

Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2016 – Developer Bids

Introduction and Background

The Local Development Plan (LDP) bid form provided by Aberdeen City Council (ACC) suggests that there is no requirement for the submission of bids for development of additional greenfield sites within the City. The form indicates that this is because 'the 2012 LDP identified a significant number of greenfield sites to accommodate these [Strategic Development Plan] requirements'. Bancon believes that this position is at best premature, for a number of reasons, and as a result considers it both sensible and prudent to submit bids for the development of additional greenfield sites. The reasons are: -

- 1) The requests for LDP bids is based upon the proposed Strategic Development Plan, published in February 2013. It is Bancon's view that the proposed SDP is woefully under allocating land for development. There are significant contradictions between the vision, aims and actual requirements and allowances in the plan. More importantly its growth projections are significantly below those predicted by the Scottish Government. It will surely be rejected by Scottish Ministers.
It is submitted therefore that the LDPs should be planned to accommodate this likelihood. Considering the SDP and subsequent LDPs will be unlikely to be adopted until 2016, Bancon calculate that there will be considerable additional housing land allocations required in the 2017-2026 and 2027-2035 periods to accommodate the growth that the Scottish Government predicts, and indeed the North East will already be experiencing.
- 2) Bancon submit that the 2012 LDP fails to provide a 5 year supply of effective housing land, as identified in the latest Housing Land Audit figures. The reliance of the 2012 LDP on a small number of large development sites also fails to provide opportunities for 2nd phase sites to be drawn down early, because these are primarily the same sites as are failing to become effective in phase 1. The current Housing Land Audit identifies a 4.4 year supply, and while the draft 2013 audit suggests an improved situation, there is considerable doubt about some of the projected delivery rates for large sites. Prudence therefore suggests that there is a requirement to identify more small sites for development as soon as possible to address the shortfall.
- 3) There are several large sites identified in the 2012 LDP that are proving difficult to develop, or slower to develop than anticipated. While it is tempting to point the finger of blame at the economic conditions, this does not bear close scrutiny. The North East has performed better than most of the UK (only London and the South East being the exceptions), and the population growth since 2006, when the last strategic Development Plan review began, has exceeded even the Scottish Government's high migration forecasts. The 2009 Structure Plan aimed to increase the City Region's population to 480,000 by 2030, and current trends suggest that we have already exceeded that number in 2013. The provision of a range of effective housing sites, bolstered by new allocations, is essential to accommodate the rapidly expanding population.

This Local Development Plan bid is therefore necessary to address any one, two or all of the above. The bid itself will concentrate on the proposed development, and the deliverability of that development. The requirement for the land will be established through the proposed SDP consultation, 2013 Housing Land Audit and progress on large 2012 LDP sites in the interim. Seeking to predict these three variables at this stage in the process is impossible.

- 1** Name of proposer: Bancon Developments Ltd.
Date: 14/06/13
Address: Banchory Business Centre, Burn O'Bennie Road, Banchory.
Postcode: AB31 5ZU
- 2** Name of landowner: W Donald & Family c/o Bancon Development Ltd.
Address: As above.

The site and your proposal

- 3** Site Name: Hill of Ardbeck, Peterculter
- 4** Site Location map: The site is located to the North of Peterculter. It will be accessed from School Road, and has the potential to take a secondary or emergency access to Bucklerburn Road/Culter House Road to the North. This could provide a direct access to the AWPR Milltimber junction once constructed.



Fig 1 – Location of site and AWPR route.

- 5** National Grid reference of the site: NJ840013
- 6** Current Use of Site/Previous Development: Formerly agricultural, grassland.
- 7** Proposed Use of the Site: Residential, recreation, woodland.
- 8** Details of Housing Proposals: The proposed development consists of 61 dwellinghouses located in the centre of the site, in the natural bowl formed by surrounding higher ground and woodland.

- 9** Provision of Affordable Housing: Affordable housing will be provided, with 15 units providing 25% affordable on site.
- 10** Business Land Proposals: Not Applicable
- 11** Other Proposed Land Uses: The surrounding open space improved to form attractive public open space with two large children’s play areas (designed to serve a much larger population than the site will generate), and pathways connecting to existing walking routes, providing access to a viewpoint at the highest point of the site, with seating areas. The peripheral woodland will be managed appropriately, improving its biodiversity and contributing valuable open space for the local population.

A walk across the site shows that it is popular for local informal recreation, but also for use by motocyclists and for fly tipping. The formalisation of the open space and the management of the woodland will increase the value and safety of the site for the local population.



Fig 2 – View from the highest point of the site looking South West.

- 12** Phasing: It is proposed to develop the site in a single phase, albeit that the involvement of an affordable housing provider may dictate that the 15 affordable houses are built separately.
- 13** Community Engagement: The proposed development of this site has been promoted for some time. As part of Green Spaces: New Places the site was promoted for sheltered housing, and supported by the Scottish Government Reporter. However, this recommendation was overruled by Aberdeen City Council, and subsequently the requirement for sheltered housing has been met elsewhere in Peterculter. The site was therefore promoted for residential development through the 2012 LDP review. This involved presentation to public meetings, and several constructive meetings with the local Community Council. Our Local Development Plan bid and objections to the Main Issues

Report and Proposed Plan were placed on our website for public inspection, and this bid will also be made publically available in the same way. All public feedback received is recorded and addressed through the design process.

Sustainable Development and Design

14 Sustainability Checklist:

- A) Exposure – The site has good shelter from both the prevailing southwesterly and northerly winds
- B) Aspect – The site is located within a bowl, with higher ground to the south and northwest and lower ground to the east.
- C) Slope – Some parts of the site are quite steep, but these are not identified for development in the plan, but as open space.
- D) Flooding – No part of the site is at risk of flooding.
- E) Drainage – The site capable of being drained effectively with foul water to the mains system and surface water disposed of using SUDS.
- F) Built and Cultural Heritage – The development will not lead to the loss or impact upon any listed building or historic landscape.
- G) Nature conservation – The site is identified as a Local Nature Conservation Site. The designation forms part of a wider ‘Peterculter LNCS’. The proposed development is located on land of little biodiversity value, and the associated improvement and management works proposed to the surrounding open space and peripheral woodland areas will enhance its biodiversity, and the contribution to the Peterculter LNCS. An ecological appraisal of the site was carried out in 2009, which identifies the limited value of the central part of the site. This report is appended to this bid.

Bancon wrote to Aberdeen City Council with regard to the designation of the site as an LNCS, which occurred at the same time as the site was considered through the 2012 Local Development Plan review. The letter is appended, along with the response from Aberdeen City Council, which provides little in the way of justification for the designation.

The environmental impact of any development of the site was proven as being minimal at the time of the 2008 local plan review. The ecological report identifies that the site contains a very limited range of plant types. The report also notes that the distribution of diversity in relation to habitat area is quite uneven, with the wet and wooded areas containing the majority of plant species, including both common plants and habitat specialists. No rare species were found on the site. Across the majority of the site, it is noted that the

dominance of tall tussock grasses hinders the establishment of shrubs and trees, and as a result diversity is severely limited.

The picture below shows the site pictured from the north side of the Reservoir looking north and east. It clearly shows the bowl in the centre of the site containing little but grass, and with peripheral woodland enclosing the site.

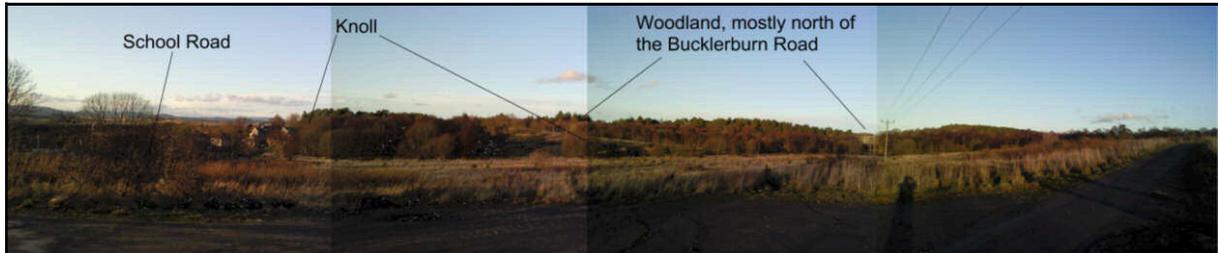


Fig 3 – Panorama of site from the Reservoir.

- H) Landscape features – The site is elevated above Peterculter, and contains a reservoir and large mound, which was originally a spoil heap. These two features offer panoramic views of the Dee Valley. The proposal seeks to maximise accessibility and public enjoyment of these views by providing paths and seating areas as part of the public open space. Around the north, east and south of the site there are areas of woodland, the southern area being covered by a Tree Preservation Order. These areas are of great value visually and in terms of biodiversity and habitat provision. The proposals seek to retain the wooded areas, and provide appropriate management to improve their contribution to the Peterculter LNCS.
- I) Landscape fit – The proposed development will be situated in the bowl in the centre of the site formed by the surrounding high ground. Whilst the peripheral open space will provide spectacular panoramic views of the Dee Valley, the development will be difficult to see. Screened to the south and the west by higher ground, and to the north and east by woodland, there will be no clear views into the site from any direction.



Fig 4 – The natural bowl in the centre of the site (view south from the high ground in the northeast).

The site forms part of the green belt and green space network, and it is clearly an important landscape feature at the highest point above the town. From the south and west, much of the town is framed against the backdrop of Hill of Ardbeck, although there is higher ground to the North East. The bowl in which the housing is proposed is not visible from the surrounding area, and could be developed quite comfortably without significant visual impact.

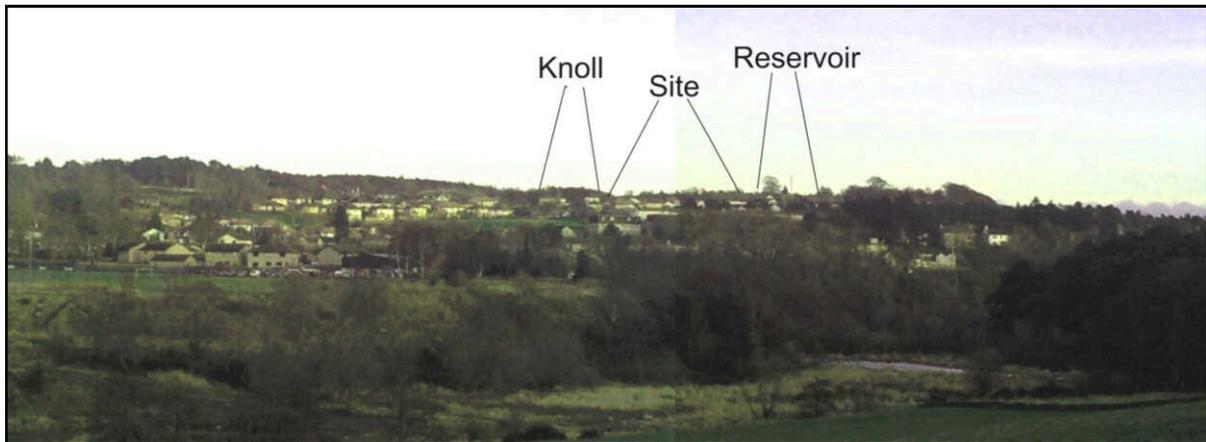


Fig 5 – view from the A93 to the west.

The above image is taken from the A93 to the west of Peterculter, and it is the most apparent view of the site. It is clear to see the bowl falling between the two areas of higher ground. Only the tops of trees in front of the site are visible from this location, and the reservoir is barely visible above them (the telecom mast that can be seen is immediately east of the reservoir). None of the proposed housing would be visible in this view.

J) Relationship to existing settlements – The proposed development is closely related to existing development on School Road to the west and Lochnagar Road to the south. Culter House Road and Bucklerburn Road to the north provide a clearly defined northern settlement boundary.

As well as being well placed for residential development, there is a considerable surrounding population that would benefit from the provision of the public open space, play areas and woodland management proposed. Fig 6 on the right shows the site in context with the surrounding residential areas.

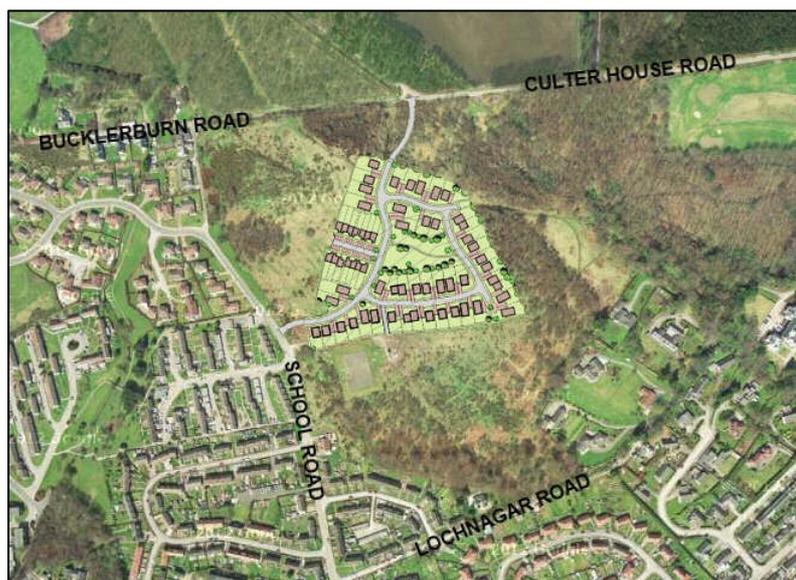


Fig 6 – Site in context.

The proposed development is around 400m from Culter Primary School, with local shops nearby. There is a sports centre and a doctors surgery on Coronation Road, also within 400-600m of the site.

- K) Land use mix – The proposed development is residential, but the additional maintained open space and woodland management will contribute public open space for the existing population.
- L) Accessibility – The site is within 400m of a bus terminus (19), and an infrequent service (24) comes considerably closer to the site, using School Road. Access to the A93 is available via School Road, and following the construction of the AWPR, there is potential to link directly to the Grade Separated Interchange via Culter House Road.
- M) Proximity to services and facilities –
 - Community facilities – 400-800m from the site
 - Local shops – 400-800m from the site
 - Sports facilities – 400-800m from the site
 - Public transport networks – Within 400m of the site
 - Primary schools – Within 400m of the site
- N) Footpath and cycle connections – The site offers excellent connections to surrounding footpaths and cycle paths, and to the wider countryside in general. The excerpt from the Council’s Core Paths Plan below demonstrates the range of formal routes that surround the site. The layout of the site, with housing in the centre and public open space around the periphery will provide numerous opportunities to link into the surrounding walking and cycling network.

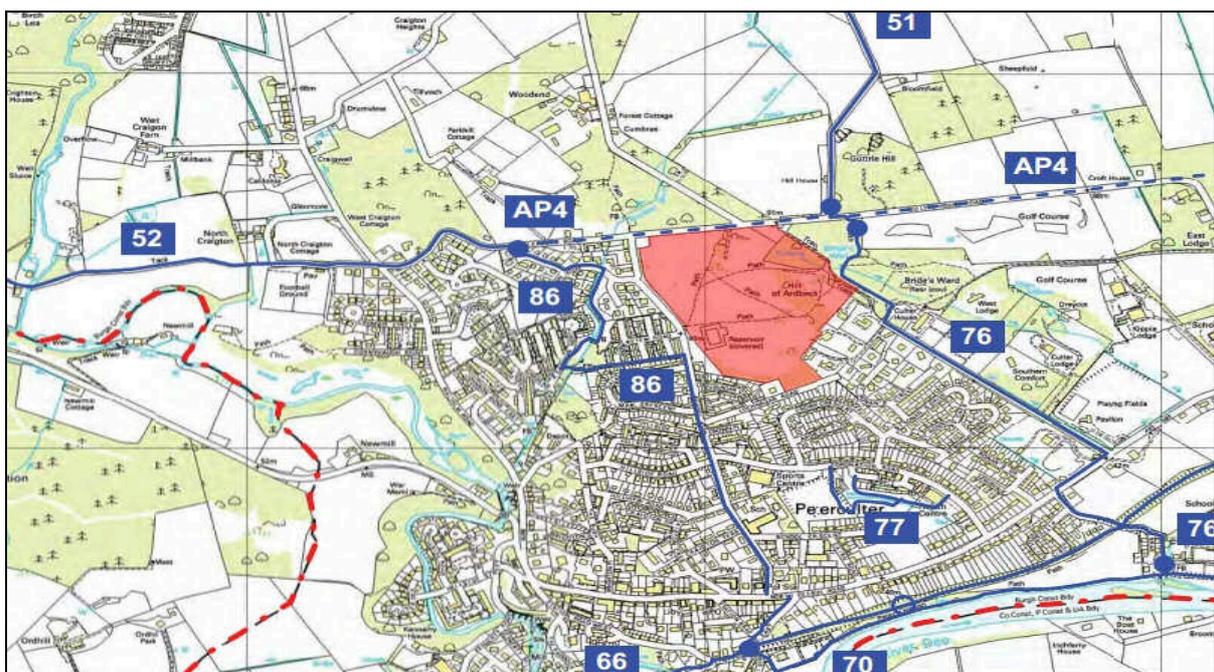


Fig 7 – Core Paths Plan excerpt.

- O) Proximity to employment opportunities – Apart from established service industries, Peterculter offers limited employment opportunities at present, although there are potential sites for new business development within the town promoted by Bancon and others that would provide opportunities. The town is, however, excellently placed to provide access to Westhill and Kingswells, which both offer extensive employment opportunities. The nearby AWPR access will further enhance the connection with these towns and other employment hubs.
- P) Contamination – No constraints.
- Q) Land use conflict – No conflict.
- R) Physical Infrastructure –
- Electricity – available
 - Gas – available
 - Water and Sewage – capacity available
 - Secondary School Capacity – current forecasts indicate capacity at Cults Academy
 - Primary Capacity – Significant capacity is available at Culter Primary School, which is 400m from the site.

15 Supporting Surveys: Appended to this report are the most recent 2009 Ecological Appraisal of the site, and the subsequent correspondence between Bancon and Aberdeen City Council's Environment Planners regarding the designation of the site as a Local Nature Conservation Site. The 1995 Ecological Appraisal is identified in this correspondence as out of date, but it is noted that the only record of uncommon species on the site was recorded in 1994 in the justification for the LNCS designation. In this respect, a copy of the 1995 report can be provided if required.

Also appended to this bid are indicative designs of the proposed children's play areas, and the equipment proposed. In contrast to many play areas associated with housing developments, Bancon consider the formation of an area of public open space and play areas to be a key element of this development. The indicative costs of the play areas is roughly 4-5 times what would normally be expected for a development of this scale. Bancon consider this size and quality of play area to be appropriate for the location of the site, and the existing population it will serve.

16 Community Benefits of the Proposed Development: As outlined above, the principle benefits from the development will be the transformation of the area from unused private farmland (to which the landowner could revert at any time) into an area of dedicated public open space. This will involve the improvement of the existing informal and privately owned open space to form a valuable area of public open space, with play areas, footpaths and a viewpoint at the top of the knoll. In addition, the management of the woodland will provide an attractive and accessible resource rich in biodiversity. This will also provide public access to the wider Peterculter Local Nature Conservation Site.

The development will also contribute to providing a range of housing, including 15 affordable houses, in Peterculter. It is noted that the 2012 Local Development Plan identified only a single site, for 25 houses, outwith the AWPR route. Whilst the concentration of development within the route of the new bypass is understandable, it should not be to the detriment of the future of settlements outwith it. The school roll forecasts for Culter Primary School for example show a significant downward trend. Development is essential to maintain the viability of services and facilities such as schools, shops and leisure facilities. The modest developments proposed in and around Peterculter, such as Hill of Ardbeck, should therefore be encouraged to support the local community.

- 17** Masterplan/Framework: It is not considered that a development framework or masterplan is required for a site of this scale, but a draft layout plan for the site is appended to this bid.



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Ardbeck Hill, Peterculter

Phase 1 & Protected Species Survey

December 2009

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For:	Bancon	

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*Due to the site specific information relating to legally protected species contained within this report, this document and its contents are **confidential** and are not intended to be made available to the public.*

Summary

A walkover Phase 1 Habitat & Protected Species Survey has been conducted on an area of ground at Ardbeck Hill, Peterculter earmarked for residential development.

The site is part of a designated District Wildlife Site. An ecological assessment of the site undertaken in 1995 is now out of date hence the commissioning of the present survey.

Main Findings:

- The site supports approximately 4.78 ha of semi-natural, acidic *Quercus-Betula-Dicranum* broadleaved woodland around its periphery. Ancient woodland indicator species present suggest a history of woodland cover for the area. Much wetter woodland exists to the north-east where willow (*Salix* sp.) is prominent and *Sphagnum* sp. become in the ground layer. There is also a wet heath element with the addition of cross leaved-heath (*Erica tetralix*) and hummocks of *Sphagnum capillifolium*.
- The central area of the site comprises semi-improved, rough neutral grassland dominated by tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) and cocksfoot grass (*Dactylis glomerata*). This has been derived from acid grassland/heath through improvement and grazing.
- Semi-improved acid grassland dominated by common bent-grass (*Agrostis capillaris*) can be found on higher ground to the south and north where

broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub is also frequent.

- Remnant patches of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) dry heath can be found on the woodland edge reflecting a community that would once have dominated much of the site.
- No demonstrable evidence of protected species was noted within the site boundary.
- Bird activity was high at the time of survey suggesting the site is a valuable site for wintering passerines and hunting ground for raptors.
- Recommendations for further survey work are given to enable a full assessment of the sites value in terms of biodiversity.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terms of Reference and Scope of Study

This report presents the results of a Phase 1 habitat & protected species survey commissioned by Bancon of a proposed housing development at Peterculter, Aberdeenshire. The scope of the work was:

1. to identify as far as possible any protected species within the site footprint covered by the proposals, and assess the potential for any significant impacts on these species.
2. to draw up a phase one habitat map of the site.
3. to identify requirements for further survey work based on the findings of the protected species survey.

1.2 Details of Proposed Works

In brief, the proposals involve the construction of a residential development and associated infrastructure on 13ha of land known as Hill of Ardbeck north-east of Peterculter.

1.3 Background

The site is part of a designated District Wildlife Site. An environmental assessment of the site was carried out in 1995 but is now out of date hence the commissioning of this survey.

2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Walk over Ecological Survey

The site was surveyed on the 4th of December 2009 using plans supplied by the developer. A Phase 1 Habitat Survey was undertaken using standard Phase 1 methodology as outlined in the *JNCC Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey* (JNCC, 1990). All parts of the site and immediate surrounding area were walked and mapped, and target notes were taken to provide further information on features of note.

The site and surrounds were checked for signs of badgers, otters, water voles, red squirrel, potential bat roosts, amphibians, and invertebrate habitat niches following standard procedure (Hill 2005).

Following completion of the habitat survey, all habitats (and species) identified as being present on site were checked against the following documents in order to determine their specific legislative status and ecological significance:

- EC Habitats Directive (Annex I, II, IV);
- EC Birds Directive (Annex I, II);
- The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994;
- Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (Schedules 1, 5, 8, 9);
- National & Local Biodiversity Action Plans
- Red Data Books
- RSPB Lists of Birds of Conservation Concern
- The Ancient Woodland Inventory

2.2 Limitations to the survey

The habitat survey has been carried out in December which is not ideal in terms of assessing the site's diversity and nature conservation value as many plant species have died away. In addition any important vernal species within the wooded areas will not have been recorded. Moreover, the true species richness of the grassland areas will not be reflected in a survey conducted at this time of year. Recommendations for further survey work are given at the end of the report.

3. SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 Site Summary

Historical maps going back to 1869 (www.old-maps.co.uk) show the site as a mixture of woodland and scrub and by 1900 as mixed woodland. Therefore, the site has a long history of wooded cover. The remnants of this woodland can be found around the periphery of the site in the form of acidic *Quercus-Betula-Dicranum* woodland. Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) has been planted throughout the woodland, particularly to the south. At some point, the central area has been cleared for agricultural purposes giving rise to an acid grassland/dry heath mosaic which has undergone improvement resulting in today's tussocky, neutral grassland. Remnants of acid grassland and heath can be found around the edges of this central area and on higher ground to the north and south. Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub is widespread some of which has been recently cleared but is regenerating. Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is frequent in the south of the site.

3.2 Phase 1 Habitat Survey (See Fig. 1)

Phase 1 Habitat Code	Description	Area (Ha)
A1.1.1	Broadleaved Woodland - Semi-natural	4.7830
A1.1.2	Broadleaved Woodland - Plantation	0.3240
A2.1	Dense scrub	0.3700
B1.2	Semi-improved acid grassland	2.1110
B2.2	Semi-improved neutral grassland	4.2270
C1.1	Bracken	0.5730
C3.1	Tall ruderal	0.2400
D1.1	Dry heath	0.2190
J3.6	Built up	0.1760
Total:		13.02 Ha

Table 1: Phase 1 Habitats Recorded and area calculations

A1.1.1 – Broadleaved woodland: semi natural

Broadleaved semi-natural woodland occupies almost 5 ha of ground to the north, south & east of the site. The majority takes the form of acidic *Quercus-Betula-Dicranum* woodland dominated by common oak (*Quercus robur*), sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), downy birch (*Betula pubescens*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) have been planted throughout, especially towards the south. Understandably, the ground flora is sparse at this time of year but includes wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), wavy hair grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), great wood rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), common bent grass (*Agrostis capillaris*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), germander speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*), greater stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*), *Scleropodium purum*, *Thuidium tamariscinum*, *Mnium hornum*, *Hypnum cupressiforme*, *Polytrichum formosum* & *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*. Occasional sprigs of blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) gives a heathy element to some stands.

There is evidence of past coppice management, and grazing, presumably by deer, is quite high. As a result, regeneration is sparse.

The woodland becomes wetter/boggier to the north (NJ8419 0151). Water filled ditches with floating bur-reed (*Sparganium angustifolium*) lead to a small waterbody with submerged willow (*Salix sp.*) and pondweeds (*Potamogeton sp.*). The surrounding woodland is boggy with willow (*Salix sp.*), downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) and rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*). Ground flora is dominated by carpets of *Polytrichum commune* and tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), *Sphagnum fallax*, soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) & *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*.

Further to the north (NJ 8400 0156) the woodland ground flora takes on a wet heath element with the addition of cross leaved-heath (*Erica tetralix*) and hummocks of *Sphagnum capillifolium* together with heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), heath rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) and *Polytrichum commune*. Much of the woodland here may be secondary birch & Scot's pine that has spread across a former wet heath habitat.

The antiquity of the woodland is difficult to assess at this time of year. The woodland to the north & east of the site boundary is included in the Semi-natural Ancient Woodland Inventory (<http://gateway.snh.gov.uk>). The boggy woodland to the north-east is included in this area. It can only be concluded that the rest of the woodland in the site boundary is also of considerable antiquity given the ancient woodland indicator species present e.g. wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), great wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), greater stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*) and sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*). There has obviously been a fair amount of past management in the form of coppicing and under planting with beech and sycamore. Self-seeding birch, rowan and willow is frequent to the north & east.



Photos 1& 2: General views of the acidic birch – oak woodland



Photos 3&4: Views of the wet woodland to the north-east



Photos 5&6: The 'wet heath' woodland to the north and bracket fungi on dead birch.

A1.1.2 – Broadleaved woodland: Plantation

Planted beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) are frequent throughout the wooded areas. However, the area to the south, on sloping ground overlooking Peterculter, is dominated by mature beech trees and has therefore been classified as plantation. The ground flora is very sparse due to the time of year and thick layer of beech leaves.



Photo 7: The beech plantation to the south.

A2.1 – Dense & Scattered scrub

Scrub takes the form of gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and broom (*Cytisus scoparius*). A large area of formerly dense gorse has been cleared from the high ground to the north-west (NJ 8388 0149). It is however regenerating vigorously has thus been left as scrubland in the classification. Scattered broom and gorse scrub is frequent across the grassland areas but much of this has also been cleared recently.

The area of boggy woodland around the waterbody to the north-east has been classified as scrub as it is largely dominated by willow species (*Salix sp.*)



Photo 8: Regenerating gorse scrub after clearance

B1.2 - Acid grassland: Semi-improved

Acid grassland can be found on the higher ground to the north & south in amongst former scrubland. It is typically dominated by common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) and wavy hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*) with creeping soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*), greater stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*), foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), *Pleurozium schreberi*, *Hylocomium splendens*, heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). A heathy element is still apparent with scattered patches of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*).

Gorse & broom scrub is frequent, much of which has been cleared leaving quite bare patches of acid grassland.



Photo 9: Overlooking areas of acid grassland

B2.2 – Neutral grassland: Semi-improved

The majority of the low-lying central section of the site comprises rough, tussocky, neutral grassland dominated by tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), cocksfoot grass (*Dactylis glomerata*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and creeping soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*). Creeping thistles (*Cirsium arvense*.) are frequent.

Its acidic origins are apparent in the general frequency of common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) and other calcifuges such as heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and scattered patches of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). Again gorse and broom scrub is frequent and there is the occasional rowan and willow bush.

This area will have been wooded in the past but has been cleared for grazing leaving an acid grassland/dry heath mosaic. This has subsequently undergone improvement leading to today's impoverished, rank neutral grassland.



Photos 10& 11: Overlooking the rank neutral grassland in the centre of the site & overlooking neutral grassland to a patch of *Calluna* heath on the woodland edge

C1.1 – Continuous Bracken

Patches of continuous bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) are largely restricted to the south of the site forming a buffer between the acid grassland and woodland communities (NJ 8418 0129).

C3.1 – Tall ruderal

Areas of rosebay willowherb (*Chamerion angustifolium*) were mapped within the acid grassland to the south (NJ 8413 0136) and around the reservoir (NJ 8398 0130).

D1.1 – Dry heath

Patches of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) can be found scattered throughout the acid grassland and woodland communities. However, towards the woodland edge, mature patches of continuous *Calluna* heath can be found (e.g. NJ8413 0144, NJ8405 0150 & NJ8400 0153). They are dominated by heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) with *Hypnum cupressiforme*, *Hylocomium splendens*, wavy hair grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*) and foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*). They are remnants of a once much larger area of heath that would have dominated much of the area now occupied by the acid and neutral grassland communities.

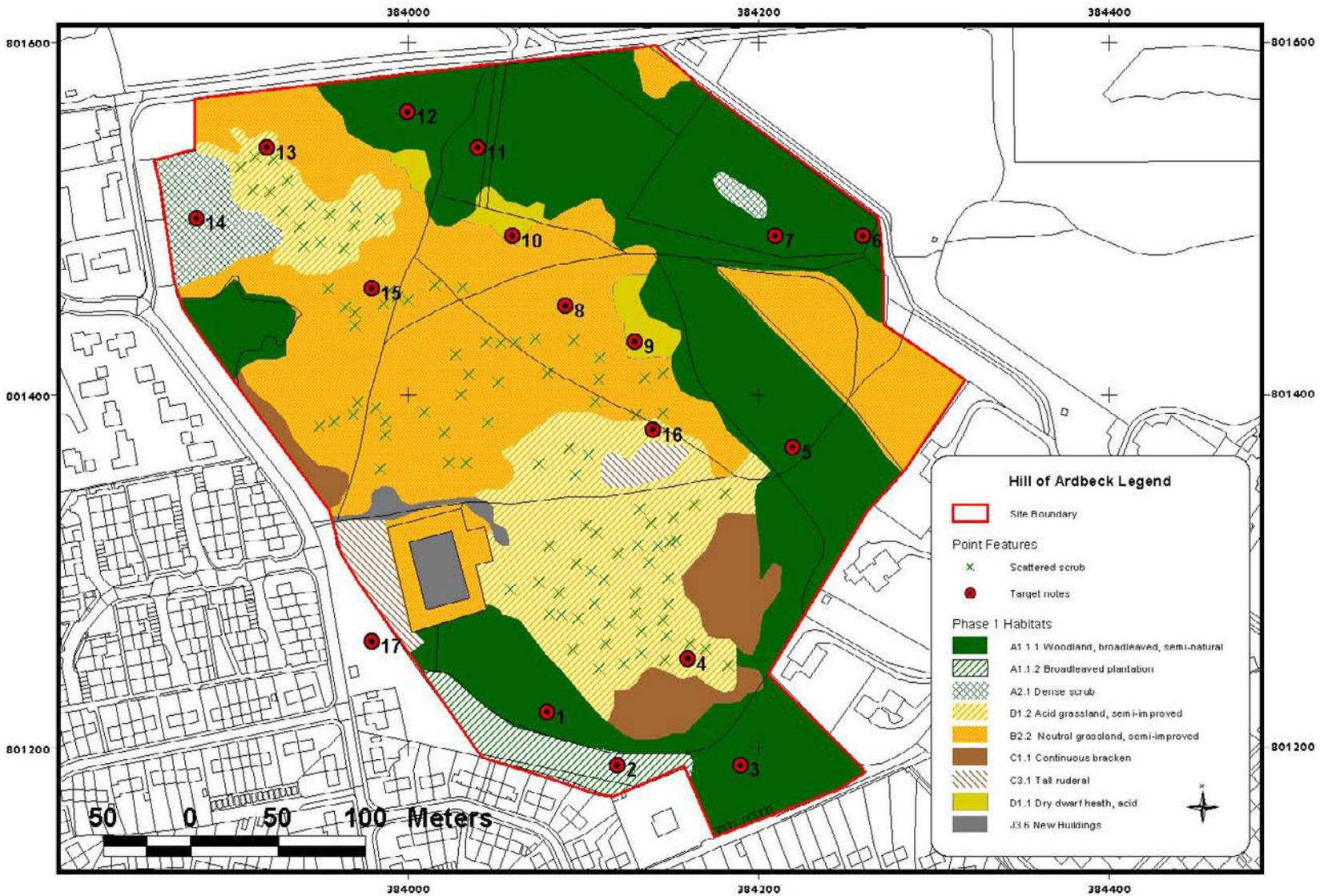


Figure 1: Phase 1 Habitat & Target Note Location

3.3 Target Notes

NO	Grid reference	Target note	Date
1	NJ8408 0122	Semi-natural strip of acidic <i>Quercus-Betula-Dicranum</i> woodland on southern slopes. Dominant trees include common oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>), sessile oak (<i>Quercus petraea</i>), rowan (<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>), downy birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>), silver birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>), and holly (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>). Mature beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>) has been planted towards the bottom of the slope. The ground flora is understandably sparse at this time of year but includes common bent grass (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>), wavy hair grass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>), brambles (<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.) stitchwort (<i>Stellaria</i> sp.), broad buckler fern (<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>) and <i>Polytrichum formosum</i> . Evidence of past coppice management.	4th Dec
2	NJ 8412 0119	Area with large, mature beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>) trees. Several of cavities which could support roosting bats.	4th Dec
3	NJ 8419 0119	Further area of <i>Quercus-Betula-Dicranum</i> woodland with rowan (<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>), sessile oak (<i>Quercus petraea</i>), downy birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>) and holly (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>). Ground flora includes wood sorrel (<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>), wavy hair grass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>), heath bedstraw (<i>Galium saxatile</i>), common bent grass (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>), bramble (<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.), germander speedwell (<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>), <i>Scleropodium purum</i> , <i>Thuidium tamariscinum</i> , <i>Mnium hornum</i> and <i>Hypnum cupressiforme</i> . Many of the rowan have been coppiced. Again with planted beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>) standards.	4th Dec
4	NJ 8416 0125	Heathy acid grassland dominated by common bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>), wavy hair grass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>), creeping soft-grass (<i>Holcus mollis</i>), stitchwort (<i>Stellaria</i> sp.), foxglove (<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>), <i>Pleurozium schreberi</i> , <i>Hylocomium splendens</i> , heath bedstraw (<i>Galium saxatile</i>), tormentil (<i>Potentilla erecta</i>) and scattered clumps of heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>). Broom (<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>) is widespread, some of which has been recently cleared but is regenerating.	4th Dec

5	NJ 8422 0137	More acidic semi-natural <i>Quercus-Betula-Dicranum</i> woodland with sessile oak (<i>Quercus petraea</i>), rowan (<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>), hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>), downy birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>), silver birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>), holly (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>), beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>) and sycamore (<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>). Ground flora acidic with broad buckler fern (<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>), common bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>), creeping soft grass (<i>Holcus mollis</i>), blaeberry (<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>), bramble (<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>), wood sorrel (<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>), wavy hair grass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>), great wood rush (<i>Luzula sylvatica</i>), <i>Polytrichum formosum</i> , tufted hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>), <i>Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus</i> and <i>Scleropodium purum</i> . Rowans have been coppiced and there is a little regen. Evidence of deer grazing widespread.	4th Dec
6	NJ 8426 0149	Walled avenue - walls covered in bryophytes and polypody ferns	4th Dec
7	NJ 8421 0149	Wet, boggy area with water filled ditches. Ditches contain floating leaves of floating bur-reed (<i>Sparganium angustifolium</i>). Ditches lead to waterbody supporting floating bur-reed (<i>Sparganium angustifolium</i>), pond weeds (<i>Potamogeton spp.</i>), and submerged willow (<i>Salix sp.</i>). Surrounding woodland boggy with willow (<i>Salix sp.</i>), downy birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>) and rhododendron (<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>). Ground flora is dominated by carpets of <i>Polytrichum commune</i> and tufted hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>), blaeberry (<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>), <i>Sphagnum fallax</i> , soft rush (<i>Juncus effusus</i>) & <i>Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus</i> .	4th Dec
8	NJ 8409 0145	Area of former scrub/heath which has been cleared for grazing. Grassland now semi-improved neutral dominated by tufted hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>), cocksfoot grass (<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>) and Yorkshire fog (<i>Holcus lanatus</i>). Acidic origins still apparent with frequent common bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>), wavy hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>) and occasional patches of heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>), especially towards the woodland.	4th Dec
9	NJ 8413 0143	Patch of mature heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>) dry heath with <i>Hylocomium splendens</i> , wavy hair grass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>) and foxglove (<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>).	4th Dec
10	NJ 8406 0149	Another patch of dry <i>Calluna</i> heath on edge of woodland with abundant <i>Hypnum cupressiforme</i> and <i>Hylocomium splendens</i> .	4th Dec
11	NJ 8404 0154	Dense, scrubby wet woodland dominated by willow (<i>Salix sp.</i>), downy birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>), alder (<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>) and scattered Scot's pine (<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>). Ground flora includes tufted hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>), soft rush (<i>Juncus effusus</i>), <i>Polytrichum commune</i> , <i>Sphagnum fallax</i> & <i>Sphagnum palustre</i> .	4th Dec

12	NJ 8400 0156	Area of wet heath/wet woodland with downy birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>) and Scot's pine (<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>) over heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>), cross leaved-heath (<i>Erica tetralix</i>), <i>Sphagnum capillifolium</i> , heath rush (<i>Juncus squarrosus</i>), & <i>Polytrichum commune</i> .	4th Dec
13	NJ 8392 0154	Former acid grassland/heath now semi-improved neutral with tufted hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>), Yorkshire fog (<i>Holcus lanatus</i>), creeping soft-grass (<i>Holcus mollis</i>), Cock'sfoot (<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>) common bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>) and false oat-grass (<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>). Foxglove (<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>) and heath bedstraw (<i>Galium saxatile</i>) occasional. Scattered rowan, broom and gorse frequent.	4th Dec
14	NJ 8388 0150	Hillside dominated by gorse (<i>Ulex europaeus</i>) and broom (<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>) which has been recently cleared but is regenerating. Rhododendron suckers frequent. Acid common bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>) grassland is developing where scrub not dominant.	4th Dec
15	NJ 8398 0146	Tussock grassland dominated by tufted hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>), Cock'sfoot (<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>), Yorkshire fog (<i>Holcus lanatus</i>) and common bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>). Some more acidic patches with remnant <i>Calluna</i> heath and scattered broom (<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>) and rowan (<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>).	4th Dec
16	NJ 8414 0138	Heathy, acid grassland with abundant broom (<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>) scrub which has been recently cleared. Remnant sprigs of heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>) occasional.	4th Dec
17	NJ 8398 0126	Small patch of Japanese Knotweed (<i>Fallopia japonica</i>) behind reservoir with bracken.	4th Dec

3.4 Protected Species Survey

The survey did not find any demonstrable evidence of protected species within the site boundary. However, the following observations should be borne in mind:

Bats

Several of the large beech trees to the south have features which could support roosting bats. If anything is to happen to these trees, a bat survey may be required.

Red squirrel

Although no signs of red squirrels were noted within the site boundary, they are known to be in the area (NBN Gateway). A survey for dreys should be conducted prior to work commencing on the site.

Birds

The following birds were noted within or hovering over the site boundary:

- Wren
- Blackbird
- Song thrush
- Redwing
- Blue tit
- Coal tit
- Treecreeper
- Great tit
- Chaffinch
- Kestrel
- Buzzard
- Robin
- Siskin

The birch woodland was full of activity with bird life on the day of survey suggesting it is an important winter foraging site for passerines, especially tit species. The open grassland will provide good hunting ground for raptors with a plentiful supply of voles and hunting perches. The woodland provides excellent habitat for breeding birds.



Photo 12: A kestrel watching over the open grassland from hunting perch

4. Recommendations for further survey

- It is recommended the site is re-surveyed during the spring/summer particularly regarding the grassland and woodland habitat. This will enable a proper assessment of the sites floristic diversity to be made.
- A bat survey may be required if anything is to happen to the large beech trees towards the southern boundary of the site.
- A breeding bird survey should be conducted to establish the site's value to breeding birds.
- A survey for red squirrel dreys may be required before work commences.

5. Evaluation of Habitats

Habitats are evaluated against the following guidelines (IEEM, 2006).

Levels of Value of Ecological Resource

Level of Value	Examples
International	Internationally designated or proposed sites such as Ramsar Sites, Special Protected Areas, Biosphere Reserves and Special Areas of Conservation, or otherwise meeting criteria for international designation. Sites supporting populations of internationally important species in internationally important numbers, numbers i.e. Annex 1 of Birds Directive, migratory species on migration routes, or in breeding, moulting, wintering or staging areas.
National	SSSI or NNR designated or qualifying sites holding species or assemblage of national importance. Sites supporting viable breeding populations of Wildlife and Countryside Act Schedule 1 Species and supplying critical elements of their habitat requirements. Sites supporting nationally important numbers of a single species (>1% UK population). Species contributing to the integrity of an SPA or SSSI but which are not cited as species for which the site is designated.
Regional	Sites not meeting SSSI criteria but comfortably exceeding SINC criteria. Species subject to special conservation measures in UK BAP or sites holding viable breeding populations or supplying critical elements of their habitat requirements. Sites containing regionally important numbers of a single species (>1% regional population).
High Local	Sites meeting the criteria for a county area designation (SINC), Designated Local Nature Reserves holding viable populations of any key species identified in the Local BAP. Sites supporting viable breeding populations of substantial number of species known to be Red or Amber List Species of Conservation Concern and supplying critical elements of their habitat requirements.
Moderate Local	Undesignated sites, or features considered to appreciably enrich the habitat resource within approximately 10 km radius from the site. Sites supporting viable breeding populations of a small number of species listed as Red list or Amber list Species of Conservation Concern or supplying critical elements of their habitat requirements.
Low Local	Undesignated sites, species or areas considered to enrich the species richness within the immediate environs of the site.
Negligible	Areas with a poor species richness and none of the above. Any other species.

Evaluated against the above criteria, the ecological value of the habitats on site as it stands is as follows.

Level of value (Geographic scale of importance)	Ecological feature
Moderate Local	Semi-natural woodland resource
Low Local	Scrub, acid grassland & remnant heath communities
Negligible	Semi-improved neutral grassland

However, it should be borne in mind that the survey was carried out with the optimal time scale for a habitat survey and the true species diversity may not be reflected in the findings. The presence of rare plant species may increase the level of value considerably.

The semi-natural woodland on site is listed on Annex 1 of the EC Habitats Directive as 'Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles'. The habitat is also a priority habitat under the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and Aberdeenshire's Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) as mixed oak and birch woodland.

The remnant areas of dry *Calluna* heath are also listed on Annex 1 of the EC Habitats Directive as 'European Dry Heaths' and are UKBAP & LBAP priority habitat.

REFERENCES

- Hill, D. *et al* (eds.). 2005. *Handbook of Biodiversity Methods – Survey, Evaluation and Monitoring*. Cambridge University Press.
- IEEM 2006. *Guidelines for Ecological Evaluation and Impact Assessment*. In Practice: The Bulletin of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management 29.
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2003). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey*, Revised reprint. JNCC, Peterborough.
- Stace, C. 1997. *New Flora of the British Isles* (2nd Edition.) Cambridge University Press.

10th January 2012

Anne-Marie Gauld, Environmental Planner

Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure - Planning and Sustainable Development
Aberdeen City Council
Ground Floor North, Business Hub 4
Marischal College
Broad Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1AB

Dear Madam

Peterculter Local Nature Conservation Site designation.

I write with regard to the designated site review process that was undertaken by Aberdeen City Council in 2011, and approved by the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee in September. Our particular concern lies with the designation of the Peterculter Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS), which amalgamates previous designations of Woodend Woods, Culter House Woods, Guttrie Hill and Hill of Ardbeck.

Bancon Developments have an interest in the land known as Hill of Ardbeck, and as the Council are well aware have been promoting it for development through the current Local Development Plan (LDP) review process. We are frankly amazed that the Council should have undertaken this review while the LDP review was still being considered by Scottish Ministers.

I would also like to draw attention to paragraph 4.7 of the SNH guidance notes for Local Authorities on LNCS designations.

4.7 The following are proposed as being the key stages for selecting new sites :

- A provisional site is identified, and the landowner or manager is contacted with information about why it has been identified, the LNCS selection process, and the potential for the site to benefit from positive management for its geodiversity or biodiversity interest.*
- Existing information about the site is reviewed, and a decision made as to whether further information is needed. If so, permission for access to the site is sought from the landowner or manager, to allow the site to be surveyed to sufficient level of detail to assess its importance.*

- *The importance of the site is assessed according to locally set criteria, as detailed below (para 4.8). A formal record of the reasons for selection is made.*
- *Site Statement is prepared, as detailed in paragraphs 4.15 – 4.16. The landowner or manager is provided with information on the survey and assessment, and with the Site Statement.*

With regard to Hill of Ardbeck, it is clear that such a procedure has not been followed. We understand that no contact has been made with the landowner, nor with ourselves – although the Council were aware of our interest – at any stage in the process of reviewing the former District Wildlife Site (DWS) designation, and re-naming it as a LNCS.

There is no evidence of existing information about the site being reviewed. This is despite Bancon having provided two separate reports, the first an Environmental Assessment of a proposed residential development of the site in May 1995 by Aberdeen University (AURIS Environment Ltd), and the second a Phase 1 and Protected Species survey carried out in December 2009 by Central Environmental Surveys. Both of these reports highlighted a negligible biodiversity value of the central part of the site, with habitat and biodiversity interest limited to the peripheral broadleaf woodland areas. These reports have been in the public domain since their production, as well as before the Council and Scottish Ministers as part of the LDP review.

I note from the report to the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee in September that the University of Aberdeen were involved in the review process, as well as being authors of the May 1995 report on Hill of Ardbeck.

Neither Bancon nor the land owner has seen evidence of a Site Statement, or any information relating to the survey and assessment of the site.

The results of the LDP review have just come to hand, and we are now faced with what our professional advisors lead us to conclude as an unjustified local designation that constrains the use of land, without having been party to the designation process. Whilst we do not wish to disguise the fact that we wish to develop part of the site for housing, our proposals include considerable environmental improvement works, woodland management and the formation of valuable public open space facilities.

We are further frustrated by the rejection of our proposals through the Local Development Plan process due solely to the DWS/LNCS designation. Having submitted the two reports mentioned above, it is apparent that these have been given no regard by the Environment Team, the Planning Policy Team, or indeed the Scottish Government Reporters. In regard to the LDP review, it is likely that we will take further action directly with the Scottish Government to ascertain why these reports were not given consideration.

I enclose a copy of each of the reports noted above, and I request that you provide me with details of the survey and assessment work done, and the Site Statement, along

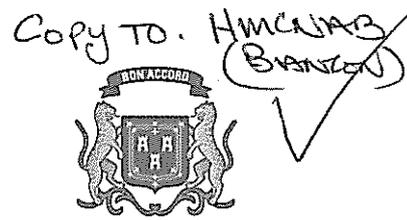
with any evidence of notification of the designation to the landowner, or alternatively some justification as to why the SNH guidance has not been followed.

Yours faithfully,

**Ben Freeman,
Planning Manager,
Bancon Developments**

**Cc Gale Beattie – LDP Manager
Landowner**

Your Ref.
Our Ref. ADS/P101347[ZFM]
Contact Alex Scott
Email pi@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Direct Dial 01224 522279
Direct Fax 01224 636181



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6 September 2010

William Cowie Partnership
6/7 Albyn Lane
Aberdeen
AB10 6SZ

RECEIVED
- 8 SEP 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

**The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)
Proposal of Application Notice, Hill Of Ardbeck, Peterculter
Application Reference Number: P101347**

After consideration of your proposal of application notice which was received on **24 August 2010**, it is the opinion of the planning authority that the proposed consultation is insufficient for the development proposed. Therefore, the following should be undertaken in addition to what is outlined on the proposal of application notice –

The local elected members for the Lower Deeside ward, within which the site is located, should also be advised of the proposals by an invite to the public meeting or other appropriate means. The councillors are Cllr M. Boulton, Cllr A. Malone and Cllr A. Milne.

Once the required consultation has taken place, a pre-application consultation report should be produced and then submitted to the planning authority at the same time as the planning application. The report should specify who has been consulted and set out what steps were taken to comply with the statutory requirements (outlined in the pre-application consultation notice). The report should also set out how the applicant has responded to any comments made by those who were consulted, including whether and the extent to which the proposals have changed as a result of consultation.

It would be helpful if the report could also provide appropriate evidence that the various prescribed steps have been undertaken – e.g. copies of advertisements of the public events and reference to material made available at such events. It is also

GORDON McINTOSH
DIRECTOR



HILL OF ARDBECK, PETERCULTER AREA 2



Steel Link Rope Hammock
a/w Douglas fir posts



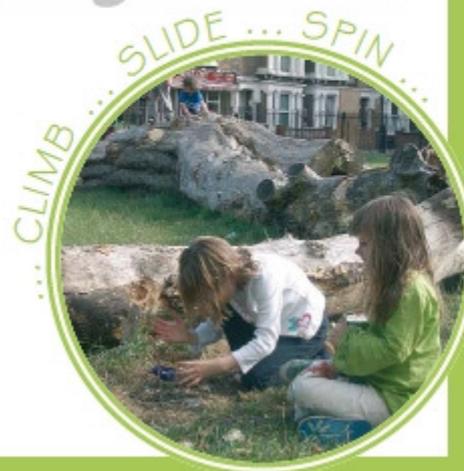
Rope Net Tower 1



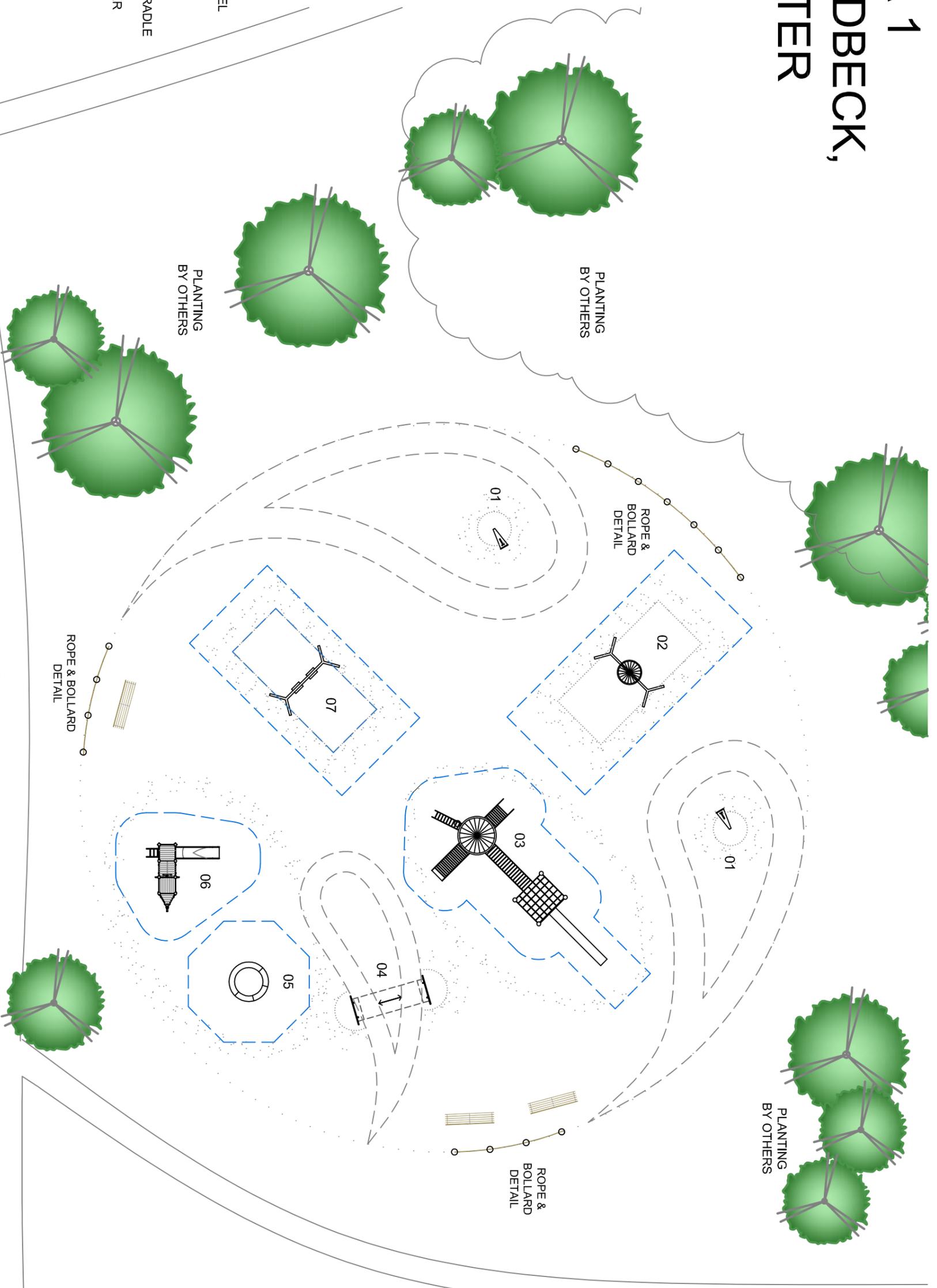
Super Rope End Swinger
a/w Douglas fir posts



TZA036
Low Rotator



PLAY AREA 1 HILL OF ARDBECK, PETERCULTER



EQUIPMENT:

- 01. MEG100 MEGAPHONES
- 02. SNS080 NEST SWING
- 03. LITTLE EAGLE NEST PRAIRIE C/W STEEL SLIDE
- 04. TUN100 3m TUNNEL
- 05. SWD550 OYSTER ROUNDABOUT
- 06. KK TRAWLER 0-21144-001
- 07. 2.4m JUNIOR SWING C/W 1 FLAT & 1 CRADLE

ALL EQUIPMENT ON TO GRASS MAT SAFER SURFACING

ALL PLANTING, PATHWAYS AND GRASS MOUNDS FORMED BY OTHERS

DO NOT SCALE FROM DRAWINGS.

All dimensions to be checked by the contractor and any discrepancies to be notified to the Designer prior to works being commenced.
Use figured dimensions only.

Dimensions given are minimum.



Job Title		Client No.		Rev	
DAVID WILSON ASSOCIATES		2011/264		-	
Drawing Title		Date	Drawn		
HILL OF ARDBECK, PETERCULTER		MAY 2011	KH		
Scale					
1:200@A3					

Sutcliffeplay
Good design for children
Scotland

Sutcliffe Play Scotland
Prospect Business Centre
Technicity Park
Dunfermline
DD2 1TY
Tel: 01382 562351
Fax: 01382 561590

HILL OF ARDBECK, PETERCULTER AREA 1



SNS000
Nest Swing



SWD660
Oyster Roundabout



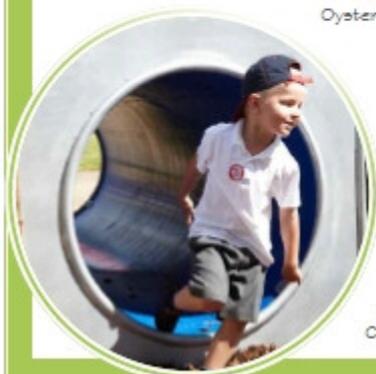
Little Eagle's Nest Frame
a/w Stainless Steel Slide



Rope & bollard
detail



SWB002
Junior Swing
a/w 1 flat & 1 oradlie



TUN100
Crawl Tunnel



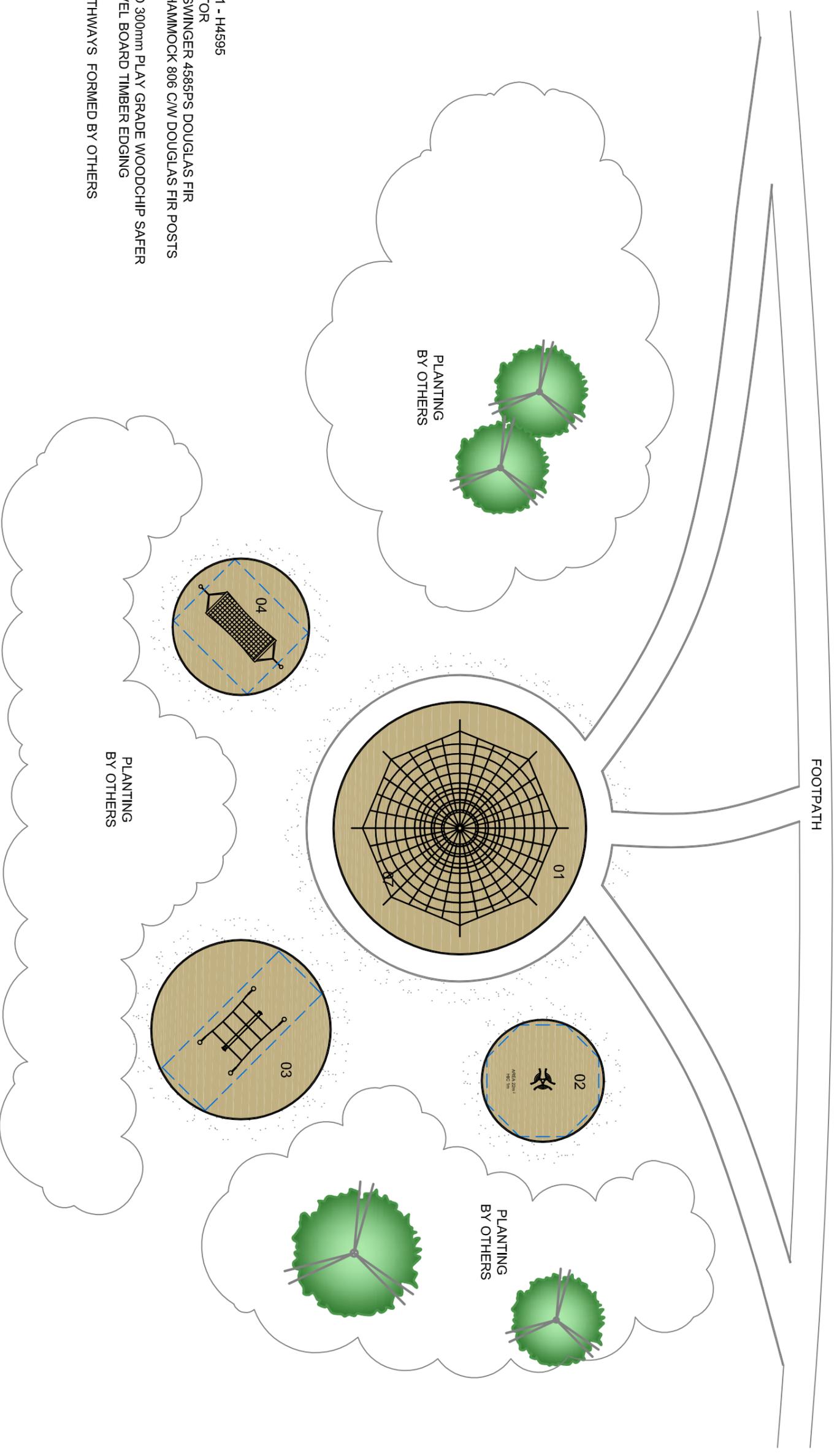
MEG100
Megaphones



KK Trawler
0-2 | 144-001



PLAY AREA 2 HILL OF ARDBECK, PETERCULTER



EQUIPMENT:

- 01. ROPE NET TOWER 1 - H4595
- 02. TZA036 LOW ROTATOR
- 03. SUPER ROPE END SWINGER 4585PS DOUGLAS FIR
- 04. STEEL LINK ROPE HAMMOCK 806 C/W DOUGLAS FIR POSTS

ALL EQUIPMENT ON TO 300mm PLAY GRADE WOODCHIP SAFER SURFACING AND GRAVEL BOARD TIMBER EDGING

ALL PLANTING AND PATHWAYS FORMED BY OTHERS

DO NOT SCALE FROM DRAWINGS.

All dimensions to be checked by the contractor and any discrepancies to be notified to the Designer prior to works being commenced.
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Job Title	DAVID WILSON ASSOCIATES	Client No.	2011/264	Rev	-
Drawing Title	HILL OF ARDBECK, PETERCULTER	Date	MAY 2011	Drawn	KH
		Scale	1:200@A3		

Sutcliffeplay
Good design for children
Scotland

Sutcliffe Play Scotland
Prospect Business Centre
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Fax: 01382 561590

