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Project Reference	Dallas Dhu
Details	Housing development on the edge of Forres
Location	Forres, Moray
Use Type	Housing / Masterplan
Client/Developer	Sir Alastair Gordon-Cumming, Altyre Estate
Lead Designers	Richard Heggie, Urban Animation
Planning Authority	Moray Council
Planning Ref	n/a (see <a href="http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_110661.html#">http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_110661.html#</a> )
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## **Housing Masterplan for Dallas Dhu, Forres A&DS ref MOR 04**

Further to the Appraisal workshop held at A&DS on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017 which addressed the Dallas Dhu Masterplan Consultation Draft document dated January 2017, and in light of our workshop engagements with the council and Altyre Estate since March 2014, we have the following comments.

### **Scope of Advice**

Our advice addresses the following issues:

- Integration of the development with local routes and facilities in Forres.
- Integration of the development into the wider landscape.
- Housing design and layout.
- Design of proposed streets and public spaces.
- Proposed architecture and landscape design.
- Implementation of the development by housing developers.
- The potential human experience of the development in relation to aspirations for public accessibility through the site and along the Dava Way.
- Delivery of high quality housing compatible with a prominent and sensitive landscape setting.

### **Current Proposal**

The intent of Altyre Estate to foster high quality development, the rural economy, and potential to promote a housing exhibition on the site, are strongly supported. Since our initial involvement the proposals have been evolved to include the following welcome elements:

- Generally the wording and the level of aspiration indicated in the consultation draft masterplan is high and very promising, albeit that this has not yet been fully translated into the design proposals.
- Study of the character of the rural landscape, woodland, topography, the distinctive knolls and Dava Way has been helpful. Also helpful has been the study of town character along Mannachie Road culminating in Mannachie Farm and Dallas Dhu distillery.

- A significantly improved layout has resulted from responses to these studies. This includes designed variations of form for the proposed housing and new landscape elements that create a transition from urban to rural character. Importantly this encompasses variations in street, plot layout, architecture and density of the proposed housing as well as proposed boundary design, planting, parkland and structure landscape.
- A more comprehensive approach is emerging that integrates the R6 housing proposals into the approach adopted for R10 and LONG 2.
- Similarly steps taken to improve the integration of the site with the neighbouring Ferrylea development and Mannachie Road are progressing. There is strong potential to create attractive and welcoming routes into and around the site and importantly to improve access to the countryside and Dava Way.
- The potential has been established for high quality Placemaking design capable of benefitting the wider community. This would be consistent with national planning and architecture policy such as Designing Streets and the 6 qualities of successful places set out in Scottish Planning Policy. The masterplan document sets out to show how placemaking design should influence the layout of buildings, planned variations in building types, proposals for new structure planting and public parkland, street/footpath/cycle infrastructure and requirements for distinctive housing (character areas) in different parts of the site.
- A useful key diagram is included to highlight the main structuring principles of the layout. This could be developed as a key diagram for design coding – see below.

Having reviewed the current proposals on the basis of these strengths, and subject to some important issues being addressed as we have set out below, we consider that the masterplan proposals are capable of being supported by A&DS. The issues that would need to be addressed are nevertheless substantial and involve both the applicant and the council as roads authority. These issues were discussed with you and the Altyre Estate team at the workshop on 4<sup>th</sup> May and are set out below. We anticipate these issues being addressed in a revised and supplemented masterplan document as a condition of our support.

## **Issues to address**

### Level of Detail in the Masterplan Document

Generally the type of information in the masterplan was not considered explicit or detailed enough in some instances to articulate and secure the design intent when this is implemented by third party developers. The work done to respond to the character and distinctiveness of the site and the crucial placemaking intent risks being lost in translation. A number of suggestions were made as to how this could be addressed as set out in the points below.

### Infrastructure and Connections into the site

Drawings presented by the council to show walking, cycling and bus networks and the connections these have to existing and planned services in Forres should be included in the masterplan to highlight the planned connecting routes into the site and the planned connections with new dentist and shop facilities on the adjoining Ferrylea site. Improvement to the top of Dava Way should be considered for the potential this offers as part of a safe route to school for new residents.

### Landscape Proposals

To secure the design intent a strong landscape framework is needed to articulate the layers of thinking, define the character of the open space, edge conditions, and elements of landscape amongst the housing to show how that character has been carefully designed to work with the existing landscape. This needs to include:

- a framework plan with text and notes/dimensions explaining what is required and where,
- *a management plan setting out the principles of landscape transformation, addressing existing and proposed landscape components and covering factoring arrangements in outline.*
- illustrations (or storyboard sequences) showing views and design intent for key experiences such as arrival sequence along Dava Way route – these should show how both building massing and landscape elements are intended to be seen,
- phased delivery of landscape linked to housing phases,
- proposals for children's play,
- clear graphics showing: wetland and planting infrastructure, existing and proposed elements, proposed topography, and clearly showing different landscape elements such as grass/trees/hedges/garden walls/shrubs etc.
- small-scale but important landscape elements such as hedges and walls should be clearly identified,

- intent to preserve particular contours (with building lines and routes following these) should be more explicitly set out as should the intent to preserve the characteristic knolls and the natural east-west valley routes,
- the considered proposals for plot boundaries should be shown on the drawings and including the restriction of close-boarded fencing to non-visible locations.

#### House tenures and types

To help achieve an integrated mix of social and private housing the affordable housing should be re-visited to spread this across at least three locations, avoiding concentration in one area and better integrated in townscape terms.

We would encourage a stronger and fuller demonstration of design intent for the series of distinctive 'character areas' intended. The characteristics of form and layout that make each area distinctive, the photos of relevant precedents and worked examples should be more evidently site specific, focussed and convincing. It should also be clearer how variety is built in whilst retaining the sense of coherent placemaking (e.g. ref Urban Animations work in Inveraray). The elements of character that are intended to be consistent across all areas should also be clearer, such as building materials and boundary types.

Within this the way variations of house type and density are planned should be more explicitly drawn out to build on the intent to create a strong townscape and streetscape character. A rationale is beginning to emerge equivalent to the Urban Animation work studying variations of character in Inveraray. This could be strengthened to identify urban design intent and locations for gateway types, corner types, street front types, terraces, clusters, edge types and other planned variations and this should be carried through the R6 part of the site.

The influence of the distillery, farm, rail heritage and historic character of Forres, whilst intended, does not come across strongly enough as part of the proposed character whether in the form/scale/massing of buildings or in relation to proposed materials. This should be strengthened.

#### Mannachie Road

In order to achieve integration with the adjoining Ferrylea housing development, to respect the rural setting and to build on the study of character along Mannachie Road the proposals for this important edge of the site should be further developed. We encourage a review by roads officers of requirements for new infrastructure incompatible with the rural setting. This work should include:

- The housing format should be reviewed to bring frontage line and boundary walls/hedges closer to the road edge typical of the more attractive examples of local character in historic Forres. Alternative parking options such as parking courts should be considered to avoid the impact of both turning areas and visible front curtilage parking.
- The current requirements for road widening and cycle route should be reviewed and both cycle route and road widening south of the Ferrylea access are potentially unnecessary. The cycle route should also be taken on the western Ferrylea side of road where this will not conflict with frontage accesses onto the masterplan site. Could bus passing places be provided north of the Ferrylea access as an alternative to road widening? We would also strongly encourage drawing back to fewer more attractive and better used cycle routes by prioritising the Dava Way as the local north-south route rather than the bottom end of Mannachie Road.
- Crossing points to Ferrylea should be considered – these could be an extension of the proposed e-w green fingers.
- The way a 'sense of welcome' is created by building positioning and well overlooked paths at gateways into the site needs to be secured to support attractive walking routes to and from local services in Forres, including 'safe routes to school'. This applies to the gateway R6 site in particular.

#### Integration of R6

Whilst the current proposals for R6 are now better integrated there is further work to do on the housing formats, parking and streetscape to be compatible with the site-specific placemaking intent of the wider masterplan. The definition of 'character areas' should help clarify characteristics for this housing at a house/plot level linked to the grain of characteristics elsewhere in the masterplan.

#### Altyre Estate vision

The Altyre Estate aspirations for high quality housing, models of rural living, the linked 'living land' aspirations, support to forest industries and rural industry are welcomed and should be highlighted at the beginning of the document. The intent for complimentary visitor/leisure uses on adjoining sites and in

conjunction with HES/Diaggeo plans at the distillery are important and should be recorded. We would strongly encourage Altyre Estate to hone down a stated vision in these respects and explicitly set this out in the document to guide and influence implementing developers. The estate's aspirations and the delivery of a high quality of new development are important principles compatible with the site's visibility and prominence in the sensitive local landscape setting and its transitional gateway role for Forres.

In this respect we also strongly encourage the pursuit of stronger design controls and emphasis on a site specific approach to housing design, see below.

#### Design Controls

We recommend the incorporation of design coding in conjunction with the masterplan document to firm up on what will be expected of 3<sup>rd</sup> party developers when it comes to implementation. This could be a short and simple new document or an amplification of the masterplan document. Mechanisms to consider include adopting the code as a formal planning document or, alternatively, the landowner could include it as a condition within the contract sale/purchase of the site. In any case a more robust approach is needed that makes the design intent fully explicit and capable of being followed through by both Altyre Estate and the council. This will be especially important to control the quality of the more prominent 'rural edge' and Mannachie Road housing. Throughout the masterplan document the use of 'shall' 'should' 'may' wording and key diagrams should identify critical mandatory elements as well as providing more flexible guidance where there is scope to depart from the proposals illustrated.

We trust that this is of use to you in your consideration of the current submissions and the identification of further work required to finalise the masterplan prior to adoption.