

**ROYAL BURGH OF WIGTOWN & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL
PLANNING WORKING PARTY
REPORT FOR COMMUNITY COUNCIL 10.8.2020**

Members

- Nick Walker, Paul Tarling, Kathleen Hart, Ada Montgomery, Sandra McDowall, Robin Richmond, Willie McCartney, Kerr Inger.

NEW APPLICATIONS

20/1127/FUL SITING OF 6 HOLIDAY CHALETS, ALTERATIONS TO EXISTING ACCESS, FORMATION OF ACCESS ROAD AND INSTALLATION OF SHARED SEPTIC TANK AND SOAKAWAY. LAND ADJACENT TO WIGTOWN HOUSE HOTEL, BLACKS' FIELD, BANK STREET, WIGTOWN.

Summary

Sited on the field immediately off Bank Street opposite the War Memorial, below the Wigtown House Hotel (Bayview Nursery). Six, one bedroom, wooden chalets with composite roofing (construction details not finalised), with balconies, angled to face across Wigtown Bay; design includes wood-burning stoves. No indication of solar panels, heat pumps or outdoor amenities (such as BBQ area). Septic tank and soakaway lower down the same field close behind the wall opposite the Kirk near Croft-an-Righ. Recycling and waste bins immediately beside Bank Street. Roadway to access the site and each chalet, with parking for two cars at each chalet, and a T-layout turning point at the Wigtown Bay end of the development site, with planting down the new boundary beyond the development to separate the field.

Planning portal

As at 9.8.2020, there are 11 public submissions registered. Objections – 8 (including from the Architectural Heritage Society); supporting – 3 (all from outwith the locality). Scottish Water has made submissions, not objecting but pointing out there is a sewerage system running through the application site which creates some restrictions to development in regard to planting, excavation, private sewerage arrangements and storm water handling. Sewerage piping runs along the top of the site, and this is likely to require a clearance of at least 3 m.

Public meeting and submissions to CC

The public meeting on 6.8.2020 had 25 in attendance including the applicant. Representations were entirely opposed to the development. Submissions by email and on facebook have been almost entirely opposed. Contributions overall (including to the preapplication information) total 47 objections and 6 in support. Comm. Councillors have noted that the balance of feeling around the town is overwhelmingly negative about this development, though somewhat supportive of the need for more local holiday accommodation if more appropriately located.

Major issues identified:

The application refers to most of the planning policy areas that are relevant: general policy, economic development, tourism, agricultural land, environment, conservation, and archaeology. It wrongly refers to Wigtown House Hotel as “unoccupied for 15-20 years” and fallen into “a state of disrepair”. It fails to note that Wigtown House Hotel is a B Listed Building which, in fact, is inhabited and although not functioning as a hotel, operated a bistro until less than one year ago. The design statement makes poorly substantiated assertions that the development does not conflict with environmental and heritage policy, and this forms the major element of public concern about the proposal. The design statement also refers to Wigtown as a village.

General policy

At its most basic level, planning policy aims to support applications except where they run counter to specific elements of planning policy. In some cases, an application will be in keeping with some aspects of planning policy but counter to others. A judgment on the balance of policy compliance must be reached in such cases.

The public sewerage system crosses the application site, seemingly in the exact area of the upper three chalets; this runs counter to waste water policy which must be considered significant.

Economic development

D&G Council has overarching policies to support proposals which seek to provide economic benefit to the region. Areas such as tourism are important for the economy of this locality, and we should be supportive in principle of developments which increase tourist accommodation as this supports Scotland's National Booktown, other tourist attractions, and hospitality and general retail. The unspoilt natural environment, typified by Wigtown Bay Local Nature Reserve, and the built heritage environment are significant elements of the tourist attraction in the area however, and a development which detracts from the built and natural environment is likely to diminish the tourism offering despite increasing tourist accommodation provision.

Agricultural land

The application site is agricultural land which should not be developed, except for specific reasons, such as for agricultural worker accommodation and for diversification of farm businesses. This proposal seeks to add holiday accommodation to the applicant's farming business which could be reasonable as far as this policy applies, were it not to run counter to several other policies.

Environment

The application site is near to and overlooks Wigtown Bay Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The development would interfere with one of the primary points from which people can view the LNR. The current adopted Local Development Plan explicitly aims to protect the land on the eastern edge of Wigtown in recognition of its visual and historical sensitivity. In our opinion, the sharp transition on Bank Street from urban to rural, and the broad and uncluttered view across the bay from the application site, are distinctive and historic features of the town, which are important factors in the attractiveness of the area for both residents and visitors. The proposal includes bin areas at the entrance to the site off Bank Street which will further detract from the appearance of the environment.

Conservation

The application site is entirely within Wigtown's designated area of outstanding conservation importance reflecting the town's historical status as a Royal Burgh and as County Town. Developments within the conservation must be sympathetic to the area's heritage and seek to enhance it; this proposal is not sensitive and would diminish its conservation value. The site is immediately adjacent to Wigtown House Hotel and the length of Bank Street. It is next door to Croft-an-Righ. It is immediately opposite St Machute's ruined parish church and the current Wigtown Parish Church. It is directly opposite Wigtown War Memorial. Siting wooden chalets with composite roofing, on stilts, with a large waste/recycling bin area beside the road would be completely out of keeping with the historical and cultural character of the area.

Listed buildings

Wigtown House Hotel and its walled garden are B listed. St Machute's ruined church and Wigtown Parish Church are both B listed. The setting of Listed buildings is an important consideration in assessing planning applications, and this proposal is out of keeping with important built heritage. In particular, the proposal includes three chalets immediately beside Wigtown House Hotel.

Archaeology

The mediaeval Dominican Friary at Wigtown was in the vicinity of the application site. Archaeological evidence of the Friary is limited but the field would certainly have been Friary land, at least. It is possible that significant archaeology exists on site which this development could harm.

Recommendation

The Comm. Council's role as a statutory consultee on planning is to ascertain and express the views of the community. For many applications, we take no active part. For some, there are clearly important comments to make based on policy and experience. For a few, there is considerable public interest. This application falls into that last category. Based on public sentiment, rooted in the planning issues identified which on balance demonstrate that the proposal is out of keeping with planning policy, **it is proposed that the Comm. Council submits a formal objection to this application**, citing the issues highlighted above as the grounds for objection. There is also a risk that, if approved, this development could establish a precedent for further undermining of protections of natural and built heritage locally.

UPDATES

20/0221/LBC PARTIALLY LATE (RETROSPECTIVE) ALTERATIONS INCLUDING REPLACEMENT WINDOWS, ERECTION OF EXTENSION AND INTERNAL ALTERATIONS TO CHANGE TO DWELLING-HOUSE. RED LION INN, 4 NORTH MAIN STREET, WIGTOWN. Restoring disused building in sympathy with its C listed status and the conservation area, and bringing back into residential use. Mainly retrospective.

UPDATE: no CC submission made. Application disappeared from planning site but now back on line, and decision expected August 2020 according to planners.

19/1906/LBC INSTALLATION OF 14 L.E.D. FLOODLIGHTS TO COUNTY BUILDINGS FACADE. WIGTOWN. D&GC application to install floodlights around the façade of the B listed County Buildings, which replaces old, defunct floodlights, and will be lower energy. Missing information provided early June 2020.

UPDATE: Nil. *Supportive submission put in by CC per January meeting.*

19/1383/FUL ERECTION OF 43 DWELLING-HOUSES AND ASSOCIATED ACCESS, LANDSCAPING, ETC. OLD SHOWFIELD, SOUTHFIELD PARK, WIGTOWN. Application updates earlier ones with additional information about roadways and large vehicle access. Water, waste water and storm water handling remain unclear, with potential flooding impact still not adequate for Roads Dept. but some additional info. submitted in January 2020; this included removing some boundary wall to create driveways from Lilico Loaning but LDP states that "original stone boundary walls include medieval carving within their fabric" and should be retained. Scottish Water unable to confirm adequate sewerage handling capacity and request fuller engagement. Little detail on how affordable housing element is proposed to operate. *D&GC Education requires £1744.93 levy per house.* {NOTE: Robin, Kevin, Nick, Jak have conflict of interest in this application through W&BCI.}

UPDATE: No further update since January 2020, except for recent Police activity in ruins on site and derelict building now demolished (without formal permission). *CC made no submission reflecting divided opinions in community.* Note that previously D&GC has declined this application after several months without receiving requested further information.

ACTIONS SOUGHT

1. Note report.
2. Decision on Blacks' Field submission.

Nick Walker, 9.8.2020