

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a forest. The upper portion shows the canopy of tall trees with golden-brown foliage against a clear sky. The lower portion shows the forest floor with numerous thin, light-colored tree trunks and dense green undergrowth, including ferns and small shrubs.

countesswells, aberdeen

development framework and phase 1 masterplan

Client: Countesswells Consortium

Document No: 110342_DF-MP

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*This document sets out a **Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan** for the site at Countesswells, Aberdeen, identified as OP38 in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan.*

*The document has been produced following Aberdeen City Council's **'Masterplanning Process'**.*

Project: Countesswells, Aberdeen
Document: Countesswells Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan
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Issue	Revision	By	Approved	Date
27/11/2012	First draft for ACC Review.	IL	PM	27/11/2012
08/11/2013	Second draft for ACC - Incorporating comments previously received from ACC	IL	PM	08/11/2013
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21/02/2014	Final DF and MP for SG.	IL	PM	21/02/2014
25/06/2014	DF and MP update following ACC Consultation.	IL	PM	25/06/2014

The guidance was first produced prior to the adoption of the Local Development Plan.

However, the document remains valid and the guidance derived from this still informs the City Council’s decisions on such development in Aberdeen. Therefore any queries concerning the text of the guidance should be directed to the Planning Authority for possible clarification.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Countesswells

The Countesswells site is located approximately 7km to the west of Aberdeen city centre. The site OP38 as included within the Aberdeen Local Development Plan covers an area of approximately 165.9 hectares (410acres), see Figure 1 opposite.

1.2 Document purpose

This document has been produced to fulfil the Aberdeen Local Development Plan requirement for the production of a Masterplan for the land at Countesswells OP38 (Masterplan zone 6) aiming to coordinate the planning and delivery of both the development and its associated infrastructure requirements.

It is intended that this Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan will be approved and adopted by Aberdeen City Council as formal Supplementary Guidance to the Local Development Plan.

1.3 The Countesswells Consortium

The Countesswells Consortium is comprised of three experienced property development companies.

Stewart Milne Homes:	Heron Property:	Ian Suttie:
One of the UK's leading independent home builders and construction companies.	A long established, family owned property group.	Trading as IDJ Properties.

1.4 The Design Team

The Countesswells Consortium has assembled a multi-disciplinary team to produce this Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan.

Masterplanners:	OPEN (Optimised Environments Ltd)
Planning Consultants:	Ryden
Engineering Consultants:	Fairhurst
Transportation Consultants:	Fairhurst
Environmental Consultants:	Ironside Farrar
Educational Consultants:	TPS
Public Relations Consultants:	Orbit Communications

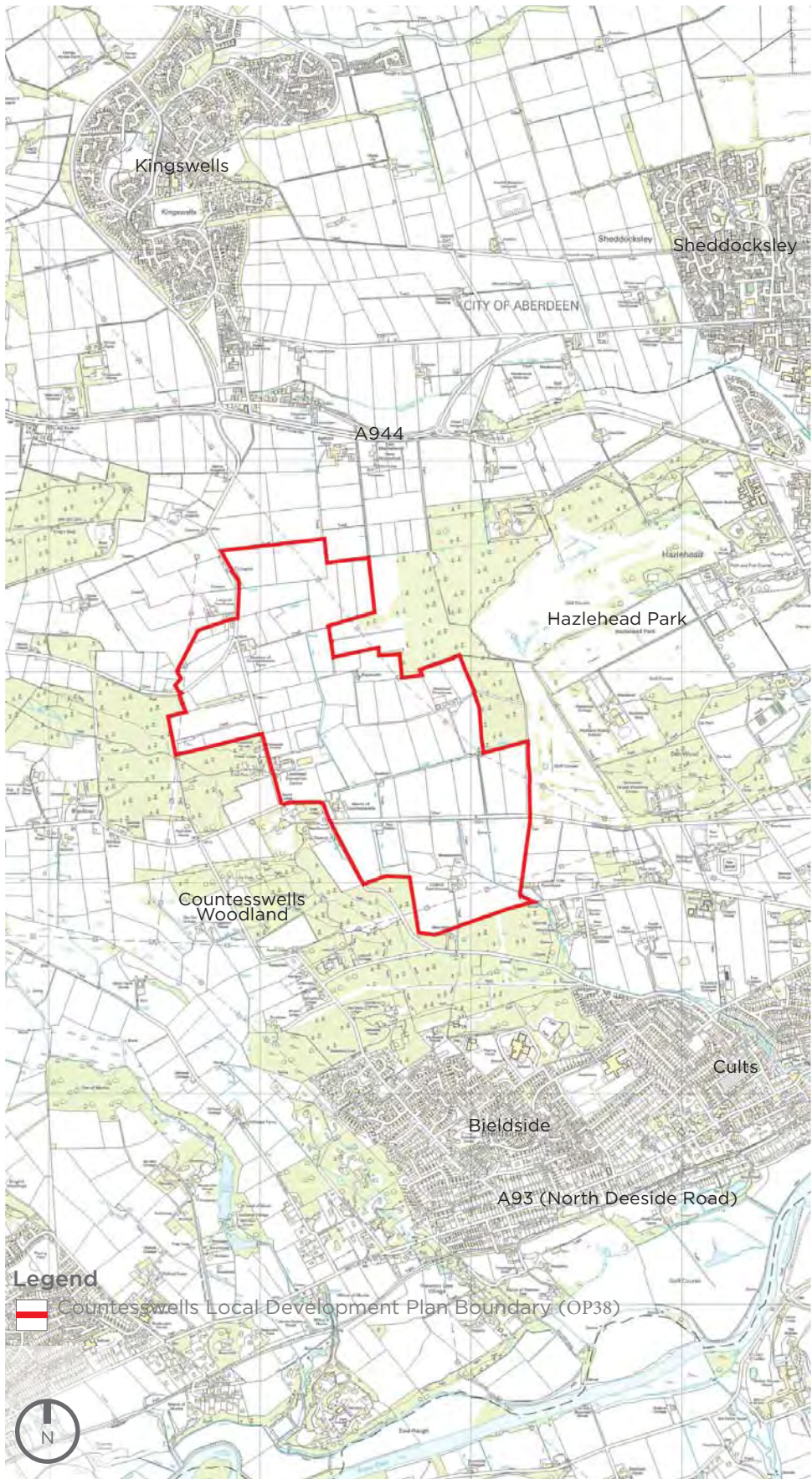


fig. 1: OS map and ALDP boundary

1.5 Supporting information

A number of technical studies and surveys have been produced to support the production of the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan. These include:

- Planning Statement
- Consultation Report
- Environmental Statement
- Traffic Impact Assessment (full Transport Assessment to be agreed with ACC)
- Drainage Impact Assessment
- Education Strategy
- Outline tree survey

2. Planning Context and Masterplan Process

2.1 Planning context

Countesswells has been identified by the Aberdeen Local Development Plan as an opportunity site for the development of 3,000 homes and 10 hectares of employment land. It is a key element of the Plan's spatial strategy to address the housing requirements of the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan approved in March 2014. The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan has been prepared having regard to guidance from a wide variety of sources.

2.1.1 National Planning Framework

The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan will follow National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) (2014). The Vision set out in NPF3 is for a Scotland which is:

- » a successful, sustainable place.
- » a low carbon place
- » a natural, resilient place
- » a connected place

2.1.2 Scottish Planning Policy

Scottish Planning Policy is Scotland's national land use Policy Statement and provides high level development advice and guidance. A range of policy documents, circulars and planning advice notes set out an approach to achieving these objectives.

National planning policies of relevance to this site, and to be followed in the design proposals for the site, are set out in Scottish Planning Policy. Best practice is set out in Planning Advice Notes.

Reference to these and other Policy documents is provided in more detail throughout the Development Framework.

2.1.3 Aberdeen City & Shire Strategic Development Plan

The Vision set within the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan is for Aberdeen City and Shire to be "an even more attractive, prosperous and sustainable European city region and an excellent place to live, visit and do business." It will be recognised for:

- » enterprise and inventiveness;
- » the unique quality of environment; and,
- » high quality of life.

The Plan aims to increase the population of the city, specifically promoting the construction of 21,000 homes on Greenfield homes in Aberdeen City up to 2035. The development of the Countesswells site will help in achieving this target. For sites in the Strategic Growth Areas which are more than one hectare, the SDP requires development to generally have no less than 30 dwellings per hectare. Development proposals for Countesswells will comply with this policy.

2.1.4 Aberdeen Local Development Plan

The ALDP supports the aims and objectives of the Strategic Development Plan. Its objective is to set out a spatial framework to meet city development needs over the next 10-20 years and promoting sustainable growth of the city over this period. The Plan refers to Scottish Government Planning Policies including Designing Streets.

The ALDP identifies desired directions for growth throughout the city and identifies a number of Masterplan Zones. Policy H4 - Housing Mix requires a Masterplan to be prepared for developments larger than 50 dwellings. Masterplanning of large sites such as Countesswells will be required to ensure that individual development in specific areas are co-ordinated and holistically address infrastructure requirements.

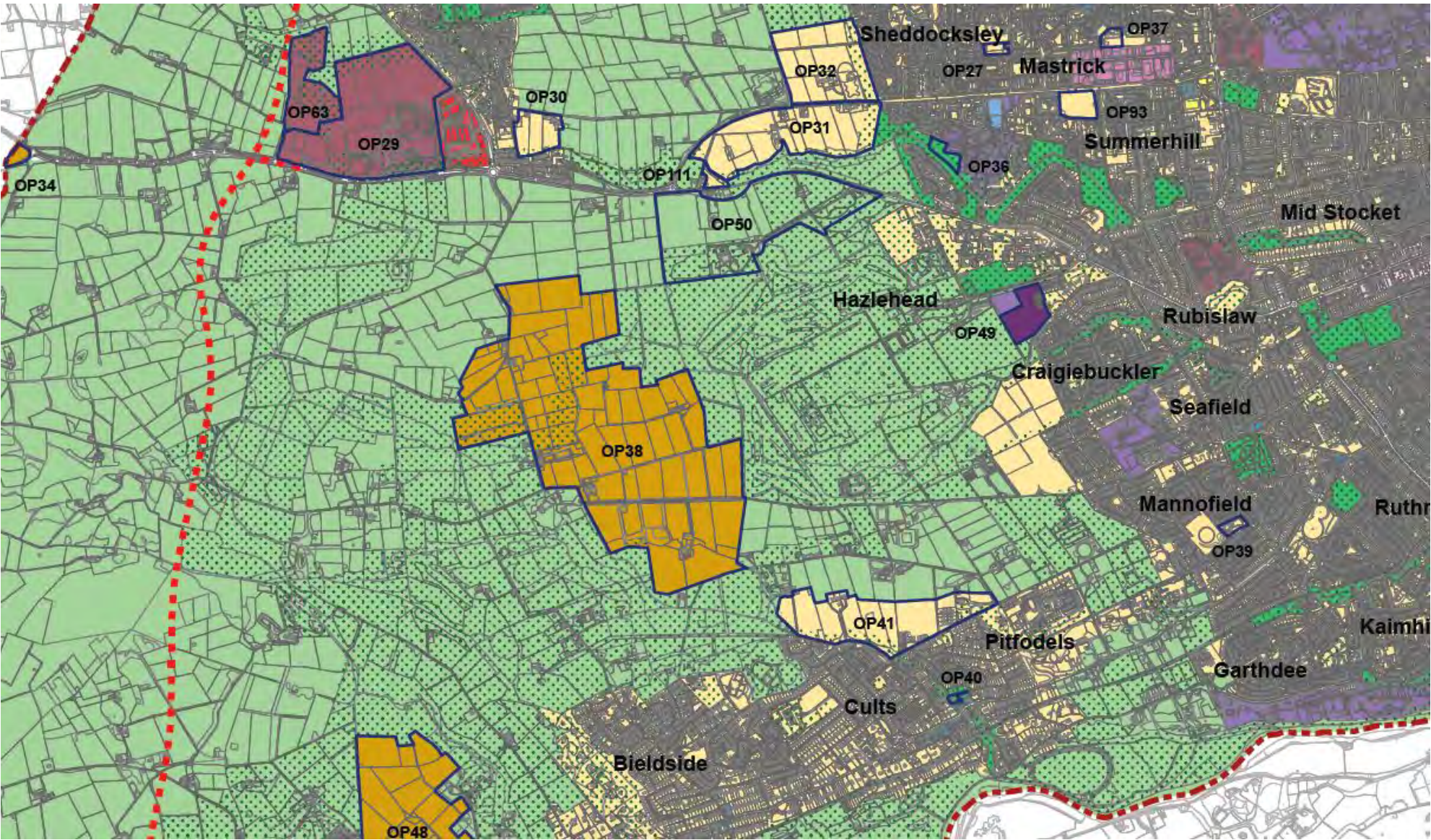


fig. 2: Aberdeen Local Development Plan Extract

2.2 The planning process

A scoping exercise was undertaken in consultation with Aberdeen City Council and it was agreed that a Development Framework would be prepared for the overall site, along with a Masterplan for Phase 1. This Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan, once approved by the Council's Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee, will form Supplementary Guidance which future Planning Applications will require to address.

A formal screening opinion was also sought from the Council under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1999 (as amended). The requirement for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment was confirmed by the City Council on 7 July 2011. This Environmental Assessment has helped inform the preparation of the Development Framework.

2.3 The masterplanning process

The Aberdeen Masterplanning Process is a guide for developers. It reflects current national design guidance and seeks to enable the delivery of sustainable places. The process identifies the need to consider an integrated approach to site planning, urban design, sustainable transport, ecology, landscape, and community involvement. It recognises the need to raise the quality of design for new developments in Aberdeen, from the largest and most significant areas of change to smaller individual sites.

Through the initial site analysis and concept development the client and design team have worked closely with Aberdeen City Council. A number of meetings and design workshops have helped inform the proposals, focusing on masterplanning, placemaking, transportation, environment and education. These were designed to:

- Help ensure the aspirations for the site are compatible and complementary with Aberdeen City Council's plans for the City.
- Discuss thoughts and keep Aberdeen City Council up to date with the evolving principles and aspirations for the site.
- Ensure the proposals fit within Aberdeen City Council's Development Plan Process and Masterplan Process.
- Explore opportunities to promote exemplary design and sustainability.
- Discuss in detail specific issues relating to transport and environmental issues.

Throughout the design process, the Consortium has also been committed to thorough engagement with the local community, the wider public and elected representatives at all levels. This is reflected in the fact that the engagement process commenced well in advance of the formal submission of the statutory Proposal of Application Notice required for the PPIp application.

2.4 Application for planning permission in principle

In 2012 the Consortium submitted a Proposal of Application Notice (PoAN) for the development of 3,000 homes and 10 hectares of employment land with associated infrastructure and appropriate community facilities, all in accordance with the adopted Aberdeen Local Development Plan Opportunity Site OP38, Countesswells.

The proposal constitutes a major development, as defined by the Town & Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, requiring a statutory minimum level of consultation. The PoAN was submitted to Aberdeen City Council on the 10th August 2012 and confirmation was received from the Council that the pre-application consultation proposed to be undertaken was satisfactory and met the statutory requirements. Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber Community Council, Craigiebuckler and Seafeld Community Council and Kingswells Community Council were all provided with copies of the PoAN.

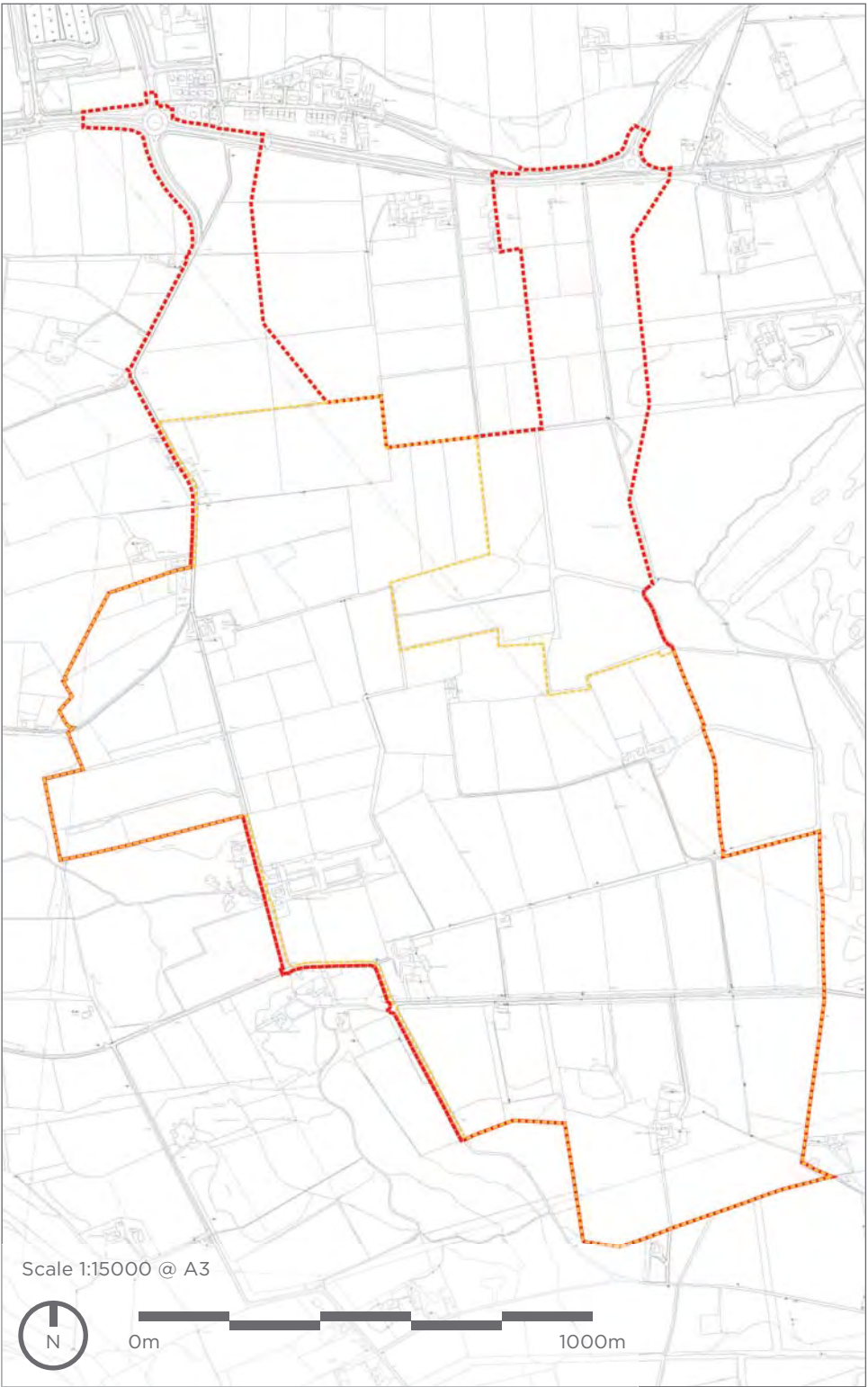


fig. 3: Site boundaries
Aberdeen Local Development Plan Boundary and Countesswells Proposal of Application Notification Boundary.

The PoAN set down the details of the public consultation. The public consultation for the Development Framework, Masterplan and PPIp which were run in tandem to avoid duplication and confusion. Details of the public consultation are set down in the PoAN and will be included in the Pre-Application Consultation Report. A summary of the consultation is provided on the following pages.

The relevant supporting documentation will be submitted along with future planning applications.

2.5 Consultation - A collaborative approach

The Masterplan process has been committed to involving local people and stakeholders at all stages in the design and development process at Countesswells. The design team believes the Development Framework and Masterplan have benefited greatly from meaningful consultation and involvement with the local community and stakeholders. Consultation has been carried out following the best practice guidelines as set out in Planning Advice Note 81, Community Engagement, Circular 3/2010 Community Engagement and Aberdeen City Council's Guidelines for Community Engagement.

The community consultation and engagement approach adopted for Countesswells has been specifically designed to:

- Ensure awareness of the Countesswells Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan aspirations, creating 'knowledgeable communities' which can then contribute purposefully at all stages of the development process;
- Ensure events are well publicised and easy to get to;
- Ensure engaging and inspiring consultation materials which present information clearly and in an accessible format;
- Ensure that members of the design team are available at consultation events to answer questions and engage in dialogue;
- Provide opportunities to comment and become involved;
- Keep people informed of progress; and
- Give confidence and assurance that comments are being heard and issues dealt with.

2.6 Consultation to date

In preparing the Development Framework the Consortium has been committed to involving the local community, the wider public, local Councillors and the Community Councils within or adjacent to the proposal site. At the outset, the Consortium took the decision to hold a minimum of two public consultation events in each of the three Community Council areas. This was to be complemented by meetings with the respective Community Councils, locally elected Members, Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of Parliament within whose area the site fell. A specific Liaison Group was established comprising members of the Community Councils, a member of the Aberdeen Youth Council and nominated residents within and adjoining the site, in order to facilitate discussion and an ongoing involvement in the preparation of the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan. A number of residents workshops have also been held and a website was also established, www.countesswells.com in an effort to disseminate information and gather as much feedback as possible.

The initial round of public engagement focused on the provision of information relative to the scale of the development proposed and the nature of uses likely to be included in the development. All parties were encouraged to provide feedback on their vision for Countesswells. This information subsequently helped to form the initial Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan.

A full Environmental Statement commissioned by the Consortium and the ongoing Transport Assessment process have both fed into the Masterplanning process and informed the evolution of the initial Development Framework. Armed with that information a further round of public consultation was held to obtain feedback on the emerging development proposals.

In addition to the public engagement undertaken by the Design Team on behalf of the Consortium, Stewart Milne Homes, as a key member of the Consortium, undertook extensive market research on the Countesswells proposals. Focus Groups primarily made up of people who would be likely to purchase a dwelling in the near future and a widely distributed questionnaire were used to establish the wider public's general perception of development at Countesswells and to seek their views on the form of that development and the services and facilities it should provide.

2.6.1 Arrangements

As a pre-cursor to the initial public engagement events, meetings were held with Kingswells Community Council on 14th May 2012, Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber Community Council on 24th May 2012 and Craigiebuckler and Seafeld Community Council on 5th June 2012. MPs, MSPs and Councillors within whose area the site falls were also briefed in individual meetings. The first round of public consultation events were thereafter held in each of the Community Councils' areas on 14th, 15th and 16th June 2012 at Craigiebuckler, Kingswells and Cults respectively. These comprised exhibitions over a period of 6 hours each day where representatives of the Consortium were on hand to provide information on the proposals and encourage public comment. Information leaflets were available at each venue along with a feedback form.

Subsequent to the initial round of public consultation, the Community Liaison Group had an inception meeting in the Cults Hotel on Monday 2nd July 2012 and a series of further workshops were planned. The first workshop with the Liaison Group was held on 29th August 2012 in advance of preparation of the draft Development Framework and the second round of public consultation. Further meetings were also held with the respective Community Councils to update them on progress and address issues raised at the initial consultation events. Meetings took place with Kingswells Community Council on 13th August 2012, Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber Community Council on 23rd August 2012 and Craigiebuckler and Seafeld Community Council on 4th September 2012.

Meetings were also held with the Aberdeen Cycle Forum on 4 September 2012 and with the Aberdeen City Youth Council on 25 September 2012.

The emerging Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan were presented to the local community and wider public at the second round of public exhibitions held on the 6th, 7th and 8th of September 2012 at the Four Mile House, Kingswells, Airyhall Community Centre and Cults Academy respectively. Following refinement of the development proposals a further round of briefing meetings was held with the Community Councils. These meetings took place on 2 October 2012 at Craigiebuckler and Seafeld Community Council, on 8 October 2012 with Kingswells Community Council and on 25 October 2012 with Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber Community Council. A further meeting of the Liaison Group took place on 9th October and meetings were held with local residents on 26th and 27th of September.

More recently a further meeting was held with the Liaison Group on 3 February 2014 to update them on refinements to the design and layout of the site following the consultation process and discussions with ACC, and progress with regard to education, traffic and transport matters.

2.6.2 Publicity

In an effort to generate as much interest as possible in the proposals a number of measures were utilised in addition to the statutory press notices, copies of which are attached in the Consultation Report. This included information leaflets being distributed to over 10,000 homes lying to the west of Aberdeen, targeted letters and widespread press and media coverage. A copy of the information leaflet is attached at Consultation Report.

The website also raised the profile of the development consultation and provided information on the proposals including all the exhibition material. Public feedback was also facilitated through the website.



fig. 4: Countesswells consultation event

2.7 First round of consultation

2.7.1 Community Council meetings

A number of issues were raised by Community Council members, including:

- The development should include facilities for future residents and avoid becoming merely a large suburb,
- The development should draw on local examples of good practice in other developments such as good connectivity and access to the countryside,
- Members expressed concern regarding primary education provision and urged the Design Team to satisfy demand created by new housing early in the phasing strategy,
- Concerns were raised regarding local traffic pressures on the existing road network through the area and the need for a cohesive strategy to resolve these issues,
- Queries were made regarding the existing properties, particularly the equestrian centre currently located in the area,
- Queries were made regarding the inclusion of places of worship.

2.7.2 Public exhibitions

A total of 244 people attended over the three days with 96 on day one, 62 on day two and 86 on day three. 42 feedback comments were subsequently received, plus 1 noted interest from a Church regarding relocation and a letter from Cults Medical Practice seeking discussions on the opportunities for locating within the site. The feedback form distributed at the event encouraged comments on specific issues. A summary of the responses are set out below.

Question 1: What are the best and worst aspects of the Countesswells area now?

26 of the respondents felt the best aspect of Countesswells was the open green spaces and woodland areas. 18 considered the worst aspect to be the poor condition of the roads and the vehicular congestion in the area.

Question 2: What do you think are the key opportunities for a new community at Countesswells?

8 of the respondents felt there was no requirement for a new community at Countesswells; 6 considered it an opportunity to improve roads in the area; and, 7 highlighted the importance of getting the plans right at this stage. The importance of integrating the development with the countryside was highlighted along with the opportunity to provide a development based on the best of current European Community Planning – self contained and provided with a full range of community services. Emphasis was placed on the formation of a modern community with community facilities provided early in the phasing.

Question 3: What do you think are the key issues for the Design Team to consider with regard to development at Countesswells?

The importance of upgrading the roads and improving the infrastructure in the area were highlighted by 18 respondents. 7 intimated that retaining the green space and wildlife was important – maximising greens space linked by green corridors, footpaths, cycle ways and bridle ways. The importance of having regard to best practice again featured with emphasis on making it an attractive place to live.

Question 4: What key environmental considerations do you think are important for the site?

25 respondents highlighted the importance of retaining the woodland, green spaces and wildlife whilst making sure development was environmentally friendly, energy efficient, protected from noise from the adjoining road networks. Green corridors linking countryside to the east and west was again highlighted. 3 commented on the importance of good public transport links and 3 suggested the requirement for cycle paths through the development.

Question 5: What transportation considerations do you think are important for the site, particularly in relation to public access and public transport?

25 suggested the provision of good public transport throughout the development and to surrounding towns, not just direct to Aberdeen. Cycle paths and alternative forms of transport were also suggested. 9 commented on the need to upgrade the roads in order to accommodate increased traffic and suggested provision of a new link road to the roundabout with the A944 and Lang Stracht.

Question 6: What form of housing would be appropriate for the site and how should it look and feel?

14 respondents suggested the housing should be mixed and 8 mentioned that the affordable and sheltered housing should be indistinguishable from other homes. The importance of environmentally friendly and energy efficient homes was stressed by 4 respondents. 5 commented on the importance of getting the design right, preferably not high rise and not looking like other developments in the area. High quality detached properties were sought with decent sized gardens in an effort to create a community, possibly with a “feature” building.



fig. 5: Exhibition boards for first public consultation event

Question 7: With the aim of creating a new community at Countswells, what facilities or amenities do you think should be included to support homes?

Overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents mentioned the need for schools, shops (locally owned, not chains), health facilities, sport/leisure facilities, community centre, parks, children’s play areas and recycling facilities. The requirement for a place of worship was also mentioned.

Question 8: What facilities and amenities should be located within the community core to help ensure Countesswells is an attractive place to live and visit?

In addition to the above, respondents also highlighted the requirement for pubs, restaurants, hotels, coffee shops, parking for visitors, and the provision of office space.

Question 9: Would you consider living at Countesswells, if it were developed following the Consortium’s aspirations?

8 respondents considered that they would consider living at Countesswells, 7 were undecided whilst 18 highlighted that they would not consider living at Countesswells.

Question 10: Do you have views on our initial ideas for the site or any further comments you wish to make?

A number of respondents liked the suggested access corridors and the green swathes crossing the site linking Hazlehead and Countesswells Wood. Others, continue to oppose the principle of development at Countesswells preferring to leave it as an area of countryside. One party criticised the initial ideas as conservative and too traditional, preferring to look towards alternative transport facilities and cycle links. Innovation and design was considered important. Community facilities should be in the core of the settlement and not peripheral to it.

Question 11: Have you found the exhibition useful?

25 respondents considered the exhibition to be useful whilst 2 felt it lacked detail and was unhelpful.

2.7.3 Community Liaison Group meetings

The inception meeting of the Community Liaison Group took place in the Cults Hotel on 2 July 2012. A number of issues were raised, including;

- Uncertainty regarding education provision. Concerns were expressed that a number of existing schools were at capacity and refurbishment works were required at Milltimber and Cults' Primary Schools;
- The arrangements for the transition period between the commencement of the development and the opening of new schools to serve the development;
- Recognition that the schools' provision could, and should, be an essential element in realising the potential of the importance of place;
- Generally, concerns were expressed over the infrastructure and education provision, requesting that the next community engagement event outline how these were to be funded and when facilities would start coming on stream;
- Concerns were expressed regarding traffic and the impact on the local road network. Again, further details were sought at future engagement events;
- The position regarding the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route was queried, should it not proceed, and general concern was expressed at the cumulative impact of new developments proposed throughout the City; and
- The extent of affordable housing was raised and comment made that it should be to a similar standard as the private housing.

At the Liaison Group Workshop on 29th August 2012 representatives were provided with an update on progress with the preparation of the Development Framework and ongoing work assessing traffic impacts and mitigation measures. As well as presentations on the above, discussions took place on a broad range of issues and in particular considered the services and facilities which should be contained within the settlement and the form the development should take.

Local residents raised specific issues regarding the direct impacts on their properties but were generally constructive in their views as to how the settlement should evolve. Given some of the issues raised it was decided that residents only meetings should be arranged during the second round of public consultation. These were subsequently held on the 20th and 27th September.

Community Council representatives, as well as actively contributing to the debate on the form and content of the settlement, raised concerns regarding impacts on the wider area. These included, traffic impacts, education provision, particularly in the short term, the cumulative impact of development throughout the City and the limited opportunity to comment on the finalised Development Framework once submitted to the Council.

A further Liaison Group meeting was held on 3rd February 2014 to provide an update on progress with the proposals. Specific matters focused on were the provision of a road link from the A944 and the current strategy for education provision, particularly in the initial stages of the development.

Concern was had with regard to impact on the existing local road network south of the Framework area as a result of increased traffic from the Countesswells development. Extensive junction modelling work has been carried out to identify any potential impacts on junctions to the south. This work highlighted that Kirk Brae (C189) / Kirk Terrace / Friarsfield Road priority junction currently operates within capacity. With the addition of development traffic, however, this junction appears to operate beyond acceptable capacity and therefore appropriate mitigation will be required.

In addition modelling work at the existing Countesswells Road / Springfield Road signalised crossroads was undertaken. Junction analysis predicts that this junction currently performs satisfactorily, with reserve capacity and acceptable queuing levels. Previous proposals for residential development at Pinewood / Hazeldene within the vicinity of this junction identified improvements to be made to this junction and modelling these improvements with the addition of development traffic shows it to perform satisfactorily.

The Craigton Road signalised junction was modelled with development traffic and was shown to operate within acceptable capacity as were the Kirk Brae (C189) / North Deeside Road and Baillieswells Road / North Deeside Road signalised junctions.



fig. 6: Countesswells consultation event.



fig. 7: Countesswells consultation event.

2.7.4 Response to consultation issues

Principle of Development

A number of participants questioned the principle of development at Countesswells and the need to provide so many houses in what is a predominantly rural area. Concerns were expressed regarding the loss of agricultural land and the impacts on local amenity and the landscape setting of the City.

In response to these concerns, the Design Team highlighted the fact that the site is allocated in the statutory local development plan to deliver 3,000 houses and 10 hectares of employment land. The process of creating this plan established the requirement for development on this site through a rigorous land audit and site assessment process. The Main Issues Report (MIR) and proposed Local Development Plan was also open to public consultation and comment as well as scrutiny by elected members and Scottish Government reporters. This process has given the plan a democratic rigour on top of the technical processes that confirms the site's suitability for development.

Transportation

The Design Team are aware of the issues posed by the local transportation network and its capacity to cope with the inevitable increase in car journeys created by the development. This was emphasised by the local community who identified a number of issues relating to traffic, including the poor quality of the existing roads, the use of country roads as 'rat runs' for commuters and safety issues relating to local schools and access to existing properties.

In preparation of the Development Framework, Phase 1 Masterplan and application for Planning Permission in Principle, the Design Team undertook a transportation scoping report and are conducting a Transport Assessment (TA) to look at the strategic impacts and local network impacts of the development on the existing road network.

The concerns raised by the local community have been addressed through the access strategy which looks to encourage alternative forms of transport. An additional access onto the A944 relieves pressure on the Kingswells roundabout, whilst the road network and street hierarchy provide a variety of routes through and around the settlement in an effort to reduce speeds and minimise 'rat-running'.

Previous transport appraisals produced during the local development plan submission and the recent transportation scoping report and TA have shown the majority of trip journeys would move towards the A944 corridor. Existing congestion on the roundabout at Kingswells was identified by the local community as a major issue. The Design Team have responded by investigating a number of potential options with regard to access and egress from the site. Studies have demonstrated that the development can be expected to require two connections to the A944 to the north of the site to provide efficient transport connections for all users between the various development blocks and the existing road network surrounding the site.

It is proposed that the western connection will be a public transport only link, utilising the Kirk Brae (C189) access onto the existing signal controlled Kingswells roundabout junction. This will require a bus gate to be installed on Kirk Brae (C189) to prevent the through flow of non-permitted traffic. The precise location and operation of the bus gate will be finalised following further detailed analysis and liaison with local residents.

A new, all vehicle, junction is proposed to the east and will require substantial modification and upgrade of the existing roundabout at Jessiefield. The final junction layout will be formulated following further detailed analysis and design. Traffic modelling demonstrates that this will also improve east west flows on the A944.

In order to reduce the need for car based travel, sustainable transport is a key element of the Development Framework. Local communities stressed the need to improve public transport provision as well as increased options for walking and cycling through the development. In response, the Design Team is in discussion with local bus operators to ensure a regular service is available to link the settlement with surrounding destinations. A strategic path network has been designed into the settlement which encourages walking and cycling through the settlement and out to the surrounding area.

A number of participants have sought to retain a direct route running north - south around the periphery of the new settlement. However, this runs counter to the ethos of 'Designing Streets' and is likely to exacerbate existing problems suffered by local residents. The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) lying to the west, will address the major north - south traffic movements and traffic would gravitate to that route rather than travel via the street network through Countesswells.

Environment

The quality of the environment and the landscape setting of Countesswells were repeatedly identified as a major asset by the local community. The opportunities for forest walks, outdoor activities and exercise provided by the natural landscape of the area should not be threatened by the development. In response, the Design Team have incorporated the surrounding woodland areas of Hazlehead Wood and Countesswells Wood linked by a clear route for Core Path 57.

The landscape strategy of the Development Framework responds to the local community's wish to retain green spaces, by creating green corridors between the two areas that preserve the rural amenity of the area and its wildlife. The development takes advantage of the opportunities provided by the landscape setting by forming core spaces along the east-west axis that provide space for informal recreation, circular walks and important connections through the development.

A prominent feature of the proposed new settlement at Countesswells is the creation of a new central park. This space will provide a meeting and gathering place for the community adjacent to local shops and community facilities. This green space at the heart of the settlement will contribute towards a more cohesive community, provide for an attractive destination for local residents and create a sense of place vital to sustainable communities. The central park would form part of the first phase of development which demonstrates the importance the Consortium places on this aspect of the design.

Education

Another major topic that emerged through the consultation process was the importance of school provision at an early stage in the development. Many respondents felt current schools would be unable to support even a modest number of new homes in the area. In response, the Design Team has planned for a new primary school to form part of the first phase of development, which again shows the importance the consortium places on education facilities.

As the development progresses through to phase 2, the first phase of the secondary school campus will emerge to create secondary education capacity and form part of the Community Core. The campus will provide sports facilities, a library and meeting rooms to be shared between the school faculty and local community. This campus will also accommodate a second primary school to meet demand as the development progresses.

Education provision within the new settlement is designed as a fundamental element of the development of Countesswells. This is a direct response not only to the local community concerns around school capacity, but also a desire to see a balanced community that is self-sustaining, vibrant and represents the best of current European community planning.

Other

Concern was expressed by some respondents about the location and quality of affordable housing through the development. Specifically, people were worried that the affordable housing requirement would be met with sub-standard housing that would be developed separately from the main development. Local residents insist that affordable housing should be indistinguishable from the rest of the development. As the Consortium is looking to create a balanced and sustainable new settlement, the provision of affordable housing, along with a wider mixture of housing types, styles, densities and tenures is seen as essential to achieving this aim.

Concern was also raised about the size of the development and whether this was deliverable given current depressed market activity and restricted access to credit. The economics of the development were questioned by some as was the viability of the various non-residential land use elements. These concerns are addressed in the development’s phasing strategy which demonstrates delivery of the development over a significant period of time. This phasing and delivery strategy over the long term ensures the development can progress r market cycles. Furthermore, a range of services and facilities will be provided in each stage of the development to ensure the emerging settlement is sustainable and properly integrated.

The issue of drainage across the site was raised by local members and the impacts on surface water movements the development would cause. The Development Framework has incorporated these concerns and includes a drainage system that integrates conveyance swales and detention basins into the core areas of open space. SUDs will integrate with existing watercourses, ditches and field drains which will be incorporated into the design of open space and amenity areas.



fig. 8: Exhibition boards for second public consultation event

2.8 Second round of consultation

2.8.1 Public exhibitions

Three further public exhibitions were held, the exhibitions on the 6th and 7th of September ran from 3pm – 8pm and the event on the 8th ran from 10am – 4pm. All events were well attended with 53 people at Kingswells, 105 at Airyhall Community Centre and 70 at Cults Academy. Local Members were also fully briefed ahead of each event.

A questionnaire was available for attendees to complete. It was stressed to all that the results of the questionnaire would form part of the completed submission and inform the Development Framework and Masterplan. They were also made aware of the fact that they still had an opportunity to submit comments to the planning authority as part of the statutory determination process once an application was submitted.

A total number of 14 responses were received (by 18/09/12) and a summary of these responses is provided below.

Question 1: The centre of the development is proposed to be the core of the community, containing the primary civic, commercial and community facilities, and the Central Park. What facilities would help create a sustainable community?

Responses to this question were wide-ranging with a number of suggestions including a cinema, health centre, a church and schools. The most popular answers were youth centre and improved roads.

Question 2: Strong attention is being paid to the delivery of public spaces, including civic spaces. What would you like to see contained in these areas? How would you like to see the public space utilised within Countesswells?

Three respondents to this question suggested keeping the area as it is currently with a further three respondents incorporating outdoor activities (i.e. skate park, cycling) within a large area of green space. One respondent suggested the key issue was maintenance of public space and the long term management of this space.

Question 3: Countesswells is focused around the development of a mixed use core and distinct neighbourhood. These focal points could contain a primary school and may also contain small scale local facilities such as local shops and community facilities. What facilities do you think would be suitable for the core and what perhaps should be located elsewhere in the settlement?

At the core respondents suggested a health/community/youth centre. Respondents suggested play areas and small shops should be located elsewhere. Mentioned in both contexts were doctors, dentists, chemists, library and post office.

Question 4: We are aiming to develop Countesswells as a “destination” place i.e. a place to come home to and to visit rather than a place to pass through. What is your view on this and is Countesswells somewhere you think you would visit and if so why?

The consensus among respondents was that Countesswells would not be a destination to visit and simply would be somewhere to pass through – a suburb.

Other respondents thought Countesswells as a destination to visit would be unlikely due to high volumes of traffic.

Question 5: Would you consider living as Countesswells, if it were developed following the Consortium’s aspirations?

One respondent already lived in the area and a further individual stated they would consider moving to Countesswells. Four respondents stated they would not like to live in the new development without giving any reasons.

Question 6: Do you have views on these ideas for the site or are there any further comments you would like to make?

Eight respondents were concerned about future road congestion. Connected to this, one respondent was concerned with road safety, and another was concerned with the effect increased congestion would have on wildlife. One respondent stated that facilities for children are of paramount importance whilst another said that linking Countesswells and Hazlehead woods with a green corridor was vital. Another respondent wanted only a small number of houses built on the site.

Question 7: Which aspect of the exhibition have you found most useful and in which way could we improve the explanation of a project of this scale?

Three respondents stated that issues existed around maps, suggesting larger maps which showed more reference points and the wider context within which the development sits, particularly to the south onto North Deeside Road and the south – east along Countesswells Road. Another believed the maps displayed were outdated. Two respondents believed a better explanation of the road network would be an improvement. One respondent welcomed the demonstration of the education provision in the development whilst another suggested scrapping the entire project.

2.8.2 Community Meetings

Workshop sessions were held with local residents over two evenings on 26th and 27th September where a range of issues were discussed. As well as addressing general issues impacting on the wider area, many of which had already been raised, it provided an opportunity to focus on specific issues relative to individual properties. Where requested, subsequent meetings were held with individual residents in an effort to address their concerns and the Consortium is committed to continuing that dialogue throughout the planning application process.

A further Liaison Group meeting was held on 9 October to specifically explore traffic and transport issues. As well as the Consortium, Council representatives were in attendance to explain how the cumulative impact of development within the City would be addressed through the Strategic Transport Fund. Impacts on the local road network are addressed through the Traffic Impact Assessment and mitigation measures, and their timing, are highlighted later in this Framework document.

On 6th November 2012 a meeting was held with the Airyhall Primary School Parent Council to explore education issues and potential impacts arising as a consequence of the development. These are fully addressed later in the Development Framework under the education strategy. This strategy has been developed in liaison with the Council as education authority.

2.8.3 Response to consultation issues

The Design Team received broad support for the proposals with many solutions to the issues raised welcomed by participants. Several suggestions arose from this round of consultation which the Design Team considered before finalising the Development Framework and Planning Permission in Principle application. A lot of the issues discussed were similar to those raised in earlier rounds, with issues surrounding local traffic congestion prevailing. A summary of the emerging points discussed is given below.

Existing property owners

Residents of properties within the site boundary expressed concerns relative to the impacts on their homes. Specifically, they wanted to see how the development would affect their access, views and amenity. Several owners had concerns around the compulsory purchase of their properties and whether or not they would be forced to leave the area to make way for the development.

The Design Team’s response was to reassure existing owners that there is no intention to force any residents out of the area and that a key design principle of the development was to build upon the amenity of the local area and not to destroy it. As a further element of this consultation exercise, the Design Team undertook to engage directly with existing property owners on the issues that affect their properties. A number of meetings have already taken place and this will evolve as the development progresses. The Design Team will continue to work with existing property owners to try to overcome issues in relation to the setting of their properties.

Traffic

Existing residents also expressed concerns surrounding current and potential use of the area as a ‘rat-run’ to and from Kingswells and Dyce. Presently, this is a problem along Kirk Brae (C189), which is a road lined with vegetation where cars regularly speed. The impact this has on road safety, particularly relating to the access of existing properties is a concern to existing residents.

The response from the Design Team has been to create a network of new streets running through the development which is guided by the principles set out in the Scottish Government’s Designing Streets policy. The aim is to take speeding traffic off the currently rural part of Kirk Brae (C189) and accommodate this within a network of urban streets where speed and movement are controlled and cars can travel through in safety. Not only is the connectivity and permeability of the area greatly improved by the new network of streets, but with Kirk Brae (C189) retained as a public transport only link it will see a significant reduction in the speed and volume of traffic which will benefit the residents of existing properties that use this road for access.

Education

Despite some scepticism around the delivery of new schools within the development, the Design Team received encouragement from participants for plans for provision of a primary school early in the development phasing. Local residents were satisfied the development would be self-sufficient in terms of education provision and asked questions on catchment areas and accommodation for pupils living in surrounding areas.

Participants were also encouraged by the secondary school campus and the plans to feature this facility at the centre of the settlement. Broad support was given to plans to incorporate community facilities on campus as part of a wider town centre retail, healthcare and leisure offer. However, concerns were expressed about local resident access to these community facilities on the secondary school campus and questions raised about ensuring these are available to local residents even when the school is closed.

The Design Team were questioned on proposals to site the secondary school next to the main road network. Concerns were raised about road safety and the mixing of school pupils and traffic heading from Countesswells road to Kingswells. The response to these concerns is contained within the access strategy which, having been informed by Scottish Government policy Designing Streets, provides for a pedestrian-friendly environment where traffic speeds are managed to maximise safety.

Environment

Participants were encouraged by the Design Team’s landscape strategy which proposes usable, well-designed green spaces that encourage biodiversity, creates a sense of place and contributes to the amenity of the area. Support was received for the core path link between Hazlehead and Countesswells Woods, although questions were raised as how this path would interact with the proposed road network.

Local Services

Most participants agreed a crucial element of the development would be the community facilities located in the centre of the new settlement. Participants broadly agreed these should include healthcare, leisure and retail facilities. Other suggestions included places of worship, a theatre, a skate park and a sports centre. The Design Team will take these into consideration. Broadly, it was agreed that to make the settlement a destination, adequate provision of services was required and those located in the centre should be of a type that encourages visitors.

Cumulative impacts of LDP allocations

Much of the dialogue with the Community Councils and visitors to the public exhibitions surrounded the cumulative impacts of all the local development plan allocations around the city on the local road network. They are concerned that the net effect of developing these sites would be to further exacerbate congestion on the roads in and out of the City. Various ‘pinch points’ would restrict easy flow of traffic and lead to queues and heavy delays, made worse by conflicts of movement between north – south and east – west.

The Design Team are aware of these concerns however the solutions to these wider scale transportation issues is most appropriately addressed by Aberdeen City Council which can address the concerns through a City-wide overview. The Design Team highlighted the initiatives taken by NESTRANS and the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils to address transport at the strategic level leading to the creation of a Strategic Transport Fund. It is anticipated that this fund will enable Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils to implement an appropriate plan that delivers an improved road network which will accommodate all the Local Development Plan allocations and ease the movement of traffic around the City for the benefit of all.

2.9 Conclusions

A broad range of issues were considered by the Design Team and presented to the public in an extensive series of consultations with local interest groups, representatives and residents of surrounding neighbourhoods. Many of the concerns expressed by participants have been addressed by the Design Team in the formation of the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan.

The main issues raised by this consultation series have been the local road network, the environmental quality of the area and the provision of education facilities for future residents. The Development Framework has addressed these concerns and produced a series of strategies to engage these main issues and provide solutions as far as practicable and appropriate at this time. A more detailed study of these transportation issues is in the Transport Assessment being produced to support the masterplan process and application for Planning Permission in Principle.



fig. 9: Countesswells consultation event.

3. Site Analysis



3.1 Size and Location

3.1.1 Strategic context

The site at Countesswells is different from all the other opportunity sites identified in the ALDP (shown on Figure 10 opposite) in that it is set on its own. It is distinct from any existing settlement and does not form an extension to an existing place. It is located in an attractive landscape setting, bounded by Den Wood, Hazlehead Park, Countesswells and Foggieton woodlands. In addition to the attractive rural setting, the site benefits from its close proximity to the city and surrounding communities to the north and south. The site will also benefit from good access to the existing road network including the A944, North Deeside Road (A93), Countesswells Road, C189 and Kirk Brae (C189) and in due course the AWPR.

The location provides a unique opportunity to create a new place, distinct within the Aberdeen area, a place that can benefit from the attractive rural setting but also allows good links to any other part of the City and surrounding communities.

3.1.2 Site location

The site at Countesswells occupies a ‘greenfield’ location within the city boundary to the west of the city centre.

The Countesswells site lies out with the built up area of the City of Aberdeen, approximately 7km west from the city centre. The site lies to the south of the A944 and Kingswells and to the north of the villages of Bieldside and Cults. The site is located approximately 1km south of Kingswells and 0.5km north of Cults. The site area is distinct from both of the existing communities which are connected via the C189 (Kirk Brae (C189)) – running along the western edge of the site.

To the west of the Countesswells site area is the AWPR alignment, with new junctions on the A93 between Milltimber and Peterculter and on the A944 between Kingswells and Westhill.

3.1.3 Scale

The site area at Countesswells (ALDP boundary) is 165.9ha (410 acres). It measures 1.22 miles north to south at it longest point and 0.88 miles east to west at its widest.

To understand the scale of the site and the potential opportunities and issues that this may present the design team have compared the site area to a variety of existing settlements. For reference some of the comparison diagrams are shown below.

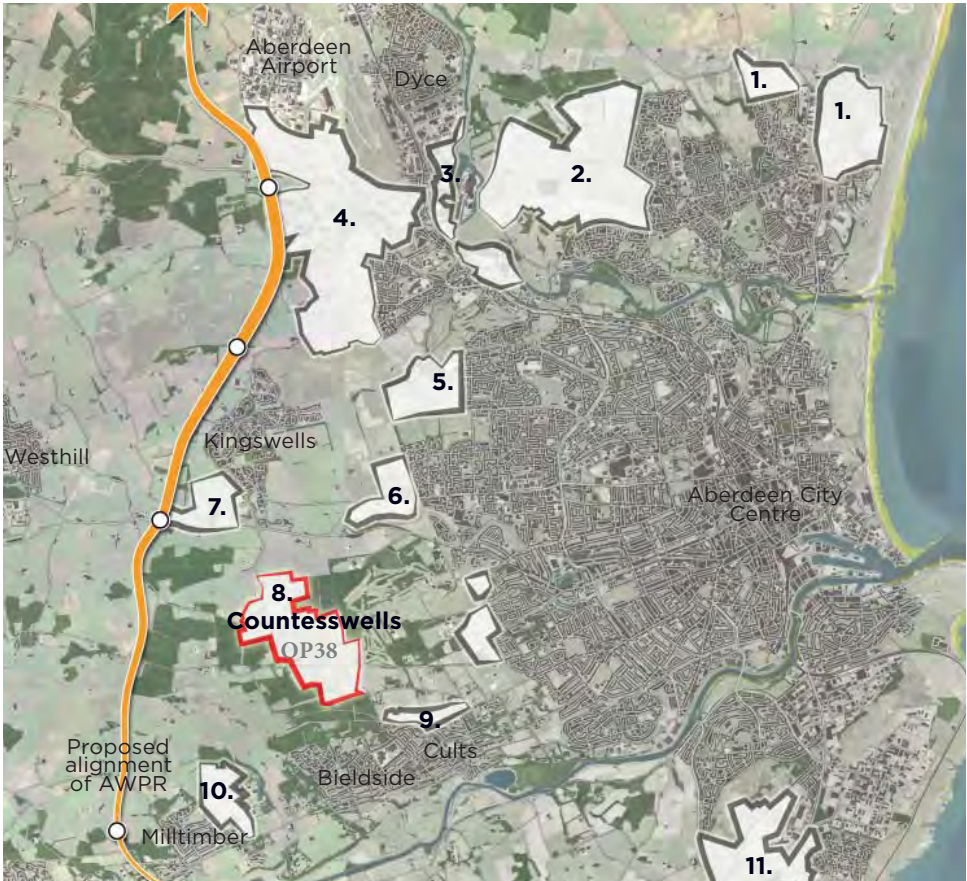


fig. 10: Countesswells in the context of City wide development

Aberdeen Local Development Plan Masterplan Zones

As identified on Figure 10 above.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Dubford and Murcar | 7. Friarsfield |
| 2. Grandhome | 8. Loirston |
| 3. Newhills Expansion and Dyce Drive | |
| 4. Greenferns | |
| 5. Maidencraig | |
| 6. Countesswells | |

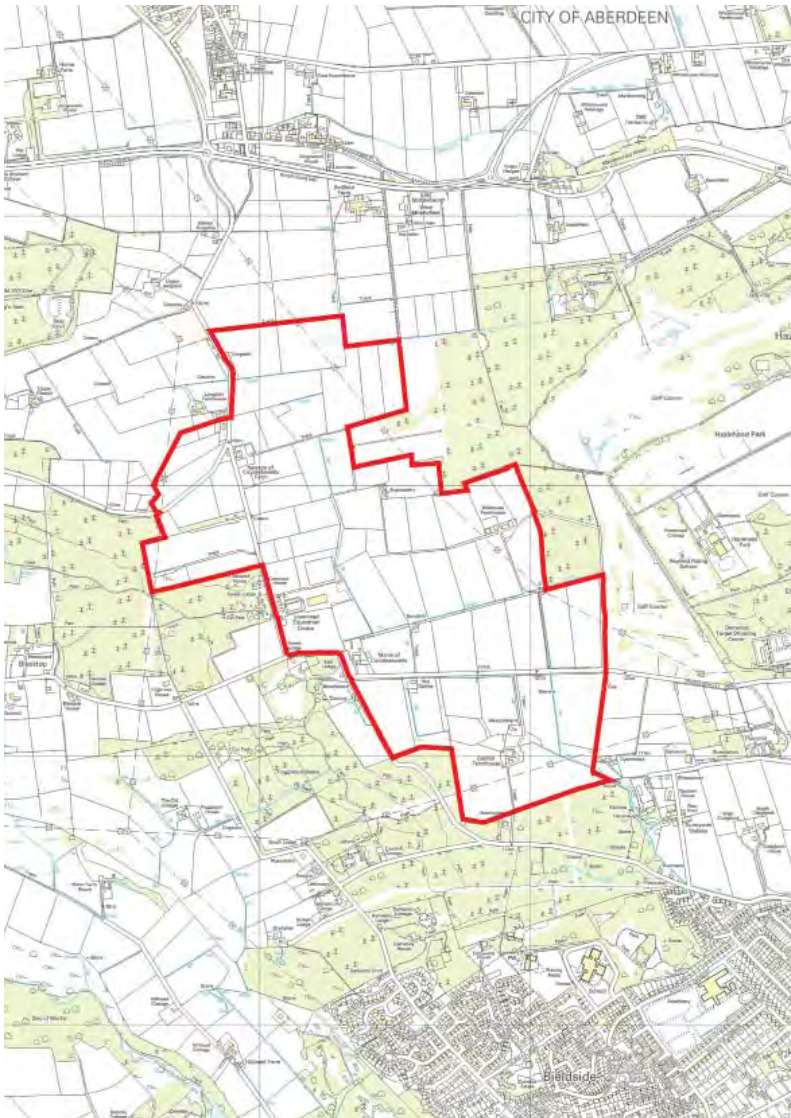


fig. 11: Aberdeen Local Development Plan Boundary.



fig. 12: Countesswells scale comparison with Huntly



fig. 13: Countesswells scale comparison with Kingswells



fig. 14: Countesswells scale comparison with Stonehaven



fig. 15: Countesswells scale comparison with Creiff

3.2 History, landuse and ownership

3.2.1 Site history

The site at Countesswells has remained relatively unchanged for the past 100 years or more. With the exception of some small scattered developments, the land has primarily been used for agricultural purposes. The site is bounded by, or in close proximity to several areas of Ancient Woodland in the form of Countesswells and Kingshill Wood to the west, Foggieton Wood to the south and Hazlehead and Denwood to the east, indicating the continuous presence of woodland since the Roy maps of 1750.

Countesswells House is a Grade B listed building located to the west of the site. Its historic influence on the landscape is represented by the avenue planting lining Countesswells Road and some of the associated field boundary planting in this vicinity. The importance of the House in relation to the once formal avenue approach has been diminished through alterations to road and access arrangements around the house over time however its influence on the landscape remains and Countesswells Road is one of the key existing features of the site.

3.2.2 Existing landuse

There are currently two main land uses on site; agriculture and equestrian, with some individual dwellings and farmhouses.

Countesswells Road dissects the southern half of the site running east to west, while Kirk Brae (C189) Road crosses the far western boundary from north to south.

The eastern edge is bound by Hazlehead Golf Course and wood, north by agricultural land, while to the west and south the site is bound by existing woodland, predominantly commercial forestry.

Loanhead Equestrian Centre sits midway along the western side of the site. Much of the land surrounding the equestrian centre to the north, east and south is used for grazing horses. Loanhead Equestrian Centre will not be retained as part of the proposals, however, the historical use of the site and surrounding area for equestrian uses has been important in informing the proposals.

Most other land on site is used for arable farming. There are a number of individual residential proper-ties scattered throughout the site and several areas of plantation woodland, tree belts and an area of felled woodland to the east of the site.

3.2.3 Statutory designated sites

The proposed development site does not contain any sites statutorily designated for nature conservation.

The River Dee located approximately 3km south of the Countesswells site is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EC Directive 92/43/EEC (The Habitats Directive). The SAC was designated in March 2005 based on the following qualifying interests:

- Atlantic Salmon (Salmo salar)
- Freshwater pearl mussel (Margaritifera Margaritifera); and
- Otter (Lutra lutra)

The Environmental Statement (prepared to support the Development Framework and Masterplan) includes a ‘Report to inform Appropriate Assessment’ as an appendix to the ecology chapter – see section 4.8.4.

3.2.4 Non – statutory designated sites

There are 80 Local Nature Conservation Sites within the Aberdeen City Council area which includes both District Wildlife Sites and Sites of Interest to Natural Science (Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy 2010 – 2015).

No Local Nature Conservation Sites exist within the site boundaries, however there are a number of non-statutory designated sites (LNCS) within the surrounding area including Den Wood, Den of Maidencraig and Hazlehead Park to the east, Cults quarry to the south and Foggieton, moss of Auchlea and Rotten of Gairn to the west.

3.2.5 Existing properties

There are a number of existing properties on the site. Many of these, including Mains of Countesswells, Newton of Countesswells, Loanhead, Wardhead, Kingshill, Colthill and Bogskethy, have all existed on or around the site area as far back as the late 19th century, while records suggest that Countesswells House was built during the early 18th century.

All existing properties within the site area (ALDP boundary) are proposed to be retained and are identified on Figure 20, opposite.

3.2.6 Land ownership

Of the total site area the Consortium land interest at Countesswells is 159.9 hectares (395.11 acres).



fig. 16: Properties at Colthill Farm and Meadowbank.



fig. 17: Mains of Countesswells.



fig. 18: Wardhead.



fig. 19: Bogskethy.

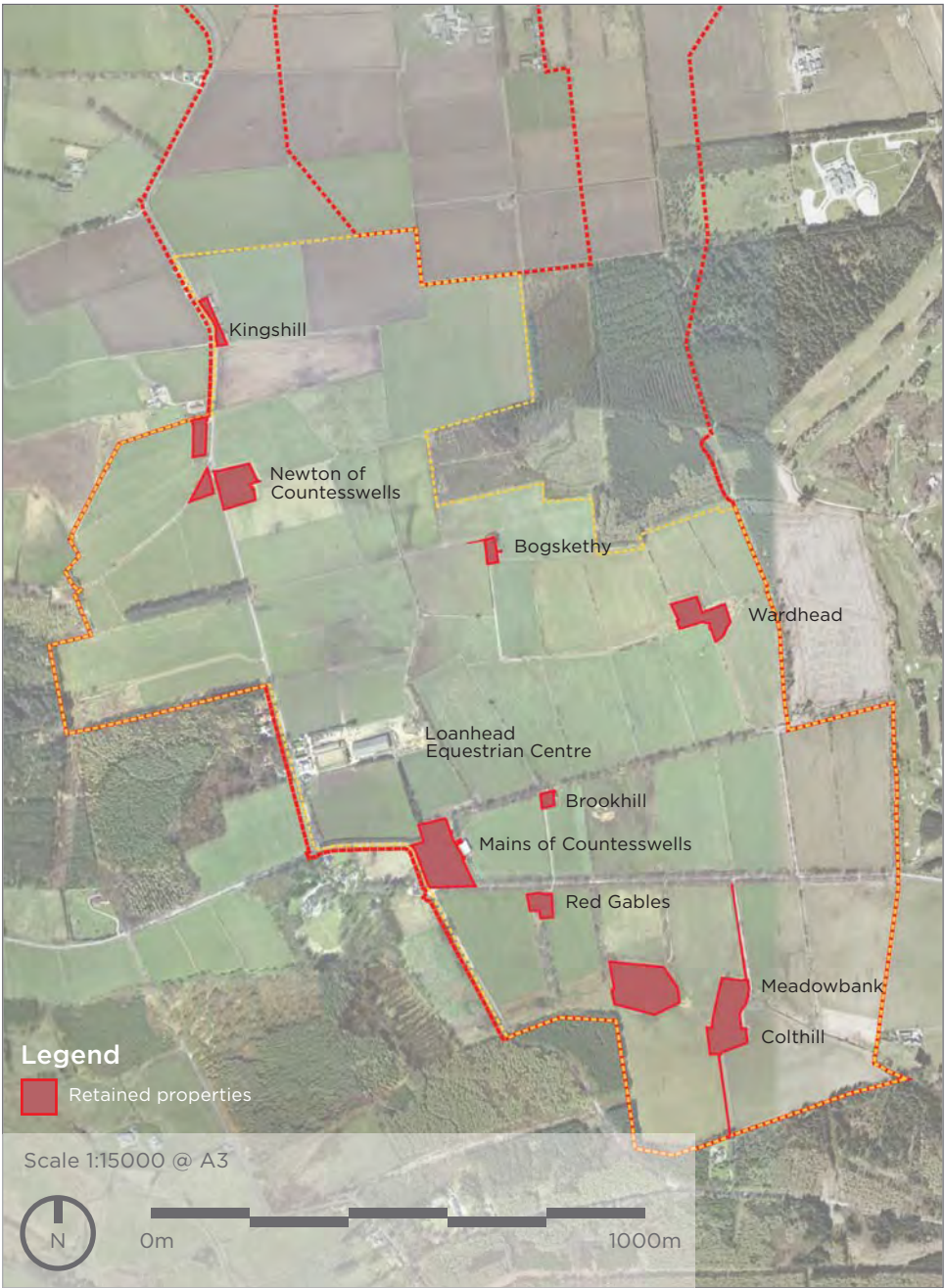


fig. 20: Retained properties

3.3 Landscape setting

The site is contained within a natural ‘bowl’ in the landscape, therefore is not readily visible from the surrounding settlements of Kingswells, Cults and Craigiebuckler. Overall the site is well contained, the lower lying areas to the south, which are contained by woodland blocks, are less prominent than the more elevated northern area.

Development at Countesswells will be sensitively integrated with the existing site characteristics. Specific issues such as wildlife, landscape, nature conservation and protection of amenity have been taken into account from the outset. This will be further addressed in the detailed design of the development through the progression of the Development Framework, the Masterplan, phasing and production of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

The photographs on this page and the following pages give an impression of the landscape setting of the Countesswells site. The photographs also illustrate some of the key site features and characteristics.

Green Belt

The purpose of the green belt is to maintain the identity of Aberdeen and surrounding suburban and rural communities by defining their physical boundaries. The designation of a green belt avoids coalescence and urban sprawl, maintains a high quality landscape setting and ensures an adequate provision of high quality open space.

Prior to being designated as an Opportunity site within the ALDP, the proposed site formed part of the Aberdeen City Green Belt. Land surrounding the site is designated as Green Belt and the design and approach to the Countesswells development has, through the landscape strategy and development layouts, considered how the proposed development will successfully link with the surrounding landscape and Green Belt features.

Green Space Network

See Figure 2.

The Green Space Network (GSN, ALDP Policy NE1) defines a strategic network of woodland/habitats, pedestrian, cycle and equestrian routes, greenspace connections and watercourses. The GSN promotes high quality settings for future development and improved opportunities for outdoor recreation, nature conservation and landscape enhancement. The GSN includes Open Space, Green Belt, Natural Heritage and other policies and indicates areas within the City where greenspace enhancement projects could be focused.

The ALDP identifies a central band within the site between Hazlehead Park and Gairnhill Wood as part of the Green Space Network and this has been incorporated as part of the Cults Burn Corridor network providing high quality open space and connectivity and permeability between existing woodland habitats in terms of biodiversity.

OP50 Allocation - Skene Road, Hazlehead for Phased Cemetery Development

See Figure 2.

The access to the OP38 site is adjacent to the OP50 allocation for a phased cemetery development at the Aberdeen Crematorium. The alignment and landscape design for the new road link will seek to minimise the impact of the road on the setting and amenity of the Memorial Garden

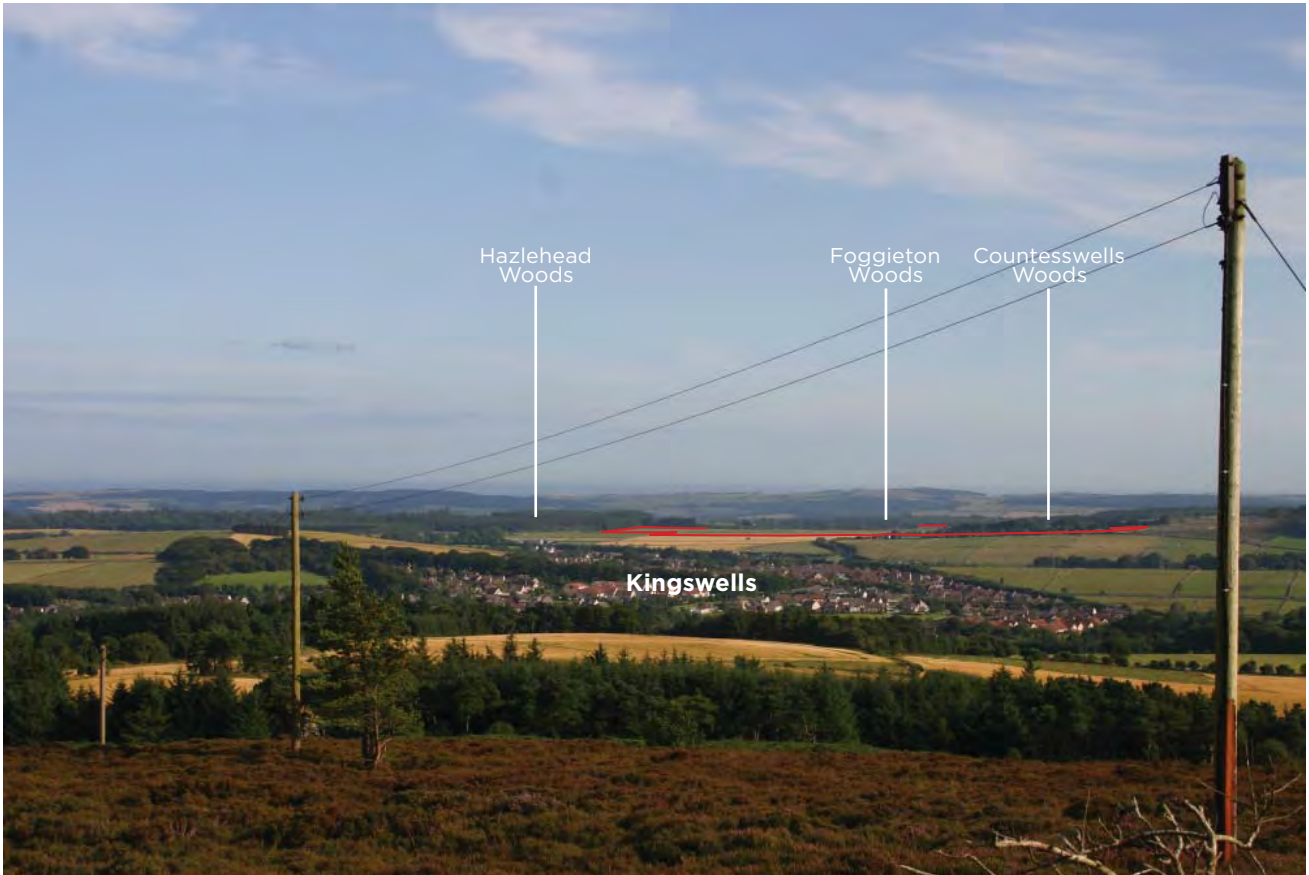


fig. 21: View from Brimmond Hill

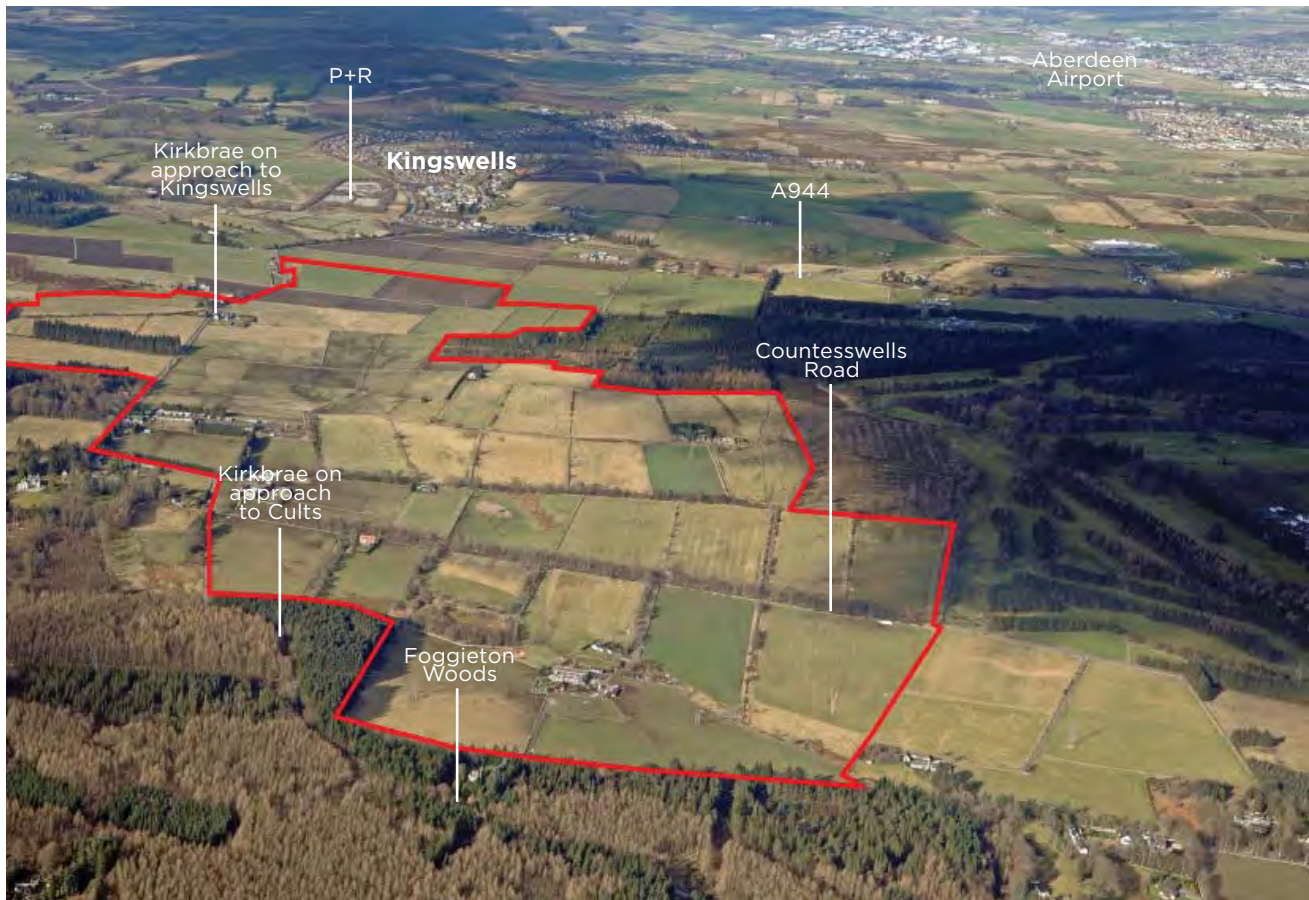


fig. 22: Aerial view looking north



fig. 23: Aerial view looking south east





3.3.1 Selected site views

Specific panoramas from within the site have been selected to illustrate site characteristics and views out of the site where relevant.

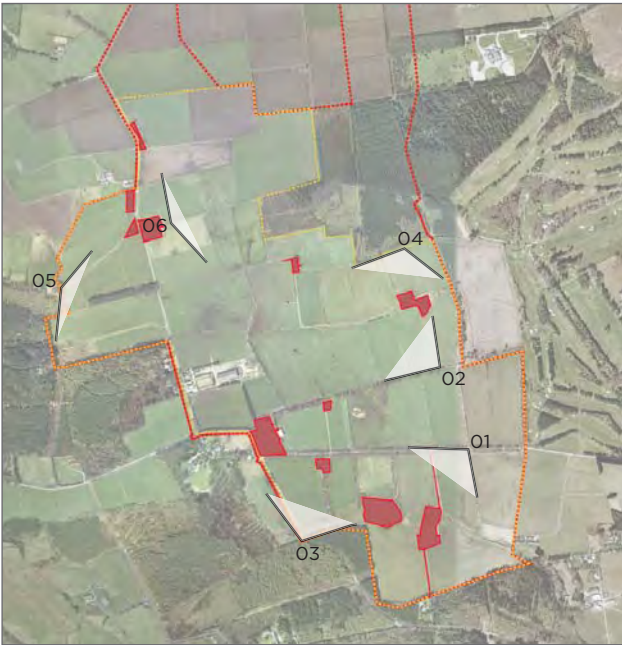


fig. 24: Viewpoint location plan.



fig. 25: View 01:
Looking south from Countesswells Road



fig. 26: View 02:
Looking north west to Kingshill Wood in background between Countesswells Wood and the prominent slope adjacent Wardhead Farmhouse



fig. 27: View 03:
Looking north along Kirk Brae (C189) from where the road exits Foggieton Woods

Meadowbank and Colthill

Countesswells Road



Newton of Countesswells

Bogskethy

Wardhead



Former reservoir



Wardhead

Brookhill



fig. 28: View 04:
Looking south over the site and towards the Dee Valley from the top of the slope above Wardhead Farmhouse

Kingshill Properties

Newton of Countesswells



View taken from the high point on the western boundary of the site looking south and east over the site and to the North Sea beyond.

Kingshill Properties



fig. 30: View 06
View from existing right of way off Kirk Brae (C189).

Loanhead Equestrian Centre



Bogskethy



Bogskethy

Loanhead Equestrian Centre



3.4 Topography

The landform generally falls from north to south. Land close to the northern boundary of the site is around 170 metres AOD and falls to approximately 110 metres on the southern boundary. The slopes are in general between 1 in 20 to 1 in 30. There are locally more steeply sloping areas with gradients steeper than 1 in 10, around a low hilltop in the central section of the site, an area close to the north western boundary, and within clearings on the western edge of the site.

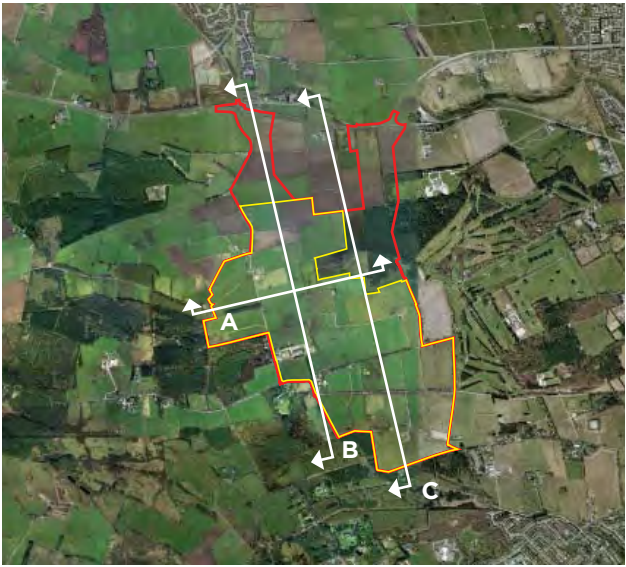


fig. 31: Section locations

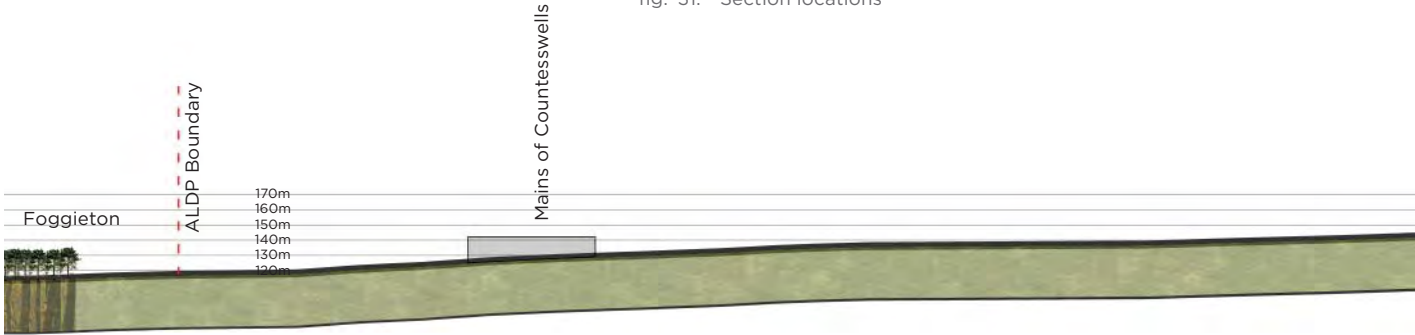


fig. 32: Section B

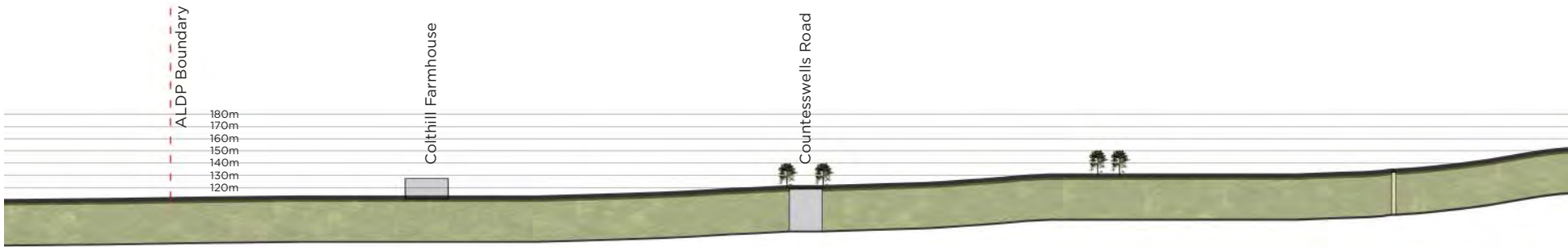


fig. 33: Section C

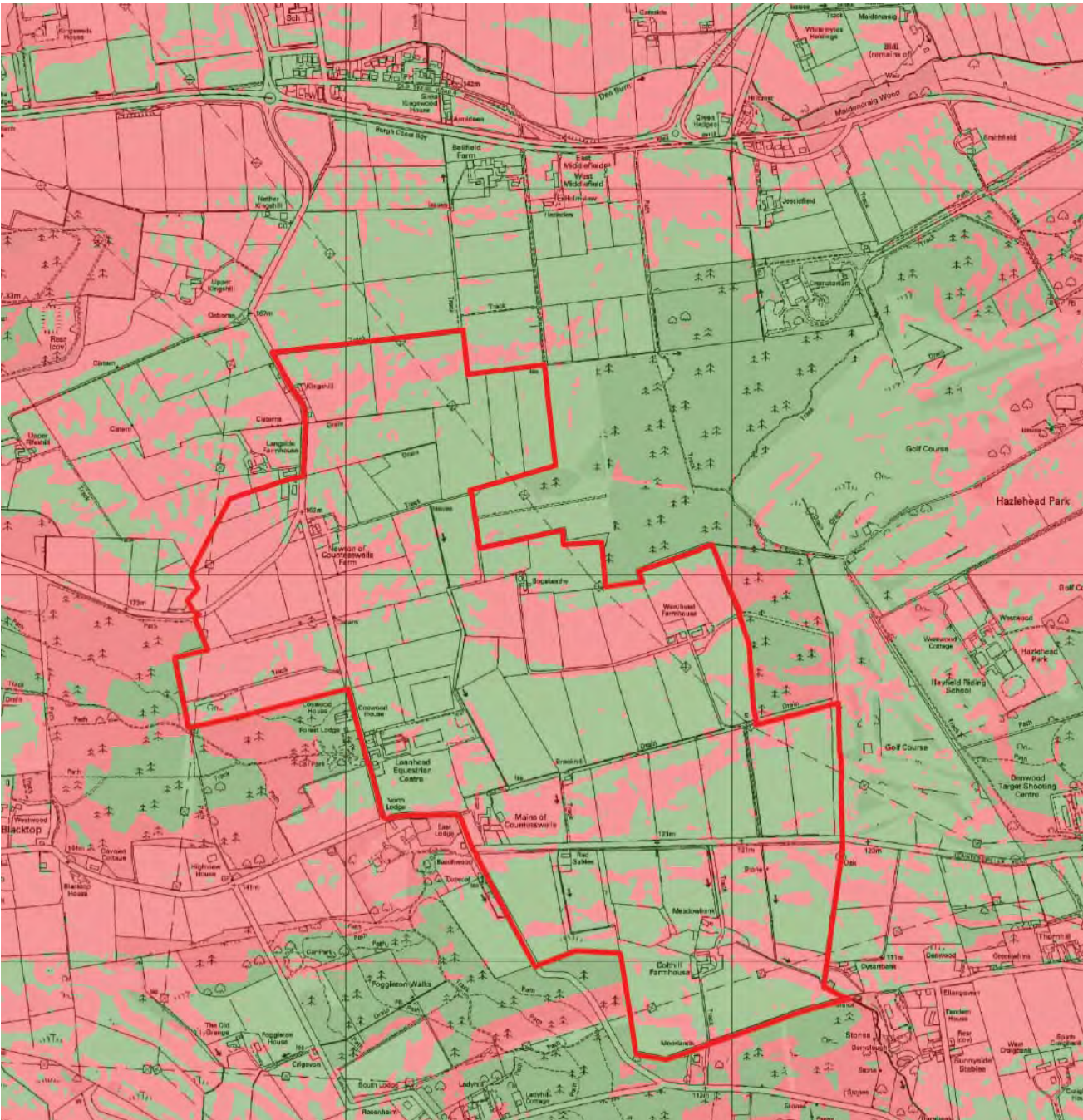


fig. 34: Slope analysis

Slope analysis



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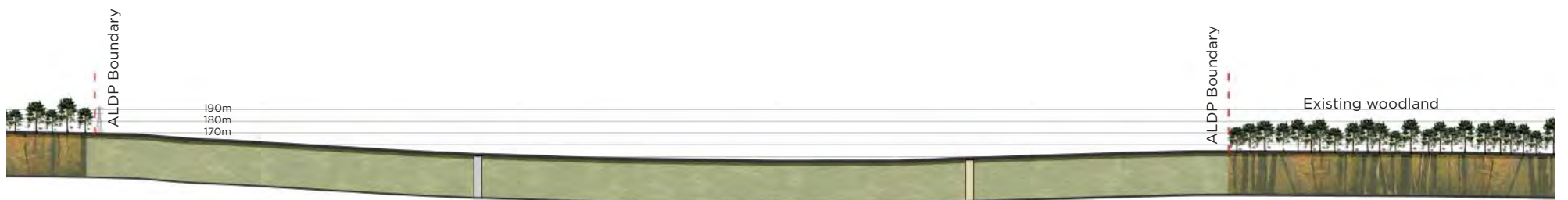
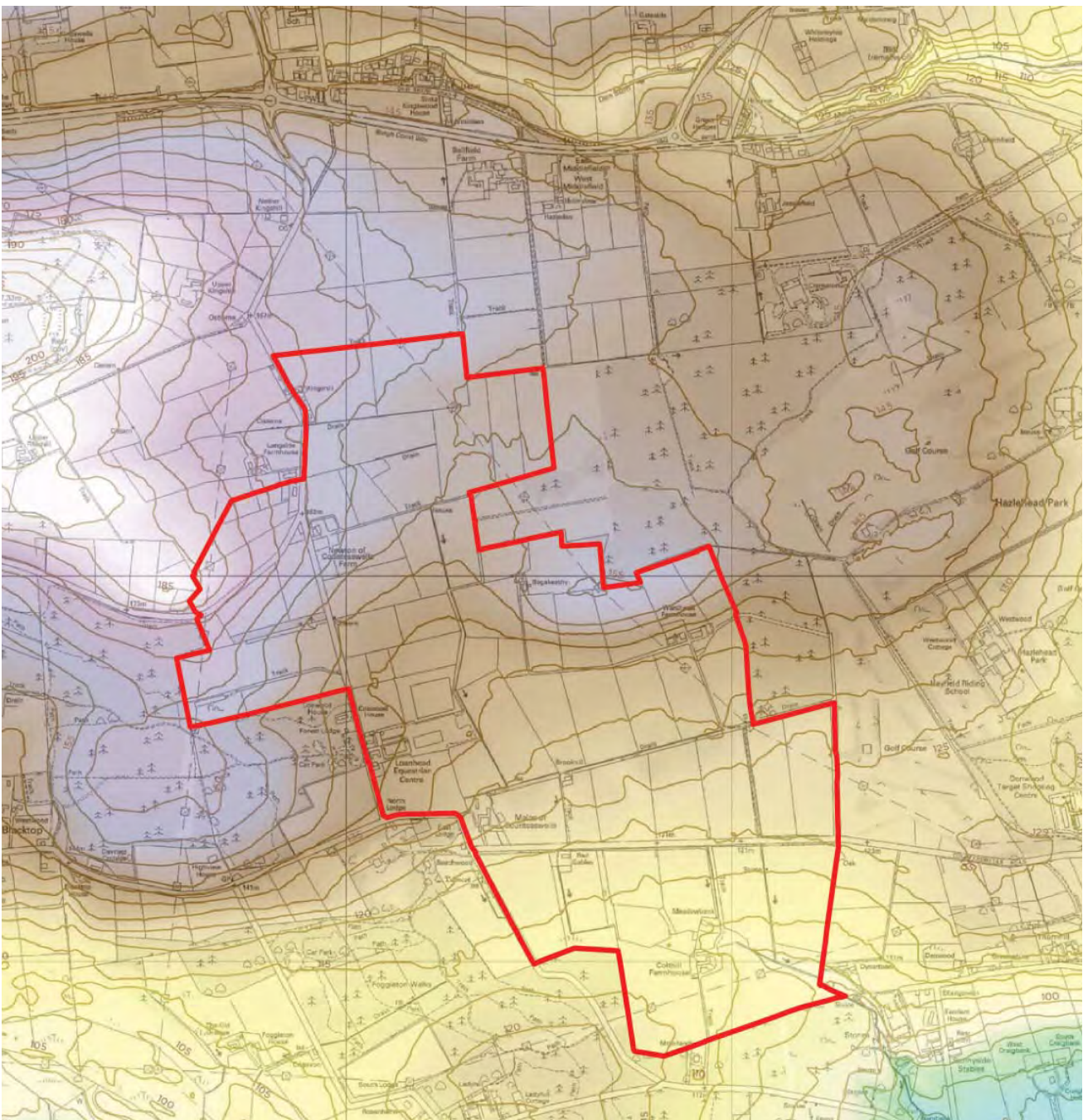


fig. 35: Section A



Elevation



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fig. 36: Elevation

3.5 Hydrology

3.5.1 Surface water

There are no significant watercourses on site. A number of drainage ditches exist in the northern part of the site, with a culverted ditch in the most southern area. The main water course within the site is Cults Burn, a modest watercourse gathering natural drainage from the site and flowing from the south-east corner of the site in a generally southern direction, to outfall in the River Dee. The existing water courses on the site are identified on Figure 41 opposite.

Soils information from the Geo-Environmental desk study and evidence from the site walk over indicate relatively poorly draining soils, with an absence of natural sands and gravels, thus indicating poor infiltration characteristics.

There are no Scottish Water surface water sewers on or close to the site. The Cults to Kingswells unclassified road has a road drainage system, suitable for this road alone, but with no capacity for additional development.

3.5.2 Flood risk

There are no indicative flood risks on the SEPA flood map affecting any part of the proposed development site. Local overtopping of some of the minor bodies noted on site is a possibility, but very local to the water flow. No mitigation would be required for any such incidents prior to development. Cults Burn is not identified as a flood risk. The other minor water bodies currently on site appear to be part of an agricultural drainage system.

The minor unnamed watercourses and ditches on the site do not feature on SEPA's flood map. The map does indicate potential flooding from surface water however the areas affected are to be developed and will therefore be incorporated into the drainage design. A Level 1 Flood Risk Assessment, which will consider any existing risk will be carried out as part of the detailed drainage design. As the watercourses are minor and are not represented on the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale maps, site observations and reference to the topographical survey must be made to assess flood risk on a high level basis.

A Level 1 Flood Risk Assessment, will be carried out as part of the planning application process. It should include a model of the existing drainage network and should extend fully downstream to include all culverts along the Cults Burn.



fig. 37: Existing field drainage ditches



fig. 38: Existing drainage ditch adjacent Countesswells Road



fig. 39: Existing drainage ditch adjacent Countesswells Road



fig. 40: Existing low lying wetland area to south of site



fig. 41: Existing site drainage

3.6 Existing trees and woodland

Existing woodland within the ALDP OP38 boundary itself is relatively limited. However there is considerable woodland planting adjoining the site boundaries, much of which is classified as Ancient Woodland. A Tree and Woodland Survey Report Countesswells March 2012 has been produced by Struan Dalgleish Arboriculture.

3.6.1 Significant groups of trees

Significant groups of trees are located at the north eastern corner of the site where substantial areas of coniferous plantation (G10 and G12 to G16) were recorded. These areas of trees adjoin the woodlands of Hazlehead Park.

A substantial shelterbelt of mature Sitka spruce (G18) was recorded near the western boundary of the site.

Strips of mature trees occur as an avenue of mixed broadleaf's along Countesswells Road (G21) and lining adjacent field boundaries within the southern portion of the site (G6 and G20 to G25 and G27).

Elsewhere, trees were often recorded around farm buildings and houses or as small scattered trees growing from stone dykes at field boundaries. This includes G1 to G3, T4, G5, G7, G8, G9, G11, G17, and G19.

3.6.2 Summary of management issues

Lodgepole Pine

Where lodgepole pine occurred within the coniferous plantations G13, G14 and G15 the trees appeared to be unhealthy and of low vigour with sparse crowns and prone to wind damage.

Within these groups the lodgepole pine is considered to be of very limited long term potential and will required to be removed within the next 10 years.

Wind damage

The effects of high winds uprooting and snapping trees was noted to be a particular issue within G12, G13 and G15 with lodgepole pine the most prone to damage as mentioned above.

Where windblown trees overhang paths these should be removed as soon as possible. Due to the unpredictable nature of severe storms there is a degree of uncertainty in quantifying the future likelihood of wind damage within the other coniferous species present, namely Sitka spruce, larch, Scots pine and Norway spruce. It is however generally considered likely that due to the even aged structure of these stands that as the trees increase in height the likelihood of further and severe wind damage occurring will increase.

Appropriate management of the plantation woodland could create a more diverse and robust woodland improving the conditions for the retention of trees in the long term.

Dutch Elm Disease

The disease, which is becoming increasingly common in the area, appears to have been responsible for the death of a number of trees throughout the site. Dead elm trees were noted within G5, G21 and G24.

At present there remain a good number of apparently unaffected and healthy elm trees throughout the site, and further spread of the disease would have serious implications for the tree cover. The elm population should therefore be closely monitored for signs of infection and where noted prompt action taken in an attempt to limit the spread.



fig. 42: Woodland edge of Hazlehead Wood

3.6.3 Trees and development

No-build Zones

A recommended 'no-build' distance has been provided for each woodland group. These distances are based on ultimate tree height and take into consideration factors such as shading and the concerns often expressed by home owners with regard to the presence of large and mature trees in close proximity to their houses. Recommended no-build zones are given in the tree survey schedule. These distance as are measured from the base of the trunk of the edge trees.

This is therefore intended to be a zone where construction of houses, light structures and gardens are excluded however roads and paths to provide access would be permitted provided their construction does not negatively impact on root protection zones.

All development will be considered in accordance with BS5837:2012 'Trees in relation to Design, Demolition and Construction' and should be discussed with the ACC Arboriculture Officer.

Root Protection Zones

Root Protection Zone's (RPZ's) are areas surrounding the tree that contains sufficient rooting volume to ensure the survival of the tree. Within this zone no ground works should be undertaken to avoid soil compaction, root severance, changes in level or soil contamination which could reduce the trees health or stability.

In-accordance with BS5837:2012 'Trees in relation to Design, Demolition and Construction' the protective distance can be calculated by multiplying the stem diameter by 12, or by 10 in the case of a multistemmed tree. This distance is measured from the base of the trunk and provides a RPZ. In setting out an RPZ it should not be presumed that roots can spread uninhibited in all directions, consideration should be given to the morphology and potential disposition of the roots. External factors may require the RPZ to be off-set or non-circular.

For the purpose of this report where individual tree diameters have not been recorded and to provide general guidance for site layout RPZ should be considered to be equivalent to the drip line of the canopy as found at the time of survey. This is not an accurate methodology and the actual RPZ should be established as part of the Tree Protection Plans produced to support future applications.

Following construction sufficient space around the trees to be retained must be provided to ensure their long term retention/survival. This should be based on tree species and habit rather than the RPZ.

A detailed Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of BS5837:2012 'Trees in relation to Design, Demolition and Construction' and Scottish Government policy 'Control of Woodland Removal' following the detailing of site layout design proposals.



fig. 43: Existing ancient woodland to South of site



fig. 44: Tree avenue along Countesswells Road

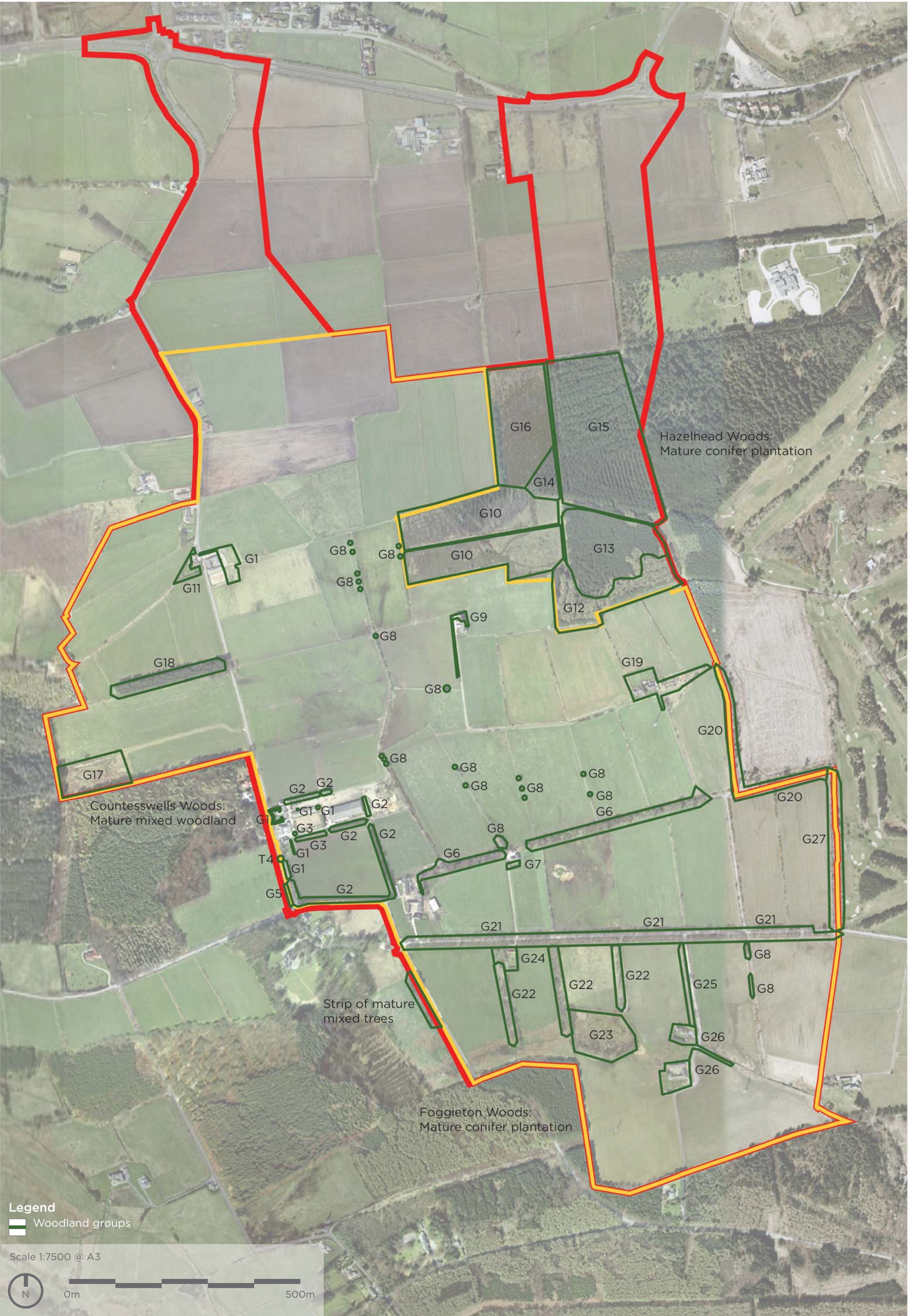


fig. 45: Existing Trees

3.7 Access and connectivity

3.7.1 Pedestrian and cycle access

Located 2km west of Craigiebuckler, 1.5km north of Cults and 2km south of Kingswells the principal existing walking routes in the vicinity of the Countesswells site are generally for leisure purposes and in particular horse riding with a number of countryside and forest trails formed in the areas surrounding the proposed site. Publication of the City Council's Core Paths Plan in April 2009 has formalised the status of these existing routes, see Figure 47 below. Apart from a potential link to Hazlehead Academy (currently the nearest secondary school) there are no other existing significant attractions which are accessible within a conventional 1600m walking distance from the site by the existing path network.

In order to improve the potential for cycle commuting Aberdeen City Council and NESTRANS implemented a Westhill-Aberdeen cycle route along the A944 corridor to the north of the site. This has led to the implementation of significant improvements to the route as an off road route, eastwards from Kingswells towards the city.

Whilst some of the existing cycle provisions around the site are off-road routes and dual-use paths the majority are on-road via either cycle lanes or 'recommended routes' along more lightly trafficked roads. Some of the lightly trafficked roads however do not form the most direct routes likely to maximise cycling potential. Much of the existing local road network serving the area carries significant volumes of orbital traffic movements around Aberdeen particularly at peak hours impacting on its attractiveness for cyclists.

Following completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) it is envisaged that substantial proportions of existing traffic movements will divert to the new route thereby significantly improving the attractiveness of the existing network for cyclists and facilitating the development of priority routes for cyclists, with many employment and other attractions in the city and surrounding areas within convenient cycling distance.

The Established Access Route identified on the plan below has been utilised for both pedestrian and equestrian recreational activity in excess of 20 years. This link through the site will be maintained, diverted slightly in order to link up to the proposed network of footpaths and streets, allowing for better connectivity and fluidity through the development. A wider path network is proposed with routes that will be able to accommodate equestrian users and allow movement between Countesswells woodland and Hazlehead woodland.

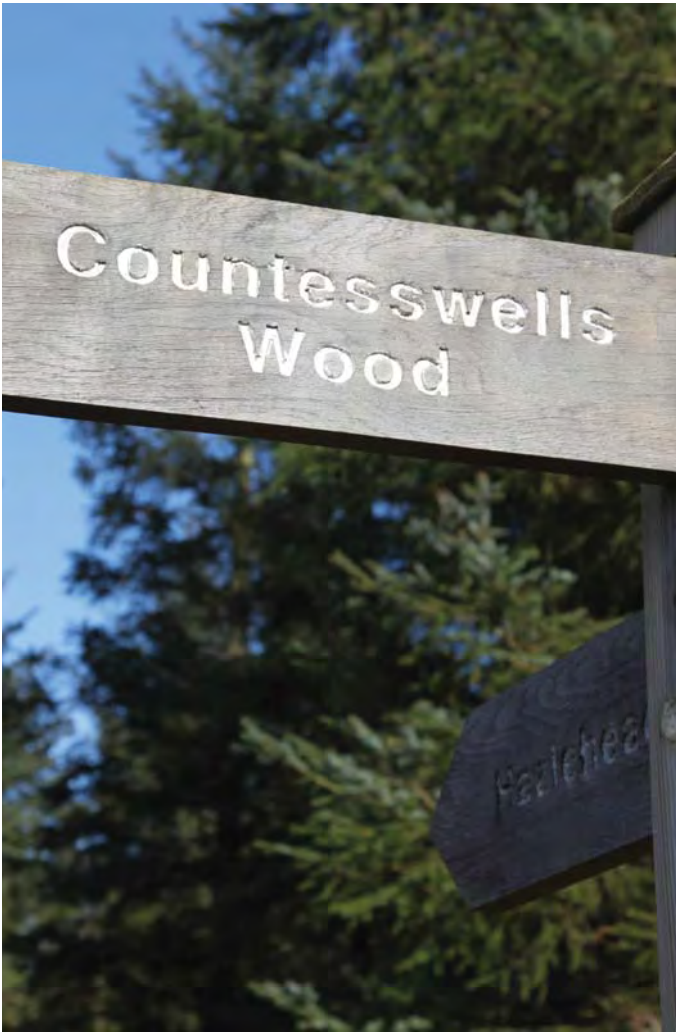


fig. 46: Signpost in Hazlehead Woods



fig. 47: Existing path network



fig. 48: Walking in Countesswells Woods



fig. 49: Horse riding along the core path 57

3.7.2 Public transport

The site does not currently have access to public transport within the conventional 400m walk threshold due to its location on the fringe of the existing urban area. The A944, which runs along the northern boundary of the proposed site, is a designated bus priority corridor and the park & ride at Kingswells located some 800m to the north west of the OP58 boundary will provide a focus for the identification of future bus services, both to/from the city centre and other peripheral destinations via the AWPR.

Existing public transport to the south is approximately 3km from the centre of the site. This is beyond desirable walk distance but within an easy cycle distance or car journey. Links to accommodate these modes will be provided where feasible. The Development Framework has been designed so that public transport can be accommodated from the south should operators wish to do so in the future.

3.7.3 Local road network

The site lies between two of the main radial traffic routes into Aberdeen City Centre from the West with the A944 to the north and A93 (North Deeside Road) to the south.

As a key route into Aberdeen, the A944 accommodates significant traffic volumes in excess of 1500 vehicles (one-way) during the peak hours. The A944 is dual carriageway between Jessiefield roundabout and Westhill to accommodate the high traffic volumes which comprise principally commuters but also high proportions of heavy goods vehicles serving the offshore business park area in Westhill and bus traffic serving both Westhill-Aberdeen and the Kingswells Park and Ride site. Despite its rural context it has street lighting between Aberdeen and Westhill and urban speed limits. Key junctions along the A944 are the Six Mile Fork (at Westhill), the Kingswells roundabout (at Kingswells) and the Jessefield roundabout (Switchback) linking the A944 with Skene Road and Lang Stracht. These junctions are roundabout junctions but the Kingswells and the Switchback roundabouts have partial signal control. The significant traffic volumes commuting along the A944 and negotiating these junctions leads to congestion, queuing and delay during the morning and evening peaks.

The A93 North Deeside Road provides a parallel commuter corridor linking North Deeside communities to the city centre. Tidal traffic flows are observed along this route as the majority of traffic travels towards the city centre during the AM peak and away from it during the PM peak. As it passes through Peterculter and Milltimber towards Aberdeen the route passes contiguous built up frontages with 30/40 mph speed limits and signalised junctions with key side routes such as Baillieswells Road and Kirk Brae (C189).

Principal routes off North Deeside Road at present giving access to the Countesswells site are Baillieswells Road and Kirk Brae (C189). The junction of Baillieswells Road with North Deeside Road is a signalised crossroads. Baillieswells Road beyond the residential areas to the north of North Deeside Road is a relatively narrow two way rural route providing access to Blacktop and links with Kirk Brae (C189) / Countesswells Road.

The junction of Kirk Brae (C189) with North Deeside Road is also a signalised crossroads providing access for residential areas within Cults to the north of North Deeside Road. Kirk Brae (C189) then routes northwards through rural areas, past the proposed development area and its northern end links to the A944 at the part time signalised Kingswells roundabout.

Friarsfield Road also links with Kirk Brae (C189), via a priority junction, to the north of North Deeside Road and continues eastwards on a parallel alignment. It becomes Craigton Road which continues east to a junction with Springfield Road. Countesswells Road is another rural route to the north of and parallel with Craigton Road running between Springfield Road in the east, across the site as a tree lined avenue to link at its western end with Kirk Brae (C189).

Baillieswells Road, to the west of Kirk Brae (C189), connects between Blacktop Road and North Deeside Road. To its northern end it is a narrow rural road but it passes through residential areas of Cults to link at a signal controlled junction with North Deeside Road.

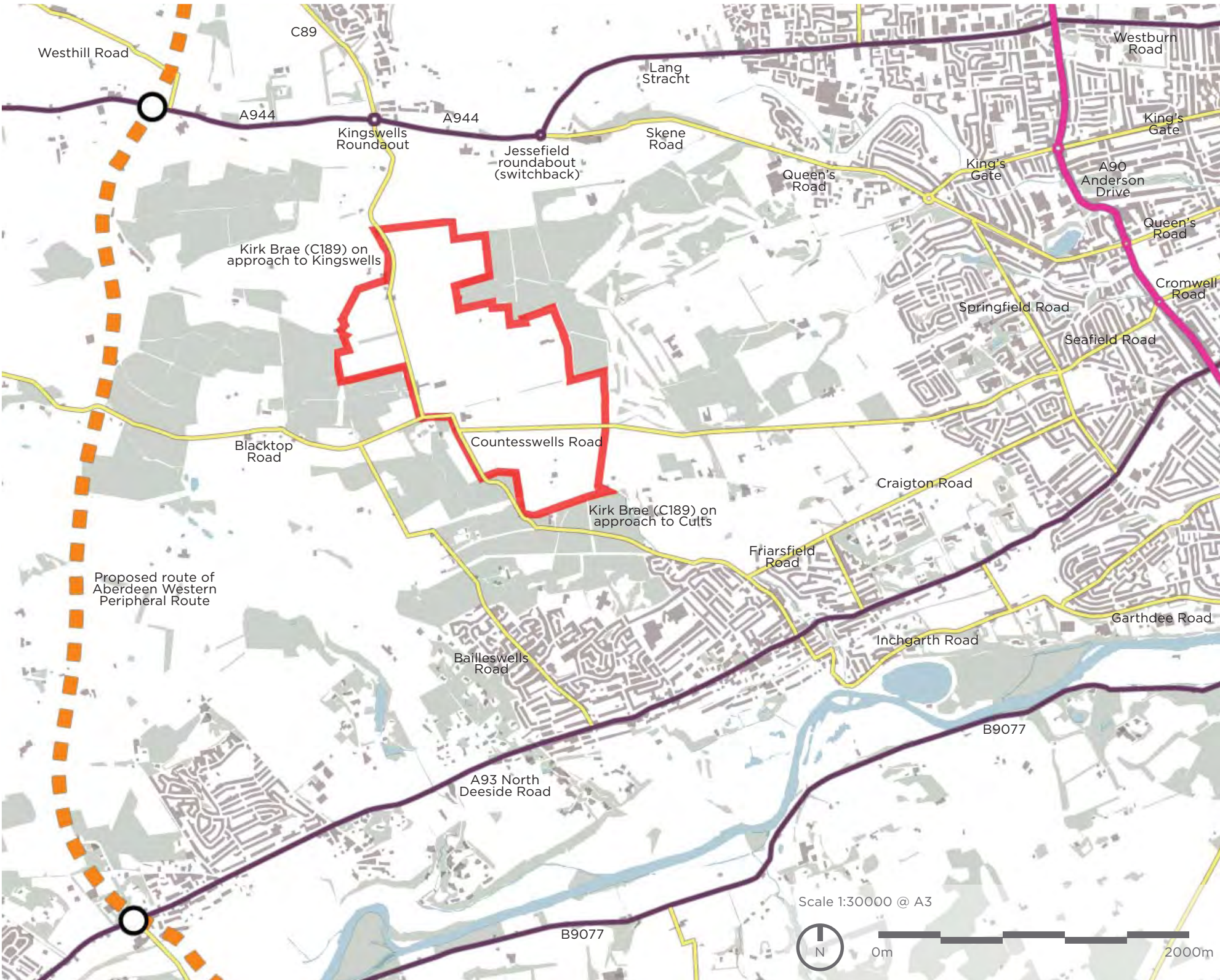


fig. 50: Existing roads

To the west of the area is the AWPR alignment, with new junctions on the A93 between Milltimber and Peterculter and on the A944 between Kingswells and Westhill.

The principal existing route from the Countesswells site to the south is currently an unclassified road which runs north / south past the western side of the proposed site as a single carriageway road subject to a national speed limit; current proposals by ACC will reduce the speed limit on this route to 40 mph. At its southern end, just south of Countesswells Wood, a priority junction is formed with routes signed to the west to Wester Ord and to the east towards Cults. Blacktop Road continues as a national speed limit route to the west and provides access to Easter Ord and Wester Ord.

A second priority junction links with Countesswells Road running east with a national speed limit to link with Springfield Road at a signalised cross roads junction providing access to south west Aberdeen. Kirk Brae (C189) continues east then south after the junction and becomes more urbanised at its southern end, with the speed limit reducing to 30mph. Just prior to entering the urban area Kirk Brae (C189) links, via a priority junction with Friarsfield Road which continues eastwards to Springfield Road. Kirk Brae (C189) continues south to link with North Deeside Road at a signalised cross roads junction and thereby provides access to the majority of residential areas within east Cults to North Deeside Road.

The A93, North Deeside Road, provides a commuter corridor parallel to the A944 linking communities along North Deeside with the city centre. Tidal traffic flows are observed along this route with the majority of traffic travelling towards the city centre during the AM peak and away from it during the PM peak. Peterculter and Milltimber have continuous built up frontages with 30/40 mph

speed limits and signalised cross road junctions with key side routes such as Kirk Brae (C189) and Baillieswells Road.

Junction modelling work has been undertaken to model the effects of the development on junctions to the south. This work highlighted that Kirk Brae (C189) / Kirk Terrace / Friarsfield Road priority junction currently operates within capacity. With the addition of development traffic, however, this junction appears to operate beyond acceptable capacity and therefore mitigation will be required.

Countesswells Road / Springfield Road is a four arm signalised cross roads with the addition of a left turn bypass lane on the Countesswells Road (Eastbound) approach. Junction analysis predicts that this junction demonstrated that it currently performs satisfactorily, with reserve capacity and acceptable queuing levels. Previous proposals for residential development at Pinewood / Hazeldene within the vicinity of this junction identified improvements to be made to this junction and modelling these improvements with the addition of development traffic shows it to perform satisfactorily.

The Craigton Road signalised junction was modelled with development traffic and was shown to operate within acceptable capacity as were the Kirk Brae (C189) / North Deeside Road and Baillieswells Road / North Deeside Road signalised junctions.

All proposals will be finalised and agreed via the Transport Assessment process which will be required to support any future Applications. The Transport Assessment must determine whether the currently proposed mitigation is adequate and identify any further mitigation that is required as a result of the development.



fig. 51: Aerial view looking north

3.8 Environment

3.8.1 Protection of Environmental Assets

The Countesswells site benefits from a range of environmental assets that will be protected and enhanced through the development process. The Development Framework and Masterplan design process has been informed by environmental and ecological baseline surveys and consultation advanced with a number of consultees and stakeholders.

Environmental work undertaken to date includes:

- Initial Environmental Risk Assessment and walkover survey to identify potential issues and opportunities associated with environmental assets.
- Completion of suite of Ecological Surveys spring/summer 2012 to inform the detail of the Development Framework and to provide baseline for subsequent Environmental Impact Assessment.
- Environmental Workshop with officers from Aberdeen City Council and statutory consultees provided the opportunity to advance discussions with Aberdeen City Council Environment Team, potential opportunities and constraints presented by the site.
- Preparation of a Scoping Report and submission of a formal scoping request to Aberdeen City Council in June 2012. This follows a screening determination (July 2011) from Aberdeen City Council that EIA was required to support the PPIP.
- Review of the Scoping Responses received to ensure recommendations and suggestions for assessment are addressed within the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Statement
- Undertaking surveys and assessment associated with the preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Statement which will be submitted with the PPIP.

3.8.2 Design Response to Environment

The Design Team have considered the influencing factors posed by existing site features, including watercourses, mature trees, topography and built heritage in parallel with existing sensitivities and constraints. Iterations of the preferred development included analysis of the most optimal locations for the built and landscaped elements, so as to avoid impacts on natural and cultural heritage features of interest and value and any potential neighbouring receptors.

This exercise has included review of a range of alternative layouts informed by an environmental ‘constraints’ plan and advice from specialists relative to ecology, water environment and cultural heritage. A Tree Survey informed the retention and protection of high quality trees and advised relative to management of trees in poor quality.

Key Environmental Design Considerations:

- The Greenspace Network within the site and in the surrounding areas containing a range of habitat types (Source: Aberdeen City Council ‘In My Area’ GIS Resource).
- Protection and enhancement of biodiversity capital on the site e.g. tree belts, hedgerows and habitat relative to protected species interest and landscape features including Cults Burn
- Protecting and enhancing the landscape and visual amenity of the site and surrounding area. Particular consideration of retention, where possible, features of the site that contribute to the local landscape, character and quality of the site including hedgerows, tree avenues and boundary planting.
- The development enhances the greenspace by promoting a network of woodland corridors through the site linking Hazlehead and Countesswells woods.

3.8.3 Environmental Impact Assessment

A Regulation 6 (1) request for a Screening Determination in terms of the 2011 EIA Regulations was lodged with Aberdeen City Council by Stewart Milne Homes on behalf of the Countesswells Consortium on the 14th June 2011 with regard to proposed development of the Countesswells site. Aberdeen City Council determined that Statutory EIA was required. A subsequent scoping request was submitted on behalf of the Countesswells Consortium to Aberdeen City Council in June 2012 with responses received from statutory consultees, planning officers and other key consultees.

Consultation responses received from the Council and key statutory consultees (SNH, SEPA) were reviewed and comments taken into consideration during the preparation of the Environmental Statement and further development of the design proposals.

This scoping exercise facilitates the progression of design and an EIA on the basis of a full understanding of the constraints relating to environmental sensitivity and statutory agency/ planning authority requirements. Pre-scoping consultation has been advanced with key consultees to discuss specific topic areas (for example Ecology and Environmental Designations) and this consultation has continued to inform the design which the subsequent EIA will assess.

In addition to statutory EIA scoping, the Consortium have also engaged in a series of pre-application consultation events, inviting members of the public and the local community councils to view and discuss the proposed Development Framework for the Countesswells site. Environmental issues and opportunities raised have been addressed through survey, assessment and design iteration.

The environmental assessment is being progressed in accordance with EIA best practice.

EIA Assessment Methodology

Planning Advice Note 1/2013 Environmental Impact Assessment provides guidance on the determination of significance of potential environmental impacts of developments based on the following criteria:

- The sensitivity of the receptor
- The likelihood of the potential impact occurring
- The potential magnitude of any impact
- Initial recommendations for mitigation/measures to address these potential impacts

Some specialist EIA topic areas such as Landscape and Visual Impacts and Ecology use a slight variation on the assessment approach described above as they follow best practice guidance – these chapters will define the specific assessment methodology and how significance of impacts has been assessed. The Environmental Assessment will clearly identify any mitigation to be implemented as part of construction and/or operation of the scheme.

The site layout has been developed around a drainage network located within landscape corridors to provide a comprehensive visible drainage system across the site that will manage surface water and improve water quality. In order to protect the existing water environment and prevent run-off and sediment impacting on watercourses, including the River Dee, a method statement, detailing how surface water arising during construction is to be dealt with, will be prepared by the contractor for approval prior to commencement of works on site. During the development of the site a surface water management strategy will be prepared for each individual construction phase. A Construction Environmental Management Plan for each phase of development will be submitted to the Planning Authority.

3.8.4 Habitats Regulation Appraisal

European Directive 92/43/EEC (The Habitats Directive) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 requires competent authorities to carry out an Appropriate Assessment of projects that, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, are likely to have a significant effect on European designated sites.

The River Dee has been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for populations of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) and otter (*Lutra lutra*). The proposed development at Countesswells is located approximately 3.5km north of the River Dee.

A Report to Inform the Habitats Regulation Appraisal was prepared as part of the Environmental Statement. This report concludes that, subject to the mitigation proposals identified, the development will have no likely significant environmental effects on the integrity of the River Dee SAC. Mitigation includes production and implementation of Construction Environmental Management Plan(s) and implementation of SUDS and water saving technologies. In accordance with SNH advice.

Environmental Statement

Aberdeen City Council determined that a Statutory EIA is required and should be submitted with the application for Planning Permission in Principle (PPIP). Work on the EIA is currently underway. The EIA will cover OP58 and includes the road corridors connecting north to the A944.

Work undertaken on the EIA to date has identified no significant environmental issues that Masterplanning, Environmental Mitigation and appropriate Environmental Management has/will not successfully address.



fig. 52: Red squirell in Countesswells woods



fig. 53: Deer adjacent Countesswells woods

Land Use

The development proposal represents a land use change from low grade agricultural land (agricultural fields and grassland) to a Mixed Use Sustainable Community. Key landscape features have been incorporated into the design proposals and full consideration given to landscaping, green networks and corridors in the design of the development.

Hydrology, Drainage and Water Quality

Surface water bodies include Cults Burn and tributaries which drain in to the River Dee which lies 3km south of the Countesswells site. The site contains a number of field drains which have been incorporated into the drainage strategy for the site and potential impacts will be discussed within the EIA. Comprehensive Sustainable Urban Drainage systems according to best practice, will ensure run off, and water quality are adequately accounted for the design parameters. On completion of the works, the overall changes in hydrology and morphology are anticipated to be beneficial for Cults Burn and the field drains.

The River Dee is a European Designated site (Special Area of Conservation, SAC) for the species that it supports and therefore any discharges will need to be carefully management as part of surface water drainage strategy and design (SUDS). The EIA will assess potential impacts of the proposals on the water environment and will recommend appropriate mitigation measures where required. A Draft Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will seek to outline key actions for pollution prevention and control measures including those to protect the water environment.

Ecology, Nature Conservation and Biodiversity

Approach and Surveys

The ecology assessment collates and evaluates the available wildlife information for the proposed development at Countesswells, Aberdeen. Extensive and wide-ranging consultations were held with interested parties and members of the public, local organisations and statutory consultees including Scottish Natural Heritage.

Ecological surveys were undertaken over the period February 2012 – November 2013 and were to national standards using recognised methods and covered, habitats, trees, breeding and wintering birds, bats, otter, badger, red squirrel and higher plants. This established baseline was evaluated and features assigned values from local to international importance.

- Desk-top data collation from SNHi, National Biodiversity Network, North East Scotland Biological Records Centre, Grampian Badger Surveys, Saving Scotland’s Squirrels Project
- Consultation with SNH, and Scottish Wildlife Trust
- Site specific surveys, all to standard methods, to provide a baseline
- i. Phase 1 Habitat survey
- ii. Breeding bird survey
- iii. Otter, badger, red squirrel and water vole surveys
- iv. Specialist bat survey
- v. Higher plant species listing
- Data evaluation and assessment according to current guidelines as defined in: SNH (2010). A Handbook on Environmental Assessment; and Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2006) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK . IEEM.

Ecological Evaluation, Assessment and Design

The Countesswells site is of lower nature conservation interest due to a long history of agricultural use combined with local plantations dominated by non-native tree species. It lacks large features such water courses and waterbodies as well as any significant semi-natural habitat. The foregoing is reflected in the absence of any statutory nature conservation designations. Main species level interest is limited to a few farmland bird species in low numbers. There are no known protected mammal species constraints on the site as breeding bats, breeding badgers and breeding red squirrel are absent. The few residual impacts are in the range positive to slight. The EIA will include a detailed Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA).

Iterative design has been informed by ecological information. The development enhances the greenspace by promoting a network of woodland corridors through the site linking Hazlehead and Countesswells woods. Biodiversity has been addressed through the Landscape Strategy and will be further developed through detailed design.

Landscape and Visual

The development sits within the open and wooded farmland landscapes to the west of Aberdeen. Open farmland is characterised by gently rolling landform of open character containing scattered farmsteads, while wooded farmland is characterised by diverse, undulating and rural landscape containing woodland plantations, shelterbelts and clumps and scattered traditional style buildings.

A landscape and visual impact assessment is required as part of the assessment of environmental impacts, in order to determine the effects of the proposed development on the existing landscape and on visual receptors with views of the site

An assessment in accordance with guidance given in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Second Edition) (2002) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment and Management as well as guidance on the assessment of landscape character (Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002), Scottish Natural Heritage and The Countryside Agency).

Cultural Heritage

Baseline studies for the proposed development area comprised a desk-based assessment and field survey (in the form of a walk-over survey) of all known sites within the development area and a 100 m buffer zone surrounding it. A further 1 km buffer zone was established within which all statutory and non-statutory designated sites were recorded, researched and the impact of the proposed development assessed. Surveys and assessment have been undertaken by GUARD Archaeology Ltd. Study of this surrounding landscape provides the local archaeological and historical context of the development area giving a broader understanding of the historical development of the area and the potential for as-yet-unidentified archaeological remains within that area.

The walk-over survey of the proposed development area was undertaken on 22nd - 24th February 2012 in dry conditions. A Global Positioning System (GPS) was available to record the locations of any features identified; any such features were also to be recorded by written description and, if appropriate, measured sketches and photographs. Previously recorded sites noted through the desk-based assessment were visited to assess their current condition Interest

A total of 37 cultural heritage sites were recorded within the study area. The proposed development area itself contains 19 sites of cultural heritage interest. A further 6 sites were recorded within 100 m of the development area boundary and another 12 sites recorded within 1 km of the development area boundary.

Summary of Key Findings

While there are 19 known cultural heritage sites within the proposed development area, only eight of these, none of which are particularly significant, will be directly impacted. Aberdeen City Council may nevertheless require a limited programme of targeted survey and evaluation prior to the ground-breaking works.

Given that the development will have negligible indirect effects upon the settings of thirteen statutory designated sites within the surrounding study area, we do not anticipate that any mitigation of setting effects will be required by Historic Scotland or Aberdeen City Council.

Site	Site name	Site sensitivity	Magnitude of Effect	Magnitude of Effect
12	Kingshill Farmstead	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
14	Newton of Countesswells Farm	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
16	Colthill Boundary Stone	Low	Substantial	Minor/ Moderate
17	Colthill Oak Tree	Lesser	Substantial	Minor/ Unknown
18	Countesswells Reservoir	Lesser	Negligible / No Change	None
19	Mains of Countesswells Consumption dyke	Low	Substantial	Minor/ Moderate
21	Bogskeathy Farm	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
22	Bloomfield Farmstead	Lesser	Substantial	Minor/ Unknown
23	Loanhead farm	Low	Substantial	Minor/ Moderate
24	Wardhead Farmhouse Cairn	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
25	Colthill Farmhouse	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
26	Mains of Countesswells Farmhouse	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
27	Mains of Countesswells Cottages (Broomhill)	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
28	Newton Cottage	Unknown	Negligible / No Change	None
29	Wardhead Rig	Low	Negligible / No Change	None
30	Wardhead Farmhouse	Low	Substantial	Minor/ Moderate
31	Wardhead Boundary Stone	Unknown	Substantial	Minor/ Unknown
33	Woodside Croft	Lesser	Negligible / No Change	None
34	East Middlefield Boundary Stone	Unknown	Substantial	Minor/ Unknown

Noise & Vibration

A noise assessment is being produced for the EIA - the main objective of the assessment is to identify the key environmental noise and vibration issues in relation to the proposed development

Traffic flows will inevitably increase as a result of the new development on the existing local road network. However it is considered that there will be no significant increase in noise levels (greater than 33 dB), as result of the scheme. Impacts on existing dwellings will be buffered by the new development which will screen noise pollution. The assessment will be presented within the EIA.

It is inevitable that there will be noise disturbance during the construction phase; however this will be a localized phenomenon and will be temporary in nature. Existing residential properties will be most affected by this impact; however the Construction Environmental Method Statement will provide measures to reduce the impacts of noise and vibration.

Any planning application will require to ensure the protection of Hazlehead Park from increased transportation noise associated with the development. This is in accordance with it's designation as a Candidate Quiet Area in accordance with the Council's Draft Noise Action Plan.

Air Quality

The aims of the air quality assessment are to establish the baseline pollutant concentrations at representative locations in the vicinity of the site, assess the impacts associated with the proposed development; and consider the air quality impacts of traffic emissions arising from predicted changes in traffic flow from the completed development. Current concentrations of air pollution in the area are well within the Government's air quality objectives, the main source of which is road traffic. During the operational phase of the development, there will be local impacts on air pollution likely from increased traffic, particularly on properties 1km north, adjacent to the A944, however concentrations of these are anticipated to remain below government targets – detailed assessment will be presented within the EIA.

There may be short periods during the development process when some local properties experience minor levels of nuisance from dust deposition. Potential construction impacts will be assessed in accord with ‘Guidance on the Assessment of the Impacts of Construction on Air Quality and the Determination of their Significance’, 2010. Mitigation of potential impacts during construction will be addressed within the Draft Construction Environmental management Plan incorporating a Draft Dust Mitigation Plan.

Pedestrians, Cyclists and Community Effects

Hazlehead Park (LNCS) and Denwood LNCS to the east of the site and existing woodland areas to the west including Blacktop LNCS and Foggieton LNCS are all locally/regionally important for formal/informal recreation by local residents e.g. dog walking/cycling/horse riding etc. Footpath networks and greenspace areas/corridors have been integrated within the development proposals and footpath network / links will improve links with these wider areas to maximise connectivity within and outwith the site.

Traffic and Transport

Potential environmental impacts arising from increased traffic flows presented during both construction and operation have been identified. With mitigation, where required it is anticipated that environmental impacts can be minimised to an acceptable level. Traffic impacts relative to Noise and Air Quality are assessed within relevant specialist chapters.

The proposed development will result in significant travel demand, where a significant amount of that demand will be retained on site. Significant demand will be put on public transport resulting in a radical overhaul of the current provision in conjunction with connections to the Kingswells Park and Ride.

Construction Impacts

A Draft Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) incorporating a Draft Dust Mitigation Plan will be produced for the site. This will include a review of potential construction phase impacts, phasing, and key actions that may be required to protect environmental assets through to completion. There will be a Construction Environmental Management Plan submitted as part of the planning application process.

3.9 Aberdeen airport

Countesswells is within the 13km safeguarding radius of the Aberdeen Aerodrome indicating the need for consultation with the aerodrome regarding the development. The SUDS Strategy and Landscape proposals have been informed by BAA Guidance on Aerodrome Safety including

- BAA Advice Note 2: Lighting
- BAA Advice Note 3: Potential Bird Hazards and Landscaping
- BAA Advice Note 4: Cranes
- BAA Advice Note 6: Potential Bird Hazards and SUDS
- BAA Advice Note 8: Potential Bird Hazards from Building Design

3.10 Existing utilities

Electricity Transmission Lines

The site is traversed by several high voltage transmission lines with a maximum rating of 132 kV on the main north-south transmission line which runs into Craigiebuckler Substation. This line is pylon mounted, as is the overhead line running east-west and roughly parallel to the south boundary. There are also lesser rated local high voltage lines which serve properties within the site and traverse the site to serve other areas.

The very high voltage overheads are to be left unaltered, with a corridor provided for the usual safety clearances between the live overhead cables and future built development.

Lesser high voltage lines may be utilised in the new supply network, abandoned or diverted, according to the overall servicing strategy agreed with SSE plc.

Electricity

Whilst transmission lines exist across the site, these lines cannot directly supply electricity without going via a substation with transformers to alter the voltage to usable levels.

Therefore, for a new electricity supply, 11 kV cables will be brought to site, most likely from Craigiebuckler, and these will feed a series of local substations which supply 440 V low voltage to blocks of properties. These small substations will be strategically located to suit phased development and to minimise voltage drop in the supply.

It is envisaged that perhaps six such substations will be located within the development, each occupying a small footprint of approximately 25 m .

Gas

There are no existing mains gas supplies on site. Enquiries to Scottish Gas Networks (SGN) confirm that new mains to serve the development may be run from Kingswells or the Countesswells area, or both. These will be in public roads and will then distribute throughout the development.

Water

A Water Impact Assessment has been undertaken, in order to assess capacity of one existing main which serves the site area at present, and to assess additional requirements for new mains and storage reservoir capacity.

The assessment confirms that up to 300 houses may be served from an existing main on the west side of the site.

Thereafter, new mains are required to provide greater pipe capacity in the water network. In addition, after the 600th house, the nearby Kingshill Reservoir from which all supplies will be taken, requires additional water storage capacity. This capacity can be provided within Scottish Water land at the reservoir and, for the whole development, requires to be 2 M litres of water storage. The full reservoir size for this maximum capacity upgrade will be designed and constructed to Scottish Water's specification, for adoption and future operation by the Water Authority.

Diversion or protection of the existing 600mm diameter main crossing the north of the site will be required to accommodate the new distributor road proposed to connect to A944.

Foul Drainage

No foul drainage other than local to existing properties is available within the proposed development area.

A Development Impact Assessment has been undertaken in order to determine the most suitable point of connection to the existing sewer network and to identify any constraints requiring upgrading on the network.

The DIA concludes that the proposed development can connect to existing sewers on Countesswells Road. There is capacity in the network at this point and downstream to the Treatment Works, except for one very short section of sewer at the junction of Countesswells Road and Springfield Road. This requires upgrading to overcome a local surcharge problem. That is the only off-site requirement on the sewer network.

The DIA has been agreed with Scottish Water and its output will be the foul drainage strategy for the development. The foul sewer linking the site to the existing network will be pumped from a new pumping station located within the site.

All new sewers and associated works will be to Scottish Water's specification for adoption by the Authority as future public sewerage.

3.11 Summary of analysis and considerations for design

The plan opposite illustrates the key opportunities and constraints that have shaped the form and layout of the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan at Countesswells. Below the key opportunities and constraints have been listed with the design approach and response to these factors noted.

Existing properties

All of the existing properties identified on the plan opposite are to be retained and will remain within the context of the Development Framework. Access has been maintained to each of the properties in accordance with the title deeds. The location, access and setting of each of the properties has been considered as an important part of the consultation and design process.

Existing trees and woodland

Where trees are proposed to be retained on site or where the site is adjacent to existing trees, root protection, fall distances and daylighting are all important considerations for the Development Framework. To achieve the successful retention of these features appropriate space should be provided. Equally important for the longevity and safety of these features is long term management and maintenance.

Countesswells Woods

Countesswells woodland is a significant area of ancient woodland enclosing much of the western boundary of the site and providing an important ecological and recreational resource. Development at Countesswells should look to protect the setting of the woodland whilst providing enhanced pedestrian links to the area to further realise the area as a key recreational asset.

Hazlehead Woods

Hazlehead Park and woodland areas provides a major recreational resource within this area. Development at Countesswells should seek to provide a number of pedestrian links to the Hazlehead Park area as part of the landscape strategy for the new community.

A strategic area of open space should be provided to connect Countesswells Woodland to Hazlehead Woodland in lines with the aims of the ALDP 'Green Space Network', providing a recreational and ecological corridor connecting these two significant landscape areas.

Ecology / Nature Conservation

A suite of ecological surveys and ongoing assessment has informed the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan. The site is of low ecological sensitivity as a result of past and current land uses - Iterative design has been informed by ecological information. The development enhances the greenspace by promoting a network of woodland corridors through the site linking Hazlehead and Countesswells woods. Biodiversity has been addressed through the Landscape Strategy and will be further developed through detailed design.

Pylons

There are no proposals to divert or underground the existing 132 KV power lines, so they will be treated as a constraint around which development can be configured. Generally to ensure required clearances are preserved under the transmission lines, only limited earthworks should be undertaken in these locations. Where proposed streets pass under transmission lines this should generally occur as close to pylons as possible to allow maximum clearance. The impact of pylons on views and vistas should also be a key consideration of the Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan.

Existing watercourses and ditches

The existing watercourses/drainage ditches currently on the site appear to have all been artificially modified and straightened in the past. It is therefore understood that there is potential to realign these as part of the development proposals.

Wherever possible watercourses should be naturalised and deculverted. Providing buffers of riparian vegetation to watercourses (at least 6 m from top of the bank) following ACC Supplementary Guidance and naturalising artificially modified watercourses are all specific requirements of the plan. Any stretches of watercourse that have existing good banks should be preserved to avoid disturbance

Slopes and topography

The site generally slopes to the south which allows opportunities for development to benefit from both a good aspect and also on the areas of higher ground to benefit from views out to the south over the River Dee valley. Views eastward towards the City and North Sea can also be gained from the higher ground to the west.

The Development Framework will be set out to minimise the requirement for major earthworks, avoiding the steepest slopes and aligning roads and development areas to take account of the landform.

Within the development taller buildings should be located on the areas of lower ground located at the centre of the site. The visual impact of new buildings on the areas of higher ground should be carefully considered as part of the Development Framework. The Development Framework will take on board the findings of the Landscape and Visual Assessment in considering the setting of buildings.

Existing Roads

Existing roads within the site should be considered in the whole context of the proposed new development. Design solutions and layouts should aim to:

- Retain character forming elements such as the tree lined avenue of Countesswells Road;
- Improve road safety and reduce traffic speeds; and
- Maintain access to existing properties.

Existing paths

A route for Core Path 57 which provides an important link between Hazlehead and Countesswells Woods must be provided for within the Development Framework.

The Established Access Route identified on the plan below has been utilised for both pedestrian and equestrian recreational activity in excess of 20 years. This link through the site will be maintained, diverted slightly in order to link up to the proposed network of footpaths and streets, allowing for better connectivity and fluidity through the development. A wider path network is proposed with routes that will be able to accommodate equestrian users and allow movement between Countesswells woodland and Hazlehead woodland.

In addition to the recognised routes described above the Development Framework will also aim to provide connections to existing paths and routes adjacent to the site area to ensure good connectivity.

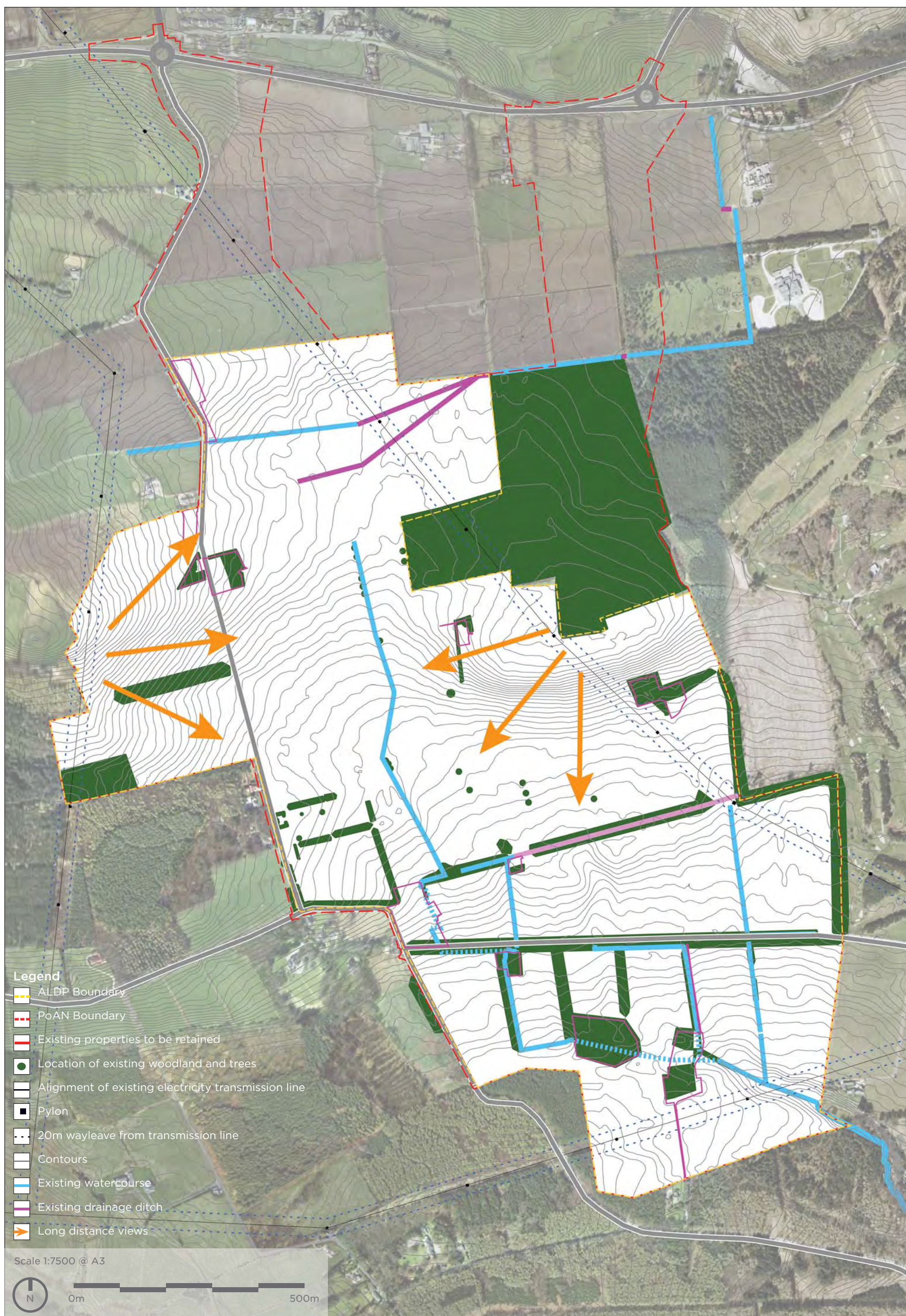


fig. 54: Opportunities and constraints

4. The Opportunity and Vision



4.1 The opportunity and vision

The site at Countesswells offers a unique opportunity within Aberdeen City for the creation of a new settlement in an attractive and well contained landscape setting, close to the city centre. The quantum of proposed development allows the creation of a deliverable mixed use community complete with supporting infrastructure and increased opportunities for sustainable solutions. The key opportunities which set Countesswells apart are:

Rural setting on the edge of the city

Countesswells is a rural site in one of the most accessible parts of the City area. It has the capacity to create a mixed use sustainable community that fits within the attractive landscape setting in a way that will make it one of the preeminent places to live in the City region and provide new opportunities for employment, education and recreation.

This high amenity location, set between the woodland at Countesswells and Hazlehead Park is one of the key assets of the site. The site is well situated for easy access to recreational opportunities, utilising the wide range of existing path networks surrounding the site and also provides the opportunity to create enhanced links between these recreational resources, expanding and connecting the path network.



A place in itself

Countesswells presents a unique opportunity for the creation of a new place with its own character and identity. The opportunity is distinct from all the other strategic development opportunities within the City area which predominantly represent the expansion of existing large communities.

The site has the capability to deliver a successful mixed-use development that will play a crucial role in delivering Aberdeen’s development targets. The key opportunity exists in defining the form and character of the place. Countesswells should be distinct within the Aberdeen area and provide a high quality destination not only for people to live but also to visit and work.

A clear identity will be communicated initially through the urban form, architecture and open space.



Scale of development

Countesswells has the potential, whilst respecting the quality of the landscape and surrounding woodland areas, to accommodate a wide range of uses that not only contribute to the immediate housing requirements, but helps fulfil the Structure Plan aims “to grow and diversify the regional economy”.

The number of proposed properties will help support a self-sustaining community and deliver the City’s wider structure plan objectives. The number of new residents will provide a critical mass of population to help support the requirement for schools, businesses, shops, community facilities, public transport and other local amenities that will in turn create a highly desirable place for people to live, work and play.

The proximity and accessibility to the City is a further attractor when thinking about land use options within Countesswells.



Integrated approach to design

Countesswells will not happen overnight, it will be planned to grow and evolve as a new community with the required facilities in place to create an attractive settlement at all stages of its evolution. It will be planned to be grown in a manner that ensures it presents an attractive proposition not only to future residents, but also to prospective commercial investors, further enriching it as a highly desirable place to live and work.

As a result of the location and scale of development the opportunity exists for Countesswells to be planned as a viable mixed use community. Employment opportunities, education facilities, retail and leisure can be planned alongside residential development as an integrated mix of uses.



A place for everyone

Countesswells presents the opportunity to create an inclusive and mixed community in which people can live throughout their life. Countesswells will be a place for everyone.

Creating an identity and sense of place will be central to the new community’s success. At the heart of this vision will be the desire to create opportunities for residents to live more sustainable lifestyles, benefiting from local employment opportunities, involvement and stewardship opportunities in site governance. Countesswells will cater to a diverse range of people, ensuring that the development is accessible and meets a full range of housing need and demand. The development will provide 25% affordable housing across the site.



fig. 55: Opportunity and vision

4.2 Strategic Concept

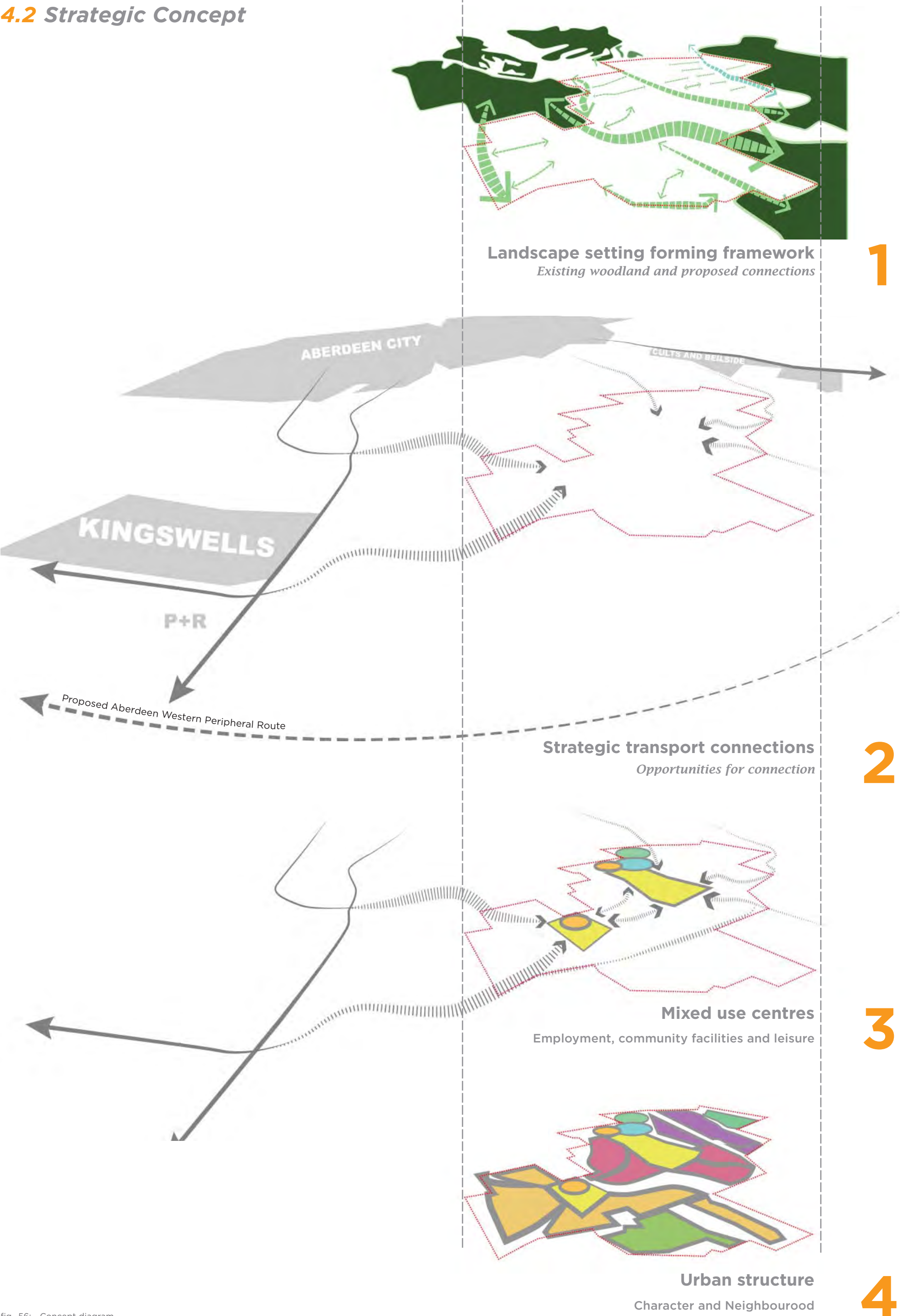


fig. 56: Concept diagram



fig. 57: Concept diagram

1 - Landscape setting forming framework

Existing woodland and proposed connections

A key aim of the development is to connect the areas of woodland at Hazlehead and Countesswells through the creation of landscape corridors within the development. These corridors could be either areas of open space or woodland planting and will include parts of the core path network and drainage network set within the development. They will add to the landscape setting containing the development to the north and provide enhancement of the ecological and recreational networks in the area.

2 - Strategic transport connections

Opportunities for connection

Countesswells will aim to create a place where people can live and work without relying on private transport. For those things that cannot be provided by the site, the proximity to the wider urban area of Aberdeen will be supported by efficient public transport and cycleways, allowing residents and workers to benefit from the proximity to the City and the surrounding communities at Westhill, Kingswells and those along Deeside and up to Dyce. The development will also provide connections to surrounding areas of open space amenities, and employment such as Hazlehead Park, Countesswells Woodland, Kingswells Park and Ride and Prime Four business park.

The street network will be based around connecting all the existing roads (Kirk Brae (C189), Blacktop Road, A944, A93 and Countesswells Road) through the new development to allow good access and efficient transport links.

All streets will be designed reflecting the relative importance of the routes, creating a legible hierarchy within the development. Streets will be designed firstly as places, creating a pedestrian friendly environment that is easy and safe to move around in and follow the principles set out in 'Designing Streets, Policy Statement for Scotland'.

3 - Mixed use centres

Employment, community facilities and leisure

Due to the location and setting it is proposed that Countesswells be designed as a 'destination' and not simply a place to pass through. It should become 'a place to come home to' and 'a place to visit'. The centre of the development is proposed to be the core of the community containing the primary civic, commercial and community facilities creating a focus. The street network should provide good access from all the existing roads to and around all parts of the development.

4 - Urban structure

Character and Neighbourhood

Countesswells is focused around the development of a mixed use core, a neighbourhood centre to the north and a number of distinct neighbourhoods. The mixed use centre will be located at the centre of the community, accessible to all with a smaller neighbourhood centre to the north providing local facilities to those in that area. The neighbourhood centre will contain a primary school and may also contain small scale local facilities such as local shops and community facilities as well as opportunities for some commercial development.

The residential neighbourhoods within Countesswells will be designed to have a unique identity, drawing from their location and setting. A number of distinct character areas will be designed within the development in response to the landscape context and the location within the development.

4.3 Design exploration

Setting



fig. 58: Concept development - setting

Green links



fig. 59: Concept development - green links

Connections

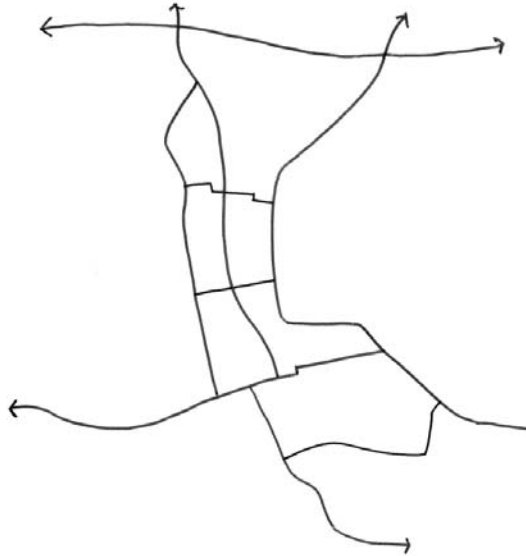


fig. 60: Concept development - connections

4.3.1 Design evolution

The Development Framework and Phase 1 Masterplan presented in this document have evolved over the course of the design process. The way in which the plan has changed has been as a direct result of increased technical understanding of the site, design input from the client and design team, consultation with Aberdeen City Council, statutory consultees and the community.

A multi-disciplinary design team including masterplanners, architects, education specialists, transport specialists, engineers and environmental experts has ensured the viability and robustness of the proposals.

By utilising in-house expertise in housing construction and place making a robust approach to all aspects of sustainability, from the vision and framework stage through to eventual delivery has been developed.

The approach to planning Countesswells has been design led, considering various levels of detail and aspects of design at the same time to ensure the development of an attractive and technically robust proposal.

The buildings, streets and spaces will all be designed taking account of the local environment, the setting and context in order to forge a clear identity for the built environment.

At the same time as considering the architecture and urban form, the design team have explored how the site can be developed into a well-balanced mixed use development. A balance of commercial, community, educational, retail uses and residential mix within the site will allow the creation of a varied and interesting urban form with residents moving around the town and further supporting the creation of a viable mixed use place.

The plans and diagrams opposite reflect some of this process and how it has approached sustainable design in its widest sense. Good design testing at this stage, taking a holistic view of sustainability issues, allows the Framework to create a robust guide for sustainable development.

True sustainability arises from a comprehensive understanding of the natural, social and economic aspects of a place. It means getting the right mixture of tenures and house types and offering a distinct character that gives an area its own identity - Building places, spaces and houses that excite; places that people are proud of and take ownership of.

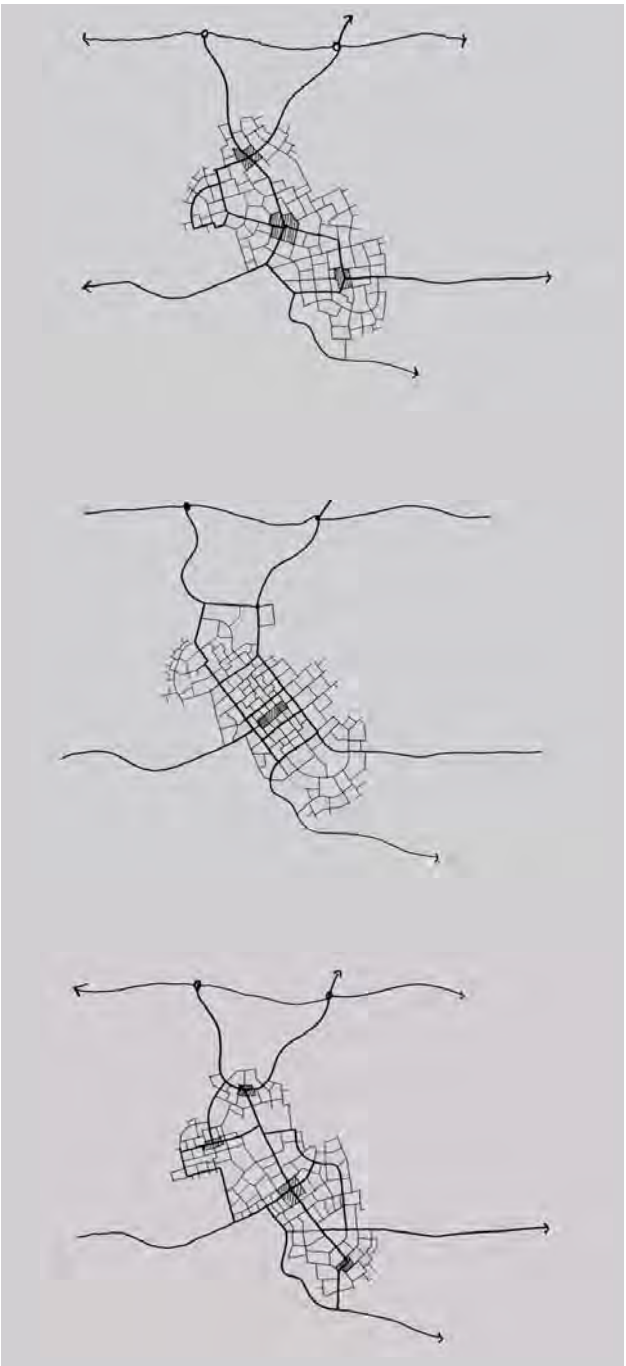


fig. 61: Exploring development form



fig. 62: Community consultation



fig. 63: Community consultation

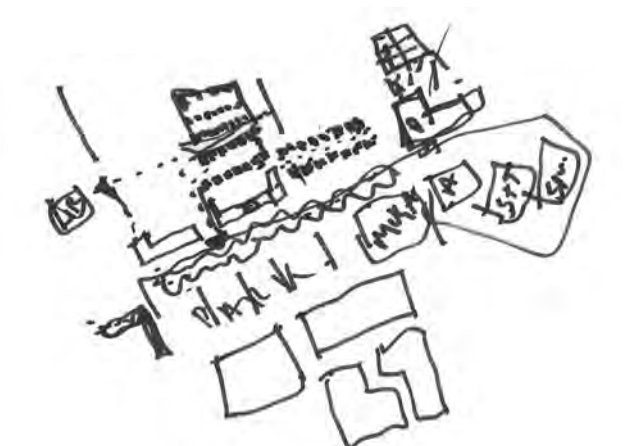


fig. 64: Developing urban form



fig. 65: Initial 3d studies

Development blocks

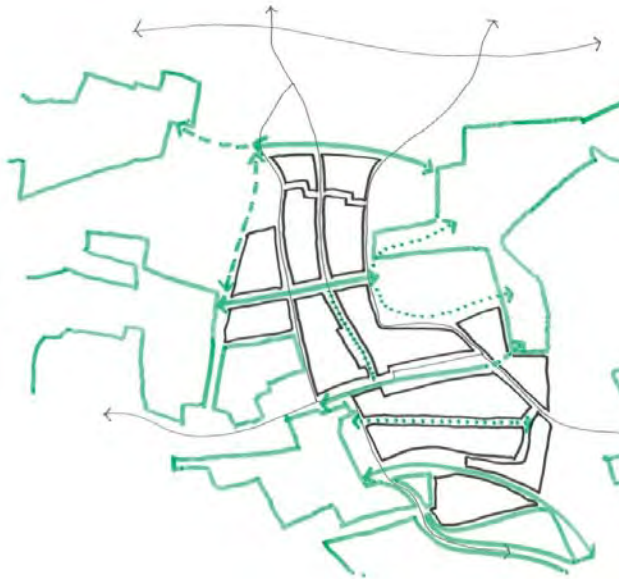


fig. 66: Concept development - blocks

Street blocks



fig. 67: Concept development - Evolving street blocks

Development form

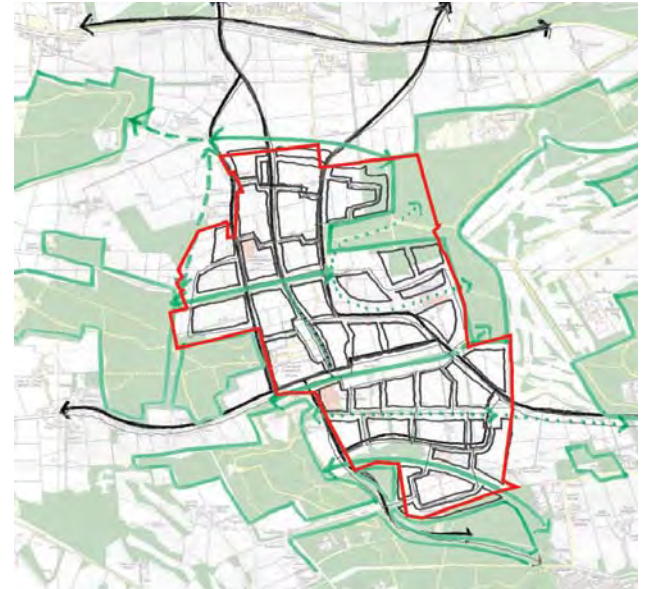


fig. 68: Evolving development form



fig. 69: Exploring block structure



fig. 70: Exploring town centre form



fig. 71: Exploring town centre form



fig. 72: Exploring early development concept

4.3.2 Influences and ideas

Planning for a new community is not a new process. There is a rich history of planning new settlements in Scotland, particularly in the North East.

Successful places are characterful places with a distinctive identity. A Scottish character is a combination of several elements. It is not just about the architecture but all the components of a place. The physical characteristics of a town play a significant part in the social fabric of a place influencing the behaviour of residents and thereby the general feel of a town. It is therefore important to design places at a home scale, imagining how it would be to walk around.

The extract opposite identifies some of the planned towns in Scotland and in the north east developed during the eighteenth century. Primarily conceived by landowners as ways of engineering social, economic and architectural change in their area. As part of the masterplan process the design team have visited some of these planned towns including Granttown on Spey, Dufftown, Fochabers and Huntly, to try and identify what makes a successful and attractive place and what does not work so well.

As well as the historic planned towns the design team have also visited more recent new towns and new developments within Scotland and England to further understand and learn what aspects work in creating successful places that people want to live.

In looking at all the places that we consider successful communities and attractive places to live, one thing that is consistent and clear is that planning the small details well is as important as the large scale planning decisions. The design of the buildings, the streets, the path networks, parks, the locations of bus stops, local shops and schools all combine to create the places that are distinctive and attractive and importantly are comfortable in which to live.

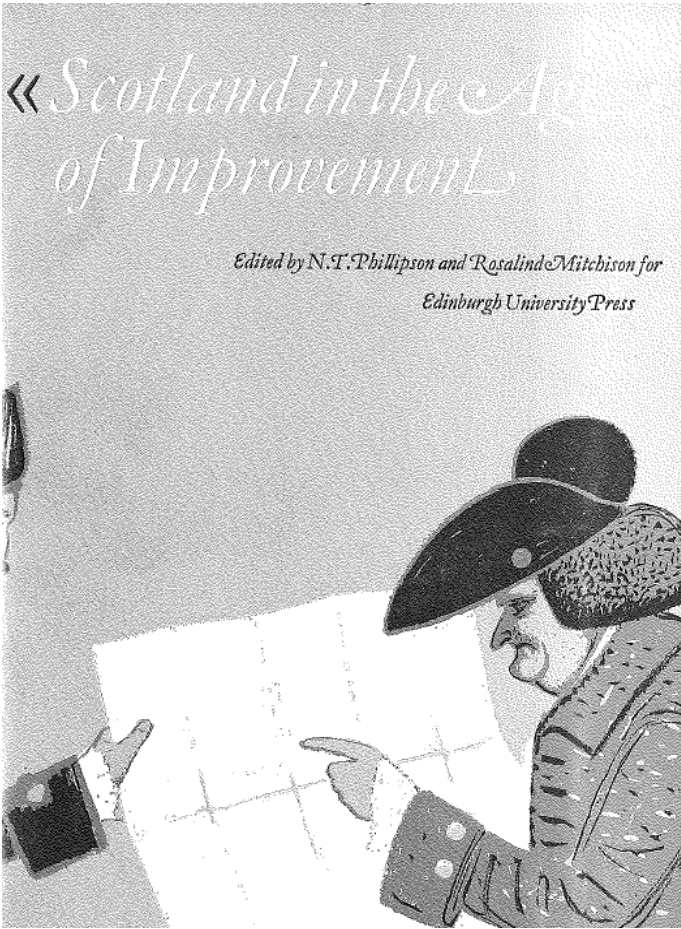
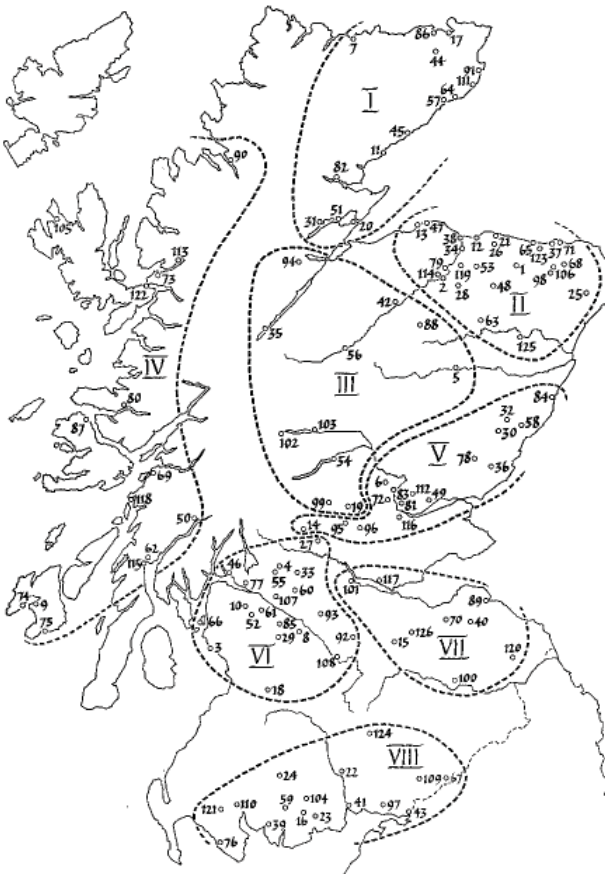


fig. 73: Extract from: Scotland in the Age of Improvements by Lord Monboddo.



The Planned Village in Scotland, 1730–1830



fig. 74: Aerial photo - Ballater



fig. 75: Aerial photo - Dufftown



fig. 76: Aerial photo - Fochabers



fig. 77: Aerial photo - Granttown on Spey



fig. 78: Aerial photo - Stonehaven



fig. 79: Aerial photo - Tomintoul

Traditional precedents



fig. 80: Buildings overlooking public space - Granttown on Spey



fig. 81: Variety in building height - Tomintoul



fig. 83: Variety in building line - Granttown on Spey



fig. 84: Landmark buildings - Dufftown



fig. 86: Mixed use development - Fochabers



fig. 87: Civic spaces - Huntly



fig. 89: Residential street - Turriff



fig. 90: Corner building - Fochabers



fig. 92: Civic buildings in the street - Fochabers



fig. 93: Single sided street - Granttown on Spey

Contemporary precedents



fig. 82: Buildings overlooking public space, Upton, Northampton.



fig. 85: Pedestrian routes - Greenhithe



fig. 88: Residential street - Accordia, Cambridge



fig. 91: Residential street - Upton, Northampton



fig. 94: Buildings overlooking public space - Harlow