

**08/24 I/CP**

PLANNING APPLICATION AT  
THE AVIEMORE CENTRE, GRAMPIAN ROAD,  
AVIEMORE

**APPENDIX 8**

**A+DS REPORT  
2 DECEMBER 2008**



## **Introduction**

This report relates to a detailed planning application for a masterplan and associated buildings at the Aviemore Highland Resort. The project was presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 2 December 2008 in Edinburgh.

The masterplan was previously reviewed, as part of a detailed planning submission, in August 2008, and a report issued dated 9 September 2008. An earlier plan was reviewed at outline planning stage in November 2007, and a report issued on 28 November 2007.

The project was presented by Gary Johnston of GH Johnston Building Consultants Ltd., Jim MacFadyen of Fletcher Joseph Architects, and Paul Miller of Hirst Landscape Architects.

The meeting was also attended by Don McKee and Andrew Tait of Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA).

Panel Members were Karen Anderson (Chair), Eelco Hooftman, Ric Russell, Brian Veitch and Dorian Wiszniewski.

A+DS staff present were Eric Dawson, Tony Reilly, David Seel and Angela Williams.

Cindy Harris (DCfW) and Kirsteen MacKay (CABE) attended as observers.

No A+DS Advisory Board Members other than those who sat on the Panel have taken any part in formulating A+DS's views.

## **A+DS Views**

### **1 General comments**

1.1 As with the two previous reviews of this project, our comments are confined to the masterplan. The abbreviated presentation, and late receipt of drawings that describe the design of individual buildings, has precluded the panel from properly considering detailed aspects of the scheme. Notwithstanding that, a detailed assessment of the design of individual buildings would be premature until the masterplan has developed sufficiently to define their context. We do, however, recognise the importance of giving due attention to detailed aspects of the design at an appropriate stage, and look forward to doing so once the masterplan has been resolved.

1.2 We recognise that efforts are being made to develop the design, and are pleased that our involvement is sought on the basis that our contribution has been, and continues to be constructive and helpful. It is within this context that the following comments are made.

### **2. Design development**

2.1 It was encouraging that the most recent presentation commenced with an analysis and appreciation of the landscape and wider setting. We welcome the professional contribution and recognise a desire to explore and develop the designs that, until now, has not been clearly apparent.

2.2 We acknowledge that there have been improvements made that begin to address some of our earlier concerns. We welcome the deletion of the proposed roundabout junction on Grampian Road into the site, and the reduction in car parking which has opened up opportunities for more attractive public spaces. We also recognise that the design of the area around the 'town square' has been developed. However, despite incremental amendment,

there remains a lack of ambition and vision and fundamental aspects of the masterplan have yet to be developed.

2.3 The conceptual diagrams presented reveal that a much-improved outcome, that aligns built form and infrastructure with the landscape, could be achieved. It is evident that, with design development and appropriate, skilled professional involvement, a proposal that is worthy of its location and significance within the National Park, and one that A+DS could support, could readily evolve.

2.4 It is regrettable that the promise of the conceptual diagrams has not yet been translated into the design as submitted for planning consent. Although the apparent clarity of the concept proposal is inconsistent with the submitted masterplan, we believe the opportunity exists to speedily readdress the design in the best interests of the resort and the local community.

### **3 Previous comments and further recommendations**

3.1 Notwithstanding the positive aspects of the most recent presentation noted above, many of our concerns noted in the report dated 9 September 2008 have not been addressed. Major points from that report, that are still relevant, are summarised below.

3.2. We continue to urge everyone associated with the project to collaborate in preparing a masterplan for the wider Aviemore area to ensure that spatial and design quality are integrated with the wider area, and are of a standard appropriate for a gateway entry to the National Park.

3.3 The masterplan, as developed, still lacks a strong and appropriate vision of place, and does not respond or relate sufficiently to the unique and special qualities of Aviemore and its landscape setting. The conceptual analysis recently presented to us indicates that this is understood as an issue, and we recommend that the masterplan be revisited and developed in the light of this analysis.

3.4 Although we acknowledge that the designs are being developed in this respect, we still have concerns, and would urge that more attention be given, to the quality and sequence of spaces and places being proposed. Three-dimensional visualisations/sketches of some spaces, though rudimentary, have been prepared. A more structured series of representational images is required to assist in promoting an understanding of how the spaces are conceived, and the sequential movement between them, within an appropriate landscape structure.

3.5 We do not consider that the 'Design Statement' meets the requirements of PAN 68. As submitted, it essentially restates the policy context and background information. It does not illustrate the quality of the places to be created; nor does it "explain and illustrate the design principles and design concept of the proposed layout" or "how these will help to achieve the qualities in *Designing Places*".

3.6 A Design Statement is yet to be provided that includes, along with the design narrative: an analysis of how the proposals relate to the existing context; a micro-climatic study; and an assessment that demonstrates and ensures that the additional retail will not have a detrimental effect on the existing retail core along Aviemore High Street / Grampian Road.

3.7 Although we welcome the appointment of a professionally qualified landscape architect, and acknowledge the quality of the landscape analysis recently presented to us, it is still not clear how the masterplan as developed responds either to this analysis, or to the wider landscape and a strategic landscape framework.

3.8 In our previous report, though welcoming the appointment of a professionally qualified architect, we noted that the hand of a single designer in all of the buildings would result in a lack of individuality throughout the scheme. We suggested that design coded guidance could be developed to ensure a co-ordinated design approach, and separate architects be commissioned for individual buildings to create a more varied and interesting development. As noted above, we have not studied the designs of the buildings in detail, because the masterplan is insufficiently developed to provide a context within which they can be assessed. We remain concerned, however, that our advice has not been heeded, and designs for individual buildings have been finalised whilst the masterplan is still in development. A strong, well communicated masterplan is a vital tool in the development process and should mitigate against development mistakes now and in the future. A good master plan will realise the full potential of the site to provide buildings and spaces that make a distinctive place and a successful development. The master plan sets the context and guides the design for the buildings – it must come first before plans are developed.

3.9 Although there has been some improvement in relation to the road layout, notably the omission of the roundabout on Grampian Road, we still have concerns about the detrimental impact that the roads layout is having on the development. We consider that the scale of roads and junctions proposed will mitigate against the provision of high quality public spaces.

3.10 Although welcoming the reduction in car parking spaces, we recommend that the large area of car parking could be better dispersed throughout the site to reduce its bulk and visual intrusion.

3.11 There is no sense of uniqueness, 'specialness' or hierarchy of the various spaces in the proposed masterplan. There is no legibility about the way in which pedestrians enter and navigate through the site. A set of clear diagrams that describe how key routes and spaces connect throughout the development that would assist in considering such points is yet to be submitted. More effort should be made to create high quality cycle and pedestrian connections that link and connect throughout the town and the surrounding area.

3.12 We recognise the challenge resulting from the fragmented arrangement of existing buildings; however, there appears to be a tension between the geometrical approach to parts of the plan (such as the regimented car parking) and the natural landscaping. We suggest that the layout should be developed in a more organic way, to respond to the topography of the site and connections to adjacent areas. The landscape analysis that has recently been carried out will be of assistance in this respect.

3.13 We welcome the improved entry sequence to the Highland Resort at the head of Laurel Bank, and believe this is capable of further development in association with the wider masterplan.

3.14 The proposed supermarket on Grampian Road will form a gateway into the development from the north in terms of its edge treatment, building frontage, orientation and synthesis with the landscape. As part of a wider masterplanning study, this particular project should be considered in the context of the development of the wider townscape.

3.15 We question the proximity and impact of the proposed road serving the new block of twelve flats relative to the existing adjacent access, and wonder if the approach to the block could be from the rear.

### **Conclusion**

Though supportive of the essential nature of this development, we still have fundamental concerns about the masterplan, and most of the issues raised in our earlier report have not yet been addressed. It is still not evident how the masterplan responds to those qualities set out in the national planning policy document '*Designing Places*'. Given the extent of our involvement, we are disappointed with what is proposed for this significant site. We are also

surprised that the quality of what has been submitted is considered sufficient to permit the determination of a detailed planning application for such an important project in the National Park Area.

From the analytical and conceptual diagrams most recently presented, it is clear that there is the potential for a masterplan driven by a strong vision to be developed, capable of integrating with and informing a wider Aviemore masterplanning exercise. However, the promise that these diagrams present has not yet been translated into a masterplan – the current one does not align with them. We urge the CNPA and the design team to resist a hasty decision on the planning outcome in order to ensure new development is integrated and well conceived within a masterplan that recognises, and is appropriate to, its context.

This is a major investment, and a unique opportunity to deliver a vision that is special for the resort, for Aviemore, for the National Park and for Scotland; as such we believe it requires a well-advised, competent and skilful masterplan. We remain unable to support the project in its present form. We would emphasise that the designs are not of a sufficient quality for one of Scotland's National Parks and a major visitor destination, and the project is not yet meeting its potential to create a positive development, that capitalises on the assets of the site, and maximises its appeal as a place to attract visitors. We continue to believe that greater investment in design could result in economic benefits for the Resort, and the wider community.

We wish to be advised of the outcome of this application, and trust there will be an opportunity to comment further on the masterplan and more detailed aspects of the design once our concerns have been addressed.

**Report issued:** 9 December 2008