



Architecture+DesignScotland
Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

Project Title:	ABS 18: Trump International Golf Course
Details:	Masterplan for golf course, leisure resort and residential village
Location:	Menie Estate, Balmedie, Aberdeenshire
Use type:	Housing / Leisure / Public Realm / Infrastructure
Client / Developer:	Trump International Golf Links Scotland
Lead Designer(s):	Gareth Hoskins Architects Ltd.
Planning Authority:	Aberdeenshire Council
Planning Status and Ref:	Approval of Matters Specified In Outline Planning Permission Ref. APP/2006/4605
Issue Date:	22nd February 2010

Introduction

This report relates to an application for 'Approval of Matters Specified in Outline Planning' for a golf and leisure resort and new village on the Menie Estate at Balmedie, Aberdeenshire, details of which were presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 26th January 2010 in Edinburgh.

Preliminary designs for the emerging masterplan were presented to A+DS in March 2009 and a restricted report issued on 7th April 2009. Informal presentations were made to a small A+DS panel and Aberdeenshire Council in July and August 2009, and restricted letters issued on 18th August and 3rd September 2009 respectively. A subsequent Design Review meeting was held on 24th November 2009 in Edinburgh and a restricted report issued on 10th December 2009. This report is based on the material presented to the panel on 26th January, and on previous restricted reports updated to take account of amendments.

A+DS Views

1 General comments

1.1 We thank the project team for their clear presentation and are pleased to have had the opportunity for continued dialogue with them and Aberdeenshire Council on this significant, intriguing and difficult project. We recognise the huge amount of work that has gone into developing the masterplan to this critical stage and commend the project team for their efforts thus far. We are generally supportive of the masterplan. The sensitive response to the site and its wider landscape, the overall landscape strategy, the distribution of buildings across the site, and the quality of linking spaces between them successfully achieves the broader ambitions for the designs set out by the project team. However, we feel that the designs for many of the individual buildings, in particular those within the resort village, require further work and are as yet unproven as successfully integrated pieces of architecture. We offer the following comments for consideration at this time. This is our first public response on the project since our

comments on the outline application in May 2007. Our previous responses at pre-application stage are summarised below for information.

2 Previous comments

2.1 Presentation to full Panel - March 2009

At the first presentation to a full Panel in March 2009 we supported the direction in which the designs had progressed since our response to the initial Outline Application, and shared the aspirations of the project team and the Council for this to be a development of the highest quality.

We stressed the importance of a balance being achieved between the new community and the existing neighbouring community of Balmedie, in terms of the provision of community facilities and of affordable housing. We also felt that it was critical for direct routes to be established between Balmedie, the new village and the holiday resort to ensure that they did not become isolated from one another, and to discourage potential social barriers between communities.

2.2 Interim Review 1- July 2009

In a subsequent presentation from the project team to a smaller panel and staff we were presented with a number of options for distributing accommodation across the site. Noting the considerable impact the amount of consented holiday accommodation would have on the north end of the site, we supported the relocation of 200 holiday units into the proposed residential village to alleviate pressures on this sensitive area, and to help create a greater mix of residential use between the resort and village.

We were concerned that the option presented of placing a large volume of accommodation along the escarpment would create a wall of buildings that would dominate the skyline and the surrounding landscape, and isolate the large body of the site from the sea views. Such a linear approach seemed alien to the landscape, and would not be successful in place making terms. We suggested that an iconic hotel building might be supported in principle, but that in order for such a proposition to be successful it should not compete with other similarly sized blocks in close proximity.

We supported the idea of the hotel as an iconic 'stand-alone' building on the escarpment, but as the designs developed we looked to see the form of the hotel respond more closely to the topographic and climatic conditions of the site, to create a building more rooted in its time and its place.

We were generally supportive of the way in which the designs for the proposed village had evolved and were confident that issues raised in regard to detailed aspects of its layout would be resolved as the designs developed.

2.3 Interim Review 2 – August 2009

At the second interim meeting we were pleased that the client and their design team had developed an option for the resort that worked with, rather than against, the contours of the site. We felt that the design for the resort had moved on very positively and were pleased that, through exploring various options for the site, the client and their design team had arrived at a conceptual layout that we believed held great potential, and which

laid firm foundations for the project to be taken forward to the next stage. The strategic move of redistributing the resort apartments to the rear of the site would allow the hotel to enjoy iconic status as a stand-alone building on the escarpment. We welcomed the way in which the holiday villas had been arranged around existing topographical features and noted the importance of integrating the villas, landscape and road infrastructure to ensure a unique and contemporary response to place. We also encouraged the project team to develop a landscape strategy for the whole site.

2.4 Presentation to full Panel - November 2009

At the last review in November we felt that the masterplan had matured significantly since last presented to a full panel, to create a series of evocative spaces that worked with the sensitive landscape. Comments made at that time reflected some of the more detailed aspects of the designs presented to us, in particular the residential village and the evolution of its micro-townscape, the clubhouse and resort buildings. There were also some important aspects of the overall masterplan commented on previously that we sought to reaffirm, particularly in relation to connectivity with the neighbouring community.

3 Current designs

3.1 Landscape

We generally support the broad landscape moves being made throughout the masterplan, which successfully sets the framework for the golf resort and village to develop. We commend the 'light touch' approach to the landscape that is being followed, and some of the more detailed images that suggest building typologies grouped together to sit sensitively within it.

As the designs progress to a more detailed stage, and development briefs for specific buildings and areas are developed, consideration should be given to how the different areas tie together, and to what extent the masterplan, and the principles enshrined within it, will be delivered and controlled. We suggest, for instance, that greater unity between areas might be achieved by using continuity of materials rather than of form.

3.2 Residential Village

Previously the Panel commented that some of the more detailed designs for the residential village showed promise, but felt that the composition of the public realm, including the village square and streetscapes, and their close relationship with the landscape, required further development. They were also keen to see further information with regard to how connections to the village of Balmedie would be achieved, over and above the re-opening of the historical route between Balmedie House and Menie House; and in particular how other pedestrian, bus and cycle routes would be developed as part of a phased masterplan.

We note the additional information provided within the masterplanning document with regards to a public access strategy and are pleased to see a network of public access routes proposed throughout the masterplan area. The general layout of the village appears to work well, though some of the public spaces are still not yet resolved. In particular the design of the village square, in terms of its sense of scale and enclosure, still requires development. Additionally, the sketches of the residential crescents appear

seductive but it is unclear how they will terminate and relate to the adjoining landscape strip.

3.3 Hotel

At the last review the Panel were not convinced by the quality of the designs for the hotel and felt that some of the historical precedents referred to were entirely inappropriate for this context. Though still of the opinion that a landmark building could work well on the site, we feel strongly that a prominent building on such a very sensitive site should reflect Scotland as a modern and vibrant nation, rather than try to recreate historical pastiche. A successful design solution will need to relate strongly to the topography of the site, and not overly dominate the near and distant landscape with what is essentially 'private' accommodation.

We understand that detailed designs for the hotel will come forward as part of a separate development brief and application. However, the design concept for the hotel will become enshrined within the masterplan and we do not yet feel that the designs for the hotel have been sufficiently developed for us to feel confident that a satisfactory solution will be arrived at. We feel that the sketch that shows the concept of the hotel stepping into the contours of the site is promising. However, there appears to be some disparity between the imagery shown and the programme of the building, in particular the relationship of the section to the plan and the location of public and private space. It would also be useful to see further exploration of the courtyard side of the building.

We are not convinced that the current sketch reflects the concepts aspired to in the contemporary and historic precedents shown in the masterplan document, and the notion of the type of architecture that is envisioned is unclear. Such a prominent building requires a skilful and considered response and its design should be given sufficient time to develop. However, it is critical that sufficient guidance is built into the masterplan at this stage to guard against an inappropriate design being promoted in future.

3.4 Villas and apartments

The way that the resort village has been arranged around the three existing landscape bowls appears to work well in terms of creating a cohesive development that successfully ties into its natural context. We support the way that the design of the villas has developed around the concept of a series of farm steadings and split level buildings. However, in being presented in the past with a number of precedent studies we have been concerned that some of the brand references referred to did not seem to support the aspirations behind these concepts. In this respect we support the contemporary approach that is currently proposed.

We previously noted that the designs for the apartments were at a very early stage, but that the strongly articulated roofscape suggested by them had the potential to tie in well with the dune landscape. However, the additional imagery presented raises some questions with regards to the scale of the buildings and the proposed building typology. The apartment blocks, although variable in height, are substantial and comparable with parts of the hotel. We are unclear why they need to be so tall. The siting of the blocks works well, but the proposed building typology, coupled with the height of the blocks, seems in opposition to the landscape. The vertical nature of the blocks appears out of

character with the horizontality of the villas and we suggest that the apartment blocks might benefit from some sort of horizontal connector to tie them back into the landscape. Although these are questions of design development, it is essential to consider them in the context of a strategic masterplan approach, as the general appearance of the buildings must be established at this stage.

The way in which the buildings are procured will also have an impact on the appearance and quality achieved.

3.5 Clubhouse

We recognise the importance of the clubhouse building as a centrepiece for players on the green and spectators alike, but feel that the designs that have been presented to us so far lack the sense of occasion and drama required of them. This prominent building will form an important part of the overall composition of the golf resort and, as such, a continuing constructive dialogue between its designers and the masterplanners is essential if a successful result is to be achieved.

3.6 Control measures / delivery

Given the nature and size of the development, and the potential for different design teams to be taken on board to develop individual components of the masterplan over time, a degree of ongoing control will be required. We support the use of design codes as a way of helping to achieve homogeneity throughout the development and understand that work is being done in this respect in relation to the residential village. It will be important when setting these design codes to avoid being overly prescriptive. The codes need to set an appropriate level of control, whilst leaving enough scope for varied and interesting designs to come forward and an identity and character specific to the location to be defined. We suggest that the landscape and the required infrastructure should play a significant role in informing this work.

Conclusion

A+DS has been pleased to engage with the project team and Aberdeenshire Council on the designs as they have developed. We generally support the masterplan and the broad moves being made in relation to the distribution of buildings on the site and how they relate to their unique landscape setting. The project team are to be commended for the quality of investigations carried out and the significant improvements that have been made to the designs since the original masterplan was granted outline consent.

We recognise that the masterplan is setting the design principles for the development of the residential village and resort village, and that individual development briefs for different parts of the masterplan will be coming forward in due course. Notwithstanding, certain design principles will be established and enshrined within the masterplan that will impact on future development. There are some aspects of the designs, in particular the hotel building, apartment blocks and some of the public spaces within the residential village, that we feel need further work, and are as yet unproven as successfully integrated pieces of architecture.

We look forward to continued involvement in the project and to seeing future development briefs for individual parts of the masterplan coming forward in due course.