



**Machrihanish Airbase**  
**Development Brief**

# **Argyll and Bute Council – Development Services**

## **Machrihanish Airbase**

### **Development Brief**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) has been prepared in recognition of the broad redevelopment opportunities now afforded at the former RAF/NATO airbase at Machrihanish. The former airbase is one of the most significant development/redevelopment opportunities within Argyll and Bute. By virtue of its scale and its prominent and accessible location, the site is considered to be of regional importance. It is considered to have the potential to deliver significant economic, environmental and social benefits and, as such, considerable care will need to be exercised in any development/redevelopment of the asset to maximise these benefits.

#### **2. Purpose**

- 2.1 The purpose of this brief is to set out in broad terms the planning requirements for any subsequent re-use of the assets within the base and to ensure that the economic development potential of such assets is used as far as possible to support the local economy and to maintain and provide additional jobs for the local population. This brief supplements the policies contained within the Argyll and Bute Development Plan (Structure and Local Plan). As Supplementary Guidance, this brief will be a material consideration in the determination of development proposals for the Machrihanish site. The brief will further inform the detailed 'masterplan' that will be prepared in order to demonstrate how any new proposals will address the requirements of both the Development Plan and the needs of the local area.

#### **3. Site Location, Description and Disposition**

- 3.1 The former airbase was initially closed as an operational RAF facility in 1994. Since then the base has remained as an operational asset for NATO use and has been used intermittently for NATO exercises and has in recent times been effectively mothballed. The MOD has now taken the decision to formally close the facility and has appointed the consultants Drivers Jonas to develop a disposal strategy for the base. This strategy will provide an audit of the existing facilities/buildings, the identification of strategic issues, the evaluation of strategic options

culminating in the development of a preferred strategy linked to an economic impact analysis.

- 3.2 The airbase is located some 5 kilometres to the east of Campbeltown on low-lying ground. The site extends to an area of approximately 423 hectares (see attached map) and contains a main runway which is 3,000 metres in length. In addition to the main runway there are a number of associated dispersal areas and a large number of buildings, including hangars, accommodation blocks, mess facilities and other buildings and structures associated with its former military use. Perhaps the most important of these assets is a large Gaydon Hanger and aircraft refuelling and storage facilities. The existing buildings on the site vary in age, type and use comprising original barrack accommodation from the 1940's, newer warehouse and administration blocks from the 1980's and more recent ancillary buildings to accommodate the fuel storage facilities. It should be noted however that as these buildings were constructed by the MOD most, if not all of them do not have the benefit of planning or building warrant consents. They're will be a need to undertake an audit of all existing buildings to establish their lawful use under the Town and Country Planning Use Classes (Scotland) Order 1997.

- 3.3 The base has relatively good access links being located close to the main Glasgow/Campbeltown road – A83 and there is a port facility available at Campbeltown which is 4Km to the east. The northern part of the airbase currently has two road access points. One provides access to the main base; the other provides access solely for the wind turbine tower manufacturing plant operated by Welcon. The southern half of the site is accessed by a single-track road and weight restricted bridge.

Currently Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd operate the civilian air terminal from the base which has its own dedicated access and air terminal building. The continued use of the runway for this 'lifeline' air service from Glasgow is considered vital for the local community, and any alternative uses contained within the base should not jeopardise the operational requirements of this service and should ideally help to support the continued presence of this service for the local community. The requirement to protect Airports is reflected in the Local Plan Policy LP TRAN 7 – Safeguarding of Airports. It is recognised that there may be a requirement to shorten the length of the existing runway, and this must not have any detrimental impact on the operational capacity of the existing civil air service.

- 3.4 Following the initial closure of the base, the service personnel housing that is located at the north-eastern boundary of the site has subsequently been sold-off to a property developer and most of the housing is now occupied as permanent or holiday homes. This housing is located outwith the perimeter fencing of the base itself and does not form part of the assets that are to be disposed of.

- 3.5 More recently, Vestas the Danish wind turbine manufacturer, with the assistance of HIE Argyll and the Islands, established a new factory for the fabrication of turbine towers and nacelles. This factory together with external storage areas is located within the base itself and currently employs approximately 100 persons most of whom are local. The establishment of this manufacturing facility has helped soften the blow of the loss of other jobs within Campbeltown, most recently Jaeger the clothing manufacturer has closed with the loss of approximately 120 jobs. This of course follows on from a long downturn in the economy of Campbeltown and South Kintyre with retractions in the primary sectors of agriculture and fishing which have sustained the economy of the town and the wider Kintyre peninsula.
- 3.6 The turbine tower manufacturing plant has recently changed ownership, and the new operator – WELCON has announced plans for a significant expansion of the facility which it is anticipated will support an increased workforce of up to 200. As a pre-requisite for this investment, the Council is currently working-up proposals for infrastructure improvements to the road network and pier facilities in Campbeltown to allow the transit of the proposed longer turbine towers by sea rather than by road.

#### **4. Policy Framework**

- 4.1 It is essential that the former airbase is developed in a manner that is in full accordance with the national and local planning policy framework. This supplementary guidance together with the masterplan and any subsequent development proposals must comply with, and reflect the overall principles and specific provisions as set out by the national and local policy frameworks.
- 4.2 The following summarises the general and site specific policies that apply;

##### **National Policy**

The Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)\*

SPP2	Economic Development
SPP7	Planning and Flooding
SPP15	Planning for Rural Development
SPP17	Planning for Transport

Planning Advice Notes (PAN's)

PAN 33	Development of Contaminated Land
PAN 68	Design Statements
PAN 69	Planning and Building Standards Advice on Flooding
PAN 83	Masterplanning

PAN 60	Planning for Natural Heritage
PAN 56	Planning for Noise
PAN 65	Planning and Open Space
PAN 61	Planning and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems
PAN 75	Planning for Transport
PAN 79	Water and Drainage

\* It should be noted that SPP's are currently under review by the Scottish Government, although no substantive policy change is anticipated.

## Local Policy

A number of policies in the Development Plan are of relevance to any redevelopment/development of the Machrihanish site as follows;

### Argyll and Bute Structure Plan 2002

STRAT SI 1	Sustainable Development
REC SI 3	Argyll Isles Rural Development Area
REC SI 4	Renewable Energy Investment
STRAT CP 1	Coastal Transshipment Development
PROP TRANS 1	Development Control, Transport and Access

### Argyll and Bute Local Plan (This currently at pre-adoption stage)

Policy LP ENV 1	Development Impact on the General Environment
LP ENV 2	Development Impact on Biodiversity
LP ENV 3	Development Impact on European and Ramsar sites
LP ENV 5	Development impact on SSSI's
LP ENV 6	Development Impact on Habitats and Species
LP ENV 8	Development Impact on Local Nature Conservation Sites
LP ENV 12	Water Quality and Environment
LP ENV 16	Development Impact on Scheduled Ancient Monuments
LP ENV 17	Development Impact on Sites of Archaeological Importance
LP ENV 19	Development Setting, Layout and Design
LP BUS 2	Business and Industry Proposals in the Countryside Development Control Zones
LP RET 4	Retail Development within Countryside Development Control Zones
LP BAD 1	Bad Neighbour Development
LP TOUR 1	Tourist Facilities and Accommodation, including Static and Touring Caravans
LP SERV 1	Private Sewage Treatment Plants and Wastewater (i.e. drainage) Systems
LP SERV 2	Incorporation of Natural Features/Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
LP SERV 3	Drainage Impact Assessment (DIA)

LP SERV 4	Water Supply
LP SERV 5	Waste Related Development and Waste Management in Developments
LP SERV 7	Contaminated Land
LP SERV 8	Flooding and Land Erosion – The Risk Framework for Development
LP TRAN 2	Development and Public Transport Accessibility
LP TRAN 3	Special Needs Access Provision
LP TRAN 4	New and Existing, Public Roads and Private Access Regimes
LP TRAN 5	Off-site Highway Improvements
LP TRAN 6	Vehicle Parking Provision
LP TRAN 7	Safeguarding of Airports
LP REC 1	Sport, Leisure and Recreation
LP PG 1	Planning Gain

- 4.3 The whole of the airbase is currently identified as an Area for Action (AFA 14/7) in the Argyll and Bute Local Plan where the nature of action identified is

*“Strategic: Redevelopment and inward investment opportunities”.*

This gives general support for a wide range of activities recognising the current fragility of the economy in South Kintyre and the potential economic development opportunities afforded by the airbase. The extent of the AFA is shown on the attached plan, and effectively encompasses the whole of the former military facility with the exclusion of the former service personnel housing.

- 4.4 The development plan supports proposals for employment uses subject to:-

- The proposals forming part of a comprehensive land-use and access plan for the site as a whole.
- Any new uses within the site not compromising the existing civil airport facility.
- Any new uses within the site do not adversely affect the residential amenity of the adjacent housing or the tourism/economic potential of the adjacent golf course development.
- The nature conservation and any heritage value of the site is sufficiently safeguarded.

- 4.5 Clearly the key asset is the airfield itself and some form of commercial/civilian use would be encouraged as it would secure the use of the existing assets and provide long-term maintenance of the runway and refuelling facilities and provide a sustainable basis for the continuing presence of HIAL.

Such commercial/civil air uses might include aircrew training facilities, aircraft maintenance and repair, aircraft storage or air freight distribution and storage.

4.6 There is also scope for the expansion of the wind turbine manufacturing facilities to include other forms of renewable energy manufacture and discussions are currently on-going in this respect. The base, together with the port/harbour facilities within Campbeltown now offers a unique location to site renewable energy manufacturing and maintenance facilities to service Scotland's western seaboard where there is recognised capacity for off-shore wind, and marine renewable energy generation.

4.7 Given the existing manufacturing use represented by Vestas, other manufacturing uses would not be discouraged, particularly if existing buildings/structures could be adapted for re-use.

Other potential uses might be based on tourism, conference, recreation or other manufacturing, distribution/storage.

There may be some very limited opportunities for further residential development particularly where it can be demonstrated that it is associated with employment activity within the former airbase.

4.8 In all cases, proposals must follow the principles of sustainable development, mixed use and high quality design. In terms of sustainable development, key supportive objectives are as follows;

- Prioritising the redevelopment of previously developed land or utilising derelict or under utilised buildings, before seeking to develop Greenfield sites.
- Encourage good quality design throughout the site, minimising energy use where practicable, improving the quality of the existing environment, attracting additional complementary business or investment and reinforcing a sense of place.

4.9 In the preparation of the masterplan and the submission of any subsequent planning applications, developers will be required to demonstrate that the foregoing policies are satisfied and that the overall principles of the development plan are addressed.

4.10 In doing so, proposals will be expected to be supplemented by a transport assessment, and where required development proposals may be supported by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

4.11 It is anticipated that subject to the scale of any development/redevelopment proposals, there will be a requirement for planning gain. It is anticipated that this would most likely involve off-site

road/junction improvements. However at this stage it is not possible to quantify the extent of any planning gain that may be required.

#### 4.12 **Known Constraints**

It is understood that the services for the airbase (sewerage and water supplies) may require to be upgraded to meet the demands of any alternative uses proposed for the site.

There are no Listed Buildings or Ancient Monuments within the site boundaries although there are Monuments outwith but close to the site. Nevertheless, any new development proposals may be subject to a requirement for archaeological investigation work.

The site is bounded to the immediate west by a large SSSI which covers the Machrihanish and Westport beach/dune systems.

There is a site of Local Nature Conservation interest that straddles the site boundary at its east/north side.

There may be contaminated land within the site and this will require further investigation.

#### 4.13 **Key Consultees**

Argyll and Bute Council – Development Services  
– Roads & Amenity Services  
- Operational Services (Environmental Health)

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)  
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA)  
Historic Scotland  
Scottish Water  
Civil Aviation Authority  
Community Council(s)

### 5. **Access**

5.1 Development of the masterplan must also include reference to proposed access arrangements and how access will be provided to different parts of the site from the existing public road network.

### 6. **Unacceptable Uses**

6.1 Retail:

The use of land/buildings for retail uses would be resisted other than small scale shops that might serve the day to day needs of the existing housing or other tourism development within the site. This in



accordance with Local Plan Policies LP RET 1; LP RET 2; LP RET 3 and LP RET 4.

## 6.2 Housing:

The land within the boundaries of the existing airbase is zoned as sensitive countryside in the Argyll and Bute Local Plan. Local Plan policy LP HOU 1 – General Housing Development, sets out the framework for housing development within the settlements and countryside development control zones.

Within the Sensitive Countryside designation the policy allows for only small scale housing development in close proximity to existing buildings in infill, rounding-off, change of use of buildings and re-development sites.

Given the nature and location of the Machrihanish airbase, it is not generally considered suitable for housing development particularly when there are identified housing allocations within Campbeltown. However, there may be some longer term potential for additional residential use adjacent to the existing residential areas and where residential accommodation is associated with employment needs.

## 7. Masterplan - Implementation

71 This SPG is intended to help guide the preparation of a masterplan for the whole of the site which will in turn be used to assess specific development proposals for the site.

7.2 This document provides a policy context and establishes broad principles as set out in the Council's Development Plan. It is expected that the masterplan will translate these principles into a more detailed framework. This framework is intended to ensure that a comprehensive, sustainable, integrated, high quality development is achieved in order to address physical, economic, social and environmental issues together with a detailed programme and means of implementation.

7.3 In particular the masterplan should:

- Explain how it complies with this development brief.
- Establish a plan form for the site with details on how it links with the immediate and wider surroundings.
- Identify key development parcels, land use types and mixes, public realm and vehicular/pedestrian routes.
- Provide as far as practicable, a sustainable access and transport strategy.

- Specify appropriate car parking and servicing requirements.
- Establish relevant design criteria and principles, having regard to scale, height, massing and external appearance of the built form and public realm.
- Establish principles of sustainability that will be utilised.
- Set out how the public will be consulted during the preparation of the masterplan.
- Provide a detailed phasing strategy, including the cessation of any existing uses or the demolition of existing buildings and structures.
- Identify the long-term management of the base, the partners involved, and how the masterplan will be implemented.
- Set out a timescale for the review of the masterplan.

## **8. Conclusion**

The designation of the Machrihanish airbase as an Area for Action in the Argyll and Bute Local Plan was done specifically to provide a strategic planning basis to encourage and allow new economic uses to be found for the assets within the airbase. It is anticipated that any new uses will provide additional new employment opportunities to support the economy of South Kintyre and to protect and enhance the assets within the airbase facility, subject to national and local planning policy frameworks as set out above.

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