

NOTE OF MEETING – WOODHILL HOUSE

16TH January 2006 1530

Present: J.Mackinnon (Scottish Executive)
C.Gore (Aberdeenshire Council)
K.Newton (Aberdeenshire Council)
G.Massie (Jenkins and Marr)
R.Laird (Jenkins and Marr)

GM outlined current thinking on the development proposal to the meeting. This included the following:

- World class 18 hole golf course
- 200 bed 5 star hotel, including high class dining and leisure and conference facilities.
- 150 condominium units
- 100 private houses
- Clubhouse
- Golf academy
- Driving range
- Caddyshack
- Maintenance building
- Turf/grass nursery and lab
- Tournament infrastructure

There then followed a general discussion on the proposal which addressed the following comprehensive range of issues.

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

It was recognised that the principle of a golf course and tourism related resort was a good fit with the inward investment goals of SDI and the need to diversify the economy of the Aberdeen area.

Due process must, however, be followed by both Aberdeenshire Council and the Scottish Executive to ensure that there is a clear audit trail, including a transparent and rigorous consideration of the issues. A sensitive Planning Bill has just been introduced at the Scottish Parliament and individual decisions both locally and nationally are likely to come under particularly close scrutiny.

This requirement for due diligence in the submission and determination of the application results in part from some of the topical issues in planning at the moment, such as giving genuine recognition to community involvement, and the pressure from some quarters for objectors to planning proposals to be given a right of appeal.

LOCAL POLICY BACKGROUND

The local policy framework contained in the Structure and Local Plans, was also supportive of the principle of the development. The specific policies

relating to tourism and rural development are generally supportive of the resort and leisure aspects of the proposal. This is on the understanding that these aspects of the development do not adversely effect the natural heritage designations on site, such as the SSSI.

Without wishing to be negative about the project overall, it was agreed that one area where the development does not sit easily with the local policy background, is the inclusion of approximately 250 houses for private sale.

PRIVATE HOUSING

The erection of 250 houses for private sale would not in itself accord with the development plan. It was recognised that the opportunity existed to tie this housing to the resort development, either through use of a planning condition, or a Section 75 agreement. The closer this connection was between the housing and the resort, the better the fit with local policy.

The inclusion of a substantial number of houses for sale on the open market would raise issues which would not apply if they were linked to the resort development. Matters which would require to be addressed include, provision of education facilities; examination of capacity in local schools; sustainable transport issues; and affordable housing provision.

Local and national housebuilders have been closely monitoring the adoption of the Aberdeenshire local plan. It is important, therefore, that a consistent approach is taken to the application of policy in specific cases in what has been a sensitive subject in the Aberdeen area to minimise the risk of successful legal challenge

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The aim should be to include the EA as part of the original outline planning submission in March 06. This will be a challenging requirement to comply with. Should additional seasonal survey work be required, this could delay the determination of the application. It is not possible to use planning conditions to address the requirement for additional survey work (should this arise) if there are concerns about the impact on European designated areas or species.

Ironside Farrar had been appointed to carry out the EA and they will require to liase closely with the key environmental agencies to ensure that all the relevant issues are addressed.

TRANSPORTATION ASSESSMENT

Again this should be submitted with the original outline application in March. At the moment, this deadline was achievable.

Cameron and Ross had been appointed to carry out this work and will need to

liaise closely with the highway authority on their requirements.

PUBLIC REACTION

At the moment, the public reaction to the development was difficult to predict. The level of response which was received would be likely to have a bearing on timing of the determination of the application.

In an effort to ensure that the public were fully informed about the proposals, it was agreed that holding some form of community consultation exercise would be essential.

PLANNING GAIN

It will be necessary to negotiate this subject with the Council's Planning Gain Co-ordinator. These negotiations can commence asap.

TIMETABLE

Outline submission was aimed for the end of March 06. To ensure early determination, this should include the EA & TA. It was likely that this would allow determination by the the local Area Committee (Formartine) in summer 06, followed by consideration by Infrastructure Services Committee thereafter.

The relevant potential Committee dates are as follows:

Area Committee:

25th July
29th August
19th September
10th October

Infrastructure Services Committee:

24th August
12th October
7th December

Once the application has been considered by both of the above Committees it would require to be referred to the Scottish Executive, who would have 28 days to decide if call in was necessary. Most applications are returned to the councils in that period. Approximately 10% of applications to referred to the Executive are called in which would result in a public local inquiry. Cases that are called in tend to be very large scale proposals where there are major unresolved issues and/or substantial local objection.

To allow construction of the golf course to commence as planned, it would be necessary to submit an application for detailed permission for the golf course and maintenance buildings, prior to the determination of the outline

application. This is the only acceptable method to ensure a start date by September 2006.

Group suggested meeting again in February with Ashley Cooper and Neil Hobday also to be invited.

REL 17/1/6