



**ABERDEEN**  
CITY COUNCIL



**Woodlands Hospital  
Pitfodels**

**Planning Brief**

**February 2004**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Woodlands Hospital sits on the western outskirts of Aberdeen and the eastern outskirts of Cults. It is located amongst a varied but generally rural setting to its north and east, a more densely developed but still low density residential setting to the south and the suburban outskirts of Cults to the west. Woodlands Hospital has been declared surplus to requirements by NHS Grampian and will close during 2003, being fully vacated by 31st March 2004. This 'previously used' site contains significant areas of modern development, the granite-built Woodlands House and large areas of open space and woodland. It has the potential to provide new high quality residential, business, healthcare or educational uses in a prestigious location and set within a mature treed landscape. This Planning Brief has been produced by Jenkins & Marr on behalf of NHS Grampian, in partnership with Aberdeen City Council as future development guidance for the Woodlands Hospital site. The guidelines contained in this brief will help to make the most of the site, fitting new development within mature landscape features and promoting development that is both modern and high quality as befits the site.

## 2.0 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

2.1 Woodlands Hospital is located in the Pitfodels area of Aberdeen 3.5km to the south west of the City Centre. It sits sandwiched between Rocklands Road (an unmade and overgrown road infrequently used for vehicular traffic) to the south and the adopted Craigton Road to the north. Access to the hospital is currently taken from Craigton Road. Figure 1 below indicated the location and extent of the site, some 26.5 acres (10.73 hectares).



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Figure 1 – Woodlands Hospital - location and boundary

2.2 Historic maps indicate that Woodlands House and the quarry (now disused and set in woodland to the south west of the site) have been in existence since at least 1869 when the surrounding lands remained undeveloped. Further scattered development took place during the 20th Century until the 1960s and 1970s when the majority of the residential areas of Cults were developed nearby for housing. New residential units for the children staying at Woodlands Hospital were constructed in the 1970s and are shown on the map and photograph in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 – Woodlands Hospital - modern accommodation units and layout



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- 2.3 The modern units and the traditional granite-built Woodlands House are now no longer suitable for modern health related purposes. As indicated previously, having been declared surplus to requirements, they will be vacated by the end of March 2004.
- 2.4 Aberdeen City Council currently lease an area of ground within the site for Woodlands School. Woodlands School was originally built to cater for the children who lived on site. There have been no children living on site for a number of years and all of the children who attend the school are now bussed in from outside of Woodlands. Aberdeen City Council, however, retains the lease for the school and may wish to do so until it expires. Notwithstanding this, developers may wish to negotiate with the City Council regarding the future retention of the school on this particular site. This brief assumes that the school will be remaining on site but also includes provision for redevelopment of the school site should it be relocated in the future.

### **3.0 DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE OVERVIEW**

- 3.1 Woodlands Hospital is now surplus to requirements and, as required by Adopted Local Plan policy, a Planning Brief is being prepared setting out the parameters for its future development.
- 3.2 The 10.73-hectare site is situated in the Green Belt and a conservation area. Its future development should therefore be sensitive to its location.
- 3.3 Woodlands Hospital is undoubtedly a 'previously used' site. National planning policy supports the appropriate reuse of such sites over Greenfield sites. The existing development contains significant blocks of hospital buildings set within a parkland type setting. Any future development will be expected to be sensitive to the retention of trees and areas of open space. The original granite-built Woodlands House will also be retained.
- 3.4 The site is suitable for a number of uses but is unlikely to be suitable for large-scale retail or leisure use. Other uses that may be appropriate are housing, hotel, outdoor or small to medium scale leisure, education and institutional uses. In general, terms, any use that does not conflict with the character of the conservation area and the surrounding uses may be acceptable. If the site were to be developed for private sector residential use then a mixture of house types would be preferred. Developers of the site should be aware that the City Council has approved Interim Planning Policy Guidance for Aberdeen that contain a policy to secure an element of affordable housing within all major residential developments. Housing layouts must ensure that any affordable housing provision is appropriately integrated with the development as a whole and be in accordance with the Development Guidance set out in this Brief. A new Finalised Local Plan, including proposed new policies on the provision of affordable housing, is due to published in 2004.
- 3.5 National planning policy supports improved design in new development as material consideration.
- 3.6 The Development Plan supports the reuse of sites such as Woodlands Hospital but also supports the protection of countryside and open space, wildlife and landscape. Non-Green Belt uses (such as residential, business, healthcare etc.) may be appropriate given the site's close proximity to Aberdeen, surrounding population and services, and public transport routes.

## 4.0 DETAILED DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

4.0.1 Figure 3 indicates the overall development guidelines that apply to new development on the Woodlands Hospital site. The main issues are dealt with in more detail below:

### 4.1 Retentions and Demolitions (Buildings)

4.1.1 Much of the building on site is of poor quality, doesn't fit well within the context of Pitfodels and could be demolished. The only building that is worthy of retention is Woodlands House itself. It should be retained and converted to a new use. Modern additions should be removed to re-establish the quality of the original building and the intimate spaces that give it its character. New south facing courtyard entrances could create pleasant spaces and, if used for residential purposes, provide privacy and a sense of ownership.



4.1.2 The remainder of buildings on site (See examples below) may be demolished to make way for new development.



4.1.3 Woodlands School is assumed to be remaining on site. The building itself, however, is of no architectural merit and may be redeveloped if it becomes surplus to requirements.

## **4.2 Access and Movement**

4.2.1 The existing main access to the Woodlands Hospital is lined with mature trees and presents a distinguished sense of arrival when entering the site. This fits well with the image of the Pitfodels area but is somewhat undermined by the quality of the buildings once on the site (with the exception of Woodlands House). It will be important to try and retain the main vehicular access to the site at its present location. Using the existing access will help to protect the existing tree cover in the northern section of the site but also provides a suitable access point for the traffic related to any new development. The existing network of roads also offers a framework for a new site layout facilitating limited or no impact on the existing tree cover.

4.2.2 Whoever may use the site, and for whatever purpose, the Adopted Local Plan and new and emerging policies seek to establish greater access to the countryside. Woodlands has an established network of paths and, although not public, they provide access to informal leisure opportunities (woodland walks and open spaces). Creating greater access into and out of the site for those who may live or work there could bolster this network. The existing access on to Rocklands Road to the south should be retained. A new pedestrian access at the south east of the site should be provided to enable direct access to the bus services a few hundred metres away on North Deeside Road. New access may also be provided to the north east of the site, enabling pedestrian access to Aberdeen or a new footpath behind the line of the existing drystone wall. The woodland walk to the south of the site also offers the potential for expansion to the west and even into the woodland area next to the disused quarry.

## **4.3 Open Space, Trees and Boundaries**

4.3.1 A full tree survey has been carried out. It indicates that although there are over 380 individual trees on site (not including heavily wooded areas), most of these are set around the edge of the site or around Woodlands House itself. The remainder are spread around the site, many are smaller/younger specimens, and they do not necessarily impinge on the development potential of the site. Many of the remaining trees fall within areas of open space or landscape zones that should be retained in any event. Limited tree removal may be acceptable but only if a replacement planting scheme, agreed with the City Council, is in place. All established woodland areas as shown on Figures 3 and 5 should be protected.

4.3.2 Open space is a key feature in certain parts of the site. In order to maintain the character of the site it will be necessary to retain a significant area of open space to the west of the site, and further landscape/open space zones around the southern, eastern and northern boundaries. The existing hospital buildings are around 25 to 30 metres from the northern boundary and 25 metres from the eastern boundary (see figure 4 over). Ardsheiling, on Bairds Brae, is set only 10 metres back from the road. A northern landscape zone of around 30 metres and an eastern landscape zone of around 20 metres should therefore be retained. These landscape zones reflect the character of the existing development on site but, more importantly, the character of the wider Pitfodels area. Both of these landscape zones, however, could accommodate some garden ground (either communal or private) depending on the type of development proposed and the treatment of the associated landscaping.

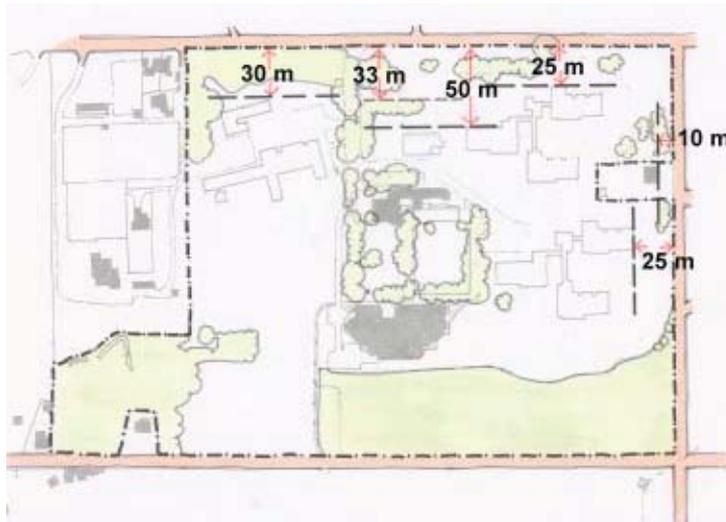


Figure 4 – Existing site layout and distances to boundaries

4.3.3. Woodlands Hospital is bounded, in general, by low drystone walls. Most of these are in reasonable condition and should be retained. Those that are damaged should be reinstated. New internal enclosures or boundary features should reflect the scale and materials of these low granite boundary enclosures. Traditional boundary enclosures within the site should also be retained.

4.3.4 The woodland and landscape zones that make up a continuous green fringe around the boundary of the site, enclosed by traditional drystone walls, builds on the character of the area setting new development back from the surrounding road and path network.

#### 4.4 Area A – North East

4.4.1 This area is the most visually sensitive of all areas of the site. It presently includes much of the modern hospital buildings on site. These can be demolished leaving a substantial area of 'previously used' land to make way for new development. The format of that new development, however, is of major importance. If residential, new development in this area should be large houses in substantial gardens. Each house should, when seen from Craigton Road, be perceived as an individual house rather than a series of similar houses in a suburban street pattern. Each house in this area should be separated (west-east) by 20 metres and need not necessarily face onto Craigton Road. The 30-metre landscape zone should be retained to the north but could incorporate private garden ground with appropriate landscaping and an embargo on any built structures within the 30-metre zone. Access should, preferably, be taken from the existing on-site road network. The overall layout, and the layout of individual houses, must take into account the existing trees, retaining as many as possible, using them to assist the development to blend into the landscape. Development in this area should make the most of the long distance views to South Deeside afforded by its elevated position.

#### 4.5 Area B – North West

4.5.1 This area is set back from Craigton Road and well hidden from the remainder of the site to the east by trees and from Craigton Road by a 20-metre belt of mature woodland. A large, generally tall single storey, hospital building and taller workshops and maintenance garages presently occupy it.

4.5.2 In principle, it offers the opportunity for new development that is associated with the retention of open space to the south. Development in this area should address the open space rather than turn its back on it. If the site is used for residential purposes, the open space could be considered a focal point for the whole site with the potential for housing along its northern and western edges leaving the eastern aspect open to the retained Woodlands House and School. The open space in this location should also be accessible to the School with both direct visual and physical access. The well-hidden nature of this 'previously used' section of the site could accommodate a somewhat higher density development than that on Area A, perhaps 2 or 3-storey terraced housing. A high standard of design and materials would be expected. Development in this area should make the most of the long distance views to South Deeside afforded by its elevated position.

#### 4.6 Area C – East

4.6.1 The site generally drops from north to south. Area C, therefore, sits with a visual envelope of trees on three sides and Area B rising above it to the north. Development in Area B will hide most of Area C from Craigton Road with only broken views into the site from Bairds Brae to the east. Again, all buildings here are modern and have no architectural quality that would merit retention. Once more, their demolition would provide further scope for new development but once again associated with retention of an area of open space to the south and a landscape zone of around 20metres to the east. This area could accommodate a somewhat higher density development than that on Area A, perhaps 2 or 3-storey terraced housing, without harming the character of the site or the Pitfodels conservation area and meet the requirements of national and structure plan policy on the best use of 'previously-used' sites. Open space retained to the south provides both privacy for Woodlands School and a recreational/ environmental buffer zone for the woodland to the south.

4.6.2 Existing on-site road layouts allow easy access to Area C.

#### 4.7 Area D – Central incl. Woodlands House and School

4.7.1 This whole area is, in many ways, the simplest in terms of future development guidelines (see figure 5). Woodlands House should be retained and lends itself well to conversion to apartments. It has established car parking and garden areas, is surrounded by mature trees and could provide a very high quality residential or business environment. The modern additions (to the east of the main building) can be removed without great cause for concern. Their removal, however, may provide scope for further modern extensions to Woodlands House or stand-alone development in a similar location related to the walled garden to the south east. The walled garden presently provides an enclosed area of grass with a 'soft' path (for those making use of the hospital facilities) but contains no landscaping of any significance. Redevelopment of the existing modern extension with appropriate hard and soft landscape improvements, will offer the opportunity to make the most of the walled garden.

4.7.2 Granite walls within Area D should be retained, as should all of the trees. North-south and east-west pedestrian permeability allows for increased use of recreational and open space and greater connection between the wider countryside, local services and this site.

4.7.3 If the school is retained then the close relationship between its main entrance and the open space to the north west must remain. This brief assumes that the school will be staying. Potential developers, however, are at liberty to discuss its future, and potential relocation of the facility, with Aberdeen City Council. If the school is not retained, however, the building does not merit retention and further limited development may be appropriate in its place.

#### 4.8 Area E – South West

4.8.1 This part of the site has been fenced off and is generally made up of overgrown gorse and grass. A metal gate on its the southern boundary suggests that it has been used as a field for grazing livestock in the past. This part of the site is also more steeply sloping than the rest of the site. The northern section of Area E could accommodate some development, albeit quite limited, related perhaps to the development of Area A and the retention of an area of open space to the north. The majority of Area E, however, should be considered an extension of the woodland strip to the east and a natural connector to the woodland around the disused quarry. A new path could be accommodated opening up more of the site for informal recreational.

#### 4.9 Other General Principles Across the Whole Site

- a) Removal of existing sound trees will not be allowed except in exceptional circumstances. Compensatory planting will be required;
- b) A satisfactory landscape plan must be submitted;
- c) The design of buildings, the materials and open spaces must be of a high quality;
- d) Development should utilise existing services without damage to trees walls or local amenity; and,
- e) Boundary enclosures should be good quality walls, fences, trees or hedges that correspond with the local traditional character.
- f) The main open spaces within the site should be considered as communal open space and made easily accessible by a network of footpaths.
- g) Developers should provide a management and maintenance plan for all areas of communal open space, trees and woodland.
- h) Developers will be required to submit a 'Design Statement' as part of their planning application (see guidance in Planning Advice Note 68 - Design Statements).

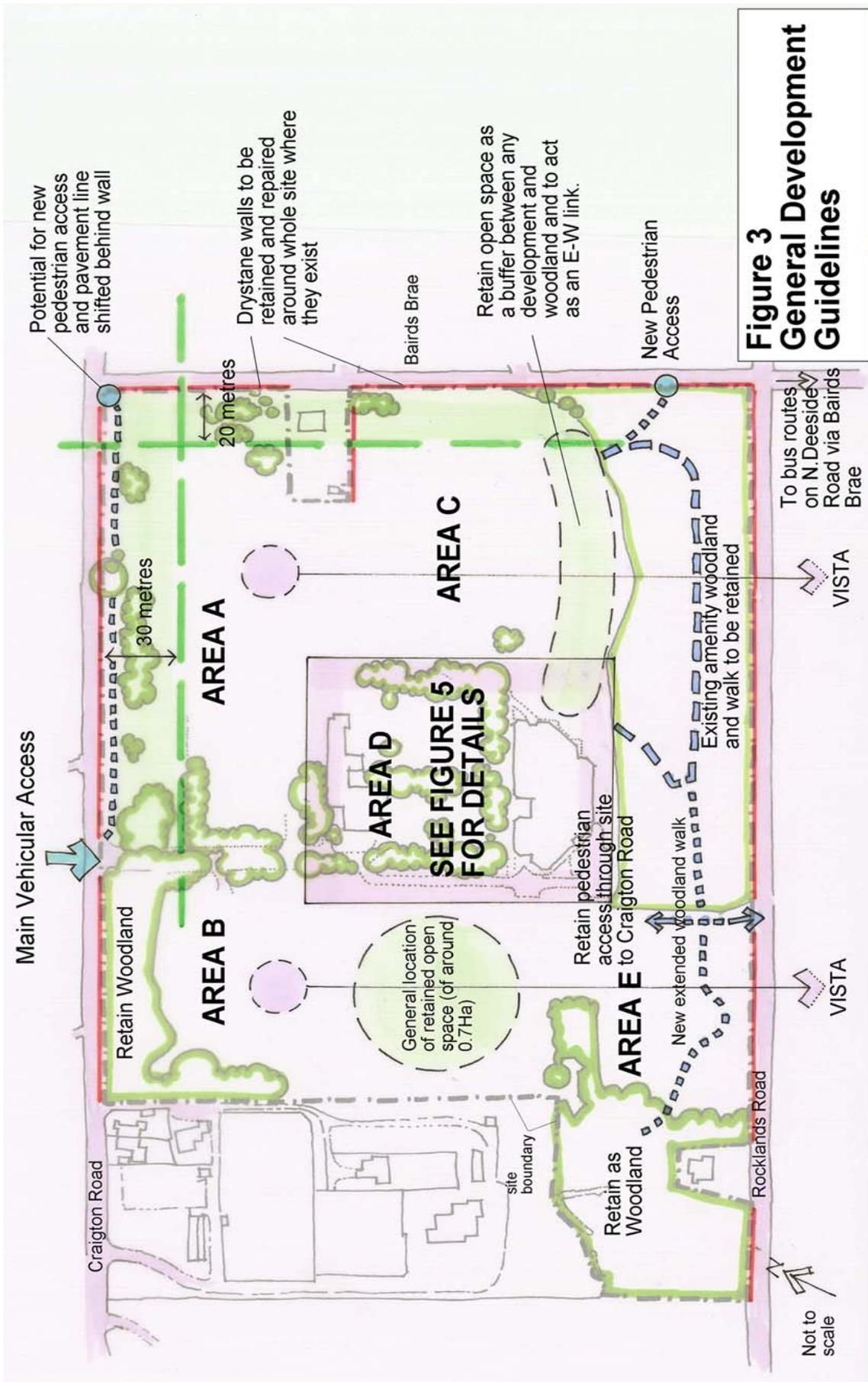
#### 4.10 Access, Transport and Drainage

- 4.10.1 The Woodlands Hospital site is situated close to a key distributor and public transport corridor with easy access to the City Centre and within easy walking distance of many services and facilities, especially recreational.
- 4.10.2 The main vehicular access relating to new development must be taken from Craigton Road using the established access points shown on Figure 3.
- 4.10.3 A transport assessment will be required and should address the requirements of NPPG 17 with the primary aim being the delivery of accessible and sustainable transport to the development site. A 'Scoping Study' should be agreed with Road's officers prior to proceeding. As part of the assessment, it will be necessary to assess the capacity of the affected network taking into account other current and related developments that may affect that capacity. A key point of impact will be the junction of Craigton Road with Springfield Road.
- 4.10.4 While there are existing pedestrian routes to the site, these can be poorly lit and may be perceived to be dangerous. The Council will expect that the developer will improve these routes where they are related to movement and access for those living on or using the site. This may include better signage, better lighting, improved surfacing, new access points or path alignment etc.
- 4.10.5 Surface water run-off should be dealt with using Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) incorporated within the design of any proposals, and must be approved by the local planning authority, in consultation with SEPA and Scottish Water prior to the commencement of development. A drainage Impact Assessment will be required and developers should demonstrate that their proposals for foul and surface drainage are the best available in terms of Sustainable Urban Drainage.

#### 4.11 Construction Arrangements

- 4.11.1 Any construction works should be carried out in such a way that no existing tree that is being retained within or immediately adjacent to this site is harmed. Trees should be protected in accordance with a scheme of fencing and other required measures based on British Standard 5837 (1991) and be agreed with Aberdeen City Council.

- 4.12.0 Planning Briefs are produced as supplementary guidance to the Local Plan. They do not have the statutory status of the Local Plan. Proposals that adhere to the principles of the Planning Brief will normally be received favourably by the Planning Authority.



**Figure 3  
General Development  
Guidelines**

