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ABERDEEN
CITY COUNCIL

16 May 2008

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Dear Mr Bell

OUTLINE PLANNING PERMISSION FOR GOLF COURSE AND RESORT DEVELOPMENT ON LAND AT MENIE HOUSE, BALMEDIE, ABERDEEN

The City Council's formal response to the Golf and Leisure Report at Menie Estate in Aberdeenshire is contained in the Committee report and Minutes of the Planning Committee of 16 August 2007. Both the report and Minutes are attached. This letter expands on some of the points made therein and the City Council would wish to rest on these documents as written submissions.

The City Council very much welcomes the proposals as being a unique opportunity to strengthen and diversify the regional economy. Members of the City Council have made public their support and believe that this support is backed by public opinion. Council Leader Kate Dean invited members of the public to email her their views on the proposal. Of the 396 emails received, almost 88% registered their support for the development. Many of these felt that the development would:

- Benefit the economy of the north east
- Diversify the economy – this was seen as important in the context of a current reliance on the oil and gas industry Attract international investment, and subsequently business and tourists
- Provide a golden opportunity to increase the profile of the region and put it on the world map.

This very much reflects the vision of the **North East Scotland Joint Public Sector Group (NESJPSG)** which was formed in 2000. It comprises the Chief Executives or equivalent of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils, NHS Grampian, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, Grampian Police and Grampian Fire & Rescue. Their clear number one priority is the economy, which is acknowledged as the key driver for the North East. Economic stability is vital. The two greatest areas for attention are the diversification of the economy away from the heavy reliance on the oil and gas

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Councillor Scott Cassie - Member for
Garthdee/Ruthrieston/North Holburn and Broomhill



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industry and the retention of skilled staff. Addressing these issues will require a combination of:

- Investment to attract new business and supporting indigenous business to grow
- Skills training
- Sustainable inward migration, given the predicted population decline
- Creation of an environment in which people want to live and work

In a similar vein, the **Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Forum Economic Manifesto for Aberdeen City and Shire**, adopted in 2007 sets the following vision for the area:

“We aim by 2025, for Aberdeen City and Shire to be recognised as one of the most robust and resilient economies in Europe with a reputation for opportunity, enterprise and inventiveness that will attract and retain world-class talent of all ages.

The location of choice for high value oil and gas and renewable energy organisations, and a first choice for organisations of all sizes operating in other high value, quality niche markets.

Our environment, our accessibility and our hospitality will make Aberdeen City and Shire one of the most interesting and enjoyable locations in the UK in which to visit, live, work and grow up.”

The Manifesto goes on to state that in order to maintain current levels of growth we need to sustain a vibrant business base and build on the success of the oil and gas sector and establish the region as a global centre of excellence for all-energy, leveraging the excellence in our academic and research institutes, while growing the regions other key sectors – Food and Drink, Life Sciences, and Tourism.

Aberdeen’s Community Plan sets out our vision for the future of our City and how we intend to achieve it. The proximity of the proposal to Aberdeen means it could impact on several community plan issues, including:

- a sustainable City with an **integrated transport system** that is accessible for all

The Transportation Assessment supporting the application considers the links to Aberdeen airport which is located approximately 14.5km from the development. An exclusive shuttle bus will be provided for visitors to the development linking directly with the airport. As with a proposed new bus service to the railway station it will be an “on demand” service made available to visitors.

Given the importance of the airport to the economy the City Council approved an application to extend the airport runway in December 2005. Therefore, should the development lead to an increase in long haul tourism, particularly from Asia and North America, the extended runway should be able to sustain any resultant increase in air traffic.

To ensure that the development does not adversely impact on accessibility to and within the City the Council requested an audit to ensure that cross boundary impacts

are adequately addressed in the transport assessment and that any mitigation required extends into the City. This remains the Council's position.

- being a City that protects, enhances and **values its environment**

Whilst the City Council recognises that there are potentially significant environmental issues arising from the impact of the development on Foveran Links Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and from traffic arising from the development, these will have to be weighed against other issues to judge the sustainability of the proposal. It is the view of the Council that with appropriate environmental mitigation the proposal should be supported.

- being **welcoming to business** and values its business community

The City Council believes that the project represents a significant opportunity to build an industry sector which will greatly assist with the diversification of the economy. In this respect it is one of four major golf related proposals in the area, the other three being:

- The redevelopment and consideration of the operation of the Hazlehead golf courses in Aberdeen (which include an Alister MacKenzie designed course)
- The Jack Nicklaus course at the Ury Estate near Stonehaven
- The Paul Lawrie course at Blairs College on the South Deeside Road.

A further issue is that the area is currently experiencing a significant shortage of hotel accommodation which is hindering economic development and reducing our ability to increase the number of conferences and conventions being brought to the city. It is considered that the hotel, conference centre and spa would enhance the attractiveness of the destination to a large number of influential high spending UK and international associations. The City Council therefore welcomes the opportunity that this proposal provides in increasing the profile of north east Scotland as a destination and in terms of the provision of high quality leisure, tourism and business facilities.

- presenting a **strong, positive image** of itself both nationally and internationally

As stated previously, Members of the City Council welcome the opportunity that this proposal provides in increasing the profile of north east Scotland. The Council has recently approved a number of planning applications which present a very positive image of the north east as a place to do business (including non oil and gas related business) and for leisure and tourism. These include the airport runway extension, the world headquarters for FirstGroup, new offices for BP and the Wood Group, a new contemporary arts centre, the extreme sports centre, and the International School for Aberdeen. This development would very much support that image both nationally and internationally.

- developing Aberdeen as an **Active City**

There are potentially significant social benefits arising as a result of this proposal through the provision of new leisure and golf facilities.

In respect of **Planning Policy**, the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan North East Scotland Together (NEST) was approved by Scottish Ministers in December 2001. Section 9.3 of the Environmental Statement accompanying the application deals with this issue. NEST is generally supportive of economic diversity, competitiveness, creating new economic development opportunities and developing the natural strengths of the area (Objective 2). Policy 6 specifically encourages tourism and related developments where they are compatible with policies safeguarding the natural and built environment.

In respect of the residential elements of the proposal, the Council would ask that thought is given to possible cross boundary effects, particularly in terms of transportation requirements.

It has to be recognised that any major new golf course proposal must almost inevitably take place in the countryside outwith the urban area and that it will attract built development associated with it. The Menie Estate is in the rural area. According to Table 1 of the NEST's strategy, the role of the rural area is "for the operation of indigenous rural industries and related business, and opportunities for tourism, recreation and other diversification". It is also part of the coast – a key nature conservation, landscape, recreation and tourism area. In this respect, the golf, leisure and tourism elements of the proposal could be said to broadly fit the key recreation and tourism roles of these areas according to NEST.

Social and Economic Benefits of the Proposal

Because of its adverse impact on an SSSI – a designation of national importance – elements of the proposal could be said to be contrary to national and structure plan policy. However, if it can be demonstrated that the adverse impacts of the proposal on the environmental asset or coastal resource are outweighed by its social and economic benefits, then the proposal could comply with these policies. In this case, because an SSSI is a national designation, the social and economic benefits should be demonstrated to be of national importance.

Chapter 2 of the Environmental Statement outlines the need for the project. The Project is seen to support a number of objectives of the Local Economic Development Strategy 2003-10, namely

- To become a city and region of enlightenment – in terms of profile, international events and leisure facilities
- To be a world class strategic location and the leading region in the north Atlantic and Baltic seaboard
- To be a unique destination for golf, recreation, new market opportunities and world class facilities
- To promote sustainable economic growth in key sectors.

The rest of the chapter discusses further social and economic benefits of the proposal. The Aberdeen City region is one of the most prosperous in the UK. However, this should not lead us to become complacent. National Planning Framework 2 recognises that employment in the oil and gas industry is now past its peak. Although the region is exploring alternative growth opportunities in the energy sector, there is a need to continue to broaden and diversify the economy so that it is not reliant on one or two sectors.

The **National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2)** recognises that tourism and leisure activities have an important contribution to make to the development of the economy. It also suggests that there is scope to attract more tourists to Aberdeen and that the East Coast Corridor offers many opportunities for leisure, recreation and tourism.

Aberdeen is beginning to develop a role as a major tourism gateway and Aberdeen Airport is described as having an important international gateway function with links to Scandinavia and the North Atlantic. The UK currently accounts for 83% of tourism trips to Scotland. 87% of overseas visitors to Scotland arrive in the UK by air and 62% of UK visitors to Scotland come by car. By improving cross border rail and road links, and by bringing Scotland within three hours of major English cities, the economic benefits of tourism can be spread more widely. The Aberdeen Airport expansion will cater for more international tourists.

As well as tourism, the area could also further expand as a centre for conferences, conventions and business related tourism. The success of Offshore Europe shows that Aberdeen can host large conferences and is improving on those areas needing attention, such as accommodation.

The plans for Menie Estate will support all of these aims and I very much hope you look favourably on the proposal.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Scott Cassie
Convener of Planning
Aberdeen City Council

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

Name of Committee	: Planning
Date of Meeting	: 16 August 2007
Title of Report	: Consultation on Golf and Leisure Resort, Menie Estate, Balmedie, Aberdeenshire
Lead Officer	: Dr Margaret Bochel
Author of Report	: Andrew Brownrigg ☎ (52) 3317 ✉ abrownrigg@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Other Involvement	: None
Consultation undertaken with	: Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services North Area Corporate Director, Strategic Leadership City Chamberlain, Resources Management City Solicitor, Resources Management Head of Economic and Environmental Sustainability Planning Strategist, Strategic Leadership Infrastructure Strategist, Strategic Leadership Development Management Manager, Strategic Leadership Principal Engineer, Neighbourhood Services South AWPR Team Councillor Scott Cassie, Convenor, Planning Committee Group Leaders Councillor Kate Dean Councillor Kevin Stewart Councillor Len Ironside Councillor Alan Milne Councillor Marie Boulton

Summary of Report

This report summarises a major planning application for a golf and leisure resort at the Menie Estate, just to the north of Balmedie. Aberdeenshire Council asked the City Council for comments on the application and this report forms the basis of that consultation.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

a) Members welcome the opportunity that this proposal provides in increasing the profile of north east Scotland as a destination and in terms of the provision of high quality leisure, tourism and business facilities. It is believed that the project represents a significant opportunity to build an industry sector which will greatly assist with the diversification of the economy.

b) in the absence of a clearer picture of the phasing of the housing, the Council do not object to the proposal at this stage but that Members ask that thought is required on possible cross boundary effects, particularly in terms of transportation requirements. The 36 golf villas are not considered to raise any strategic issues regardless of their programming so no objection is raised to these.

c) given the environmental issues raised in the Environmental Statement and in the absence of more complete mitigation measures, the national benefits of the proposal be more fully assessed in order to address national policy and structure plan requirements.

d) Members request that the transport impacts of the proposal on the City, particularly in the Bridge of Don area, be investigated as part of the Transportation Assessment and that an audit of the Transportation Assessment is carried out on behalf of the City Council to ensure that cross boundary impacts are adequately addressed and any concerns notified to Aberdeenshire Council.

Links to the Community Plan and to a Partnership for Aberdeen

If implemented, the proposal could impact on several community plan issues, including:

- a sustainable City with an integrated transport system that is accessible for all
- being welcoming to business and values its business community
- presenting a strong, positive image of itself both nationally and internationally
- developing Aberdeen as an Active City
- being a City that protects, enhances and values its environment

Implementation

The proposal is likely to be implemented by the private sector with some public sector involvement, particularly in terms of infrastructure provision.

Resource Implications

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| People | : Should Members agree, roads officers will arrange for consultants to carry out an audit of the Transportation Assessment. |
| Finance | : The costs of an audit (around £2000 to £3000) would be met from the Consultancy budget for Planning and Infrastructure for 2007/08. |
| Systems & Technology | : There are no specific technology implications resulting from the approval of this report. |

Main Considerations:

The proposal is located on the Menie Estate, which extends for around two miles along the coast north of Balmedie Country Park. The proposed golf and leisure resort would comprise the following elements, covering 452 hectares;

- Two 18 hole links golf courses – one championship course to the north and a “future golf” course to the south
- Golf clubhouse
- Golf Academy
- Golf maintenance building and caddy shack
- Short game area and driving range
- 450 unit resort hotel, conference centre and spa
- 36 golf villas
- 950 holiday homes
- Accommodation for 400 staff
- Future residential development of 500 dwellings
- Trump Boulevard (a spine road serving the development)
- Parking provision (the amount is unspecified)

The accompanying Environmental Statement outlines the need for the project, a consideration of alternatives, a description of the proposal and the environmental assessment findings themselves. There are four broad themes on which Members may wish to comment, along with some other observations;

1. Broad compliance with the structure plan
2. The adverse impact on a Site of Special Scientific Interest and opportunities for mitigation
3. Whether, in the absence of mitigation, these adverse impacts are outweighed by national benefits
4. Whether further reassurance is required on the impact of the development on the traffic situation, particularly around Bridge of Don
5. Other Observations

1. Compliance with the Structure Plan

The Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan North East Scotland Together (NEST) was approved by Scottish Ministers in December 2001. Section 9.3 of the Environmental Statement deals with this issue. NEST is generally supportive of economic diversity, competitiveness, creating new economic development opportunities and developing the natural strengths of the area (Objective 2). Policy 6 specifically encourages tourism and related developments where they are compatible with policies safeguarding the natural and built environment. The issues of impacts on the environment and coast are dealt with in sections 2 and 3 below.

It has to be recognised that any major new golf course proposal must almost inevitably take place in the countryside outwith the urban area and that it will attract built development associated with it.

In respect of the proposed 950 holiday homes, accommodation for 400 staff and the 500 future houses, it is not clear when they will be built. The Transportation Assessment refers to the golf course, hotel and holiday accommodation being completed by 2009, but whether the latter

- Property** : There are no City Council property interests in this area.
- Other Equipment** : There are no specific equipment implications arising from the approval of this report.
- Other** : There are no other specific implications arising from the approval of this report.

Other Implications

- Health & Safety** : It is important that the health and safety implications of traffic arising from the development are considered as part of the Transportation Assessment.
- Risk Management** : The Environmental Impact Assessment will enable more informed decision-making and will lessen the likelihood of inappropriate development.
- Human Rights/
Equalities/Diversity** : This is a matter primarily for Aberdeenshire Council to deal with as the planning authority.
- Sustainability** : There are potentially significant social and economic benefits arising as a result of this proposal through the provision of a 5 star hotel, conference, leisure and golf facilities. There are also potentially significant environmental issues arising from the impact of the development on Foveran Links Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and from traffic arising from the development. These will have to be weighed against each other to judge whether or not the proposal is sustainable.
- Environmental** : Please refer to comments under Sustainability above.
- Social** : Please refer to comments under Sustainability above.
- Economic** : Please refer to comments under Sustainability above.
- Construction** : If approved, there will be a considerable amount of construction required to implement this project.

Signature : _____

involves all 950 holiday homes is unclear. It goes on to say that the future housing element will be phased in over a 20 year period. If these housing elements are phased for construction prior to December 2010, the proposal is likely to conflict with NEST Policy 9 Housing Allocations 2006-10. Policy 9 does not specifically allocate any housing for Balmedie, but it does allow for small scale housing for local needs to be identified by the local plan.

For future housing in the period 2011-15, NEST makes provision for the identification of indicative housing land reserves in local plans through Policy 10 Indicative Housing Distribution 2011 to 2015. In doing so, Policy 10 states that the scale of indicative allocation should be based on the capacity of settlements and in accordance with their roles and function as set out in Table 1 of the NEST's strategy. The Menie Estate is in the rural area, the role of which is, according to NEST "for the operation of indigenous rural industries and related business, and opportunities for tourism, recreation and other diversification". It is also part of the coast – a key nature conservation, landscape, recreation and tourism area. In this respect, the golf, leisure and tourism elements of the proposal could be said to broadly fit the key recreation and tourism roles of these areas according to NEST. However, the housing element appears to conflict with both NEST Policies 9 and 10. An exception is the 36 golf villas which are not considered to be a significant strategic issue. Any housing phased beyond 2015 is beyond the timescale of policies on housing allocations set out in NEST and the structure plan strategy can only be applied at a more general level for now.

In the absence of a clearer picture of the phasing of the housing, it is suggested that the Council would not wish to object to the proposal at this stage but ask that thought is required on possible cross boundary effects, particularly in terms of transportation requirements. This issue is considered in section 4 of this report.

2. Environmental Impact on Foveran Links Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest are areas of land or water which, in the opinion of Scottish Natural Heritage, are of special interest by reason of their flora, fauna or geological or geomorphological features. They are a designation of national significance. This does not preclude development but proposals have to be assessed for their effects on the designation.

It is proposed that the golf course will cover approximately 33% of the Foveran Links SSSI. Foveran Links is notified as both a biological and geological SSSI and is regarded as a high quality example of the dune features that characterise this part of the north east coast.

The proposal will involve stabilisation of mobile sand dunes which will cause the loss of dynamic features of the site which in turn are the basis of its natural heritage interest. This loss of dune habitat will have a significant adverse effect on the areas flora and fauna. The Environmental Statement proposes to establish a Menie Environmental Management Advisory Group to oversee the production of a management plan for the site. This would include specific measures designed to mitigate the adverse effects of the proposal. The report acknowledges that despite these mitigation measures, impacts on the most important features of the SSSI remains severely adverse and that there will be an overall net reduction in biodiversity.

There is relatively little discussion on the effects of the development on the wider coastal environment, specifically the whole of Aberdeen Bay running from Aberdeen to Rockend at Forvie National Nature Reserve. The Environmental Statement says that there will be no impact on coastal sedimentation either to the north or the south of the site. This is because the main coastal dune at Menie is mature and stable and no use is planned for the main dune ridge. This allows the free movement of sand and other processes along Aberdeen Bay.

Appendix 6.7 and 6.8 of the Environmental Statement considers the geomorphological issues of the 'possible future golf' proposal directly to the north of Balmedie Country Park. However in the absence of any specific proposals, it was not possible to address the question of specific adverse impacts. It is considered that impacts on the recreational use, geomorphological processes or other environmental aspects of any future use here should be addressed prior to the approval of detailed proposals.

3. Social and Economic Benefits of the Proposal

Because of its adverse impact on an SSSI – a designation of national importance – the proposal could be said to be contrary to national and structure plan policy, specifically NPPGs 13 and 14 *Coastal Planning and Natural Heritage* and NEST Policies 19 *Wildlife, Landscape and Land Resources* and NEST Policy 29 *Coastal Planning*. In all of these cases however, if it can be demonstrated that the adverse impacts of the proposal on the environmental asset or coastal resource are outweighed by its social and economic benefits, then the proposal could comply with these policies. In this case, because an SSSI is a national designation, the social and economic benefits should be demonstrated to be of national importance.

Chapter 2 of the Environmental Statement outlines the need for the project. The Project is seen to support a number of objectives of the Local Economic Development Strategy 2003-10, namely

- To become a city and region of enlightenment – in terms of profile, international events and leisure facilities
- To be a world class strategic location and the leading region in the north Atlantic and Baltic seaboard
- To be a unique destination for golf, recreation, new market opportunities and world class facilities
- To promote sustainable economic growth in key sectors.

The rest of the chapter discusses further social and economic benefits of the proposal, particularly at a local and regional level. Whilst these latter benefits are potentially significant, it is considered that the Environmental Statement needs to further assess the national significance of this proposal in order to address environmental policy issues.

Nevertheless, it is believed that the project represents a significant opportunity to build an industry sector which will greatly assist with the diversification of the economy. In this respect it is one of four major golf related proposals in the area, the other three being;

- The MacKenzie Project at Hazlehead
- The Jack Nicklaus course at the Ury Estate near Stonehaven
- The Paul Lawrie course at Blairs College on the South Deeside Road.

A further issue is that the area is currently experiencing a significant shortage of hotel accommodation which is hindering economic development and reducing our ability to increase the number of conferences and conventions being brought to the city. It is considered that the hotel, conference centre and spa would enhance the attractiveness of the destination to a large number of influential high spending UK and international associations. The City Council therefore welcomes the opportunity that this proposal provides in increasing the profile of north east Scotland as a destination and in terms of the provision of high quality leisure, tourism and business facilities.

4. Transportation Issues

The Transportation Chapter of the Environmental Statement makes no reference to the serious peak time traffic congestion in Aberdeen, particularly around Bridge of Don, and whether the development would impact on this if it were to be implemented before the major infrastructure improvements planned for the area were in place. The A90 and the existing principal road network serving Bridge of Don carries high volumes of both commuter and industrial traffic and is heavily congested especially in the peak periods. The capacity of the road network in the Bridge of Don area is significantly constrained by the two crossings of the River Don connecting the extensive areas of the Bridge of Don and the hinterlands of the north to the south and the busy city centre. Continued expansion of residential and industrial land to the north of the Don, both within the City and Shire areas has had a major impact on the remaining capacity of the principal road network and its junctions. For this reason, the Finalised Local Plan 2004 does not allocate any greenfield housing land north of the River Don. This position was maintained by the Council at the Public Inquiry into the local plan where it was argued that there should be no further greenfield housing released around Bridge of Don until after the completion of the AWPR and preferably, the Third Don Crossing as well. The construction of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route will bring benefits for traffic coming to the development from the south of Aberdeen and will also improve access from the airport to the development. The Third Don Crossing is also expected to improve traffic flow in the area.

In the meantime, the road network within the Bridge of Don continues to be highly sensitive to nominal changes in traffic flows or to changes in the road network. Extensive delays over and above that normally experienced do occur on occasion, having a significant impact on journey times for public transport, commuter and commercial traffic. As congestion levels have risen, an element of peak spreading has occurred that has assisted in constraining further extensive delays on the A90 and A956. However this approach cannot in itself be considered sustainable. The development proposals may have a significant impact on the network, particularly in relation to the housing, and it can be assumed that the high profile nature of the golf course will bring special events to the area that will need to be managed. It is proposed that an audit of the Transportation Assessment is carried out on behalf of the City Council to ensure that cross boundary impacts are adequately addressed and any concerns notified to Aberdeenshire Council.

5. Other Observations

The North Sea Trail/Aberdeenshire Coastal Path runs along the beach area which will not be encroached by the proposal. The area proposed for "future golf" is immediately adjacent to Balmedie Country Park. The Country Park receives as estimated 220,000 visitors per year, (excluding local residents who walk to the park) and is a well used regional facility. Many visitors walk north onto the future golf area without realising they are outwith the Country Park. If this area is to be used as a golf course, then access to the golf greens may be denied. The Environmental Statement fails to point out however, that the Land Reform Act would allow the public to cross the golf course – for instance to reach the beach or the north sea trail. In order to mitigate potential conflicts arising from this, the Environmental Statement should show how alternative access could be provided.

The Environmental Statement says that development will have significant adverse impacts on landscape character and visual receptors. The largest proposed building will be visible for some 3km from the site. It is considered that more could be done to mitigate this by relating the scale and proportions of the buildings more directly to landform i.e. higher buildings in depressions and lower ones on higher ground.

ITEM PAGE

The Transportation Assessment considers the links to the airport which is located approximately 14.5km from the development. An exclusive shuttle bus will be provided for visitors to the development linking directly with the airport. As with a bus to the railway station it will have the Trump International Golf Ltd livery and will be an “on demand” service made available to visitors. Should the development lead to an increase in long haul tourism, particularly from Asia and North America, the extended airport runway should be able to sustain a resultant increase in air traffic.

Concerns have been expressed in the past on behalf of the Trump Organisation in respect of the effects of the Aberdeen offshore wind farm proposal on the golf development. Since then however, officers from both projects have been carrying out an ongoing and constructive dialogue to ensure that both projects can be compatible and good neighbours.

27. GOLF AND LEISURE RESORT, MENIE ESTATE, BALMEDIE, ABERDEENSHIRE – CONSULTATION. The Committee had under consideration a report by the Head of Planning and Infrastructure which advised of the receipt by Aberdeenshire Council of a major planning application involving the creation of a golf and leisure resort on 452 hectares of land forming part of the Menie Estate, Balmedie, Aberdeenshire and sought the views of the members regarding that application as part of a cross-boundary consultation exercise.

The report author described to the Committee the main elements of the proposal which would comprise two eighteen-hole links golf courses, a golf clubhouse, a golf academy, a golf course maintenance building and “caddy shack”, a short game area and driving range, a four hundred and fifty unit resort hotel, conference centre and spa, thirty-six golf villas, nine hundred and fifty holiday homes, accommodation for four hundred staff, a future residential development comprising five hundred dwellings, a spine road to serve the development and parking areas (as yet unspecified); and made reference to the accompanying Environmental Statement lodged which outlined the need for the project, contained a consideration of alternatives and a description of the proposal and detailed the assessment findings.

In his general assessment of the application proposal, the report author considered to what extent the various elements would comply with the Structure Plan, i.e. the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016; to what extent the golf courses proposed would impact on Foveran Links, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and regarded as a high quality example of the dune features that characterise that part of the north-east coast; and to what extent the development proposed would impact on the wider coastal environment, specifically the whole of Aberdeen Bay. The social and economic benefits of the proposal were also highlighted within the report both in the context of the local economic development strategy and also from the point of view of its national significance. The current shortage locally of hotel accommodation and the effect of that situation on the economic development of the region was also referred to. On the matter of the transportation issues arising, the report author referred to the fact that the Environmental Statement made no reference to the serious peak time traffic congestion in Aberdeen, particularly around Bridge of Don, and whether the development would impact on that if implemented before major infrastructure improvements planned for the area were in place. The introduction of a dedicated link to Aberdeen Airport, situated some 14.5 kilometres from the application site was, however, highlighted. Other observations contained within the report related to the fact that the North Sea Trail/Aberdeenshire Coastal Path link will not be encroached upon by the development and that as regards the Aberdeen Offshore Wind Farm proposal, constructive dialogue had apparently taken place between the project teams.

By way of concluding her report, the Head of Planning and Infrastructure recognised that generally speaking any major new golf course proposal must almost inevitably take place in the countryside outwith the urban area and have an element of built development associated with it; acknowledged that despite the mitigation measures proposed, the impact of the development outlined for the Menie Estate on the most important features of the Foveran Links SSSI remained severely adverse, with a overall net reduction in biodiversity; and acknowledged also that the development proposed may have a significant impact on the transportation network, particularly in relation to the housing element but also from the point of view that the high profile nature of the golf course would bring special events to the area which would need to be managed. On the plus side it was suggested that Aberdeen City Council should welcome the opportunity that the proposed development would provide as regards increasing the profile of North-East Scotland as a destination in terms of the provision of high quality leisure, tourism and business facilities.

The report recommended:-

(a) that members welcome the opportunity that the proposal provides in increasing the profile of North East Scotland as a destination and in terms of the provision of high quality leisure, tourism and business facilities. It is believed that the project represents a significant opportunity to build an industry sector which will greatly assist with the diversification of the economy;

(b) that in the absence of a clearer picture of the phasing of the housing, the Council do not object to the proposal at this stage but that members ask that thought is required on possible cross-boundary effects, particularly in terms of transportation requirements. The 36 golf villas are not considered to raise any strategic issues regardless of their programming so no objection is raised to these;

(c) that given the environmental issues raised in the Environmental Statement and in the absence of more complete mitigation measures, the national benefits of the proposal be more fully assessed in order to address national policy and structure plan requirements; and

(d) that members request that the transport impacts of the proposal on the city, particularly in the Bridge of Don area, be investigated as part of the Transportation Assessment (TA) and that an audit of the TA is carried out on behalf of the City Council to ensure that cross-boundary impacts are adequately addressed and any concerns notified to Aberdeenshire Council.

The Committee resolved:-

that on the basis that Aberdeen City Council "very much" welcomed the proposed development and under deletion of the reference within recommendation (b) to the fact that the Council do not object to the proposal "at this stage", the recommendations contained within the report be approved.