MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

1. In autumn 1996 the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAFF) vacated their site on Greyhope Road, Torry. The main 3 and 4 storey building remains on the site, together with car parking and other ancillary buildings, all of which are vacant. The Planning Committee, at their meeting in October 1997, approved a Design Brief for the site promoting its use for housing. A planning application for 73 residential units for affordable rent and shared ownership, together with associated café and flexible office space was lodged by Grampian Housing Association. Planning permission was refused in February 2001. An appeal was subsequently dismissed in October 2001 on grounds that the proposed development was contrary to the Planning Brief and constituted over-development of the site without adequate provision for open space.

2. A Working Group has been set up to build on a “Planning for Real” event at Victoria Road Primary School, where members of the community together with a wide range of Aberdeen organisations considered options for regeneration within the Torry community. As a result the Working Group is currently considering a Maritime Development proposal including an aquarium for research and tourism with associated conference, exhibition and restaurant facilities. The Working Group includes, among others, the local member, the Chief Executive, City Development Services, Community Development, Grampian Housing Association, Fisheries Research Services, SEPA, Scottish Fisherman’s Federation, Scottish Enterprise, Torry Community Council, Church of Scotland, Aberdeen Harbour Board, Aberdeen Fish Curers and Merchants Association, AMEC, Wood Group, Aberdeen Foyer and Shell UK.

3. With this in mind it is now considered appropriate to reinforce the terms of the original 1997 Planning Brief and investigate further development and regeneration opportunities for the wider Old Torry area in the form of this Study.

Site Description

4. The Study area is defined as Sinclair Road/Greyhope Road to the north, St Fittick’s Road to the east, Victoria Road to the south and Baxter Street to the west. The area includes the former MAFF Food Research Laboratory, SEPA offices and laboratory, and Aberdeen Mineral Water Co Ltd, all of which front onto Greyhope Road. To the south of the site, the Fisheries Research Services Marine Laboratory is accessed from Victoria Road, Abbey Road, Wood Street and St. Fittick’s Road. To the north east of the site is a grassed playing field, currently in the City Council’s ownership. The remainder of the area consists of private housing on Wood Street, Baxter Street and the south-west corner on Victoria Road.

5. The Study area generally falls from south to north. The area is characterised by piecemeal development with little or no consideration given to long-term strategies for usage and layout. Usable public space is at a premium with substandard or non-existent footpaths making life difficult for the pedestrian. Any benefits of a harbour setting, with views of the harbour itself, the city, Footdee and out to sea, are lost.
Policy Background 6. The area is currently covered by several designations in the Aberdeen City District Wide Local Plan adopted in 1991. The MAFF and the Marine Laboratory sites are within an ER1 Further Education and Research Uses policy designation; the SEPA and Aberdeen Mineral Water Co Ltd sites are both within Industrial I1 policy areas; and the remainder of the Study area is given a Residential R1 policy designation (see figure 1). The District Wide Local Plan is soon to be replaced by a new Aberdeen City Local Plan which is currently progressing through Council and is expected to be published within the next few months. The new plan will maintain the current mix of policy designations with various parts of the Study area retained within residential, industrial/business, and higher education/research policy designations. The new plan also acknowledges the current Planning Brief for the MAFF site, which is identified as a development opportunity for residential/mixed use and open space.

DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES 7. General 7.1 The aim of the Study is to explore opportunities for regeneration of this area of Old Torry. The Planning For Real exercise highlighted public desire for a major facility/public attraction to raise the profile of Torry generally. The Study concentrates on facilitating the opportunity to accommodate this whilst promoting a mix of uses that could enable increased employment opportunities, homes and open spaces within an enhanced environment that respects its harbour setting. 7.2 The Working Group’s Maritime Development proposal to introduce a public aquarium, possibly linked with a new research aquarium facility for the Marine Laboratory, complete with associated conference facilities will increase employment and tourism opportunities to the area. It is essential that the opportunities presented by an aquarium proposal be capitalised upon to create the possibility of an expanded centre of education and research in Old Torry. Facilities provided in any new aquarium complex, such as restaurant and meeting rooms, could then be shared between Fisheries Research Services, SEPA, other agencies, local businesses and the Aberdeen community.

7.3 As part of the EU funded North Sea Coastal Trail/Nortrail Proposal, the coastal path currently exists from Cove to Nigg Bay. It is proposed to extend the path around Girdleness to Torry and the River Dee Estuary. A proposed aquarium would have a strong synergy with the Nortrail Proposal in promoting coastal access and tourism, the interpretation of built and natural heritage features, and business/community links with other coastal towns/cities in Aberdeenshire, Angus, Fife, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. An aquarium of appropriate striking design could provide a fitting terminus to the coastal route.
7.4 Such a proposal will greatly increase pedestrian footfall. It is essential that the pedestrian network in the area be enhanced. Greyhope Road is discussed in greater detail in section 12 below. General improvement in the pedestrian network elsewhere in the Study area is required to cater for residents, employees, tourists and increased footfall from public transport services on Victoria Road. The opportunity must be taken with all new development to not only cater for vehicular access and parking, but also to consider the pedestrian flows in the area.

7.5 Vehicular access to the former MAFF site shall be from Abbey Road as stated in the Planning Brief. Vehicular access to any other new facilities fronting onto Greyhope Road should also be restricted to Abbey Road, with both Baxter Street and St Fittick’s Road used as feeder access. This will help providing the opportunity for enhancing Greyhope Road, ultimately facilitating the long-term aim of pedestrianising the waterfront area. Parking associated with all new development must be provided within the Study area. It will not be acceptable to rely on over-spill parking on-street, particularly given options to close Greyhope Road to traffic.

7.6 Green transport options must be considered for the operation of the conference facilities associated with the proposed aquarium. It is envisaged that those booking a conference will be encouraged to transfer delegates to the site by hired coach to alleviate traffic and parking congestion.

7.7 No new construction should be permitted to the extreme south of the site of the former MAFF Laboratory on Abbey Road. Sufficient space should be left to allow vehicular access to the rear of the SEPA site. This is will allow the opportunity to remove all parking accessed from Greyhope Road and generate the possibility for enhanced pedestrianisation along the waterfront.

7.8 Any new development fronting onto Greyhope Road should take advantage of its harbour setting, presenting an imaginative and exciting image when seen from the harbour. Views of the harbour should be opened out and maximised. Opportunities, when they arise, should be taken to remove derelict buildings from the Study area. General property rationalisation in the whole Study area must be considered, not only in raising the quality of the environment, but also to allow the necessary parking requirements for any new development to be accommodated.

7.9 At this stage it is envisaged that all housing within the Study area on Abbey Road, Baxter Street, Wood Street and Victoria Road will remain as existing. Any changes to the immediate surrounding environment must respect the domestic nature of these properties. It is hoped that whenever opportunities arise to upgrade individual properties and gardens that those residents are encouraged to do so.
8. Former Food Research Laboratory, Greyhope Road

8.1 As a result of the appeal decision concerns arose regarding open space provision, basic standards of privacy, noise/amenity and safety for proposed housing on this site. Any development must also have regard to its context. With this in mind it is suggested that residential uses only may be restricted to the south of this site, with the north side adjacent to the harbour available for mixed use. This will allow for either future expansion of business uses possibly associated with SEPA next door, or associated workshops in conjunction with Grampian Housing Association’s proposals for the site. By concentrating residential uses to the south of the site, the frontage onto Greyhope Road is minimised, thereby alleviating some of the safety and amenity fears. Residential uses also then relate directly to existing housing, addressing the concerns the reporter raised during the planning appeal.

8.2 The 1997 Design Brief for this site recommended that no new building should exceed 3 storeys. However the existing building is equivalent to 4 modern storeys in height. If meaningful redevelopment of the area is to be achieved, it will be necessary to maximise the potential of each site. It is therefore proposed that any new building should not exceed the height of the existing building and four storeys generally. Given the scale of the existing building it is expected that any new build will have less of an impact as seen from the surrounding residential streets of Wood Street and Abbey Road. In light of local residents concerns regarding four storeys, this should only be permitted where it is clearly demonstrated that an effective and efficient layout cannot be achieved otherwise. In any case vistas must be created to allow views across the harbour. It is vital that views of the harbour are maximised, both for potential new residents and existing residents. This may best be achieved by creating a pedestrian access route running north/south from Abbey Road through to Greyhope Road (see figure 2).

9. Aberdeen Mineral Water Co Ltd, Greyhope Road

9.1 As current owners and occupiers, Aberdeen Mineral Water Co Ltd have kindly allowed exploration, via this Study and its subsequent consultation, into the suitability of this site for possible future use as an aquarium. This site is designated as Industrial and Business Land (BI1), which supports the current use as a soft drinks manufacturer. However, this is a possible site for any proposed new research aquarium. It potentially has close links with the Marine Laboratory, access to both sea and fresh water supplies and could also provide a fitting terminus to the proposed North Sea Coastal Trail. This particular location lends itself well to an exciting contemporary design addressing its prominent location at the mouth of the harbour. Education and Research Institution Use (CS7) in association with the adjacent Marine Laboratory would be acceptable.
10. **Marine Laboratory, Victoria Road/Wood Street**

10.1 In association with any new development it is essential wider opportunities for reassessing and improving the existing pedestrian network in the Old Torry area are also considered. The Marine Laboratory occupies a large portion of the Study area and presents a rather bleak image, with much of the premises fenced off for security purposes. It would be advantageous to adopt a campus approach to the laboratory site, creating a more open, accessible and flowing pedestrian provision. A high quality environment where people are encouraged to meander through can discourage damage and promote social responsibility. Fisheries Research Services have indicated a willingness to investigate further an improved campus-like approach to the whole site in conjunction with the Maritime Development Proposals. If the proposal is implemented it is essential to capitalise on the opportunity presented to rationalise existing property. Space will be at a premium, and removal of any redundant buildings and consolidation of remaining property is required to maximise the potential of the area.

11. **SEPA Offices, Greyhope Road**

11.1 SEPA are currently investigating options for their existing office accommodation at Greyhope Road. Given the opportunity provided by the prospect of a Maritime Development Proposal in Old Torry, it is appropriate and should be considered necessary to encourage SEPA’s continued presence as a major employer in the area. As suggested above, any property rationalisation would create the opportunity to investigate shared facilities with Fisheries Research Services, including meeting rooms, restaurant or canteen facilities, external circulation, access and parking.

12. **Waterfront, Greyhope Road**

12.1 The existing waterfront area on Greyhope Road is extremely disappointing and does not take advantage of its setting. At present it is used as a minor through route, and although two-way, it invariably is subject to on-street parking throughout the day restricting the usable width. It is desirable to enhance the waterfront area to create a better environment for residents, employees and visitors to the area. Views across the harbour should be taken advantage of. In order to achieve this, it is desirable to maximise the pedestrian footpath provision on both sides of the carriageway, whilst at the same time reducing as far as practical the vehicular provision.

12.2 The long-term aspiration for this stretch of Greyhope Road is to provide a fully pedestrianised area adjacent to the waterfront. This is desirable to support expected increased visitor activity should an aquarium be constructed in the area. In addition Greyhope Road is included as part of the North Sea Coastal Trail. Pedestrianising the section of Greyhope Road between Sinclair Road and St Fittick’s will provide a comfortable environment to enjoy views of the harbour, whilst catering for expected increase in activity around the proposed aquarium.
12.3 An alternative vehicular route to Balnagask and Torry Battery can be taken via Victoria Road and St Fittick’s Road. To achieve this it will be necessary to increase the width of St Fittick’s Road. Purchase of land for improvement works to do so will be required. It is also likely that a turning circle will be required at the resulting terminus of Sinclair Road. There may be objections to any future Traffic Order required to close Greyhope Road as this would result in HGVs being restricted to exiting the Sinclair Road Industrial area via Sinclair Road to the west only.

12.4 Improvements to Abbey Road at the junctions with Baxter Street and St Fittick’s Road will be required to improve visibility for access.

13. Victoria Road Playing Fields

13.1 The existing playing fields at the corner of Victoria Road and St Fittick’s Road are currently under City Council ownership and are designated for Residential uses (H4). Given the surrounding uses, the opportunity could be created to allow further expansion of the Fisheries Research Services Marine Laboratory or associated facilities. Alternatively, there may be an opportunity to relocate SEPA to such a location. In either case, an Education and Research Use would be complementary to the surroundings and is likely to be acceptable. There are, however, open space issues which need to be resolved prior to any such proposal being implemented. Current policy prevents the loss of existing open space in residential areas. The City Council has been in discussion with the Torry community to improve recreational facilities in the area by concentrating on Torry Academy Playing Fields and intensifying the use of adjacent open space for leisure and recreational purposes to improve the wider Torry neighbourhood. Compensation could also be made by providing a community park or garden in, for example, Abbey Road to the west of the Study area, relating directly to Victoria Road Primary School.

14. Joint Approach to Redevelopment

14.1 It is important to recognise and credit the joint approach to redevelopment of the area currently being undertaken by Grampian Housing Association, SEPA, Fisheries Research Services, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, Torry Community Council and Scottish Natural Heritage. By endeavouring to work together these agencies have created the opportunity for more comprehensive regeneration. This Planning Study sets out a framework for redevelopment that should be considered adaptable in terms of the uses on various sites within the Study area. It will be necessary to embark on further feasibility work to determine the practicalities of promoting a Maritime Development Proposal, and indeed how much can be satisfactorily accommodation within the constraints of the site.
15. Consultations

15.1 Formal consultation has taken place with interested parties on the Working Group in preparation of this Planning Study. Valuable input in finalising the Study has been received from Fisheries Research Services, SEPA, Aberdeen Mineral Water Co Ltd, Grampian Housing Association and their agents, Torry Community Council as well as other Council departments including Community Development, Roads and Property. All landholders and residents in the Study area have been consulted, including many of those on the periphery.

16. Recommendations

16.1 That the Committee approves the Draft Planning Study as a basis for development guidance in the area.

16.2 That the emerging Local Plan includes reference to the Old Torry Planning Study.

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Figure 2: Not to Scale

Existing Local Plan Proposals
Old Torry Planning Study
City Development Services

Industrial and Business Land (BI1)
Green Belt (NE1)
Existing Research Institution (CS7)
Residential (H4)
Residential (H4)
Proposed new uses are indicative and can be interchanged to achieve optimum layout.

Enhanced pedestrian route

Figure 2:
Not to Scale

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