

Addendum to the SDPA Bulletin – March 2016

Golf Course and enabling development (90 houses) at Ury Estate, Stonehaven

- 2.7 The application (APP/2015/0541 - <http://tinyurl.com/AC0541a>) is for a Championship Golf Course with enabling development of 90 x 5-bed homes on the edge of Stonehaven. The site is not allocated in the Aberdeenshire LDP (or Proposed LDP).
- 2.8 The application is contrary to the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (2014), which is up-to-date and relevant to this application. While it may be able to draw some unquantified comfort under the economic development objective (by helping to diversify the economy), it is contrary to the objectives on population growth (a very generous housing land supply has already been identified), sustainable mixed communities (the application is purely high-end housing and not mixed in terms of size, type, tenure or cost, and has a density below that generally suitable in Strategic Growth Areas) and accessibility (by being poorly located for walking, cycling and public transport - not attractive choices).
- 2.9 In addition to the above, the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment does not provide a robust assessment of the net economic impact of the current application. Even if this application were acceptable in principle, no valid justification has been provided for the scale of housing proposed. The response to the application can be found at Appendix 10.

PLANNING PROPOSAL	
Local planning authority: Aberdeenshire Council	
Proposal: Proposed Nicklaus Golf Course & Enabling Housing Development (90 No. Dwellinghouses) with Associated Roads, Infrastructure & Landscaping at land at Ury Estate Ury Stonehaven	
Reference No: APP/2015/0541	Date received:
Case Officer: Neil Mair	Target date:

STRATEGIC PLANNING OBSERVATIONS
<p>This is a strategic response addressing matters of principle and strategy rather than the detail of the current application in terms of siting, design and landscape impacts.</p> <p>Strategic Development Plan</p> <p>The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (SDP) was approved by Scottish Ministers on 28 March 2014, replacing the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009). The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (2012) is just three and a half years old and Aberdeenshire Council is at an advanced stage with the preparation of its replacement plan (submitting it for Examination in December 2015). The development plan for Aberdeenshire is therefore fully up-to-date.</p> <p>The application site is within the Aberdeen Housing Market Area (AHMA) and the Aberdeen to Laurencekirk Strategic Growth Area in terms of the SDP's spatial strategy. Strategic Growth Areas are the main focus for development in the period to 2035.</p> <p>The SDP's vision is for Aberdeen City and Shire to be "an even more attractive, prosperous and sustainable European city region and an excellent place to live, visit and do business." (SDP para 2.1). Economic resilience, sustainable development and an inclusive society are all highlighted within the vision.</p> <p>The importance of growing and diversifying the regional economy is emphasised in the SDP, along with the critical need to address the urgent challenges of sustainable development and climate change – dealing with these issues simultaneously rather than in isolation. These are clearly set out in the main aims of the plan (para 2.2). The plan recognises the need for confident and courageous decision-making to achieve our aims, recognising that maintaining a commitment to all the aims of the plan is the only way we will achieve our vision. There is no doubt that economic diversification is vital over the coming years, as recognised by the plan and emphasised over the past 18 months. However, this needs to be achieved in the context of the plan's other aims and objectives if the vision is to be achieved.</p> <p>The SDP recognises the importance of providing opportunities which encourage economic development and create new employment, as well as diversifying the regional economy. Tourism is highlighted as important for the future, building on the area's current assets (SDP para 4.1). While a golf course may well provide an economic asset for the future and help diversify the economy, it is not clear that the 'quality' of the course can be controlled through the planning system. Indeed, it will only have any noteworthy economic impact if it is substantially superior to the currently available courses. The Socio-Economic Impact Assessment accompanying the application does not provide a robust assessment of</p>

economic impact of the proposal (see below) and does not therefore indicate what the net economic benefit of the scheme might be in the context of Scottish Planning Policy para 29.

The SDP has an ambitious strategy for change, facilitating substantial growth in a limited number of places to deliver the significant infrastructure required to deliver that growth (paras 3.5 and 3.9), while enhancing quality of life. In relation to housing, sites have been allocated for all 4,600 homes identified for the period to 2026 in SDP Figure 4. Stonehaven is the main settlement in the area, although most of the allocated land is further north at Chapelton of Elsick. The Aberdeen Housing Market Area has a healthy supply of housing land, well in excess of the requirements of Scottish Planning Policy (more than 50% more), so there is no need to identify more housing land in the area.

The SDP (p34) has an objective to ensure new development maintains and improves the region's important built, natural and cultural assets. It is not known whether this is relevant to the current application due to the strategic nature of this response.

The SDP seeks the creation of sustainable mixed communities. However, the housing proposed does not support or create a sustainable mixed community or a more inclusive society. The application is for 90 x 5-bed detached homes, in stark contrast to the mix sought by the SDP (para 4.35) in terms of type, size, tenure and cost. The plan targets (generally) a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare in Strategic Growth Areas but this application would deliver a density substantially below this given the type of housing proposed.

The application site is not a location which will enable walking, cycling and public transport to be attractive choices (Accessibility Objective, p38). It is not only physically distant from the rest of Stonehaven but also suffers from a significant gradient difference. The SDP requires a focus on creating sustainable mixed communities, making housing, employment and services highly accessible by public transport (para 3.8 and 4.43-4.44). The plan targets reducing the percentage of journeys made by car but this development will be accessed almost exclusively by car – both the golf course as well as the residential component. While this may be acceptable for the golf course, this is not the case for the residential component.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS AND POLICY CONCLUSION

Even if this application were acceptable in principle, no valid justification has been provided for the scale of housing proposed. It is unreasonable to expect 'enabling' development to finance the whole capital cost of the golf course as proposed, even if it were acceptable to enable part of it. It is not clear that any evidence has been provided as to what could be delivered commercially.

It is noted that the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) does not actually relate directly to the development applied for. In addition to being titled 'draft' and dating from almost a year prior to the application's submission, the development proposal set out in para 1.1 of the SEIA includes elements which are not part of this application. In addition to assessing the impact of the use of Ury House as a hotel (not part of this application – para 4.3.2), it also includes the impact of 10-12 golf lodges with approximately 200 bed spaces between them, which are again not part of this application. This fundamentally undermines the assessment as it is not possible to disaggregate the impacts. On this basis, the positive economic impact of the application is likely to be very significantly less than claimed, especially in terms of employment and consequently GVA. The housing element of the scheme has been included in the assessment but it is argued that there would be a very high level of displacement effect as there is already a very generous supply of housing land

in both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City. In essence, it is likely that if homes were built on this site they would not be built elsewhere – hence the argument that additional net economic benefit would be very low indeed (if any) for this element of the proposal. This would further reduce the net economic benefit presented in the assessment. As a consequence of the above, the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment does not provide a robust assessment of the net economic impact of the current application.

There is no way of knowing if/when an application for golf lodges would be made or whether such an application would be acceptable. As a consequence, the only conclusion that can be reached is that the current application would have an unknown but undoubtedly smaller net economic benefit than that reported.

This application is contrary to the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (2014), which is up-to-date and relevant to this application. While it may be able to draw some unquantified comfort under the economic development objective (by helping to diversify the economy), it is contrary to the objectives on population growth (a very generous housing land supply has already been identified), sustainable mixed communities (the application is purely high-end housing and not mixed in terms of size, type, tenure or cost) and accessibility (by being poorly located for walking, cycling and public transport).

Author: David Jennings

Date: 11 February 2015