Ryden

Aboyne Castle Farms

Development Bid for Land at Aboyne, Aberdeenshire

November 2008

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This development bid is submitted on behalf of Aboyne Castle Farms who own the land to the north west of Aboyne, as highlighted on the attached location plan. The site extends to approximately 55.71 hectares (137.66 acres) and lies immediately adjacent to the northern settlement boundary of Aboyne, adjoining the current fh1 site.

1.2 It is considered that this site is well-placed to provide an appropriate contribution to the future land supply within the settlement and Aboyne Castle Farms respectfully request that this land be identified for residential development in the forthcoming Local Development Plan.

2.0 ABOYNE

2.1 Aboyne is a main settlement and one of the main service and employment centres within the Rural Housing Market in the Marr area of Aberdeenshire. Aboyne lies approximately 30 miles from Aberdeen, The town lies midway between Banchory and Ballater on the A93 and is a popular commuter and tourist town, with a population of over 2,200 inhabitants. The settlement is well-served with a primary

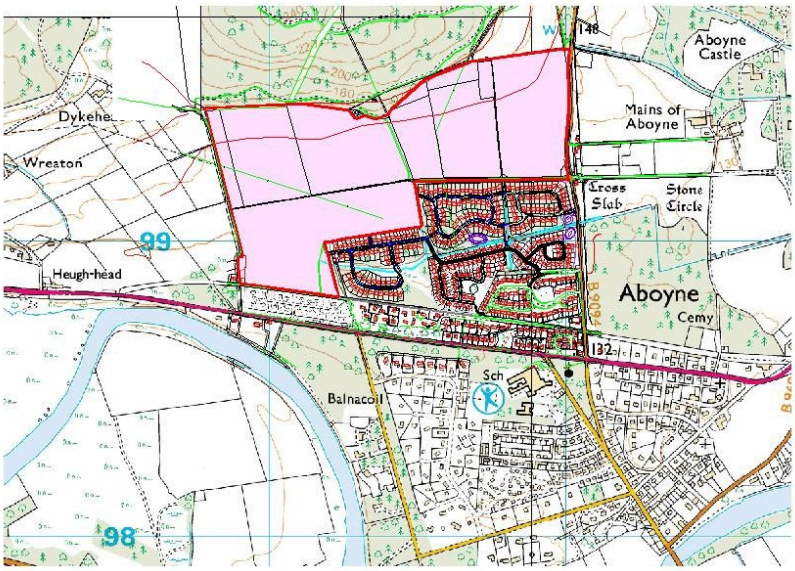

Figure 1: Location Plan

and a secondary school, health centres, hospital with maternity ward, swimming pool, sports centre and many other community facilities. Within Aboyne the main issues are the demand for new housing; protection and enhancement of the role and attractiveness of the town; and the protection and enhancement of the town's landscape setting.

2.2 During the 19th century the town of Aboyne fanned out to all points north, east and west from the semicircular slope down to the haugh where the railway station was constructed. Aboyne Castle policies inhibited development to the northwest, and the thrust has been consistently westwards. As everywhere else, development has mushroomed over the last fifty or so years, with the focus of residential development and the main, structured community facilities to the west of the town.

2.3 Until recently, like many settlements throughout Aberdeenshire, Aboyne had been developed on an uncoordinated and piecemeal basis; this is now being addressed with the allocation of a large swathe of land for residential development to the west of the town, in order to provide a comprehensive and well-planned development over a number of phases.

Surrounding buildings

2.4 The development to the south of this site comprises: a) new-build residential development; b) land both allocated for residential development in the current Local Plan; c) allocated land with permission already in place; and d) residential areas under construction. The West Lodge of Aboyne Castle Policies sits immediately east of the site, close to the proposed vehicular access junction. The traditional character of the lodge comprises a later 19th century, category B-listed, turreted building, of granite rubble, with granite courses and a slate roof, set against a wooded backdrop.

2.5 These new residential areas were designed in accordance with a development brief, written and approved by the Council. The housing densities within the area are mixed, however the scale of development is predominantly of medium density.

3.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

Site Location

3.1 The site lies to the north-west of Aboyne, to the immediate north of the current and allocated land for housing within the current Aberdeenshire Local Plan (ALP) 2006.

3.2 The site comprises approximately 55.71 hectares (137.66 acres) of uncultivated fields, used mainly for grazing.

3.3 The site is bounded to the north by mature woodland, to the east by the (B9094) Aboyne – Tarland Road, to the west by a further belt of mature trees and to the south by residential development (constructed/ under construction).

3.4 The land is south-facing and is currently accessed via a private track from the Tarland Road to the east of the site, and to the north-east corner of the fh1 housing site within the current ALP.

3.5 A belt of mature broadleaf trees, (approximately 90 – 130m in width) runs north-south through the middle of the site, bisecting the land into two distinct areas. There is a covered reservoir sitting on the northern boundary of the site.

Conservation Area

3.6 The site lies to the north-west of Aboyne, well outwith the Aboyne conservation area. However phased development of the areas allocated within the current ALP settlement strategy for Aboyne have been treated sensitively in light of the location, in line with an approved development brief.

Planning History

3.7 The site itself is in agricultural use (arable and grazing) and has no relevant planning history, with the exception of the field to the south-west of the bid site, which is currently allocated as 'EmpB' in the current Local Plan, for appropriate for Class 4 'business' uses. The

EmpB site measures approximately 0.4ha and is partially screened from the road by the land allocated fh3 in the current ALP.

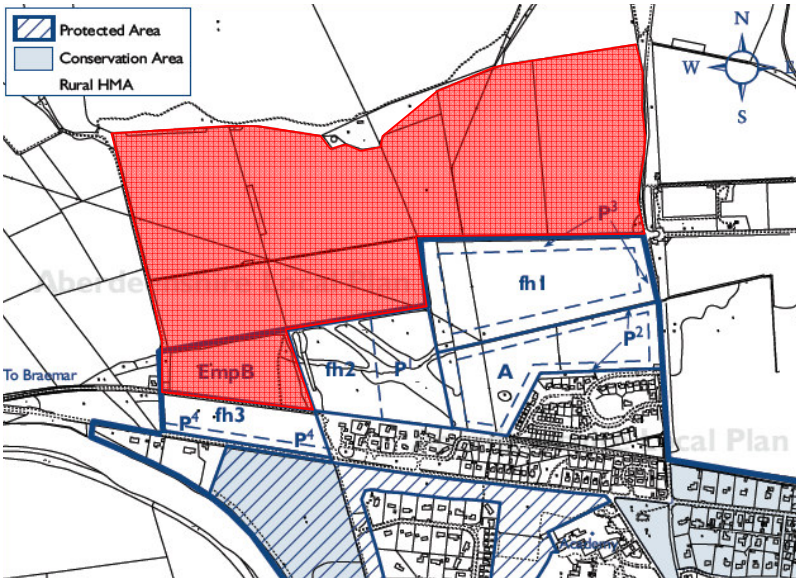

Figure 2: Extract from Aberdeenshire Local Plan 2006

3.8 Under the current Local Plan and the approved development brief for the site, development for employment uses within the EmpB site must ensure that:

- access to and from all business premises should be possible for articulated lorries without the need to reverse on the public road;
- the site should be laid out to minimise disturbance to either the fh3 or the neighbouring fh2 residential sites;
- the site is not accessed from the adjacent residential areas.

Adjacent land uses, and relevant planning proposals

3.9 The land to the immediate south is allocated within the current ALP to accommodate approximately 225 houses over the life of the plan (A: 90 houses; fh1: 80 houses; fh2: 55 houses); community facilities (P1); Class 4 employment uses (EmpB); and strategic landscaping.

Relevant History:

- APP/2008/3443 (pending approval): Phase 4 (Formerly 4A & B), Erection of 130 Dwellinghouses *valid 25/09/2008*

- APP/2006/4327 (approved): Phase 3A Erection of 46 Dwellinghouses and Garages

- APP/2006/3064 (approved) Whole Site, Tarland Road, Aboyne: Erection of 62 Residential and 50 Affordable Dwellinghouses

Topography

3.10 The site occupies a south-facing slope to the north of Aboyne. The A93 runs at approximately 140 – 145m above sea level; with the land to the north of this road, allocated for development in the current ALP, rising to 150m (NW corner) and 140m (NE corner).

3.11 The highest point, to the north of the site rises to approximately 180m above sea level, with the north-eastern corner lying at approximately 155m, and the north-western corner reaching 170m; the site drops down to 140m at the south-eastern corner and drops to approximately 140m at the south-west, adjacent to the Old Deeside Railway Line Walk.

Views to/from/over site

3.12 The vista southwards from the northern part of the site encompasses the town and the River Dee Valley. From the A93 the site is not immediately visible as the land which gradually rises north comprises residential development. This will partly screen any development further north. The northern-most part of the bid site rises at a sharper gradient; however it is considered that built development is not appropriate to this area, and that the land should be incorporated as a public amenity and recreation area, with the provision of south-facing allotments, footpath linkages and street furniture (benches) appropriate to fully enhance the vantage point for community benefit. The Aboyne – Tarland Road runs at a slightly lower level than the site, which, in conjunction with the mature trees along the boundary disturbs the views, which may otherwise have been available across the site from the road. The mature tree belts along the south of the bid site will create a sense of enclosure for the houses to the south and screen northerly views.

Microclimate – wind, sun orientation, exposure, shelter

3.13 The prevailing wind and predominant wind chill is from the south-west; the mature wooded area to the north and the tree belt to the west will provide robust shelter to the site and require to be retained. There is a large belt of mature woodland bisecting the site, which further screens the eastern part of the site from any wind chill. The site is south-facing and is ideally located to maximise passive solar gain capture.

Public Utilities

3.14 Connection to the adjacent public water supply is available; alongside connections to the foul drainage systems are available within the vicinity.

3.15 An overhead power line runs NW – SE through the western field of the bid site, with another crossing the top of the eastern field (where no development is proposed) and running southwards alongside the woodland. These power lines run through the sites of the existing and approved housing. These technical issues are not insurmountable constraints and would be addressed at the time of detailed design of the site.

Public Services

3.16 As discussed in 2.1 above, Aboyne benefits from a range of public services, including primary school and a secondary school, town hall, library, community centre, health centre, hospital, swimming pool, sports centre and many other community facilities. The more structured community facilities (i.e. schools, library, community centre, swimming pool, sports centre) are located to the west of the town; the retail and commercial hub is predominantly located around Station Square, approximately 750m from the centre of this site, in addition to the Victoria Hall, tennis courts and bowling green at the centre of Aboyne; situated to the east of the town lies health centre, hospital, and informal recreation and amenity walks and cycle ways.

3.17 Pedestrian linkages through the residential area to the south of the site, to the old Deeside Railway line, Aboyne Castle Policies and through to the heart of the town are an important component of the indicative Masterplan; however the potential for the provision of localised,

complimentary facilities – to meet an identified demand within Aboyne has also been explored.

Public Transport

3.18 Aboyne is incorporated within over 9 regular bus routes between Aberdeen, Banchory, Ballater and the surrounding towns. The principal route through Aboyne is the A93, which runs through the centre of the town and is easily accessible, with several routes running along the east of the site between Tarland and Aboyne. The phased development of sites A, fh1 and fh2 allow for bus services to be routed through the development, which will provide public transport stops in close proximity of this site. Discussions with bus operators and Aberdeenshire Council Transportation & Infrastructure Service have commenced in this regard.

4.0 SCOTTISH PLANNING POLICY

4.1 Scottish Planning Policy 1: The Planning System advises that the aim of the planning system is to ensure that development and changes in land use occur in suitable locations and are sustainable. Further to this, the planning system should feature as part of an integrated approach to social justice by giving a high priority to accessibility when considering locations for jobs, homes, shops, leisure and other community facilities.

4.2 SPP3: Planning for Homes was revised in 2008 to take account of the difficulties in delivering housing land in Scotland. It states that a range of factors have contributed to house price inflation and growing divergence between incomes and house prices and there has been no corresponding increase in the supply of new housing in response to increases in both demand and cost. Difficulties in bringing forward sufficient land for new housing was identified as one of the most significant obstacles to the delivery of new housing. To combat this, the Scottish Government is committed to the goal of raising the rate of house building to 35,000 new houses a year by the middle of the next decade. Planning has a central role in meeting this goal through the

identification of sufficient land to support an increased supply of the right homes in the right places.

4.3 Where brownfield and infill sites cannot meet the full range of housing requirements, it may be necessary to release Greenfield land next to built up areas. Meeting housing requirements through extensions to existing towns and villages has a number of advantages, including the reduction of servicing costs. New housing can also benefit existing communities by helping to sustain local schools, shops and services.

4.4 SPP17: Planning for Transport highlights that the aim of the planning system is to support and accommodate new investment and development in locations accessible by a range of means of transport and which seek to minimise the impact on existing transport networks and the environment. SPP17 seeks to ensure that new developments of significant travel-generating uses are located in areas where access to infrastructure is within than 400 metres for pedestrian accessibility. PAN75 highlights that community facilities and services should lie within a threshold of 1,600m by walking or cycling.

5.0 CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 The current development plan for the area comprises North East Scotland Together (NEST), the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001 – 2016 which was approved by Scottish Ministers in December 2001, and the Aberdeenshire Local Plan which was adopted in June 2006.

5.2 Within the development plan, a hierarchy of settlement locations exist. Aboyne is a ‘main settlement’. Main settlements act as a main focal point for most new development in Aberdeenshire, in order to encourage sustainable development through the consolidation of land uses and the location of housing, services, facilities and jobs closer together and maximise the use of existing physical and service infrastructure.

5.3 Structure Plan Policy 8: Approved Housing Allocations January 2000 to December 2005 indicates that in the Rural Housing Market Area, the Local Plan should identify land for 90 dwellings in Aboyne; policy 9: Housing Allocations: January 2006 to December 2010, requires that land for 150 homes in Aboyne should be identified. This is in addition to an identified effective housing land supply of land for 64 homes and a constrained site for 15.

5.4 Current development opportunities in Aboyne, as contained in the Aberdeenshire Local Plan, consist of sites: eh1, suitable for around 14 houses; eh2, suitable for around 20 houses; site A, suitable for around 90 houses; and site EmpB is suitable for uses under Class 4, business, of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes)(Scotland) Order 1997. Allocations for development between 2006 – 2010 consist of sites: fh1, suitable for around 80 homes; fh2, suitable for around 55 homes; and fh3, suitable for around 15 homes. Demand for housing in Aboyne is such that all of these housing allocations have been developed or are programmed for development within the current plan period.

6.0 DRAFT STRUCTURE PLAN

6.1 The Draft Structure Plan identifies a requirement for around 72,000 dwellings within the Structure Plan area over the next 20-25 year period. It also identifies three strategic growth areas (SGAs) which will be the main focus for development in the area up to 2030. Although these areas will carry out different roles, they can be expected to account for around 75% to 80% of the growth over the next 20 years or more. Around half of new development is likely to be located in Aberdeen City, with significant development expected to take place in the Huntly to Laurencekirk corridors and the Aberdeen to Peterhead corridor.

6.2 Outwith the SGAs however, there is little mention of how the housing figures are to be distributed. In particular, the housing allocation within the Rural Housing Market Area (RHMA) amounts to 4,400 houses between 2007 and 2010; 4,000 houses between 2017 and 2023 ; and

4,000 houses for the period 2024 to 2030. Presently, the above noted figures for the RHMA represent approximately 34% of the projected house building activity in Aberdeenshire over the next 24 years and concern is expressed that they have only been allocated to fall 'somewhere' within the RHMA, with the exception of the SGA areas around Laurencekirk, Peterhead and Huntly.

6.3 Representations to the draft Structure Plan are currently under consideration and it has been strongly suggested that the majority of the RHMA housing allocation should be directed towards the 'main settlements' within the RHMA, in order to secure confidence for developers and other bodies to commit to the required levels of infrastructure investment to support the future growth in these areas.

6.4 Settlements in the Rural Housing Market Area are comparatively remote from the centralised services of Aberdeen City, it is therefore particularly important to focus development towards the larger settlements and to those with the physical and community infrastructure that can sustain growth, such as Aboyne; thus ensuring those communities have the facilities to serve them well in the future. Aboyne is well-placed to accommodate future growth, there is an abundance of community facilities within the settlement and it is well-served by infrastructure and related services, with potential to further expand its current provision.

6.5 Directing housing towards the main settlements within the RHMA is not only sustainable in terms of water, sewerage and transport infrastructure, but an increased critical mass also creates the confidence required to foster investment in public services and public transport in these areas. The proximity to the services of these main settlements allows for a reduction in journeys by private car, as recognised by SPP17 and other recent Scottish Government guidance.

Forthcoming Local Development Plan

6.6 A report entitled 'Initial Approach to Be Taken for Settlements in a Future Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan', by Aberdeenshire Council's Head of Planning Policy and Environment, was discussed at the meeting of the Marr Area Committee on 4th November 2008. The

recommendations within the report were a result of discussions of the Planning Policy and Procedure Member / Officer Working Group (PPPMOWG). It was recommended that Aboyne be recognised as a town to which allocations for development should be directed and that the settlement was an affordable housing priority area.

7.0 INDICATIVE MASTERPLAN

7.1 The Masterplan comprises a range of uses to create a development which successfully encompasses all sectors of the community creating a mixed-tenure, mixed use development which caters for all age ranges, and incorporates a full range of suitable house-types and sizes. The mix of uses suggested for the site comprise residential, potential school, associated community facilities, mixed use commercial core, open amenity and recreation space, strategic landscaping - are discussed in detail below. The Masterplan effectively 'swaps' the site allocated for employment land in the current ALP (EmpB) for residential development, more appropriate to the location, and redistributes the use within a mixed use core, for the provision of complimentary commercial uses, appropriate to a residential area, as discussed in 7.21.

Figure 3: Indicative Masterplan

7.2 This site to the north-west of Aboyne marks the gateway into the town from the north and as such its development must be designed to respect the location, the natural landscaping and wooded character and the topography. This Local Plan bid incorporates an indicative Masterplan, illustrating how development of the site for residential and commercial and community purposes can be successfully achieved, whilst preserving the character of the town. The mature wooded areas have been retained as an important part of the landscape character and to provide effective shelter from the prevailing winds. This provides an attractive landscaped backdrop and enhances the amenity of the site. Pedestrian linkages are shown through these areas to maximise their potential for sensitive amenity use. The location of any paths will be dictated following a survey of the condition of the trees.

7.3 The eventual design and layout of the site would require careful attention to ensure that development understood and sensitively related to the town's historic townscape and landscape. A number of key design principles from the development of the allocated residential land to the south of this site should be carried forward in order to secure well-planned and organic growth of the town:

In the case of the specific site the characteristics that would require to be reflected in the layout are:

- retention of as much of the existing woodland around the site as possible and reinforcement of this by new planting elsewhere;
- making the most of the views of the surrounding countryside;
- respect for the site's position at the northern entrance to Aboyne.
- linkage of the site to the rest of the town by a network of "green corridor" footpaths, connecting to the old Deeside Railway Line, but also the cycle and walkways within the more recent development to the south of the site, as well with the open space and community areas which form the heart of the proposed development;
- it is essential that future development is designed to minimise, and/or mitigate adverse visual impacts. Appropriate design will require that developers identify all the site's environmental

constraints and opportunities prior to layout design of buildings and infrastructure.

- Development of the site should be subject to a full tree survey, in order to identify, categorise and record the dimensions and the condition of each tree on site. The information that the tree survey produces should form the basis of the development layout design and decision-making process.
- The planting proposed for all development areas should be based on the list of native planting and be appropriate to the character of the area. Birch and pine feature naturally throughout the area and should have a significant presence in future development. Primacy should be given to native species in the public spaces and structure planting of future development in this area.
- The wooded natural character of the west end of Aboyne will be maintained and enhanced.
- All surface water should be disposed of using sustainable urban drainage systems.

Layout

7.4 Principal vehicular access to the site is envisaged from the Tarland road, which would be upgraded to reflect the status of the junction and the increased use of the road. The Traffic Assessment carried out for the current development to the south of this site had demonstrated that there is capacity available for further phases of development; and studies will be undertaken to identify the capacity of all roads, accesses and junctions would require to be assessed and upgraded as identified, in line with the scale of development that would be accommodated.

7.5 Formal and informal open space is to be provided within the development. Strategically placed cycle and pedestrian linkages will formalise desire lines and promote use of public open space.

Access and circulation

7.6 The indicative layout of the site utilises natural and existing features to provide character between the proposed residential areas, with pedestrian linkage throughout the site and into the neighbouring developments to the south. The layout is pedestrian and cycle friendly,

but allows for school and public transport routes to connect to this part of the town.

Connection

7.7 The views south over the river valley from above the 170m contour line are spectacular and public access through landscaped pedestrian footways should be incorporated and safeguarded as a community asset and linked with the community woodland and through to the Old Deeside Railway line and through to the town centre.

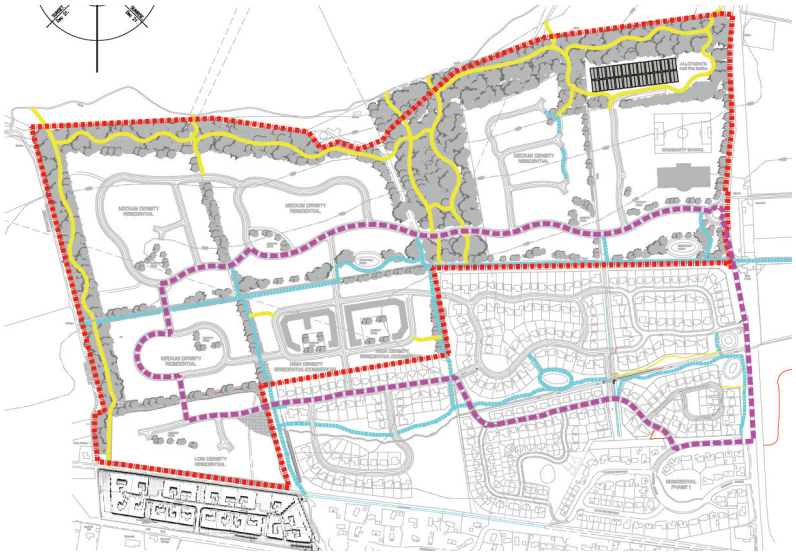

Figure 4: Access and Circulation Diagram

7.8 Aboyne Castle Policies lie across the Tarland Road, along the eastern boundary of the site. These grounds feature within the core path and local cycle networks, with linkages through the castle policies to connect with the town.

Play space/recreational space

7.9 Open space within the site is an important characteristic. The fundamental principle underlying the masterplan layout of this site is to promote an integrated community. In addition to formalised areas of open space provided, the land to the north of the site rises and should not be developed beyond the 170m contour line, at the very maximum.

7.10 Minimal intervention within this area should include a management and maintenance scheme for the area and informal pedestrian linkages and benches.

Bus stops and routes, taxi stops, cycle routes

7.11 Cycle routes are indicated throughout the Masterplan, in order to allow safe pedestrian and cycle connectivity throughout the development, the Old Deeside Railway Line and with the town. The indicative road layout through the site would be developed to the required specification to allow the re-routing of bus services through the site. Bus stops shall be located at appropriate points throughout the site, in accordance with PAN75, development should not be located further than 400m from a bus stop.

Servicing arrangements

7.12 The main servicing requirements will be to supply the proposed school to the east of the site. The location of the school adjacent to the Tarland Road removes any requirement for commercial vehicles to enter the residential area to access the school. The scale of commercial uses that would operate from the mixed use core would be restricted to uses which are appropriate to a residential area, such as class 4 business use; which would be of a scale to compliment the surrounding area.

Pedestrian access

7.13 The layout of the site will incorporate initiatives including 'safe routes to school' and 'secured by design' and other measures which promote sustainable transport and community well-being.

7.14 Pedestrian access to and from the site will predominantly comprise routes to school and services within the town centre; routes for dog-walking and informal recreation. As such, the Masterplan acknowledges the desire lines which facilitate these uses and formalises such linkages. The wooded area to the north of the site, rising up Court Hill, is in separate ownership and lies outwith the site; the land comprises semi-mature plantation conifers; the area is used for informal recreation and dog-walking. The indicative Masterplan

provides a substantial belt of strategic landscaping along the north of the site, which would comprise a belt of mature trees and associated indigenous planting, with footpaths throughout the length of the belt.

Residential

7.15 The development will be masterplanned to encompass all sectors of the community creating a mixed-tenure, development which caters for all age ranges, and incorporates a full range of suitable house-types and sizes. Whilst indicative at this stage, the Masterplan recognises the importance of the incorporation of the guidance set out within PAN78 (Inclusive Design).

Phasing

7.16 The development of the residential areas is anticipated to occur at a sustainable rate of approximately 20 dwellings per annum, over the next 25 years. Indicative phasing is illustrated on the Masterplan, to occur in sustainable phases and differing densities to ensure a full and varied development at each stage. For the purposes of the Masterplan, indicative phasing is based upon the draft Structure Plan phases: Phase 1 (2008 – 2016) comprises 1a - a low-density residential area on the previous EmpB site to the south-western corner, 1b - high density mixed commercial/ residential use and 1c - a medium density residential phase; phase 2 (2017 – 2023) comprises 2a - the second phase of the high density mixed use core, 2b – a development of medium density residential, community school and associated community facilities and allotments to the north-east of the site; phase 3 (2024 – 2030) comprises two phases of medium density residential development to the north-west of the site.

Community School

7.17 It is acknowledged that Aboyne Primary is nearing capacity, with Aboyne Academy exceeding its capacity; therefore the location of a community school within the development, adjacent to the Tarland Road is suggested in order to relieve the pressure at the existing facilities.

	ACTUAL							FORECAST								
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
PK01 **ABOYNE**																
PI Input							27	25	26							
Pupils/Hhld	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40
Housing	16	23	17	0	0	5	22	51	60	56	47	27	10	10	5	0
Parents Charter	-1	-5	-4	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
P I	31	35	37	32	37	34	30	28	30	34	37	38	36	36	36	36
P II	30	30	37	38	32	37	35	32	31	33	37	38	38	36	36	36
P III	30	34	32	38	37	31	34	37	35	34	36	38	39	38	37	36
P IV	50	30	39	31	38	40	27	35	39	37	36	37	38	39	39	37
P V	30	42	30	40	36	42	36	28	38	41	39	37	37	39	39	39
P VI	37	32	45	31	39	38	41	37	30	39	42	39	37	37	39	39
P VII	52	33	35	46	36	40	36	42	39	32	41	43	39	37	37	39
Total Roll	260	236	255	256	255	262	239	239	242	250	267	270	264	262	262	261
Total Capacity	205	205	270	270	270	270										
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	55	31	-15	-14	-15	-8										
(Tot Roll/Tot Cap)%	127%	115%	94%	95%	94%	97%										

Figure 5: Aboyne Primary School Roll Forecast

SK01 ABOYNE ACADEMY

Sec Class/Yr Distribution Factor		Staying on Ratio	
S I	0.25	S IV/V	0.75
S II	0.25	S V/VI	0.60
S III	0.25		
S IV	0.25		

	ACTUAL							FORECAST								
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
S I-IV Pupils/Hhld	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20
Housing	57	59	32	14	1	5	46	94	91	89	61	39	15	14	5	0
Parents Charter	-17	-1	-16	-20	-19	-7	-8	-11	-11	-11	-11	-11	-11	-11	-11	-11
S I	122	147	119	116	127	125	126	117	134	123	122	113	127	107	112	115
S II	126	115	149	120	116	128	121	130	121	138	127	125	119	131	111	114
S III	124	119	115	151	122	117	126	125	134	126	142	130	131	122	136	113
S IV	115	119	125	119	149	120	116	130	129	139	130	146	136	135	127	139
S V	68	75	99	107	92	109	87	87	97	97	104	97	109	102	101	95
S VI	47	59	37	57	63	53	66	52	52	58	58	62	58	66	61	61
Total Roll	602	634	644	670	669	652	642	640	668	681	682	674	681	663	648	638
Total Capacity	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610	610
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	-8	24	34	60	59	42	32	30	58	71	72	64	71	53	38	28
(Tot Roll/Tot Cap)%	99%	104%	106%	110%	110%	107%	105%	105%	109%	112%	112%	111%	112%	109%	106%	105%

Figure 6: Aboyne Academy School Roll Forecast

7.18 The provision of land for the accommodation of a new two-stream primary school is mooted within the bid site. This would allow for expansion of Aboyne Academy within its current site to accommodate current and future capacity issues. Alternatively a second single-

stream primary school could be accommodated within the site, to cater for the needs of the residents to the west of Aboyne.

Community Uses

7.19 Community facilities, of a scale to accommodate local requirements without compromising the current facilities, have been suggested and land to provide these alongside the community school is identified within the indicative masterplan.

7.20 The aim of the development would be to provide a mix of uses and house-types within the area, in order to cater for all generations of the population, from young couples and families, to the provision of accommodation for the over 50s, to reflect the inclination for down-sizing accommodation within the same settlement. As such, community facilities appropriate to the location should be identified in line with consultation from the community, to ensure that the developments reflect the desires of the local residents.

7.21 Community facilities within the indicative masterplan have been located to be easily accessible from the spine road through the development, with easy access from the development to the south and to the centre of Aboyne, which will remain the main heart of the community.

Commercial Uses

7.22 The land to the south-west of the bid site is identified as EmpB in the current Local Plan. This land is currently allocated for class 4 uses, including office use, which could be carried out within a residential area without disturbance to the residential amenity. The site, to the west of Aboyne is disconnected from the main commercial activity in the town centre, and within the plan period, the site generated no interest for such uses. As a settlement organically expands, it is prudent to reserve land to accommodate future uses, which are related to the surrounding needs and land uses. Within the southern part of the site, a zone is proposed for high density mixed use development. Again, the uses envisaged could be class 4 office, type uses, or local services to serve the immediate residents, which complement, rather than compete with the facilities of the town centre. Providing a mix of uses

and tenures within the site allows for the potential commercial/ community uses to be fully integrated with the surrounding development and provide a community hub/ mixed use core. These uses are shown developed around two squares of open space, providing maximum solar gain capture for the residents and buildings, and informal amenity and recreation space.

Day, night, seasonal variation of use

7.23 Land has been identified for the potential location of a community school. This site may incorporate a two-stream primary school and associated facilities. This development would be utilised by community groups in the evening and at weekends. Its location in the heart of the development ensures that vibrancy and connectivity are key principles to the design and layout of the area.

7.24 The development is intended to cater for a range of uses, including: residential, community, educational and class 4 business uses. Bad neighbour, class 5 and 6 uses are not appropriate to this location. Any development will be designed in accordance with 'Secured by Design' guidelines.

Landscape Character

7.25 The northern part of the site comprises uncultivated grazing land, with arable land to the south. A wide belt of mature woodland runs north-south, bisecting the two northern fields within the site; otherwise the sites are relatively bare of mature trees and landscaping. There are a number of mature trees along the boundaries of the site, which would be retained.

7.26 The land slopes northwards, with an increasing gradient to the north-east of the land. For this reason there may be a requirement for ground modelling to the east of the site, adjacent to the Tarland Road, in order to secure visibility and access which meets Aberdeenshire Transportation & Infrastructure standard. Where possible, the development will respect the natural contours of the site, exploiting opportunities to maximise solar gain.

7.27 There are no specific focal points within the site, excepting the woodland which bisects the northern fields; land to the northern limits of the site does rise steeply, with far-ranging views south, over the Dee valley. For this reason, land to the eastern part of the site should not be developed beyond the 170m contour line and this area should be incorporated as community woodland, to be the subject of a tree survey which will identify areas for public footpaths and an appropriate maintenance regime.

Hard landscaping

7.28 While the Masterplan accompanying this bid is indicative, street furniture would be located in conjunction with recognised pedestrian routes, bus stops, public open space/ scenic areas. Street furniture will require to be of sufficient quality to withstand the local climate.

7.29 As the development is intended to cater for varying ages/ sectors of the community, the incorporation of street furniture at the above locations will promote the use of pedestrian linkages and open space, providing areas for rest and appreciation of the wider area.

Community Woodland/ Nature Conservation

7.30 The mature woodland which bisects the two northern fields comprises many mature, native trees. It is intended that this area be protected for community use and strategic landscaping. Minimal intervention within this area is envisaged, with a management and maintenance schedule identified for the ongoing preservation of the area.

7.31 A survey of the area at the time of application will identify any sparse areas and location of dead/dying trees, which may be areas suitable for pedestrian/cycle linkages through the area, in order to increase the connectivity within the site and appreciation of the area. For the purposes of this bid however this has not yet been undertaken.

8.0 JUSTIFICATION

8.1 Settlements in the Rural Housing Market Area of Aberdeenshire are comparatively remote from the centralised services of Aberdeen City, it

is therefore particularly important to focus development towards the larger settlements and to those with the physical and community infrastructure that can sustain growth, such as Aboyne; thus ensuring those communities have the facilities to well serve them in the future. Aboyne is well-placed to accommodate future growth, there is an abundance of community facilities within the settlement and it is well-served by infrastructure and related services, with potential to further expand its current provision.

8.2 Directing housing towards the main settlements within the RHMA is not only sustainable in terms of water, sewerage and transport infrastructure, but an increased critical mass also creates the confidence required to foster investment in public services and public transport investment in these areas and the proximity to the services of these main settlements allows for a reduction in journeys by private car, as recognised by recent Scottish Government guidance.

8.3 Aboyne Academy is however currently overcapacity and Aboyne Primary is predicted to reach its capacity limit in 2012. Completion rates for house building in Aboyne since 2003 have averaged at 11 units per annum[1]; this depressed level of activity bears no reflection on local market demand, which remains consistently high; but reflects the delays experienced in securing the timely release of the allocated housing land within the settlement, as a result of the protracted Aberdeenshire Local Plan Inquiry process.

8.4 Prior to the aforementioned PLI, completion rates for new housing within Aboyne averaged at 23 units per annum for the period 2000 to 2003; Aberdeenshire Council's Draft Housing Land Audit 2008 projects completion rates for the next 5 years to average at 47 units per annum, reflecting a more accurate picture of local market demand. These dwellings will contribute on average 0.2 secondary school pupils per household and 0.4 primary school pupils per household; and while housing which is identified in the current Local Plan is accounted for in school roll projections, the provision of community infrastructure in Aboyne will require to respond to this growth.

8.5 In sustainability terms, the above site is already serviced, with connectivity to the existing road and pedestrian/ cycle networks and public infrastructure readily available. The heart of the site is under a kilometre to the secondary and existing primary school, and the retail facilities at Station square are approximately 1.5km – all within the recommended walking distances specified within PAN75.

8.6 The development suggested within the indicative Masterplan has the capacity to accommodate a sustainable level of organic growth over the next 25 years and recognises the requirement for housing and community facilities to cater for an enhanced population. Organic growth is necessary to ensure appropriate levels o service provision s directed towards main settlements. Aberdeenshire has an ageing population and without settlement growth the population will stagnate and services will become unsustainable. Key settlements such as Aboyne will not cease to grow in a sustainable and organic manner; and given the existing requirements for increased capacity at Aboyne Academy and primary, securing a viable housing strategy for the town enables levels of developer contribution to be assessed and address the future needs of the settlement.

8.7 Aboyne is identified as an affordable housing priority area within the recent 'Initial Approach to Be Taken for Settlements in a Future Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan' report, discussed in 6.6 above. The bid site to the west of Tarland Road is well-placed to sustainably accommodate a proportion of this demand, in line with the Local Plan requirements for the settlement.

8.8 Land to the west of Aboyne is sustainable in terms of landscape containment to the north and west, and in terms of connectivity to the centre of the town and to existing residential areas. Development of the land to the south and south-east has been explored but is susceptible to flooding from the River Dee. To the south-west, the settlement is contained by the River Dee, which forms a defensible boundary to this extent. To the north, small-scale growth of the town is

[1] Source: Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council Housing Land Audit 2008

possible; however this is constrained by the golf course and the designed landscape of Aboyne Castle policies.

8.9 The re-designation of the EmpB land for residential uses and the incorporation of commercial uses within a mixed use core addresses the isolation of the previous site. Uses which could be incorporated could encompass a wider range of uses, from classes 1-4, to serve local need and compliment the main facilities within the town centre. This is more inclusive and sustainable than promoting class 4 uses on a site with poor access, on the edge of the settlement. Throughout the lifetime of the current plan only one speculative enquiry into the site has been made and no proposals for development have come forward.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

9.1 It is seen as necessary for the levels of housing allocated to the RHMA by the Structure Plan to be distributed amongst the main settlements, such as Aboyne, which are the main service centres for their rural hinterland. Within the Local Development Plan, the scale of housing allocations to the main settlements should recognise the requirement for levels of housing to generate developer contributions and population which enable the enhancement of existing or the provision of new infrastructure and service provision to meet the needs of existing and future residents, whilst retaining the character of these areas.

9.2 The above land to the north-west of Aboyne is exemplary in terms of being able to deliver a long-term, phased and sustainable development, with good proximity to the centre of the town. The site is ideally placed to maximise passive solar gain capture and has the ability to provide a range of complimentary community facilities which will enable the sustainable and organic growth of this main settlement; whilst alleviating pressure on the existing community facilities and services, and providing new opportunities as identified by the community.

9.3 The land to the north-west of Aboyne has the ability to deliver a long-term, bespoke development which is sensitive to the location of the site and provides an area to absorb the organic growth of the community; catering to a range of sectors of the local population, from first-time buyers who do not want to move away from the area, to families and meets the needs of an ageing population that wishes to down-size, whilst remaining connected to the heart of their community.

9.4 In light of the above, it is respectfully requested that the above site to the north-west of Aboyne be allocated to provide residential development with associated community facilities, to meet the stated requirements of the local community, with a capacity for 20 houses per annum over the next 25 years, in line with the development periods set out within the draft Structure Plan.