

Case reference	NA-ABD-048
Application details	Proposed community and sports facilities, football academy, (comprising outdoor pitches, pavilion, ancillary buildings), stadium (20,000 capacity), ancillary uses, formation of access roads, parking and associated landscaping and engineering works
Site address	Land at West Kingsford (North of A944 Road, Skene Road, Aberdeen)
Applicant Determining Authority Local Authority Area	Aberdeen FC Community Trust & Aberdeen Football Club PLC Aberdeen City Council
Reason(s) for notification	2015 Direction (Objection by adjoining authority)
Representations	10,705 (plus Westhill and Elrick Community Council, Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber Community Council and Kingswells Community Council)
Date notified to Ministers Date of recommendation	2 February 2018 but not fully documented until 8 February 2018 1 March 2018
Decision / recommendation	Clear

Description of Proposal and Site:

- The application by Aberdeen Football Club and Aberdeen FC Community Trust is for a new football stadium (20,000 capacity), community and sports facilities, a football academy, ancillary uses and the formation of access roads, parking, and associated landscaping and engineering works.
- The site lies within the greenbelt to the west of the City of Aberdeen to the east of Westhill. The western edge of the site forms the boundary between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The site is accessed from the A944 which is a dual carriageway. The Aberdeen Western Periphery Route is being constructed to the east of the site.

EIA Development:

- The proposal fits the description of being an urban development project under 10(b) of the table in Schedule 2, and is over the size of the threshold. An Environmental Assessment has been carried out and the authority are content that adequate environmental information is available to inform assessment.

Consultations and Representations:

- 10,705 representations were submitted for this application, covering a wide range of issues – the Council note that 53.2% were in support, 46.6% object and 0.2% were neutral in content.
- Transport Scotland have not objected to the proposal but have asked for 2 conditions to be attached to any permission concerning a Travel Management Plan and signage. The planning authority have attached both conditions as requested (conditions 23 and 25).
- Aberdeenshire Council object to the proposal in that it is contrary to the SDP; would result in the loss of greenbelt land; would result in the coalescence of urban areas; is inappropriately located giving rise to unsustainable travel patterns; and have a negative impact on the City Centre in terms of its mix of uses and lost revenue. Following notification, Aberdeenshire Council wrote to the SG raising concerns about a footbridge, which they suggest cannot be conditioned and needs planning approval from Aberdeenshire Council. They raise concerns about the suitability of the footbridge to meet the likely pedestrian demand and do not consider it meets accessibility standards. They also object to the conditioning of a Controlled Parking Zone. Aberdeenshire are questioning the appropriateness of this (and other) conditions and have separately written to the Chief Planner following notification to set out their concerns.
- The Strategic Development Plan Authority observe that the application is contrary to the SDP in that it is in an unsustainable location, and does not accord with the aims and objectives of the SDP.

Assessment

Development Plan Position

- The site is allocated green belt land in the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan (2017).
- The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2014 identifies 2 possible locations for a *“new community stadium to support the growing sporting infrastructure of the city.”* The SDP states that a new stadium will be a *“regionally important facility with will bring economic, social and cultural benefits”*. The 2 sites identified as possible locations are the existing site at Pittodrie and a site at Loirston.

Relevant planning History

- A previous application (Ref NA/ABD/046) by Aberdeen Football Club for a stadium (without associated football academy) on a different site at Loirston Loch was notified to Scottish Ministers in 2011. Ministers did not consider there to be any reasons to justify call in and the application was subsequently cleared back to the authority but was withdrawn in 2016.
- We believe that the site at Loirston was no longer viable due to the refusal of planning permission for training grounds nearby. The Council also note that the site at Loirston Loch is not deliverable as the land owner is not willing to sell the land.

Issues for SG consideration

- The planning authority have considered in detail the material considerations with this case.
- Our role at this stage is to determine whether we think there are issues of national significance that would warrant calling in the application for further consideration.
- The relevant issues with this case which could be nationally significant are transport issues, the loss of green belt land and the suitability of the site in terms of the sequential test.

Transport:

- Transport Scotland have not objected to the proposal.
- National Planning Policy supports sustainable patterns of transport. This site is currently not well served by a range of transport modes. The Council recognise that the site is not accessible by sustainable means, but note that this would be mitigated by a green travel plan to ensure extensive use of shuttle buses on match days from the city centre and other accessible locations.
- The Council accept that those travelling from outwith the city centre will be likely to have to use unsustainable modes, primarily car, which is contrary to national and development plan policy.
- Whilst match days would generate significant footfall, non-match days are not expected to.

Green Belt:

- The authority acknowledge that the training pitches could be compatible with green belt policy but that the stadium and car parking elements of this proposal represent a significant departure and could erode a green buffer between Kingswells and Westhill and potentially impact on the wider landscape setting of Aberdeen.
- It is not considered that the loss of greenbelt at this location would be significant at a national level.

Sequential Test:

- National and development plan policy favours town centre sites for all significant footfall generating development.
- The planning authority advise that they have carried out their own sequential test, and are satisfied that there are no other sites within Aberdeen that would be suitable, available and deliverable that would be preferable in terms of environmental impacts
- Some objectors have raised concerns that the sequential test should have been carried out looking for separate sites for the stadium and training ground, but the Council Committee report concludes that there are no suitable sites for the co-located development or either one of the stadium or training ground which is available and deliverable within a reasonable timescale.
- There are some concerns from objectors that this is a regionally important facility, and as such, the planning authority should have looked outwith their administrative boundary. Whilst we note this argument, the details of carrying out the sequential test is a local matter and would not warrant intervention.

- Whilst national policy is clear that significant footfall generating sites should be located in town centre, the authority has assessed other options and carried out a sequential test.

Conclusion:

- Whilst the planning authority recognise that the location of this site raises a number of issues, they consider the economic and social benefits of this unique proposal outweighs the contravention of policy and consider they have adequately mitigated the impacts through conditions.
- The location of the site contravenes national and development plan policy in terms of sustainable travel, but it is accepted that this is a unique development and significant levels of footfall are only expected on match days. Whilst the proposal is clearly a departure from planning policy, it does not raise issues of national significance to warrant intervention.

Correspondence from Aberdeenshire Council

- The correspondence from Aberdeenshire Council regarding the footbridge and delivery and resourcing of a Controlled Parking Zone within their area, relates to matters of detail, and does not raise issues for consideration in terms of consideration of call in. It is a matter between the two authorities. If calling in the application, these issues would be looked at in more detail. However in themselves they are not of national significance to have a bearing on our consideration at this notification stage and are for Aberdeen City Council to consider further.

Decision/Recommendation:

- We do not consider there to be planning issues that would warrant intervention in this case and recommend that the application is cleared back to Aberdeen City Council.