

**Development Brief  
For Residential Development and Reinstatement  
of Castle Gardens & Woodland at  
Ellon Castle**

**April 2004**

**Taylor Design Services, With  
Aberdeenshire Council**

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## **1.0 Purpose of Development Brief**

- 1.01 The purpose of this brief is to (a) provide guidance to developers, and (b) help set a framework for the future development of land around Ellon Castle, including the proposed reinstatement of the Castle Gardens and community woodland within this central area of Ellon.
- 1.02 It is also the aim of the brief to encourage new development that will create an attractive and high quality environment that acknowledges and enhances the existing fabric and context of Ellon Castle and its former policies.

### **Policy Context**

- 1.03 The Development Plan consists of the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001 to 2016 (NEST) and the Gordon District Local Plan 1989.
- 1.04 The latter document is now significantly out of date and superseded by two Structure Plans, and so more relevant local policy guidance is currently available in the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan, August 2002, which is still subject to a forthcoming Local Plan Inquiry.
- 1.05 Relevant policy guidance within the NEST Structure Plan includes Housing Policy 7 (5 year effective housing land supply), Policy 8 (housing allocations January 2000 to December 2005), Policy 11 (general housing considerations), Policy 13 (developer contributions), Policy 16 (sport and recreation facilities), Policy 17 (countryside and open space access), Policy 20 (built heritage and archaeology), Policy 21 (design), Policy 22 (water management), Policy 31 (connecting communities within the north east) and Policy 6 (tourism).
- 1.06 Within the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan, 2002 the subject sites are identified as one of three project areas under Site P1 (improved public access) whilst it is considered that around 25 houses would be suitable under Site ch2. The woodland areas are identified as a Protected Area.
- 1.07 It is recommended that appropriate professional advice is sought on the interpretation and weight to be accorded to the various policies referred to above, together with any other relevant material considerations such as the terms of this Planning Brief and any particular circumstances that apply at the time of a planning application.

## **2.0 Site Analysis**

### **Setting/Location**

- 2.01 The Area to which this brief relates is shown on the plan in Appendix 1. This includes an area identified for housing and improved public access and is one of three project areas in Ellon as identified in the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan, 2002.
- 2.02 Whilst Ellon Castle itself is now in private ownership and outwith the area to which this brief specifically relates, the site includes the remains of the original Ellon Castle, the Castle Gardens that were originally laid out in a formal manner, together with the woodland and former grazing areas associated with the former castle grounds.
- 2.03 The bulk of the site is very well contained and screened by existing trees and vegetation. However, the central area (marked P1 in the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan) is more visible from longer distance views, particularly from the south when viewed from the main access road into Ellon Town Centre. The southwest corner (cross-hatched on the site plan at appendix 1) in particular may therefore require special treatment and consideration in any site appraisal.

### **Land Form**

- 2.04 The site slopes in a southerly direction and is generally uniform in its fall.

### **Wind Chill**

- 2.05 The prevailing wind is from the south west with the coldest winds coming from the East.

### **Trees, Hedges & Boundaries**

- 2.06 The site is contained on all sides by existing woodland areas. The woodland setting to the site is considered to be of importance, and the woodland areas surrounding the site are protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

### **Archaeology**

- 2.07 The area within Ellon Castle policies may contain a number of sites of archaeological interest. No recent investigations have taken place and the opportunity should be taken to conduct such examinations prior to any development commencing. The advice of the Council's archaeological service should be sought at the earliest opportunity.

### **Urban Form**

- 2.08 The site lies just to the north of the existing town centre in a transition zone between more traditional compact town centre development to the south, and more modern housing estate developments to the north and east. The grounds of Ellon

Academy and the swimming pool are located to the south west. Taken in the context of the surrounding woodland areas associated with the former Ellon Castle gardens and grounds, the subject site is conducive to high quality, low density development with associated access to the community woodlands.

### **Density**

- 2.09 The density of residential development in the near vicinity varies but is generally low to medium.

### **Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas**

- 2.10 Ellon Castle and associated Castle gardens are subject to a number of listings, as referred to on the map and schedule of listings at Appendix 2. Full details are available from Aberdeenshire Council Planning Department. The site is not within a Conservation Area.

### **Hazards**

- 2.11 There are no known hazards affecting the site such as contamination, noise or power lines.

### **Local Facilities and Bus Services**

- 2.12 A community centre abuts the eastern boundary of the site at Craigievar Crescent. Ellon Academy and community centre/swimming pool is located immediately to the south-west of the site. Bus services are available via Golf Road to the west and the Woodlands Rise and Craigievar developments to the north and east. Ellon Town Centre, with a full range of local services and shops, is located approximately 10 minutes walk to the south of the site.

### **Rights of Way and Pedestrian Desire Lines**

- 2.13 Existing rights of way are identified on the plan in Appendix 1. No other pedestrian desire lines exist.

### **Water Supply, Public Drainage and Watercourses**

- 2.14 There is a water supply available from the adjoining Woodlands Rise and Craigievar Developments to the North and East. Foul sewer connections are also available here. Discharges from surface water sewage systems will require the consent of SEPA. Surface water disposal will need to be disposed of separately given current constraints however, developers should contact SEPA and the Council's Flood Prevention Team to discuss their requirements.
- 2.15 Whilst it is not considered likely to be an issue, SEPA should also be contacted to confirm the potential for any flooding, and where burns or wetland areas exist their potential for inclusion within any development proposal should be considered.

### **Electricity/Gas/Renewable Energy**

- 2.16 Electrical supply and gas is available from the Woodlands Rise and Craigievar developments to the north and east. There are no known renewable energy supplies available.

### **Land Ownership**

- 2.17 The land is currently in private ownership although it is anticipated that a Trust/company/some such arrangement will be set up to manage the proposed development including the re-instatement of Ellon Castle Gardens and the future maintenance of the former policies and woodland areas. It is anticipated that the Trust/company might include representatives from Aberdeenshire Council, the Community Council and other influential parties.

## **3.0 Site Requirements**

### **General**

- 3.01 The Council wishes to encourage a sensitive development on the site in a way which enhances the quality of the environment. A statement indicating how the developer feels sensitive development can be achieved should be included within any supporting statement submitted with a planning application.

### **Energy Efficiency/Environmental Friendliness**

- 3.02 Any new development in general should meet or exceed current insulation standards and energy conserving methods. The aim is to ensure development proposals are environmentally friendly and sustainable. These principles are carried forward in current work on development and sustainability indicators in the form of the Index 21 project, with new emphasis on “scoring” proposed projects and determining their sustainability. There are six basic principles which prospective developers must consider:

- Respect for the site.
- Working with the climate.
- Energy efficiency.
- Respect for users.
- Optimising resources.
- The Complete Approach.

These six elements are described in detail in the document “ Development within Nature” published by the former Gordon District Council and Robert Gordon University.

### **Response to Climate**

- 3.03 There are two main issues when considering how a site should respond to the climate, these are:
- Solar considerations: both the ch2 site and the P1 site occupy south facing slopes and can therefore take advantage of any available solar radiation in proposed buildings. The height of trees surrounding both sites will reduce the opportunities in certain areas of the site.
  - Wind considerations: the presence or absence of wind may have a greater impact than solar gain in the heating of buildings, particularly during colder months. These sites will benefit from the surrounding mature woodland.

### **Energy Efficiency**

- 3.04 Any development will be encouraged to maximise energy conservation within the structure of the buildings through insulation and minimisation of energy use, and also in efficiency at heating and ventilation systems.

### **Resource Efficiency**

- 3.05 New housing should be designed to have shared vehicular and pedestrian traffic and this must be minimised to what is necessary, to minimise construction. The use of energy efficient, low maintenance and sustainable materials will be encouraged wherever practicable.

### **Social Sustainability**

- 3.06 The sites are located close to the centre of Ellon, the Health Centre and Academy. It is close to employment opportunities at Balmacassie, minimising the need for travel between work and home. It has opportunities for being an attractive place for living and visiting alike.

### **Bio-Diversity**

- 3.07 The considerable areas of existing and proposed new landscaping will encourage a range of flora and fauna. These areas will also provide shelterbelts thus further encouraging bio-diversity in adjacent spaces. The opportunity should be taken to enhance the existing situation with new habitat creation, taking account of the change in land use and in response to climate considerations such as wind and solar influences and the requirements/expectations of public access.

### **Access**

- 3.08 Vehicle access to the site is to be taken from Woodlands Edge. A secondary emergency access may be taken across land in the ownership of Aberdeenshire Council adjacent to the Community Centre and into Craigievar Crescent. The emergency access will be formed with bollards allowing everyday pedestrian and cycle use, but restricting vehicles to emergency use only. It should be laid out in grasscrete to ensure sensitivity with the adjacent woodland.
- 3.09 Existing footpath links are shown on the attached plans. These should be continued throughout the site, with these important links being upgraded to tarmac finish with street lighting. The routes of upgraded links will be carefully considered to minimise loss of, and damage to trees. The important links are (1) Ellon Academy – Woodlands Edge, (2) Ellon Academy – Castle Park housing development (3) Ellon Castle Gardens to green space within the residential development.
- 3.10 Traffic calming will be required within the residential areas, and the incorporation of “home zones” should be given full consideration. Car parking requirements must accord with the adapted “Car Parking Standards for Development Control”.
- 3.11 There should be no need for additional public transport provided links to nearby bus-routes are provided.



## **Developer Contributions**

- 3.12 This area offers significant potential for the reinstatement and opening up to the public of the Castle Gardens and grounds that for economic reasons at present lie as a hugely under resourced and under-utilised asset. If reinstated, they could provide immense cultural and amenity value to the residents of Ellon and further afield. However, to enable the reinstatement of, and public access to, these areas of historic value and interest, it has been recognised that some new development will be required to help fund access, regeneration and future maintenance of the Castle gardens and policies.
- 3.13 Policy Gen/3 – Developer Contributions - of the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan provides policy guidance on developer contributions. The subject of potential developer contributions should be discussed at the earliest opportunity with the Council's Planning Gain Co-ordinator.

## **Design and Landscape Fit**

- 3.14 The importance of a well-designed proposal is stressed. Areas of land shown on the site plan at Appendix 1 are proposed for residential development. Given the location and quality of the surrounding area, the housing should be low density, not at a density akin to the new development at Knockothie. It is anticipated that overall density over the two sites would be approximately 3.8 houses/acre, whilst recognising a higher density to the allocated site, and overall allowing approximately 75 houses over the combined 20 acres. It is envisaged that the larger central site will attract more innovative design and materials, sensitive to this enclosed site. The sites provide a great opportunity for mixed development to provide a real community development. Affordable housing should be integrated and distributed within the sites. The Council's preference for the provision of affordable would be on site.
- 3.15 The development footprint is largely established by the extent of existing woodland planting, although careful siting and design will be required, particularly in the area hatched, to ensure no adverse impact on amenity, particularly longer views into the site from higher ground to the south and south east.
- 3.16 Early consultation with Development Control is advised to agree building heights, mix and choice across the site and to take account of housing and space standards. Given the topography of the site the maximum height of buildings on the lower part of the site should be limited to 2 storey, with 1½ storey housing restricted to the higher parts of the site.
- 3.17 In considering overall design, the following distribution of land uses should be considered:
- Two significant housing elements;
  - Need for public open space/ improved public access and footpath links.
  - Existing mature woodland/new strategic planting;
  - Restored Castle gardens, structures and Scheduled Monument (Ellon Castle remains of)
  - Green corridors;

- Strategic landscaping – species proposed whether formal or informal, purpose whether screening or aesthetic.
- 3.18 Careful consideration should be given to sensitive surface water disposal from new housing that will accord with Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems.
- 3.19 Careful consideration should also be given to the sensitive positioning and use of lighting in residential areas, including along new and existing footpaths, in any proposed parking areas and in the proximity of the Castle gardens.
- 3.20 The Scottish Executive Planning Advice Note 44 (PAN 44) “Fitting Development into the Landscape” and PAN 67 “Housing Quality” highlight a number of relevant points. Developers should refer to these documents and demonstrate:
- Respect for the local environment and landscape setting.
  - Improvement of visual impact of the development as seen from any road and rail routes – and also public open spaces.
  - Measures to retain and create important views through the site.
  - Measures to integrate the development within the existing townscape and landscape.

### **Woodland Areas**

- 3.21 It is envisaged that areas of woodland would be put into trust or some other company/arrangement and managed/made available for public access. Aberdeenshire Council may also give consideration to the inclusion, within the management trust or company, of Caroline’s Well Wood.

### **Reinstatement of Castle Gardens**

- 3.22 Improved access and parking provision could be provided to the Castle Gardens that would be reinstated to their former high standard. A consideration in respect of the reinstatement of the Castle Gardens must be the privacy of the residents of Ellon Castle. It is anticipated that the implementation of these reinstatement works, and future maintenance, would be undertaken by the Trust/management company, as with the associated woodland areas.
- 3.23 The existing glass houses and potting sheds located to the south of the Castle Gardens could be reinstated, and a museum promoted within the area adjacent to the greenhouses to act as a tourist draw and promote the history surrounding Ellon Castle.

## Further Advice

3.24 Further advice on this site can be obtained from:

Planning & Environment Service  
Aberdeenshire Council  
45 Bridge Street  
Ellon  
AB41 9AA  
Tel: 01358 726428

Developers are encouraged to discuss their proposals with the Planning & Economic Development Service, and where necessary, with other staff as outlined below, before submitting planning applications:

- For copies of the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan, contact Peter Macrae, Head of Local Plan Team, 01224 664725.
- For information on roads and footpath/cycle routes contact Ian Rendall, Transportation & Roads Client Manager, 01467 628 086.
- For information on water supply and drainage contact Eric Hinds, Assistant Area Manager, North of Scotland Water Authority on 0345 437 437.
- For information on gas and electricity supply contact Scottish Gas Housing, PO Box 23114, Edinburgh EH5 1YR, telephone 01563 573 502 or Scottish & Southern, Tayside & Central Depot, Central Warehouse, Ruthvenfield Way, Perth, PH1 3AF, telephone 01738 453 143.
- For copies of Planning Advice Notes and other design guidance contact Susan Stirling, Planning, Scottish Executive Development Department, 2H Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ on 0131 244 7551, email [susan.stirling@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:susan.stirling@scotland.gsi.gov.uk).
- For information on Best Management Practice for surface water treatment (SUDS) contact Nicola Abrams, Planning Liaison Officer, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, 01224 248 338.