

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Subject:        PROGRESS REPORT ON DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK  
                     FOR THE FORMER RSNH SITE, LARBERT**  
**Meeting:       ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE COMMITTEE**  
**Date:            15<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2008**  
**Author:         DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

**1.        INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1       This Committee Report seeks to update members on progress with the various aspects of the RSNH Development Framework, in the period since it was approved by the Council in December 2004.
- 1.2       The Development Framework was prepared in response to the choice of the RSNH site as the location for the new Forth Valley Acute Hospital (FVAH). It sought not only to provide guidance for the new hospital, but also to outline requirements for the future use, management and maintenance of the wider estate including safeguarding and promoting new uses for the Category B listed Larbert House, stables and walled garden.

**2.        RSNH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

- 2.1       The key objectives of the Development Framework are:
- Deliver a state of the art hospital of design quality and distinction, which sits comfortably within and draws inspiration from its mature landscape setting;
  - Capitalise on additional business potential arising from the site's exceptional environment and location, subject to such development having minimal additional impact on the environment of the site and being compatible with the primary healthcare uses;
  - Promote efficient and sustainable transport use associated with the site, particularly with regard to minimising the number and impact of car trips;
  - Conserve, enhance and secure the future management of the site's exceptional natural heritage, whilst providing a valuable recreational asset for the local community;
  - Secure the cultural heritage of the site, including the restoration and reuse of the listed buildings, and the designed landscape; and
  - Secure a flood attenuation solution within the site to address downstream flooding problems associated with the Chapel Burn

- 2.2 The Development Framework (attached as Appendix 1) set out a broad location for the hospital (Core Hospital Site 1), potential development sites within the estate (Development Sites 2-5), design and infrastructure criteria for development, and built and natural heritage features to be restored and brought under management. It also set out an aspiration to create a significant area of public greenspace out of the residual land at RSNH. The wider estate is considered a major opportunity to formalise and improve public access and manage the woodland, parkland and loch habitats for biodiversity, landscape benefit and public amenity.
- 2.3 The Development Framework also considered it vital that the future of the wider estate, including the listed buildings, and development sites was taken forward with the development of the new hospital.

### **3. FORTH VALLEY ACUTE HOSPITAL**

- 3.1 The hospital was granted detailed planning permission in March 2007 and construction is ongoing. The footprint of the hospital is more extensive than anticipated and encroaches beyond the core hospital site as identified in the Development Framework. More woodland has been removed than was originally allowed for and the hospital encompasses Development Site 3 and part of Development Site 2 leaving less land for ancillary business development. In utilising these sites for the hospital complex the amount of development land capable of cross-subsidising the management of the estate has been reduced. However in overall terms, the design, orientation and landscape fit of the hospital has followed the design principles set out in the Framework.
- 3.2 The hospital will open in three phases. Phase 1 (Falkirk Services) is scheduled for completion in May 2010, Phase 2 (Mental Health) is scheduled for August 2010, and the hospital will be fully open on completion of Phase 3 in April 2011.

### **4. THE WIDER ESTATE**

- 4.1 The Development Framework requires the preparation of a master plan and management framework for the wider estate. This requirement is now incorporated in the Section 75 Agreement attached to the outline planning permission for the hospital. The master plan is required to outline the following:
- nature/extent of the proposed uses for the residual land area
  - phasing of development and responsible parties
  - infrastructure requirements/provision
  - detailed habitat and management plans
  - management framework/ plan.

No development within any part of the wider estate can occur in advance of the Council's approval of the master plan.

- 4.2 Ian White Associates (IWA) have been appointed by NHSFV to prepare the master plan, and subject to approval by the Council, this would be implemented by NHSFV. There have been regular review meetings amongst NHSFV officers, their consultants and the Council over the last year to take the master plan forward. The master plan is likely to be submitted to the Council by early summer 2008 and will in due course be presented to Environment and Heritage Committee for consideration.
- 4.3 A significant change to the context in which the master plan is being prepared is that the agricultural land which forms part of the estate is no longer in the control of NHSFV, the southern and eastern pastures having been transferred to the tenant farmer.

### **Woodland/Parkland**

- 4.4 The RSNH estate comprises a very attractive historic landscape including areas of woodland, the core parkland around Larbert House and the loch to the east of Larbert House. IWA have produced the following three broad options for the future of this landscape for consideration by the Council.
- Option 1 Landscape Parkland  
This is essentially an upgraded 'status quo' involving upgrading of existing access routes, a core parkland around the loch/Larbert House, minimum intervention in the woodland, and the existing pasture remaining in agricultural use.
  - Option 2 Country Park  
This envisages more extensive public access by extending the core parkland into the adjacent woodland area to the west and provision of additional paths. However existing pasture remains in agricultural use.
  - Option 3 Urban Park  
This involves much more intensive recreational use with public parkland extended, not only into the western woodland, but also into the eastern pasture, providing space for playing fields and play areas.
- 4.5 IWA is focusing the master plan around Options 1 and 2. Option 3 is not realistic at the present time. However, elements of the 'urban park' could be introduced at a later stage if the agricultural land was to become available, and they were considered to be compatible with the retention and conversion of Larbert House.

## **Listed Buildings and Associated Development Areas**

- 4.6 The RSNH Development Framework required the restoration of Larbert House, the stable block and the walled garden. It also allowed for two small adjacent areas of enabling development (Development Sites 4 and 5). The restoration of Larbert House is required through a condition on the outline planning consent, which indicates that the hospital shall not be operational until it is demonstrated that the re-use of Larbert House is fully committed within a timescale agreed with the Council.
- 4.7 The Larbert House fire at the end of 2006 raised issues over the viability of its restoration. Accordingly NHSFV commissioned an independent review of the listing. The report concluded that the house is worth restoring not least because of its relative rarity value in the district but also its excellent site. The report points out that the conversion of Larbert House to residential use causes difficulties in terms of aspirations for a public park, and the compatibility of the two uses. However, it is considered that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, if an appropriate curtilage for the house is defined.
- 4.8 NHSFV have indicated that residential use is the most likely option for Larbert House but that the restoration would not be viable on its own. However, if packaged with the stables, walled garden and associated development sites it could form a viable overall development.
- 4.9 Indicative layouts have been produced for this development area by IWA. Their purpose was to explore how a sympathetic and high quality development could be fitted within the estate, to allow commercial viability to be tested and to provide guidance to prospective developers. The work has been useful in establishing the overall extent and location of new development and assessing the implications of different design models.
- 4.10 The overall number of units indicated is 36-40 units and is considered realistic and appropriate. Whilst the Development Framework sought to have the walled garden maintained as a landscaped or horticultural space, it is now accepted that this area can accommodate some development with a landscaped area retained as a focal point. NHSFV are currently discussing the development package with a potential development partner.

## **Chapel Burn Flood Attenuation Scheme**

- 4.11 The Development Framework safeguards an area of land to the north of the hospital for the provision of a flood attenuation scheme for the Chapel Burn. It is now clear that this will not be integrated with the surface water solution for the hospital site itself, and will be taken forward by the Council as a stand alone scheme, for which provision has been made in the Capital Programme.

## **5. FUTURE LONG TERM MANAGEMENT OF THE ESTATE**

- 5.1 The successful implementation of the Development Framework's aspirations for the estate landscape is dependent on securing a mechanism for its long term management and maintenance. NHSFV officers have indicated that the Health Board are unlikely to wish to retain ownership of the residual land, as this is not within their healthcare remit. This requires finding an agency prepared to take over ownership and responsibility of the area, and resources to meet the significant capital and revenue costs of maintaining the estate.
- 5.2 IWA have undertaken some preliminary work on the capital and revenue costs of the various options, and it is clear that the costs of even Option 1 are substantial, given the lack of investment in the estate in recent times. The expectation is that, if NHSFV do transfer the land and management responsibility, they will be expected to make a contribution to upgrading and long term maintenance.
- 5.3 There is the potential for the Council to play a role in the management of the parkland/woodland/loch area of the estate. This could potentially involve the Council taking on ownership and management responsibilities. Deciding the way forward is clearly a corporate issue requiring cross-service discussion, involving Development Services, Community Services and Corporate and Commercial Services. This discussion needs to focus on the following:
- The Council's vision for the long term future of the Estate
  - The role the Council or other appropriate agency needs to play in delivering that vision
  - The terms of any transfer of land from NHSFV to the Council or other agency, including consideration of commuted sums for long term management and maintenance
  - Resource implications of the Council's involvement.
  - Process and timescale
- 5.4 Consideration of the future role of the estate as public green space should also take account of the emerging Open Space Strategy. Previous Local Plans have acknowledged the deficiency in active open space provision within Larbert and Stenhousemuir, and the Strategy provides the opportunity to assess this.

## **6. SITE VISIT**

- 6.1 At the last review meeting NHSFV offered a site visit to the hospital and the estate for Committee Members and Local Members, to be arranged at mutual convenience.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The construction of the hospital is progressing well, and NHSFV will continue to keep the Council updated with progress. Discussions on the wider estate have reached a stage where the development and land use options are becoming clearer. However there are still issues to be considered on the future management of the estate, and the potential role which the Council may play in the implementation of the Development Framework's vision for the historic landscape

## **8. IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Policy. The RSNH Development Framework was approved by the Council in December 2004 and provides supplementary planning guidance in the determination of future planning applications within the estate.
- 8.2 Legal. Any possible role which the Council may play in the long term management of the estate would require advice on legal implications.
- 8.3 Financial. If the Council became involved in the future management and maintenance of the wider estate, this is likely to have financial implications.
- 8.4 Personnel. None.

## **9. RECOMMENDATION**

- 9.1 **That Committee notes the progress that has been made in implementing the RSNH Development Framework.**
- 9.2 **That Committee awaits the submission of the formal master plan for the residual estate at RSNH.**
- 9.3 **That arrangements are made for Members to visit the RSNH site.**

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**Director of Development Services**

**Date: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008**

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## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. North Larbert Strategic Development Opportunity: Development Framework for the Former RSNH site, Larbert. December 2004.

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 504717 and ask for Louise Blance (Planning Officer).