

Tornagrain

A Planned Town for the Highlands

Community Engagement Statement



Introduction

This report has been produced to support the outline planning application for a new town at Tornagrain, to the south of the A96(T) road and Inverness Airport.

As part of the modernising agenda for the Scottish planning system, instigated by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006, Planning Advice Note 81 'Community Engagement: Planning with People' (PAN81) was released in March 2007 to provide advice to applicants on best practice with public consultation.

Although the secondary legislation required to provide the legal support for the provisions of PAN81 had not taken effect at the time of the outline application, the Tornagrain proposal has been the subject of extensive community engagement, both through the process administered by The Highland Council in developing the A96 Growth Corridor Development Framework 2007 (summarised in **Appendix 1**), and through initiatives promoted by the applicant both during the creation of a masterplan for Tornagrain, and during the extensive pre-application process.

This report therefore follows the guidance set out in PAN 81 in explaining the process of community engagement relevant to the Tornagrain proposal, both by the Council and more specifically by the applicant.

Principles and Objectives

The site lies within the A96 Corridor, which is identified for significant growth in national, regional and local planning policy. This policy context has been described in some detail in the Planning Statement, a separate document that has been produced in support of the Tornagrain application. The planning authority's policy guidance and specific allocations for economic growth are contained within The A96 Growth Corridor Development Framework which was approved in September 2007. The identification of the site as appropriate for a new town has been established through the planning authority's community consultation process (outlined in Section 2) and subsequent approval of this document.

From the outset Moray Estates Development Company Ltd (MEDCO) has sought to recognise the importance and benefits of effective community engagement in helping to realise the potential of the site to deliver a successful development. Its primary objective was to undertake extensive community consultation to understand how a self sufficient sustainable new settlement could best be created and delivered by continuously listening and responding to the views, concerns and aspirations of the local community.

Participants, Roles & Responsibilities

A development of the size and scale proposed at Tornagrain affects a wide range of different people and organisations. Each of these different groups has their own specific interests. It was incumbent on MEDCO to identify a wide ranging process of consultation in order to best understand and respond to the varying interests of these different groups, it was therefore necessary to engage with these groups in an appropriate manner. In recognition of this, MEDCO has employed several different engagement methodologies and procedures. The specific groups that have been engaged include:

Neighbours

Those people and organisations with a property adjoining the site or within the immediate vicinity of the site and who have a strong direct interest in the development. Whilst this group has a keen interest in the development (and as such would be likely to want to proactively engage) MEDCO recognises that special effort had to be made to ensure that communication was as comprehensive and accessible as possible so that this group felt part of the process.

Local and Community Councillors

The Local and Community Councillors are elected representatives and therefore well placed to present the broad cross section of interests that exist within the local communities. Accordingly, MEDCO recognised from the outset the importance of continuous engagement with these representatives. In recognition of the size and scale of the development proposed, MEDCO had discussions with a number of Local and Community Councillors representing communities throughout the A96 Corridor.

General Public

In recognition of the regional significance of the development, MEDCO has sought to engage generally throughout the A96 Corridor area, rather than just within the immediate vicinity of the site.

Statutory Consultees and Agencies

MEDCO has consulted with the various statutory and non-statutory consultees throughout the process to ensure their expertise and specialist knowledge has been drawn upon in the preparation of the scheme.

Local Business Community

Given the positive contribution that the scheme can make to local economic development, local business community organisations have been actively engaged through out the preparation of the scheme.

Local Developers

In light of the wider A96 Corridor development context, MEDCO has sought to engage with other local developers to understand their observations and issues, and to ensure that development is delivered in a coordinated manner.

Methodology

MEDCO has undertaken a programme of community engagement that has comprised a series of inter-related activities. The methodology employed for each activity has varied dependent upon the particular requirements of the different groups identified as having an interest in the development. The individual activities are described in more detail below:

Charrette

The Tornagrain Charrette was held at the Drumossie Hotel in Inverness between the 5th and 14th September 2006. The design team was led by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, the US architecture and town planning practice which is credited with developing the Charrette as a method for design and public engagement. The consultant team included specialists in the field of socio-economics, ecology, design, utilities, engineering, cost control, transport and landscape all of whom had prepared comprehensive reports to inform the debates and meetings.

A Charrette is an intensive community based planning workshop where the public, designers and specialist consultants work together to deliver a masterplan for the development of a site.

The process involves the team of designers and specialist consultants setting up a fully operational 'design studio' in which a series of formal and informal meetings and seminars are held to iteratively work towards a masterplan for the site through a process of ongoing debate and design. The public are invited to participate in the debates and contribute to the evolving masterplan throughout the process. The Charrette therefore provides a forum for an active exchange of ideas between all those who have an interest in the development of a site. Importantly the process allows for immediate feedback between the public, designers and specialist consultants. The overarching objective of the Charrette is to be as open and inclusive through the design process as possible, to understand community concerns at the outset (rather than post planning application) and to foster a more informed debate about the specific development and the options open to the community. The Charrette, of course, also allows attendees to contribute to the design process either with ideas or by voicing concern about certain elements.

The Tornagrain Charrette therefore formed the foundation of the public engagement programme undertaken by MEDCO by facilitating intensive engagement with many of the identified groups.

The process comprised three large public meetings which were advertised widely in the local press and radio. The first meeting 'set the scene' with an opening presentation of the local planning context and design concepts, an introduction to the consultant team and overview of the Charrette process. The second meeting occurred at the halfway point and provided the design team with

an opportunity to present and receive feedback on the work in progress. Finally, a third meeting occurred on the final night of the Charrette and presented the final masterplan vision and the work which led up to it.

In addition to the public meetings, focused debates were held to discuss specific topics related to the proposed development such as transport, ecology, infrastructure or economy. The debates were open to the public, with specific invitations being sent to stakeholders with a particular interest in the topic being discussed. These debates allowed direct engagement with the relevant statutory consultees and the identified special interest groups. The organisations invited to participate in the specific focused debate sessions are listed in **Appendix 2**.

A discussion session was also arranged for local community representatives, in recognition of the important role that they were to play in the ongoing process of community involvement. The local community representative session invitees are listed in **Appendix 2**. Members of the public were also encouraged to, and did, attend this meeting.

The Charrette included open design sessions which the public were also invited to attend, observe, contribute to the design process and ask questions of the design team. The timing of the open sessions were arranged to maximise the opportunity for public engagement, and to provide alternative opportunities to participate for all those who could not attend for whatever reason at other times during the process.

Several different methods were employed to publicise the Charrette both in advance and during the process. A 'Charrette Paper' explaining the process and inviting people to attend was distributed to approximately 9000 homes within the A96 corridor (**Appendix 3**). In addition, advertorials appeared in both the Inverness Courier and Nairnshire Telegraph (**Appendix 4**) together with public notices in both these papers. Finally, advertisements on Moray Firth Radio were broadcast in advance of the Charrette to invite attendance.

The Charrette received much local, Scottish and UK national media and press coverage, perhaps most notably BBC Newsnight Scotland, Channel 4 News, Grampian News and various newspapers. A full summary of this coverage is set out in **Appendix 5**.

In addition, Andres Duany of DPZ gave lectures at the University of Highlands and Islands, RIAS and RIBA in June and July 2006. These helped to publicise the forthcoming Charrette and some of the planning and urban design issues central to the debate over Tornagrain and the A96 Corridor.

It is estimated that the Charrette process overall attracted an attendance of in excess of 600 people overall with 150 attending each of the three main sessions. The Charrette is



designed to engage with members of the community not usually motivated to attend public events. The deliberately inclusive and participatory structure of the Charrette helped to engage people in a wider debate about the choices for the area, and this also appeared to appeal to a wider cross section of views in the community.

In February 2007 a 'Post Charrette Paper' summarising the outcomes of Charrette process was distributed to approximately 9000 homes in the A96 Corridor (**Appendix 6**).

Public Exhibitions Programme

Having achieved considerable community involvement through the Charrette process, MEDCO recognised the importance of continued and ongoing engagement in the lead up to the submission of the planning application. MEDCO therefore devised a programme of public exhibitions to ensure a process of continued communication and engagement.

The programme consisted of three stages:

- **Stage 1** – exhibition held on 7th and 8th November 2007. The key theme was a summary of the outcome of the Charrette, evolution of the masterplan, and an explanation of the process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), together with a summary of the baseline studies undertaken on all of the key technical issues relevant to the application. Specialist consultants were on hand to respond to any queries or concerns with regard to the following topic areas:
 - Air Quality
 - Cultural Heritage and archaeology
 - Ecology
 - Landscape and Views
 - Noise and Vibration
 - Socio-Economic
 - Transport
 - Utilities and Sustainability
- **Stage 2** – exhibition held on 10th and 11th March 2008. The focus of this exhibition was an explanation of the masterplan that had resulted from feedback through the consultation process and having regard to the technical analysis undertaken through the EIA process.
- **Stage 3** – exhibition held on 15th and 16th September 2008. The aim of this session was to present in summary form the content of the forthcoming planning application.



Above: Public workshop at Tornagrain Charrette – September 2006

Left: Post Charrette Paper – February 2007

Below, left to right: September 2007 A96 Growth Corridor Development Framework document, November 2007, March 2008 and September 2008 exhibition brochures



The exhibitions were all held at the Petty Church Hall which is located immediately adjacent to the proposed development site. This location was therefore particularly accessible for neighbours and those living in the vicinity of the site.

The exhibitions ran over two days between 12 noon and 9 pm on the first day and 10 am until 9 pm on the second day. As such, a varied opportunity was provided for all those with an interest in the development to attend the exhibition at some point.

The exhibitions were staffed at all times by representatives of MEDCO and appropriate specialist consultants, dependent upon the content of each session. Those attending the exhibitions were invited to ask questions and provide feedback to the team about the scheme.

To facilitate this process, the exhibition was reproduced in full as a booklet. This was made available to all visitors, with additional copies sent to local interest groups including Community Councils and stakeholders, and copies left at relevant local venues such as, local shops and post offices. In addition, the brochures were available to download from the Tornagrain website. Each brochure contained a postage paid feedback form inviting written comments to be submitted to MEDCO. Copies of the exhibition brochures are contained in **Appendices 7–9**.

The exhibitions were advertised widely in the local press (**Appendix 10**). Letters inviting local residents and stakeholders to attend the exhibitions were sent in advance. The exhibitions also received coverage in the local press and radio.

It is estimated that all three exhibitions generated around 150 - 200 visitors in total.

The public exhibition programme ensured that the process of communication and engagement with the local community continued throughout the preparation of the planning application. In adopting this approach, MEDCO was able to interact with those within the local community interested in the preparation of the application and also be available to answer questions and provide clarification on any aspect of the project.

Importantly, the exhibitions also acted as a 'feedback' process in explaining how earlier comments and concerns had been addressed in the evolving masterplan. The Charrette and the subsequent exhibitions had an important influence on the masterplan. Sometimes direct ideas or suggestions were put forward, such as the inclusion of allotments, often it was the process of the design team challenging the existing design following comments or expressions of concern from the local community.

A summary of participant comments through this process and the response of MEDCO are provided in the next section.

Community Consultative Forum

The Community Consultative Forum (CCF) was established by MEDCO in May 2006 to provide a regular forum for dialogue with representatives of the local community and local businesses. The aim was to ensure close engagement with key stakeholders in addition to the wider engagement with the general public. A lists of those organisations currently involved in the CCF is included in **Appendix 11**. The CCF is the principal formal engagement conduit with Community Councils, local councillors, business organisations and major local businesses.

Recognising the importance of early engagement with community/business representatives, the Forum was the first method of public engagement employed by MEDCO during the early stages of the scheme. The stated objective of the Forum from the outset was to provide a two way flow of information and ideas between MEDCO and the local communities and the other stakeholders in the A96 corridor area with particular reference to MEDCO's proposal to create a new town adjacent to Tornagrain.

The Forum meetings provided the opportunity for lively debate and allowed the local community to express their concerns and for MEDCO to respond.

It is envisaged that the Forum will continue to meet at key points following submission of the application.

Tornagrain Residents Meeting

In addition to the CCF, MEDCO has held several meetings exclusively for existing residents of Tornagrain. The purpose of these meeting was to engage with those residents most directly affected by the scheme.

The content of these meetings was often similar as for the CCF, but as only a few of these residents were participants in the CCF, greater engagement with this group was considered appropriate. This recognised the status of direct neighbours as a special interest group in the process often with concerns or views different from those of more distant communities.

Workshop Session

Where particular issues are clearly a major concern to the local communities MEDCO has wished to respond in a way which encourages informed discussion on the matter. Many community participants expressed concern that MEDCO would not be able to enforce its design aspirations with developers likely to be involved in the delivery of the new town. To engage in this further, MEDCO arranged workshop sessions in April 2008 to discuss Design Codes and their role in design quality enforcement. These workshops were led by Andres Duany of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co who had the previous day presented a further UHI

Participation – Key Findings

lecture – also on Design Codes. The workshops were attended by local community councils, local planning pressure groups, architects and other stakeholders. A list of invitees is attached as **Appendix 12**.

Ongoing Informal Meetings and Correspondence

As an active land owner with an historic presence in the Inner Moray Firth area, MEDCO also has various other established channels of communication with the community. In particular, the Managing Director of MEDCO, Andrew Howard, is an established point of contact for the community. Throughout this process he has acted as the representative of MEDCO and has met and corresponded at various times with residents and interested parties on an informal basis to answer questions and respond to concerns.

Web Site

A website (www.tornagrain-newtown.co.uk) was established in 2006 to inform and update the local (and wider) community on the context and progress of the project. It provided an outline and context in respect of THC's Development Framework for the A96 Corridor, explained the background, principles and vision of the new settlement, the operation of the Charrette process, and regular updates on the evolution of the masterplan and accompanying supporting illustrations. The website also provided contacts for enquiries and further information such as the exhibition brochures.

Conclusion

MEDCO has employed a wide range of engagement methodologies to respond to the different needs and requirements of those identified as having an interest in the development of Tornagrain.

In recognition of the regional significance of the development MEDCO wanted to engage as widely as possible with the local community in the development of a scheme for the site. The Charrette process, accompanied by widespread publicity and advertising, was seen as the most appropriate method of achieving this level of engagement at the outset. The public exhibitions and brochures were then used to maintain the level of involvement achieved and continue the process of exchanging information and thoughts with the community as the scheme evolved.

In recognition of the direct interest that the neighbouring communities and residents have in the scheme MEDCO has also used regular focused meetings and ongoing informal communication to deliver a closer level of involvement.

The aim at all times has been to communicate in the most appropriate manner possible so that all those with an interest can be informed and be afforded the opportunity to respond and engage generally as the project has evolved.

The views expressed by local communities during the process of public engagement have been wide ranging reflecting the varying interests of the different groups engaged. However, the views expressed overwhelmingly revolve around several key issues. As such the following analysis identifies these reoccurring key issues and also sets out the response of MEDCO that has been provided on an ongoing basis.

Realistic Population Forecasts

Concerns were expressed that The Highland Council's forecast population growth for the A96 corridor of up to 30,000 people over the next 30 years, upon which the need for Tornagrain is predicated, is not justified.

In addressing this point MEDCO commissioned independent socio-economic consultants DTZ to consider thoroughly the population forecasts for the A96 Corridor area.

A summary of DTZ's socio-economic analysis has been included at each public exhibition stage, and a representative of DTZ has been available at all times to answer questions.

Appropriate Location for Growth

Concerns have been expressed that Tornagrain was not the appropriate location to accommodate the forecast population growth; specifically it was suggested that the growth be accommodated in Inverness and Nairn.

MEDCO's view is that Tornagrain is a wholly sustainable and appropriate location for growth for several reasons:

- Development in this location will provide a sustainable pattern of growth within the A96 corridor, both in terms of the location of the town adjacent to the significant employment allocation of IABP, and having regard to the masterplan which proposes a compact and walkable community.
- Development in this location will deliver a new town of sufficient scale to accommodate retail and commercial development and a broad range of social and community facilities. As such, this location supports the creation of a new town within the existing settlement hierarchy for the Corridor.
- Development in this location will capitalise on the opportunity to provide sustainable transport solutions and also reduce the need to travel through the creation of a level of achievable self sufficiency.
- Development in this location will preserve and enhance the valuable areas of high landscape quality in the Highlands.

Impact Upon Local Services & Infrastructure

Some consultees have suggested that the development would place undue pressure upon existing infrastructure (such as roads, water supply and sewerage) and local services (such as health and schools).

MEDCO has sought to promote a development of sufficient scale to deliver all the necessary infrastructure and facilities that are required to serve the development. In addition, appropriate EIA technical studies (transport, socio-economic and drainage) have assessed the impact of the development upon existing services and infrastructure and set out the infrastructure upgrades required to mitigate these impacts.

Investigating how infrastructure and services should be delivered and integrated within the scheme has been an integral part of the public engagement process, for example the proposals for the upgrading and realignment of the A96 resulted from the Charrette process.

Impact Upon Neighbouring Communities

Concerns were expressed that the development of Tornagrain would detract from the vitality of neighbouring communities.

In response, MEDCO's approach has been to create a self sufficient settlement which will seek not to have a negative impact upon neighbouring settlements. MEDCO has specifically sought to engage with neighbouring communities throughout the process to understand their concerns and directly respond to them. In listening to these concerns, MEDCO has ensured that design of Tornagrain will deliver a development of the highest quality which does not detract from existing neighbouring settlements (for example proposals to create woodland between Tornagrain and Croy to maintain a degree of separation).

Associated Employment Opportunities

Some participants questioned where the future residents of Tornagrain would be employed.

MEDCO has highlighted the employment opportunities that will be created by the development of Inverness Airport Business Park which will be situated directly adjacent to the town and with employment opportunities within the town. The design of the town integrates the business park and the town through coordinated urban design.

Design Approach

Many participants have responded positively to the design of the scheme. Furthermore a number of participants expressed positive views regarding the 'traditional urbanism' design approach and the aspiration to create a town which is compact, walkable and with an extensive provision of services. Participants highlighted the benefits that adopting this approach could have for future developments.

Delivering Sustainability

A number of participants highlighted the importance of delivering a development which is environmentally sustainable, incorporating energy efficiency measures and sustainable energy generation measures. MEDCO is committed to delivering these measures and has highlighted this throughout the public engagement process, and in particular during the public exhibitions.

Facilities

Throughout the process the participants have highlighted the types of services and facilities that should be incorporated in Tornagrain to make it a successful, self sufficient settlement. For example, the number of primary schools provided has been debated and discussed through the engagement process. In addition, participants suggested that allotments be included within the development.

MEDCO has made very effort to incorporate these suggestions into the design of the scheme where possible.

Public Engagement Programme

The opportunity to comment and participate has been welcomed by the vast majority of the local community and has provided an opportunity for supporters and objectors alike to voice their comments and engage in debate with MEDCO, designers and technical advisors. The opportunity to actively engage in the scheme from the outset through the Charrette process was specifically welcomed by participants.

Summary and Conclusion

This statement has sought to explain how the pre-application public engagement process undertaken by MEDCO has responded to the advice for Community Engagement set out in PAN 81. In summary the process has:

- 1. Involvement:** Identified the following people and organisations as having an interest in the development of Tornagrain: neighbours; local and community councillors; the general public; statutory consultees and agencies; the local business community and local developers. MEDCO has employed engagement methodologies to respond to the particular requirements of each of these groups.
- 2. Support:** Identified the barriers to involvement that might be experienced by each of the identified groups of participants and has sought to overcome them by employing methodologies which respond to the particular requirements of these groups.
- 3. Planning:** Established the purpose and scope of public engagement. The aspiration for participation was formulated to compliment the public participation process being undertaken by The Highland Council with regard to the A96 Growth Corridor Development Framework.
- 4. Methods:** Employed the following appropriate methods of engagement to deliver effective engagement with those groups identified as having an interest in the development: Charrette, Public Exhibitions, Community Consultative Forums, Tornagrain Residents Meetings, ongoing informal meetings and correspondence and the website.
- 5. Working together:** Employed clear procedures that enable participants to work together effectively and efficiently particularly the regular Community Consultative Forums which allowed for dialogue between representatives of the local communities.
- 6. Sharing information:** Ensured necessary information is communicated between the participants, particularly through the public exhibitions which regularly set out in clear and concise language a summary of the technical information that underpins a development.
- 7. Working with others:** Worked effectively with others with an interest in the development, even when that interest has been opposed to the scheme, particularly through the ongoing informal meetings and correspondence and in an effort to build up a constructive and productive dialogue.
- 8. Improvement:** Developed skills, knowledge and confidence of the participants, particularly through the Charrette process given the immediate feedback and debate with designers, and subsequently through the evolution of the master plan.
- 9. Feedback:** Fed the results back to the wider community and agencies affected. In particular, through the brochures which were distributed prior to the Charrette, after the Charrette and at each of the three public exhibition stages, providing a clear explanation of how the scheme has evolved in response to the public engagement and EIA processes.
- 10. Monitoring and evaluation:** This statement comprises the applicant's evaluation of the engagement process. It is the applicant's view that the process achieved its purpose and met the national standards for community engagement.

In conclusion, it is considered that the pre-application public engagement process adopted for the Tornagrain proposal is consistent with the principles of PAN 81 and the emerging secondary legislations regarding community engagement.

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