

Supplementary Guidance

Hillhead Campus

Don Street

Opportunity Site 105

January 2013

The Hillhead Campus Planning Brief 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



Hillhead Campus

PLANNING BRIEF

Originally prepared on behalf of the University of Aberdeen in partnership with Aberdeen City Council.

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March 2003

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Hillhead Halls of Residence presents an attractive, self contained development opportunity in a pleasant riverside and woodland setting close to local amenities and King Street, the main north south distributor road on the east of the City. It has easy access to the City Centre either by car or public transport.

1.2 This Planning Brief has been prepared by Jenkins & Marr, planning and development consultants, on behalf of the University of Aberdeen and in partnership with Aberdeen City Council City Development Services. A consultation exercise was carried out with the local community and a number of statutory consultees during the preparation of this brief.

1.3 Planning Briefs are produced as supplementary guidance to the Local Development Plan. Proposals that adhere to the principles of the Planning Brief will normally be received favourably by the Planning Authority.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Hillhead Halls of Residence lie approximately 3.5 km north of Aberdeen City Centre. The 9.9Ha site occupies a relatively secluded hilltop location surrounded by mature woodlands in a parkland and riverside setting south of the River Don and just to the west of King Street, the main north south trunk road on the east of the City. Seaton Park lies to the south and the valley of the River Don and its steep banks surround the western and northern site boundaries. The historic Brig'o'Balgownie and associated village lies to the north east with the River Don flowing east out to the beach and the North Sea beyond.

2.2 The site can be split into two distinct areas either side of Don Street. To the east of Don Street is a smaller area of grassed open space containing sparsely planted young trees with mature trees on the eastern and southern boundary. This area also contains tennis courts and a pathway running parallel with the road. A low granite wall running alongside Don Street delineates the whole area. This wall gains in height as it runs north culminating in the ruin of a cottage. The eastern boundary falls away very steeply to the River Don. Keith Park football ground and pavilion lies to the south.

2.3 The larger and more significant part of the site is located to the west of Don Street and contains all of the student residences as well as some communal facilities, associated car parking, access roads and landscaped open space/grassed areas. A 1.5 metre high granite rubble and brick wall runs the length of the eastern boundary broken by two vehicular/pedestrian access points. The majority of the boundary is delineated by mature woodland limiting the views in and out of the site. A public walkway runs along the eastern and northern boundary external to the site. Seaton Park and a small stable conversion, now in residential use, lies immediately to the south.

2.4 Topographically this larger part of the site is fairly level but has an area of higher ground to the north west and lower ground to the north and north east. It sits high above the River Don and is accessed via Don Street from King Street (a traffic light controlled junction).

Figure 1 - Site Boundaries/Current Access



Figure 1
Site Boundary and
existing buildings

2.5 There are a number of scattered blocks of student residences within the site, built between 1968 and 2008. The on-site buildings are roughly located around a number of central open spaces with no meaningful or defined pattern of development. Constructed in a variety of modern 4 and 5 storey styles many of the buildings have no architectural merit and are in a state of disrepair.

2.6 Both parts of the site are immediately adjacent to parkland, woodland or outdoor leisure uses. A small residential area containing a number of listed buildings at the Brig'o'Balgownie leads across the pedestrian bridge itself (A listed) into the Bridge of Don. A development of 2 and 3 storey terraced housing is located further southwards along Don Street with a Territorial Army base and a University owned development site at the junction of King Street and Don Street. Four residential tower blocks, a petrol filling station and open space at the links exist to the east of King Street. Open space has been designated in this area for a mosque in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (February 2012). A local convenience store, a family pub and an area of open space make up the remainder of the land uses on the west side of King Street between the River Don and the site.

3 PRESENT USE

3.1 This site has been used for educational purposes since the 1960s.

3.2 Although Hillhead currently accommodates approximately 2000 student bed spaces, it is underused and the University's requirements can be met through a number of other existing Halls as well as the potential redevelopment of part of this site for modern student accommodation. Many of the existing Halls of Residence are sub-standard and the consolidation and updating of student accommodation is part of a wider strategy of providing newer affordable rented accommodation in appropriate locations that meet the needs of the student population.

4 PLANNING POLICIES

4.1 National planning policies, adopted Structure Plan policies and Local Development Plan policies all promote the re-use of previously used sites (brownfield sites) for new uses. Scottish Planning Policy requires that full and effective use should be made of previously developed sites within existing built-up areas, including redevelopment and conversions, to meet as much demand for new housing as possible. Priority should be given to brownfield sites in preference to greenfield sites, provided a satisfactory residential environment can be created (para 80).

4.2 The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (September 2009), requires that new housing throughout Aberdeen is of a high quality with appropriate densities, a choice of residential environments and housing types, and directs housing to brownfield locations.

4.3 If the site were to be developed for private sector residential use then a mixture of house types would be preferred. The adopted Aberdeen Local Development Plan contains a policy to secure an element of affordable housing within all major residential developments. Policy Policy H5 - Affordable Housing sets out that developments of five units or more are required to contribute no less than 25% of the total number of units as affordable housing. Further guidance on the provision of affordable housing from new developments is available in Supplementary Guidance on Affordable Housing. This is in line with guidance from the Scottish Government (SPP para 88) and the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan. 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 in Section 9.

4.4 In determining what constitutes affordable housing, the role of the University in providing student accommodation is recognised. This provision reduces the level of demand on mainstream rented accommodation. The effective contribution that new student accommodation can make towards the required element of affordable housing is currently being assessed

4.5 The adopted Local Development Plan (2012) zones the site as H1 Residential areas. This policy states:

“Within existing residential areas (H1 on the Proposals Map) and within new residential developments, proposals for new residential development and householder development will be approved in principle if it:

1. does not constitute over development;
2. does not have an unacceptable impact on the character or amenity of the surrounding area;
3. does not result in the loss of valuable and valued areas of open space. Open space is defined in the Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2010;
4. complies with Supplementary Guidance on Curtilage Splits; and
5. complies with Supplementary Guidance on House Extensions.

Within existing residential areas, proposals for non-residential uses will be refused unless:

1. they are considered complementary to residential use; or
2. it can be demonstrated that the use would cause no conflict with, or any nuisance to, the enjoyment of existing residential amenity.”

4.6 The River Don is further protected as a District Wildlife Site running adjacent to Hillhead along the west, north and eastern boundaries. Policy NE1 – Green Space Network of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan also covers such areas giving protection around the site protecting existing linear areas of natural open space from development. The policy states:

“The City Council will protect, promote and enhance the wildlife, recreational, landscape and access value of the Green Space Network. Proposals for development that are likely to destroy or erode the character or function of the Green Space Network will not be permitted. Where major infrastructure projects or other developments necessitate crossing the Green Space Network, such developments shall take into account the coherence of the network. In doing so measures shall be taken to allow access across roads for wildlife and for access and outdoor recreation purposes. Masterplanning of new developments should determine the location and extent of the Green Space Network within these areas. Development which has any impact on existing wildlife habitats, or connections between them, or other features of value to natural heritage, open space, landscape and recreation must be mitigated through enhancement of Green Space Network”.

4.7 The adopted Local Development Plan also contains policies protecting open space in urban areas and provides guidance on the amount of open space required for new developments, through Policy NE3 - Urban Green Space and Policy NE4 - Open Space Provision in New Development. The Plan introduces further policy relating to design and layout of brownfield sites with Policy D1 - Architecture and Placemaking and Policy D2 - Design. Developers should pay due regard to these policies when considering the layout of any future development on this site.

5 OTHER DESIGNATIONS

5.1 A number of other designations affect this site.

5.2 Cottown of Balgownie sits to the north east immediately outwith the site boundaries. All of the buildings here are either A or B listed. The Brig'o'Balgownie is an A listed Scheduled Ancient Monument. Any development on site should not detract from the setting of these listed buildings.

5.3 The site falls within Conservation area 1 (Old Aberdeen). Proposed development would be required to preserve and enhance the character of that conservation area through good design, high quality conversion of existing buildings where required, high quality hard and soft landscaping and the protection of trees (all trees are automatically protected within a conservation area). There are no buildings of historical merit on this site.

6. FUTURE USES AND POTENTIAL

6.1 Hillhead Campus offers an extremely attractive setting for any new development and a number of uses could be acceptable. Large-scale retail and multi-leisure use e.g. a multi-screen cinema, are not appropriate in planning policy terms for this site nor would they make the best use of the well established natural features and location. Residential, office or business, recreational uses, or a mix of these uses, in principal are acceptable.

6.2 If the site were to be developed for residential use then a mixture of house types would be preferred. The setting of the river and the riverside walk is important and good quality landscaping would be required within the site. Care needs to be taken so as not to damage the trees that surround the site and sight lines for new roads may also be an issue if they require the removal of trees. The junction at Don Street/King Street may also be problematic depending on the end uses and subsequent traffic generation. This is especially so at peak morning and evening traffic flows across the Bridge of Don.

7 SITE COVERAGE

7.1 The existing buildings are generally of no historical or architectural merit and need not be kept. Some of the more modern buildings may be suitable for conversion. Current open space policies, car parking standards and the required road layout will determine the remainder of the site that could accommodate development.

7.2 All existing trees around the site and those of merit within the site should be protected. A tree survey will be required to a) establish the distance of new development from trees at the edge of the site, and b) to facilitate agreement between the developer and the Planning Authority on which trees must be retained and which may be removed.

8 ACCESS, TRAFFIC & CAR PARKING

8.1 The Hillhead 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.

8.2 The main vehicular access relating to new development must be taken from Don Street preferably using the established access points shown on Figure 2.

8.3 A transport assessment will be required and should address the requirements of SPP (para 165) 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.

8.4 With the retention of student accommodation, the University intends to retain the existing bus service (no. 20) to the City Centre thus maintaining the site's public transport accessibility. The main University academic buildings are located in Old Aberdeen, roughly 750 metres from the southern boundary of the site.

8.5 While there are existing pedestrian routes to the site, these can be poorly lit and in some cases located some distance from the road. Consideration should be given to improving the lighting and alignment of these routes. In forming these proposals, the developer should be mindful of the position and location of existing trees in these areas.

9 DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE

9.1 Figure 2, Site Development Principles, indicates the guiding principles for development. These are based on this Planning Brief, current planning policies or designations and the opportunities for making best use of the site.

9.2 The following principles will apply:

• The redevelopment of this previously developed site can help meet national and local policy requirements and augment the City's housing land supply.
• Any housing on this site is to be of a good quality design and contribute to the choice of housing types throughout the City. A range of house types and sizes will be expected on this site.
• Proposals will be required to protect the mature trees on site and surrounding the site.
• Proposals will be required to protect the wildlife value of the River Don District Wildlife Site.
• The riverside walk and the setting of the River are important. A scheme of landscape enhancement should be included to improve this setting. Improved and safe pedestrian links between the site, Seaton Park and the Riverside Walk should be integral to any proposal.
• Current open space policies will apply. The open space to the east of Don Street is not suitable for development and should be retained as open space/recreation with improved pedestrian access across Don Street.
• Aberdeen University wishes to retain some student accommodation but the site can also accommodate a number of other uses (see 6.0).
• Vehicular access should be taken from the existing access points to reduce the potential impact on trees.

9.3 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.

10 CONSTRUCTION ARRANGEMENTS

10.1 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 British Standard 5837:2005

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

For further information, please contact:

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Figure 2 Site Development Principles

-  Road with pedestrian priority measures
-  Main vehicular access
-  Potential for new pedestrian access
-  Riverside Walk
-  Existing pedestrian routes suitable for improvement
-  Riverside Walk
-  Retained trees (general location only)
-  Retained open space
-  Area of greatest visual impact on conservation area
-  Local views to be retained
-  Steep slope