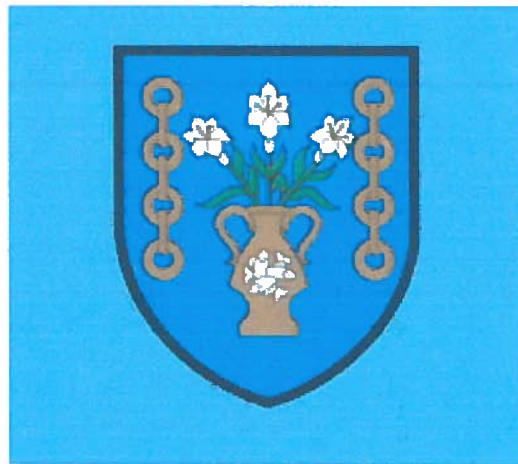


**ABERDEEN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT
PLAN REVIEW**

PLANNING ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

RESPONSE BY

**OLD ABERDEEN COMMUNITY
COUNCIL**



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PREAMBLE

Old Aberdeen Community Council's area is unique in Aberdeen and possibly in Scotland, in its concentration of heritage buildings and un-built open space.

Approximately 50% of OACC's area is open space, comprising the River Don corridor, Seaton Park, graveyards, Aberdeen University recreation areas and other private and public owned green space.

Only a very small percentage of that area would be considered by the local community as being acceptable for sympathetic development. The major part of the development bank is identified as two sites, the former Dunbar Halls site and the area from Lord Hay's Grove through to King Street.

Conservation area status presents constraints which, due to the high percentage of the OACC's area designated as a conservation area, are greater than in other community council areas in Aberdeen.

As there are variations in the needs and expectations of the resident, as well as the conservation requirements of each area, location specific guidance should be developed for each individual conservation area in Aberdeen. This should be designed to clarify the duties of the owner, tenant, developer and planner and make all parties more aware of these needs and expectations.

In view of the above, it is seen as essential that community councils should be given statutory consultation rights in respect of all changes to signage, traffic flow, lighting and other matters affecting the environment of the residents whom the council represent. Indeed, should this not be extended beyond the conservation area to embrace all streets within a community council's bailiwick?

Within the heritage area of Old Aberdeen there is extensive use of granite sets and OACC see it is seen as essential that these are preserved and maintained. There have been examples in the past of sets being replaced by tarmac as a less expensive option, but this has been at the expense of the nature of the area and does not present a viable long-term solution. Where sets are necessary to preserve an environment, then they should be re-laid by suitable skilled craftsmen. No set replacement should be undertaken without prior community council consultation.

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The River Don corridor, Seaton Park and the Dunbar Halls site provide a habitat and transit route for a wide variety of wildlife, including deer, fox, a spectrum of large and small birds and the possibility of a return of red squirrel, all of which are currently threatened by the uncontrolled and worsening flooding of the Seaton Park.

The bio-diversity of the food chain cannot be maintained if the majority land area of Seaton Park becomes permanently flooded or waterlogged, something which is rapidly developing due to the failure of the existing drainage system. The loss of grass and shrub areas will remove insect habitat and impact adversely on the area's ability to support larger wildlife.

All open spaces have to be regarded as "at risk", whether from premeditated development, accidental pollution and similar incidents, or vandalism, such as occupation by travellers. It is seen as important that bodies such as OACC or Old Aberdeen Heritage Society act as guardians for the preservation of their immediate area and beyond, reporting concerns and pursuing what is perceived as the best solutions to the continued well being of the area as a place to live, study and work.

Open Spaces (with probable owner in brackets): -

- a) St. Peter's Cemetery (ACC)
- b) College Bounds Park (ACC)
- c) University Playing Fields. (AU)
- d) Area at the corner of Bedford Road/St. Machar Drive (AU)
- e) Cruickshank Gardens and area to the south of Tillydrone Motte (AU)
- f) Tillydrone Motte (ACC)
- g) St. Machar's Cemetery (ACC maintained)
- h) Seaton Park (ACC)
- i) Keith Park (AU)
- j) Donside corridor – Brig o'Balgownie to Bridge of Don (ACC)
- k) Area from Lord Hay's Grove to King Street (private).
Currently subject to a planning application for a hotel.
- l) Dunbar Halls site (AU). Cleared and ready for re-development.

Threats (areas at risk): -

- 1) ACC budget reductions leading to a lack of maintenance. (a, b, f, h & j)
- 2) ACC selling off assets to reduce deficit. (b, f & h).
- 3) Change of University development policy (c, d, e, i & l.)
- 4) AU selling off land for development. (c, d, e, i & l).
- 5) AU developments unsuitable in character and purpose. (d, e, i & l).
- 6) Possible changes of use. (c, d, e, i, k and l.).
- 7) Poor design and specification of materials, e.g. St. Peter Street development proposals.
- 8) Poor design leading to light and noise pollution. (All developers, e.g. excessive light levels in car parks and noise pollution from commercial undertakings.)
- 9) Flooding of Seaton Park.
- 10) Damage and pollution by “travellers”, as opposed to Gypsies and Travellers who generally have a greater respect for their environment.
- 11) Development, within and outside OACC’s area, detracting from the unique character of Old Aberdeen, e.g. the St. Peter Street developments and historic developments such as the Seaton high-rise blocks.

Action Required

Refurbish the drainage system in the Seaton Park.

Even if a loch were created, adding to the park’s features, the excess water will still have to be drained or the water logging will continue to spread. The destruction of grass due to water logging is not something which can be rectified without a considerable expense and a long-term maintenance programme, after the drainage has been restored.

If the current area and beyond is not to be permanently blighted, this is required now, not at some unspecified future date.

Aberdeen cannot afford to lose more formal recreational pitches and this will be the result if the work is not carried out immediately and the flooding to the north of the road over the football pitches also becomes permanent.

Ensure that our natural heritage is not sold off for short term gain which will have no lasting impact on the finances of our city.

Monitor ACC and AU's development and land holding strategy and attempt to influence those decisions which are perceived to be detrimental to the residents and character of Old Aberdeen.

Prevent the granting of "change of use" permissions for land within the area, so as to preserve the character and profile of its "green" credentials. This should not preclude sympathetic development of sites currently zoned for development, such as the Dunbar Halls and at the rear of Lord Hay's Grove. Nor should it dismiss out of hand the possibility of development in small areas, such as that bounded by Tillydrone Road, Tillydrone Avenue and the Cruickshank Garden, on which permanent family housing for AU staff might be considered to mitigate the effect of HMOs and halls of residence.

Continue to monitor and influence planning applications to ensure that "due process" and standards are maintained by the Planning Department.

Support improved lighting in public areas, but only where this is required and not to the extent that it detracts from amenity of an area.

Support Police Scotland in the maintenance of the current low crime figures in the OACC area.

Encourage City Wardens to enforce illegal parking, litter and most especially, dog fouling.

Support the creation of suitably located travellers' sites and press for illegal encampments to be removed immediately they are created, to prevent them becoming established, with the resulting litter, fouling and damage.

RECREATION

Formal Recreation

Within the OACC area are the University recreational areas, Seaton Park, College Bounds Park and Keith Park and adjacent to the area are the Sports Village, the new swimming pool, the beach area, golf courses, etc.

Informal Recreation

Seaton Park, Cruikshank Garden, Donside corridor, etc. all lie wholly or partially within the OACC area and present ample opportunity for informal recreation. In addition, there is easy access to the Links, Aberdeen Beach and the coastal strip north.

Culture

Aberdeen University and St. Machar Cathedral provide a wide cultural diversity.

What action is required?

As previously noted, the flooding in Seaton Park will cause a loss of recreational playing fields unless the problem is addressed immediately and a long-term solution is formulated and financed by ACC.

Promote continued access by the public to the existing facilities and greater use by the residents of Old Aberdeen, and the public in general, to ensure the continued viability of the facilities and their future expansion and improvement. The existing co-operation between ACC and AU, demonstrated by the Sports Village and the new pool, must be nurtured to allow for the fitness of the present and future generations.

Hospitality

There are several fast food outlets and one restaurant within the area. Other than the Hillhead Halls, there are no facilities for short or long stay visitors. Note: - Area k is subject to a planning application for a hotel, but this application has not been carried forward and, due to the delay, would have to be reassessed by planning.

Desirability

The development of a hotel and improved catering would enhance the area's attraction to visitors.

TRANSPORT

The area is currently contained by routes which are subject to gross traffic congestion.

Tinkering with a multiplicity of unconnected schemes has led to the current chaotic situation and a holistic review of Aberdeen's traffic management, in conjunction with a linked review of the suburbs within Aberdeenshire, is urgently required. The opportunity presented by the WPR should be grasped and a city and suburb wide scheme formulated, carried forward and, most importantly, completed to allow the free movement of commercial and public transport. It would be an essential part of this review that Community Councils were given their rightful role in representing and presenting the needs of the residents of Aberdeen, divorced from political bias.

The Third Don Crossing will greatly affect the area and the traffic planning presentations may not be as accurate as would be hoped. The scheme will have an appreciable effect on the area's traffic during construction, perhaps for the next 3 to 5 years, before all the elements are completed. The creation of a major new traffic route without a segregated cycle lane for its full length is to be deplored.

The continued granting of planning permission for developments north of the River Don, as far out as Peterhead, can only lead to the exacerbation of this problem.

It is questioned whether the long delayed WPR will completely relieve the problem and the Third Don Crossing scheme, while it may relieve problems to the north of the Don, will bring its own problems to our area.

The service by the monopoly bus provider is perceived as being overpriced, the scheduling questionable, vehicles ageing and poorly maintained and timekeeping poor. In fairness, the timekeeping is probably due to the traffic situation along our main routes and the busses travelling through King Street and Union Street, as well as negotiating the Bridge of Dee.

There is no other form of public transport to service this area.

The existing cycle routes in the area are not maintained to a satisfactory standard, with National Cycle Route No.1 being particularly poor and unsuitable for cycling. Normal carriageway cycle routes are so potholed, as to force cyclists onto the footpaths, to the detriment of pedestrians.

Parking within the area is limited and the CPZ has lead to anomalies which will have to be addressed in the long term.

Action

Press for the speedy completion of the WPR.

Place a moratorium on development north of the River Don until suitable traffic arrangements south of the river and through the city are fully functional.

Monitor the effect of the Third Don Crossing, especially its effect on St. Machar Drive traffic and whether there is any reduction in congestion and pollution of the King Street corridor.

Continue liaison with First Bus to improve services and to assist First Bus to improve their image with residents in the area of their premises.

Seek alternatives to a monopoly bus provider.

Consider route planning to mitigate the effects of transiting King Street, Union Street and the Bridge of Dee on one route.

Maintain and expand cycle networks and continue the education of vehicle drivers to respect cyclists.

All new cycle routes must be segregated from other traffic, including pedestrians and, where practicable, all existing routes should be made contiguous, upgraded to segregated status on a rolling programme with a defined timescale.

Develop regular, but non-routine, enforcement campaigns on traffic and parking laws by Scottish Police and City Wardens, including cycling on pavements, use of lights, visibility and cycle roadworthiness

AU should give greater encouragement to alternative means of travel and thus reduce their staff parking on the few available free parking spaces in the area. If oil companies can provide staff transport, can this not be done for staff and students at peak times?

Consideration must be given to the provision of parking to encourage visitors to enjoy the heritage and recreational facilities of Old Aberdeen from the High Street to St. Machar Cathedral.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Architecture, Urban Design and the Historic Environment

As previously noted, a major percentage of OACC's area is a conservation zone and has a high loading of heritage buildings, many granite buildings of good quality and appearance and a range of residential apartments and houses.

Heritage buildings include: - St. Machar's Cathedral, Kings College, King's Pavilion, The Chanonry, Bede House, Brig o' Balgownie and associated buildings, etc.

Other University and public buildings, which will become our future heritage buildings, including the Sir Duncan Rice Library.

Student halls of residence feature throughout the area, with numbers increasing, and present their own specific problems

First Bus headquarters and depot.

Houses in multiple occupancy (HMO)

Old Aberdeen House and St Peter's School.

City Centre

Outwith the OACC area, the opportunity presented by the demolition of St. Nicholas House should not be allowed to slip. All the residents of Aberdeen need a city centre focal point with a sufficient unobstructed area in which to gather and celebrate special events, as well as just a leisure and relaxation space in the centre. Creating another concrete structure of no architectural value or cultural opportunities will not achieve this and will not promote city centre regeneration.

Housing

There are a good range of residential types within the OACC area, but they represent a small permanent family type residential pool and a disproportionate number of short-term, young residents, who generally have little interest in the long-term viability of the community.

HMOs are a threat to the demographic profile of the area and lead to a poor standard of upkeep and housekeeping. As demonstrated by the recent consultation process, there is a need to limit the density of HMOs to prevent the degrading of residential areas and to make them more attractive to the permanent, family orientated, resident of all ages.

Halls of residence give a high percentage of “transient” young residents with little population balance.

There is a perception that the student population give rise to increased litter and anti-social behaviour, but this is not perhaps borne out in fact, when compared with other residential areas in Aberdeen and beyond.

The student population is an essential part of our community and must be catered for, although the rationale of the number of RGU students accommodated in the area and having to travel daily to Garthdee must be questioned.

There is a limited provision of affordable or sheltered housing within the area, but this is a reflection of the high demand for other residential types.

Employment

Employment in the OACC area is limited to two main employers, Aberdeen University and First Bus and, due to the lack of suitable buildings or development land, there cannot be any significant change to this.

The provision of “starter” opportunities for diverse small business within the area should be encouraged, especially technological development which could be nurtured by AU facilities.

Education

There is only one school within the OACC area, but there is adequate primary and secondary provision within a reasonable access radius.

St. Peter’s School and Old Aberdeen House.

The school is over capacity and it is seen as desirable that the school should be expanded to accommodate the needs of the area’s residents.

Old Aberdeen House currently houses various ACC departments and plans should be made to transfer these to purpose built premises which are more suited to the needs of archival storage and laboratory purposes. With the 3rd Don Crossing, an area of former recreational ground west of Tillydrone Avenue, opposite the Biological Science building, will become available and this would present the opportunity for developing a new building, yet keeping the employment within the area.

This would release the original school building for refurbishment as additional premises for St. Peter’s and preserve a significant building for the future.

Retail

There is a limited provision of retail outlets, but one supermarket lies within the area and adequate retail provision is available within an acceptable radius. The Post Office on St. Machar Drive is an essential which must be protected.

There can be no doubt that the creation of shopping malls, supermarkets and other large retail premises, both on the city centre fringe and on the outskirts, has seriously affected both the local shop and the city centre retail outlet. It is unlikely that this trend can now be reversed, but the recent report by RGU on city centre regeneration should be taken as a starting point from which to develop a strategy by which the Union Street area may be rejuvenated without the destruction of further granite frontages.

Residential Development

This is not a practicable consideration, given the lack of suitable sites. There is little opportunity or desirability in demolishing existing housing stock to provide modern accommodation and the refurbishment of older property is an ongoing process.

Individual developments should be monitored and considered on their respective merits, or lack of them.

Where a new development is sanctioned, the provision of centralised communication equipment from a single source must be made mandatory to prevent the proliferation of external aerials and other clutter.

University Developments

Aberdeen University have recently completed the £57m Sir Duncan Rice Library with the architectural theme “Ice and Light of the North” and this gave rise to considerable debate. The building is a statement of modern design and perhaps presents the architectural philosophy of the University Court. If other University developments are of a similar standard, then the symbiotic relationship between ancient and modern could continue to be manifest in Old Aberdeen.

OACC will maintain a watching brief and present the residents’ desires and aspirations to the University through continued liaison.

OACC will oppose any moves to undesirable change of use for University buildings or land.

Upgrading of existing housing.

To date in the private sector, this has generally been achieved without undue friction, with the property owner seeking desirable change to enhance the property. The exception is in cases prompted by work designed to create an HMO and requiring expansion of the property to an undesirable degree.

It is to be hoped that the current consultation on HMOs will reduce the issuing of licenses for HMOs and thus reduce the problem.

Available land and premises.

Aberdeen City Council should take action to reduce unoccupied residential property and to ensure the prompt disposal of any structure or site which is no longer required.

The redundant nursery building on The Spital is an example the scarce resource of a brown field site within the OACC area which is lingering into dereliction.

Street Furniture

There has been an effort by the various authorities to use sympathetic street furniture to achieve the desired level of control and lighting, but there are issues with the number of traffic signs which are erected within the heritage area. There is little consistency in application and, as has been proved in experiments in other areas, excessive signage can be detrimental to road safety.

OACC continues to seek a more acceptable level of signage where it is deemed that the current level detracts from the heritage landscape and has an undesirable visual impact on the area.

As seen in photograph 21, factors other than road signs, street furniture and poor architectural practice affect the visual environment and constant monitoring of the area is required. Community Councils can provide this and should be given greater say in matters affecting the resident.

Some disquiet has been expressed on the level of illumination installed within a car parking area of the University and commercial premises and it is to be hoped that future developments will use levels which are less polluting to the environment, whilst still maintaining the required security.

The Needs of Gypsies and travellers.

This is probably the most contentious issue currently facing communities within Aberdeen City and Old Aberdeen has suffered from the unacceptable temporary encampments which spring up on public and private land.

The failure of the Scottish Government and Aberdeen City Council to effectively tackle this problem is deplored by the residents of Old Aberdeen.

There can be no provision of permanent encampments within the OACC area as there is no area suitable or of sufficient size.

Illegal encampments must be prevented in order to preserve the amenity of the Seaton Park and other scenic and recreational areas which have been previously blighted.

As can be seen in photograph 26, action taken by private landowners to protect their property becomes visually intrusive and reduces the amenity of the neighbourhood for the permanent council tax paying resident.

The increase in cases of illegal encampments cannot be permitted to continue and the protocol for action to be taken to preserve the needs of the community should be clear and should be subject to immediate action by all relevant authorities, with legal enforcement and penalties.

INDEX OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

- 1 King's Pavilion (1939). An example of good design melding with heritage buildings and becoming an icon in its own right.
- 2 King Street Functional modern building providing a pharmacy and dental practice premises. The design maximises the site footprint without an appreciable negative visual impact, although this has been somewhat spoiled by the retro-fitting of window stickers.
- 3 First Bus Office A good refurbishment of a heritage building for modern requirements which is maintained to a high standard and adds to the King Street image.
- 4 First Bus Depot Good office building design which is sympathetic to area visually, but the nature of the undertaking and some operational practices give rise to noise pollution which detracts from neighbour amenity.
The site does not benefit from any screening which would mitigate the problem.
- 5 Lord Hay's Grove A well designed housing development which is maintained to a very high standard.
- 6 Sir Duncan Rice Library 2012 A visually striking building which has suffered from faults during and post construction, detracting from the impact which it should have had. It is to be expected that when these are finally overcome, it will take its rightful place among Old Aberdeen buildings.
The open door policy to the public and the exhibition space benefit the whole community and not just the academic section.
- 7 St. Peter's Cemetery An underused resource which provides another large green space in the area and creates a wild life sanctuary as well as a historical role.
- 8 River Don A major recreational, scenic and wildlife resource within the area.
- 9 Kayaking facility One of the provisions within the Seaton Park, which also provides playing fields, informal recreational areas and formal gardens.
The promotion of the Park by the recently formed Friends of the Seaton Park should benefit not only the immediate neighbourhood, but those who come from further afield to enjoy the facilities.
- 10 Cruickshank Garden This little known facility has for the first time had a full-time curator appointed and it is to be hoped that his plans for the development of the garden and its facilities will increase its popularity and prove to be a draw to the tourists who visit the area.

11 College Bounds Park	The provision and maintenance of small green spaces is essential for those who lack mobility. These should be situated throughout the community and close to housing designed for the elderly and those of limited mobility.
12 Undeveloped site.	In this case owned by ACC and despite having been for sale it continues to deteriorate in an area which has virtually no available development land. The fate of the site created when the Dunbar Halls were demolished is also undecided and it is becoming a haven for all wildlife, up to and including deer, which will have to be displaced if it is to be developed.
13 Demolition	In this case a good quality granite building with a King Street frontage. It is not believed that such demolition is the most appropriate solution and its replacement with modern student accommodation will undoubtedly detract from the visual amenity of King Street.
14 Brown field site	St. Peter Street currently has two development sites created by the departure of commercial undertakings from the area. One application has been opposed on the basis of overdevelopment and was refused. The sites are adjacent to the First Bus depot and will be subject to noise pollution from this source. Reasonable development would not be opposed, but the choice of materials would have to be closely monitored to prevent the adverse visual impact which has been seen in some apartment developments.
15 Lighting Overkill	This view is at the rear of the First Bus depot and in this view there are 18 lighting or CCTV standards. The level of lighting here and in at least one University car park is causing lighting pollution to an unacceptable level and future developments will have to be closely monitored to ensure that this is not repeated.
16 Parking	The control of parking has been formalised in the area with the introduction of the Old Aberdeen CPZ, but this has led to anomalies which will have to be addressed where the CPZ does not apply.
17 Poor Maintenance.	The high proportion of multiple occupancy buildings within the area and their occupation by transient tenants who are not 12-month resident has led to a reduction in the level of building maintenance. There has also been an increase in littering and reduction in amenity in general.
18 Signage	The level and visual impact of the signs within this retail/hospitality area is acceptable to the tenants and does not present an unacceptable visual impact.

19 Street furniture	The high visibility Keep Left and the yellow grit bin, as well as other signs and furniture, detracting from this architectural treasure. This is typical of the length of the High Street and elsewhere.
20 Panel – High Street.	This garish panel, inserted for no apparent reason or worth, detracts from the ambience of the High Street and its heritage buildings.
21 Location of bins.	This garish colour is totally out of keeping with the view into which it intrudes. Commercial premises should be monitored as to the storage location of bins provided by commercial waste disposal contractors.
22 No street furniture	This view of the Chanonry is the ideal to which all streets might aspire. By their own admission, the authorities agree that the law relating to speed, one-way systems, etc., is generally unenforceable and the proliferation of signs which do not appear to comply with the law must be avoided.
23 Unacceptable signage and traffic control measures.	This view of College Bounds shows high visual impact traffic measures which require a multiplicity of signage, with resulting visual detraction, yet achieve no benefit to traffic flow or parking.
24 Blighting the view.	A modern fluorescent bus stop erected in what must be the finest heritage building view in Aberdeen. There is not one other modern element to mar the picture which is taken by every visitor to the area.
25 Flooding	The area of Seaton Park as it is in June 2013 after a prolonged period of drought, but now permanently blighted by flooding which will have to be controlled immediately if greater areas of the park are not to be lost.
26 Barriers	Erected to stop traveller intrusion onto private land, but visually intrusive, potentially child harmful and preventing public access to a green area.
27 National Cycle Route 1.	This is a cycle route which it is impossible to cycle in safely. The level of maintenance can be compared only with a rutted farm track and no thought has been given to the needs of cyclists, something which typifies the cycle routes in Aberdeen.
28 Bad practice in road maintenance.	An example of the poor standard of maintenance to granite set laid roadways, presenting both a hazard to cyclists on National Cycle Route 1 and detraction from the heritage vista.



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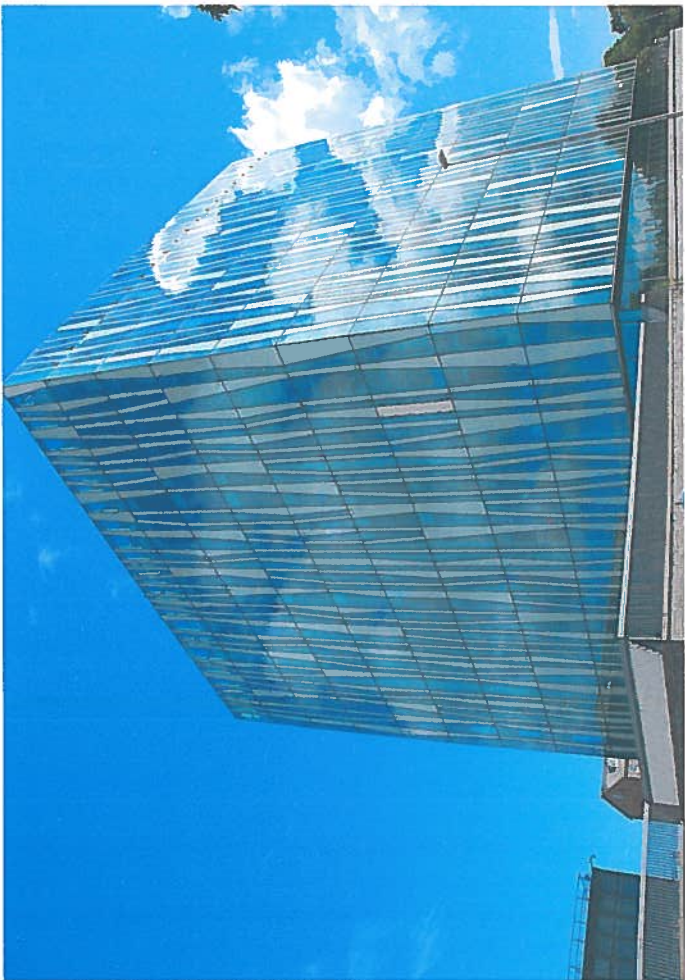
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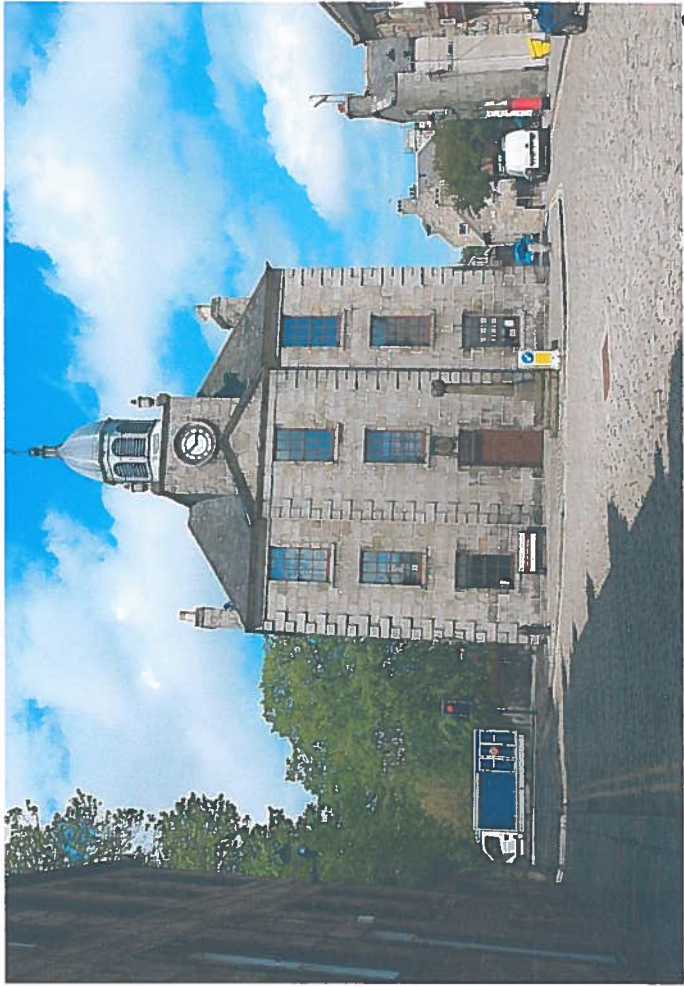
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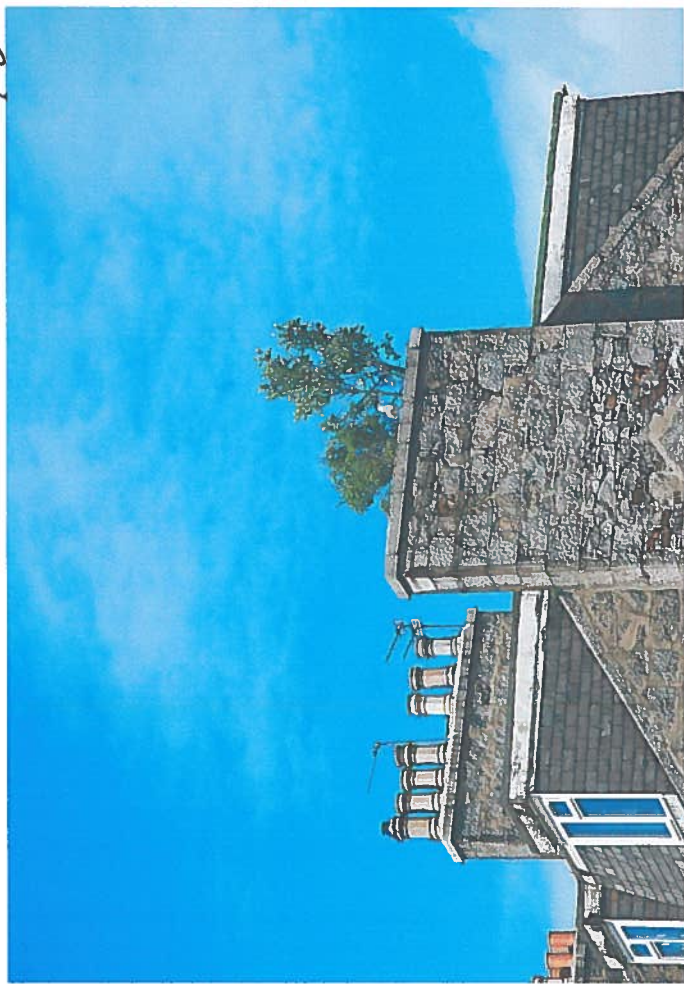
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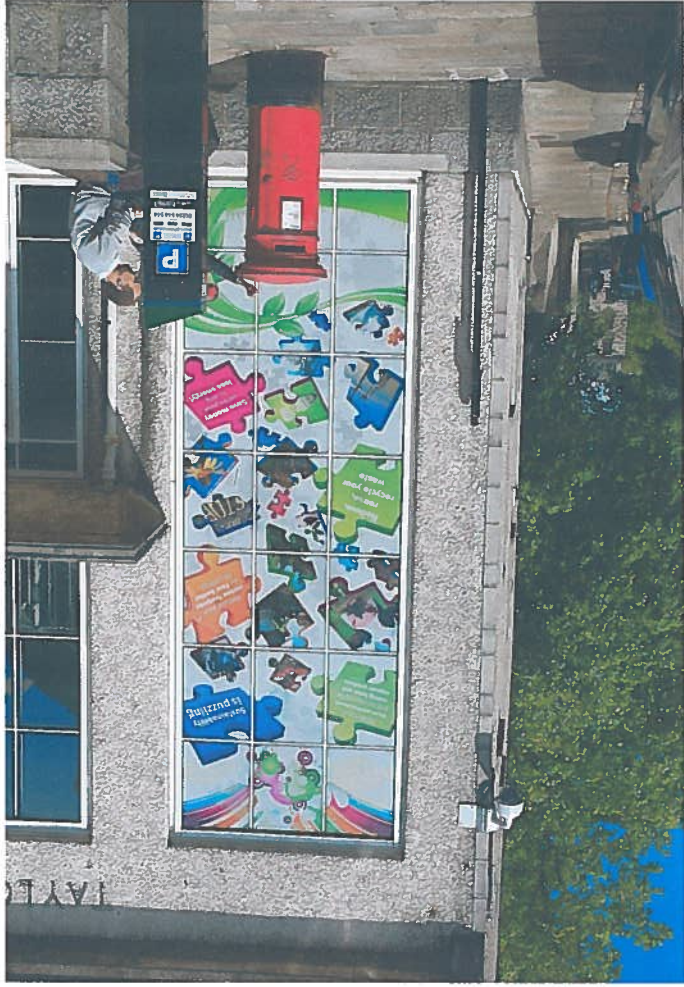
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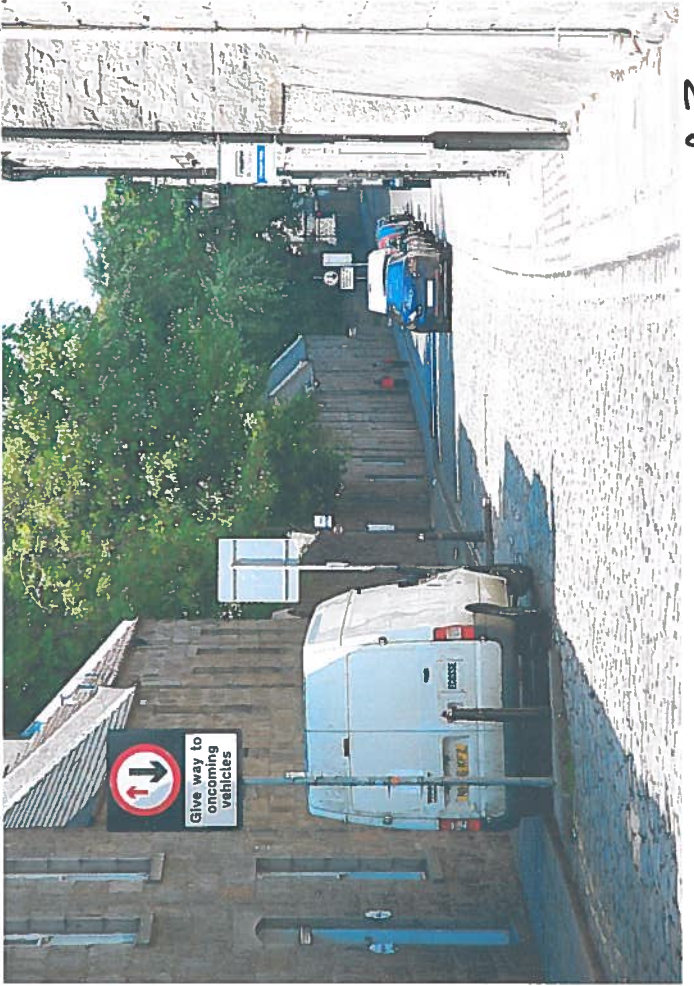
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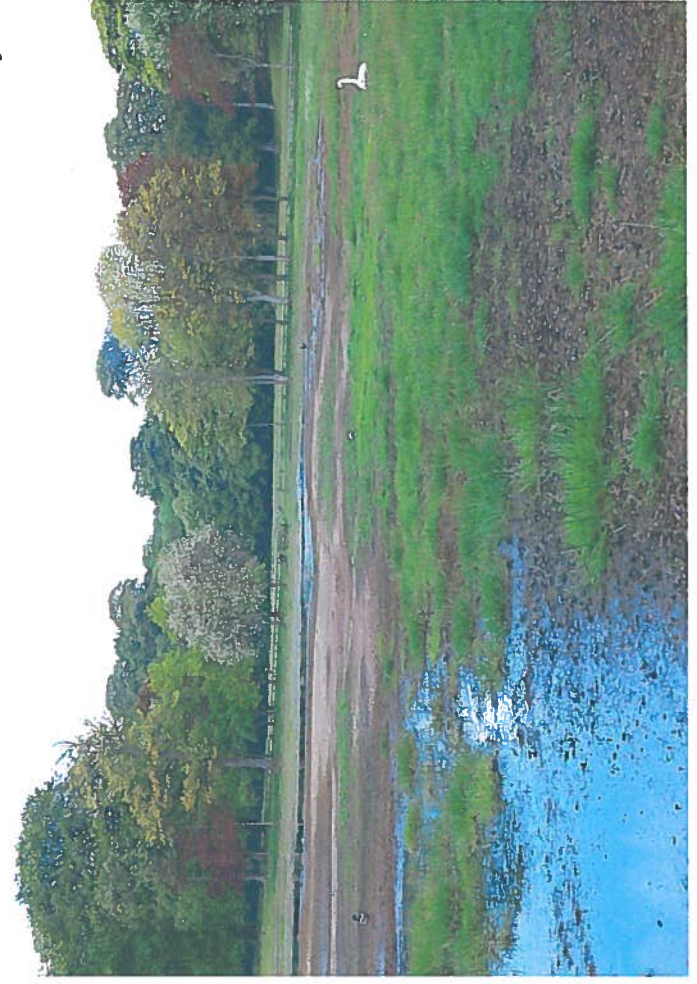
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Old Aberdeen Community Council

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Community Council Boundary

Bridge of Don

Tillydrone

Seaton Park

Old Aberdeen

Seaton

Seaton, Linksfield and Pittodrie

Froghall, Powis and Sunnybank

Castlehill and Pittodrie

George Street

