

9 May 2008

Anne McCall  
Head of Planning and Development  
RSPB Scotland  
Dunedin House  
25 Ravelston Terrace  
Edinburgh EH4 3TP

Dear Anne

**MENIE ESTATE, BALMEDIE, ABERDEENSHIRE**

Further to your initial instruction and subsequent discussions regarding the outline application for a golf and leisure resort at the above site, I enclose a plan showing a routing study for a possible alternative golf course layout.

**Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference of the study were as follows:

- to provide a routing study for an 18 hole golf course layout which
  - uses land entirely outside the boundary of the Foveran Links SSSI
  - avoids the sensitive Balmedie Sand Dome area within the Foveran Links SINS
- to indicate on plan an additional area for future golf (capable of accommodating 18 holes) which also meets the above constraints.

In addition it is stressed that the routing study is a preliminary stage in the design process: specifically it does not aim to provide a level of design comparable to the layouts shown in the Environmental Statement, and the subsequent Golf Masterplan by Hawtree Ltd. dated February 2008. The study also specifically does not address the masterplanning of any other components of the TIGLS proposal and the locations and areas of other land-uses shown on the TIGLS Concept Masterplan were not regarded as primary constraints.

**Methodology**

The design process adopted in preparing the study incorporated the following conventional key stages and tasks:

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*Golf Course Architect  
33 East Claremont Street Edinburgh EH7 4HT*

- appraisal of the environmental conditions of the project site
- development of the golf course routing plan taking account of
  - opportunities to incorporate and enhance the existing landscape and other environmental assets
  - constraints relating to potential adverse environmental impacts<sup>1</sup>
  - golf course safety margins derived from the specific site circumstances, informed by indicative guidance provided to professional golf course architects.

The following information sources were referred to in preparing the proposal:

- Environmental Statement and accompanying Appendices
- Hawtree Ltd Golf Masterplan (February 2008)
- Aerial photography (Ordnance Survey MasterMap Imagery Layer)
- Contour information (as used for Hawtree Feb 2008 layout) from AutoCAD file supplied to SNH by developer
- Additional contour information from Ordnance Survey Land-Form Profile 1:10000 DTM
- SSSI boundary as supplied by SNH
- SINS boundary as supplied by NE Scotland Biodiversity Record Centre
- Additional data on habitats and NVC Communities supplied by SNH
- Published guidance on best practice for golf course development including PAN 43, SGEN guidelines on landscape, nature conservation, and construction
- European Institute of Golf Course Architects Statement of Environmental Policy.

The work has also been informed by a site walkover undertaken on 22 April 2008 accompanied by RSPB staff with local knowledge of the site.

## **Proposals**

The proposals consist of two principal components:

- routing study for primary links course, including practice range and putting green, and areas allocated for clubhouse, car park, and golf course maintenance facility;
- area allocated for future second 18-hole golf course.

### Routing Study

The plan presented in the accompanying Annex is of the simple “stick diagram” type, indicating the positions of the back tee, turning point(s), and green centre for each golf hole. The turning points are at 259m for par 4 holes and 259m and 190m for par 5 holes. The total length shown is approximately 6600 metres (7195 yards). While this is rather shorter than the 7000 metres plus indicated on the Hawtree plan, it is comparable to current and planned high-end “Destination” courses in Scotland<sup>2</sup> and is considered to

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<sup>1</sup> The proposals contained in this letter have not been subject to EIA.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include Kingsbarns 7126 yards, The Castle St Andrews 7188yards, Loch Lomond (Nicklaus Course) 7137 yards.

represent an appropriate balance between current playing preferences and the natural attributes of the site. The overall site area of approximately 93ha, and the contiguous 67ha golf course site, also allow scope for additional length to be added should a major professional tournament be attracted in future.

The most significant feature of the plan is to demonstrate that a modified version of the classic out-and-back links routing (similar to the Old Course “Shepherd’s Crook” shape), would be feasible without resorting to either the SSSI land or the main unstable bare sand areas within the SINS. The routing crosses a variety of landform types as mapped by Professor Ritchie including predominantly the vegetated and generally stable “Coastal dunes” and “Lower dunes”, and the completely stable “Links surfaces”. Smaller areas of “Dune Heath”, “Vegetated deflation surfaces” and “Stream terraces” are also incorporated. The inland south-western loop or crook is sited chiefly on the transitional dune pasture/agricultural area.

While the routing plan takes account of the available information on habitats provided in the ES and by SNH, which identifies many areas of very high nature conservation interest including the fixed dune and dune slack communities, in common with the TIGLS proposal it would result in impacts on communities which include EC Habitats Directive Annex 1 priority habitats. However it should also be noted that the alternative layout locates a significant proportion of the overall routing (holes 6-10) on less valuable unimproved neutral grassland habitats.

The routing “corridors” of Holes 1-4, 6-9, 10, and 18 shown on the Feb 2008 Hawtree plan have been incorporated into the design, with some modification where necessary either to improve their incorporation into the alternative proposal, or to reduce potential environmental effects, or for both reasons. The indicative locations of the clubhouse and car park, practice range, practice putting green, and maintenance facility, are also generally similar to those of the Hawtree layout as these are in logical central positions to allow efficient access to and from the course.

The position of the clubhouse has however been moved slightly further to the south, allowing modified versions of the Hawtree Holes 10 and 18, linked by a new par 3 hole played from the top of the fossil cliff-line, to form the culmination of the round. These three holes (16, 17, and 18) are sited just to the south of the SSSI land, which will thus provide a spectacular landscape setting which will arguably surpass that of any of Scotland’s existing classic links. Remembering also however that this scenic backdrop, like its theatrical equivalent, is a mobile one, and is likely to continue to move northwards away from the golf course as time progresses!

Overall it is considered that the diversity and quality of the dune landscapes through which the alternative course is routed are at least equal to those of the majority of the existing established classic links courses in Scotland, including those currently on the R&A’s Open Championship rota (The Old Course, Carnoustie, Muirfield, Royal Troon and Turnberry). More recently developed “Resort” or “Destination” courses on coastal sites including Kingsbarns, Castle Stuart and The Castle, St Andrews, which perhaps relate more closely to the TIGLS model, do not occupy truly equivalent linksland

landscapes in the sense of having both geomorphology and soils derived exclusively from windblown sand deposits, and in this respect the site used for the alternative layout may be regarded as inherently superior. It is interesting to note that for a recent comparable Scottish development on such a site, Machrihanish Dunes, the approach adopted differed markedly from the existing TIGLS proposal in many respects, not least in that the golf course area is restricted to the fixed dune elements.

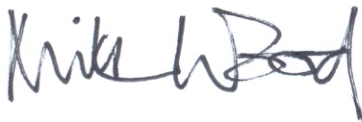
### Future Golf Area

The area allocated for future golf is substantially similar in extent to that shown on the TIGLS Concept Masterplan (67ha versus 68ha). This is entirely adequate for a high standard 18 hole layout which would complement the longer course, albeit that in comparison it would provide less flexibility and opportunity for visual separation between holes. The land used is generally to the west and inland of the primary course, utilising partly the links plain terrain and partly the more elevated post glacial surfaces, including part of the old fossil cliff line. The habitat types as noted in the ES are predominantly unimproved neutral grassland or arable. Some constraints in terms of shape undoubtedly exist, but are arguably less significant than for the equivalent TIGLS land-use.

### **Conclusion**

It is considered that the routing study is sufficient to demonstrate that in principle, there is potential within the application boundary to create a first class links golf course in the Scottish idiom, utilizing by tradition the most stable parts of the duneland system, and thereby avoiding impact on both the SSSI land and the most sensitive landforms within the SINS.

Yours Sincerely



Mike Wood  
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Associate Member EIGCA

encl. Annex 1: Routing Study pdf  
Annex 2: CV