



Project Title:	ABS 18: Menie Estate
Details:	Proposed Golf & Leisure Resort Development
Location:	Land at Menie House, Balmedie, Aberdeenshire
Use type:	Mixed Use / Housing / Leisure / Infrastructure
Client / Developer:	Trump International Golf Links Scotland
Lead Designer(s):	Gareth Hoskins Architects Ltd.
Planning Authority:	Aberdeenshire Council
Planning Status and Ref:	Pre-planning (Reserved Matters)
Issue Date:	7th April 2009

Introduction

This report relates to designs for a golf and leisure resort development and new village on the Menie Estate at Balmedie, Aberdeenshire. The emerging masterplan was presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 17th March 2009 in Aberdeenshire.

Kenny Fraser, an Enabler with A+DS and member of the panel, declared that his wife works for Ironside Farrar who is employed as Environmental Consultants and Landscape Architects on the project. She is not involved in the project. It was agreed by all parties that this did not constitute a conflict of interest.

A+DS Views

1 General comments

1.1 The site has a unique character that requires a design of an exceptionally high quality to respond to its varied and special landscape qualities. Both the design team and local authority have an obligation to ensure that the proposed development compliments its setting and does not detract from the natural beauty of the site.

1.2 Commenting on the outline application for the project in May 2007, we acknowledged that the proposal could represent a significant opportunity for the north-east of Scotland. However, we had serious concerns with the design approach and did not believe that the illustrative designs submitted were of a sufficiently high quality for this unique location, for a project with such an international profile, or for Scotland as a whole. We suggested that the designs be revisited and more information provided to demonstrate:

- a creative approach to landscape design, sympathetic to the coastal location;
- an exemplary, and contemporary, approach to the design of the built environment, based on a response to landscape and environmental issues;
- the appointment of a team of consultants with a commitment to high quality design;
- an exemplary approach to sustainable design;
- a commitment to the interests of the local community and non golf playing visitors;
- the avoidance of a gratuitous response to local tradition, in the context of a development that will be unlike anything built before in the north-east;

- a development that represents Scotland as a modern and vibrant nation;
- compliance with Scottish Government design related policies.

1.3 We are pleased to note that some of our suggestions have been taken on board. The appointment of a new design team who have already demonstrated a commitment to high quality design is much welcomed. The proposals presented were at an early stage, and related to strategic masterplanning issues, but we are generally supportive of the approach that is being taken and see that many of the issues raised in our earlier response are beginning to be addressed. We trust that the following comments will be helpful in informing the designs as they develop.

2 Masterplan and landscape design

2.1 A cohesive masterplan that considers how the whole development sits sympathetically within this exceptional landscape is required. The approach that is now being taken is promising in this respect, and we welcome the way in which the designs are beginning to address the character and topography of the site. We encourage the design team to follow this approach through to the detailed design of the buildings, road infrastructure and the junctions between the existing landscape and new interventions.

2.2 Though we commend the design team for their thorough analysis of the site, we were not provided with much information on how the designs tie into the wider landscape grain, which differs from that within the Menie Estate boundary. We understand that landscape architects have assessed this in greater detail and we look forward to seeing how their analysis has been incorporated into the designs in future presentations.

2.3 Consideration should also be given to how the development will relate to other planned developments that are part of the future expansion along the A90 growth corridor.

3 Resort

3.1 Hotel: Commenting on the illustrative designs that accompanied the outline application, we raised serious concerns about the way in which the large and prominently located hotel building would relate to its sensitive landscape context. Whilst acknowledging that there is a case for placing such a building in a prominent position, we stress that a high quality design that maintains the integrity and attractiveness of the site is essential. We support the way that the current designs are beginning to address the issue of scale by breaking down the massing, form and layout of the building, and suggest that there may be ways in which the building could be integrated more successfully into the topography of the site by considering more carefully how it relates to the escarpment edge.

3.2 Villas and holiday homes: We are generally supportive of the early efforts to relate these buildings to site contours. However, the extensive infrastructure that will be required, such as road access, service access, car ports etc., is not yet indicated in the designs. It will need to be handled in a sympathetic way to protect the precious landscape context. We would support any attempt to minimise the impact of these buildings and associated infrastructure on the dune landscape.

4 The village

4.1 The number of units proposed for the new village will necessitate a high density of development if limited to the site already allocated. We would not wish to see the village spreading further east and impacting on the coastal strip either now or in any future expansion. The overlaying of plans for developments of similar densities will be useful in terms of testing how such densities might be achieved, and ensuring that the extent of the village is limited.

4.2 Although we do not advocate a gratuitous response to local tradition, it is also important that the character and materiality of the village should reflect its location within Aberdeenshire. The studies currently being carried out of other established planned towns of a similar type and scale are welcomed in terms of providing useful precedents for how the new village might develop as a place.

4.3 We note that the design of the shelter belts which are a defining characteristic of the layout of the new village takes reference in part from the structure of the historic landscape around Menie House. We are generally supportive of the approach being taken, in particular the way in which the layout sets up an east west relationship down towards the beach, but we would like to be reassured that the design and orientation of the shelter belts also responds to the topographical and climatic conditions, and that they will perform as well as they might to mitigate any adverse environmental conditions within the new village.

4.4 We note that the design team have so far been commissioned to prepare a masterplan, and that other designers may come on board to develop particular parts of it. There may be benefits in introducing different architects to the project but, particularly in the case of the village, a degree of control will be necessary if a cohesive identity is to be created and maintained throughout the delivery of the project. We recognise that the design team are progressing a detailed brief in conjunction with the masterplan, within which a level of design coding may be required

5 Community and infrastructure

5.1 We recognise that under a Section 75 agreement a number of community buildings and facilities are being proposed to cater for the new village, including a school and affordable housing. We encourage the Council and the project team to consider carefully which elements should be located within the existing village of Balmedie and which within the new settlement. It is important that both settlements remain sustainable mixed communities, and facilities shared equitably between the two. We believe it might be beneficial, for example, to share the allocation of affordable housing between the two villages rather than concentrating it all in Balmedie as currently proposed.

5.2 The proposed new development will add significant pressure to the existing infrastructure. We recognise the importance of the future junction upgrading and duelling of the A90 to help alleviate this.

5.3 It is critical that direct routes are established between the proposed new village, Balmedie, and the new holiday resort to ensure that they do not become isolated from one another, and to discourage any potential social barriers between communities. We welcome the proposed re-opening of the historical route between Balmedie House and Menie House

in this respect, and look forward to seeing how this and other pedestrian, bus and cycle routes between communities are developed.

5.4 The new championship standard golf course is likely to attract a concentration of traffic and visitors whenever a large event is held. Consideration should be given to how the development will cater for the additional parking required during this period and how the influx of media, vehicles and visitors will be handled for the duration of these events. The effect that this may have on the other communities in the area should also be considered.

5.5 The service road currently planned to run to the east of the hotel would potentially form a barrier between the hotel and the beach. This seems unfortunate, and we encourage the design team to reconsider servicing arrangements in order to avoid such a severance.

Conclusion

We generally support the direction in which the designs have progressed since previously reviewed and congratulate the project team on their work thus far. We share the project team and Council's aspirations for this to be a development of the highest quality. It is apparent that many of the concerns raised in our last report are being addressed. In particular we welcome the way in which the masterplan, and the proposed buildings and infrastructure within it, are beginning to address the sensitive landscape in which they sit in a much more coherent and sympathetic way than the previous designs. We look forward to continued involvement with the project and the opportunity to review more detailed aspects of the proposals as they progress.