that the photographs showed the narrow road width, lack of footway provision and poor visibility at the junctions with North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road. He noted that Pitfodels Station Road was narrow, had poor visibility and had sections where no footways were provided, which included across the bridge and increasing safety concerns for all road users. The gradient of the road onto North Deeside Road was such that cars often rolled back at the top waiting to exit Pitfodels Station Road.

Mr Peters explained that Westerton Road was similarly narrow and there was limited junction visibility when coming up onto North Deeside Road given the gradient. He advised that a Transport Assessment had been prepared in support of the development proposals and submitted as part of the planning application. Initial scoping was submitted to the Roads Development Management Service to agree the methodology and key parameters to be included within the assessment. Several meetings had taken place

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with Council officers to discuss the proposals, including the proposed link road alignment and form of junctions with both the A93 North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road.

The Transport Assessment had assessed the traffic impact of the development proposals on the wider road network that surrounded the site, and specifically on the A93 North Deeside Road, Inchgarth Road, Westerton Road and Pitfodels Station Road.

The assessment of the link road had considered the effects of the traffic generated by the development proposals as well as transferring all existing traffic that used both Westerton Road and Pitfodels Station Road to use the proposed link road instead.

The new link road would provide potential for public transport links to form between Inchgarth Road and North Deeside Road, extending to the AWPR and also allow new bus route opportunities to be explored. The Transport Assessment had considered all possible junction types with the junction analysis results confirming that the Link Road junction with Inchgarth Road could be a roundabout, simple priority junction or priority junction with right turn Ghost Island, with all modelled junction scenarios shown to be operating within capacity with minimal levels of queuing and delay. Mr Peters noted that it was ACC officers' preference for the junction to be a priority junction with / without a right turn ghost island, which was therefore what was shown on the Masterplan.

It was considered that the site was highly accessible by walking, cycling and public transport, as well as for vehicles to/from the adjacent local road network. Measures within the proposed development would effectively promote sustainable travel by residents, staff, customers and visitors.

It was concluded that the site's location and characteristics met with local, regional and national policies on sustainable development, and no specific traffic or transport impacts would arise from the development.

Mr David Suttie then concluded the presentation and advised that they had come up with an innovative and unique development to match the needs of the community for the retired and elderly. He explained that the land was currently an eyesore and made no meaningful contribution to the greenbelt or greenspace network and was not available for public or leisure use. He advised that the proposal created a fabulous opportunity to deal with the sub-standard conditions on Pitfodels Station Road and the dangerous rat-running in the area to the west. He explained that the proposed link road would alleviate pressure on the existing sub-standard local road network, and promoted sustainable travel through dedicated cycle and pedestrian links to the Deeside Way, as well as providing the opportunity for public transport links where none currently existed.

Members then asked questions of the applicant and the presenters and the following information was noted:-

- It was a demand led development and the developer already had a list of elderly people who would be interested in buying a new property in the retirement village;

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- In regards to the shop units and who would occupy these, this had not currently been investigated;
- Discussions were ongoing with relevant bus companies;
- There was a demand for care homes and suitable accommodation for elderly people and they had received a lot of interest from care home operators;
- The type of housing was still to be determined but they were aiming to have varied accommodation;
- The houses would be privately owned with 25% affordable housing; and
- The legal agreement would include details on retirement age of residents.

The Committee then heard from **Mr Colin Morsley**, Cults, Milltimber and Bielside Community Council, who advised that in the Spring of 2018, they issued their first draft Community Plan for public comment. Responses came in very slowly until this planning application was submitted, at which point they received more than 150 letters and emails overwhelmingly in support of the proposal and emphasising two issues:

- a. Firstly, the potential to provide a new properly-engineered link road between North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road.
 - b. Secondly, the opportunity to provide high-quality retirement-friendly housing with easy access to the village centre in Cults and to the City Centre.
2. They also noted that when Aberdeen City Council consulted in 2016 on a possible new Dee Crossing, they surveyed the community themselves and received more than 200 notes of support for options which included the link road.
 3. The Community Council submitted a detailed response to the planning application on 29 August 2018 offering conditional support for the proposal based on the provision of the link road and retirement-friendly housing. They concluded that there was a strong community support for this proposal and assessed that many of the people who had responded, had also submitted their support through the Council's planning system.
 4. They contended that Westerton Road, Pitfodels Station Road and Deevie Road South were simply not fit for purpose for the traffic which they currently carried which had not noticeably reduced following the opening of the AWPR. Mr Morsley explained that most of it originated locally heading for Altens, Tullos, Robert Gordon's University and the Garthdee shopping area so was unlikely to divert to the AWPR. He indicated that this development would create the opportunity for the Council to significantly improve traffic flows around Cults to the benefit of the wider community and could allow the introduction of a regular bus service between Lower Deeside and the Garthdee shops.
 5. The proposal would also significantly improve safe access to the Deeside Way for walkers, cyclists and wheelchair users. The present access at Pitfodels Station Road was by steep steps and required walking on the road to reach them.
 6. They fully appreciated that the site was currently graded as Green Belt and Green Space Network. However the land was of poor visual quality and populated by some spindly self-seeded trees. It was also not readily accessible for any recreational purpose. Mr Morsley advised that they would prefer to see some

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appropriate management of the land to the West of the proposed link road with extensive new planting of trees and think that this could improve the bio-diversity of the area and compensate for any tree loss caused by the development.

7. Finally, Mr Morsley noted that they recognised that the proposal was contrary to the 2017 Aberdeen Local Development Plan. He concluded that they would welcome a departure from the current Local Development Plan but would definitely support its inclusion in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2022.

Members then asked Mr Morsley a number of questions.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mrs Louise Harnett**, a local resident who was in support of the application and spoke in regard to health and safety issues in the local area regarding traffic. Mrs Harnett explained that Pitfodels Station Road was used basically as a rat run between North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road and advised that Council officers had acknowledged many years ago that the road was not fit for the volume of traffic using it.

Mrs Harnett explained that almost everyone who used Pitfodels Station Road could tell a story about an accident or a near miss and noted that navigating the road to get to the railway line with grandchildren, a dog, a buggy, scooter or bikes, residents had to rely on traffic stopping on the middle of the bridge, which often caused havoc with the changing lights.

Mrs Harnett also explained that the piece of land in regards to the application had been an eyesore for many years and so overgrown in the summer that it was not suitable for any leisure use by the public and noted from her experience these fields were used by a very few local people as a dog toilet. However, Mrs Harnett advised that the new development could be enjoyed by many people and the area at present could make some feel vulnerable when walking on the railway line or along the main road in the evening in the winter.

Mrs Harnett explained that the development would enhance the green space in the area through the wildlife park which could then be used by the public as well as the residents.

In conclusion, Mrs Harnett advised that she recognised the need amongst friends and neighbours for this type of development with retail and other facilities, and highlighted there were many older people living in large houses in the area who would eventually like to downsize but who wanted to stay within their own, known and familiar community. Mrs Harnett advised there was a clear, identified need in the local area for smaller houses to accommodate the elderly and for smaller affordable homes and felt that the development of a new relief road would negate the use of the smaller roads and provide a much safer route for drivers and cyclists between the North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road and for pedestrians on the minor roads. It would also provide easier access to the Railway Line for the elderly, families and cyclists.

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The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Neil Middleton**, who advised that he was against the application for the following reasons. Firstly he felt that the application contravened the following policies as stated in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan. Policy NE1 Greenspace Network, NE2 Greenbelt, Policy T5 Noise, NE 8 Natural Heritage and also the Pitfodels Conservation area. Mr Middleton explained that the financial viability of the application had to be questioned. He advised that the income generated from 65 flats, 16 semi detached houses, 14 amenity houses and a 50 bed nursing home in the present poor market, did not come near to covering the cost of ground acquisition, a multi million pound link road, construction of the dwellings and care home, services such as drainage and hydroelectric, developers contributions, professional fees, road bonds, doctors surgery bank interest and profit. Mr Middleton questioned why the applicants were proceeding with the application and felt there must be another agenda. He advised that the applicant could get planning permission, then explain that the proposal did not work, abandon the retirement village and apply for a supermarket with 150 parking spaces.

Thirdly Mr Middleton indicated that Aberdeen city and shire along with The Scottish Government had just spent in excess of £1billion on the Aberdeen Western Peripheral road and this had resulted in a 34% or thereby reduction of traffic in the city and an improvement in air quality which was terrific. He noted that the proposed new link road would be a huge cost to the fragile environment with the result of more traffic, and poorer air quality. He advised that there would be a huge carbon footprint during construction with thousands of tonnes of infill which would have to be trucked in, and also the removal of twenty broad leaf trees on North Deeside Road for sight lines.

Mr Middleton also indicated the devastation for the wildlife, the protected bats, badgers, owls, and red squirrels, the deer, fox and birds if the development was to go ahead and also noted the removal of even more trees on the Deeside Way.

In conclusion, Mr Middleton asked Councillors to look to the future and not reverse the positive impact of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route. He explained that residents had entrusted Councillors to adhere to the Aberdeen Local Development Plan where there was no mention of a need for a link road or a retirement village. He urged Councillors to look after the green belt and Pitfodels Conservation Area and urged Councillors to refuse the application.

The Committee was then addressed by **Ms Lorna Lorimer**, who advised that she objected to the application on the following grounds.

Firstly, it was contrary to the Local Development Plan of 2017 which stated that the plan was to “safeguard natural and open spaces, also improve air and water quality and help to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change”. It was contrary to the policy for Green Belt and also for Green Space Network.

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Secondly, Ms Lorimer advised that she understood that more facilities were needed for the elderly but questioned whether this was the right place of the right format. She explained that the area already had several homes for the elderly, which put a great deal of stress on the present local medical facilities and caused an imbalance in the local community. Ms Lorimer also advised that the plan suggested easy access to bus routes and noted this might be fine for the more able but noted on the north side there was an incline, however gentle, to reach North Deeside Road.

Thirdly Ms Lorimer questioned the need for a new road in the area and noted there were access roads from North Deeside Road to Inchgarth Road, which had to be negotiated carefully but she felt that was not a bad thing as it slowed traffic down. She also highlighted that a consequence of developing a new road would be a large unsightly concrete tunnel over the old railway line which would greatly detract from the green space.

Fourthly, Ms Lorimer questioned the provision of local facilities and noted there was a shortage of doctors and care workers, and wondered the likelihood of finding staff for the proposed facilities and noted that without these, many of the elderly would be stranded.

In conclusion, Ms Lorimer highlighted that most of the letters of support wanted the development because of the proposed road but with little regard for other considerations or possible consequences. Ms Lorimer noted that the area was one of the last green spaces on the edge of the city and it complemented the old railway line and could be incorporated by creating a community wild area, which would save the present Green Belt with its wildlife. The proposed new development would cause the loss of something special which could never be replaced and she hoped that officers and Councillors abided by the Local Development Plan and continued as the development plan stated, "to protect and enhance the green infrastructure networks" around the city.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mrs Clare Harris**, who advised that she was a local resident and had lived on Westerton Road, in between the bridge over the old railway line and North Deeside Road for 30 years and was supporting the proposed application for the following reasons.

Firstly, in regard to safety, Mrs Harris explained that the proposed link road would provide a much needed fit for purpose route for both traffic and pedestrians travelling between North Deeside Road and Garthdee and beyond, which would relieve Westerton Road and the other minor roads of the volume of traffic for which they were never designed and make them safer places for residents and other pedestrians to use.

Secondly, Mrs Harris felt that there was a need for more age appropriate accommodation in the area with easy links to shops and amenities. The proposed development would provide a great opportunity, with amenities on site, and easy access to walking routes and also to bus stops with transport into Aberdeen, out along Deeside and down to

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Garthdee. Mrs Harris explained that amenities such as a café would also encourage people to use the old railway line for recreation.

In conclusion, Mrs Harris advised that she was hopeful that in an area that continued to see major housing developments, with all the increased traffic that brought, Councillors would take the opportunity to put the last remaining piece of open land between Cults and the city to good use and approve the proposed development.

Mrs Harris also spoke on behalf of **Mr Mark Sawdon**, who had indicated he wished to speak at the hearing but was unable to attend at the last minute. Mrs Harris read Mr Sawdon's speech and it stated the following.

Mr Sawdon was in support of the application, on the grounds of safety. He regularly had to push his very elderly and frail mother in a wheelchair from their house, round the corner to Ashfield Road, where they had a disabled parking space. This was not located outside their house because of the narrowness of Westerton Road and pavements. Mr Sawdon's mother found it a daunting experience and felt they were running the gauntlet of traffic passing unnervingly close to her. Mr Sawdon was in support of the application.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Jeff Smith**, who was in support of the application. Mr Smith explained that after studying the information submitted to the Council by the applicant, and assessing the proposal on its merits, a clear benefit was the proposed new link road. Mr Smith advised he was a frequent user of Pitfodels Station Road, and he believed that the proposed new road meant linking the North Deeside Road with Inchgarth Road would be of great benefit to the local area and beyond. He explained that residents of Pitfodels Station Road, and Westerton Road in particular, would benefit from the reduction in through traffic and increased safety as these roads no longer met the necessary standards for the volume of traffic using them. He highlighted that both junctions with the North Deeside Road were narrow and hazardous and the visibility at the foot of Pitfodels Station Road was poor and being opposite the entrance to Norwood Hall Hotel made the junction potentially dangerous. Mr Smith also explained that another benefit was the range of residential accommodation and associated facilities that were to be provided. Mr Smith noted that the Local Development Plan stated the need for more housing with particular focus on retirement housing and he believed the range of accommodation to be provided, which included some affordable homes, along with care home provision and community and retail facilities, met all of the needs of the local area and should be welcomed.

Mr Smith also explained that he was a frequent user of the Deeside Way both as a walker and a cyclist and considered it to be a valuable asset within the community. He advised that the proposals would not impair his enjoyment of using the route. The existing open space to the west of the new link road would remain but with enhanced planting and public accessibility for recreational use.

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Mr Smith also highlighted his delight that the mature trees within the site along the North Deeside Road were to be retained, should the application be approved.

In conclusion Mr Smith stated that the proposal would benefit the local community by solving the long-established problem of excessive traffic on the currently substandard link roads; there would be the provision of much sought-after properties suitable for 'last time buyers', thus freeing up larger family homes elsewhere; and by maintaining the asset that was the Deeside Way but with enhanced accessibility to public open space for all sections of the community.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Dave Thompson** who explained that he had been a resident on Westerton Road for approximately 16 years and the amount of traffic on the road had been a concern throughout that time and he had been actively working and engaging with other neighbours to try and make the road safer for the last four years. He explained that although there was a 20mph speed limit in place it was obvious that this was ignored by many drivers and it was a definite risk to pedestrian safety on the road.

Mr Thompson advised that any improvement that could be made to reduce the high volume of traffic on Westerton Road and increase pedestrian safety would be greatly appreciated and he supported the new link road and development as a result.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Sam Murray** who advised that he was in support of the application for a number of reasons.

Mr Murray advised that the inclusion of a new link road between North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road was most welcome, as the existing options of Westerton Road and Pitfodels Station Road left a lot to be desired. He noted that the junctions of both of the roads with North Deeside Road were narrow, with poor visibility, making them difficult for vehicles to negotiate and in both cases the footpaths were non-existent or inadequate, making them dangerous for pedestrians. As a cyclist, he explained that he found these routes to be somewhat treacherous and was pleased to see the plans would include a new cycle path. Similarly the much improved access to the Deeside Way, which would be created by this development, was a real advantage to the community.

Mr Murray advised that the plot proposed for development was, in fact, a really unkempt piece of ground and an eyesore. The area would be transformed into a great community asset and the layout of the proposed development was sympathetic to the surroundings and the inclusion of a public space was most welcome.

Mr Murray indicated that there were a large number of people who would want to downsize to a modern home which suited their needs in their retirement without having to leave their existing locality and he felt that the community this development would create could only bring financial benefits to the local businesses serving the local area.

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Mr Murray also highlighted that all three local hotels namely, the Cults Hotel, The Marcliffe at Pitfodels and the Norwood Hall Hotel supported the proposal.

In conclusion, Mr Murray asked that the proposed development be approved.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mrs Anne Milne** who explained that she had been a local resident for 40 years and lived close to the proposed development. She advised that people her age welcomed the proposals with new retail facilities an added bonus. Mrs Milne felt that the area at present was an eyesore and the new road would make the area safer with a better route and would also tidy up the whole area.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr William Morrison** who explained that he had lived in the area for 40 years and supported the application for similar reasons to other speakers.

Mr Morrison outlined his reasons as follows.

He felt that it would reduce traffic through Deeview Rd South, the lower part of Inchgarth Road, Westerton Road, Ashfield Road and Station Road Pitfodels and would reduce congestion at the present junctions. Mr Morrison felt that the AWPR had not noticeably reduced traffic in the area and that it appeared to have increased with student and staff from North Aberdeenshire using the AWPR and consequently the local roads to access Robert Gordon University. He added that there was a need for a decent link road between the North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road which was identified a number of years ago. With respect to area of ground itself, the proposed area for development had changed from farm land to wilderness with small thickets of self seeded trees. He noted that it was frequently used for fly tipping with fridges, washing machine, tumble dryers and the obligatory mattress dumped within the grounds. The wall and fence on the Inchgarth side of the property was in a very distressed condition and did nothing to protect or enhance the area. He frequently walked the area, and noted there was a variety of wildlife mainly birds and deer, however had never seen squirrels or any of the usual signs of badgers. The development would provide a realistic balance between rural and developed space similar to that already approved in other developments, albeit in a smaller scale. Mr Morrison added that there was a need for good after care facilities for the elderly and this was an ongoing issue with life expectancy for both males and females set to increase over the coming decades. He also indicated that a small retail unit would not go amiss to serve the community and visitors to the development.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Alastair Walker** who explained he was in support of the application for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the levels on the site fell considerably from the North Deeside Road to Inchgarth Road and there would be no negative impact from the development and indeed there would be a very positive improvement in the scenic appeal of the area. The area was south facing and the views from the homes to be built there would be fabulous.

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Secondly, there was a need for a good connecting road between Inchgarth Road and North Deeside Road as the existing roads were inadequate and had a negative affect on the residential property owners living on Westerton Road and Station Road.

Thirdly, the area of land in question was of no great merit for anything other than for development. He felt it was a great idea to put this land to good use instead of it lying overgrown and in a sorry state of repair due to neglect over a period of many years.

Fourthly, with an ageing population, the area needed another care home and housing suitable for the elderly and would be of interest to him.

In conclusion, Mr Walker felt that the proposal had been well thought through, would improve access to the disused Deeside railway line, did not conflict with other developments in the area, would not put excessive strain on the existing road network and the new link road was vitally important to the local community.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Keith Morrice** who explained that he knew the area well and was often in the area. He felt that the roads were poor and urgently needed improvement. Mr Morrice noted that combined with the retirement village, the proposed development would be a positive addition and was a very good idea.

The Committee was then addressed by **Ms Dawn Barrack** who explained she lived at 229 North Deeside Road in Cults, adjacent to the proposed development. Ms Barrack advised that she felt very strongly about the development and was against development on this site as it was classed as Green Belt in the Pitfodels Conservation Area.

Ms Barrack indicated her shock that it was suggested that the proposed development would take an estimated 6 years to develop. 6 years of total disruption to her life and also her neighbours' life. Ms Barrack noted that the height of the road was so close to her home it was horrifying.

Ms Barrack advised that Policy NE2 Green Belt, meant that there was general prohibition to develop, subject to exceptions. Ms Barrack highlighted that this development was not essential and would just create another rat run, encouraging large vehicles and buses on to Inchgarth road, which was not suitable.

Ms Barrack concluded that the noise levels for her home, regardless of the proposed planting, would not be sufficient.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mrs Janet Jackson**, who explained that she had lived on North Deeside Road since the early 1980's and the driveway at the back of her house exited onto Westerton Road, which used to be a country road. The volume of traffic had significantly increased over the years and the residents actively campaigned to get speed bumps installed. However Mrs Jackson felt that the road was still too narrow

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to cope with the amount of traffic and large vehicles still used the road, even though they were prohibited. Mrs Jackson indicated that there had not been an improvement in the traffic levels since the opening of the AWPR and a new road such as the proposal, was now essential to link the areas of Garthdee and Cults.

Mrs Jackson also indicated that in regards to the area of the development, for many years things had fallen more and more into disrepair and it was not a particularly nice place to walk. The area had been left to run wild and was not much of a "conservation area". Rubbish had been dumped there and was just an eyesore and was certainly not an area of outstanding natural beauty. Mrs Jackson noted that deer and bird did visit the area, and commended the developers for including the wildlife corridor in the plans.

In conclusion Mrs Jackson felt that the proposed development should be approved.

The Committee was then addressed by **Dr Francis Philip** who had been a resident on Westerton Road for many years. Dr Philip was in support of the application for the following reasons.

Firstly, there was a demand in the area for the provision of suitable accommodation for the elderly and he noted there was a large number of people who would be keen to downsize and remain in the area. The inclusion of a care home and affordable housing would also be a great benefit to the community.

Dr Philip also advised that at present, the site was a wilderness and not open to the public so the proposal would materially enhance the area and provide access and associated enjoyment to all. He also indicated that the link road was a huge bonus and noted the present situation with traffic on Westerton Road was heavy at times which provided difficulty for both drivers and pedestrians and the blind summit at the bridge was dangerous when vehicles were parked nearby. Dr Philip encouraged Councillors to approve the application.

Dr Philip also read out the statement from **Mr Ritchie Manson** who could not be at the hearing, but was also a local resident. Mr Manson was in support of the application and noted how extremely dangerous the local roads were and that he had witnessed many accidents and something had to be done to improve safety. Mr Manson also highlighted the ageing population and had full confidence that the development would have a positive addition to the local community.

The Committee was then addressed by **Anna Jackson**, on behalf of **Steve McKnight** who could not be in attendance at the hearing. Ms Jackson read out Mr McKnight's statement and the following was noted.

Mr McKnight's property was located on the corner of Inchgarth Road and Pitfodels Station Road and his entrance sat on the corner at an angle, diagonally opposite the entrance to Norwood Hall hotel. Mr McKnight advised that the junction had very poor sight-lines and

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visibility and was extremely dangerous. The new road would remove traffic from Pitfodels Station Road, Westerton Road and St Devenick's Place to the benefit of those living on these roads. It would also remove traffic from Deevie Road South and Ashfield Road to the benefit of the residents. It would also make the roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Mr McKnight noted that the site was currently unkempt and he looked forward to seeing a significant improvement with public access. He noted that the proposed development was innovative in terms of its concept and design and the provision in the area for housing for the elderly which included affordable housing should be welcomed by all. He advised that the layout fitted into the landscape and with the extensive open space included within the development, it maintained the separation between Cults and Pitfodels/Garthdee. The proposed building would not be seen from long range views.

Finally, Mr McKnight indicated that the proposed planting and wildlife area, the green space/green network in the area would be retained and enhanced and that he was fully in support of the development.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Gavin McDonald**, who explained that he was not a local resident, but travelled through Cults regularly. He advised that the junctions were very dangerous at both ends and the development would see improved access to the Deeside Way. Mr McDonald also indicated that the type of elderly housing included in the proposed development, would be something he would be very interested in.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Philip Anderson**, who explained that he had stayed in the area and would like to return to the community in retirement and was in full support of the application. He explained how many people were ready to downsize and felt the development fitted well. He also highlighted how the new link road was badly needed in the local area and would provide a safe route between North Deeside Road and Inchgarth Road. Mr Anderson also explained how the proposed planting would enhance the local environment and the green space would be strengthened.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Scott Findlay**, who was also in support of the application and felt that the current road structure was no longer fit for use and very dangerous. He explained that the proposed new road should be given full backing, as it would improve safety access for all road users. Mr Findlay also highlighted how there were no retirement villages in the area and he felt that this was a welcomed proposed development.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mr Peter Littlefield** who explained that he lived on Westerton Road and was in full support of the proposed development. Mr Littlefield explained that the housing development would be most welcomed as it would provide much needed accommodation for elderly people but also new facilities such as a pharmacy, café and doctor's surgery. He also noted that the development would not only

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provide a unique combination of appropriate accommodation and support facilities for its residents but would also be available to existing residents in Pitfodels and Inchgarth.

Mr Littlefield highlighted that the proposed development made good use of the abandoned and unkept area of land and by retaining a wildlife corridor and the management of green areas, would be a positive impact on wildlife. Also, the improvements to access to the existing Deeside Way and creation of additional walking/cycling routes within the overall development would provide considerable benefits for residents and visitors alike.

Mr Littlefield advised that residents had suffered for many years with the danger, noise and inconvenience of heavy traffic using the road as a rat run and noted that the construction of the proposed link road, would be specifically designed and constructed to modern-day standards thereby meeting the current and future vehicular and pedestrian requirements.

In conclusion Mr Littlefield asked that Councillors support the application.

The Committee was then addressed by **Mrs Lesley Little**, who explained that she was against the proposed development. Mrs Little advised that traffic had decreased since the opening of the AWPR and felt that the new proposed road would then become a rat run. She also felt that it was a poor site for a development for elderly people. She also highlighted that greenbelt land should be protected and thought it was unthinkable to move the wildlife access. Finally Mrs Little questioned the financial viability of the proposed development.

The Convener thanked all those who attended the hearing, specifically those who had presented their case, submitted representations and provided information. She advised that the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning would prepare a report for submission to a special meeting of Full Council for subsequent consideration and determination.

COUNCILLOR MARIE BOULTON, Convener