

Pre-determination Hearing

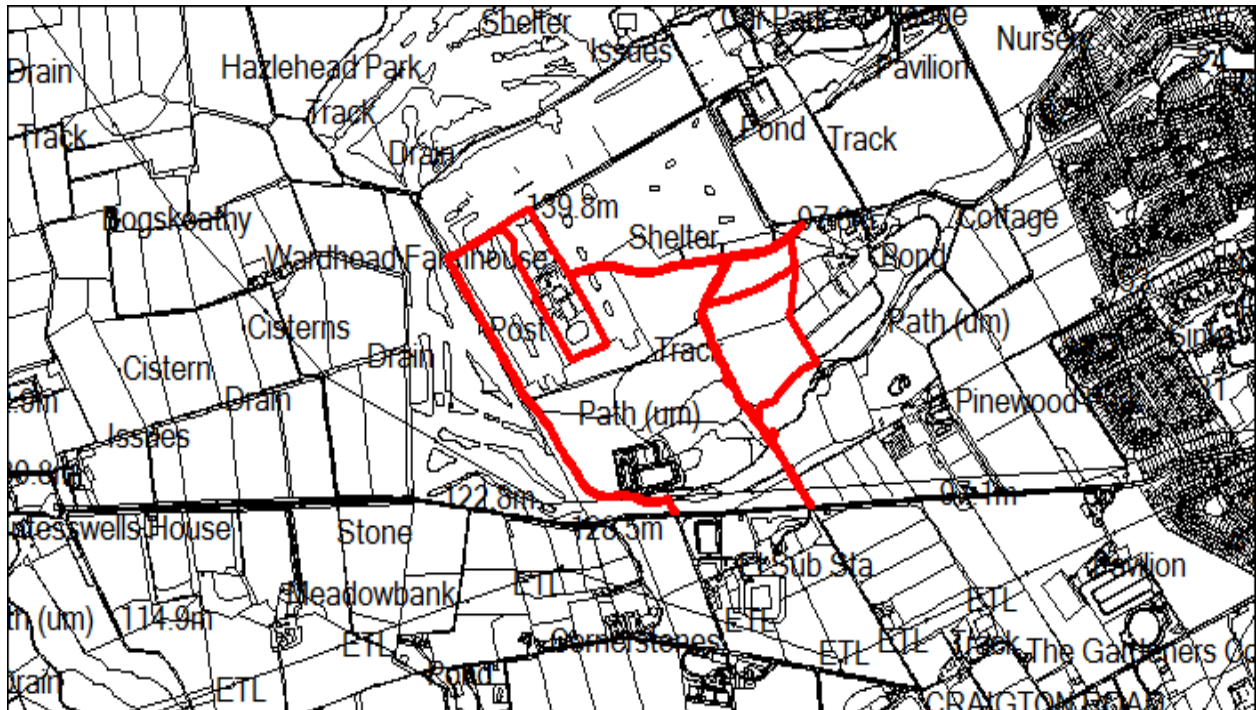
HAYFIELD RIDING CENTRE, HAZLEDENE ROAD, HAZLEHEAD PARK

A PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF A HOTEL AND COUNTRY CLUB WITH CIRCA 250 BEDROOMS, SPA, SWIMMING POOL, FUNCTION AND CONFERENCE FACILITIES AND RESTAURANTS INCLUDING HOLIDAY CHALETS, EQUESTRIAN CENTRE AND COUNTRY CLUB HOUSE WITH ASSOCIATED CAR PARKING/ ALTERATIONS TO ACCESS ROADS.

For: Mr Alan Massie

Application Type : Planning Permission in Principle
Application Ref. : P141026
Application Date: 24/07/2014
Officer: Lucy Greene
Ward : Hazlehead/Ashley/Queen's Cross
(M Greig/J Stewart/R Thomson/J Corall)

Advert: Dev Plan Departure
Advertised on: 20/08/2014
Hearing Date: 14 November 2014
Community Council: comments



This report provides information for the Pre-determination Hearing required to be held for major applications deemed to be a significant departure from the development plan.

The purpose of the hearing is for elected members to hear the views of those who have made representations on the application, prior to the application being determined at a future date by full Council. There is, therefore, no evaluation of the proposal and no recommendation.

This report will be augmented by presentations made at the hearing.

DESCRIPTION

The application site consists of two large areas linked by access roads and paths of varying widths and qualities.

Site A consists of a roughly square shaped area of fields that is approximately 5.48 hectares in size. The fields are used for the grazing of horses.

Site B consists of a rectangular shaped site of approximately 3.72 hectares. This currently contains the hayfield Riding Centre, with stables, indoor and outdoor school, two terraced houses, a steading, a detached house and ancillary buildings. The houses and steading are granite and traditional in nature. There are paddocks within the northern portion of the site.

Site A lies to the east of Site B and approximately 300m to the north west of Countesswells Road. This site is accessed from the road that leads between Hazledene Road (to the north) and Countesswells (to the south). In recent years the surface of this road has become significantly eroded and barriers have been erected in an effort to prevent vehicular through access.

Site B is accessed via a single track road that adjoins Hazledene Road. This road lies within the application site, as well as the paths that leads from the north west corner of the site and loops round to meet the shooting range to the south.

Site A is surrounded by woodland on three sides with a tree lined drystone dyke to the east.

Site B lies within the golf course, although there are lines of trees along the east and west boundaries and woodland to the south. To the north is a track with drystone dyke along the site boundary.

The wider area contains the golf course and park to the north, the site of the former Dobbie's nursery to the east and woodland to the south and west.

PROPOSAL

The applicant will speak at the hearing to describe the proposals.

The application is for Planning Permission in Principle for:

Site A (the fields to the east):

- a hotel containing 250 bedrooms,
- restaurant and banqueting / function facilities, spa and swimming pool
- conference facilities to seat approximately 1000 people
- car parking at a ratio of one space per bedroom, one space per lodge and provision for the conference facility (total approximately 437 spaces across sites A and B) with a large proportion located underground,
- serviced lodges / holiday homes, the indicative plans show 15 no. lodges

Site B (existing Hayfield site):

- Hotel club house
- Services lodges / holiday homes, the indicative plans show 16no. lodges
- Equestrian centre, indicative plans show paddock and training area

The Planning Supporting Statement by Knight Frank, dated June 2014, states that improvements would be provided to the core path and cycle network within the Hazlehead Area

The application includes plans that are indicative only and the details of the proposal, including design and massing of the buildings, would be dealt with under further applications for Matters Specified in Conditions.

To provide a rough idea of the size of building, the indicative plans show a 'horse shoe' shaped building of three and a half / four storeys, with the maximum extent of the footprint extending across an area approximately 100m by 80m.

The planning statement states that the hotel would be of a 5 star standard and would fill a gap in the market, following the envisaged closure of the Marcliffe Hotel.

The planning statement contains an analysis of alternative sites where a facility of this might be located, this is in the form of a sequential test and includes opportunity sites within the Local Development Plan.

Access:

The Transportation Assessment contains four options for access:

Option 1: Access via Hazledene Road only, the link to Countesswells Road would remain closed.

Option 2: Access would be provided along Hazledene Road, and additionally access would be provided along both Groats Road and Hazlehead Avenue with the one way link along the existing lane between the golf course and Hazlehead Park. The link to Countesswells Road would remain closed.

Option 3: Access via Hazledene Road, with access also provided to Countesswells Road, would be one way with due to an existing pinch point preventing widening.

Option 4: Access via all routes mentioned above.

The applicant has stated that a shuttle bus to the city centre would be provided.

Supporting Documents

All drawings and the supporting documents listed below relating to this application can be viewed on the Council's website at

<http://planning.aberdeencity.gov.uk/PlanningDetail.asp?ref=141026>

On accepting the disclaimer enter the application reference quoted on the first page of this report.

The supporting documents include:

- Transportation Assessment
- Ecological Report
- Plans and indicate drawings
- Supporting Planning Statement
- Report on the Pre-application Consultation

PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION

The proposed development was the subject to pre-application consultation earlier this year between the applicant and the local community, as required for applications falling within the category of major developments as defined in the 'Hierarchy of Development' Regulations. The consultation involved one public meeting and a meeting with the Craigiebuckler and Seafield Community Council.

CONSULTATIONS

Roads Projects Team – Discussions are on-going with the team and a Roads Officer will speak at the hearing.

The current position is that:

1. Whilst the applicant prefers Option 1, the Option 2 is the preferred option for the road authority since the creation of multiple points of access is a key objective which forms part of "Designing Streets" policy, and the inbound development trips could be distributed over Hazledene Avenue/Queens Road junction and Hazledene Road/Queens Road junction. Achieving a low cost engineering solution is not a priority for the road authority, whilst the other criteria are ranked equally, so it scores higher than Option 1.
2. Strategic Transport Fund would be payable.
3. Clarification is required as to how the shuttle bus would operate, and this could then be conditioned.

4. It may be that the Countesswells access point could be used for special events, further discussion is required with Traffic Management.
5. Welcome the indication that a car-free link could potentially be provided to the clubhouse.
6. Further consideration is required of the distribution of the inbound development traffic across two junctions instead of one.

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Environmental Health – Request attachment of condition relating to a noise assessment.

Developer Contributions Team – Comments to be confirmed at the hearing.

Enterprise, Planning & Infrastructure (Flooding) – The requirement for Drainage Impact Assessment could be dealt with by condition.

Education, Culture & Sport (Archaeology) – Requests attachment of condition requiring an archaeological dig prior to development.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency – Require attachment of conditions any consent granted, relating to: a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) for surface water drainage, the submission of a site specific Construction and

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) – no comments.

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) - SSRS raises concern about the development proposal as Den Wood is a key site for red squirrels in Aberdeen.

The SSRS has been working in the park since 2009, prior to that, trapping was carried out by SNH from around 2005.

Evidence exists that the red squirrel population has undergone a remarkable recovery – Hazlehead Park constitutes a reservoir of red squirrels of major importance for their successful recolonisation of wider Aberdeen.

Concern is expressed that the proposed development would impact negatively on red squirrels. This is due to the need to upgrade roads, thus reducing habitat, increasing fragmentation of habitat and increasing the risk of traffic related mortality.

At present the road is narrow enough for red squirrels are able to cross the canopy. Road sign and rope bridges are considered to be ineffective.

It is considered that the proposed work would be contrary to objectives of the Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy, in relation to preserving and sustainably managing natural heritage, increasing the value of wildlife corridors and considering nature conservation in all Council projects.

It is requested that roads are placed within the landscape so as to avoid bisecting woodland blocks.

Craigiebuckler and Seafield Community Council (CSCC) – Refer to the consultation on the Main Issues Report for the emerging Aberdeen local Development Plan 2016 (emerging LDP), whereby the Community Council in their response supported the Council's preferred approach, not to allocate further sites. This was for the reason that the allocations already provide a generous supply of housing and employment sites and that increasing the supply of land for development would result in exacerbating the traffic congestion. The Community Council therefore states that it is bound to concur with all decisions by the Council to refuse planning permission in principle to applicant who propose to build on land which is not designated for development in the emerging LDP.

CSCC is aware that a luxury hotel to the west of the city is about to close leaving a gap in the market. It is considered that there would be advantages to the economy if this gap was filled with a new high quality luxury hotel and leisure complex.

The sites are well suited to the purpose because of the visual appeal of their surroundings, proximity to the golf course, paths and gardens.

The location is well screened and development should have minimal visual impact.

REPRESENTATIONS

19no. number of letters of representation have been received. The objections raised relate to the following matters –

- Impact on Park: Hazlehead Park is a valuable facility that has been enjoyed for generations. It is well used by walkers, joggers, cyclists and horse riders and golfers. It is also one of few unspoilt areas through largely undeveloped land and a haven for wildlife – birds, wild animals and deer. The park has already been affected by the Dandara development at Countesswells Road and adjoining pathways through fields have been lost. The development would detract considerably from the park, due to:
 - o Development in the heart of the Park detracting from amenity;
 - o volume of traffic – would change character of park and be hazardous to walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- Green Belt: This is green belt land where development is wholly inappropriate. Even if there were some justification for the Hotel and Country Club, there is no justification for serviced chalets/ holiday homes / second homes / timeshare properties which may result in residential development. This may set a precedent for further development.
- Development would fragment the green belt.
- Scale of development is inappropriate;
- Roads would not cope with the additional traffic – widening would impact upon trees and dry stone dykes;
- Development would be out of keeping with the surrounding area
- Negative impact on wildlife habitat, in particular:
 - o The woods are red squirrel habitat, disruption would impact on red squirrels which have thrived due to efforts in recent years.
 - o Buzzards – nest on site A
 - o Bats forage over the fields
 - o Owls feed on field mice from the fields
- Noise disturbance to residential areas due to increase in traffic in streets used for access, including those leaving functions at night.

- Alternative sites: that it has not been adequately demonstrated that suitable alternative sites have been considered objectively, especially in peripheral areas and Aberdeenshire. Including comments on the following:
 - o Grove nursery, the remaining area, could be considered;
 - o The Marcliffe site could be used
 - o It is stated that access through a housing estate is not acceptable for a quality hotel operator – the appropriateness of Hazledene Road is questioned.
- Queries as to whether transport assessment (TA) takes into account PrimeFour.
- The possibility of creating a rat run through the area has not been modelled and this would not be acceptable.
- Hazledene Road is crossed by those attending Hazlehead Primary and Academy and increased traffic is a safety risk.
- The TA is based on a 200 bed hotel, whereas the application is for 250 bedrooms – Note: the TA has been updated to reflect this.
- That the Queens Road / Hazledene Road junction is not fit for purpose to accommodate this development.
- Drainage is a problem in the area and has been exacerbated by recent development.
- That the park is being revitalised as the first Climate Change Park in Scotland. The proposed development's large carbon footprint would be the antithesis to sustainability.
- The proposal would result in undesirable light pollution in an area that is currently dark.
- That the proposal could risk the future existence of the golf course and the area be developed for housing.
- The Country Club would be very expensive and not affordable to most.
- The Hazlehead Complex belongs to the citizens of Aberdeen and should be kept as such.
- That the Council wish to sell the Hazlehead Golf complex to the private sector.

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy and Guidance

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)

SPP reiterates the Scottish Government's central purpose is to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.

The SPP introduces a presumption in favour of development that contributes to sustainable development. Decision should be guided by various principles including:

- giving due weight to net economic benefit; and

- protecting, enhancing and promoting access to natural heritage, including green infrastructure, landscape and the wider environment.

The SPP contains a strong emphasis on creating high quality places by taking a design-led approach, at every level.

One of the core principles of the SPP is the plan-led approach to planning.

Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan

The overall vision of the structure plan is:

Aberdeen City and Shire will be an even more attractive, prosperous and sustainable European city region and an excellent place to live, visit and do business.

We will be recognised for :

- Out enterprise and inventiveness, particularly in the knowledge economy and in high-value markets;
- The unique qualities of our environment; and,
- Our high quality of life.

The strategy focuses development on places where there are clear opportunities to encourage people to use public transport, planning for significant growth in a limited number places.

The structure plan contains objectives that relate to providing opportunities for economic development, protecting the natural environment and sustainability.

Aberdeen Local Development Plan

Sections 25 and 37(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) require that where, in making any determination under the planning acts, regard is to be had to the provisions of the development plan and that determination shall be made in accordance with the plan, so far as material to the application, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The sites are zoned within the green belt and Green Space Network.

Policy NE2 'Green Belt'

No development will be permitted in the green belt for purposes other than those essential for agriculture, woodland and forestry, recreational uses compatible with an agricultural or natural setting, mineral extraction or restoration or landscape renewal. There are exceptions to the policies, including the following:

- Proposals for development associated with existing activities in the green belt;
- Essential infrastructure;
- Conversion of buildings of historic or architectural interest that contribute to the character of the green belt;

- Proposals for extensions of existing buildings as part of a conversion or rehabilitation scheme.

Policy NE1 'Green Space Network'

The wildlife, recreational, landscape and access value of the network will be protected and enhanced. Proposals that destroy or erode this will be resisted. Where development crosses this, it shall take into account the coherence of the network, including measures to allow access across roads for wildlife and for access and outdoor recreation. Development that has an impact on existing wildlife habitats must be mitigated through enhancement of the network.

Policy D1 'Architecture and placemaking'

To ensure high standards of design, new development must be designed with due consideration for its context.

Policy D3 'Sustainable and Active Travel'

New development will be designed to minimise travel by private car, improve access to services and encourage active travel

Policy D4 'Aberdeen's Granite Heritage'

Retention of granite buildings will be encouraged, even where are not listed or within conservation areas.

Policy D6 'Landscape'

Development must avoid, inter alia:

Significantly adversely affecting landscape character;

Disturbance or loss to important recreation, wildlife or woodland resources or to the physical links between them;

Sprawling onto important green spaces or buffers between communities or places with distinct identities

This policy highlights consideration of impact on existing landscape elements, linear and boundary features or other components that contribute to local amenity, and development should provide opportunities for conserving or restoring them.

Presumption against all activities that will result in loss or damage to established trees and woodlands.

Policy NE6 'Flooding and Drainage'

Development will not be permitted where it would increase the risk of flooding, be at risk of flooding itself.

Policy NE8 'Natural Heritage'

Development that has an adverse effect (even taking into account mitigation measures) on protected species or areas, will only be acceptable where it take into account Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)

Policy NE9 'Access and informal recreation'

New development must not compromise the integrity of existing or potential recreational opportunities including access rights, core paths, other paths and rights of way. Where possible development should include new or improved provision for public access and links to green space for recreation and active travel.

Dr Margaret Bochel

Head of Planning and Sustainable Development.