Introduction

The South Beach Study builds upon the work carried out by previous planning studies for Aberdeen Beach, the 1990 Aberdeen Waterfront Study by the Scottish Development Agency and the City Council Queens Links South Development Brief. The South Beach study has been written to examine the future uses and potential development “footprints” for this land. The City Council recognises that open land in the area has been available to Aberdeen's citizens as part of the Common Good legacy for many years and that this public good element needs to be considered in terms of any future uses.

Location and Study Boundary

The South Beach Study area extends along the Aberdeen Beach frontage from the existing developments at Queens Links through to the northern edge of Footdee village conservation area. The Study area is shown on the attached location plan.

History

The South Beach area forms part of the Queens Links. It is one of the last remaining areas of open land of what was once a continuous stretch of dune and traditional Scottish links between Footdee, the Beach Boulevard and beyond. It is an area of open land between Aberdeen City Centre and the Sea currently owned by the City Council. The land was used in the past for a range of informal recreation activities including travelling fairs.

The Queens Links was divided from the sea by the esplanade and the promenade, which were originally built in the late 19th Century and subsequently rebuilt in the 1960s. The built form of the promenade and Esplanade is designed to allow visitors to access the beach, view the sea, encouraging people to linger, to take in different moods of the sea and the sky, or different ships visiting Aberdeen.

Following the development of Aberdeen and the harbour for servicing the oil industry, the Queens Links came under development pressure for extensions to the harbour and to provide more contemporary indoor leisure and entertainment uses. This development pressure has led to the construction of the pleasure beach with the Amadeus Night Club, Bingo Hall and Burger King frontages onto the Esplanade, north of Wellington Street. To the south of Wellington Street land has been developed for open storage in connection with Aberdeen Harbour.

Character and Land Use

The Study area’s character is determined by the quality of the beach, its landscape and the associated traditional links areas, its relationship to the sea, land use patterns and their associated built form, and the movement of people and vehicles through the area during different times of the day.

Land use patterns are divided into the following categories:-

- the promenade and Esplanade, a coastal strip of land for informal leisure use;
- the pleasure beach, including existing business frontages at the Amadeus Night Club, Bingo Hall and Burger King;
- the designated open land from Wellington Road to Footdee;
5 Policy Background

5.1 Within the Aberdeen City Modified Finalised Local Plan, the Study area is designated as developed coastal land. The individual land parcels are subject to specific policies.

5.2 Sports & Recreation Policy 3: Retention of Open Space – This states, “Permission will not be granted to use or redevelop any playing fields, sports pitches, or all other areas of open space for any use other than recreation or sport unless an equivalent and equally convenient area for public access is laid out and made available in the locality by the applicant for open space purposes. In all cases, development will only be acceptable provided that there is no significant loss of the landscape character and amenity of the site and adjoining areas, access links are maintained or enhanced, the site is of no significant wildlife value and there is no loss of established trees or mature trees.”

5.3 Business & Industry Policy 1: Industrial & Business – This states in paragraph 1, “Industrial and business uses (including already developed land) in these areas shall be retained.” Paragraph 3 states, “Existing areas of recreational and amenity open space, areas of recreational and amenity open space, areas of wildlife value and footpaths included within BI1 areas should be retained for these uses.”

5.4 Natural Environment Policy 11: Coastal Management – This states that development will be permitted on the developed coastal zone where it is demonstrated that a coastal location is necessary and that it is compatible with other local plan policies and surrounding land uses. Development will not be permitted on the undeveloped coastal zone unless:

1) the social and economic benefits clearly outweigh any negative environmental impacts and

2) the developer has taken satisfactory account of locating the proposal on brownfield land or in existing settlements or in areas of developed coast.

6 Issues

6.1 The Esplanade and the promenade were built to open up Aberdeen Beach from the historic village of Footdee to Donmouth. Both are now showing signs of needing repair and require a more innovative approach to what is in effect a linear park stretching from Footdee to Donmouth.

6.2 This Study is not intended to cover the entire Beach area. Work is commencing in November 2002 on a major public realm and road realignment at the junction between Beach Boulevard and Beach Esplanade. This project includes a new road junction, new paving and landscaping along the Esplanade together with improved lighting. The City Council has also just commissioned a team of consultants to review future options for the Beach Ballroom to the north of the area. The South Beach is considered as the next stage in possible future development.
6.3 The area occupied by Amadeus Night Club, Bingo Hall and Burger King around the junction of Wellington Street and the Esplanade requires reassessment in terms of built frontages that turn their back on the sea. The Night Club and Bingo Hall currently present a bleak and barren frontage to the Beach Esplanade giving a negative contribution street scene. The lack of visual interest reduces active daytime use.

6.4 The former Queens Links, the remaining open land between the Pleasure Beach and Footdee provide views back into the centre of Aberdeen, interrupted by the industrial storage areas associated with the harbour. Unfortunately, the land offers little in the way of usable public open space to local residents and visitors, but it does attract significant amounts of fly tipping and acts as an unauthorised stopping off point for travelling families.

6.5 Any proposals for future development in the area will have major implications in terms of traffic generation, car parking, public transport investment and roads infrastructure as well as adding pressure to the existing public realm.

6.6 The City Council is seeking to encourage proposals that would provide an active beach frontage 7 days a week, 24 hours a day to compliment the proposals for mixed uses in the nearby City Centre.

7 Initial Ideas

7.1 The ideas identified in this section should not be interpreted as finalised proposals. Rather they are included as a framework for discussion and offer possible solutions to perceived current problems.

7.2 There is an opportunity to examine the potential for the South Beach area to be developed as a significant landmark cultural and tourism development, which could benefit the people of Aberdeen and visitors to the City.

7.3 Both the built environment and the public realm in and around the Study area must to be of high quality capable of providing a major attraction for Aberdonians and tourists. Good architecture raises profile and credibility and has a key role to play in the success of businesses and attractions. The South Beach area is capable of accommodating high quality, innovative contemporary architecture.

7.4 Design of the any proposed new development must respect the coastal location regarding setting, open aspect, visitor aspirations, design advantages, natural and artificial lighting effects and threats such as gales, windblown litter, sea spray, ground conditions and poor drainage.

7.5 Any new development within the Study area will need to provide means of minimising traffic impacts upon the Esplanade and the promenade. The Esplanade between Wellington Street and Beach Boulevard is subject to a traffic management/environmental enhancement scheme, commencing November 2002. This combined approach to traffic management and environmental enhancement should also be applied to the Esplanade and promenade between Wellington Street and Footdee.
7.6 Any proposed development must seek to:-

- Maximise panoramic views of the harbour and the bay;
- Maximise views and access to the promenade;
- Achieve appropriate massing and scale of building to provide a landmark for Scotland's North Sea City;
- Maximise opportunities for natural and artificial lighting and heating;
- Encourage the use of renewable energy technologies;
- Complement or link to other visitor attractions in Aberdeen;
- Encourage and develop environmental art
- Provide shelter from the prevailing winds
- Minimise the impact of car parking
- Enhance public open space and the public realm.

7.7 Night Club, Bingo Hall & Beach Frontage –

The objective is to make the promenade outside these buildings a more suitable place for people activities across the day. By encouraging the new developments to overlook and to open up onto the promenade and esplanade it is hoped to make these public areas more friendly, safer places for people to use and enjoy. Ideally the frontage to the Beach should be opened up in each of these buildings toward the sea allowing more interaction with the street. This could be achieved by either breaking open the existing facades in conjunction with any possible future reorganisation of internal spaces, or by innovative use of glass, interior and external lighting, allowing a new intervention to function as a sheltered extension area to the promenade. This frontage could possibly support a ribbon of cafe and restaurant developments on up to two levels overlooking the Beach Promenade and the Esplanade, rising to a tower at the junction with Wellington Street. Any potential development could extend commercial and leisure activities along the beach frontage, opening up frontages in order to bring cafe or other leisure uses onto the walkway.

7.8 Wellington Street/Esplanade site –

This is the core site in the South Beach Study area. A mixture of public and commercial tourism, cultural, media and leisure uses are proposed. A high quality design emphasis is essential to the successful development of the site as a landmark tourism project. This design could be delivered by: -

- achieving the right scale, massing and use of materials appropriate to the site’s environment, proposed uses and users;
- utilising new materials and technologies to deliver sustainable heating, lighting, electricity, water and waste management systems;
- picking up on the maritime/shipping themes of the nearby harbour;
- changing the building levels across the site to take full advantage of changes in site topography;
- integrating car parking into the building form;
relating the orientation of the building(s), so it connects to the esplanade and the promenade; and

- providing public transport connections as part of the visitor infrastructure.

The innovative and effective use of glass and lighting would be particularly appropriate to this location in a bid to visually connect the building(s) and activities within to the beach promenade and Esplanade. Other options for this site include the enhancement of the existing open space for outdoor recreation, possibly including children’s play space and landscape enhancement.

7.9 The remaining strip of open land between the Pleasure Beach and Footdee provides an opportunity to further screen the industrial storage areas in addition to the existing fencing. Continuing the theme of a ribbon of development could be considered. Alternatives include an enhancement scheme in conjunction with the development of the Links area outlined above.

7.10 Consideration should be given to physically linking this development with the adjacent leisure businesses and to the promenade itself through the use of a network of pathways, forming pedestrian routes, including environmental art.

8 Green Transport Plan

8.1 The new developments proposed for the South Beach area should provide a Green Transport Plan, which will provide a mechanism whereby the transport needs of the any new development can be met through a range of solutions, and take into account the following considerations:

- the need for a Transport Impact Assessment to detail the effect any new development may have on the existing road and pedestrian network including the Beach Boulevard/Esplanade and Links Road junctions which are outside the area of this Study, but will be impacted upon by the proposals;

- the need to assess how the public transport infrastructure and services for Aberdeen Beach including Footdee can be integrated into the development proposals;

- how shared car parking provision for the new developments can be provided within the development proposals and on existing adjacent car parks; and

- the need for new infrastructure provision and how this may integrate with other development;

- public transport services.

8.2 A green transport plan must be proposed as an integral part of the development planning process. This is to enable the resolution of traffic generation, car parking, public transport investment and roads infrastructure, as part of the planning process. The green transport plan will be delivered through the use of a section 75 agreement attached to the planning consent. Space available for car parking to support a major public attraction may not be available on this site. Adding further large expanses of surface car parking is not appropriate in this location. Consideration needs to be given to underground or split level car parking within any proposed building envelope.
9 Conclusion

9.1 The South Beach Study area provides opportunities to make the most of this area for Aberdeen’s people yet presents conflicts between different land uses and policy guidance.

9.2 The opportunities arise out of the reuse of the different sites identified in this Study. The most exciting of these is the proposal for a landmark building providing a base for all year round cultural and tourism activities. Such a proposal will require further detailed feasibility study work.

9.3 There is clearly a conflict between the existing designation of the open land as open space covered by the Sports & Recreation Policy 3: Retention of Open Space as detailed in the Aberdeen City Finalised Local Plan and the Study’s proposal to allocate land for a landmark cultural or tourism development. However, the site in question does meet the criteria contained in the policy for allowing development on open space, in that:-

- there is no loss of established or mature trees;
- the site is of no significance to wildlife;
- access links will be maintained or enhanced; and
- there is no significant loss to the landscape character and amenity of the site and adjoining areas.

10 Recommendations

10.1 Acknowledgement is made that a feasibility study is required regarding the development of a landmark cultural and tourism scheme in conjunction with partner development organisations.

10.2 That the programme of integrated infrastructure improvements to the Harbour boundary/Beach Esplanade and Promenade continues in consultation with local people, businesses and communities of interest.
Proposals Plan
South Beach Study Area
Boundary of Study Area

Open up frontages
Esplanade/footpath/promenade re-alignment and environmental enhancement scheme
Corner feature could act as Focal point/Point of reference
Open frontage and links to Promenade development
Possible New Landmark Tourism building
Potential development ribbon for leisure or enhanced landscaped open space
Frontage screen to Industrial area/Harbour activities

Industrial area/Harbour activities

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