

**Report Title:** Blairs College Estate, Aberdeenshire  
**Issue Date:** 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007  
**Client/Developer:** Farningham McCreadie Partnership  
**Lead Designer:** White Young Green  
**Local Authority:** Aberdeenshire Council  
**Location:** Blairs College Estate  
**Planning Ref:** KM/APP/2006/4973

**Details:** Outline planning application for a housing, hotel and leisure development with associated regeneration of former Roman Catholic seminary buildings in the northern sector of Blairs College Estate, Aberdeenshire



Architecture+DesignScotland  
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## INTRODUCTION

This report relates to an outline planning application for a housing, hotel and leisure development with associated regeneration of former Roman Catholic seminary buildings in the northern sector of Blairs College Estate, presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007 in Edinburgh. Preliminary designs were seen at a Design Review meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2007 and a report subsequently issued on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2007.

The project was presented by representatives of Farningham McCreadie Partnership and White Young Green.

The meeting was also attended by a representative of Historic Scotland.

## A+DS VIEWS

### 1 General comments

1.1 We thank the project team for their clear explanation of the way in which the designs have progressed since previously reviewed. We are generally supportive of the approach that is being taken, but the designs are still at an early stage in their development, and we are concerned that the quality that the project aspires to may not be delivered. There are a number of aspects of the designs that should be developed further at this stage.

### 2 Site layout

2.1 We support the proposed reuse of the existing Blairs College buildings and welcome the way in which they would act as a focus for links to the new development. The proposed layout follows a logical urban pattern, utilising the existing planting divisions across the site. We welcome the way in which the streets and squares have been defined within these natural divisions and support the allocation of parking to the rear of the houses to encourage pedestrian activity and minimise vehicle impact. However, we think that a denser and more compact development should be considered which would better define the streets and squares and help engender a sense of place and character. The natural screening between the various plot areas could also be made more solid to better define these spaces.

### 3 Design quality

3.1 We welcome the development of an architectural narrative that responds to the special and unique qualities of the site. It is imperative that the setting of the listed buildings is not compromised. The rejuvenation of the listed buildings is the *raison d'être* of the project and is key to unlocking the value of the site. Delivery mechanisms should control the extent, density, layout and detail design of the settlement in order for the full potential of the scheme to be

realised and to ensure that the quality aspired to at this stage is maintained. Principles of the house designs should be identified as part of an overarching development brief to avoid the standardisation of house types.

#### **4 Connectivity / sustainability**

4.1 The increased pressure that such a development would put upon the existing infrastructure in the area needs to be recognised and proposals should be made to address this. Sustainable transport links to the city and local schools are essential and, in this respect, we would welcome an additional pedestrian link across the Dee to the north. However, there is no evidence of this in the current proposals. The potential to link the proposed settlement with the adjacent school, by creating cycle and walking paths through the estate, is to be encouraged and would be a great asset to the development. A coordinated approach should be adopted when designing the landscape to encourage physical connections between the proposed golf course and the housing.

4.2 The development is not of a sufficient scale to be classified as a village; however, it should still be self-sufficient. Shops and other local facilities should be provided within the settlement to provide resources for the community.

4.3 Sustainability benchmarking, such as Eco Homes or BREEAM assessment, should be applied to the designs and we encourage the project team to appoint a sustainability consultant to help address this.

#### **CONCLUSION**

We thank the project team for their clear explanation of the way in which the designs have progressed since previously reviewed. We are generally supportive of the approach that is being taken, but the designs are still at an early stage in their development, and we are concerned that the quality that the project aspires to may not be delivered. We also suggest that the site could support a development of higher density. Our endorsement of the project is conditional on design quality and ambition being maintained so that the design of the new settlement does not compromise the listed buildings and their setting, and a sustainable community may be formed. The Council should require a suitable design brief as a condition of any planning approval.

**Report issued:** 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007