

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Enterprise, Strategic Planning and Infrastructure
DATE	13 March 2014
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Countesswells Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan
REPORT NUMBER:	EPI/14/006

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report outlines the Countesswells Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan, prepared as a strategy for the future development of land identified in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (ALDP) as OP58.
- 1.2 A summary document of the Development Framework is appended to this Committee Report. The full Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan for Countesswells is a large document containing a lot of illustrative material and can be viewed by accessing the following link:

www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/masterplanning
- 1.3 A hard copy of the full Development Framework and phase 1 Masterplan is available in the Members' Library (Town House), within the Planning and Sustainable Development Service at Ground Floor North, Marischal College, or by contacting the Masterplanning, Design and Conservation team.
- 1.4 The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan has been made available to the Cults, Bielside and Milltimber, Kingswells and Craigiebuckler and Seafield Community Councils for information prior to this report being considered for public consultation in accordance with the Council's approved Aberdeen Masterplanning Process.
- 1.5 Given the school holidays, a 6 week public consultation exercise rather than the usual 4 weeks is proposed.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (a) Approve the Countesswells Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan as interim planning advice; and
- (b) Agree for officers to implement the process to ratify the Development Framework as Supplementary Guidance. This will include a 6 week public consultation with results reported to Committee prior to submission to Scottish Government.

2.2 Definitions

‘Interim Planning Advice’ – this specifies that the Development Framework is in the public domain and available for the purposes of a formal City-wide consultation. As such it becomes a material consideration in the determination of any planning application. The duration of consultation will typically be 4 weeks, given that public engagement has taken place throughout the preparation of the Framework. This allows responses to be collated and reported back in the next Committee cycle.

‘Supplementary Guidance’ (SG) – this is adopted and issued by a planning authority in connection with a Local Development Plan, as a result any such guidance will form part of the Development Plan. Before adoption, the SG must be publicised and a period for representations to be made specified, this includes targeting key consultees and stakeholders who may want the opportunity to comment. Following the specified consultation period and as a result of comments received, relevant changes will be made to the final document before reporting back to Committee and subsequent submission to Scottish Ministers. After 28 days have elapsed, the authority may then adopt the guidance unless Scottish Ministers have directed otherwise.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Landowner has met the cost of preparation of the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan including all consultation and engagement. The proposals will result in efficiencies in the determination of future planning applications related to the Development Framework, leading to a reduction in Council staff time to assess future detailed proposals.

4 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan reduce the risk of piecemeal and inappropriate development in the site area. Mixed use development and the efficient use of land will contribute towards the Council’s aim of promoting sustainable economic development.
- 4.2 Approving the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan will contribute to efficiencies in determining future planning applications

and a reduction in Council staff time to assess future detailed proposals. By encouraging acceptable forms and uses of new development to be agreed publicly, it allows more informed decision making to be made earlier, saving time and resources for staff, applicants and the public.

- 4.3 The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan contribute towards a higher rate of new house building in the City, including 25% on site affordable housing provision in accordance with the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2012).
- 4.4 In accordance with the Aberdeen Local Development Plan: Action Programme and the Infrastructure and Developer Contributions Manual, the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan references how the development will seek to address requirements for cumulative and local transport infrastructure; public transport along with walking and cycling.
- 4.5 A Strategic Environmental Assessment has been undertaken on the Countesswells site as part of the preparation for the Aberdeen Local Development Plan.

5 BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 5.1 The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan has been produced by Optimised Environments on behalf of The Countesswells Consortium (Stewart Milne Homes, Heron Property and Ian Suttie) and aims to create a new settlement in an attractive, well contained landscape setting. The development will deliver a mixed use community, complete with supporting infrastructure and increased opportunity for sustainable solutions. A multi disciplinary project team has contributed to the preparation of the Framework, consisting of:

Developers - The Countesswells Consortium
Masterplanners - OPEN (Optimised Environments Ltd)
Planning Consultant- Ryden
Engineering and Transportation Consultants – Fairhurst
Environmental Consultants – Ironside Farrar
Education Consultants – TPS
Public Relation Consultants – Orbit Communications

Site Description

- 5.2 The Countesswells site (OP58) is located to the West of Aberdeen. It is situated between Bielside to the south and Kingswells to the north. The site is bounded to the east by Hazelhead Woods, Park and Golfcourse and to the west by Foggieton and Countesswells Wood. The site is currently largely in agricultural use and measures approximately 165.9 hectares.

- 5.3 The AWPR is located to the west with a proposed new junction on the A93 between Milltimber and Peterculter and on the A944 between Kingswells and Westhill.
- 5.4 The site is well contained within its landscape framework of woodland and undulating landscape within a natural bowl. The site is approximately 1,964m at its longest and 1,423m at widest. The lower lying areas to the south of the site are well contained by woodland blocks and are less prominent than the more elevated northern areas.
- 5.5 There are some tree belts and trees within the site which are being maintained and enhanced. It is identified that the tree lined part of Countesswells Road is one of the key character features for retention on the site.
- 5.6 The site falls within the Cults, Bielside and Milltimber and Craigebuckler and Seafield Community Council catchments and adjoins the Kingswells Community Council boundary at the A944.

Policy Summary

- 5.7 The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan has been prepared following the Council's adopted Aberdeen Masterplanning Process and contributes towards the Scottish Government and Aberdeen Local Development Plan policy aims of raising design quality through the 6 key qualities of creating successful places, namely – distinctive, welcoming, safe and pleasant, adaptable, easy to get to and move around, and resource efficient.
- 5.8 The Countesswells site is identified in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2012) as Opportunity Site (OP58) for 3000 homes (including 25% affordable) and 10 hectares of employment land. The housing provision is split into two land release phases, 2,150 homes proposed for the period up to 2016, 850 homes up to 2023. 10 hectares of employment land are required prior to 2024.
- 5.9 This proposal helps bring forward land for development in the early phases of the Local Development Plan and helps meet the targets and objectives in the Structure Plan, including that development should generally be no less than 30 dwellings per hectare as an average across the whole site.

Opportunity and Vision

- 5.10 Countesswells presents a unique opportunity for the creation of a new place with its own character and identity. It is different from other developments within the City given that they predominantly represent the expansion of existing large communities. The quantum of proposed development allows the creation of a deliverable mixed use

community, complete with supporting infrastructure and increased opportunities for sustainable solutions.

- 5.11 Creating an identity and sense of place will be central to the new Community's success. At the heart of this vision is the desire to create opportunities for residents to live more sustainable lifestyles.
- 5.12 The key opportunities for the site have been identified as:
1. Rural setting on the edge of the city
 2. A place in itself
 3. Scale of development
 4. Integrated approach to design
 5. A place for everyone

Access and Connectivity

- 5.13 An extensive permeable network of paths will be provided within Countesswells. A main east-west connection along the Cults Burn corridor is prioritised. The core path connecting Countesswells Wood and Hazelhead Park is maintained and will be within an open space area.
- 5.14 The Development Framework aims to ensure a high degree of pedestrian connectivity with a number of paths throughout the site which will also connect into the wider core path and cycle network.
- 5.15 A bus (and access) only route is proposed to connect into the Kingswells Roundabout to alleviate pressure on this junction. A potential bus route has been identified around the whole site ensuring all residents should be within a 400 metre walk from a bus stop.
- 5.16 The main vehicular connection to the A944 will be an upgraded Jessiefield Junction. The upgrades are proposed as part of phase 1 of the development, further detail on phasing can be found on p73. There will be cycle and pedestrian paths adjacent to the main vehicular route.
- 5.17 A Transport Assessment (TA) is currently being prepared and will determine the level of development that can be accommodated on the road network prior to the Jessiefield Junction upgrade. The TA will also determine road and junction requirements for the development and will help to inform the requirements for each phase of development. The Transport Assessment will also determine what local road improvements and upgrades are required.

Uses

- 5.18 The site is allocated for 3000 houses and 10ha of employment land. There are two local centres proposed, one around the central square and one to the north of the site. Both the local centres are in close

proximity to the schools. Within the site, two primary schools are proposed along with a secondary school. One of the primaries is associated with the secondary school in a Community Campus. Further detail on Education can be seen on pages 70 and 71 of the Development Framework. Health care, open space and drainage provision will also be provided within the site.

- 5.19 The Development Framework identifies 9.76 hectares of mixed use containing opportunities for employment including supporting infrastructure. The employment provision and mixed use areas are shown on page 67 of the Development Framework. The tables on page 68 provide further detail about the density, uses and number of units.

Streets

- 5.20 The street structure of Countesswells aims to be permeable with a clear hierarchical network. This includes a primary street, secondary street, and tertiary streets along with smaller lanes and courtyards. The permeability of the site and the indicative street types are shown on pages 64+65 of the Development Framework.

Environment, ecology and Open Space

- 5.21 The site is contained within a natural bowl with the lower lying areas to the south being less prominent than the more elevated areas to the north. The landscape setting around the site also provides a level of containment and attractive setting for the development. The main aim of the Development Framework is to connect the large areas of open space at Hazelhead and Countesswells through the creation of landscape links within the development.
- 5.22 The provision of Open Space within the site exceeds the Council's Open Space requirements. Areas of open space include the Countesswells Central Park, Cults Burn Corridor, Countesswells Road Avenue and edge boundary landscaping. Fig 102 on page 55 shows where the different open spaces are located. Within these larger areas other provision includes play areas, allotments and outdoor sports areas. Details of the provision can be found on page 56+57 of the Development Framework. The Framework has been designed with reference to ACC's Open Space Supplementary Guidance (March 2012).
- 5.23 The Open Space will be managed by a private management company or similar.
- 5.24 It should be noted that due to their scale, some of the open spaces within the site will be multifunctional and have more than one use. The final design, detail and maintenance of these open spaces will be addressed through detailed planning applications for each phase of the

site. Each area of open space is included within a phase, including the Central Park being delivered as part of Phase 1. Phasing is shown in more detail on pages 73-75 of the Development Framework.

- 5.25 A number of ecological surveys have been carried out to inform the document, these include otter, badger, phase 1 habitat, bat and a red squirrel surveys. The Framework and subsequent Masterplans aim to enhance biodiversity and improve ecology within the site. There is the requirement to carry out further ecological studies to inform any planning application.

Cultural Heritage

- 5.26 Baseline studies were carried out for the proposed development site. A number of known cultural sites were assessed. It is likely that further assessments will be required as part of the planning application process.

Housing

- 5.27 The proposals for Countesswells include a mix of house types, densities and uses. The majority of development will be 2-3 storeys in height with properties around the central park/ mixed use areas mainly 4 storeys with opportunities for key corners or focal points to be higher.
- 5.28 The density of the site averages out at approximately 30 dwellings per hectare in accordance with both Structure and Aberdeen Local Development Plan policies. The higher density will be in mixed use cores with lower density towards the edges of the site. The mixed cores will also likely have commercial premises on the ground floor with residential properties above. The diagram explaining density is on page 69 of the Framework document.
- 5.29 The residential mix will cover all market sectors and will include:
- Flats/apartments
 - Terraced houses
 - Semi detached houses
 - Detached properties
- 5.30 There is a requirement for the site to deliver 25% affordable housing in accordance with Policy H5 – Affordable Housing of the Local Development Plan. The affordable housing provision will be tenure blind and spread throughout the whole site through all phases of the development. Affordable housing will predominantly be located in areas which are well connected in terms of path network, access to public transport and accessible to the proposed mixed use centres. A contribution towards offsite provision of a Gypsy Traveller site will be made.

Infrastructure

- 5.31 A detailed break down of the Infrastructure Requirements and delivery for the site can be found on page 125-129 of the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan.
- 5.32 Education provision –two primary schools and a secondary school will to be provided within the site (discussions on going with Education). It is anticipated that local provision will be made in neighbouring schools until such a time as on site provisions is needed. It is envisaged the first primary school will be required within phase 1 of the development.
- 5.33 The site has affordable housing provision of 25%. An appropriate off site financial contribution towards a Gypsy Traveller site will be agreed through planning gain contributions and a Section 75 Agreement.
- 5.34 New road links and improvements at A944 and upgrades to the local road network, with appropriate design standards to accommodate forecasted traffic volumes are required. The detail of these connections and upgrades will be determined through the traffic assessment process.
- 5.35 Health care provision – the ALDP Action Programme details the requirement for planning gain contributions and land (where identified) to support a General medical service capable of holding 5 GP's, a new 4 chair dental surgery (could be accommodated in the new health centre and 2 community pharmacies. Detailed discussions will take place and agreement reached on phasing and delivery through a Section 75 Agreement as part of the planning application process.
- 5.36 Water and drainage – a full list of requirements will be identified following completion of detailed Drainage and Full Water Impact Assessments and a Scottish Water Development Impact Assessment and the linking of any requirements to the phases of development.
- 5.37 Strategic Transport Fund contribution will be made in accordance with the Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- 5.38 Countesswells is one of 17 UK projects announced by the UK Government in October 2013 as having 'pre-qualified' for the UK Guarantee Scheme. In all, 40 projects are earmarked for benefitting from the £40billion scheme which provides Government Guarantees for major Infrastructure projects. The Guarantee will be used to ensure funding will be put in place to deliver the project over the anticipated 15 year development period by the Consortium.

Phasing

- 5.39 An indicative phasing strategy has been developed which details the delivery of the allocation in accordance with the ALDP 2012.

	Approximate house numbers
Phase 1	1005
Phase 2	1013
Phase 3	985

- 5.40 The phasing strategy amounts to approximately 3000 units as identified in the Local Development Plan allocation. The phasing plan also includes the relevant associated open space and the employment. The phasing plans can be viewed on pages 73-75 of the Development Framework.

Public Consultation and Involvement

- 5.41 Throughout the design process for Countesswells, the project team have involved the local community and stakeholders in the proposals. A Countesswells Liaison Group was set up including representatives from the Community Councils and local residents. The first meeting of the liaison group took place on 12 July 2012.

- 5.42 Design for the site has evolved with continued input from the community. Their input has been fundamental in shaping the proposals ensuring that they meet the aspirations for the site. Events that took place during the Masterplanning process for the sites include:

- Community Council meetings,
- A 3 day Public exhibition took place with a total of 244 people attending,
- A second 3 Day public exhibition took place in September in varying locations around the site. In total around 230 people attending over the 3 days,
- Community Workshops took place on 26 + 26 September 2012,
- A second liaison group took place on the 9 October 2012,
- A meeting took place with the Airyhall Primary School Parents Council 6 November 2012,
- A third liaison group was held on 3 February 2014, updating on the current position.

- 5.43 The main issues arising from consultation during the preparation of the Development Framework include:

- **Current Infrastructure**

Concern was raised about the existing transport network and the capacity on the existing roads. Concern highlighted the poor quality of the existing roads and the use of country roads as 'rat runs.' Safety

concerns relating to local school and access to existing properties were also identified as essential to maintain.

Detailed Transport Assessments will determine the level of development that can be accommodated prior to the implementation of the Jessiefield access being in place. The TA will also determine the level of improvement required to the current road network and junctions. The street network of Countesswells has also been designed to discourage rat running.

The tree lined Countesswells Road is to be retained as a pedestrian/ cycle route with the street being realigned to better integrate it into the development area.

Detailed discussions will take place with the bus operators to ensure that the site is well serviced by public transport.

- **Education**

Existing school capacity and the delivery of schools onsite was deemed to be very important and had to be considered carefully. The initial primary school is proposed as part of phase 1 with children prior to this going to schools in the local area with existing capacity. The participants in the event were satisfied that the community would be self-sufficient in terms of education and that the schools would be at the heart of the community. The provision of community facilities within the community campus schools was also welcomed.

- **Environment and open space**

The environment at Countesswells was seen to be a major asset of the site. The opportunity for forest walks, outdoor activities and exercise within the area should not be affected by the development. The framework creates green corridors and connects existing green spaces and woodlands. A new central park is proposed which will be a focal point of the community with further green spaces and paths along the Cults Burn Corridor. The Development Framework maintains a network of green spaces across the whole site in accordance with policy.

5.44 Details of the comments received throughout the preparation of the Framework, the engagement process and responses can be found on Pages 11-15 of the Development Framework.

Phase 1 Masterplan

5.45 This document includes a Masterplan for phase 1 of the Countesswells development. The phase 1 Masterplan is included on pages 83-125 of the document. The Masterplan provides more detail on topics such as street network, key buildings, spaces, heights, parking provision and

connections. It also sets out some key principles for the development including the open spaces. Detailed layout of phase 1 can be seen on pages 90 and 91.

5.46 Pending approval of this report, the Countesswells Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan will be the subject of a 6 week statutory consultation (given the school holidays an additional 2 weeks have been added to the consultation period) beginning on Monday 17 March 2014. The following list highlights those that will be consulted. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list:

- Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber Community Council
- Kingswells Community Council
- Craigiebuckler and Seafield Community Council
- Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Authority
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Forestry Commission Scotland
- Scottish Water
- SEPA
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Historic Scotland
- Scottish Enterprise Grampian
- Transport Scotland
- NHS Grampian
- NESTRANS
- Planning Gain
- Countesswells Liaison Group

5.47 The results of the statutory consultation will be reported to the Enterprise, Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee in due course, including any recommended amendments to the document.

5.48 It is important to note that engagement will continue throughout the development process, during detailed Masterplan stages and any subsequent planning applications.

6 IMPACT

6.1 The proposal contributes to the following Single Outcome Priorities: 1 – We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe; 2 – we realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people; 10. We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need; 12 – We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect and enhance it for future generations.

6.2 The proposal contributes to the 5 Year Business Plan in terms of objective – Communication and Community Engagement; sharing our plans and aspirations for the city, – delivering an up-to-date plan, –

facilitating new development projects to improve Aberdeen's living environment and, – support open space initiatives.

- 6.3 The proposal contributes towards the Aberdeen City Council Administrations vision for Aberdeen: 2012 – 2017, particularly creating a City which is a great place to live, bring up a family, do business and visit. It specifically contributes to the follows objectives: Governance – encouraging citizens to participate in design and development; Living – improving opportunities for physical activity; Environment – energy efficient design and construction, attractive streetscapes and access to green space; Economy – improve access to range of affordable housing; Mobility – encourage cycling, walking and promoting a sustainable transport systems which reduce carbon emissions.
- 6.4 The proposal is consistent with the Council's Corporate Plan in particular with regard to delivering high levels of design from all development, maintaining an up-to-date planning framework, sustainable development and open space provision.
- 6.5 The proposal contributes to one of the key goals on the Strategic Infrastructure Plan – A step change in the supply of housing. In particular Countesswells relates to the project: Delivery of the housing element of the Strategic Development Plan and is the pilot project highlighted in paragraph two "The Council is in ongoing discussions with HM Treasury and in particular its infrastructure development arm – Infrastructure UK – to investigate options to help release funds to enable investment in the infrastructure for such developments to take place. A pilot project to use the Governments Guarantee Scheme is currently being progressed with a developer and Infrastructure UK with the guarantee being sought amounting to £30-40 million."
- 6.6 The proposal is consistent with the Planning and Sustainable Service Plan, in particular engaging the community in the planning process, and the delivery of Masterplans/Development Frameworks in line with The Aberdeen Masterplanning Process.
- 6.7 An Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment has been prepared. In summary:

In summary, many of the aims of the proposal will have positive benefits, including;

- Younger – the proposals include the provision of Play Space, open spaces and recreational facilities for children.
- Race – the development proposals include financial contributions towards and off-site Gypsy Traveller site.
- Other / Housing – greater provision of housing to meet the housing demand and affordable housing to meeting range of housing needs.
- Other / Health – improved access useable open spaces for leisure pursuits and opportunities for walking/cycling/exercise.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 The Countesswells Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan February 2014 is a large document containing a lot of illustrative material and can be viewed by accessing the following link:

www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/masterplanning

7.2 Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2012

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=42278&SID=9484>

7.3 Aberdeen Masterplanning Process 2008 (article 22, Planning Committee Minute, 6/11/08)

http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/Planning/pla/pla_planningbriefs.asp

8 REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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