

CRAIGIEBUCKLER AND SEAFIELD COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Application Number: P141026. Site Location: Hazledene Road (Land at), West of Former Dobbies Garden Centre. Pre-determination Hearing on Friday 14 November 2014.

Address to the Planning and Development Management Committee

Convenor 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".

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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!!!

We are face with what we consider to be the dismal prospect of the demolition of the Marcliffe at Pitfofodels 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 over supply of existing leisure facilities (these claims are being made by existing providers) with all parts of the city being provided for.

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 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 ambiance 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.
