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Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

Project Title: ABS21 Hill of Banchory Care Home, Banchory
Details: Proposed city centre mixed use development
Location: Banchory, Aberdeenshire
Use type: Health
Client / Developer: Bancon Developments
Lead Designer(s): Archial Architects
Planning Authority: Aberdeenshire Council
Planning Status and Ref: Planning Ref: M/APP/2009/3076
Issue Date: 21 October 2009

Thank you for your letter of 24 September 2009, in which you referred the re-submitted scheme for the above project to us for comment. The previous application was reviewed by an A+DS Design Review Panel in Aberdeen on 17 March 2009 and a report was subsequently issued on 8 April 2009, which suggested several matters of strategy and detail that needed to be reviewed if the proposals were to result in an enjoyable environment for the elderly residents of the home. Amended designs were sent to us by the applicants for comment in May 2009 and we issued a letter in response dated 19 June 2009, a copy of which was sent to your department. The designs now submitted are virtually the same as those sent to us in May, and therefore the comments below are very largely the same as those in the previous restricted letter.

We have previously made comments about the choice of site in the report on the original submission, which we understand is contrary to the designated Land Use. While such questions of policy are entirely for the Council to decide upon, it is still relevant for us to highlight the noted disadvantages of the site, which stem from its relative isolation and context within a designated business park area, and the design challenge that these factors represent. However, should the Council decide to accept the principle of a residential development on this site then the implications of this change in policy need to be considered. Specifically, we would suggest that the principles set out in the Design Guide for the Hill of Banchory Development would need to be amended to allow an attractive residential environment to be made in the area.

Notwithstanding the above, we acknowledge that the revised designs have started to address several of the issues highlighted in our previous report. We welcome improvements in the size and openness of the garden court, the introduction of external garden areas, and simplification of the landscaping specification. Within the building we also welcome the improvement in the layout of the internal entrance area, the opening up of the ends of corridors, the improved orientation of the social rooms, and the introduction of bays for north facing bedrooms. Notwithstanding these promising developments, the changes made have been in selective areas only and in general we are still not convinced that the project as a whole yet promises to create the welcoming and supportive environment that is required for the elderly residents.

The design approach that has been introduced needs to be extended through the whole of the proposals, to ensure that all spaces achieve their full potential as attractive places to live and work in. The piecemeal nature of the changes has also resulted in the external elevations and forms appearing unresolved. The opportunity to address this through further design development should be explored to ensure the building becomes more legible and an integrated whole of high quality throughout.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that some of the proposed amendments have begun to address some of the detailed comments made in our report. However, the issue of location and land use remains to be resolved, and the designs require further development if a quality residential

environment for the elderly is to be created. We trust that these and any further matters can be resolved through discussions with the Project Team, and we hope that a quality home can be delivered through positive engagement around these issues.