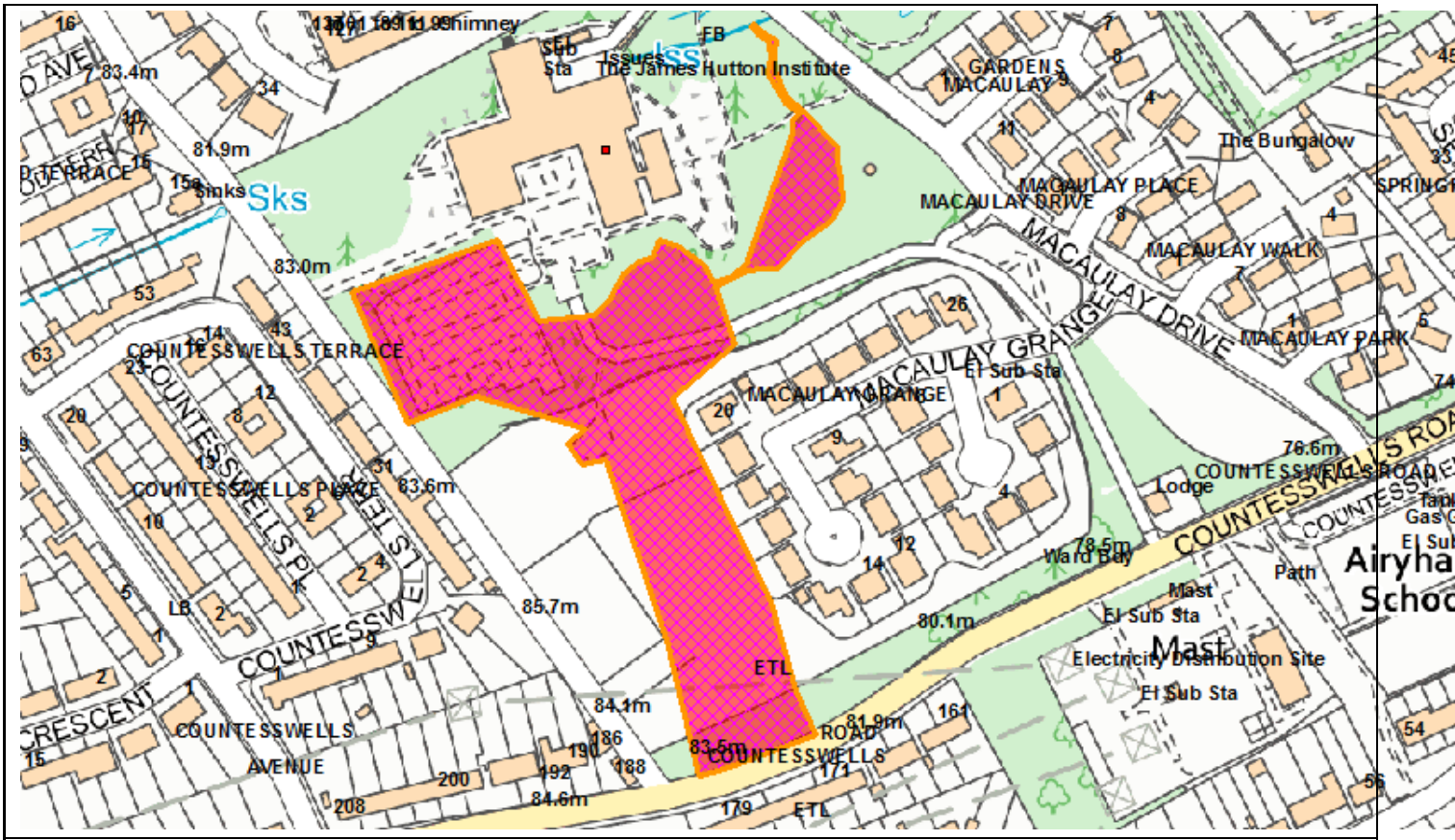
ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL	**Planning Development Management Committee**
	Report by Development Management Manager
	Committee Date: 24 August 2023

Site Address:	The James Hutton Institute, Countesswells Road, Aberdeen, AB15 8QH
Application Description:	Formation of access road, amended car parking and associated drainage
Application Ref:	221419/DPP
Application Type	Detailed Planning Permission
Application Date:	30 November 2022
Applicant:	The James Hutton Institute & the Macaulay Development Trust
Ward:	Hazlehead/Queen's Cross/Countesswells
Community Council:	Craigiebuckler and Seafield
Case Officer:	Matthew Easton



RECOMMENDATION

Approve Conditionally

APPLICATION BACKGROUND

Site Description

The application relates to land within the campus of the James Hutton Institute (JHI), which is located on the north side of Countesswells Road, within Craigiebuckler. The campus comprises a main building set within woodland, with various smaller buildings in the north west corner of the site. South west of the main building are 130 parking spaces, spread between a main car park of 118 spaces and a secondary area of 12 spaces located closer to the building.

The campus is heavily landscaped with a range of native and exotic tree species. All trees within the site and along its boundary with Countesswells Road are protected by Tree Preservation Order (TPO) No. 46.

The areas subject of the application relate to a field which sits between Countesswells Road and the main JHI building and associated car park to the north, as well as some of the woodland surrounding the existing building. The field is largely grassland and has an open, undulating character.

The surrounding area is residential in character, with the homes at Macaulay Grange and off Macaulay Drive having taken place on land once forming part of the institute.

Relevant Planning History

None

APPLICATION DESCRIPTION

Description of Proposal

Detailed planning permission is sought for construction of a new junction and access road, re-organisation of an existing car park and provision of associated drainage infrastructure. The access would comprise a single carriageway road with footpath on its west side. The road would be located in the eastern part of the field. Additional planting is proposed west of the road.

The new junction would be located opposite the three houses at 175, 177 and 179 Countesswells Road, 310m west of the junction with Macaulay Drive and 120m east of Airyhall Avenue. To facilitate the creation of the junction, a section of boundary wall would be removed, and ten trees would be felled.

The junction would provide access to the new road which would be some 230m long and lead to the existing main car park to the north, roughly along the line of an existing gap in the tree belt and informal vehicular access to an area of hardstanding for informal overspill parking. Ten further trees would require to be felled where the car park would be connected to the new road. The car park would be reconfigured to create drop-off areas and reduce the number of parking spaces at the campus to 96 and space for one coach.

Surface water sewers within the road and car park would drain to a new drainage basin within the woodland to the south east of the main building.

Amendments

None.

Supporting Documents

All drawings and supporting documents listed below can be viewed on the Council's website at:

https://publicaccess.aberdeencity.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=RLWSE2BZLR200

- Drainage Assessment Report
- Environmental Walkover Survey Report
- Planning Statement
- Transport Statement
- Tree Survey Report

Reason for Referral to Committee

The application has been referred to the Planning Development Management Committee because it is being recommended for approval and –

- six or more representations objecting to the proposals have been made; and
- the community council for the area has objected to the proposals.

CONSULTATIONS

ACC - Roads Development Management Team – No objection. The site is located in the outer city and not within an area of the city with current controlled parking measures.

As there are no proposals or alterations to floor space of the James Hutton Institute, the site shall remain as accessible as it is currently. As the proposal is to provide a new access road with adjacent footpath, this shall create an additional suitable pedestrian link and tie-in with existing adopted footpath network on Countesswells Road.

Such new pedestrian provision shall also provide a direct link to the nearest public transport provision on Countesswells Road.

- Parking – The site has a current car parking capacity of 130 spaces, which is acknowledged by the applicant as over provision. As part of the re-configuration proposals, the volume of parking would be reduced to 84 car parking spaces and provision for coach parking (as and when necessary). There are an additional 12 car parking spaces elsewhere on site taking the total remaining provision to 96 spaces, therefore a total of 34 spaces would be removed. This is a more acceptable level of provision and is in-line with that found by surveys undertaken by the applicant's consultant which is included within the supporting Transport Statement. Parking bays would be 2.5m x 5.0m and provide a 6m aisle width throughout.

  There requires to be clarification that the site still retains suitable disabled bay parking provision and whether such works is an opportunity to provide suitable EV charging provision.

- Development access – The proposal is for a simple priority junction access onto Countesswells Road opposite property no's. 175-179. Such a junction is typical and in-keeping with other

junction/accesses along Countesswells Road, including that of the existing route into this site via Macaulay Drive.

Opposite the proposed junction on the south side of Countesswells Road, the aforementioned properties all have private driveways. While typically such driveways should not be within proximity of or opposite a junction, there is no break up of existing driveways which would allow the creation of a more suitable location for the new access. The applicant has attempted to offset the existing driveways as much as possible from the proposed access with one driveway still directly opposite. Whilst there is slight concern, this is not considered significant enough to prohibit such an arrangement, as visibility remains very good, and the road is relatively wide with large verges also aiding visibility.

That being said, should there be any future proposals at the JHI campus with associated requirements to upgrade this junction at a future date (such as a signalised junction), the presence of the driveways could significantly hinder that possibility.

The proposed new access shall require to be in accordance with ACC standards. Based on the level of design detail provided thus far, this would appear to be the case in terms of visibility, width, corner radii etc. This will however require a further detailed design to be carried out that includes appropriate dropped kerbs and tactile paving across the junction to provide continued pedestrian connection and necessary drainage tie-in with the adopted aspects of Countesswells Road.

- Internal road layout – The new access road would be 6m in width and connects Countesswells Road with the re-configured car park, this road would include a 2m wide footpath for its entirety along the west side and proposed to be constructed to an adoptable standard. However, the road would not be adopted, and the adopted extents would only cover the bell-mouth of the new junction. The construction of the new access junction and road shall allow the existing means of access, via Macaulay Drive, to still be utilised as an additional access for emergency vehicles, pedestrians, and cycle access if necessary. Within the site, it is noted that all the proposed footpaths appear to all connect, however crossing points shall require to provide suitable dropped kerbs and tactile paving.

- Impact on local road network – A capacity analysis and traffic surveys were undertaken by the applicant, which evidenced that a simple priority junction would have no material impact on the operation of the surrounding road network. However, further reviews would be required should there be any further future proposals for the development of the JHI campus.

- Travel plan framework – It is requested that a suitably worded condition be attached for the applicant to provide a site Travel Plan, which they may have already but shall require to be updated. Such a plan should provide overarching aims to support sustainable travel, realistic modal share targets and a series of measures to obtain these targets.

- Drainage – It is confirmed that for surface water, adequate levels of treatment are proposed with the mitigation indices outweighing those of the pollution indices. All drainage provision within the site shall be privately maintained and all aspects shall be subject to further review should future development be sought. The site's surface drainage should not discharge onto Countesswells Road, therefore adequate gully provision shall be required at the junction access and can be addressed as part of the roads construction consent application.

Archaeology Service (Aberdeenshire Council) – No objection. Having reviewed the application, it can be confirmed that, in this instance, the Archaeology Service have no further comment to make.

Craigiebuckler and Seafield Community Council – Object to the proposal for the following reasons:

1. Trees – The proposed access road is not in keeping with the character of the local area which is semi-rural and features an arboretum of mature trees, a greenspace, and a belt of woodland at the estate's boundary with Countesswells Road. The proposed road would have a detrimental impact on this environment because mature trees at the site's southern boundary would be felled. Those trees are the subject of a tree preservation order.

2. Wildlife –The proposed road would cause the depletion of the wildlife habitat, resulting in the reduction in numbers (or the extinction on the site) of bats, deer, squirrels, badgers, foxes, and bees that feed on the heavy Linden blossom that flourishes on the open greenspace. Public concern has been expressed about the impact the proposed access road will have on the wildlife in the area by removing the trees which support the nests of sparrow hawks, owls and many other bird species including woodpeckers. Pine martens have been observed in the grounds, and barn owls have been seen hunting, feeding, and resting regularly in the field where the new road is proposed.

3. Car dependency – The proposed road would encourage motorised transport, contrary to Aberdeen City Council's Local Transport Strategy, which aims to reduce the dependence on the private car in favour of sustainable forms of transport, the objective being to achieve a target of zero carbon emissions.

4. Residential amenity – The proposed access road would be close to the boundary of the houses of Macaulay Grange, leading to traffic noise and fumes degrading the amenity of their back gardens.

5. Road safety – The proposed road junction with Countesswells Road is located on a blind bend and close to its junction with a lane, which serves as the only vehicular access to residential properties. Therefore, the formation of a new junction on that bend, and near the lane's junction, heightens the risk of road traffic collisions (RTC) involving vehicles travelling east to access Airyhall Primary School, other public amenities, and the junction with Springfield Road. Furthermore, drivers merging from the proposed junction may have difficulty doing so safely because they will not be able to see traffic approaching from beyond the bend.

6. To mitigate, the applicant should include a statement that no motorised traffic accessing or exiting the premises and grounds of the James Hutton Institute will be able to do so via Macaulay Drive because the present internal link road will be restricted to pedestrian and cyclist traffic. Countesswells Road has become increasingly busy with traffic generated by the new Aldi store, the Dandara housing development, and the growth of the new Countesswells Village to the west of the city. The junctions for all these new developments interrupt the flow of the thousands of traffic movements by functioning to determine their directions of travel. The applicant proposes to add another junction to this complex mix of road engineering, thus increasing the risk of accidents involving school pupils who cross them on their way to Airyhall Primary School.

7. Considering its proximity to Airyhall Primary School and nursery, the applicant does not seem to have considered the impact the proposed road would have on these establishments. The traffic generated by the proposed road would also add to the congestion at the junction between Countesswells Road and Springfield Road. The transport statement indicates that traffic surveys were completed on 16 June 2022. Since this study was conducted a new Aldi

supermarket has opened at the top of Countesswells Road (July 2022) which has significantly increased the volume of traffic on that road. This is a fundamental change to the road usage and the traffic survey is now outdated and irrelevant.

8. Proximity to driveways – In addition to road safety concerns, the proposed junction would be against ACC guidelines as it is proposed to be located within 15m of existing accesses to residential driveways. ACC guidance states "*Driveways should be a minimum of 15m from a junction, although there may be circumstances where this may be relaxed when not deemed a road safety issue. In no circumstances, however, will a driveway be permitted within 10m of a junction.*" Due to the volume and speed of traffic on Countesswells Road, a road safety issue does exist. Consequently, the 15m rule should not be relaxed. The proximity to the driveways of properties on Countesswells Road adds to likelihood of the occurrence of an RTC involving a resident who is attempting to park their vehicle on their driveway or enter the road from their driveway.

To conclude, the proposal does not take account of the inevitability of the environmental impact of the planned road on the eco system of the natural environment of the site. Furthermore, the applicant has provided what seems to be an outdated traffic survey which, in the event of it being deemed credible by members of a Council Planning Committee, would have adverse implications for the safety of those who use Countesswells Road.

REPRESENTATIONS

Forty-eight representations were received to the application. All but one object to the proposal. In summary the matters raised are –

Amenity

1. The proposed road would be too close to the rear of homes on Macaulay Grange, resulting in noise and environmental pollution. It should be located closer to the opposite side of site, with significant landscaping provided as a buffer between the two.

2. There would be overlooking and loss of privacy.

3. Car head lights from vehicles using the new junction would shine into homes on Countesswells Road.

Natural heritage

4. The decision taken to not do a full comprehensive assessment of the wildlife throughout the year and during the night hours on their own land demonstrates a level of disappointing hypocrisy by the JHI given the nature of their research goals for biodiversity.

5. The proposal erodes the green space and would impact upon species (red squirrel, deer, fox, badger, bat, barn owl, sparrow hawk, starlings, waxwings, woodpecker) and biodiversity.

6. There would be a significant loss of protected trees, which contribute to the visual amenity of the area. It is not true that their removal will have limited conservation impact due to them being non-native species. Many of these trees are at least 75 years old and add considerably to the ambience of the area.

Road safety

7. Countesswells Road is a busy road, and a new junction would create further congestion. There are existing issues with congestion and speeding. There are various uses such as Airyhall Primary School and the electricity sub-station which require access from the road.

8. The road junction would be on a bend in the road, which would make it difficult for drivers and pedestrians to see cars pulling out.

9. To ensure safety of children walking from Countesswells Avenue and Macaulay Drive to Airyhall School, a new pedestrian crossing on Countesswells Road should be a condition of this application.

10. Residents and visitors to the homes opposite the junction would no longer be able to park outside their homes.

11. It is already difficult for residents to enter and exit their driveways on Countesswells Road due to traffic levels.

12. The relocation of JHI traffic from Macaulay Drive to the new junction on Countesswells Road would have a far higher impact on residents on Countesswells Road than it ever would on those in the Macaulay estate with the current arrangement. one slightly busier road is better than two less busy roads.

13. This new access has no considerations to help ensure the safety of pedestrians and children attending Airyhall Primary School crossing the new access road. An assessment of crossing safety and implementation of mitigations should be carried out before approving this application.

Traffic

14. The new road would reduce traffic using Macaulay Drive to access

15. A new junction is not required as there is already a satisfactory access into the JHI campus. There is no problem with the level of traffic associated it or the junction at Macaulay Drive and Countesswells Road which leads to it and the traffic survey numbers and those projected for 2030 do not appear to support the need for a new road.

16. Macaulay Drive is a residential area with no through traffic and should no longer be used for any access to The James Hutton Institute. All access to The James Hutton Institute should be via the newly proposed access road from Countesswells Road.

17. Traffic calming measures should be included.

18. The traffic assessment is out-of-date.

Other

19. The reduction in parking spaces does not appear to support the need for a new road.

20. Further housing is not required in the area.

21. There are power lines close to where development would be.

22. Historically access was also provided via Craigiebuckler Avenue – that access road could be reopened.

23. The 2005 Craigiebuckler Planning Brief identified the preferred option was an entry only access from Countesswells Road with exit movements continuing to be via Macaulay Drive. This was identified by ACC as being the safer option as it avoids any traffic exiting onto Countesswells Road at the bend in the road. The traffic volume on Countesswells Road has increased significantly over the last 17 years and will no doubt continue to do so with current and future developments at Countesswells Village. Taking this into consideration, the creation of a new, unjustified, two-way road would now be even less of an option than it was in 2005.

24. The proposals are contrary to JHI's Health, Safety, Quality and Environmental Policy Statement which states JHI will "enhance the environment by preventing pollution and work hard to achieve a carbon neutral footprint as soon as possible."

25. This new access has no considerations to help ensure the safety of pedestrians crossing the new access road. An assessment of crossing safety and implementation of mitigations should be carried out before approving this application.

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Legislative Requirements

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

Development Plan

National Planning Framework 4

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is the long-term spatial strategy for Scotland and contains a comprehensive set of national planning policies that form part of the statutory development plan. The relevant provisions of NPF4 that require consideration in terms of this application are –

- Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises)
- Policy 3 (Biodiversity)
- Policy 4 (Natural Places)
- Policy 6 (Forestry, Woodland and Trees)
- Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management)
- Policy 23 (Health and Safety)

Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2023)

The following policies are relevant –

- Policy CF1 (Existing Community Facilities)
- Policy NE3 (Natural Heritage)
- Policy NE4 (Our Water Environment)

- Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodland)

Other Material Considerations

- Craigiebuckler Planning Brief (2005)

EVALUATION

Background

The Craigiebuckler Planning Brief which covers the JHI Campus was agreed between the institute and Council in December 2005. It is a non-statutory document and no longer has any particular status but represents an agreed position between the Council and JHI on matters surrounding the future development of the campus. The brief included plans for improved access arrangements and new office & laboratory buildings.

In 2021, discussions on the future of the campus between JHI and the planning service led to a review of the 2005 Planning Brief and strategy for the campus. Planning officers provided comments on JHI's proposed strategy and future aspirations for the campus in the form of pre-application advice. This review and update of the earlier planning brief has not been formally agreed by the Council and therefore does not form part of the 2023 Local Development Plan and its supporting advice and guidance. JHI has indicated it wishes to improve its research offering at the campus and encourage open science and better community integration. The institute has indicated that the proposed road is intended to form the first phase in the wider delivery of their plans for the campus.

In October 2022, JHI were awarded £7.19 million from the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund to establish a new facility at the campus known as the 'Just Transition Hub'. The hub would see collaboration with a range of stakeholders to develop nature-based, net-zero solutions for issues such as community renewable energy development, flood management, sustainable groundwater access, biodiversity enhancement and peatland restoration. JHI consider the importance of providing the new road is significant and will enable the delivery of the new hub for the institute and the wider north east community. Architects were appointed by JHI in May 2023 to develop proposals for the hub. Discussions between the Planning Service and JHI regarding the new hub are underway and the proposed road is related to the Just Transition Hub as part of the next stage of evolution of the JHI campus.

Central to JHI's plans for the campus is to increase the visibility of institute and its work within the city. At present the access comprises a narrow access road which is hidden from Countesswells Road and largely serves a residential area, which JHI consider is not fit for purpose and does not offer the visibility it requires. JHI indicate that the new access road would improve access to the existing Institute buildings, create a fit-for-purpose access road for the existing users as well as potential future uses, and would help support the proposed hub. The objective for the Institute is to create an Open Campus, welcoming the public and in particular the adjacent surrounding community to use the facilities and understand the importance of the research being undertaken. Later phases of proposals for the campus are expected to feature new research and laboratory type development which would complement existing operations, with the aims of attracting similar organisations to the campus, creating a larger scientific hub in Aberdeen.

Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises) of NPF4 requires planning authorities when considering all development proposals to give significant weight to encouraging, promoting, and facilitating development that addresses the global climate emergency and nature crisis. As

enabling development which would support delivery of the Just Transition Hub, the work of which would contribute to Scotland's aim of achieving net-zero, the proposed new road and junction would indirectly support the aims of Policy 1 of NPF4 in relation to climate change.

Land Use Zoning

The site is in an area where Policy CF1 (Existing Community Sites and Facilities) applies. The policy states that "*existing further education and research institute sites shall be used mainly for these purposes".* It goes on to say that *"proposals for new or extended uses of these types on these sites will be supported in principle. Where land or buildings become surplus to current or anticipated future requirements, alternative uses which are compatible with adjoining uses and any remaining community uses, will be permitted in principle*".

On the basis that the proposed junction, access road and car park are to serve the existing use and future proposals associated with the institute, there is no tension with the underlying land use zoning. The proposals would support the development aspirations of the institute described in the previous section.

Junction Design

The new junction would be formed as a simple priority T-junction which would allow traffic to enter and exit the site. It would have a radius of 12m which would be suitable for coaches and other large vehicles.

The junction's location is essentially in the same position as envisaged in the 2005 planning brief, offset ever so slightly to the west from where the brief proposed the road. At that time, the arrangement was expected to be a one-way system, with traffic entering the campus from the new junction and exiting through the existing driveway onto Macaulay Drive. The view is expressed in representations that the one-way system should still be the arrangement implemented. Notwithstanding, no concerns have been raised with a two-way junction by ACC roads officers. The planning authority are also required to consider the application before it, rather than any hypothetical alternative that has not been proposed (*issue 23*).

Concerns have been raised that the location of the junction would not be suitable due to the bend in the road. ACC roads officers consider that the bend is only slight and that satisfactory visibility splays for the 30mph urban environment would be provided in either direction. This would provide motorists the ability to see a sufficient distance when emerging from the junction and for pedestrians when crossing it (*issue 8*).

In terms of its position, the junction would be located opposite the three houses at 175, 177 and 179 Countesswells Road. Each house has a driveway in the front garden which is accessed from Countesswells Road. ACC roads officers have indicated that typically driveways should not be within close proximity of or opposite a junction. However, at this section of Countesswells Road there no sufficient gap between driveways which would result in an alternative location being any more appropriate for the junction. Therefore, if the principle of a new junction into the campus is accepted, the most suitable location for it is where it is proposed. The applicant has attempted to offset the existing driveways as much as possible from the proposed access, however one driveway would still be directly opposite. This is not considered by ACC roads officers to be significant enough to prohibit such an arrangement, as visibility remains very good, and the road is relatively wide with large verges also aiding visibility. The arrangement would not be unusual for the area, with similar arrangements found at the Countesswells Road junction with Airyhall Avenue and Craigton Road's junctions with Northcote Avenue and Airyhall Avenue for example (*CC issue 8 and issue 11*).

It is noted in representations that residents and visitors of the houses opposite the new junction would no longer be able to park outside their homes. Roads officers advise that to keep the south side of the street opposite the proposed junction clear of parked vehicles, parking restrictions would be necessary. It is anticipated that the restrictions would extend approximately 10-15m in either direction from the junction. Notwithstanding, motorists would still be able to park on-street beyond these restrictions, which would only be a short distance from the houses affected and existing driveway parking would remain (*issue 10*).

A 78m stretch of the existing stone wall along Countesswells Road would be removed to allow construction of the junction. Of this, 19m of wall would be reconstructed along Countesswells Road on the west side of the junction and 33m on the east side. The remainder of the stone from the wall would be used to extend the new wall into the site, returning on either side of the junction.

Whether a right-hand stacking lane should be provided was considered, however this would result in increased land take, some of which is outside the applicant's control, and a higher degree of tree loss. It was also noted that the existing junction at Macaulay Drive does not feature a stacking lane and operates satisfactorily.

The geometry of the road design negates the need for any specific traffic calming measures such as speed bumps or build-outs (*issue 17*).

Policy 23 (Health and Safety) of NPF4 requires development proposals to be designed to take into account suicide risk. There are no features apparent within the junction, road or car park which would increase the risk of suicide occurring.

It is considered the design and location of the junction is acceptable and would not raise any road safety concerns (*CC issue 5*).

Local Road Network and Traffic

To consider the impact of the junction on the local road network, the applicant has produced a Transport Statement (TS) which has been considered by the Council's Roads Development Management Team.

In terms of traffic, it has been highlighted in representations that Countesswells Road is a busy road, with it suggested that a new junction would create further congestion. A junction capacity analysis was undertaken as part of the TS, which shows that the junction would operate with ample capacity and minimal queuing. There would be minimal delay to through traffic on Countesswells Road. Any delay to westbound traffic at the new junction would be offset by reduced delay at the existing Countesswells Road/Macaulay Drive junction, due to the redistribution of traffic entering the site (*CC issue 7 and issue 14*). The provision of a new junction and access road would not in itself encourage the use of the private car (*CC issue 3*).

It is acknowledged that that the traffic levels of Macaulay Drive are expected to reduce as motorists take the more direct route into the campus from Countesswells Road, increasing activity beside the houses near the new junction. Whilst Macaulay Drive is a dead-end that serves the campus and surrounding residential properties, Countesswells Road is a key route though the area. The proposal therefore does have the benefit, albeit a minor one when the levels of traffic are considered, of redistributing traffic away from a quieter residential street and keeping it on Countesswells Road which is more suitable for higher levels of traffic movement (*issue 12 and 14*).

The TS does consider hypothetical future traffic levels, utilising anticipated levels of floor space which might be able to be accommodated within the site, should JHI's future vision for the campus be realised. This shows that the junction again would operate satisfactorily. Notwithstanding, the future development proposals are not part of this application and would therefore be considered as and when any proposals were submitted to the planning authority. ACC roads officers highlight that this may result in requirements to upgrade the junction at a future date, such as the installation of traffic signals, however the presence of the driveways could significantly hinder that possibility. As there is no additional floor space associated with this application and the junction and road themselves do not generate traffic, there would be no material impact on the operation of the local road network as a result of the junction.

The traffic count on Countesswells road for the junction capacity analysis was carried out in June 2022, a month before the nearby Aldi supermarket at Countesswells Road opened. The traffic count therefore does not include any traffic now associated with the supermarket. Notwithstanding, roads officers have considered the level of traffic, which was modelled for the supermarket, in conjunction with the traffic for this proposal, and it is considered that carrying out a further traffic count would not lead to any material change to the outcome of the analysis (*issue 18*).

It is suggested in representations that a new pedestrian crossing should be provided on Countesswells Road to assist children from Countesswells Avenue and Macaulay Drive (on the north side of the road) to reach Airyhall Primary School (on the south side). However, as the traffic levels would not be materially different from existing as a result on the proposal, there would be no justification for requiring a new crossing. An uncontrolled crossing with a central island already exists opposite the school which can be utilised by pedestrians walking from the west towards the school (*issue 9*)

Concern is raised with speeding drivers on Countesswells Road; however, a new junction is unlikely to have any bearing on such activity. Motoring offences are an enforcement matter for Police Scotland (*issue 7*).

In summary the Council's roads officers consider that the new junction would have no material impact on the operation of the surrounding road network (*CC issue 6* and *issues 7, 11, 12*).

Amenity

Concern is raised with the proximity of the road to the rear of homes on Macaulay Grange, with the potential for noise and environmental pollution. Given the minor nature of the road and the carriageway being at least 10m from the rear boundary fences of houses, it is not expected that residents would experience any significant disruption or loss in amenity from activity associated with the road. It is expected that vehicles would be driving at relatively low speeds as they approach or leave the junction which would minimise traffic noise within what is a suburban area where there will be a range of noise sources and activities already (*CC issue 4 and issue 1*).

The rear gardens of homes on Macaulay Grange are enclosed by standard timber fences and ground levels within the site would generally be lowered to accommodate the road. Therefore, there are no concerns with the potential for overlooking or loss of privacy as a result of the road or use of it (*issue 2*).

Concern is raised that car headlights would affect amenity of residents living on Countesswells Road opposite the new junction. Again, it is not unusual for houses to be positioned opposite junctions or on a road bend resulting in car headlights facing them, however within a residential area full-beam headlights should not be being used. Any impact would be negligible (*issue 3).*

Parking

The car park would be reconfigured to create drop-off areas and reduce the number of parking spaces at the campus to 96 and space for one coach. The site has a current car parking capacity of 130 spaces. The applicant and Council's roads officers note that is over provision when compared to the Councils parking standards. Parking surveys carried out by the applicant and found a peak demand 76 spaces. The proposed level of parking would therefore be sufficient for the current demand associated with the institute. The current accessible parking spaces would remain unaltered. Parking provision for any future development, including electric vehicle charging, would need to be considered as part of any applications for that development.

It is noted in representations that the reduction in parking spaces does not appear to support the need for a new road. As explained earlier in the report, the new junction and road are not proposed to address any increase in parking at present but could facilitate new development in future (*issue 19*).

Trees

Policy 6 (Forestry, Woodland and Trees) of NPF4 seeks to protect and expand forests, woodland, and trees. It goes on to say that Development proposals that "*enhance, expand and improve woodland and tree cover will be supported*" and that "*Development proposals will not be supported where they will result in adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value*". Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodland) of the ALDP largely reiterates these aims and says there is a presumption against all activities and development that will result in the loss of, or damage to, trees and woodlands that contribute to nature conservation, landscape character, local amenity or climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The site is covered by tree preservation order 46. A total of 159 trees and four tree groups were surveyed. The trees are of various species and ages, with several large mature specimen trees. Twenty trees would be felled to accommodate the proposals. Another twenty trees, which are not required to be removed to accommodate the proposals, are recommended to be felled for health and safety or woodland management reasons.

Ten of the trees to be felled would be to allow the new junction to be formed on Countesswells Road. Six of these are good quality mature trees of various species, the other four are poor quality mature deciduous trees. The removal of these trees, which average around 10m in height, would create a gap in the tree belt which borders the northern edge of Countesswells Road. This would introduce a noticeable change in the streetscape, with a gap of around 25m being created in what is a generally a continuous stretch of trees along Countesswells Road, between its junctions with Macaulay Drive and the lane to the immediate west of the site. The exceptions to this is a gap with electricity lines above, slightly to the east of where the road is proposed and a gap further to the east where Craigiebuckler South Lodge is located, opposite to Craigiebuckler Primary Substation. Notwithstanding the loss of trees at this location, substantial trees would be retained on either side of the junction, which would help maintain the tree'd character of the north side of the street. The road would be within the root protection area of some of the retained trees. The tree survey concludes that as they are semi-mature trees, they would not be significantly impacted by this infringement and should be retained rather than removed.

Ten further trees would require to be felled where the car park would be connected to the new road. They vary in height between 5m and 27m. Due to the curved alignment which the road would have at this point, the removal of these trees would not have a significant visual impact, with woodland backdrop when viewed from the south maintained by the surrounding trees which would be retained.

The proposed surface water detention basin would be formed by creating a bund to the northeast of an existing natural hollow in the land to the east of the carpark. Three trees, all of which appear healthy, are located within the hollow area where the detention basin would be established. As these trees are tolerant of short periods of water inundation, the occasional, temporary inundation of tree roots in the basin is not expected to have any impact on these trees.

To compensate for the loss of trees, replacement planting is proposed within the JHI campus. The tree survey recommends the planting of 100 trees which would be a mix of nine different native species, complementary to those already present.

In summary, whilst there is tension with Policy 6 of NPF4 and Policy NE5 of the ALDP due to the loss of trees, particularly the associated visual impact because of the removal of trees alongside Countesswells Road, it would not be possible to construct the road without tree loss occurring. The minimum number of trees required to allow the new road to be constructed would be removed, with compensatory planting proposed to compensate for the loss (*issue 6*).

Natural Heritage

Policy 4 (Natural Places) of NPF4 states that development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported. It goes on to say that development proposals that are likely to have an adverse effect on species protected by legislation will only be supported where the proposal meets the relevant statutory tests. If there is reasonable evidence to suggest that a protected species is present on a site or may be affected by a proposed development, steps must be taken to establish its presence. The level of protection required by legislation must be factored into the planning and design of development, and potential impacts must be fully considered prior to the determination of any application. These principles are reiterated by Policy NE3 (Our Natural Heritage)

Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises) of NPF4 requires planning authorities when considering all development proposals to give significant weight to encouraging, promoting, and facilitating development that addresses the global climate emergency and nature crisis. Similarly, Policy 3 (Biodiversity) of NPF4 seeks the enhancement of biodiversity.

An Environmental Walkover Survey was carried out in July 2022, with a later update in February 2023 to include a winter survey for squirrel dreys (resting places) and bat roosts. The survey has been considered by the Council's Natural Environment Policy Team and is considered satisfactory (*issue 4*). The site is not subject to any natural heritage designations. In terms of habitats, the site can be divided into three general areas. Broad-leaved woodland around the car parks and main building; the field which comprises unimproved neutral grassland and the broad-leaved woodland strip along Countesswells Road.

Although red squirrels are known to the present in the area, no evidence was found of any dreys within the trees. Similarly, bats have been observed foraging within the campus woodland and at nearby Couper's Pond. Four trees are considered to have bat roosting potential; however, none of these are to be felled.

It is indicated in representations that pine martens, deer, badgers, and foxes are reported to have been seen in the site. The survey did not find any evidence of animal tracks, dung or grazing from mammals. Therefore, although species may occasionally forage in the site, this is unlikely to be to any significant degree. Notwithstanding, the development of what at the moment is an open field, will see a reduction in foraging habitat for such species.

In relation to birds, the survey did not find evidence of the presence of any priority species. To avoid damage, destruction or interference with any active bird nest, tree felling would take place outwith when birds are not breeding (generally September to January).

The survey identified invasive non-native species within the application site, therefore, to ensure the risk of spreading these species during construction is minimised, a condition is proposed requiring the submission and implementation of a management plan.

In summary, whilst no specific impact is identified in terms of protected species, there would some tension with Policy 4 (Natural Places) and Policy NE3 (Our Natural Heritage) due to the loss of habitat and trees. This could be offset in the medium to long term by the tree planting mitigation discussed in the previous section (*CC issue 2)*.

Drainage

Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management) of NPF4 aims to strengthen resilience to flood risk by promoting avoidance as a first principle and reducing the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding. It goes on to requires development proposals to "*(i) not increase the risk of surface water flooding to others, or itself be at risk; (ii) manage all rain and surface water through sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), which should form part of and integrate with proposed and existing blue-green infrastructure. All proposals should presume no surface water connection to the combined sewer; and (iii) seek to minimise any areas of impermeable surface."* Policy NE4 (Our Water Environment) generally reiterates these principles, requiring all new developments to incorporate SUDS to manage surface water.

A small area of the site is identified on the SEPA Flood Maps as being at a low risk of surface water flooding. This area would be adjusted to accommodate the new road, with surface water run-off from it being collected by gullies and then being conveyed to an extended detention basin which would provide storage and treatment for both the road and future development area run-off. The basin would discharge at a restricted rate to a swale, which would drain into an existing land drain within the woodland to the east of the basin. The drain flows north and discharges into the West Burn of Rubislaw, which is within the campus grounds. The car park drainage arrangements would remain as they are at present, with areas of hardcore intercepting the majority of the surface water run-off and allowing it to infiltrate to the ground or surrounding landscaping. The proposed SUDS features, and overall surface water drainage proposals are considered acceptable.

It is also proposed to install foul sewers within the new road to accommodate future discharges from the future development area. The sewer would connect to the existing public sewer on Macaulay Drive. This would avoid opening up the new road in future to install sewers, should the future development area be developed.

Other matters raised in representations

- It is suggested that no further housing is required in the area. This application however does not propose any housing (*issue 20*).

- It is noted that there are power lines close to where junction and road are proposed, however this would not prevent the construction of the road below. The applicant would be responsible for ensuring construction work does not affect any power lines or other utilities in the area (*issue 21*).

- Access to the campus does appear to have historically been available from Craigiebuckler Avenue to the north, with the suggestion in representations that this could be re-opened as an

alternative access route. However, the planning authority are required to consider the application before it, rather than any hypothetical alternative that has not been proposed (*issue 22*).

- Whether the proposals are contrary to JHI's Health, Safety, Quality and Environmental Policy Statement or otherwise, is a matter for the applicant rather than a material planning consideration (issue 24).

RECOMMENDATION

Approve Conditionally

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

On the basis that the proposed junction, access road and car park are to serve the existing use and future proposals associated with the institute, there is no tension with the underlying land use zoning and Policy CF1 (Existing Community Sites and Facilities) of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (ALDP). The proposals would support the future development aspirations of the institute.

The junction and road design are considered acceptable by the Council's Roads Development Management team and are considered to have no material impact on the operation of the surrounding road network in terms of traffic.

Whilst there is tension with Policy 6 (Forestry, Woodland and Trees) of National Planning Framework 4 and Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodland) of the ALDP due to the loss of trees, particularly the associated visual impact because of the removal of trees alongside Countesswells Road, it would not be possible to construct the road without tree loss occurring. The minimum number of trees required to allow the new road to be constructed would be removed, with new tree planting proposed to compensate for the loss. Whilst no specific impact is identified in terms of protected species, there would some tension with Policy 4 (Natural Places) of NPF4 and Policy NE3 (Our Natural Heritage) of the ALDP due to the loss of habitat and trees. This could be offset in the medium to long term by the tree planting mitigation.

CONDITIONS

(01) DURATION OF PERMISSION

The development to which this notice relates must be begun not later than the expiration of 3 years beginning with the date of this notice. If development has not begun at the expiration of the 3-year period, the planning permission lapses.

Reason - in accordance with section 58 (duration of planning permission) of the 1997 act.

(02) TREE PROTECTION FENCING

No development (including site setup) shall take place unless the tree protection measures shown in Tree Survey JHIC-2211-TRA-A (dated 17 March 2023) and drawing JHIC-22-11-TP (Rev.A) by Astell Associates (or such other details and drawing which may be approved by the planning

authority for the same purpose) have been implemented. Thereafter the fencing shall remain in place for the duration of construction of the development.

Reason – to protect trees and vegetation from damage during construction in accordance with Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodlands).

(03) INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES

No development shall take place unless an invasive non-native species management plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority. The plan shall include details of measures designed to minimise the risk of non-native species being spread during construction activities within the application site. Thereafter, construction shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved plan.

Reason – to control the spread of invasive non-native species during construction.

(04) LANDSCAPING AND COMPENSATORY TREE PLANTING

No development shall take place unless a detailed scheme of landscaping for the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority. The scheme shall include tree/shrub planting numbers, densities, locations, species, sizes, and stage of maturity at planting.

Thereafter all planting, seeding and turfing comprised in the approved scheme of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting season following the completion of the development and any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a size and species similar to those originally required to be planted, or in accordance with such other scheme as may be submitted to and approved in writing for the purpose by the planning authority.

Reason – to satisfactorily integrate the development into its surroundings and maintain the visual amenity of the area.

(05) TRAVEL PLAN

The junction and road hereby approved shall not be brought into use unless a travel plan for the campus has been submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority. The travel plan shall outline sustainable measures to deter the use of the private car, in particular single occupant trips and provides detailed monitoring arrangements and modal split targets.

Thereafter the travel plan shall be implemented.

Reason – to encourage more sustainable forms of travel to campus.

(06) DRAINAGE

The junction and road hereby approved shall not be brought into use unless all surface water drainage works detailed in the approved Drainage Assessment (140950 - DA01 (Rev.2) and drawing 140950/2000 (Rev.E) produced by Fairhurst (or such other drawing approved for the purpose) have been installed in accordance with the approved details and is available for use.

Reason – to safeguard water qualities, prevent flooding and ensure that the junction and road can be adequately drained.

ADVISORY NOTES FOR APPLICANT

(01) HOURS OF DEMOLITION AND CONSTRUCTION WORK

Unless otherwise agreed in writing with Aberdeen City Council Environmental Health Service (poll@aberdeencity.gov.uk / 03000 200 292), demolition or construction work associated with the proposed development should not take place outwith the hours of 07:00 to 19:00 Mondays to Fridays and 08:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays. No noisy work should be audible at the site boundary on Sundays. Where complaints are received and contractors fail to adhere to the above restrictions, enforcement action may be initiated under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.