

# Supplementary Guidance

## Murcar Development Framework

May 2012

The Murcar Development Framework 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. The new Local Development Plan calls for appraisals of such reports and as part of this process the policy references within the supplementary guidance has been reviewed and updated. Therefore any queries concerning the text of the Supplementary Guidance should be directed to Planning and Sustainable Development for possible clarification



## **FOREWORD**

Aberdeen City Council identified land at Berryhill and Findlay Farm, Murcar for employment use back in 2004 in its Finalised Aberdeen Local Plan. The supply of new land was seen as being vital to meeting current and future demand for sites for industrial and business use and helping ensure the future prosperity of Aberdeen City and Shire. It also sought to provide land in the Bridge of Don, an established employment location in the City and one where the current availability of industrial and business land is in short supply. Following the public local inquiry into objections to the Finalised Aberdeen Local Plan held in 2006, recommendations were made by the Scottish Government Reporters who heard the objections that the employment land allocations at Berryhill and Findlay Farm should be extended to include land at Cloverhill. This development framework covers the extended area identified for development.

This Development Framework is the equivalent of the first stage in the preparation of a three dimensional master plan as defined by 'Designing Places - A Policy Statement for Scotland' 2001. Aberdeen City Council has adopted a Master Planning Process to guide future developments around the City. Since at the time of writing this has not been finalised, and in order to facilitate economic growth in this part of the City, the Council is happy to support the Murcar Development Framework. Its production will ensure that potential developers and occupiers have a secure and clear planning framework within which future investment decisions can be made with confidence. When formally approved by the Council following public consultation, the framework will be treated as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to the Local Plan and provide a transparent indication of the requirements and expectations that Aberdeen City Council will take into account in determining planning applications.

## **1 CONTEXT**

1.1 The Murcar Development Framework provides a strategic vision and overarching planning guidance for land at Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm, Bridge of Don, an area of around 85 hectares. The framework sits within a wider study area which has been considered when preparing this guidance to ensure development relates to, and is integrated with, its surroundings. This includes the Bridge of Don Exhibition Centre and Park and Ride to the south, Royal Aberdeen and Murcar Golf Courses to the east and the farmland to the north and west. The land to the west, which includes the existing industrial estates of Bridge of Don, Denmore and Murcar is very much separated from the land at Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm by the barrier which is the A90T Aberdeen to Peterhead Road. The layout of new development must take into account the wider context of the surrounding area, in particular linkages to it and ease of movement through and within the area. The framework area is shown in Figure 1 Location Plan.

## **2 POLICY REVIEW**

2.1 The relevant Development Plan for the framework area is the 2009 Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan and the adopted 2012 Aberdeen Local Development Plan.

2.2 Of particular relevance are the Structure Plan targets which are set to encourage economic development and create new employment in a range of areas that are both appropriate for and attractive to the needs of different industries. The targets state that local development plans shall make sure there is at least 60 hectares of land available to businesses at all times in a range of places within Aberdeen City. Local development plans must also reserve at least 20 hectares of the above land in strategic growth areas which will attract high-quality businesses or be suitable for company headquarters. In total the Structure Plan stipulates that 105 hectares of new land should be identified for employment purposes in the period 2007-2023 and a further 70 hectares identified as strategic reserve land from 2024 until 2030.

This guidance has been taken forward in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2012, through a number of proposed new employment land releases. The relevant ones for the development framework are OP3 Berryhill, Murcar, a 68.4 hectare industrial and business site and OP4 Findlay Farm, Murcar, a 16.4 hectare extension to the Science and Energy Park.

2.4 Also of importance are the approved Regional Transport Strategy and the Local Transport Strategy, which include a number of proposals that have a direct or indirect impact on the release of development land within the framework area. Other relevant policies and guidance are referred to under the appropriate sections of the framework.

### 3 VISION STATEMENT

3.1 The City Council is fully aware of the need to provide new employment land in Aberdeen to help grow and diversify the economy of the north east of Scotland; new land for business use, industrial use and research and development purposes at Bridge of Don is vital to help satisfy the current high levels of demand for these uses and address the current and future needs of businesses in the city and also those companies wishing to come to Aberdeen.

3.2 In particular the development framework seeks to deliver the following objectives:

• The provision of a clear framework for development proposals;
• The provision of land for industrial and business use and research and development use;
• The provision of a high quality business location, which is accessible by different modes of transport and is a good fit with the landscape;
• The opportunity to accommodate the relocation of the Bridge of Don Park and Ride site; and
• The provision of an employment location which meets appropriate sustainability criteria, including the maximisation of development potential.

### 4 FEASIBILITY APPRAISAL

4.1 The land at Berryhill, Findlay Farm and Cloverhill is proposed for development in the local development plan and its inclusion in the plan was based on extensive consultation by Council Officers, both internal and external and consideration of the area at the local plan public local inquiry in 2006. This was carried forward for inclusion within the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2012. In planning terms the three sites are all considered to be deliverable.

4.2 Further evidence of the deliverability of the land proposed for development is provided by both Berryhill and Findlay Farm being subject to planning applications for development. Outline planning permission has been granted to Scottish Enterprise Grampian for an extension of the Science and Energy Park at Findlay Farm. An outline planning application for the development of a business and industrial park at Berryhill was submitted by a private developer (Rockwater Property Partnership) in July 2007. Indications are that this site is only really deliverable if access to the site is taken from the Murcar roundabout to the north (see paragraph 5.13). Approval of this development framework will assist in the processing of that application. These applications demonstrate the buoyant demand for new employment land in Aberdeen and this is supported by the Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future (ACSEF) Employment Land Task Force, who in a report to ACSEF in 2007 identified a strong demand for employment land and premises and highlighted the problems that the shortage of supply of industrial and business land, particularly in the city was causing for businesses' expansion plans. The Task Force did however state that as a starting point efforts should be concentrated around delivering the existing zoned greenfield sites in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, which highlights the need to prioritise the bringing forward of land at Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm at an early date to help address the current land supply shortages.

4.3 Residential use of Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm was rejected by Council planners when the local plan was being drafted on the basis that housing there would be isolated from the main facilities in Bridge of Don, a factor which is further emphasised by the barrier the A90T presents to movement between Bridge of Don and the framework area.

## 5 PLANNING AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

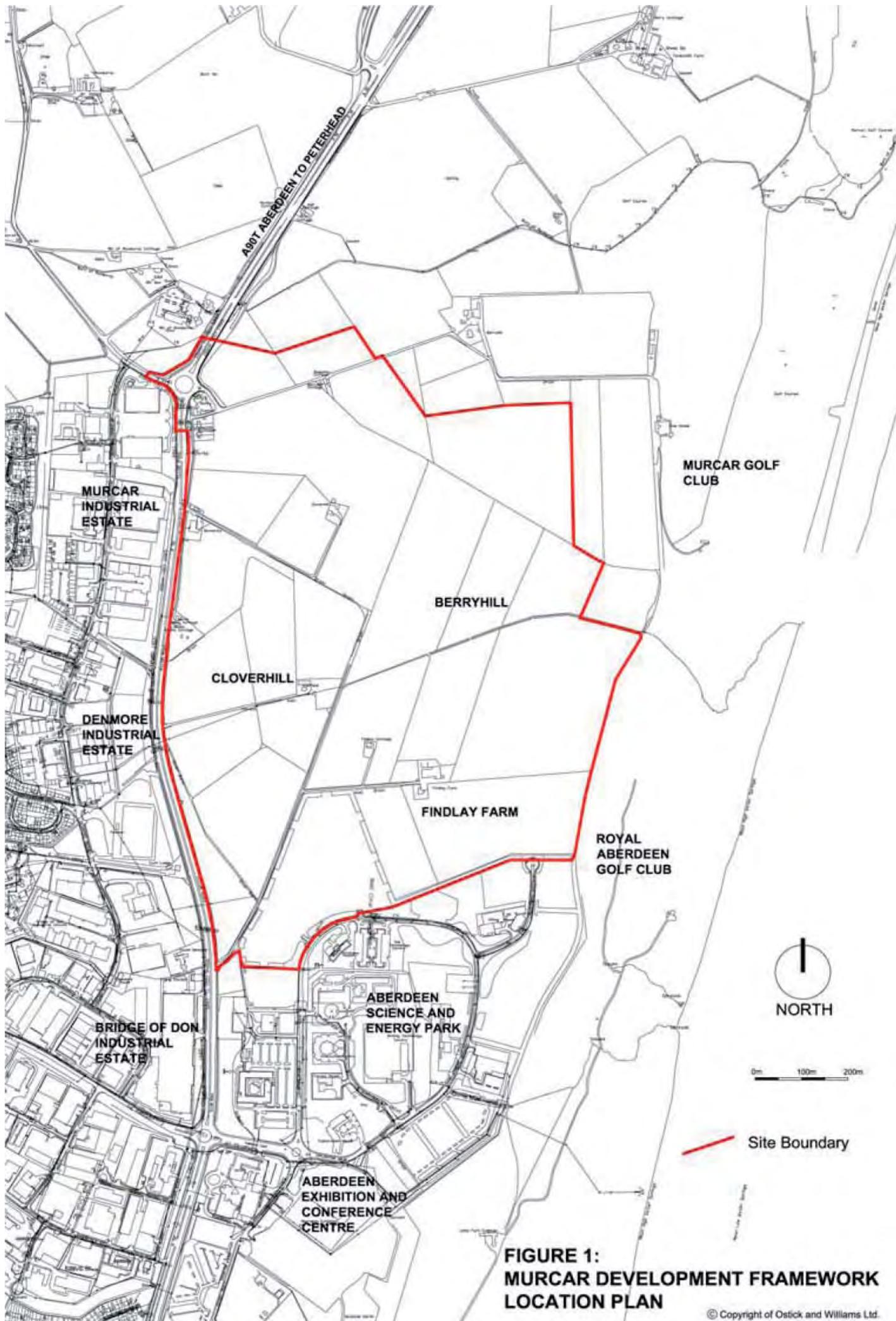
### Landscape Tree Cover and New Structure Planting

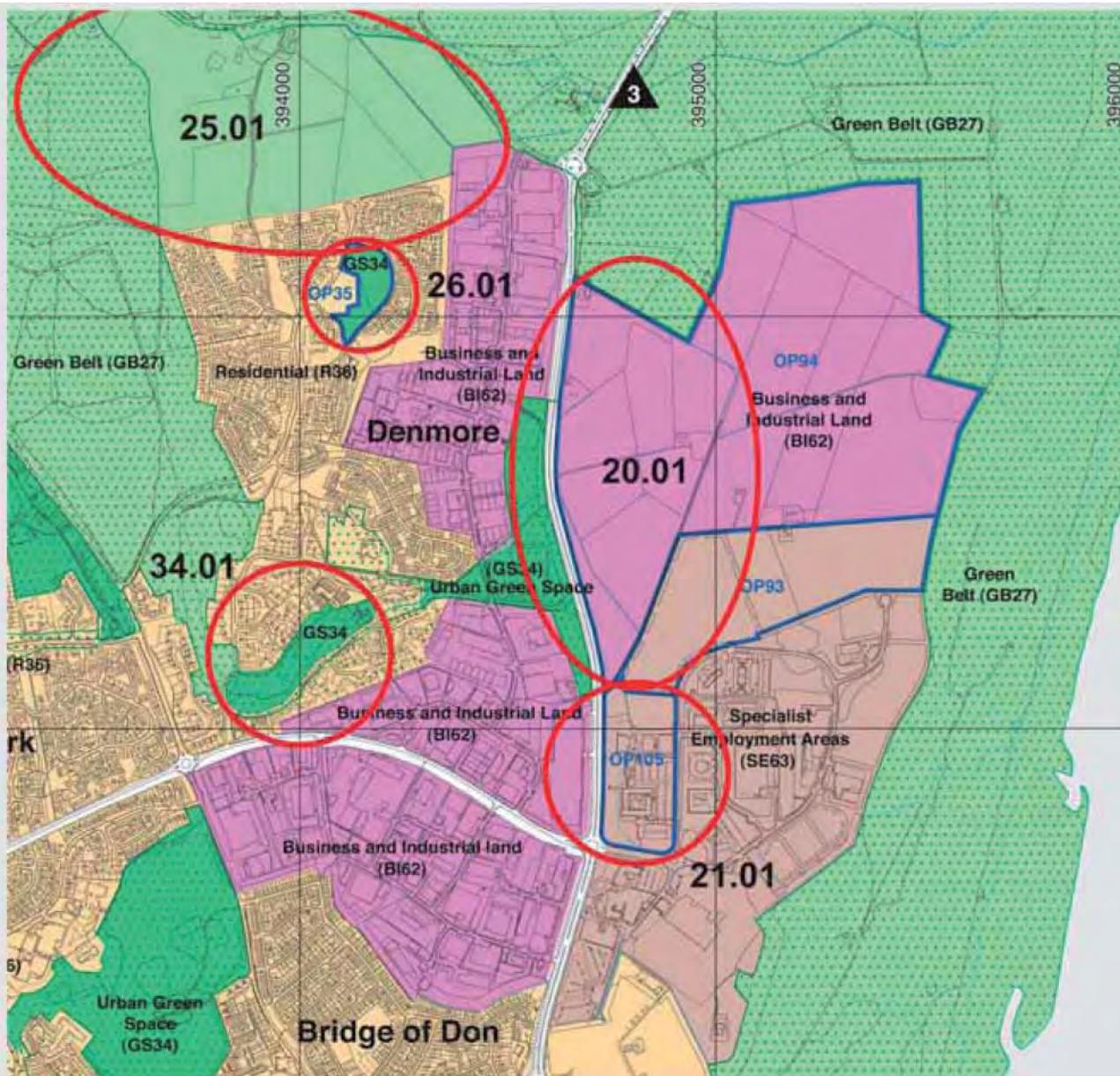
5.1 Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm lie within an open area of farmland lying between the A90T and the coastal sand dunes, golf courses and beach to the east. The land is characterised by open vistas: east to the North Sea; north to a more rolling agricultural landscape; south to the Science and Energy Park and Aberdeen City. Views to the west are generally curtailed by the mature structured planting along the west side of the A90. Although the land is essentially open in character there are some hedges along field boundaries and occasional trees and shrubs. Ornamental trees are associated with dwellings where they have been planted for privacy and shelter and field boundaries are typically the remains of stone walls with fencing on top. A former glacial drainage channel with associated vegetation, which traverses the centre of the site in a west-east direction, provides a feature of interest.

5.2 The 1996 Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment has identified the framework area as lying within the Murcar Area, which is designated as open farmland. Murcar is described as having an open, coastal landscape with considerable amounts of existing development, but which is sensitive to new development in terms of its siting and integration. Its location on the main northern road access to the city increases its visibility and sensitivity to the impacts of development.

5.3 The reporters in their consideration of Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm at the local plan public local inquiry recommended that the value of much of the land at Cloverhill is minimal in terms of the protection of Aberdeen's landscape setting. More important in providing screening and definition is the slight east-west ridge, on the eastern boundary, at whose eastern end sits Murcar Golf Clubhouse. They recommend that space be left there for a buffer area and strategic planting. They also recommended that there was the need for extensive landscaping within the northern boundary of OP94 Berryhill and the importance of creating a parkland fringe along the eastern side of the A90. In addition ample space should be reserved as a buffer for planting and for the attenuation of noise, between development and the two golf courses, especially as the golf courses are important to the local economy in terms of tourism. They recommended that the ground level of built development should generally be kept below 30m AOD. Development proposals must take account of the need to protect the amenity of any dwelling houses within or adjacent to the framework area and must provide details of mitigation measures, for example through appropriate landscaping, screening, buffer zones and noise mitigation.

5.4 The recommendations of the Reporters are important and should be taken into account in development proposals for the area, including the provision of buffer areas between the two golf courses and the development areas along the eastern boundary. The limited range of vegetation within the area results in the land being of relatively low ecological value. There is a need therefore to retain existing planting and natural features and enhance the area with additional planting along internal boundaries, circulation routes and footpaths and around proposed buildings or structures. A strategic landscape framework should be prepared illustrating planting arrangements for the overall development. Landscape provision should seek to add character to the development of the area and create a sense of place (see Figure 3 Development Framework). The preparation of landscape plans should aim to comply with the Council's published landscape guidelines (Available at - <http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=31802&sID=14394>). A management plan for the future maintenance of all external space and landscaping should accompany landscape proposals.





**KEY**

Natural Environment and Open Space

Green Belt (GB27)

Green Space Network

Urban Green Space (GS34)

Housing

Residential Areas (R36)

Economic Development

Business and Industrial Land (BI62)

Specialist Employment Areas (SE63)

Others

Opportunity Sites



**FIGURE 2:  
Proposed Local Plan Modifications 2008**

**20.01:**  
Extend opportunity site OP94 Berryhill across the objection land to the A90. Rezone from GB27 green belt and green space network to B162 Business and Industrial Land.

The nature of each Modification proposed is set out in the written list of Proposed Modifications, with reasons, to the Finalised Aberdeen Local Plan 'Green Spaces|New Places'. The relevant modification number is shown on the map against each ringed site.



SCALE: 1:10 000

0 250 500 750 1000 1250 metres

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## Ecology and Biodiversity

5.5 As stated earlier the immediate site area is poor in terms of the extent and quality of vegetated habitats and is not subject to wildlife or nature designations. However there are areas which could provide some enhancement of ecological value in a local context and these include the existing vegetation, along retained field boundaries, and the former glacial drainage channel. Where possible as part of the landscape and movement framework a green network should be introduced which incorporates these elements and fulfils a number of functions, including creating an attractive setting for development, providing recreational opportunities and links with adjoining spaces, establishing areas with a distinct character and sense of place, improving micro-climate and encouraging wildlife diversity. Scottish Natural Heritage have been consulted on the Berryhill planning application and have advised that a badger survey be carried out prior to any development of the site, and that any necessary mitigation measures must be identified and implemented. This requirement should be extended to cover the whole development framework area.

## Sustainability

5.6 The development of the employment land at Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm should be developed in accordance with the principles of sustainability. Particular regard should be had to the following:

<p>• <b>Energy and CO2 Emissions</b> - Energy production from on site sustainable sources should be maximised. In accordance with national and international targets for tackling climate change, development of the land must take account of the need to reduce CO2 Emissions. This will be through a range of initiatives including the travel modes for accessing the land, the design and construction of infrastructure and buildings, waste management and tree planting.</p>
<p>• <b>Water and Drainage</b> - Sustainable urban drainage should be incorporated within the landscape strategy and integrated as a part of the structural landscape framework for the area. A Development Impact Assessment will require to be submitted to Scottish Water to ascertain the impact of proposed development on the existing water supply and waste water treatment system. A Drainage Impact Assessment will require to be submitted with any planning application for development of the area. Drainage arrangements should not impact adversely on the golf courses to the east.</p>
<p>• <b>Waste Management and Pollution</b> - Appropriately scaled and located facilities for waste segregation and recycling should be incorporated into the design of the development of the area, meeting the requirements of the North East Area Waste Plan, PAN 63 Waste Management Planning and SPP (paragraph 212). It is not believed that there are any contamination issues that affect the area. Measures will be required to mitigate the potential adverse impact of noise from industrial uses on the two golf courses and existing residential properties. In order to ensure that the overall development works in the most energy efficient manner and has least impact on the environment, consideration should be given in their phased release of land by developers to providing combined heat and power schemes.</p>
<p>• <b>Design and Materials</b> - Development proposals are encouraged to follow the policy advice given in Local Development Plan Policy D1 Architecture and Placemaking and D2 Design and Amenity. Materials chosen should be durable and capable of being easily repaired. Developers of individual plots will be expected to examine design features that would make their proposals more sustainable, e.g., bio-mass heating, photo-voltaics, micro power generation, energy meters, low energy lighting, grey water recycling, triple glazing, waste machinators, green and brown roofs, etc.</p>
<p>• <b>Health and Wellbeing</b> - The promotion of improved health and wellbeing is encouraged. This should be taken into account in the design of site layout, the health benefits that can be generated by active travel from the provision and promotion of cycling and walking and the positive encouragement given to the provision of on site leisure and sport uses.</p>
<p>• <b>Travel</b> - Travel to the development site by walking, cycling and public transport will require to be proactively encouraged and supported by a detailed Sustainable Travel Plan that should include modal shift targets in line with the aspirations of the Local and Regional Transport Strategies. It is anticipated that the Travel Plan for the development area will be subject to a programme of ongoing monitoring, review and agreement specified through a Legal Agreement.</p>
<p>• <b>Management</b> - Developers will need to ensure that management agreements are in place to cover future maintenance of open space, the sustainable urban drainage system, planted areas (strategic and local), footways and cycle ways. These agreements may be with the Council or private contractors.</p>



## **Assessments**

5.7 Planning applications to bring forward development of the land at Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm will require supporting assessments to be carried out to help assess the impact of their development and what mitigation measures are required to address that impact. This will include a Transportation Assessment in accordance with SPP paragraph 168 will require to be submitted in support of any planning application. It is advised that a Transportation Scoping Study is agreed prior to the assessment being carried out. It will also include Landscape and Visual Assessments, Drainage Impact Assessments and Noise Impact Assessments in respect of buildings on the eastern boundary adjacent to the golf courses. Depending on the size and nature of development proposed further assessments may be requested by the local planning authority.

## **Buildings/Built Form**

5.8 The development framework covers an area prominent in the major approach to the City from the north. As such new building is expected to address potential vistas that occur from the A90T. As a high quality business location, buildings situated at the gateway to the site demand a greater architectural quality than those situated internally. The internal situation of buildings offers the opportunity for creating a sense of place within the development framework, with the potential for landmarks addressing vistas throughout the internal road network.

5.9 The commercial and economic importance of good design is recognised and in accordance with national and local planning guidance and is therefore encouraged. Building design should respect local architecture and materials, however innovative design is also welcomed. It is essential that the siting and design of new buildings within identified plots contribute to the accessibility and legibility of the area.

5.10 It is not intended to be prescriptive over the scale, massing and materials for new building within the development framework, but all new building is expected to be responsive to context and integrated within a landscape structure and particular regard is required in the areas that lie adjacent to the two golf courses, especially in relation to the height of buildings and open storage. Landscaping and sensitive screening will make a major contribution to the development of any plot and should influence the arrangement of parking, open storage areas and yard space to minimise the visual impact of hard surfaces and storage.

Grampian Police's Architectural Liaison Officer should be contacted at an early stage in the design process to ensure that advice as set out in PAN 77 - Designing Safer Places is taken into account.

## **Public Transport**

5.11 Scottish Planning Policy chapter on Transport (paragraph 165) states that the location of significant travel-generating uses such as employment use should be located in places well served by public transport, a measure supported by the emerging Aberdeen Local Transport Strategy. The development of Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm will require therefore to be readily accessible by public transport. The development land should be able to be accessed so that there is the potential to run a bus service through all the land possibly in a loop system that uses Ellon Road. Access from the north is most likely to be from the Murcar roundabout on the A90T and from the south via the Parkway roundabout at the Bridge of Don Exhibition Centre. This is discussed in more detail under Access. The recent application for an extension to the Science and Energy Park was approved on the conditions that a Travel Plan and a bus service agreement should be in place prior to development taking place.

## **Roads and Access**

5.13 It is envisaged that the main vehicular accesses to the site will be from the Murcar and Parkway roundabouts on the A90T, though no vehicular access through the site will be permitted other than for public transport. A new direct access from the A90, between the Murcar and Parkway roundabouts, to serve the extended OP3 site may be a possibility if it can be shown to be justified and subject to

Transport Scotland and local planning authority approval. Transport Scotland have stated however that, given the strategic role of the trunk road network, there is a general presumption against new trunk road accesses, which is highlighted in SPP paragraph 175. Therefore, a development which proposes a new trunk road access must be thoroughly appraised by a transportation assessment supporting a planning application in terms of need, location and access, to determine the potential trunk road and rail impact, public transport access and travel plan content. Where new access to the trunk road is being considered within the transport accessibility assessment for a specific land use allocation, full and detailed justification will be required in support of such an access strategy. This will be required to take the form of a development appraisal examining the decision process undertaken regarding the allocation of development and an assessment of access options. This would require the appraisal to be carried out using the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG).

5.14 With regard to the scope of the development framework Transport Scotland advises that its preference is to have the transport implications of the entire site allocation considered within the assessment in relation to the inclusion of Cloverhill. This approach is consistent with the policies of SPP paragraph 170, which states that " the intended approach to developer contributions linked to the transport implications of a proposed development should be set out in the development plan". The Aberdeen Local Development Plan then sets out the approach required through Policy I1 Infrastructure Delivery and Developer Contributions and associated Supplementary Guidance the Infrastructure and Developer Contributions Manual. The transport impacts relating to Findlay Farm have already been identified and mitigation works agreed as conditions of the planning consent.

5.15 At the present time, access investigations are being carried out regarding the preferred route from the Murcar roundabout to service the northern part of the development land. The current planning application for Berryhill shows the road taking a northerly route. This is based on the land being in the control of the applicants. Assessments must be made to ensure that the relative impacts of any route, with appropriate mitigation, would not have any worse landscape and visual impact than any alternative route further south. The road will be taken through the green belt and in a future review of the development plan the road line could be a strong candidate for a revised green belt boundary.

5.16 Whilst access to the principal road network will be a primary consideration, the impact of development traffic on the local road network will require detailed consideration and should include an appraisal of road safety, particularly within the nearby residential areas of the Bridge of Don to the north of the A90 Parkway.

5.17 It is anticipated that the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) will open in 2017/18. The AWPR when open will help ease congestion on the A90T and improve accessibility to the developments at Berryhill, Cloverhill and Findlay Farm. However the AWPR still remains the subject of a legal challenge and the impact of development should be considered with and without the AWPR being in place. It is anticipated that subject to agreement that the A90T within the City and south of the AWPR Blackdog junction will be de-trunked on the opening of the AWPR.

## **Park and Ride**

5.18 The Aberdeen Local Plan 2008 highlights the possibility of a new Park and Ride site being accommodated at Berryhill should the present one reach capacity. Aberdeen City Council's Policy and Strategy Committee have instructed officers to investigate the relocation of the existing Bridge of Don Park and Ride site to an area north of the Science and Energy Park and that discussions be held with the applicants for the development of the Berryhill site and expansion of the Science and Energy park to explore a mutual need to deliver sustainable transport in the area. A possible site for the park and ride relocation, which is a good fit with best practice, is within the framework area, close to the Murcar roundabout. The possibility of the park and ride being relocated to the framework area is referred to in the Aberdeen Local Plan 2008. The relocation of the park and ride to the framework area would assist in providing public transport to the area as it would bring a frequent bus service into the site with the likelihood that the bus route would run through the site. Where proposals are submitted relating to transport interventions, including the provision of a Park and Ride facility,

Transport Scotland have indicated that they will require clear evidence how these will be delivered through the proposed phasing of the development.

## **Footpaths and Cycle Routes**

5.19 The Council has an approved cycling strategy and Core Paths Plan. Strong support for these initiatives and improving and developing the cycle and footpath network and updating the cycling strategy is given in the Council's emerging LTS (Local Transport Strategy). Development proposals must ensure that footpaths/cycle ways are provided along the eastern and western edges of the framework area and also across the area and that they provide connections to the Core Path Network and bus stops. They should be designed in accordance with best practice in terms of directness, coherence, safety, comfort and attractiveness. Development should provide for physical links to footpaths/cycle ways in adjoining developments to the south and the west. Provision should also be made for the shared use of cycle ways/footways. A Toucan crossing is to be provided on the A90T in the vicinity of the Parkway roundabout as a condition of the granting of planning permission of the extension to the Science and Energy Park. This will provide a safe crossing point for pedestrians and cyclists across the trunk road and provide better links with the wider Bridge of Don community. An additional Toucan crossing on the A90T closer to the Murcar roundabout would also offer similar advantages.

## **Services**

5.20 Investigative work has already been undertaken by the developers of Findlay Farm and Berryhill into service provision in the area. It is understood that there are no particular service constraints which would prevent development taking place. Investment will be required in the upgrading of service infrastructure, particularly for the supply of electricity.

## **Businesses/Workshops**

5.21 It is envisaged that a range of workshops, warehousing, offices and open storage will be provided on the land at Berryhill and Cloverhill. This likely will include company headquarters in some instances. Development on the extension to the Science and Energy Park at Findlay Farm will be restricted to companies that are significantly engaged in research and development. Facilities such as children's nurseries, crèches, leisure/sports uses, restaurants and local shops, which support industrial and business uses may be permitted in accordance with local plan economic development policies BI1 and BI2.

## **6 THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

6.1 When formally approved by the Council this Development Framework will be treated as supplementary planning guidance to the Local Development Plan, and will therefore be a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications within the area covered by the plan. Because of economic development priorities outline planning approval was granted in advance of the Development Framework for part of the area as an extension to the Science and Energy Park at Findlay Farm. However the framework will inform future applications for the development of Berryhill and Cloverhill and the possible relocation of the Bridge of Don Park and Ride. It will also influence subsequent planning applications for reserved matters on all sites within the subject area. Phasing plans will be required for all separate planning applications relating to the overall development of each opportunity site. The outline planning approval for the extension to the Science and Energy Park is conditional on a detailed phasing programme being agreed.

6.2 The Development Framework is important both from the need to boost the supply of employment land in Aberdeen and to ensure that a high quality of development is delivered in a sustainable manner.

Further detailed advice should be obtained from the Council's Masterplanning, Design and Conservation Team.

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