

SUMMARY PRECOGNITION

of

Iain Donald Banks on behalf of Mrs & Mrs D. Banks and Messers. D. Milne, R. Davidson and M. Foote as objectors to the called in application for outline planning application for golf course and resort on land at Menie House, Balmedie, Aberdeen by Trump International Golf Limited Scotland – reference DPEA:CIN/ABS/001

1 My name is Iain Donald Banks. I am employed as a Principal Consultant with a leading international provider of services for managing risk. I have lived on the edge of the Menie estate for 25 years and have enjoyed access to the estate, the surrounding land, the dunes and the beach unhindered for all that time.

2 In my evidence I represent the views of a number of concerned individuals, (Banks, Milne, Davidson & Foote). We all live in the area of the proposed development and include a farmer, a teacher, a risk consultant, an HSE Manager and the director of a waste management company.

3 All of those individuals are members of a group known as Sustainable Aberdeenshire. Sustainable Aberdeenshire can be best described as a collective of those people (local and National) who felt so strongly that the development should not go ahead that they wrote letters of objection to their MSPs and councillors, signed petitions against the development, raised funds, devoted their time to researching the issues and took part in leafleting and awareness raising. The Manifesto for Sustainable Aberdeenshire is set out in my main precognition.

4 The Statement of Case lodged on our behalf sets out our position with regard to development plan policies. Evidence concerning these policies will be given on our behalf by Mr W. Walton.

5 We support Scottish Natural Heritage, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Ramblers Association, Scottish Wildlife Trust and others in their opposition to the proposals with regard to potential adverse impacts on the landscape, protected sites and habitats, biodiversity and potential adverse impact on access.

6 The proposed development will have an adverse impact on the community. Many of the residents, who are forced into close proximity to the proposed development, chose to live in a rural environment rather than in the city or in a suburb.

6.1 Delfriggs, Pettens, Menie, Hatterseat, Foveran, Mains of Foveran are all small groups of farms and residences with their own histories and their own identities. The rural lifestyle combines the benefits of privacy with the opportunity to be part of a wider community with its own unobtrusive community spirit. It is a community where if you so choose you can keep ‘yourself to yourself’ or take a more active role if you prefer, providing peaceful amenity and space, resulting a particular sense of place.

6.2 We now are faced with the prospect of losing that tranquil rural lifestyle to become part of a sprawling corridor of urban expansion.

7 The proposed development will result in loss of farmland.

8 The proposed development will result in loss of access. There is a network of paths and tracks used in the area, including historic routes such as the old Aberdeen to Ellon route and the Green Ladies route from Menie House to Pettens Church. The golf course itself will restrict access, limiting it to access through the golf course on predetermined pathways, in the name of safety. Due to the density of the hotel and associated buildings, the areas defined as curtilage will be so substantial that large area will become 'no go areas' on the grounds of privacy. The housing estates will due to their density remove many tens of acres of land from access by walkers.

9 The proposed development will result in adverse impact on wildlife. A long established and complex environment will be re-profiled, stabilised, drained, fertilised, manicured and maintained. Thousands of square feet of hotel buildings, clubhouse, conference centre, roads, lights, helipad, and the marching feet and buggy tracks of thousands of visitors will transform a place where you can currently hear insects buzz and hawks call into a busy resort.

9.1 The sand dunes will be partially stabilised. The complex plant, bird and animal communities they currently support will be adversely affected.

10 The proposed development will result in adverse impact on the landscape character and appearance and the visual amenity of the area, arising from the scale height and nature of the buildings.

10.1 They will also have a severe impact on those residences which will be overlooked and menaced by these huge multi-storey buildings. The light pollution from this sort of density of building will transform the star filled night sky which we presently enjoy to the orange glow of an urban night sky.

11 The proposed development will result in severe adverse impact on the beach and dunes. Many visitors comment that they are surprised that such remarkable dunes are not better known. "I have never seen such an unspoilt and dramatic sea side landscape" is a quotation attributed to Mr Donald Trump on the TIGL website.

11.1 As stated in the Visit Scotland website "The coastline of the north-east of Scotland is one of the most fascinating, unspoilt and varied stretches of any in Britain".

11.2 The dunes are used by residents, by horse riders and dog walkers, by orienteers, by people taking that part of the North Sea Coastal Trail from Newburgh to Balmedie, by those with specialised interest in and knowledge of bird life, plants, insects and fungi.

12 The resort and development as a whole will certainly increase reliance on private car use and undermines Aberdeenshire Council's Sustainability Charter Action Programme.

13. The proposed development will result in the destruction of the SSSI to the North and the SINs to the South and other environmentally sensitive areas. I rely on SNH, SWT, RSPB and others with the necessary competence to fully identify the reasons why the Trump approach is not acceptable.

13.1 In environmental risk management there is a hierarchy of actions which take place in order of diminishing effectiveness. Firstly and most importantly is to try and eliminate the need for environmental harm through the design process – changing the location and then changing the design plan as necessary. Only after exhausting those possibilities should the applicant look at harm reduction and mitigation measures. TIGL have correctly identified that their plans have harmful effects on the environment. They have not however chosen to address these issues through amending or refining the design of the development. Indeed apart from some untested proposals to re-locate parts of the dune vegetation the only real proposal is the formation of the MEMAG. The MEMAG group can not be regarded as a mitigation measure.

14 The housing element, 950 holiday apartments and accommodation block for 400 employees being excessive in scale and number are not acceptable for the reasons set out in the Statement of Case and other submissions on our behalf.

15 The economic advantages of the proposed development are not proven. Kenneth J. Thomson, Emeritus Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Aberdeen in his letter of 05/06/07 to the Planning and Environmental Services makes some telling points about the economics of the TIGL application. There are set out in 15.1, 15.2 and 15.3 of my main precognition.

16 The proposed development seeks to promote golf tourism and does not recognise that wildlife tourism (or ecotourism) rely on an unspoilt landscape. Golf tourism is only one of the tourist strategies promoted by Visit Scotland. Wildlife or ecotourism is recognised as having particular potential for Scotland. The precautionary principle should apply in this case.

17 I am not in principle against a golf course and resort development. I do not feel however the development should go ahead in its current form. Menie Estate is large enough to relocate the golf course off the SSSI and still have sufficient land to build a reasonably large hotel complex without causing irreparable damage to wildlife and the dunes. The golf course must be moved off the SSSI and all measures taken to ensure that the environment is the primary design driver for both the golf course and the associated building development. The indicative scale and height of the hotel, apartments and accommodation block should be reduced.

17.1 The housing should not be allowed to cross finance the development

17.2 All reasonable existing access to the dunes and beach should be maintained.

17.3 Ownership of the apartments must in some way be restricted so that at no time in the future can they become residential, rather than holiday apartments.