

## PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 14 November 2014. Minute of Meeting of the PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Milne, Convener; Councillor Finlayson, Vice Convener; and Councillors Boulton, Corall, Cormie, Dickson, Donnelly, Greig, Lawrence, Jean Morrison MBE, Noble, Jennifer Stewart and Thomson.

Also present:- Councillors Donnelly and Noble.

The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be found at:-

<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=348&MId=3539&Ver=4>

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

### SITE VISIT

1. The Members present conducted a site visit prior to the Hearing. The Members were addressed by the Senior Planner (Ms Greene) who advised them of the proposal for the overall site. Ms Greene also advised the Members of the exact boundaries for the proposal and pointed these out to those present. There being no detailed questions from the Members the Convener explained to those present that the Members would return to the Town House to commence the Hearing.

### HEARING

#### **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF A HOTEL AND COUNTRY CLUB ON LAND IN THE VICINITY OF HAYFIELD RIDING SCHOOL - 141026**

2. The Committee heard from the Convener who opened up the Hearing by welcoming those present. He explained that the final running order for the Hearing had been circulated and that the first person to address the Hearing would be Ms Greene.

The Committee heard from **Lucy Greene, Senior Planner, Aberdeen City Council** who addressed the Committee in the following terms:-

Ms Greene explained that the proposal was split across 2 sites (site A-5.48 hectares and site B-3.72 hectares). She explained that the area was predominantly a mixture of woodland types, including pine woodland, other coniferous woodland, mixed woodland, lowland birch woodland, and other broadleaved woodland. She advised that there were also areas of bracken, scrub woodland, neutral grassland and improved grassland. She said that the site supported a number of breeding birds and mammals (red

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squirrels) and Wych elm had been reported in the area. She advised that the good network of paths throughout the site meant that it is well used by local people.

Ms Greene outlined the proposals for the application with plans and maps which included elevation plans. She explained that consultations had been carried out with the following Teams within the Council/agencies/organisations:

- Roads
- Environmental Health
- Flooding
- Archaeological dig condition
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency – SUDS and construction method conditions
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels
- Local Community Council

Ms Greene explained that in terms of representations the following points had been raised regarding the development:

- The impact on users of Hazlehead Park
- Impact on the Green Belt
- The scale of development
- The adequacy of the roads in the area
- The character of the development
- The impact on wildlife in the area
- The noise impact on local residents
- Alternative sites for the development
- Traffic and drainage issues
- Light pollution arising from the development
- Risk to future of Hazlehead Golf Club
- Hazlehead area belongs to the public

Ms Greene explained the main planning policies that the development would be assessed against, these included:

- Scottish Planning Policy:
  - Increasing sustainable economic growth
  - Economic benefits
  - Protecting natural environment
  - Strong plan led approach
- Structure Plan:
  - Vision
  - Strategy
  - Objectives
- Green Belt

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- Green Space Network

## Others:

- Architecture and Placemaking
- Sustainable and Active Travel
- Aberdeen's Granite Heritage
- Landscape
- Flooding and drainage
- Natural Heritage
- Access and informal recreation

Ms Greene concluded her presentation by reminding Members that all Council Members would determine the application in the future.

The Committee then heard from **Mark Wilkie, Senior Engineer, Aberdeen City Council**, who outlined the main roads considerations relating to the development. Mr Wilkie explained that a Transport Assessment (TA) had been prepared by Hyder, the applicant's transport consultants, in support of the planning application, to investigate various access options and that the adopted road network extended along Hazledene Road as far west as Craigiebuckler Avenue. He explained that Hazlehead Avenue was adopted to the east of Groats Road, which was an adopted road, and that the roads within Hazlehead Park were on the City Council's Environment account, and they were not as well maintained as adopted roads. The developer had been advised to contact the relevant Council officer about any proposed alterations or improvements.

He advised that the separate Pinewood / Hazledene development will require to bring a section of Hazledene Road to the west of Craigiebuckler Avenue, up to adoptable standard and that there would be no through route for general traffic, between Hazledene Road and Countesswells Road; there would however be an emergency access.

He explained that there were four access options which were investigated for this development proposal; the second option offered more than the first option in terms of providing an additional entrance route to the development from the adopted road network. He explained that whilst neither option 3 nor 4 could be considered fully as they would reintroduce a rat-run through to Countesswells Road, there was merit in considering Countesswells Road as an exit route for special events when the proposed car parks were full and an event finished. He explained that the developer had been discussing this proposal with Traffic Management staff in the Council, who were of the view that a "rat run" must not be reinstated because up to 400 cars per hour used to use it during peak periods.

He advised that the TA now needed to be extended to address any issues arising from potential additional traffic which would be generated by this mixed use development. He explained that a capacity assessment of the Queen's Road / Hazlehead Avenue /

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King's Gate roundabout would be required in addition to a revised capacity assessment of the Hazledene Road / Queen's Road priority junction.

He advised that he had questioned why a weekend assessment was selected by Hyder who had outlined that their interrogation of national trip generation forecast software - TRICS - had indicated that there would be 60 arrivals and 157 departures from the proposed development, which was the maximum number of trips forecast in any hour, either weekday or weekend. He explained that peak periods to be assessed would have committed development traffic added, e.g. further office development at Prime Four and the residential development at Countesswells.

He advised that in order to minimise the impact on the local road network, a Travel Plan would be required to promote sustainable forms of transport as an alternative to travel by private car to and from the development. He explained that so far, the developer had indicated that a shuttle bus service would be provided for hotel staff and guests and this would operate on an hourly basis between 7am and midnight and run between the hotel and Union Street.

In summary, Mr Wilkie explained that there were outstanding issues, some of which could be addressed for any detailed application, as follows:-

- the potential to make the one-way road two-way to enable Groats Road/Skene Road to become an egress route if roundabout capacity was shown to be an issue
- permanent access from the hotel car park to Countesswells Road – only to be provided if there was no potential rat-run
- swept path assessments for coaches and service vehicles (road widening and passing places and bend improvements might be required as a result)
- the need to retain all existing access arrangements within the park
- car parking numbers to be agreed – possible overspill area for special events (Parking Management Plan)
- a Travel Plan would be required to encourage alternative modes of transport to the private car
- a Strategic Transport Fund contribution

**Members then asked questions of Ms Greene and Mr Wilkie, and the following information was noted:**

- that officers would look at the possibility of access to the site via Countesswells Road
- that officers would confirm (with all members) if the Hayfield Riding School was contained within the Hazlehead Park Policy documents
- that the exact definition of "special events" could be determined and conditioned if required
- that agreed "maintenance" costs could be negotiated

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- that other junctions/roads in the vicinity would be assessed for the impact the development may have on them
- that there would be landscaping on both sites of the development
- that an ecology report was undertaken on the site
- that further traffic assessments would be undertaken
- that traffic calming on site would be considered at the next stage of the process
- that tree thinning was to be undertaken on site in the near future
- that the officers and the developer would receive important information from the Hearing which would give them a steer as to the main issues that required to be addressed.

The Committee then heard from **Elaine Farquharson-Black, Partner and Head of the Planning Division** at **Burness Paull Solicitors**, who addressed members in the following terms:-

Convener, Members, thank you for the opportunity to outline Carlton Rock's proposals for the construction of a 5 star hotel, including leisure and conference facilities and holiday lodges at Hazlehead, together with the redevelopment of Hayfield Stables to form an equestrian centre with Country Club and associated lodges.

I am Elaine Farquharson-Black, Partner and Head of the Planning Division at Burness Paull Solicitors. I am accompanied today by Alan Massie from Carlton Rock; Graham Stuart from BMJ Architects; John Robertson of Hyder Transport Consultants, Nigel Rudd of Nigel Rudd Ecology and Tomasz Stasikowski of TGR Landscape Architects.

This is an application for planning permission in principle and so the detailed design and layout of the development has still to be worked up. However, to try to capture the essence of the development, we have produced a brochure and in the time allowed today we will focus on what we believe to be the key issues relevant to the determination of the application and the matters raised by objectors.

Mr Stuart will take you through project including impacts on the surrounding area.

Mr Robertson will highlight the transportation considerations, including concerns from local residents.

And I will conclude with an overview of the Development Plan context for the application.

All the design team will be able to answer questions.

**DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

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Today's hearing has been convened because, as Lucy Greene has highlighted, the application is considered by Officers to be a significant departure from the Development Plan. With respect, I don't believe the proposals are a significant departure. Indeed there are many policies which support this exciting project.

Importantly, the process which is being followed, including the public consultation which Carlton Rock has carried out, today's hearing followed by determination by Full Council and a referral to Scottish Ministers should the Council decide to approve the application, means that the development will have been thoroughly scrutinised on a number of occasions.

I intend to look firstly at the strategic and national guidance as it is the most up to date policy guidance.

### Strategic Vision

Overarching all planning decisions in the City is the Vision in the Strategic Development Plan. This states that:

*"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".*

It warns, however, that *"The scale of the changes needed and the challenges set by the vision, should not be underestimated"*.

Turning to Scottish Government Guidance:-

### SPP

SPP advocates a positive approach to enabling high quality development and advises that the planning system should facilitate positive change while maintaining and enhancing distinctive landscape characters.

The SPP requires planning authorities to give due weight to the economic benefit of a development.

Tourism and the food and drink sectors are areas which SPP and the SDP identify as opportunities for growth.

This Council has approved a number of hotel developments over recent years, but this development will deliver a number of key features which are lacking in the City:

1. With the closure of the Marcliffe at Pitfodels, there will be no 5 star hotels in Aberdeen. There is no hotel which offers the high quality facilities which are proposed by my clients and have been outlined today;
2. There is no hotel in Aberdeen which can accommodate more than 300 delegates at a conference. The AECC can hold larger conferences, but cannot provide accommodation and is no longer hosting weekend concerts/leisure events which bring in weekend tourists. My clients' development will fill that gap in the market;

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3. Aberdeen lacks top end restaurants. This hotel will have a number of restaurants and as you may have read in the papers yesterday, my clients are delighted that Mr Stewart Spence has expressed a wish to open The Marcliffe Restaurant within the hotel.

When you also consider that the development will create over 350 full time and part-time jobs, the economic arguments in favour of this type of development are very strong.

It is perhaps little wonder, then, that Steve Harris, the Chief Executive of Visit Aberdeen has endorsed the development. He has said, "My clients fully accept, however, that this strong economic support must be weighed against the policies applying to the application site itself."

### The site

The site is zoned as Green Belt and Green Space Network in the Local Development Plan which was adopted by the Council in February 2012. The adoption of the Plan was the culmination of a process which began in October 2009. It is, of course, impossible for the Plan to predict all the changes which will occur in the Aberdeen area over the Plan period. It could not, for example, anticipate the announcement in November 2013 of the closure of the Marcliffe at Pitfodels. Without seeking to denigrate the Plan, it must, therefore, be considered to be a snapshot. The Plan has to be amended to conform to the SDP which was approved in 2014. The SDP advises that: *"The Green Belt around Aberdeen will continue to play a vital role in protecting the character and landscape setting of the City. However, it will need to change to meet the growth this Plan seeks to achieve."*

Not only do I believe that the scale of change which would be required to the Green Belt to accommodate the development is minimal, but also there are many aspects of the development which accord with the aims and objectives for the Park itself.

### Green Belt- Policy NE2

The aim of the Green Belt is to maintain the identity of Aberdeen and the communities by defining their physical boundaries, avoiding coalescence, maintaining the landscape setting and providing access to open space. The Green Belt policy allows the redevelopment of existing Green Belt uses and this aerial shot shows quite clearly that the proposed equestrian centre, clubhouse and lodges are within the existing Hayfield site. The current site is rundown and the tenant has plans to relocate.

In terms of the proposed hotel, it is located within open fields, but Mr Stuart has explained that only around 35% of the fields will be built upon. You can see that both sites are enclosed within the surrounding woodland and the buildings will be designed to complement the area and sit within the existing landscape.

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Given the limited extent of the built development; the redevelopment of existing leisure uses and the visual enclosure, I do not believe that there will be a significant impact on the aims of the Green Belt were this development to proceed.

The final aim of the Green Belt, which is to provide access to open space, is particularly relevant to the application, given that it sits within Hazlehead Park. Hazlehead should be the jewel in the City's open space network. Growing up, I visited the zoo, I went trampolining, got lost in the maze and was a regular as you might imagine on the pitch and putt and 9 hole course, but sadly the Park is no longer considered the attraction it once was.

To try to address the decline, the Park has been designated a Climate Change Park and the Council in conjunction with the community, has identified actions for improvement to secure its long term future.

The action points include:-

- Promotion of Hazlehead Park as an important destination within Aberdeen and to the local communities.
- Ensure existing features are maintained and usable.
- Encourage use of the Park for events.
- Create more positive evening use of the Park.
- Improve the access network, condition of the paths and direction signage.
- Create meadow, wetland and woodland areas.
- Encourage bus companies to improve services to the Park.
- Introduce commercial uses to some areas.

When you consider that list, I believe that my clients' development is fully in line with the plans for the Park. This isn't a hotel which can be built on Union Street or in a business park. It needs a countryside setting, but I think the Park also needs a development like this.

This 5 star development, if approved, will, in my submission, help to promote Hazlehead Park and Aberdeen City, not just locally, but worldwide. Having a 5 star hotel and leisure facility in the heart of Hazlehead Park would open up many opportunities to secure the Park's future.

My clients propose a number of improvements as part of their own development, such as the upgrading of the equestrian centre and providing paths and meadows and wetlands, all of which will be used by the public. The bus service to the hotel will serve the wider community. Signage within the Park will be improved.

Although the application does not include any changes to the golf courses, my clients are in discussions with Hazlehead Golf Club about opportunities to link the hotel to the course and perhaps provide a dual use clubhouse.



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When you consider the improvements to the Park which will flow from the development, I believe that the development falls within the aims of Policy NE 1 – Green Space Network which seeks to protect, promote and enhance the Park area.

### Conclusion

I said at the outset that I don't think this proposal is a significant departure from the Development Plan when it is considered in the round. I hope that today's presentation has highlighted many of the benefits which will flow from this development and has also explained why the allocation of the land in the LDP should not be considered to be a barrier to the development.

The SDP charges you with making confident and courageous decisions in delivering the Vision for the City. I believe that this is the type of development which Aberdeen desperately needs if we are serious about delivering the Vision for the area, and Hazlehead Park in particular.

On behalf of the applicants, I hope that in due course this Council will decide to support this development and we can look forward to an exciting future for Hazlehead.

The Committee heard from **Mr John Robertson of Hyder** in relation to transportation. Mr Robertson advised that the proposed sites were surrounded by an extensive network of existing core paths, tracks and footpaths and bridle ways. A network of new paths would be provided within both sites to enhance site permeability and the connection with the surrounding path network. The proposals would actively promote the increased leisure use of the existing and new footpaths as a feature of staying at the site. Mr Robertson explained that extensive consideration had been given to site access and egress, as well as traffic issues, with dialogue being undertaken between the designers and Aberdeen City Council's planning and roads officers. A comprehensive traffic management plan would also be produced as part of a future detailed planning application. Mr Robertson advised that a number of road enhancements would be introduced to facilitate accessibility and user safety, whilst maintaining the character of the existing woodland canopy. The roads design would focus on the safety of all site users.

In response to some of the earlier questions asked by Members, Mr Robertson explained that a number of different scenarios had been tested in terms of the traffic levels on Hazledene and Queens Road, including a.m. peak time, p.m. peak time and Saturday peak time, and this work had shown that additional trips could be accommodated at the junctions. Mr Robertson advised that the road design would discourage rat-running through Hazlehead Park. He noted that there were a number of bus services which ran to Queens Road, and highlighted that a shuttle bus was also proposed as part of the development. In terms of the earlier discussion on the roads network, Mr Robertson advised that the extent of the network to be assessed had already been agreed, but that the designers had spoken to Mr Wilkie about the possibility of extending this, although that would be undertaken at the detailed stage.

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Mr Robertson concluded by advising that there would be traffic calming measures on all roads within the Park, as well as those roads near Hazlehead Academy.

**Members then asked questions of Mr Robertson, and the following information was noted:-**

- It was suggested that if Countesswells Road was to serve as both entrance and exit to the site, then some improvements might be required at the junction of Springfield Road and Countesswells Road. The Committee heard that the Springfield junction was to be upgraded as part of another development, but that threshold assessments would be undertaken.
- In relation to concerns about access from Countesswells Road being used as a rat-run, Mr Robertson explained that the access from Countesswells would solely lead to the hotel, and therefore there would be no through route for traffic.
- In response to a query about the low grade walls in the area, Mr Stuart explained that part of these would need to be repaired, but that they would not be removed.
- It was noted that the design of the equestrian centre was of a differing style to the hotel, and Mr Stuart explained that this was to provide a contrast.
- In response to a suggestion that the construction traffic did not use Hazledene Road to access the site, Mr Robertson advised that the developer was willing to look at the best option.
- In response to a query about whether there would be an impact on public usage of the golf course, Mrs Farquharson-Black advised that the application would not affect usage of the golf course by the public.
- In response to a query about how the general public would make use of facilities if the hotel was busy with guests, Mr Stuart advised that the developer was in discussion with service providers and that there would be a proviso from the developer that the public would have suitable access to hotel facilities.
- There was a query in relation to potholes on the surrounding roads and whether any resurfacing would be undertaken. Mr Robertson explained that the road would be upgraded to an appropriate standard for the amount of traffic using the access.
- There was further discussion about whether work would be undertaken in the Denwood area to improve the tree coverage, and Mr Stuart advised that the developer would want to work on a woodland management plan with the Council.
- In relation to a query about whether the methods proposed for the protection of the red squirrels were effective, Mr Rudd advised that the methods had been employed elsewhere. He noted that it might be the case that the rope bridges

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were found to be unnecessary, depending on the amount of tree canopy coverage.

- In relation to a query about whether the organisation was comfortable with the development being built on a network of unadopted roads, Mrs Farquharson-Black advised that access and maintenance arrangements would be covered as part of the legal and maintenance agreements. Mr Stuart also noted that in order for the roads to be adopted, they would likely need to be widened. The developer was keen to retain a 'park' feel to the site, and widening the roads would change this. Mr Stuart added that increasing the width of the roads would also probably lead to an increase in traffic speed.
- In response to a query about the landscaping at the front of the hotel, Mr Stuart advised that while the initial planting might look sparse, there would be significant tree input to the site from the beginning of the development. The trees would be at least 4.5 metres in height. A formal garden style would be adopted at the front of the hotel. It was noted that there would be a detailed report on sustainability, but that the new buildings were designed to use as limited an amount of energy as possible. It was suggested that consideration could be given to using biomass.
- In response to a query about why the proposal had not been taken through the development plan process, Mrs Farquharson-Black advised that the development plan process had commenced before the development was proposed, but added that she felt that the process of early public consultation and the pre-determination hearing was very thorough.

The Committee then heard from **William Sell of the Craigiebuckler and Seafield Community Council** who addressed the Committee in the following terms:-

Convener and Councillors. On behalf of our Community Council, I begin this address by referring to Aberdeen City Council's Main Issues Report Consultation Document for the Aberdeen Local Development Plan, 2016, page 11, "Issue 1: Greenfield Housing and Employment Allocations". Here the initial question reads: "Do we need to add to the greenfield housing and /or employment land supply by allocating more sites?"

The Council's preferred approach was to "carry over existing Local Development Plan allocations and not to release further land from greenfield sites" because "this approach would make the Local Development Plan consistent with the Proposed Strategic Development Plan; these allocations already provide a generous supply of housing and employment sites; continues to support the development of brownfield sites and protects existing green belt and green spaces".

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We agreed with ACC's preferred approach which reasoned that:-

“Even with the advent of the WPR, increasing the supply of land for development would result in exacerbating the traffic congestion on the City's roads infrastructure. The present allocations already provide a generous supply of housing and employment sites”.

At the time of the agreement, we did not know about the proposed development, but times have changed. Although we are broadly supportive of the hotel, we do not want a precedent to be created which would lead to further development on the city's green spaces.

If the Council agree to grant the application we hope the following concerns of residents and our Community Council will be taken into account:-

The granting of this application would create a precedent for other developments on green fields.

During the construction phase, there will be a clearing of the area which will unavoidably reduce wildlife habitat: healthy trees will be removed. There will be noise caused by, for example, drilling for foundations and excavating the underground car park. We note that tree removal is stated to be minimal and the intended mitigation of effects on wildlife habitat.

Construction traffic should not go down Hazledene road and we, as their Community Council, are disappointed that the Council has directed the Applicant to use this residential street as the main access to the site during and after construction. During construction there will be heavy plant and machinery moving around the area on a roads infrastructure that is woefully unfit for this purpose. At a previous meeting the Applicant had stated his preference for accessing the site from Countesswells Road. We do not want the residents of Hazledene Road to be similarly disrupted by the heavy lorries and other site traffic as are the residents of Countesswells Avenue because of a neighbouring major building site. However we note that Countesswells is considered as a possible access. We note the possibility of Groats Road being one way for traffic from the West i.e. A944. We are concerned for the safety of the pupils of Hazlehead Academy.

The proposals for managing the traffic generated by the Hotel are centred on Hazledene Road, which has no right turn at its junction with Queens Road. This is a 250 bedroom hotel which, after it is opened, will generate a lot of traffic movements, for example delivery vehicles; the private cars of staff and guests; vehicles to empty and collect waste/laundry etc. The only occasion when the hotel traffic will be compelled to leave via Countesswells Road will be during the staging of special events when there are a lot of buses and other associated forms of transport. At other times, a barrier will be in place to prevent access to and from Countesswells Road.

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The currently proposed capacities of the developments will cause a significant increase in the traffic going up and down Hazledene Road. ACC planners propose that Hazledene Road will provide the main access to the building. Many more vehicles (probably 100s per day) will be going up and down Hazledene Road. The road, which is currently quite heavily potholed, does not have the width to safely cope with a car, parked at the kerb, being passed by cars travelling in opposite directions. More cars travelling up and down the road will therefore mean greater congestion. We contend that, ultimately, ACC will be forced to cut down trees and widen the road. I am concerned about the estimate of 60 vehicles arriving and 120 departing per hour on a Saturday at peak times.

Because the road does not have the capacity to cope with the increase in traffic that will result from the development, the safe conduct of road users and children who cross the road when going to and from school from the Craigiebuckler area must be a concern for the Council.

In the event of the Hazledene /Queens Road junction being busy, drivers may decide to divert along Craigiebuckler Avenue or Woodburn Gardens to access Queens Road. More traffic will be generated on Hazledene road after the proposed hotel will be opened. There are concerns that smaller roads will carry more traffic while Hazledene Road appears to be the main access. Due to the normal traffic congestion on Queens Road at peak times, drivers already divert on to neighbouring streets.

We hope that Councillors will take cognisance of residents' objections. It has been purported that there are a low number of objections because people tend to think that councillors won't listen to them or take their representations into account.

During our Community Council meetings, concerns have also been voiced about the site because there may be a number of natural springs active on it. This could mean a disruption of water courses, similar to that which has already occurred on a neighbouring site, where water that should have flowed away in the ancient natural burns has been confined to the immediate area of its source because of soil excavations, causing massive flooding of footpaths in the established residential area. If PPP is granted, then it should be conditional upon a hydrological survey being undertaken to avoid any risk of flooding the woodland pathways and the amenities of Hazlehead Park. I am not clear as to whether is being made available prior to PPP being granted.

We are also concerned about the implications for the natural environment and ambiance of the park -which is Scotland's only climate change park. There is a contradiction inherent in any consideration about the construction of a 250 bedroom hotel (with all the associated traffic movements) in the policies of a climate change park. The two concepts seem incompatible.

There is support for the development in principle. However, we are of the opinion that there may be a heavy price to pay in terms of damage to the natural environment of the

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park as well as an increase in traffic on a roads infrastructure that cannot even cope with the traffic of the present day.

The impact on the roads infrastructure cannot be underestimated - even with the possibility of Groats Road being made one way.

We are faced with what we consider to be the dismal prospect of the demolition of the Marcliffe at Pitfodels for housing, leaving a gap in the sector of the hospitality industry that accommodates important commercial and domestic events as well as catering for visiting celebrities. We contend that it will be advantageous to the economy and prestige of the city if this vacuum is filled by the construction of a new high quality luxury hotel and leisure centre to replace the establishment which is about to close. However, it has also been claimed that the closure of the 4 star, 42 bedroom hotel, with function facilities for 500, a limited spa, a lounge and bar, in no way should be seen as creating a gap for a 250 room hotel, with function facilities for 1000, full leisure complex & Spa. Aberdeen is well catered for, with all numbers catered for – AECC, Beach Ballroom, hotels, National Trust for Scotland & private houses. The reported shortage of hotel rooms has been addressed by the refurbishment of existing hotels and the building of new hotels: some completed, some in process and some yet to commence building. There are also additional projects being mooted such as the E&M building. It has been claimed that there is an oversupply of existing leisure facilities (these claims are being made by existing providers) with all parts of the city being provided for. Their sources of revenue are less generic than would be those of the proposed development.

Nevertheless, in our opinion, the sites of the proposed developments, although not zoned in the Local Development Plan for building construction, are well suited for this purpose because of the visual appeal of their surroundings and their proximity to Hazlehead Park with its golf courses, bridal paths and gardens. However, it is not clear to us how tee-off times on the golf course will be arranged to accommodate members of the golfing public.

The location of the proposed hotel is in a well screened site and therefore should have a minimal visual impact on the surrounding area, but the access route is unacceptable to us. We also submit that the width and surface condition of the unadopted section of Hazledene Road is wholly unsuitable for heavy transport and the ease of flow of the predicted, highly frequent, two way traffic movements.

We are of the opinion that there is an economic advantage for the city if the hotel and associated developments are completed, both in terms of employment provision and the resultant increase in revenue for the businesses which supply and service Aberdeen's hospitality industry. Furthermore we speculate that this development could be regarded as an asset to tourism by "Visit Scotland".

In conclusion, the benefits that this proposed development could bring to the tourist economy of Aberdeen are obvious because it would be a fabulous destination spot. It may raise the image of the city from its association with the "Carbuncle" award that has

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featured in a recent newspaper article. The modern baronial architecture makes a refreshing change from the functional glass and concrete buildings that already exist in Aberdeen or are proposed for the city centre. We speculate that the Hotel and Leisure complex will enhance the park because links to it will be central to its success as a business. However, we realise that we have to be careful what we wish for because the infrastructure linking the proposed site of the development to the park is tenuous at best and much construction work will be required to achieve the objective of making the hotel integral to the existing amenities of Hazlehead Park. Wildlife habitat will, in our opinion, be reduced in the process. Although the hotel and leisure complex may, by the very nature of such a large development, adversely affect the natural ambience of Hazlehead Park and radically change the neighbouring built and natural environments that are so familiar to us, the myriad of functions – hotel, country club, conference centre, golf club, equestrian centre – may also have the potential to benefit the social and economic life of the whole city, which is the bigger picture. The counter argument, again on a macro scale, is that the city does not need more rooms nor additional function facilities or a leisure complex. What is required is investment in the golf courses & equestrian facilities.

The Applicant has consulted extensively with our Community Council and has established good relations with our members. The objective of this address has been to provide a balanced presentation which proactively accounts for all the known issues that members of the public have expressed in relation to the proposed development as well as the merits which can be attributed to it.

### **Mr Sell responded to questions from Members, and the following information was noted:-**

- Following a query about whether Airyhall Primary fell within the boundary of the Craigiebuckler and Seafield Community Council, Mr Sell advised that it was just beyond the boundary of his Community Council. He noted that some Members had received concerns from parents of children at Airyhall in relation to Countesswells Road being used as the access and egress from the site, and acknowledged that they would understandably have concerns, adding that he hoped that some resolution could be found if the proposal was to go ahead. In relation to a query on his thoughts about Countesswells being used as either a restricted or unrestricted exit / entrance from the site, Mr Sell stated that he felt other drivers would gravitate to this access if it was to be completely open in both directions at all times, but stressed that the Community Council also had grave reservations about confining all traffic to Hazledene.
- In relation to a query about whether a hydrology survey had been undertaken and would be before Council prior to a decision being taken on the application, Ms Greene advised that SEPA and the Council's flooding team had been consulted, and both were content for the matter to be covered under conditions if the application was approved, therefore there would be no survey before Members.

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- Mr Sell advised that he had tried to represent both sides of the community, by indicating the support which had been given for the proposal but highlighting the concerns raised by residents, particularly around the roads issues.
- In relation to a query on how the Community Council felt the impact of the construction traffic could be mitigated, Mr Sell acknowledged the option of restricting access for heavy vehicles during school hours, referring to the precedent which had been set in relation to the Hazlehead recycling centre, but added that the access from Countesswells would not be through such a populated area as Hazledene.

The Committee then heard from **Mrs Prudence King, a resident of the city**, who explained to Members that she had lived in the area for fifty years, and while she was not against the idea of a five star hotel development, the proposal was the right idea but in the wrong place. She highlighted that the proposal was not part of the development plan, and that siting facilities in an area where other major developments had already been approved (such as the Countesswells application) would upset the balance of nature and would mean that traffic was being directed through a country area. If approved, the proposal would also lead to the introduction of a residential element into areas where park policies applied. Mrs King suggested that this could result in park land being a convenient location for housing if it was not rigorously controlled.

She noted that the Hazlehead Park land had been repurchased for the city of Aberdeen in the 1920s, and added that the park was much appreciated by citizens. She stressed that the use of the land for informal and recreation purposes should be preserved, in line with park policies.

Mrs King advised that the Committee that Hazledene Road was very narrow in parts with dangerous corners, with several near misses in terms of accidents. She stated that she had mentioned the proposal to a health and safety professional who had been incredulous that Hazledene Road would be used for service access. Mrs King asked the Committee to consider what would happen if two buses were to meet on Hazledene Road, and noted that there would be an increased volume of traffic which would lead to complications at the Hazledene / Queens Road junction. She speculated that this would then force traffic into the Craigiebuckler area where there was already congestion – particularly when cars parked there for Craigiebuckler Church. Mrs King highlighted that there were poor sightlines for traffic leaving Craigiebuckler via Woodburn, and added that the additional traffic would cause congestion at the Queens Road / Hazlehead roundabout, where there was already significant traffic congestion, particularly from late afternoon onwards. Mrs King stated that there would be gridlock on Springfield Road as a result of service vehicles being directed along this route. She highlighted that special events such as the Highland Games already caused severe congestion in the area, and mentioned the safety concerns if traffic was directed past Hazlehead Academy.

Finally, Mrs King reminded the Committee that a tree preservation order existed, which would be an issue if any roads in the area required to be widened as a result of the



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proposed development. She expressed concern at the impact on the environment, particularly the wooded areas and the plant and animal life in the area, noting that any provision of utilities for the development would disturb the wildlife. She added that there would also be light and atmospheric pollution as a result.

**Mrs King responded to questions from Members, and the following information was noted:-**

- In relation to a query about the recently approved 3,000 house development at Countesswells and the impact of this development and the proposal for Hazlehead in relation to possible congestion on the roads, Mrs King stated that she had been puzzled over the possible routes which had been mooted for the development, and added that the Countesswells to A944 road would need some attention if the traffic was routed in this direction.
- In relation to a query around drainage of the site, Mr Stuart advised that there had been no detailed work done around this to date, but that initial investigations had been undertaken.

The Committee then heard from **Mr Diarmid Macalister Hall, a resident of the city**, who advised Members that he was pleased that they had undertaken a site visit as they would now be acquainted with the area if they had not been before. He stated that people did not recognise what was precious to them until it was too late; in this case, Hazlehead woods. He explained that currently, people could walk in the area and see roe deer and birds, and experience the smell of natural woodland; whereas if the development was approved, there would only be traffic, and the smell of food from kitchen ventilators. He expressed concern about the suitability of the roads infrastructure to cope with events and conferences which might be held, noting that up to 900 people could be accommodated at conferences. He added that although other events might be held at the weekend when there might not be such an impact on traffic, conferences could potentially be held on a daily basis. Mr Macalister Hall stated that people attending conferences would be unlikely to car share, and therefore there was the potential for hundreds of cars to vacate the site at the same time. He argued that the roads in the area were unsuited to this level of traffic, and this would cause an unacceptable disruption to residents.

Mr Macalister Hall concluded his presentation by highlighting how well-used the woods were, and that the land was zoned as green belt and therefore was not suitable for the proposed development. He stated that he hoped that the Planning Development Management Committee and full Council agreed that a development of the size proposed was totally inappropriate for the area.

**Mr Macalister Hall responded to questions from Members, and the following information was noted:-**

- Mr Macalister Hall advised that he was not speaking on behalf of anyone else and was representing his own views. He felt that it was important for the public

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to make their views known which was why he had opted to take part in the hearing.

- In relation to a query about whether the recycling centre at Hazlehead had led to a large influx of traffic, Mr Macalister Hall advised that the access to the centre was from Hazlehead, and therefore did not affect the Hazledene / Denwood area.
- Finally, in relation to a query about tree damage at Denwood, Mr Macalister Hall stated that he felt the trees were not thinned as often as they should be. The Committee heard that the Council was in the process of a whole scale review of wooded areas.

Finally, the Committee heard from **Mr Stephen Willis, North East Scotland Project Officer for Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels**. Mr Willis explained that the organisation's main concerns related to the increase in traffic and the fragmentation of the woodland area, which could lead to an increased chance of squirrel mortality. He added that there would be a loss of the tree canopy area if roads were widened.

Mr Willis explained that there had been a large increase in the number of red squirrels due to the work being undertaken to reduce the grey squirrel population, and added that Hazlehead Park best represented the work of the project. He stated that it was now virtually guaranteed for the public to see red squirrels in the area, which was a remarkable turnaround on the previous situation. Mr Willis highlighted the recognition of the project's work in Aberdeen, advising that the work was shortlisted for an award. He displayed slides which indicated the increase in the numbers of red squirrels in the area, and explained that any other sightings nearby were likely to be an overflow from the Hazlehead Park area.

Mr Willis added that it was difficult to see what mitigation could be undertaken to reduce squirrel mortality if the proposal went ahead. He advised that road signs had not been shown to make much difference, and although he noted that rope bridges had been suggested, he was not aware that these reduced road mortality. He concluded by highlighting the huge amount of progress the project had made to build up the number of red squirrels in the area, but added that if the proposal was to be approved, then he and his team would be keen to work with the developers as early as possible in relation to planting and safe crossings.

**Mr Willis responded to questions from Members, and the following information was noted:-**

- In response to a question about whether squirrels would make use of underpasses, and whether they would prefer to use old trees for example to cross roads, Mr Willis advised that they would probably be less inclined than other animals to use underpasses, and that they would prefer more solid structures than the rope bridges which were proposed.

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- In response to a query about the next stage of the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project activities in Denwood, Mr Willis explained that it would be ideal if the city's green spaces were better linked.
- Mr Willis advised the Committee that the mortality numbers were difficult to quantify, but that there had not been any road casualties in the Hazlehead Park area since he had been in post.
- Mr Willis explained that although the project had not made representations as part of the process on the Countesswells development, the amount of work which had been undertaken in relation to the red squirrel population in Hazlehead had prompted the organisation to speak at the hearing.
- In response to a question about the extent of the project's efforts in Hazlehead thus far, Mr Willis advised that the cost of the work undertaken would likely be in the tens of thousands.
- Finally, Mr Willis was asked about the map of red squirrel sightings and the suggestion was made that if they were emanating from Hazlehead, then the squirrels would at some point be crossing busy roads without difficulty. Members asked if figures were available for the number of squirrels killed elsewhere. Mr Willis explained that it would be difficult to determine whether the squirrels had come from Hazlehead or not, but added that the city was not a safe environment for the animals. He advised the Committee that his organisation was also approaching owners of the land nearby Hazlehead – such as around Woodend Hospital – to make them aware of the project.

There being no further speakers, the Convener thanked everyone for their contributions and for raising the points made. He advised that he was very grateful to the speakers taking their time to be at the hearing. He indicated that all the relevant information would be considered and fed back into the application report which officers would prepare for consideration at a future meeting of the Council.

- **RAMSAY MILNE, Convener**