

PROPOSED ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2020 RESPONSE FORM

As part of the production of the Local Development Plan, a 'Main Issues Report' was published in January 2019. The responses from these consultations have helped to inform the content of the Proposed Local Development Plan ("the Proposed Plan").

The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan will direct decision-making on land-use planning issues and planning applications in Aberdeenshire for the 10-year period from 2021 to 2031. The Proposed Plan was agreed by Aberdeenshire Council in March 2020 as the settled view of the Council. However, the Proposed Plan will be subjected to an independent examination and is now open for public comment.

This is your opportunity to tell us if anything should be changed in the Proposed Plan, and why.

When writing a response to the Proposed Plan it is important to specifically state the modification(s) that you would wish to see to the Plan.

This is the only remaining opportunity to comment on the Proposed Plan. The reasons for any requested changes will be analysed and reported to Scottish Ministers. They will then appoint a person known as a Reporter to conduct a public examination of the Proposed Plan, focusing particularly on any unresolved issues and the changes sought.

Ministers expect representations (or responses) to be concise (no more than 2000 words) and accompanied by limited supporting documents. It is important to ensure that all of the information that you wish to be considered is submitted during this consultation period as there is no further opportunity to provide information, unless specifically asked.

Please email comments to ldp@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or send this form to reach us by 17 July 2020.

We recommend that you keep a copy of your representation for your own records.



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If you wish to contact one of the area planning offices, please call 01467 534333 and ask for the relevant planning office or email planning@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.



Please use this form to make comments on the Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2020. If you are making comments about more than one topic it would be very helpful if you could fill in **a separate response form for each issue you wish to raise**.

Please email or send the form to reach us by 17 July 2020 at the following address:

Post: Planning Policy Team, Infrastructures Services
Aberdeenshire Council, Woodhill House, Westburn Road, ABERDEEN, AB16 5GB

Email: ldp@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Please refer to our **Privacy Notice** at the end of this form for details of your rights under the Data Protection Act.

YOUR DETAILS

Title:	Mr
First Name:	Adam
Surname:	Henry
Date:	30/07/2020
Postal Address:	Savills ██████████ ██████████ ██████████
Postcode:	██████████
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Are you happy to receive future correspondence only by email? Yes No

Are you responding on behalf of another person? Yes No

If yes who are you representing? **Barratt North Scotland**

Tick the box if you would like to subscribe to the Aberdeenshire LDP eNewsletter:

An acknowledgement will be sent to this address soon after the close of consultation.

YOUR COMMENTS

Please provide us with your comments below. We will summarise comments and in our analysis will consider every point that is made. Once we have done this we will write back to you with Aberdeenshire Council's views on the submissions made. We will publish your name as the author of the comment, but will not make your address public.

Modification that you wish to see (please make specific reference to the section of the Proposed Plan you wish to see modified if possible, for example Section 9, paragraph E1.1):

Modification Section: Appendix 7D – Settlement Statements – Garioch Kirkton of Skene (Page 599-600)

Vision

Remove the sentence:

There has been significant development pressure around Kirkton of Skene in recent years, but the need to preserve the setting and character of the settlement mean that the settlement is not an appropriate location for significant new development and as such no development allocations have been made during the Plan period.

Replace with:

There has been a limited amount of new development around Kirkton of Skene in recent years, but a modest amount of development is required to help sustain the range of important existing services within Kirkton of Skene. An allocation for 45 new homes has been made at Land South West of Old Skene Road. The delivery of additional homes on this well screened site will avoid coalescence with Westhill.

Include:

Allocated Site

OP1: Land South West of Old Skene Road

Allocation: 45 homes

This is a newly allocated site that forms a logical extension of the village. Development should be sympathetic to the character and setting of the settlement, while a landscape buffer on the southern and eastern boundary of the site will provide a robust settlement boundary. It is expected that the site will contribute towards affordable housing in line with Policy H2 Affordable Housing.

Amend:

The Kirkton of Skene inset map on page 600 to reflect the inclusion of Site OP1. The boundary of Site OP1 should replicate the site boundary for Site GR116 shown on the submitted Figure1)

Reason for change:

Key Supporting Documents

Appendix A - Landscape and Visual Appraisal submitted alongside Main Issues Response for Site GR116

Appendix B – Main Issues Report Response Document for Site GR116

Appendix C - Main Issues Report Form for Site GR116

Appendix D – Call For Sites Development Bid - Site GR116

Figure 1 - MIR Landscape and Visual Appraisal - Site GR116

Introduction

Barratt North Scotland (Barratt Homes) object to the exclusion of site GR116 at Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene from the Proposed Plan and seek its inclusion within the Kirkton of Skene settlement boundary as an Opportunity Site (OP) for development of 45 new homes within the first plan period.

This representation must be read in conjunction with, the initial Development Bid (2018) and Main Issue Report (MIR) submissions (Appendices A-D) submitted for site GR116, wider Barratt Homes representations to the Proposed Plan and Homes For Scotland representations, which our clients have contributed to and support.

A comprehensive response to the MIR consultation supported the initial development bid for residential development and illustrated how the site could be successfully delivered as a sympathetic extension to the existing Kesson Gardens development. This included a supporting Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) (Appendix A), which concluded that the site would not impact on the setting of the countryside or listed buildings, would avoid coalescence, and would preserve and enhance the identity, character and setting of Kirkton of Skene. The LVA (Appendix A) confirms that the proposed layout of the residential development safeguards the vista from the east, towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church.

In order to demonstrate the appropriateness of the site for housing, reference is made to notable topics considered within the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of New Allocated Sites and Alternative Bid Sites (April 2020).

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of New Allocated Sites and Alternative Bid Sites (April 2020) – Kirkton of Skene – Alternative Sites – Site GR116

The SEA identifies that the proposals would have neutral effects post mitigation on air, water, soil, biodiversity, material assets and human health, while population is identified as having a positive/neutral effect. We object to the following assessments (SEA assessment provided in italics for reference).

Climate Factors

The development could have a long-term negative impact due to the potential for increased travel requirements (the need to travel long distances to services) and increased emissions.

Barratt Homes do not agree with this assessment based on the scale of development proposed. There are two bus stops around 0.5 miles (5 minute walk) to the west of the site adjacent to the playing fields. These are served by the Stagecoach bus route 218 (between the regional transport interchange in Aberdeen (Union Square) and Alford to the west, via Westhill). The buses pass along the Old Skene Road to the north of the site and in that respect there is scope for a new bus stop within 400m of the site. The availability of these bus routes would reduce reliance on the use of private cars.

The site is within 400m of the village centre and amenities (village shop, village hall, pub, church, primary school and play park) via the core path running westwards along Old Skene Road. Furthermore, there are existing footpaths that link into the village centre from the relatively recent Kesson Gardens development. For reference, these footpaths can be seen on Google Earth. The west most path means that the centre of the village can be accessed directly and safely, without having to use Old Skene Road.

A dedicated off-road pedestrian and cycle core path runs past the frontage of the site and along Old Skene Road and eastwards into Westhill. In addition there are good cycle routes from the site towards the neighbouring settlements to the west, north and south. The viability of the existing facilities in the village is under pressure from a declining population and modest family housing within close proximity will increase the viability of these businesses, which are supported by [REDACTED], who own the land under option to Barratt Homes.

Small parts of the site are at risk from surface water flooding. A flood risk assessment may be required.

It is acknowledged that the indicative SEPA flood map shows some very small areas at risk of surface water flooding on the southern boundary of the site. These areas lie outwith the proposed developable area, demonstrated within LVA Figure 4 (Appendix A) and are incorporated into the proposed landscaping. Notwithstanding, if required a flood risk assessment will be submitted alongside a planning application to demonstrate there are no associated flood risks posed by the development.

As such, rather than having a neutral/negative effect post mitigation, the proposed development would result in a **positive/neutral** effect on climate factors.

Landscape and Cultural Heritage

Given that the landscape and cultural heritage SEA comments consider similar matters, both topics have been considered together.

The landscape experience is likely to change - openness, scale, colour, texture, visual diversity, line, pattern, movement, sound, solitude, naturalness, historical and cultural associations will change.

The submitted LVA (Appendix A) rigorously assessed potential landscape and visual effects to inform the proposed development. It considers that the changes to the landscape experience will be beneficial, the indicative Landscape Development Framework Plan (LDFP) at Figure 4, within Appendix A, illustrates how this can be achieved.

The site lies outwith but adjoining the settlement boundary for Kirkton of Skene in both adopted and proposed LDPs and as such has 'countryside' status. The existing urban/rural interface between settlement and countryside is rather abrupt and relatively weak in that it relies on rear garden boundary features and a post and wire fence with scattered young specimen trees to provide a long term defensible settlement boundary. The existing access from Old Skene Road, 'Kesson Gardens' is a long access road serving 6 houses along its northern side, overlooking the subject site; with a cul-de-sac of 12 houses to the north of this. GR116 is an open field, bound mostly by mature tree belts, the intention has always been to organically develop an additional phase on the southern side of the road, using the existing service infrastructure. The current proposal would constitute a continuation of this street and provide a more meaningful scale of open amenity and play space.

Sensitive landscaping would augment the existing mature tree belts around the site boundaries and former Kirkton House estate, in combination with sensitive planting and green buffer areas. The introduction of these new and enhanced visual and physical features, in conjunction with a new amenity area on the eastern fringes, would create an easily read physical relationship between the developed settlement and the open countryside to the east. Figure 4 of the LVA, within Appendix A, illustrates the landscaping proposals.

Within this context the development of the site would not prejudice the qualities of the countryside nor increase coalescence with Westhill, but rather be seen to strengthen and reinforce the settlement boundary and context of the village.

Development may have a negative impact on the setting of the listed church and graveyard, particularly on views towards the church from the east. Layout, siting and design would need to ensure that this vista remains unchanged. However, given that over a long term, what gets developed becomes part of the landscape, the effects are only likely to have medium-term effects (Landscape SEA comment).

Development of the site may have a negative impact on the setting of the B-listed parish church. Design would need to be carefully to mitigate against any adverse impact (Cultural Heritage SEA comment).

A sensitive residential scheme on the site would not impact the setting of the countryside or listed buildings, with the vista from the east towards the listed Skene Parish Church afforded suitable protection. This would lead to a unique high quality residential development set within a parkland estate setting, which would be readily absorbed into the townscape of the village and wider landscape without any detrimental impacts upon the landscape character, visual amenity and setting of listed buildings. The proposals would avoid coalescence and would preserve the character and setting of Kirkton of Skene.

It is important to note that during the promotion of the site through the last LDP (Site Ref: Ga018), the Council clearly acknowledged within the MIR (2013) that *'the site is well screened by vegetation'*. This same level of screening and associated woodland has not changed, as such the proposals will remain well screened and would not have any negative impact on the nearby listed buildings.

The findings of the submitted LVA have not been challenged by the Council, yet their landscape assessment commentary remains unaltered. Barratt Homes consider that further evidence must be provided by either the Council's Landscape Officer or their

landscape consultant to justify their position and prove the LVA has been appropriately considered.

The above SEA comments (April 2020) regarding the setting of listed buildings in close proximity to the site can be appropriately mitigated through sensitive design, as the Council suggest. Figure 4 of the LVA, illustrates the built form stepped back from Kesson Gardens corridor and introduces a linear area of grassland, framed by some sensitively selected semi-mature specimen tree planting. This would effectively allow a channelled vista to open up towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church and inter-visibility of the church with the wider countryside to the east to be maintained. The alignment of the access road 'Kesson Gardens' was designed for this purpose, Figure 2 of the LVA, and in particular Viewpoint 2 illustrates this point.

Similarly, a linear swathe of grassland and wildflower meadows, planted with woodland and riparian planting would extend from the new park along the southern periphery, and augment existing tree cover on the fringes of the former Kirkton House estate. This would create an attractive green buffer between the setting to the C-listed walled garden and to a lesser degree to the B-listed Kirkton House which is set back into the former estate grounds.

Due to the site's gateway location, the proposal offers a unique opportunity to improve the approach into Kirkton of Skene from the east. Currently, this entrance into the village is not distinguishable and in stark contrast to the western gateway which is signified by lengths of stone walls, gate piers and the West Lodge associated with the former Kirkton House estate. The site's northern boundary is defined by an ancient unmanaged woodland belt and a dilapidated stone wall. These remnant features reflect the historic past and former estate character once prevalent across the setting to Kirkton of Skene. By enhancing and extending these features and with the potential addition of boundary features and formal hedge planting, the site presents a real opportunity to create a highly attractive edge to the village.

By building upon the site's inherent key features such as the stone walls and the strong visual and physical relationship with the urban settlement edge, as well as drawing upon the characteristics of the more secluded woodland context to the immediate north and south, a high quality development would be realised and would be seen to effectively round off the built form to Kirkton of Skene, whilst creating a distinctive place with a strong identity.

In view of the foregoing, not only is the subject site appropriate for the scale of housing proposed in both landscape and visual terms, but it is necessary to the vitality of the village, aligning with the vision set out in the Settlement Statement. On account of the site's low elevation and its direct relationship with the existing urban form which wraps around three of the site's boundaries, development of the site would consolidate the built edge and round off the settlement form, providing a new robust settlement boundary which would prevent issues of coalescence in the long term.

As such, rather than having a neutral/uncertain effect post mitigation, as set out in the SEA assessment, the proposed development would result in a **positive/neutral effect on landscape**.

Furthermore, rather than having a significant negative/neutral effect post mitigation, as set out in the SEA assessment, the proposed development would result in a **positive/neutral effect on cultural heritage**.

Council Approach to Density on Existing and Proposed Allocations

Barratt Homes do not agree with the Councils approach to meet the additional 565 home requirement within Aberdeen Housing Market Area (AHMA), as a result of the recent examination of the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (SDP). Rather than allocating new housing sites, the Council have instead relied upon increasing the density on existing and proposed allocations (not necessarily at the request of the promoter) to deliver additional units required, which will not increase housing delivery. Increasing the numbers of homes on existing sites and proposed allocations where not requested by the promoter will only serve to push these additional units to the end of the build period, or not to be built at all, as these additional units will not have been subject to site-specific assessments.

Conclusions

Barratt Homes have an option with landowners [REDACTED] to promote site GR116 for residential purposes and thereafter develop the land for the second phase of their Kesson Gardens development. This demonstrates developer commitment to the settlement and adds to the overall effectiveness of the site, which is a key consideration for Aberdeenshire Council in assessing housing sites.

The LVA concludes that the site would not impact on the setting of the countryside or listed buildings, would avoid coalescence, and would preserve and enhance the identity, character and setting of Kirkton of Skene and the Council have not disputed this assessment. It further confirms that the proposed layout of the residential development safeguards the vista from the east, towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church.

The delivery of 45 new homes will help sustain the range of important existing services within Kirkton of Skene, supplying new customers to the shop and pub to ensure they continue to make a positive contribution to the village community in the long term. In areas of 'intermediate accessibility and pressure for development', SPP requires 'plans (to) be tailored to local circumstances, provide a sustainable network of settlements and a range of policies that provide for additional housing requirements, economic development, and the varying proposals that may come forward, while taking account of the overarching objectives and other elements of the plan' (para. 78). The LVA (Appendix A) demonstrates that this site is self-contained within the landscape and already benefits from the access road and service connections required, as a second phase of the existing development.

Barratt Homes do not agree with the Councils approach to meet the additional homes required following the examination of the Aberdeen City and Shire SDP. As explained, increasing the density on existing sites and proposed allocations will not result in more homes being built.

The submitted representation clearly demonstrates the effectiveness and deliverability of the site and concludes that the site is suitable for inclusion within the Proposed Local Development Plan for residential use.

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Your information is being collected to use for the following purposes:

- To provide public comment on the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. The data on the form will be used to inform Scottish Ministers and individual(s) appointed to examine the Proposed Local Development Plan 2020. It will inform the content of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021.

Your information is:

Being collected by Aberdeenshire Council	X
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The Legal Basis for collecting the information is:

Personal Data	
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Where the Legal Basis for processing is either Performance of a Contract or Legal Obligation, please note the following consequences of failure to provide the information:

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Your information will be shared with the following recipients or categories of recipient:

Members of the public are being given this final opportunity to comment on the Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. The reasons for any changes that the Council receives will be analysed and reported to Scottish Ministers. They will then appoint a person to conduct a public examination of the Proposed Plan, focusing particularly on the unresolved issues raised and the changes sought.

Your name and respondent identification number (provided to you by Aberdeenshire Council on receipt of your submission) will be published alongside a copy of your

completed response on the Proposed Local Development Plan website (contact details and information that is deemed commercially sensitive will not be made available to the public).

In accordance with Regulation 22 of the Town and Country (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 where the appointed person determines that further representations should be made or further information should be provided by any person in connection with the examination of the Proposed Plan the appointed person may by notice request that person to make such further representations or to provide such further information.

Your information will be transferred to or stored in the following countries and the following safeguards are in place:

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The retention period for the data is:

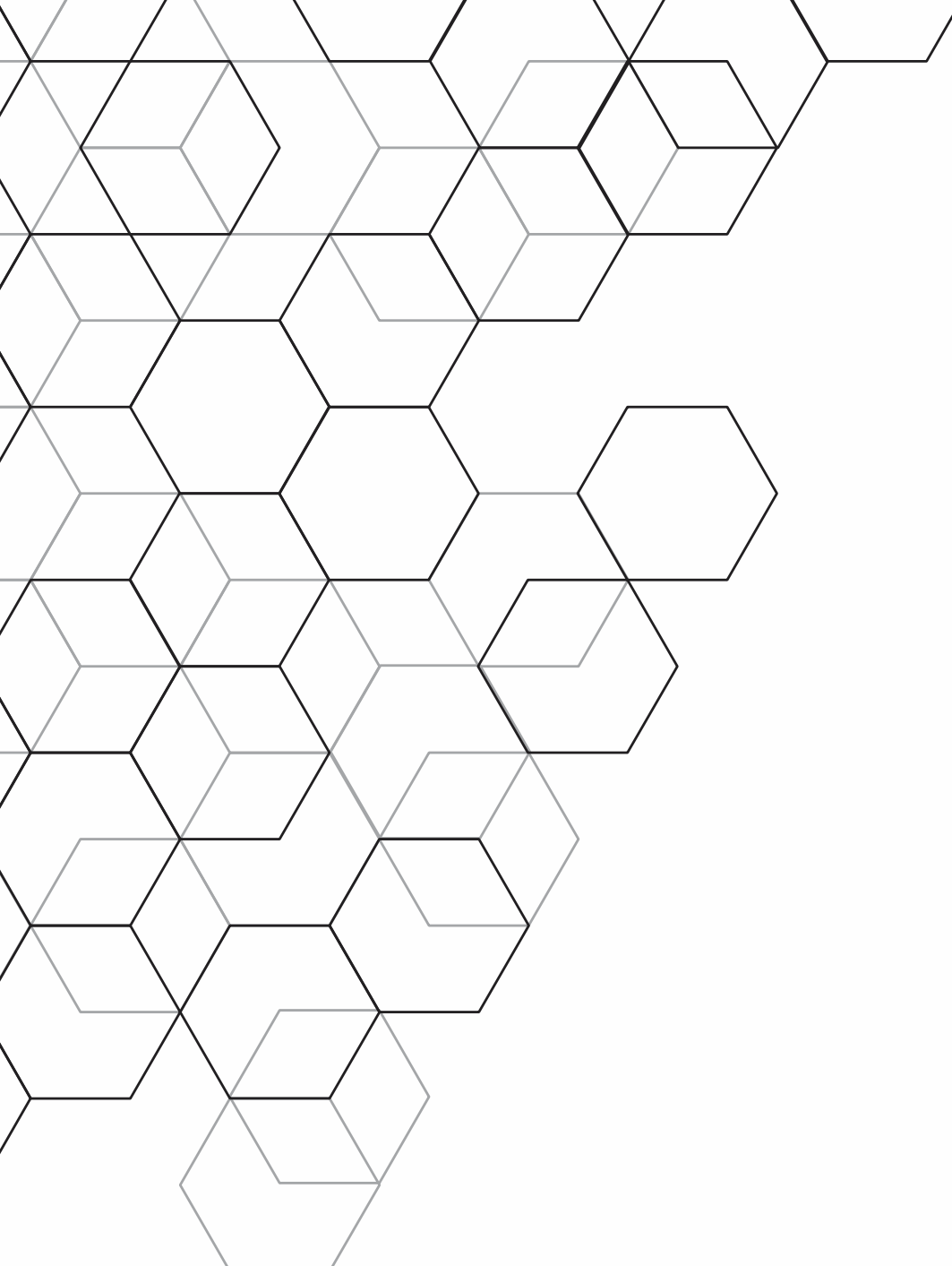
Aberdeenshire Council will only keep your personal data for as long as is needed. Aberdeenshire Council will retain your response and personal data for a retention period of 5 years from the date upon which it was collected. After 5 years Aberdeenshire Council will review whether it is necessary to continue to retain your information for a longer period. A redacted copy of your submission will be retained for 5 years beyond the life of the Local Development Plan 2021, possibly until 2037.

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Landscape and Visual Appraisal

future housing development on the
land at old skene road, kirkton of skene



CONTENTS PAGE

1	Introduction	page 1
2	Methodology	page 1
3	Site Context	page 4
4	Potential Landscape Impacts and Their Effects	page 6
5	Potential Visual Impacts and Their Effects	page 10
6	Main Issues Report – Assessment of Site GR116	page 12
7	Conclusion	page 14

Figures

Figure 1 Planning Policy and Landscape Context

Figure 2 Photographic Viewpoints 1 – 3

Figure 3 Photographic Viewpoints 4 – 6

Figure 4 Indicative Landscape Development Framework

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

1 Introduction

- 1.1 VLM Landscape Design Ltd has been appointed by Barratt Homes North Scotland to carry out an assessment of landscape and visual effects likely to arise from a future housing development on the land to the south of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene. This Landscape and Visual Appraisal forms part of a development bid for the land to be included in the forthcoming Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021. The Main Issues Report (MIR), published on 14 January 2019, identifies the land at the Old Skene Road as 'GR116', (referred to as 'the Site' hereafter).
- 1.2 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) describes the existing environment, the landscape character and visual amenity of the Site area which is located on the south-eastern fringes of the village of Kirkton of Skene. The LVA then appraises the predicted impacts that a future residential development may have in terms of its effects on views (i.e. visual impact), on the physical structure and on the aesthetic character of the landscape and townscape across the wider setting.
- 1.3 **Figure 1 Planning Policy and Landscape Context** illustrates the geographical location of the Site, its relationship to the existing settlement form of the village as well as the planning context and the Site's relationship with other adjoining land uses.

2 Methodology

- 2.1 This appraisal has been undertaken in line with current guidance contained in the '**Guidelines for Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition**' (*GLVIA 3*), published by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in association with the Landscape Institute; and, based on guidelines and principles described in *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002), published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage).
- 2.2 The methodology comprised an initial desk top study of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and planning documents, a site survey in January 2019 to 'ground-truth' desk top findings, followed by an analysis of the data and assessment of potential landscape and visual impacts. Existing mapping, legislation, policy documents and other written, graphic and digital data relating to the proposals was reviewed.
- 2.3 The approach taken reflects the need to identify and understand the following:
- the character of the landscape and townscape across the site context and its ability to accommodate change;
 - the visual relationship between the site and the residential setting of Kirkton of Skene and the wider landscape setting.
- 2.4 The aim of this appraisal is to identify and evaluate potential effects arising from a future residential development. The level of effect is assessed through a combination of two considerations – the sensitivity of the landscape and townscape character and visual amenity (views) of the receptor; and the magnitude of effect upon the receptor that will result from the proposed development.

2.5 There is no requirement for a formal Environmental Assessment to support this Assessment. In line with current guidance contained in GLVIA 3 for non EIA Landscape and Visual Appraisals such as this, the terms ‘significant’ and ‘not significant’ have not been used. However, it is important to set out the grading of the scale of the potential impacts and based on detailed information available regarding the nature of future development, the scale, duration and permanence of the change and the size of the resource/area affected. The following criteria (adapted from GLVIA 3) is used.

Landscape Sensitivity and Magnitude of Effect

2.6 Sensitivity of the landscape depends both on its intrinsic quality and explicit value and, on its susceptibility to the type of change proposed.

2.7 The criteria for **landscape sensitivity** to change are summarised as follows:

- **High:** An area of highly valued landscape with strong structure and positive character, which is considered vulnerable to small degrees of change;
- **Moderate:** An area with a well-defined landscape character with positive qualities which may however, have suffered some degradation or erosion. Sensitivity will be diminished and change more likely to be accommodated; and,
- **Low:** An area of generally poor landscape character with few positive and valued features. Change will be a positive contribution to the landscape.

2.8 The criteria for **magnitude of effect on the landscape** are summarised below.

Table 1: Criteria for Landscape Magnitude of Effect

Level	Definition of Magnitude
High	Total loss of, or major alteration to, key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape and/or introduction of elements considered to be totally uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Post development character and composition of the baseline landscape resource will be fundamentally changed.
Medium	Partial loss of, or alteration to, one or more key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Post development character and composition of the baseline landscape resource will be partially, but noticeably changed.
Low	Minor loss of, or alteration to, one or more key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape and/or introduction of elements that may not be characteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Post development character and composition of the baseline landscape resource will be noticeably changed but the underlying character of the baseline landscape will be similar to the pre-development character.
Negligible	Very minor loss of, or alteration to, key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape. Change to the landscape character will barely, if at all,

	be distinguishable.
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Visual Receptor Sensitivity and Magnitude of Effect

2.9 As with impacts on the character of the landscape, the impact on visual amenity is a function of the magnitude of effect and the sensitivity to change. Sensitivity refers to viewer sensitivity and depends upon the following:

- The length of viewing time e.g. a local resident with prolonged viewing opportunities will be more sensitive than a passer-by;
- Context of the view e.g. a viewer with an existing view of industrial structures will be less sensitive than a viewer with rural views; and,
- Distance of the viewpoint/receptor from the development and duration of effect.

2.10 The criteria for **Visual Receptor sensitivity** are summarised below:

- **High:** users of outdoor recreational facilities including strategic recreational footpaths, cycle routes or rights of way, whose attention may be focused on the landscape; important landscape features with physical, cultural/historic attributes; views from principal settlements; visitors to beauty spots and picnic areas.
- **Medium:** Other footpaths, people travelling through or past the landscape on roads, train lines or other transport routes; views from passenger ferries and cruisers, views from minor settlements.
- **Low:** People engaged in outdoor sports or recreation whose attention may be focused on their work/activity rather than an appreciation of the wider landscape.
- **Negligible:** Views from heavy industrialised areas or where direct views of the development are severely restricted and/or distant.

2.11 The criteria for magnitude of visual change are summarised in the table below:

Table 2: Criteria for Visual Magnitude of Effect

Level	Definition of Magnitude
High	Highly noticeable change, affecting most key characteristics and dominating the experience of the landscape. The introduction of incongruous development. A high proportion of the view is affected and the change is dominant.
Medium	Noticeable, partial change to a proportion of the landscape affecting some key characteristics and the experience of the landscape. The introduction of some uncharacteristic elements. Some of the view is affected and the change is conspicuous.
Low	Minor change affecting some characteristics and the experience of the landscape to an extent. The introduction of elements which are not uncharacteristic. Little of the view is affected but the change is apparent.
Negligible	Little perceptible change. No discernible effect upon the view and the change is inconspicuous.

Level of Effects

- 2.12 The level of effect of any identified landscape or visual receptor has been assessed as Major, Moderate, Minor or Negligible. These categories have been determined by consideration of viewpoint/visual receptor or landscape sensitivity and predicted magnitude of effect with the following table used as a guide only.

Table 3: Correlation of Sensitivity and Magnitude of Effect

	Landscape and Visual Sensitivity			
Magnitude of Change	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	Major	Major - moderate	Moderate	Moderate-minor
Medium	Major-moderate	Moderate	Moderate-minor	Minor
Low	Moderate	Moderate-minor	Minor	Minor-None
Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	None

- 2.13 This matrix is not used as a prescriptive tool and the methodology and analysis of potential effects at any particular location must take account of professional judgement. Occasionally, the analysis may not reflect the effects predicted by the grid.

- 2.14 The following tables provide a definition of the level of landscape and visual effects.

Table 4: Definition of Landscape and Visual Effects

Level	Definition of Magnitude
Major	The proposed development would entirely change the character of the landscape and the appearance of the view for a long time or permanently.
Moderate	The proposed development would introduce a noticeable difference to the landscape and within the view.
Minor	The proposed development would introduce a perceptible change to the receiving landscape characteristics and views.
Negligible - None	The proposed development would introduce very little to no discernible effect and may be difficult to differentiate from the surrounding landscape characteristics and from its surroundings within the view.

3 Site Context

Location

- 3.1 The Site is located on the south-eastern fringes of the small village of Kirkton of Skene, within the Garioch area of Aberdeenshire. The village lies approximately 1 km to the west of the large town of Westhill with a number of smaller villages and hamlets scattered across the wider agricultural landscape. The Site is strategically well-placed located to the south of the Old Skene Road and the busy arterial route of the A944

runs parallel to the Old Skene Road in close proximity to the south of the village. The A944 links to the new AWPR further to the east of Westhill.

Local Context

- 3.2 The small farming village developed around the Kirkton of Skene Parish Church within the core of the village where there is also a village shop, village hall, a pub, a play park and a large area of hard standing utilised as a car park. The West Lodge, dovecot and stone gate pier features demarcating the entrance into the former Kirkton House Estate are located to the south of the parish church adding to the built forms within the core and visually reinforcing the entrance into the village from the south and west. The Old Skene Road extends on an east-west axis from Westhill and forms the main spine to the village, looping around the 'core' and continuing westwards to Skene School, located beyond the fringes of the village. The B979 dissects the village on a broad north-south axis and joins the Old Skene Road for a short stretch as it loops around the village core and extends further south where it links to the A944. A number of streets branch off the northern side of the main spine road which serve approximately 100 houses. A recent housing enclave comprising approximately 15 new homes has been constructed just to the east of the village centre and served by a new road, Kesson Gardens, which is accessed off the Old Skene Road.
- 3.3 The village benefits from a relatively strong visual enclosure created by strongly rising topography to the north and north-east and extensive mature tree cover including former policy woodlands, woodland belts, ancient woodland, tree belts defining agricultural fields and numerous blocks of mixed plantations. Two former extensively wooded estates, Kirkton House and Easter Skene, effectively demarcate the southern and northern periphery to the village and form a soft backdrop when viewed from the wider setting. In addition to these well-vegetated and wooded grounds, the designated large estate and designed landscape of Dunecht House is located within the wider context to the west. The eastern fringes of this nationally protected Garden and Designed Landscape contains a large freshwater loch, the Loch of Skene, which is located approximately 1km to the west of the village, at its nearest point.
- 3.4 The former Kirkton House Estate provides the immediate context to the south of the Site where partly ancient woodland belts wrap around the periphery to the estate and extend around the Site's southern, western and northern boundaries. The driveway to the estate defines the southern boundary to the Site, extending from the West Lodge on Old Skene Road and through the estate grounds to the East Lodge located at the entrance onto the A944. Built forms from the original estate still exist including the Kirkton House, West Lodge, East Lodge, a walled garden and a dovecot. In more recent years, the estate has been utilised as a care home with additional buildings being constructed. This includes the large built form of Pitcairn Lodge in the southern part of the grounds and a cluster of cottages and a lodge near to the walled garden on the eastern fringes. Kirkton House which is located within the northern part near to the access driveway from the West Lodge was utilised as part of the care home buildings. However, it is no longer in use and currently boarded up.

Site Description

- 3.5 The Site itself comprises a broadly triangular area of land effectively sandwiched between the south-eastern fringes of the village and the mature wooded grounds to the former Kirkton House Estate. The Old Skene Road and a woodland belt define the north-eastern boundary and the former driveway into the Kirkton House grounds from the West Lodge defines the southern boundary. Built form within the core of the village including the West Lodge and cottages, the Parish Church, graveyard, and a new enclave of housing accessed off Kesson Gardens visually enclose the western and north-western part of the Site. In contrast, the south-eastern boundary is open in character defined by some scrub vegetation and a post and wire fence. The Site itself is relatively featureless comprising grassland, rough grassland and some areas of scrub along the southern fringes which extend into the unmanaged woodland belt on the northern side of the former estate driveway. A SUDS basin is located within the southern corner to the Site, near to the walled garden. This whole area including the fringes to the woodland has been unmanaged. As such, large areas of scrub vegetation has established and in conjunction with the deteriorating state of the walled garden and neglected woodland the southern fringes to the Site has an overall abandoned and discordant character.

4 Potential Landscape Impacts and Their Effects

Impacts on Landscape Designations

- 4.1 There are a number of environmental policies relating to the wider setting to the Site and the village, illustrating that the context has a high landscape quality and is noted for its natural, historical and cultural heritage as well as conservation value. A review of the Aberdeenshire LDP has identified a number of landscape designations and policies within the study area. Figure 1 Planning Policy and Landscape Context illustrates the locations of these policies and landscape designations.

Built Heritage

- 4.2 Figure 1 highlights that the study area contains a high number of listed buildings illustrating the rich history and built heritage of the area. Several listed buildings and structures are located in close proximity to the Site: the Parish Church of Skene and Skene graveyard are located adjacent to the western corner of the Site. The church is a Category B listed building, built around 1801, although there has been a church on this site since the 17th century. The graveyard is demarcated by a stone rubble wall which extends along the western boundary to the Site and is Category C listed. The former Kirkton House estate also contains a number of category B listed buildings and structures including the house itself, the dovecot at the western entrance and the walled garden, all dating to the early 19th century. There are also several listed buildings scattered across the surrounding rural landscape to the west and a few listed buildings within the former Easter Skene estate on the northern periphery to the village.

- 4.3 Within this context of high built heritage and architectural merits, the approach to the delivery of a future residential development at this location would place an emphasis on the potential for a high quality scheme which, through the application of an appropriate design philosophy, would be seen to respect the qualities, characteristics and settings to the listed buildings and structures in terms of scale, height, form, alignment and appearance. In this regard, by stepping new built forms away from the southern and western boundaries and introducing a green buffer including areas of woodland and structure planting to reinforce the primary tree cover around the periphery, it is considered development of the Site would not affect the integrity of these listed features. With a managed approach to the enhanced landscape framework, together with carefully sited built forms and the use of high quality boundary treatments, it is considered a development could come forward that would not only visually respect the surrounding built heritage but enhance their settings as well as the local environment.
- 4.4 Inter-visibility from the setting to other listed buildings and structures within the study area are contained by a combination of extensive mature tree cover and the urban form of Kirkton of Skene. As such, the settings to these built heritage features will not be affected by any future development of the Site.
- 4.5 Dunecht House Garden and Designed Landscape is located approximately 850m to the west at its nearest point. The estate covers a large area of land which is densely wooded around the Category A listed house and formal grounds within the western part. A large body of open water, Loch of Skene, occupies the eastern fringes of the GDL surrounded by wet and pine woodland. The loch is also designated as a Local Nature Conservation Site given its importance for breeding and wintering birds. From a visual perspective, due to the extensive wooded grounds combined with intervening tree cover and built form, the visual amenity and integrity of the GDL will not be affected by future development of the Site, nor will development have any impact upon the biodiversity and conservation interests of the Local Nature Conservation Site.

Green Networks

- 4.6 Consistent with the aspirations of the Local Development Plan to contribute to the Green Networks across Aberdeenshire, development of this Site represents an excellent opportunity to enhance and augment existing green networks within and on the fringes of Kirkton of Skene. Through the introduction native species woodland to the edge of the ancient woodland belts and infill planting to augment and increase the age diversity of existing mature tree cover and fragmented habitat corridors can be linked and extended around the Site and beyond.
- 4.7 In tandem with these aspirations to extend habitat corridors and increase biodiversity, development of the Site also provides an opportunity to extend and connect existing areas of green space to new amenity areas. Kirkton of Skene contains three areas of open space which are identified as 'Protected Land' in the Aberdeenshire LDP. The nearest open space is located adjacent to the most northerly corner of the Site. The introduction of an integrated path network would provide a connection between the existing core path network along the Old Skene Road and the core path within the

grounds to the former Kirkton House to the south. Not only will this allow long term permeability of this area but will increase the sense of public access and ensure a circular path network is created with direct links between existing and new areas of open space for use by new residents and the wider community.

Impacts on Landscape Resource

- 4.8 The Site comprises a large field of rough grassland and some areas of scrub vegetation which have begun to establish along the southern periphery and extend into the woodland belt and understorey planting around the northern fringes to the former Kirkton House walled garden. A linear area of managed grassland runs along the northern boundary and contains some scattered and small groups of young tree planting. There are also a few small groups of more established trees along the western boundary.
- 4.9 As a result of future construction of the Site for a small-scale housing development, there would be a loss of a large portion of grassland, limited areas of scrub and small parts of the managed grassland adjacent to Kesson Gardens. Although the Site is surrounded by extensive areas of high natural heritage importance in the form of Loch of Skene LNCS and the extensive mature tree cover and understorey across the Dunecht GDL, and the former Kirkton House and Easter Skene House estates, land cover across the Site itself is not a particularly valuable resource. In addition, there is an abundance of agricultural land and grassland within the wider context encompassing the village and its loss will be negligible.
- 4.10 Although not designated or protected through policy, the mature and ancient woodland belts and mature tree cover which extends around the periphery to the Site and across the former estate grounds to the south form distinct landscape features that support a range of wildlife habitats. The approach to the delivery to a future development would fully acknowledge the importance of these features and recognise that the retention and augmentation of these valuable resources is seen as an important baseline factor to the proper planning of this Site. Future development would not only protect these important landscape resources through effective management as far as practicable but with the introduction of native species based planting to augment and enhance the fringes and a level of ornamental specimen tree and ornamental planting incorporated site-wide this would help to reinforce the sense of structure experienced across the Site area, with benefits to the wider setting and the biodiversity and conservation value could also be increased.
- 4.11 Whilst there will be period of adjustment and change, through careful site planning, development will have a negligible impact on the overall landscape resource in the short term, whilst in the longer term many of the existing landscape features will be enhanced, adding to the overall value of the landscape resource and providing the opportunity for the creation of extended wildlife corridors.
- 4.12 It is judged that the susceptibility to change is *Medium* and the value is *Medium* (*Grassland features – Low; Mature tree cover and scrub – High*). This gives a sensitivity to change rating of *Medium*. The magnitude of effect is assessed to be **Negligible** and the impact on the landscape resource is **Negligible** and the nature of

change is assessed to be **Slight Adverse** during the construction phase. Following completion and once the planting strategy begins to establish, the overall residual effect on the landscape resource is assessed to be **Negligible** and highly **Beneficial**.

Impacts on Landscape Character

- 4.13 Following development, there would be an impact to the local landscape character of the Site and its immediate context, changing from an agricultural field to a high quality residential development set within a parkland setting and framed by an enhanced woodland structure.
- 4.14 In terms of landscape character, the Site falls within the 'Wooded Estates' Landscape Character Type, as classified in the adopted SG Landscape 1: Landscape Character. Appendix 1 of this supporting guidance provides an update to the 'South and Central Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Assessment' published by SNH in 1998. The positive attributes of this rolling lowland hills and valleys landscape include the richness of cultural heritage, the concentration of wooded estates and policy woodlands which create a strong woodland structure to the mixed farmland and pattern of fields. Specifically within the context to the Site, positive features include the ancient wooded belts and mature woodland tree cover associated with the extended former grounds of the former Kirkton House and lengths of stone walls bounding the setting to the listed parish church and graveyard along the Site's western boundary, the walled garden near to the southern boundary and the western gate lodge and listed dovecot located just beyond the south-western corner. The extensive mature wooded grounds of the former Easter Skene estate on the northern edge of the village add to the strong woodland structure and rich and diverse texture which characterises the setting to Kirkton of Skene.
- 4.15 Within this extensively wooded landscape setting almost surrounding the Site and the village, it is considered the local landscape and historic townscape offer many positive attributes that can be drawn into the vision for the Site enabling a pro-active design strategy to be developed. In turn, this would ensure that a new small-scale housing development forms an appropriate addition to the landscape on the urban edge. The numerous well-established landscape components surrounding the Site including the ancient tree belts, mature policy woodlands, small groups of mature trees along the western boundary and line of single newly planted trees scattered along the northern fringes combine with other landscape features across the village to create a strong woodland framework which could readily absorb development. In combination with the rising landform to the north and the extended urban form of the village, the Site is located within a distinct compartment in the landscape.
- 4.16 The sense of scale and form of the woodland areas which have established around the Site's northern, western and southern periphery and wider context to the south and north influence the character of the setting and therefore, a future Masterplan would allow for the introduction of new woodland belts to help enhance this characteristic and in turn, reinforce the sense of structure in this landscape. Particular attention would be given to the eastern fringes where new built form would be stepped back into the Site ensuring the existing building line created by the cluster of dwellings to the south of the walled garden (namely Pitcairn Lodge and Kirkton Mews) is

retained. A new parkland would be introduced on the eastern fringes and framed by a new woodland belt which would be seen to extend like a green finger from the wooded former estate grounds towards the Old Skene Road. This approach would reinforce and augment the existing and prolific primary woodland framework in the area and ensure new development is framed. In turn, by retaining the existing built edge, new development would be seen to be consistent with existing settlement pattern and form a new secluded wooded character to eastern edge of the village. In the long term, this approach would not only protect but visually enhance the setting.

- 4.17 Historic built features within close proximity to the Site and lengths of stone walls and gate piers defining these settings combine with the woodland characteristics and mature tree cover to create an estate character that was once prevalent in the area. In turn these components create a strong sense of place, distinctiveness and maturity. In addition to enhancing and augmenting the woodland structure, development of the Site therefore presents the opportunity to extend these built heritage features into the Site with the introduction of a new gate lodge at the entrance into Kesson Gardens from the Old Skene Road and lengths of walling and gate piers at key locations.
- 4.18 Overall, it is considered that the strategy outlined in this appraisal would be consistent with the characteristics of the inherent estate character and by incorporating a distinctly formal layout would reflect the more traditional street pattern within Kirkton of Skene. Proposals such as the introduction of a new woodland structure, woodland edge and infill planting, avenue and specimen tree planting, stone walls and gate pier features marking access points and linking building groups together, would have a positive effect and build upon the strong sense of place, distinctiveness, identity and maturity that the Site already exhibits.
- 4.19 Sensitivity to change across the local landscape is considered to be *Medium-High* given the *High* value and *Medium* susceptibility to change. Magnitude of effect is considered to be Medium to **Low** during construction and in the short term. In the long term and once the mitigation strategy establishes, the character of the Site will change and will be seen to form part of the settlement with many positive features and a more secluded wooded character to the urban / rural interface. Magnitude of effect will reduce to **Low**. Therefore the residual impacts upon landscape character are assessed to be **Moderate-Minor to Moderate** and the nature of change **Beneficial** in the long term.

5 Potential Visual Impacts and Their Effects on Visual Amenity and Views

- 5.1 In assessing the visual impact of a future housing development on the landscape and townscape, full consideration has been given to all viewpoints, their location and distance from the Site, the quality of each view and the impact that a future development will have on its setting. The visual assessment is based upon a desk top study and a site visit with a selection of photographic viewpoints illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. The locations of these viewpoints are presented in the inset on each figure.
- 5.2 In general, the prevailing topography across the wider setting where the rising agricultural land to the north and north-east of the village combine with the urban form of Kirkton of Skene and the well-established and extensive woodland structure to

create a tight visual envelope with limited opportunities for a handful of views. This is illustrated in the representative viewpoints 1 - 6, Figures 2 and 3.

- 5.3 Wider views from the south and west are generally restricted and contained by the prolific woodland structure evident across the immediate Site area and across the setting to the village, as illustrated in Viewpoint 4. Even within the local context from the west fringes of the village, the juxtaposition of built form and the strong landscape framework across the grounds to Kirkton House screen and contain the majority of views. (Viewpoint 5).
- 5.4 As the landform rises towards the summits of Auchronie Hill and the Hill of Keir and to the north and north-east respectively, long distance views are afforded across well-defined agricultural fields towards the village nestled into the lower slopes and framed by the extensive policy woodlands of Kirkton House and Easter Skene House and the woodland belt demarcating the Old Skene Road corridor. In combination with built form which wraps around the Site's north-western, western and southern periphery, heavily filtered and glimpsed views towards very small parts of the eastern sector are afforded with the vast majority of the Site hidden from view. Viewpoint 3 illustrates a middle distant view from the north.
- 5.5 Viewpoint 6 illustrates a local view looking south towards the Site from the core path which runs adjacent to the Old Skene Road, near to the junction with Kesson Gardens. This existing access road would be utilised in any future housing development. Whilst the ancient tree belt which extends along the Old Skene Road at this location filters views into the Site (and in summer months this filtering effect would be more pronounced), there would be a local visual impact for road and core path users as they enter the village. However, with a new parkland introduced on the eastern side of Kesson Gardens and infill and woodland edge planting to reinforce the ancient tree belts, it is considered visual impacts towards a new housing development could be controlled.
- 5.6 Due to the open nature of the south-eastern boundary, a gap in the mature tree structure has developed allowing some inter-visibility of the Site from the east and south-east. Viewpoint 2 illustrates a static 'worse-case' view from the Old Skene Road on the edge of Westhill where views towards part of the Site are available. A similar view is also afforded from the edge of the small village of Mason Lodge, (Viewpoint 1). Whilst the settlement form of Kirkton of Skene is effectively filtered by the mature tree cover within these views, the Kirkton of Skene Parish Church adjacent to the north-west corner of the Site and the walled garden, Kirkton Mews Cottages and Pitcairn Lodge within the former Kirkton House estate to the south of the site are highly visible.
- 5.7 Due to their extent, the built structures within the Kirkton House grounds form a large cluster and as such a prominent visual feature in views from the east. Although the entire Kirkton House grounds is out with the settlement limit of the village in policy terms, visually within the landscape, the grounds are perceived to form part of the village and essentially form the extent of the urban edge. By building upon this and retaining the existing building line, new housing would be stepped back from a large parkland area on the eastern fringes and orientated to overlook the new green space, thereby affording an outward looking development. The new park would include large

- swathes of amenity grass and wildflower meadows and would be framed by a new woodland belt, woodland edge and structure planting. Not only would this approach reinforce the perceived settlement limit to the village, but also bring a new positive element and secluded wooded character to the edge of the setting.
- 5.8 The inter-visibility of the listed Parish Church building with the wider area is seen as an important characteristic to the setting of Kirkton of Skene and as such, by stepping housing back from the south side of Kesson Gardens and introducing a linear area of grass and specimen trees, a new vista could be created on the approach to the village from the east thereby protecting the integrity of the setting to the church and ensuring the built and cultural heritage is not lost or hidden through insensitive development.
- 5.9 To summarise, views towards the Site are mostly restricted or contained through a combination of the extensive woodland structure evident across the village and its setting and the local topography to the north. Where views may be available, it is considered these would be consistent with the existing settlement pattern where glimpsed views towards built forms on the fringe of the village and framed by a strong woodland framework are wholly characteristic. The use of local historic estate features in the form of stone walls, gate piers and formal hedging would define and signify the entrance into a new housing development and would also create a strong gateway into the village from the east. In tandem with the retention, enhancement and management of existing tree cover and new landscape features, it is considered that the visual amenity of the eastern fringe to Kirkton of Skene would be significantly improved.
- 5.10 The sensitivity of the visual amenity of the context to the Site to change is considered to be *High* given the surrounding recreational receptors, the high built heritage and cultural value, the sense of place formed by the former estate settings and the Site's fringe settlement location. The visual magnitude of effect from the wider context to the north, west and south are considered to be *Negligible*; the effect is **Negligible** and nature of change **Neutral**. From the local context to the north and from the east, the visual magnitude of effect is assessed to be *Low* and the effect **Moderate** and **Slight Adverse** in the short term. Once the existing woodland cover comes under management and is enhanced by infill and native understorey planting, new woodland belts and specimen tree planting, the development as a whole would bring a new positive and attractive environment to the eastern fringes and form a strong gateway development. In the medium to long term, visual impacts would reduce to **Minor** and **Beneficial**.

6 Main Issues Report – Assessment of Site GR116

- 6.1 To support the preparation of the Local Development Report (LDP) 2021 Aberdeenshire Council published the Main Issues Report (MIR) on 14 January 2019. MIR Appendices detail the Officers' responses to the Call for Sites submissions.
- 6.2 Within the Aberdeenshire Council's detailed site assessment regarding development of the land at the Old Skene Road (the Site), identified as **GR116** in Appendix Garioch Part 2, the officers' state "*development would negatively affect the setting of a number of nearby listed buildings, particularly the B-listed Skene Parish Church and views of*

the church from the east.” In the overall assessment of the village, the officers’ regard protecting the countryside to the east as important to not only preserve the character and setting of the village but in preventing coalescence with Westhill. This is re-affirmed in the officers’ assessment of development options in Kirkton of Skene which concludes further expansion of the village is likely to exacerbate the coalescence issue with Westhill.

- 6.3 This section aims to draw out the opportunities and constraints of the Site (MIR reference GR116) which have been derived from the rigorous assessment of potential landscape and visual effects and in turn will inform the decision making process and guide development to the right place. Thereby achieving quality residential environments as prescribed in the strategic objectives and vision of the LDP.
- 6.4 The Site lies adjacent to but out with the settlement boundary for Kirkton of Skene, as defined within the Aberdeenshire LDP (2017), and as such has ‘countryside’ status. The existing urban/rural interface between settlement and countryside is rather abrupt and relatively weak in that it relies on rear garden boundary features and a post and wire fence with scattered young specimen trees to provide a long term defensible settlement boundary. It is considered a sensitive approach to the site planning would enhance the ancient tree belt along the northern boundary and extend woodland planting like a green finger along the open south-eastern boundary where it would merge with the mature tree cover across the former Kirkton House estate. With the introduction of these new and enhanced visual and physical features and in conjunction with a new large parkland on the eastern fringes, which itself would be the subject of a detailed landscape strategy, these components would create an easily read physical relationship between the developed settlement and the open countryside to the east.
- 6.5 This is advocated in the SPP. Although relating to Green Belt boundaries, paragraph 162 states, *“inner boundaries should not be drawn too tightly around the urban edge, but where appropriate should create an area suitable for planned development between the existing settlement edge and green belt boundary.”* Paragraph 162 continues, *“Green belt boundaries should be clearly identifiable on the ground using strong visual or physical landscape features such as rivers, tree belts, railways or main roads. Hedges and field enclosures will rarely provide a sufficiently robust boundary.”*
- 6.6 In addition, to positively address the interface between ‘town’ and ‘country’ a small-scale residential development arranged around a series of courtyards and shared surfaces would be proposed. Urban form would loosen towards the eastern fringe with outward-looking dwellings within large grounds arranged in an ad-hoc manner and overlooking the new area of green space. Within this context, it is predicted that development of the Site would not prejudice the qualities of the countryside nor increase coalescence with Westhill, but rather, be seen to strengthen and reinforce the settlement boundary of the village by consolidating the edge to the built up area and positively enhancing the urban-rural interface. Not only would this allow a physical and visual perception of separation between the two communities to be maintained but also bring a more wooded and secluded eastern edge to the village. A sensitively

designed development would thereby preserve the setting and character of the village and prevent coalescence in the long term.

- 6.7 The officers' concerns regarding the setting to listed buildings in close proximity to the Site can also be appropriately mitigated through sensitive design. Stepping built form back from Kesson Gardens corridor and introducing a linear area of grassland framed by semi-mature specimen tree planting would effectively allow a channelled vista to open up towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church and inter-visibility of the church with the wider countryside to the east would be maintained. Similarly, a linear swathe of grassland and wildflower meadows, planted with woodland and riparian planting would extend from the new park along the southern periphery, and augment existing tree cover on the fringes of the former Kirkton House estate. This would create an attractive green buffer between the setting to the C-listed walled garden and to a lesser degree to the B-listed Kirkton House which is set back into the former estate grounds.
- 6.8 Due to the Site's gateway location, it is considered this development bid also offers tremendous opportunity to improve the gateway into Kirkton of Skene from the east. Currently, this entrance into the village is not distinguishable and in stark contrast to the western gateway which is signified by lengths of stone walls, gate piers and the West Lodge associated with the former Kirkton House estate. The Site's northern boundary is defined by an ancient unmanaged woodland belt and a dilapidated stone wall. These remnant features reflect the historic past and former estate character once prevalent across the setting to Kirkton of Skene. By enhancing and extending these features and with the potential addition of gate piers and formal hedge planting, the Site presents a real opportunity to create a highly attractive edge to the village.
- 6.9 By building upon the Site's inherent key features such as the stone walls and the strong visual and physical relationship with the urban edge, as well as drawing upon the characteristics of the more secluded woodland context to the immediate north and south, a high quality development would be realised and would be seen to effectively round off the built form to Kirkton of Skene, whilst creating a distinctive place with a strong identity. This is advocated in Designing Places, PAN 67 and PAN 83, where CONTEXT, IDENTITY AND PLACE are fundamental issues in designing new environments for people to live.

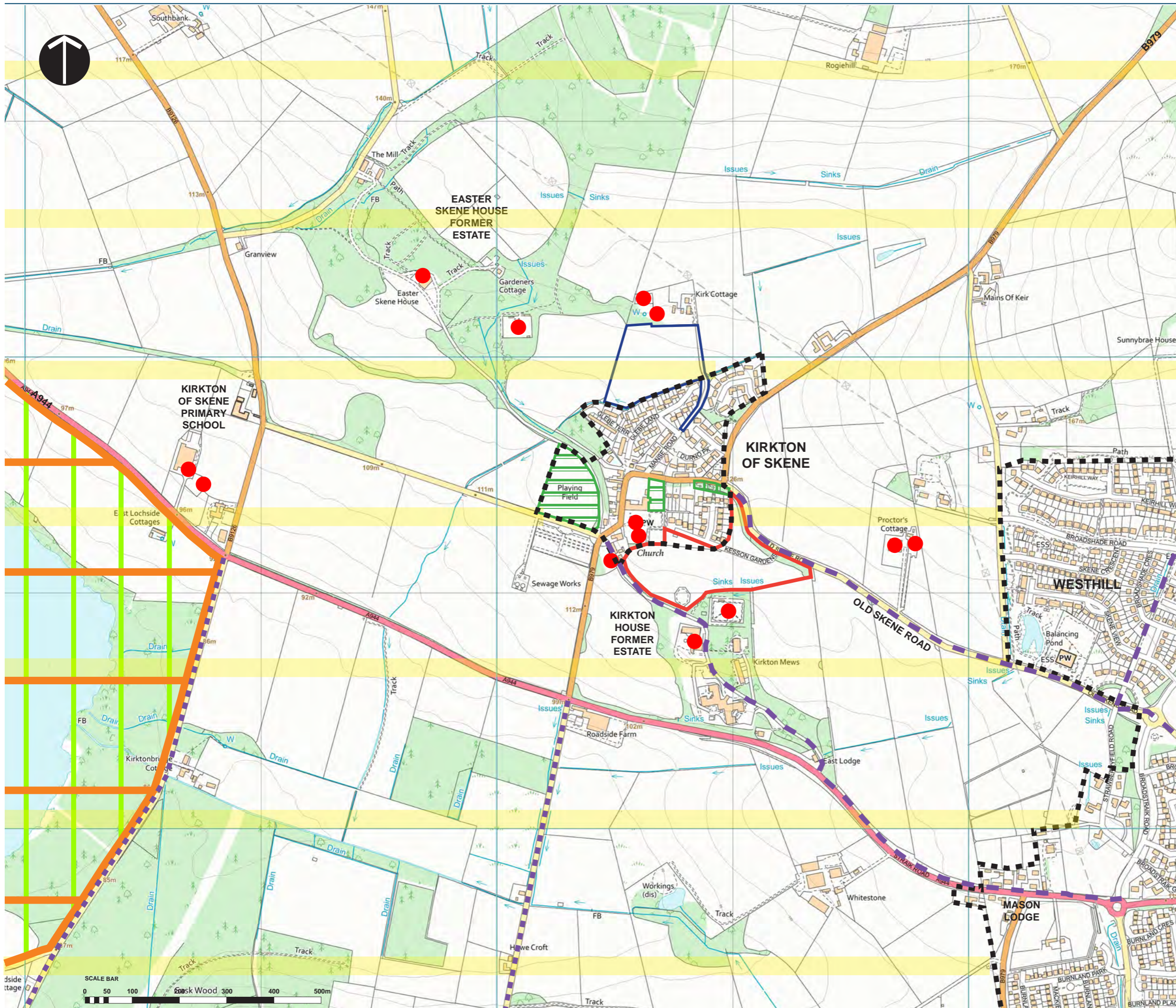
7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Following a rigorous investigation, it is considered that in both landscape and visual terms the Site is appropriate for future housing and would achieve the planning objectives for the village as advocated within the recently published MIR (January 2019). On account of the Site's low elevation and its direct relationship with the existing urban form which wraps around three of the Site's boundaries, development of the Site would consolidate the built edge and round off the settlement form. In combination with the introduction of a new park, augmentation and strengthening of the primary tree cover and an extension of woodland cover along the eastern fringes, a new robust settlement boundary could be implemented in the short term which would prevent issues of coalescence in the long term.

- 7.2 A development could be planned to incorporate and enhance the inherent Site features which relate to the rich historic past of Kirkton of Skene and with the introduction of a new woodland and structure planting would complement the existing estate setting and improve the environment at the gateway into the village from the east. This would lead to a unique high quality residential development set within a parkland estate setting and would be readily absorbed into the townscape of the village and wider landscape without any detrimental impacts upon the landscape character, visual amenity and setting of listed buildings.
- 7.3 To conclude, future development of the Site would not impact on the setting of the countryside policy or listed buildings, would avoid coalescence, and would preserve and enhance the identity, character and setting of Kirkton of Skene.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

FIGURES



- LEGEND**
- SITE BOUNDARY - DEVELOPMENT BID SITE GR116
 - SETTLEMENT FORM
 - WATERCOURSE
 - MATURE WOODLAND COVER
 - AGRICULTURAL FIELDS
- PLANNING POLICY**
(TAKEN FROM THE ABERDEENSHIRE LDP 2017)
- SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY
 - COUNTRYSIDE
 - GARDEN AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPE - DUNECHT HOUSE GDL
 - LOCAL NATURE CONSERVATION SITE - LOCH OF SKENE
 - LISTED BUILDING
 - PROTECTED LAND
 - P1: To conserve the playing field as an important local amenity;
 - P2: To conserve the area of open space;
 - P3: To conserve the play area and area of open space as an important local amenity
 - CORE PATH NETWORK
 - CORE PATH NETWORK - ON ROAD LINKS
 - DEVELOPMENT BID SITE GR127



Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

figure 1
planning policy & landscape context

date: February 2019 scale: 1-7,500 @ A3



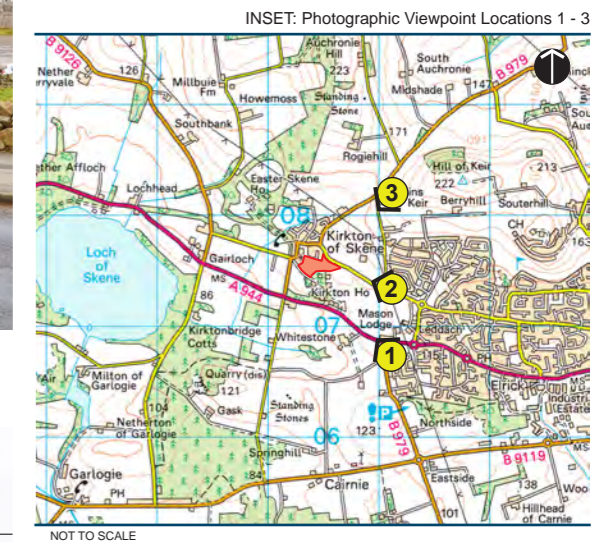
VIEWPOINT 1: Middle distant view looking north-east towards the Site from the A944, Straik Road, on the western edge of the small village of Mason Lodge. Intervening mature landscape features including policy woodlands across the former Kirkton House Estate and Easter Skene Estate, tree belts defining field boundaries and the ancient belt of trees creating an avenue effect along the Old Skene Road combine to contain views towards the western sector of the site and filters views towards the eastern sector. Where visible any new housing would be seen in the context of the existing built edge of Kirkton of Skene and would not exceed the visual urban envelope of the village from this location.



VIEWPOINT 2: Middle distant view looking west along the Old Skene Road from the western fringes of the town of Westhill. Within the rich woodland structure which extends down the lower slopes of the Hill of Keir, there is some inter-visibility with a number of buildings located on the fringes of the village including the listed Parish Church. By stepping new built form away from this listed church and graveyard and introducing a large new parkland on the eastern fringes, this approach would form a vista to the church and create a more secluded wooded character to the edge of the village, thereby protecting both the setting to the church and village in the long term.



VIEWPOINT 3: Middle distant view from north of the village looking south-west towards the Site from near the Mains of Keir Farmstead at the junction of the B979 and a minor road. The village sits on low lying ground with the wooded grounds of Easter Skene House merging with policy woodland across the former Kirkton House estate to wrap around the village and provide a soft backdrop. Views towards the Site are heavily filtered by housing and mature woodland belts along the Old Skene Road.



Future Housing Development on Land
at the Old Skene Road,
Kirkton of Skene

figure 2
photographic
viewpoints 1 - 3

date: February 2019



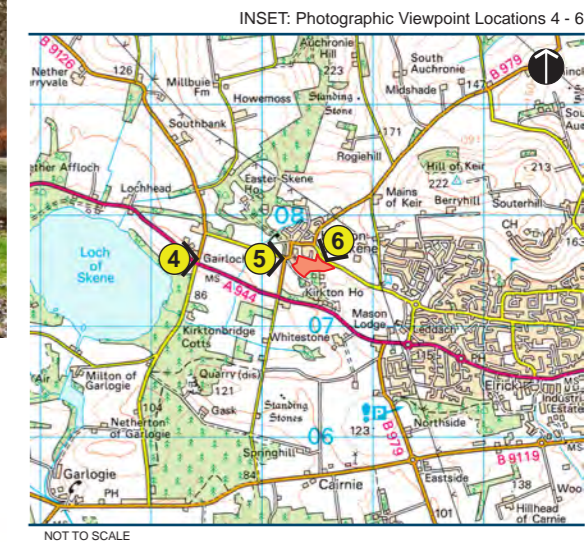
VIEWPOINT 4: Middle distant view looking east-north-east from the crossroads junction of the A944 and the B9126 across arable fields towards the Site and Kirkton of Skene. Mature policy woodlands across the former estates of Easter Skene House and Kirkton House effectively contain views towards the village. This crossroads bounds the eastern boundary to the extensive Dunecht House Garden and Designed Landscape, which extends much further west incorporating wooded grounds around the listed Dunecht House and the Loch of Skene, a Local Nature Conservation Site, which is located just beyond where this viewpoint is taken.



VIEWPOINT 5: Local view looking east towards the West Lodge entrance into the former Kirkton House estate on the western fringes of the village. The entrance into the former Easter Skene estate is demarcated by the Easter Skene Lodge and combined with stone wall features, the listed Parish Church and cottages at the entrance to Kirkton House form and mature specimen trees form an interesting townscape and attractive entrance into the village. Glimpsed views towards several new rooflines may be visible between the man-made and landscape features however they will be seen in the context of the existing historic fabric.



VIEWPOINT 6: Local view from the entrance into Kesson Gardens from the Old Skene Road, looking south towards the Site. The mature ancient belt of deciduous trees form a strong landscape feature along the Old Skene Road and merge with the prolific woodland structure across Kirkton of Skene in middle distant and wider views. These wooded features combine with the landform to define the Site in a distinct compartment. Pushing new development back from this entrance and introducing a new parkland fringe including woodland and structure planting will be seen to complete the landscape pattern in the area and provide an attractive urban/rural interface.











Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene









figure 3
photographic viewpoints 4 - 6

date: February 2019



- LEGEND**
-  SITE BOUNDARY
 -  DEVELOPABLE AREA
 -  ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE
 -  SHARED SURFACE / COURTYARDS
 -  INDICATIVE KEY BUILDING FRONTAGES

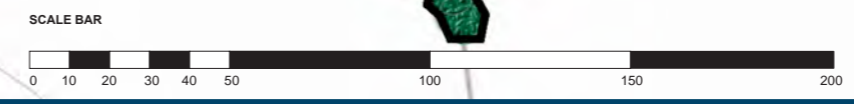
- HARD LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS**
-  2m WIDE PATH NETWORK
 -  EXISTING STONE WALL FEATURES TO BE RETAINED AND AUGMENTED WHERE NECESSARY
 -  STONE PIERS AND STONE WALLS TO FORM GATEWAY FEATURES

- SOFT LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS**
-  EXISTING TREES (INDICATIVE) ALONG SITE BOUNDARIES TO BE RETAINED AND PROTECTED - TREE PLANTING WILL BE PROTECTED DURING CONSTRUCTION PHASE BY TREE PROTECTION FENCING IN ACCORDANCE WITH BS5837:2012
 -  AREAS MANAGED AS AMENITY GRASS
 -  AREAS MANAGED AS WILDFLOWER GRASS
 -  AREAS MANAGED AS SUDS INCORPORATING WET WILDFLOWER AND AQUATIC PLANTING
 -  NATIVE HEDGE
 -  STRUCTURE PLANTING / LOW WOODLAND MIX
 -  FOCAL TREE
 -  AVENUE / STREET TREE / SPECIMEN



Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

figure 4
indicative landscape development framework



date: February 2019 scale: 1-2,000 @ A3

Land South West of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

Response to Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report





Contents

1.	Executive Summary	1
2.	Introduction	3
3.	Site Context	4
4.	Technical Site Assessment	6
5.	Planning Policy Considerations	13
6.	Summary	16
	Appendix 1 Landscape and Visual Appraisal	17

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Barratt North Scotland (Barratt Homes) are responding to the Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report (MIR) in respect of Site GR116 at Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene, for inclusion in the Proposed Local Development Plan (Proposed Plan) as a future housing site. This submission seeks the removal of the Old Skene Road site from the countryside and inclusion of the site within the settlement boundary with a designation for residential development for 45 new homes for development within the first plan period.
- 1.2. The site owners, [REDACTED], have entered into an agreement with Barratt Homes to take this site forward through the planning process to development on the ground. Barratt Homes is an award winning House Builder with a proven track record of delivering quality housing developments within Aberdeenshire and across Scotland. The Home Builders Federation (HBF) recently awarded Barratt the maximum 5 Star housebuilder rating for the 10th year in a row, and they are the only major developer to achieve this. The involvement of Barratt Homes at this early stage in the site promotion exercise demonstrates developer commitment to this location and adds to the overall effectiveness of the site, which will be a key consideration for Aberdeenshire Council in assessing housing sites.
- 1.3. The site has an indicative capacity of approximately 45 units. A number of plans accompany this document to illustrate how this capacity has been reached. Appendix 1 – Figure 1 illustrates the key site considerations, while an indicative landscape development framework plan is included within Appendix 1 – Figure 2.
- 1.4. It is also important to note that during the promotion of the site though the last LDP (Site Ref: Ga018), the Council clearly acknowledged within the MIR (2013) that *'the site is well screened by vegetation'*. This same level of screening and associated woodland has not changed, as such the proposals will remain well screened and would not have any negative impact on the nearby listed buildings.
- 1.5. A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) supports this representation (Appendix 1 of this submission), and concludes that the site would not impact on the setting of the countryside or listed buildings, would avoid coalescence, and would preserve and enhance the identity, character and setting of Kirkton of Skene. The LVA confirms that the proposed layout of the residential development safeguards the vista from the east, towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church. Further commentary is provided within Section 4 of this report.
- 1.6. There is ample capacity in Skene Primary School to accommodate the likely additional educational requirements arising from a development of the scale envisaged for this site. Further justification is set out within Section 4 of this report. This response to the MIR also provides a detailed site description and an initial analysis of technical matters.
- 1.7. The delivery of 45 new homes will help sustain the range of important existing services within Kirkton of Skene, supplying new customers to the shop and pub to ensure they continue to make a positive contribution to the village community in the long term.

Land South West of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

Response to Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report



- 1.8. The report clearly demonstrates the effectiveness and deliverability of the site and concludes that the site is suitable for inclusion within the Proposed Local Development Plan for residential use. This representation should also be read in conjunction with wider Barratt Homes representations to the Aberdeenshire MIR.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Savills Planning is pleased to submit this representation on behalf of Barratt Homes to the Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report (MIR) consultation. This report promotes a proposed housing site (GR116) at Old Skene Road in Kirkton of Skene for inclusion in the Proposed LDP (a site location plan is contained in Appendix 1 - Figure 1).
- 2.2. In support of the proposed site allocation a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (Appendix 1) has been prepared by VLM Landscape Design and is submitted to demonstrate how this site can be successfully developed.
- 2.3. ECS Transport Planning Ltd (ECS) have undertaken technical work to support new residential allocations in the wider Westhill transport network and have supplied commentary relevant to this submission.
- 2.4. Furthermore an assessment of education and housing land supply has been carried out and considers potential mitigation measures that may be required to enable development to proceed. Summaries of the key site considerations are contained within Section 4 of this report. Commentary is also included about the overall acceptability of the site in land use terms for housing as well as commentary about the site effectiveness, with reference to Planning Advice Note (PAN) 2/2010.
- 2.5. This site (Site Ref: Ga018) was first promoted in 2013 through the extant Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. Within the MIR (2013), the Council acknowledged the site was well screened and in scale with the village of Kirkton of Skene. Notwithstanding, the Council considered the proposals would cause capacity issues for Skene Primary, and on this basis the Council rejected the proposals.
- 2.6. Furthermore, the bid (Site Ref: Ga018) was not included in the Schedule 4 documentation and subsequently not forwarded to Scottish Government Reporter for consideration at Proposed Plan stage. The Reporter chose to allocate a number of small-scale sites across the Aberdeen Housing Market Area and Barratt Homes believe that this site would have been allocated to provide much needed private and affordable homes had it been before the Reporter for consideration, particularly at a time when the Reporter acknowledged that delivery rates were below previous expectations.
- 2.7. During the current local development plan review, the site was first promoted for residential development through the 'Call for Sites' exercise in March 2018, which signalled the first stages of the local development plan review. This response to the MIR follows up on that initial submission, with Section 4 of this report addressing the Council's concerns in terms of impacts on nearby listed buildings and education capacity.

3. Site Context

Site Description

- 3.1. The site lies at the southern edge of the village of Kirkton of Skene, adjoining the settlement boundary. Kirkton of Skene has a good range of services and facilities for its size including a village shop, village hall, a pub, church, primary school and play park.
- 3.2. The site is bounded to the immediate north by an existing residential development of 20 homes, developed by Barratt Homes at Kesson Gardens; while mature wooded grounds to the former Kirkton House Estate bound the site to the south. The built structures within the Kirkton House grounds form a large cluster, the grounds are perceived to form part of the village and essentially form the extent of the urban edge. The Old Skene Road and a woodland belt define the eastern boundary and the former driveway into the Kirkton House grounds defines the western boundary.
- 3.3. The site consists of grass and some areas of scrub along the southern fringes and has not been subject to any previous development. A SUDS basin, serving the recent Barratt development, is located within the southern corner to the site, near to the walled garden. The topography of the site is generally flat., however the site slopes down in a generally southern direction from a high point of approximately 121m above Ordnance Datum (OAD) at the northern point of the site to a low point of approximately 118m AOD at the southern boundary.
- 3.4. The site is well within the 400m prescribed walking distances from bus stops specified by Planning Advice Note (PAN) 75 'Planning for Transport'. The existing access from Kesson Gardens was designed to accommodate additional development in this location.
- 3.5. There are two bus stops around 0.5 miles (5 minute walk) to the west of the site adjacent to the playing fields. These are served by Stagecoach bus routes 220, X17 and 218. The buses pass along the Old Skene Road to the north of the site and in that respect there is scope for a new bus stop within 400m of the site.
- 3.6. The site is within 400m of the village centre and amenities via the core path running westwards along Old Skene Road. A dedicated off-road pedestrian and cycle core path runs past the frontage of the site and along Old Skene Road and eastwards into Westhill. In addition there are good cycle routes from the site towards the neighbouring settlements to the west, north and south.
- 3.7. The site is currently designated within the 'countryside', however given its size, location and self contained nature it is not considered that the allocation of the site to accommodate a sensitive development of a manageable scale would have a negative impact on the surrounding landscape. In fact, residential development of the site would provide an opportunity to create a new, long term and defensible boundary at this eastern edge of the village. Residential development on the site would be self contained and would not create a precedent for subsequent future urban expansion here. The indicative landscape development plan at Appendix 1 - Figure 4 clearly shows the potential for the site to round off the urban area at this location and to create a defensible countryside boundary.

Land South West of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

Response to Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report



- 3.8. PAN 2/2010 'Affordable Housing and Housing Land Audits' identifies a criteria based approach for the release of further housing land through the consideration of planning applications. The effectiveness criteria are also useful to consider in the release of further sites for housing through the local development plan review.
- 3.9. The effectiveness criteria set out in paragraph 55 of the PAN are discussed in the Table below.

PAN 2/2010 Effectiveness Criteria	
Ownership	The site is within the control of [REDACTED] who are willing to release it for residential development. Barratt North Scotland are the preferred developer and have an option on the land.
Physical	There are no known insurmountable physical constraints relating to slope, access, flooding or ground conditions affecting the site that would make it unsuitable for residential development.
Contamination	Work undertaken to date on ground conditions does not identify any contamination issues.
Deficit Funding	Barratt North Scotland are part of the Barratt Group; no public or bank finance is required to make residential development on the site economically viable.
Marketability	Based upon preliminary work undertaken to date, Barratt considers that there is a demand for housing in this area and that the site can be substantially, if not wholly, developed by 2025.
Infrastructure	There are no known abnormal infrastructure issues that require to be addressed to allow development of the site.
Land Use	The site is located immediately adjacent to an established residential area, on the edge of the existing settlement, residential use of the site is therefore consistent with the wider pattern of land use in the area. The site is also within easy reach of other ancillary land uses such as schools, public transport etc.

- 3.10. In order to demonstrate the suitability of the site for housing and its viability for development, a number of technical and environmental inputs have been completed. The next section of this report contains a summary in relation to the scope and findings of these technical inputs.

4. Technical Site Assessment

- 4.1. This section of the report contains a summary of a number of technical and environmental inputs that have been completed recently in order to establish clearly the effectiveness of the site. For reference, the full LVA is appended to this submission.
- 4.2. Within the Kirkton of Skene settlement statement of the MIR, the Council identify two main reasons why the site was not preferred as follows:
- Development would negatively effect the setting of a number of nearby listed buildings, particularly the B-listed Skene Parish Church and views from the east.
 - Development of this scale is likely to affect capacity at Skene Primary School.
- 4.3. Both of these reasons are fully addressed below under both the Landscape and Housing and Education Assessment headings, demonstrating that a residential allocation at Old Skene Road in Kirkton of Skene can be progressed with no significant negative impacts.

Landscape

- 4.4. VLM Landscape Design Ltd undertook a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (Appendix 1 of this submission) to consider the landscape and visual impacts likely to arise from a future housing development on the Site. This section aims to draw out the opportunities and constraints of the site (MIR reference GR116) which have been derived from the rigorous assessment of potential landscape and visual effects and in turn will inform the decision making process and guide development to the right place. Thereby achieving quality residential environments as prescribed in the strategic objectives and vision of the LDP. Figure 4 of the LVA sets out an indicative Landscape Development Framework Plan (LDFP).
- 4.5. The site lies adjacent to but outwith the settlement boundary for Kirkton of Skene, as defined within the Aberdeenshire LDP (2017), and as such has 'countryside' status. The existing urban/rural interface between settlement and countryside is rather abrupt and relatively weak in that it relies on rear garden boundary features and a post and wire fence with scattered young specimen trees to provide a long term defensible settlement boundary. It is considered a sensitive approach to the site planning would enhance the ancient tree belt along the northern boundary and extend woodland planting like a green buffer along the open south-eastern boundary where it would merge with the mature tree cover across the former Kirkton House estate. With the introduction of these new and enhanced visual and physical features and in conjunction with a new amenity area on the eastern fringes, which itself would be the subject of a detailed landscape strategy, these components would create an easily read physical relationship between the developed settlement and the open countryside to the east. Figure 4 of the LVA illustrates the landscaping proposals.

- 4.6. This is advocated in SPP, in the context of Green Belt boundaries, paragraph 162 states, *“inner boundaries should not be drawn too tightly around the urban edge, but where appropriate should create an area suitable for planned development between the existing settlement edge and green belt boundary.”* Paragraph 162 continues, *“Green belt boundaries should be clearly identifiable on the ground using strong visual or physical landscape features such as rivers, tree belts, railways or main roads. Hedges and field enclosures will rarely provide a sufficiently robust boundary.”*
- 4.7. In addition, to positively address the interface between ‘town’ and ‘country’ a small-scale residential development arranged around a series of courtyards and shared surfaces would be proposed. Urban form would loosen towards the eastern fringe with outward-looking dwellings within large grounds arranged in an ad-hoc manner and overlooking the new area of green space. Within this context, it is predicted that development of the site would not prejudice the qualities of the countryside nor increase coalescence with Westhill, but rather be seen to strengthen and reinforce the settlement boundary and context of the village.
- 4.8. The officers’ concerns within the MIR site overview (Site Ref: GR116) regarding the setting of listed buildings in close proximity to the site can also be appropriately mitigated through sensitive design. Figure 4 of the LVA shows how stepping built form back from Kesson Gardens corridor and introducing a linear area of grassland, framed by some sensitively selected semi-mature specimen tree planting. This would effectively allow a channelled vista to open up towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church and inter-visibility of the church with the wider countryside to the east to be maintained. Furthermore, Figure 2 of the LVIA and in particular Viewpoint 2 illustrates this point. Similarly, a linear swathe of grassland and wildflower meadows, planted with woodland and riparian planting would extend from the new park along the southern periphery, and augment existing tree cover on the fringes of the former Kirkton House estate. This would create an attractive green buffer between the setting to the C-listed walled garden and to a lesser degree to the B-listed Kirkton House which is set back into the former estate grounds.
- 4.9. Due to the site’s gateway location, it is considered that the proposal also offers a unique opportunity to improve the gateway into Kirkton of Skene from the east. Currently, this entrance into the village is not distinguishable and in stark contrast to the western gateway which is signified by lengths of stone walls, gate piers and the West Lodge associated with the former Kirkton House estate. The site’s northern boundary is defined by an ancient unmanaged woodland belt and a dilapidated stone wall. These remnant features reflect the historic past and former estate character once prevalent across the setting to Kirkton of Skene. By enhancing and extending these features and with the potential addition of boundary features and formal hedge planting, the site presents a real opportunity to create a highly attractive edge to the village.
- 4.10. By building upon the site’s inherent key features such as the stone walls and the strong visual and physical relationship with the urban settlement edge, as well as drawing upon the characteristics of the more secluded woodland context to the immediate north and south, a high quality development would be realised and would be seen to effectively round off the built form to Kirkton of Skene, whilst creating a distinctive place with a strong identity. This is advocated in Designing Places, PAN 67 and PAN 83, where context, identity and place are fundamental issues in designing new environments for people to live.

Summary

- 4.11. Following a comprehensive investigation, it is considered that in both landscape and visual terms the site is appropriate for future housing and would achieve the planning objectives for the village as advocated within the recently published MIR (January 2019). On account of the site's low elevation and its direct relationship with the existing urban form which wraps around three of the site's boundaries, development of the site would consolidate the built edge and round off the settlement form. In combination with an area of open space within the eastern portion of the site, augmentation and strengthening of the primary tree cover and an extension of woodland cover along the eastern fringes, a new robust settlement boundary could be implemented in the short term which would prevent issues of coalescence in the long term.
- 4.12. A development could be planned to incorporate and enhance the inherent site features which relate to the rich historic past of Kirkton of Skene and the introduction of native structure planting would complement the existing estate setting and improve the environment at the gateway into the village from the east. This would lead to a unique high quality residential development set within a parkland estate setting, which would be readily absorbed into the townscape of the village and wider landscape without any detrimental impacts upon the landscape character, visual amenity and setting of listed buildings.
- 4.13. It is also important to note that during the promotion of the site through the last LDP (Site Ref: Ga018), the Council clearly acknowledged within the MIR (2013) that *'the site is well screened by vegetation'*. This same level of screening and associated woodland has not changed, as such the proposals will remain well screened and would not have any negative impact on the nearby listed buildings.
- 4.14. To conclude, a sensitive residential scheme on the site would not impact the setting of the countryside or listed buildings, with the vista from the east towards the listed Skene Parish Church protected. The proposals would avoid coalescence and would preserve the character and setting of Kirkton of Skene.

Housing Land and Education Assessment

- 4.15. In order to demonstrate the case for a 45 house development in Kirkton of Skene, an assessment of the overall supply of housing land in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area, and more particularly in the immediate Westhill/Skene local housing market area has been undertaken. Furthermore, an assessment of the capacity of the local primary school in Kirkton of Skene has been undertaken.

The Aberdeen Housing Market Area

- 4.16. Kirkton of Skene is at the outer edge of the city's housing market, 10km from the centre, and some 2km west of the suburban neighbourhood of Westhill.
- 4.17. Where Westhill has grown from a hamlet to a sizeable community over the last 50 years, Kirkton of Skene has retained its village character, whilst accommodating a modest scale of new development.
- 4.18. Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils cooperate in calculating the need for future housing; targets are set for each authority, and in relation to Aberdeenshire, the Aberdeen Housing Market Area (HMA) needs have been assessed in 2017 as part of the Local Development Plan, and 2018 in its Housing Land Audit (HLA).

- 4.19. The requirement for new housing in the Aberdeen HMA is calculated as 7,500, and its “effective supply” stands at 12,140. However, on closer scrutiny of the Aberdeen HMA, to the level of the administrative area of Garioch where Kirkton of Skene is located, it is clear that the Planning Authority’s strategy is to concentrate the bulk of new housing in Inverurie and Kintore, and away from Westhill, over the next 10 years. As a comparison, around 75 houses were being completed per annum in Westhill, up to 2016; less than 20 in total are projected for the years from 2017 to 2020, **and none from 2021 to 2025.**
- 4.20. The Garioch area accounts for a substantial part of the Aberdeen HMA, and the 2018 Housing Land Audit is projecting a ‘spike’ increase over the next 3 years, to compensate for low levels of building in the past 6 years. It will then return to around 360 houses per annum to which Inverurie will contribute 200, Kintore 80, Newmachar 30 **and Westhill practically zero.**

The Westhill / Kirkton of Skene Housing Market

- 4.21. In the immediate Westhill market area (within the catchment of Westhill Academy) only three sites are included in the 2018 HLA. These include Strawberry Field, Westhill (10 units), Golf Club, Westhill (3 units) and conversion of Kirkton Lodge Nursing Homes into flats (17 units). All three sites are forecast to be completed by 2020.
- 4.22. The large site of Burnland, Elrick, has had a final 38 houses constrained since 2014, and no progress is anticipated. Therefore, **no new building is planned beyond 2021; there are no extant designations, or new designations.**
- 4.23. As such by way of reasonable assumptions, there will be a demand for new housing within the Westhill Academy catchment area. It comprises approximately 5,200 households and, as a general hypothesis, a community requires to add 1% to its housing stock each year in order to maintain population levels – especially school populations.
- 4.24. In the short term, pupil numbers will be sustained because of the levels of building (at over 50 per annum) in the years up to 2015. These numbers will have fed through the primary schools by 2023, when a decline in rolls will commence; a similar situation applies to Westhill Academy, where, by 2028, the roll will start to decline. If no new building is carried out in the next 6 years, up to 2025, this will have an effect, in the longer term, of significantly smaller school rolls.
- 4.25. Aberdeenshire Council’s pupil product ratio for determining capacity at Skene Primary School is 0.4 pupils per household. The predicted impact of the additional 17 houses (already consented) would impact on Skene Primary by some seven places. The conversion of the former nursing home into flats is unlikely to appeal to families with young children, however even when taking the seven additional projected pupils into account there is capacity at the school to accommodate the development proposal.
- 4.26. A further 45 houses, as is proposed, will increase the school roll by approximately 18 and the population by around circa 100 people.

Land South West of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

Response to Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report



Skene Primary School Capacity

- 4.27. The village school currently has a roll of 72. Previously this would have been “at capacity” however in the past year, the capacity of the school has been revised (in the annual Education forecasts) to 100, with four operational teaching classrooms.
- 4.28. The roll figures are given as follows, in the 2018 Forecasts :

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Roll	60	68	68	72	78	84	76	75	68

- 4.29. The most recent housebuilding in the village concluded in 2013, with a 20-house development at Kesson Gardens, which will have (using accepted projections) produced eight new pupils and will likely have used up the remaining spare spaces when the school’s capacity was registered as 71.
- 4.30. The three other primary schools in Westhill Academy catchment are close to capacity, and the total roll for the three is forecast to peak in 2022, as past building programmes feed through. This is summarised in the table below.

Primary School	Capacity	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Crombie	342	300	303	307	309	322	310	294	302	299
Elrick	442	408	430	428	417	410	405	401	409	398
Westhill	342	263	271	279	287	300	312	315	335	332
Totals	1126	971	1004	1014	1013	1032	1027	1010	1046	1029

- 4.31. Overall therefore, the capacity of the three Westhill schools does not rise above 93%. Individually, Westhill Primary reaches 98% in 2022, but with no new house building from previous years, the roll then begins to fall. Elrick’s roll has already started to fall; Crombie’s peaks in 2019. The 2017 School Roll Forecasts for Skene Primary predicted a steady decline through to 2022, but in 2018 the forecasts show a rising roll up to 2022, then gradual decline back to the 2017 level. **By 2023, Skene Primary will have 32 spare spaces.**
- 4.32. The significance of these forecast figures is that Skene Primary will reach its peak roll (of 84) in 2020, the year in which the consented development of 17 flats is expected to be completed.
- 4.33. If a 45 house development were to be commenced after 2020, the school could accommodate the 18 pupils generated provided:
- (i) The development was phased evenly over, say, three years 2021/22/23; and
 - (ii) Housebuilding rates remain as predicted in the current Housing Land Audit, for at least the next 5 years [and the flattened development at Kirton of Skene yields the same no. pupils as a dwellinghouse].

Land South West of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

Response to Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report



- 4.34. Given the above scenario, the roll for Skene Primary would be as projected in the education forecast up to 2020, and would then be as set out below. After 2023, the roll would be stable for some years, then (as with the Westhill schools) start to fall back to current 2019 levels

Year	School Roll
2021	82
2022	86
2023	84

- 4.35. While there will be some limited spare capacity at the Westhill schools, particularly Crombie, by 2023, there is no need to amend any of the primary school catchments.

Housing and Education Summary

- 4.36. Subject to the provisions set out in 4.33 above, Skene Primary can readily accommodate the increase in pupil numbers as a result of 45 new households.
- 4.37. Skene Primary is faced with a future of a declining roll, unless new households are brought into its catchment, a situation replicated throughout the rural areas and villages of Aberdeenshire. Development at the scale proposed can help sustain an otherwise declining school.
- 4.38. While the Skene Primary roll has been supplemented by permitting out-of-zone placements from Westhill, this is not the most desirable route for sustaining small rural schools, as children have to be transported independently to and from the school, and it does not create a cohesive community.
- 4.39. The primary schools in Westhill are not, in any event, under capacity pressure for the foreseeable future, and so do not need to draw upon the spare capacity at Skene. Aberdeenshire Council, as the Education Authority, should therefore permit this more sustainable use of its assets.

Transport

- 4.40. ECS Transport Planning Ltd (ECS) have undertaken technical work to support new residential allocations in the wider Westhill transport network. This work has been primarily to consider the potential changes to traffic flow associated with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) in relation to new large scale residential developments.
- 4.41. The proposed small scale residential development at Old Skene Road will not have any significant impacts on the road capacity, with no objections received from the Councils Road Department, either within the current or previous LDP review. Furthermore, a new residential allocation in this location will add further variety and choice to the housing land supply within the wider area. The proposed development would be supported by a range of sustainable measures including potential bus services which would be discussed and agreed with Aberdeenshire Council once the principle of development has been accepted.

Land South West of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

Response to Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report



- 4.42. While the Council considers that there are a number of improvements required to the wider Westhill strategic road network, the small scale site at Old Skene Road can be progressed without any major new road infrastructure being required.

5. Planning Policy Considerations

National Planning Policy

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (2014)

- 5.1. The Scottish Government published its updated Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) in June 2014. This document sets out national planning policies which reflect Scottish Minister's priorities for operation of the planning system and for the development and use of land. The SPP introduces a presumption in favour of development that contributes to sustainable development.
- 5.2. SPP gives strong support to housing development and, indeed, any sustainable development for which the SPP introduces a presumption in favour (SPP Policy Principles). SPP identifies that planning helps to address the challenges facing the housing sector by providing a positive and flexible approach to development. In particular, provision for new homes should be made in areas where economic investment is planned (Para. 109). It is considered that this is such a sustainable location, given the established village community at Kirkton of Skene.

National Planning Framework 3 (2014)

- 5.3. The Scottish Government published the National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) in June 2014. This document sets out the long term vision for development and investment across Scotland for the next 20 to 30 years. NPF3 states the Scottish Government's central purpose is *"to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth"* (Para.1.1).
- 5.4. NPF3 confirms that the population of Scotland is projected to rise from 5.31 million in 2012 to 5.78 million in 2037. Based on 2014 projections, a 14% increase in the number of Scottish households is projected by 2039.
- 5.5. The Scottish Government states that planning should focus housing provision efforts on areas where there is pressure for change and where the greatest levels of change are expected, Aberdeenshire can be considered such an area with pressure for housing development given the projected household increases.
- 5.6. Following the recognition that housing needs are projected to increase, NPF3 notes that the financial climate has reduced the amount of new housing built in recent years. The desire to see a significant increase in house building to ensure housing requirements are met across the country over the coming years is stated (Para 2.5).
- 5.7. More ambitious and imaginative planning is called for to meet requirements for a generous and effective supply of land for housing in a sustainable way. Furthermore, NPF3 states that planning can ensure it enhances quality of life through good placemaking, and lead a move towards new, lower carbon models of urban living (Para 2.20). The site at Old Kirkton Road is one such a location.

- 5.8. We consider the inclusion of the land at Old Skene Road to be an appropriate and sustainable location for housing with an indicative capacity of 45 homes.

Regional Planning Policy

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan, March 2014

- 5.9. The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (SDP) sets the strategic context for the development of housing land in Aberdeenshire.
- 5.10. In this context, the SDP explains at Section 4 (page 32) that, in compliance with Scottish Planning Policy (SPP), a generous supply of land for new housing is provided. In effect this places a responsibility on each local authority area, including Aberdeenshire, to provide for an increased level of generosity in setting their housing land allocations through the production of their own local development plans. Kirkton of Skene is within an area for local growth and diversification, as set out on page 22 of the SDP, where there is a requirement to satisfy local need, including housing need.
- 5.11. The Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire SDP (August 2018), continues in the same thrust as the approved SDP. It recognises that it is likely that some new development will need to take place on greenfield sites in order to help deliver the future strategy for growth. The SDP considers these allocations should be small scale in nature, and LDP should give due regard to its context and deliverability. In recognising this, it would be logical for Aberdeenshire Council to allocate a number and range of smaller, self-contained and readily developable sites that can be developed within the short term, to compliment the larger strategic developments - which can assist with infrastructure investment, whilst ultimately enabling the Council to fulfil its requirement to maintain an effective 5 year land supply. The Old Skene Road site is a prime example of such a site that merits formal allocation as a residential development site in the forthcoming Aberdeenshire LDP.

Local Planning Policy

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021 - Main Issues Report, January 2019

- 5.12. In preparing a new Local Development Plan the Council has to prepare a Main Issues Report which is the primary consultation document in the preparation of the Plan. The MIR sets out a development strategy for the future of Aberdeenshire Council, as well as a policy framework for guiding development.
- 5.13. Page 19 of the MIR supports “*the right development in the right place*” in accordance with Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) paragraph 15. Furthermore, the MIR notes that in term of new housing sites a ‘*sharp focus on delivery is required.*’ The small scale site at Old Skene Road offers a residential site, which is free from constraint and can be delivered in the short term at a sustainable rate of growth, to support local facilities.

- 5.14. Within the Kirkton of Skene Settlement Statement, the site (Site Ref:GR116) is identified as a non preferred development option. Section 4 of this report clearly sets out how there are no capacity issues with Skene Primary School and that the development would not negatively impact nearby listed building, including Skene Parish Church. As such, Barratt Homes object to the non preferred status of the site at Old Skene Road in Kirkton of Skene for residential development, and request that the proposed 45 home site is added as a new residential site to the Proposed LDP.

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021 – Draft Proposed Plan, January 2019

- 5.15. While the Draft Proposed Local Development Plan is not a consultative document, the Council does acknowledge that observations can be submitted on this and Barratt Homes wish to make comment on the Kirkton of Skene Settlement Statement.
- 5.16. Barratt Homes object to the non inclusion of the site at Old Skene Road in Kirkton of Skene for residential development. Barratt Homes request that the proposed 45 home site is added as a new residential allocation to the Kirkton of Skene Settlement Statement and Appendix 9 of the Proposed LDP.

National Design Guidance Overview

- 5.17. Development Frameworks help to deliver planning policy requirements by setting out the main planning and design principles to which subsequent masterplans will conform. Scottish Planning Policy and associated documents require that land and resources are used efficiently. A new residential allocation at Old Skene Road would include a range and choice of housing types, and sizes to cater for local demand.
- 5.18. The Scottish Government places great emphasis on improving the design of all new development to reflect the character of the area within which it is to be located, as well as creating mixed communities that are safer, more inclusive and provide new residential streets that are both attractive and safe for all to use.
- 5.19. New residential development will respond to the context and qualities of a site and its surroundings. From this, positive relationships between buildings are to be created to produce a sense of place, identity and welcome, and to clearly define public from private space. Designs will provide a hierarchy of attractive streets and spaces that are defined by buildings that reflect local character and place. This will result in distinctive new places which are designed to a human scale, be resource efficient and adaptable. Central to this is a network of well-connected, attractive and enclosed public spaces that are safe, pleasant, and easy to move around, especially on foot and cycle. The site at Old Skene Road provides a real opportunity to deliver a well planned residential development adjoining an established settlement. This is illustrated within an indicative landscape development framework plan is included within Appendix 1 – Figure 2.

6. Summary

- 6.1. The site at Old Skene Road is readily developable for residential use. The site is shown to be effective in accordance with the criteria set out in paragraph 55 of PAN 2/2010. This report contains detailed information as to the various technical specialisms pertinent to the consideration of the suitability of the site at this stage in the development process. No insurmountable barriers to the development of the site have been identified through technical work to date, most notably with no education constraints or negative impacts on the nearby listed buildings identified. The submitted LVA confirms that the proposed layout of the residential development safeguards the vista from the east, towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church. Further studies required as the site progresses are not anticipated to change this view of the site as effective.
- 6.2. The MIR clearly seeks a practical way forward to ensure that identified housing land is deliverable within the correct timescales. In order to achieve this, and to ensure the aims of sustainable development are met, it will be prudent of the Council to identify readily developable sites, effective within the plan period, to ensure the housing land supply targets are met. The site at Old Skene Road is one such site that can fulfil this criteria.
- 6.3. Currently within the countryside, the site is well placed to round off the urban area at this edge of Kirkton of Skene and to provide a defensible countryside boundary for the future, within a self contained small site that would not set a precedent for subsequent future expansion. A new robust settlement boundary could be implemented in the short term which would help avoid coalescence with Westhill in the long term.
- 6.4. Given the need for smaller deliverable sites within the lifetime of LDP to help meet the Councils housing land supply target, the Old Skene Road site offers a deliverable development opportunity able to accommodate the delivery of 45 homes (both private and affordable) over the course of new 5 year plan period.
- 6.5. The site at Old Skene Road is constraint free, as demonstrated by the technical assessment section of this report. On this basis, it is considered that the site merits release from the countryside and allocation for residential development, noting the early contribution it could make to housing land supply targets.
- 6.6. The delivery of 45 new homes will help sustain the strong range of important existing services within Kirkton of Skene. The proposals would supply new customers to the shop and pub to ensure they continue to make a positive contribution to the village community in the long term.
- 6.7. We therefore object to the non preferred status of land at Old Skene Road within the MIR and Draft Proposed Plan, and provide support in the form of this report seeking an allocation for the land Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene for 45 homes with a policy to guide its future development.



Appendix 1

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

future housing development on the
land at old skene road, kirkton of skene



Prepared on behalf of
Barratt Homes North Scotland

February 2019

CONTENTS PAGE

1	Introduction	page 1
2	Methodology	page 1
3	Site Context	page 4
4	Potential Landscape Impacts and Their Effects	page 6
5	Potential Visual Impacts and Their Effects	page 10
6	Main Issues Report – Assessment of Site GR116	page 12
7	Conclusion	page 14

Figures

Figure 1 Planning Policy and Landscape Context

Figure 2 Photographic Viewpoints 1 – 3

Figure 3 Photographic Viewpoints 4 – 6

Figure 4 Indicative Landscape Development Framework

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

1 Introduction

- 1.1 VLM Landscape Design Ltd has been appointed by Barratt Homes North Scotland to carry out an assessment of landscape and visual effects likely to arise from a future housing development on the land to the south of Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene. This Landscape and Visual Appraisal forms part of a development bid for the land to be included in the forthcoming Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021. The Main Issues Report (MIR), published on 14 January 2019, identifies the land at the Old Skene Road as 'GR116', (referred to as 'the Site' hereafter).
- 1.2 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) describes the existing environment, the landscape character and visual amenity of the Site area which is located on the south-eastern fringes of the village of Kirkton of Skene. The LVA then appraises the predicted impacts that a future residential development may have in terms of its effects on views (i.e. visual impact), on the physical structure and on the aesthetic character of the landscape and townscape across the wider setting.
- 1.3 **Figure 1 Planning Policy and Landscape Context** illustrates the geographical location of the Site, its relationship to the existing settlement form of the village as well as the planning context and the Site's relationship with other adjoining land uses.

2 Methodology

- 2.1 This appraisal has been undertaken in line with current guidance contained in the '**Guidelines for Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition**' (*GLVIA 3*), published by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in association with the Landscape Institute; and, based on guidelines and principles described in *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002), published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage).
- 2.2 The methodology comprised an initial desk top study of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and planning documents, a site survey in January 2019 to 'ground-truth' desk top findings, followed by an analysis of the data and assessment of potential landscape and visual impacts. Existing mapping, legislation, policy documents and other written, graphic and digital data relating to the proposals was reviewed.
- 2.3 The approach taken reflects the need to identify and understand the following:
 - the character of the landscape and townscape across the site context and its ability to accommodate change;
 - the visual relationship between the site and the residential setting of Kirkton of Skene and the wider landscape setting.
- 2.4 The aim of this appraisal is to identify and evaluate potential effects arising from a future residential development. The level of effect is assessed through a combination of two considerations – the sensitivity of the landscape and townscape character and visual amenity (views) of the receptor; and the magnitude of effect upon the receptor that will result from the proposed development.

2.5 There is no requirement for a formal Environmental Assessment to support this Assessment. In line with current guidance contained in GLVIA 3 for non EIA Landscape and Visual Appraisals such as this, the terms 'significant' and 'not significant' have not been used. However, it is important to set out the grading of the scale of the potential impacts and based on detailed information available regarding the nature of future development, the scale, duration and permanence of the change and the size of the resource/area affected. The following criteria (adapted from GLVIA 3) is used.

Landscape Sensitivity and Magnitude of Effect

2.6 Sensitivity of the landscape depends both on its intrinsic quality and explicit value and, on its susceptibility to the type of change proposed.

2.7 The criteria for **landscape sensitivity** to change are summarised as follows:

- **High:** An area of highly valued landscape with strong structure and positive character, which is considered vulnerable to small degrees of change;
- **Moderate:** An area with a well-defined landscape character with positive qualities which may however, have suffered some degradation or erosion. Sensitivity will be diminished and change more likely to be accommodated; and,
- **Low:** An area of generally poor landscape character with few positive and valued features. Change will be a positive contribution to the landscape.

2.8 The criteria for **magnitude of effect on the landscape** are summarised below.

Table 1: Criteria for Landscape Magnitude of Effect

Level	Definition of Magnitude
High	Total loss of, or major alteration to, key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape and/or introduction of elements considered to be totally uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Post development character and composition of the baseline landscape resource will be fundamentally changed.
Medium	Partial loss of, or alteration to, one or more key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Post development character and composition of the baseline landscape resource will be partially, but noticeably changed.
Low	Minor loss of, or alteration to, one or more key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape and/or introduction of elements that may not be characteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Post development character and composition of the baseline landscape resource will be noticeably changed but the underlying character of the baseline landscape will be similar to the pre-development character.
Negligible	Very minor loss of, or alteration to, key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline landscape. Change to the landscape character will barely, if at all,

	be distinguishable.
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Visual Receptor Sensitivity and Magnitude of Effect

2.9 As with impacts on the character of the landscape, the impact on visual amenity is a function of the magnitude of effect and the sensitivity to change. Sensitivity refers to viewer sensitivity and depends upon the following:

- The length of viewing time e.g. a local resident with prolonged viewing opportunities will be more sensitive than a passer-by;
- Context of the view e.g. a viewer with an existing view of industrial structures will be less sensitive than a viewer with rural views; and,
- Distance of the viewpoint/receptor from the development and duration of effect.

2.10 The criteria for **Visual Receptor sensitivity** are summarised below:

- **High:** users of outdoor recreational facilities including strategic recreational footpaths, cycle routes or rights of way, whose attention may be focused on the landscape; important landscape features with physical, cultural/historic attributes; views from principal settlements; visitors to beauty spots and picnic areas.
- **Medium:** Other footpaths, people travelling through or past the landscape on roads, train lines or other transport routes; views from passenger ferries and cruisers, views from minor settlements.
- **Low:** People engaged in outdoor sports or recreation whose attention may be focused on their work/activity rather than an appreciation of the wider landscape.
- **Negligible:** Views from heavy industrialised areas or where direct views of the development are severely restricted and/or distant.

2.11 The criteria for magnitude of visual change are summarised in the table below:

Table 2: Criteria for Visual Magnitude of Effect

Level	Definition of Magnitude
High	Highly noticeable change, affecting most key characteristics and dominating the experience of the landscape. The introduction of incongruous development. A high proportion of the view is affected and the change is dominant.
Medium	Noticeable, partial change to a proportion of the landscape affecting some key characteristics and the experience of the landscape. The introduction of some uncharacteristic elements. Some of the view is affected and the change is conspicuous.
Low	Minor change affecting some characteristics and the experience of the landscape to an extent. The introduction of elements which are not uncharacteristic. Little of the view is affected but the change is apparent.
Negligible	Little perceptible change. No discernible effect upon the view and the change is inconspicuous.

Level of Effects

- 2.12 The level of effect of any identified landscape or visual receptor has been assessed as Major, Moderate, Minor or Negligible. These categories have been determined by consideration of viewpoint/visual receptor or landscape sensitivity and predicted magnitude of effect with the following table used as a guide only.

Table 3: Correlation of Sensitivity and Magnitude of Effect

	Landscape and Visual Sensitivity			
Magnitude of Change	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	Major	Major - moderate	Moderate	Moderate-minor
Medium	Major-moderate	Moderate	Moderate-minor	Minor
Low	Moderate	Moderate-minor	Minor	Minor-None
Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	None

- 2.13 This matrix is not used as a prescriptive tool and the methodology and analysis of potential effects at any particular location must take account of professional judgement. Occasionally, the analysis may not reflect the effects predicted by the grid.

- 2.14 The following tables provide a definition of the level of landscape and visual effects.

Table 4: Definition of Landscape and Visual Effects

Level	Definition of Magnitude
Major	The proposed development would entirely change the character of the landscape and the appearance of the view for a long time or permanently.
Moderate	The proposed development would introduce a noticeable difference to the landscape and within the view.
Minor	The proposed development would introduce a perceptible change to the receiving landscape characteristics and views.
Negligible - None	The proposed development would introduce very little to no discernible effect and may be difficult to differentiate from the surrounding landscape characteristics and from its surroundings within the view.

3 Site Context

Location

- 3.1 The Site is located on the south-eastern fringes of the small village of Kirkton of Skene, within the Garioch area of Aberdeenshire. The village lies approximately 1 km to the west of the large town of Westhill with a number of smaller villages and hamlets scattered across the wider agricultural landscape. The Site is strategically well-placed located to the south of the Old Skene Road and the busy arterial route of the A944

runs parallel to the Old Skene Road in close proximity to the south of the village. The A944 links to the new AWPR further to the east of Westhill.

Local Context

- 3.2 The small farming village developed around the Kirkton of Skene Parish Church within the core of the village where there is also a village shop, village hall, a pub, a play park and a large area of hard standing utilised as a car park. The West Lodge, dovecot and stone gate pier features demarcating the entrance into the former Kirkton House Estate are located to the south of the parish church adding to the built forms within the core and visually reinforcing the entrance into the village from the south and west. The Old Skene Road extends on an east-west axis from Westhill and forms the main spine to the village, looping around the 'core' and continuing westwards to Skene School, located beyond the fringes of the village. The B979 dissects the village on a broad north-south axis and joins the Old Skene Road for a short stretch as it loops around the village core and extends further south where it links to the A944. A number of streets branch off the northern side of the main spine road which serve approximately 100 houses. A recent housing enclave comprising approximately 15 new homes has been constructed just to the east of the village centre and served by a new road, Kesson Gardens, which is accessed off the Old Skene Road.
- 3.3 The village benefits from a relatively strong visual enclosure created by strongly rising topography to the north and north-east and extensive mature tree cover including former policy woodlands, woodland belts, ancient woodland, tree belts defining agricultural fields and numerous blocks of mixed plantations. Two former extensively wooded estates, Kirkton House and Easter Skene, effectively demarcate the southern and northern periphery to the village and form a soft backdrop when viewed from the wider setting. In addition to these well-vegetated and wooded grounds, the designated large estate and designed landscape of Dunecht House is located within the wider context to the west. The eastern fringes of this nationally protected Garden and Designed Landscape contains a large freshwater loch, the Loch of Skene, which is located approximately 1km to the west of the village, at its nearest point.
- 3.4 The former Kirkton House Estate provides the immediate context to the south of the Site where partly ancient woodland belts wrap around the periphery to the estate and extend around the Site's southern, western and northern boundaries. The driveway to the estate defines the southern boundary to the Site, extending from the West Lodge on Old Skene Road and through the estate grounds to the East Lodge located at the entrance onto the A944. Built forms from the original estate still exist including the Kirkton House, West Lodge, East Lodge, a walled garden and a dovecot. In more recent years, the estate has been utilised as a care home with additional buildings being constructed. This includes the large built form of Pitcairn Lodge in the southern part of the grounds and a cluster of cottages and a lodge near to the walled garden on the eastern fringes. Kirkton House which is located within the northern part near to the access driveway from the West Lodge was utilised as part of the care home buildings. However, it is no longer in use and currently boarded up.

Site Description

- 3.5 The Site itself comprises a broadly triangular area of land effectively sandwiched between the south-eastern fringes of the village and the mature wooded grounds to the former Kirkton House Estate. The Old Skene Road and a woodland belt define the north-eastern boundary and the former driveway into the Kirkton House grounds from the West Lodge defines the southern boundary. Built form within the core of the village including the West Lodge and cottages, the Parish Church, graveyard, and a new enclave of housing accessed off Kesson Gardens visually enclose the western and north-western part of the Site. In contrast, the south-eastern boundary is open in character defined by some scrub vegetation and a post and wire fence. The Site itself is relatively featureless comprising grassland, rough grassland and some areas of scrub along the southern fringes which extend into the unmanaged woodland belt on the northern side of the former estate driveway. A SUDS basin is located within the southern corner to the Site, near to the walled garden. This whole area including the fringes to the woodland has been unmanaged. As such, large areas of scrub vegetation has established and in conjunction with the deteriorating state of the walled garden and neglected woodland the southern fringes to the Site has an overall abandoned and discordant character.

4 Potential Landscape Impacts and Their Effects

Impacts on Landscape Designations

- 4.1 There are a number of environmental policies relating to the wider setting to the Site and the village, illustrating that the context has a high landscape quality and is noted for its natural, historical and cultural heritage as well as conservation value. A review of the Aberdeenshire LDP has identified a number of landscape designations and policies within the study area. Figure 1 Planning Policy and Landscape Context illustrates the locations of these policies and landscape designations.

Built Heritage

- 4.2 Figure 1 highlights that the study area contains a high number of listed buildings illustrating the rich history and built heritage of the area. Several listed buildings and structures are located in close proximity to the Site: the Parish Church of Skene and Skene graveyard are located adjacent to the western corner of the Site. The church is a Category B listed building, built around 1801, although there has been a church on this site since the 17th century. The graveyard is demarcated by a stone rubble wall which extends along the western boundary to the Site and is Category C listed. The former Kirkton House estate also contains a number of category B listed buildings and structures including the house itself, the dovecot at the western entrance and the walled garden, all dating to the early 19th century. There are also several listed buildings scattered across the surrounding rural landscape to the west and a few listed buildings within the former Easter Skene estate on the northern periphery to the village.

- 4.3 Within this context of high built heritage and architectural merits, the approach to the delivery of a future residential development at this location would place an emphasis on the potential for a high quality scheme which, through the application of an appropriate design philosophy, would be seen to respect the qualities, characteristics and settings to the listed buildings and structures in terms of scale, height, form, alignment and appearance. In this regard, by stepping new built forms away from the southern and western boundaries and introducing a green buffer including areas of woodland and structure planting to reinforce the primary tree cover around the periphery, it is considered development of the Site would not affect the integrity of these listed features. With a managed approach to the enhanced landscape framework, together with carefully sited built forms and the use of high quality boundary treatments, it is considered a development could come forward that would not only visually respect the surrounding built heritage but enhance their settings as well as the local environment.
- 4.4 Inter-visibility from the setting to other listed buildings and structures within the study area are contained by a combination of extensive mature tree cover and the urban form of Kirkton of Skene. As such, the settings to these built heritage features will not be affected by any future development of the Site.
- 4.5 Dunecht House Garden and Designed Landscape is located approximately 850m to the west at its nearest point. The estate covers a large area of land which is densely wooded around the Category A listed house and formal grounds within the western part. A large body of open water, Loch of Skene, occupies the eastern fringes of the GDL surrounded by wet and pine woodland. The loch is also designated as a Local Nature Conservation Site given its importance for breeding and wintering birds. From a visual perspective, due to the extensive wooded grounds combined with intervening tree cover and built form, the visual amenity and integrity of the GDL will not be affected by future development of the Site, nor will development have any impact upon the biodiversity and conservation interests of the Local Nature Conservation Site.

Green Networks

- 4.6 Consistent with the aspirations of the Local Development Plan to contribute to the Green Networks across Aberdeenshire, development of this Site represents an excellent opportunity to enhance and augment existing green networks within and on the fringes of Kirkton of Skene. Through the introduction native species woodland to the edge of the ancient woodland belts and infill planting to augment and increase the age diversity of existing mature tree cover and fragmented habitat corridors can be linked and extended around the Site and beyond.
- 4.7 In tandem with these aspirations to extend habitat corridors and increase biodiversity, development of the Site also provides an opportunity to extend and connect existing areas of green space to new amenity areas. Kirkton of Skene contains three areas of open space which are identified as 'Protected Land' in the Aberdeenshire LDP. The nearest open space is located adjacent to the most northerly corner of the Site. The introduction of an integrated path network would provide a connection between the existing core path network along the Old Skene Road and the core path within the

grounds to the former Kirkton House to the south. Not only will this allow long term permeability of this area but will increase the sense of public access and ensure a circular path network is created with direct links between existing and new areas of open space for use by new residents and the wider community.

Impacts on Landscape Resource

- 4.8 The Site comprises a large field of rough grassland and some areas of scrub vegetation which have begun to establish along the southern periphery and extend into the woodland belt and understorey planting around the northern fringes to the former Kirkton House walled garden. A linear area of managed grassland runs along the northern boundary and contains some scattered and small groups of young tree planting. There are also a few small groups of more established trees along the western boundary.
- 4.9 As a result of future construction of the Site for a small-scale housing development, there would be a loss of a large portion of grassland, limited areas of scrub and small parts of the managed grassland adjacent to Kesson Gardens. Although the Site is surrounded by extensive areas of high natural heritage importance in the form of Loch of Skene LNCS and the extensive mature tree cover and understorey across the Dunecht GDL, and the former Kirkton House and Easter Skene House estates, land cover across the Site itself is not a particularly valuable resource. In addition, there is an abundance of agricultural land and grassland within the wider context encompassing the village and its loss will be negligible.
- 4.10 Although not designated or protected through policy, the mature and ancient woodland belts and mature tree cover which extends around the periphery to the Site and across the former estate grounds to the south form distinct landscape features that support a range of wildlife habitats. The approach to the delivery to a future development would fully acknowledge the importance of these features and recognise that the retention and augmentation of these valuable resources is seen as an important baseline factor to the proper planning of this Site. Future development would not only protect these important landscape resources through effective management as far as practicable but with the introduction of native species based planting to augment and enhance the fringes and a level of ornamental specimen tree and ornamental planting incorporated site-wide this would help to reinforce the sense of structure experienced across the Site area, with benefits to the wider setting and the biodiversity and conservation value could also be increased.
- 4.11 Whilst there will be period of adjustment and change, through careful site planning, development will have a negligible impact on the overall landscape resource in the short term, whilst in the longer term many of the existing landscape features will be enhanced, adding to the overall value of the landscape resource and providing the opportunity for the creation of extended wildlife corridors.
- 4.12 It is judged that the susceptibility to change is *Medium* and the value is *Medium* (*Grassland features – Low; Mature tree cover and scrub – High*). This gives a sensitivity to change rating of *Medium*. The magnitude of effect is assessed to be **Negligible** and the impact on the landscape resource is **Negligible** and the nature of

change is assessed to be **Slight Adverse** during the construction phase. Following completion and once the planting strategy begins to establish, the overall residual effect on the landscape resource is assessed to be **Negligible** and highly **Beneficial**.

Impacts on Landscape Character

- 4.13 Following development, there would be an impact to the local landscape character of the Site and its immediate context, changing from an agricultural field to a high quality residential development set within a parkland setting and framed by an enhanced woodland structure.
- 4.14 In terms of landscape character, the Site falls within the 'Wooded Estates' Landscape Character Type, as classified in the adopted SG Landscape 1: Landscape Character. Appendix 1 of this supporting guidance provides an update to the 'South and Central Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Assessment' published by SNH in 1998. The positive attributes of this rolling lowland hills and valleys landscape include the richness of cultural heritage, the concentration of wooded estates and policy woodlands which create a strong woodland structure to the mixed farmland and pattern of fields. Specifically within the context to the Site, positive features include the ancient wooded belts and mature woodland tree cover associated with the extended former grounds of the former Kirkton House and lengths of stone walls bounding the setting to the listed parish church and graveyard along the Site's western boundary, the walled garden near to the southern boundary and the western gate lodge and listed dovecot located just beyond the south-western corner. The extensive mature wooded grounds of the former Easter Skene estate on the northern edge of the village add to the strong woodland structure and rich and diverse texture which characterises the setting to Kirkton of Skene.
- 4.15 Within this extensively wooded landscape setting almost surrounding the Site and the village, it is considered the local landscape and historic townscape offer many positive attributes that can be drawn into the vision for the Site enabling a pro-active design strategy to be developed. In turn, this would ensure that a new small-scale housing development forms an appropriate addition to the landscape on the urban edge. The numerous well-established landscape components surrounding the Site including the ancient tree belts, mature policy woodlands, small groups of mature trees along the western boundary and line of single newly planted trees scattered along the northern fringes combine with other landscape features across the village to create a strong woodland framework which could readily absorb development. In combination with the rising landform to the north and the extended urban form of the village, the Site is located within a distinct compartment in the landscape.
- 4.16 The sense of scale and form of the woodland areas which have established around the Site's northern, western and southern periphery and wider context to the south and north influence the character of the setting and therefore, a future Masterplan would allow for the introduction of new woodland belts to help enhance this characteristic and in turn, reinforce the sense of structure in this landscape. Particular attention would be given to the eastern fringes where new built form would be stepped back into the Site ensuring the existing building line created by the cluster of dwellings to the south of the walled garden (namely Pitcairn Lodge and Kirkton Mews) is

retained. A new parkland would be introduced on the eastern fringes and framed by a new woodland belt which would be seen to extend like a green finger from the wooded former estate grounds towards the Old Skene Road. This approach would reinforce and augment the existing and prolific primary woodland framework in the area and ensure new development is framed. In turn, by retaining the existing built edge, new development would be seen to be consistent with existing settlement pattern and form a new secluded wooded character to eastern edge of the village. In the long term, this approach would not only protect but visually enhance the setting.

- 4.17 Historic built features within close proximity to the Site and lengths of stone walls and gate piers defining these settings combine with the woodland characteristics and mature tree cover to create an estate character that was once prevalent in the area. In turn these components create a strong sense of place, distinctiveness and maturity. In addition to enhancing and augmenting the woodland structure, development of the Site therefore presents the opportunity to extend these built heritage features into the Site with the introduction of a new gate lodge at the entrance into Kesson Gardens from the Old Skene Road and lengths of walling and gate piers at key locations.
- 4.18 Overall, it is considered that the strategy outlined in this appraisal would be consistent with the characteristics of the inherent estate character and by incorporating a distinctly formal layout would reflect the more traditional street pattern within Kirkton of Skene. Proposals such as the introduction of a new woodland structure, woodland edge and infill planting, avenue and specimen tree planting, stone walls and gate pier features marking access points and linking building groups together, would have a positive effect and build upon the strong sense of place, distinctiveness, identity and maturity that the Site already exhibits.
- 4.19 Sensitivity to change across the local landscape is considered to be *Medium-High* given the *High* value and *Medium* susceptibility to change. Magnitude of effect is considered to be Medium to **Low** during construction and in the short term. In the long term and once the mitigation strategy establishes, the character of the Site will change and will be seen to form part of the settlement with many positive features and a more secluded wooded character to the urban / rural interface. Magnitude of effect will reduce to **Low**. Therefore the residual impacts upon landscape character are assessed to be **Moderate-Minor to Moderate** and the nature of change **Beneficial** in the long term.

5 Potential Visual Impacts and Their Effects on Visual Amenity and Views

- 5.1 In assessing the visual impact of a future housing development on the landscape and townscape, full consideration has been given to all viewpoints, their location and distance from the Site, the quality of each view and the impact that a future development will have on its setting. The visual assessment is based upon a desk top study and a site visit with a selection of photographic viewpoints illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. The locations of these viewpoints are presented in the inset on each figure.
- 5.2 In general, the prevailing topography across the wider setting where the rising agricultural land to the north and north-east of the village combine with the urban form of Kirkton of Skene and the well-established and extensive woodland structure to

create a tight visual envelope with limited opportunities for a handful of views. This is illustrated in the representative viewpoints 1 - 6, Figures 2 and 3.

- 5.3 Wider views from the south and west are generally restricted and contained by the prolific woodland structure evident across the immediate Site area and across the setting to the village, as illustrated in Viewpoint 4. Even within the local context from the west fringes of the village, the juxtaposition of built form and the strong landscape framework across the grounds to Kirkton House screen and contain the majority of views. (Viewpoint 5).
- 5.4 As the landform rises towards the summits of Auchronie Hill and the Hill of Keir and to the north and north-east respectively, long distance views are afforded across well-defined agricultural fields towards the village nestled into the lower slopes and framed by the extensive policy woodlands of Kirkton House and Easter Skene House and the woodland belt demarcating the Old Skene Road corridor. In combination with built form which wraps around the Site's north-western, western and southern periphery, heavily filtered and glimpsed views towards very small parts of the eastern sector are afforded with the vast majority of the Site hidden from view. Viewpoint 3 illustrates a middle distant view from the north.
- 5.5 Viewpoint 6 illustrates a local view looking south towards the Site from the core path which runs adjacent to the Old Skene Road, near to the junction with Kesson Gardens. This existing access road would be utilised in any future housing development. Whilst the ancient tree belt which extends along the Old Skene Road at this location filters views into the Site (and in summer months this filtering effect would be more pronounced), there would be a local visual impact for road and core path users as they enter the village. However, with a new parkland introduced on the eastern side of Kesson Gardens and infill and woodland edge planting to reinforce the ancient tree belts, it is considered visual impacts towards a new housing development could be controlled.
- 5.6 Due to the open nature of the south-eastern boundary, a gap in the mature tree structure has developed allowing some inter-visibility of the Site from the east and south-east. Viewpoint 2 illustrates a static 'worse-case' view from the Old Skene Road on the edge of Westhill where views towards part of the Site are available. A similar view is also afforded from the edge of the small village of Mason Lodge, (Viewpoint 1). Whilst the settlement form of Kirkton of Skene is effectively filtered by the mature tree cover within these views, the Kirkton of Skene Parish Church adjacent to the north-west corner of the Site and the walled garden, Kirkton Mews Cottages and Pitcairn Lodge within the former Kirkton House estate to the south of the site are highly visible.
- 5.7 Due to their extent, the built structures within the Kirkton House grounds form a large cluster and as such a prominent visual feature in views from the east. Although the entire Kirkton House grounds is out with the settlement limit of the village in policy terms, visually within the landscape, the grounds are perceived to form part of the village and essentially form the extent of the urban edge. By building upon this and retaining the existing building line, new housing would be stepped back from a large parkland area on the eastern fringes and orientated to overlook the new green space, thereby affording an outward looking development. The new park would include large

swathes of amenity grass and wildflower meadows and would be framed by a new woodland belt, woodland edge and structure planting. Not only would this approach reinforce the perceived settlement limit to the village, but also bring a new positive element and secluded wooded character to the edge of the setting.

- 5.8 The inter-visibility of the listed Parish Church building with the wider area is seen as an important characteristic to the setting of Kirkton of Skene and as such, by stepping housing back from the south side of Kesson Gardens and introducing a linear area of grass and specimen trees, a new vista could be created on the approach to the village from the east thereby protecting the integrity of the setting to the church and ensuring the built and cultural heritage is not lost or hidden through insensitive development.
- 5.9 To summarise, views towards the Site are mostly restricted or contained through a combination of the extensive woodland structure evident across the village and its setting and the local topography to the north. Where views may be available, it is considered these would be consistent with the existing settlement pattern where glimpsed views towards built forms on the fringe of the village and framed by a strong woodland framework are wholly characteristic. The use of local historic estate features in the form of stone walls, gate piers and formal hedging would define and signify the entrance into a new housing development and would also create a strong gateway into the village from the east. In tandem with the retention, enhancement and management of existing tree cover and new landscape features, it is considered that the visual amenity of the eastern fringe to Kirkton of Skene would be significantly improved.
- 5.10 The sensitivity of the visual amenity of the context to the Site to change is considered to be *High* given the surrounding recreational receptors, the high built heritage and cultural value, the sense of place formed by the former estate settings and the Site's fringe settlement location. The visual magnitude of effect from the wider context to the north, west and south are considered to be *Negligible*; the effect is **Negligible** and nature of change **Neutral**. From the local context to the north and from the east, the visual magnitude of effect is assessed to be *Low* and the effect **Moderate** and **Slight Adverse** in the short term. Once the existing woodland cover comes under management and is enhanced by infill and native understorey planting, new woodland belts and specimen tree planting, the development as a whole would bring a new positive and attractive environment to the eastern fringes and form a strong gateway development. In the medium to long term, visual impacts would reduce to **Minor** and **Beneficial**.

6 Main Issues Report – Assessment of Site GR116

- 6.1 To support the preparation of the Local Development Report (LDP) 2021 Aberdeenshire Council published the Main Issues Report (MIR) on 14 January 2019. MIR Appendices detail the Officers' responses to the Call for Sites submissions.
- 6.2 Within the Aberdeenshire Council's detailed site assessment regarding development of the land at the Old Skene Road (the Site), identified as **GR116** in Appendix Garioch Part 2, the officers' state "*development would negatively affect the setting of a number of nearby listed buildings, particularly the B-listed Skene Parish Church and views of*

the church from the east.” In the overall assessment of the village, the officers’ regard protecting the countryside to the east as important to not only preserve the character and setting of the village but in preventing coalescence with Westhill. This is re-affirmed in the officers’ assessment of development options in Kirkton of Skene which concludes further expansion of the village is likely to exacerbate the coalescence issue with Westhill.

- 6.3 This section aims to draw out the opportunities and constraints of the Site (MIR reference GR116) which have been derived from the rigorous assessment of potential landscape and visual effects and in turn will inform the decision making process and guide development to the right place. Thereby achieving quality residential environments as prescribed in the strategic objectives and vision of the LDP.
- 6.4 The Site lies adjacent to but out with the settlement boundary for Kirkton of Skene, as defined within the Aberdeenshire LDP (2017), and as such has ‘countryside’ status. The existing urban/rural interface between settlement and countryside is rather abrupt and relatively weak in that it relies on rear garden boundary features and a post and wire fence with scattered young specimen trees to provide a long term defensible settlement boundary. It is considered a sensitive approach to the site planning would enhance the ancient tree belt along the northern boundary and extend woodland planting like a green finger along the open south-eastern boundary where it would merge with the mature tree cover across the former Kirkton House estate. With the introduction of these new and enhanced visual and physical features and in conjunction with a new large parkland on the eastern fringes, which itself would be the subject of a detailed landscape strategy, these components would create an easily read physical relationship between the developed settlement and the open countryside to the east.
- 6.5 This is advocated in the SPP. Although relating to Green Belt boundaries, paragraph 162 states, *“inner boundaries should not be drawn too tightly around the urban edge, but where appropriate should create an area suitable for planned development between the existing settlement edge and green belt boundary.”* Paragraph 162 continues, *“Green belt boundaries should be clearly identifiable on the ground using strong visual or physical landscape features such as rivers, tree belts, railways or main roads. Hedges and field enclosures will rarely provide a sufficiently robust boundary.”*
- 6.6 In addition, to positively address the interface between ‘town’ and ‘country’ a small-scale residential development arranged around a series of courtyards and shared surfaces would be proposed. Urban form would loosen towards the eastern fringe with outward-looking dwellings within large grounds arranged in an ad-hoc manner and overlooking the new area of green space. Within this context, it is predicted that development of the Site would not prejudice the qualities of the countryside nor increase coalescence with Westhill, but rather, be seen to strengthen and reinforce the settlement boundary of the village by consolidating the edge to the built up area and positively enhancing the urban-rural interface. Not only would this allow a physical and visual perception of separation between the two communities to be maintained but also bring a more wooded and secluded eastern edge to the village. A sensitively

designed development would thereby preserve the setting and character of the village and prevent coalescence in the long term.

- 6.7 The officers' concerns regarding the setting to listed buildings in close proximity to the Site can also be appropriately mitigated through sensitive design. Stepping built form back from Kesson Gardens corridor and introducing a linear area of grassland framed by semi-mature specimen tree planting would effectively allow a channelled vista to open up towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church and inter-visibility of the church with the wider countryside to the east would be maintained. Similarly, a linear swathe of grassland and wildflower meadows, planted with woodland and riparian planting would extend from the new park along the southern periphery, and augment existing tree cover on the fringes of the former Kirkton House estate. This would create an attractive green buffer between the setting to the C-listed walled garden and to a lesser degree to the B-listed Kirkton House which is set back into the former estate grounds.
- 6.8 Due to the Site's gateway location, it is considered this development bid also offers tremendous opportunity to improve the gateway into Kirkton of Skene from the east. Currently, this entrance into the village is not distinguishable and in stark contrast to the western gateway which is signified by lengths of stone walls, gate piers and the West Lodge associated with the former Kirkton House estate. The Site's northern boundary is defined by an ancient unmanaged woodland belt and a dilapidated stone wall. These remnant features reflect the historic past and former estate character once prevalent across the setting to Kirkton of Skene. By enhancing and extending these features and with the potential addition of gate piers and formal hedge planting, the Site presents a real opportunity to create a highly attractive edge to the village.
- 6.9 By building upon the Site's inherent key features such as the stone walls and the strong visual and physical relationship with the urban edge, as well as drawing upon the characteristics of the more secluded woodland context to the immediate north and south, a high quality development would be realised and would be seen to effectively round off the built form to Kirkton of Skene, whilst creating a distinctive place with a strong identity. This is advocated in Designing Places, PAN 67 and PAN 83, where CONTEXT, IDENTITY AND PLACE are fundamental issues in designing new environments for people to live.

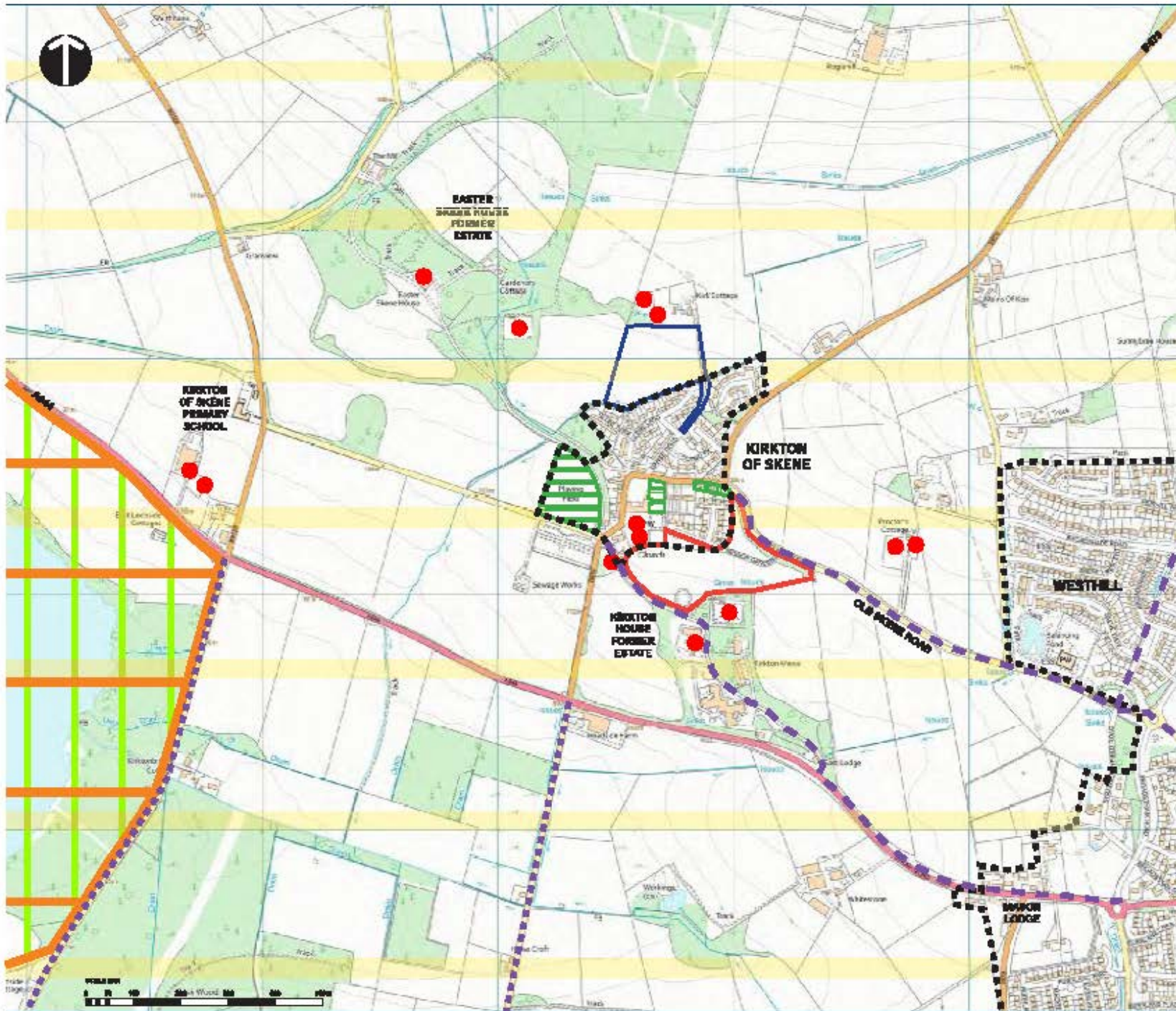
7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Following a rigorous investigation, it is considered that in both landscape and visual terms the Site is appropriate for future housing and would achieve the planning objectives for the village as advocated within the recently published MIR (January 2019). On account of the Site's low elevation and its direct relationship with the existing urban form which wraps around three of the Site's boundaries, development of the Site would consolidate the built edge and round off the settlement form. In combination with the introduction of a new park, augmentation and strengthening of the primary tree cover and an extension of woodland cover along the eastern fringes, a new robust settlement boundary could be implemented in the short term which would prevent issues of coalescence in the long term.

- 7.2 A development could be planned to incorporate and enhance the inherent Site features which relate to the rich historic past of Kirkton of Skene and with the introduction of a new woodland and structure planting would complement the existing estate setting and improve the environment at the gateway into the village from the east. This would lead to a unique high quality residential development set within a parkland estate setting and would be readily absorbed into the townscape of the village and wider landscape without any detrimental impacts upon the landscape character, visual amenity and setting of listed buildings.
- 7.3 To conclude, future development of the Site would not impact on the setting of the countryside policy or listed buildings, would avoid coalescence, and would preserve and enhance the identity, character and setting of Kirkton of Skene.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

FIGURES



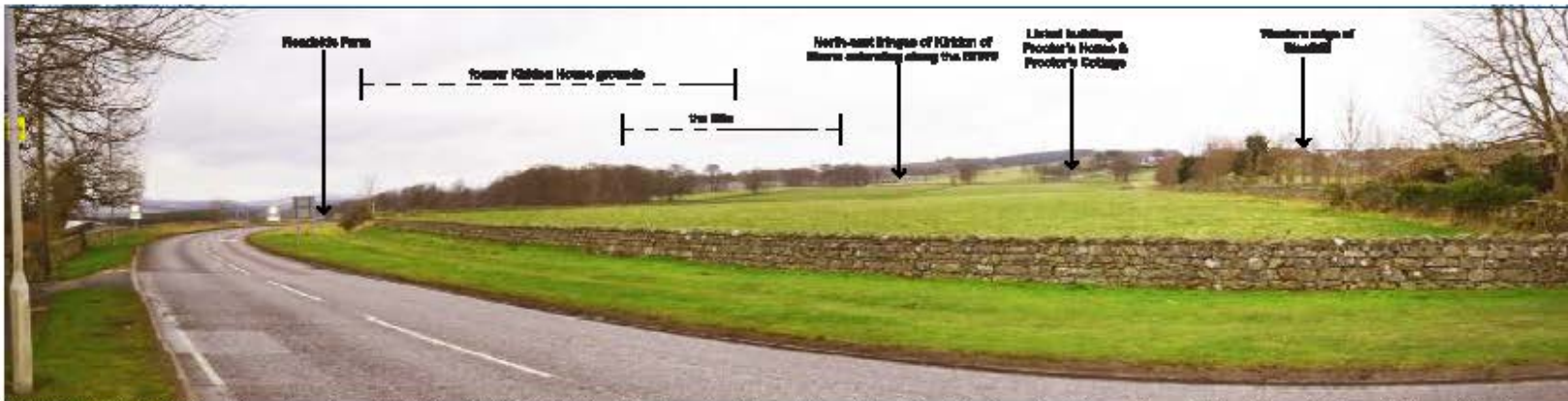
- LEGEND**
- SITE BOUNDARY - DEVELOPMENT MD SITE GR118
 - SETTLEMENT FORM
 - WATERCOURSE
 - NATURE WOODLAND COVER
 - AGRICULTURAL FIELDS
- PLANNING POLICY (DRAW FROM THE ABERDEENSHIRE LDP 2012)**
- SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY
 - COUNTRYSIDE
 - GARDEN AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPE - DUNDECHT HOUSE GOLF
 - LOCAL NATURE CONSERVATION SITE - LOCH OF SKENE
 - LISTED BUILDING
 - PROTECTED LAND
 P1: To conserve the playing field as an important local amenity;
 P2: To conserve the area of open space;
 P3: To conserve the play area and area of open space as an important local amenity
 - CORE PATH NETWORK
 - CORE PATH NETWORK - ON ROAD LINES
 - DEVELOPMENT MD SITE GR127



Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

figure 1
planning policy & landscape context

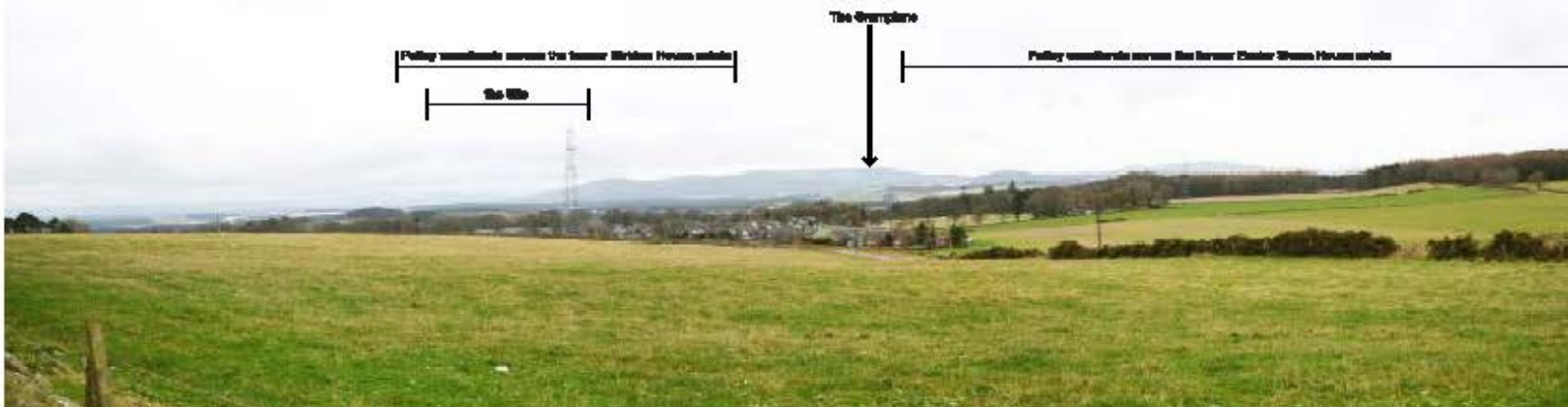
date: February 2018 scale: 1:7,500 @ A1



VIEWPOINT 1: Middle distant view looking north-east towards the site from the A914, Strath Road, on the western edge of the small village of Mearns Lodge. Intervening mature landscape features including policy woodlands across the former Kiltinan House Estate and Easter Skene Estate, tree belts defining field boundaries and the arched belt of trees creating an over-cast effect along the Old Skene Road combine to contain views towards the western sector of the site and Skene itself towards the eastern sector. Where visible any new housing would be seen in the context of the existing built edge of Kiltinan of Skene and would not exceed the visual urban envelope of the village from this location.



VIEWPOINT 2: Middle distant view looking west along the Old Skene Road from the eastern fringes of the town of Mearns. Within the rich woodland structure which accents down the lower slopes of the Hill of Kelt, there is some inter-visibility with a number of buildings located on the fringes of the village including the listed Parish Church. By stepping new built form away from this listed church and graveyard and introducing a large new parkland on the eastern fringes, this approach would form a vista to the church and create a more secluded wooded character to the edge of the village, thereby protecting both the setting to the church and village in the long term.



VIEWPOINT 3: Middle distant view from north of the village looking south-west towards the site from near the Matrix of Kelt Forestland at the junction of the B976 and a minor road. The village sits on low lying ground with the wooded grounds of Easter Skene House integrating with policy woodland across the former Kiltinan House estate to wrap around the village and provide a soft backdrop. Views towards the site are heavily filtered by housing and mature woodland belts along the Old Skene Road.



BARRATT
VLM
Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kiltinan of Skene

figure 2
photographic viewpoints 1 - 3

date: February 2019



VIEWPOINT 4: Middle distant view looking east-west-east from the roadworks junction of the A944 and the B9120 across middle fields towards the Old and Kirtion of Skene. Below policy woodland across the former estate of Easter Stone House and Kirtion House effectively certain views towards the village. This crossroads towards the eastern boundary is the extensive Durack House Garden and Designed Landscape, which extends much further west incorporating wooded grounds around the listed Durack House and the Loch of Skene, a Local Nature Conservation Site, which is located just beyond where this viewpoint is taken.



VIEWPOINT 5: Local view looking east towards the West Lodge entrance into the former Kirtion House estate on the western fringe of the village. The entrance into the former Easter Stone estate is demarcated by the Easter Stone Lodge and combined with stone wall features, the listed Parish Church and cottages of the entrance to Kirtion House form and create a gateway from here an interesting landscape and aesthetic entrance into the village. Elevated views towards several new residences may be visible between the new roads and landscape features however they will be seen in the context of the existing historic fabric.



VIEWPOINT 6: Local view from the entrance into Kirtion Gardens from the Old Skene Road, looking south towards the site. The mature ancient belt of deciduous trees form a strong landscape feature along the Old Skene Road and merge with the profile woodland structure across Kirtion of Skene in middle distant and wider views. These wooded feature combines with the landscape in setting the site in a distinct compartment. Pushing new development back from this entrance and introducing a new parkland fringe including woodland and structure planting will be seen to complete the landscape pattern in the area and provide an effective urban-rural interface.



BARRATT **VLM**

Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kirtion of Skene

figure 3
photographic viewpoints 4 - 6

date: February 2019



Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kirton of Skene

figure 4
Indicative landscape development framework

date: February 2018 scale: 1:2,000 @ A1

Savills Planning



Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021: Main Issues Report 2019

Main Issues Report Response Form

Important Information: Please Read

The Main Issues Report (MIR) is a key stage in preparing the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021 (LDP 2021). The MIR sets out options for how the LDP 2021 could be improved both in terms of the policies that Aberdeenshire Council will use to determine planning applications as well as identifying land allocations for development. The MIR has been published along with a Monitoring Report and Interim Environmental Report of the Strategic Environmental Assessment. These, along with other supporting documents are available at: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/ldp-2021/main-issues-report/>.

Comments are sought on the MIR and Interim Environmental Report, or indeed any other matter that you feel that we need to consider, by 5pm on Monday, 8 April 2019. Responses can be emailed to us at ldp@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or received via post, Planning Policy Team, Infrastructure Services, Aberdeenshire Council, Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GB.

Please note that in order for comments to be considered as valid you must include your contact details.

We will use these details to confirm receipt of your comments and to seek clarification or request further information as required. Should you have any concerns regarding the holding of such information please contact ldp@aberdeenshire.gov.uk. Anonymous comments will not be considered as part of the consultation process. Petitions will only be noted in the name of the person submitting the document.

All comments received will be carefully assessed and will be used to inform the preparation of the Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. There will be a further opportunity to comment on the Proposed Plan when it is published in December 2019.

Name	[REDACTED]
Organisation <i>(optional)</i>	Savills (UK) Ltd
On behalf of <i>(if relevant)</i>	Barratt North Scotland
Address	Savills [REDACTED]
Postcode	[REDACTED]
Telephone <i>(optional)</i>	[REDACTED]
E-mail <i>(optional)</i>	[REDACTED]



Doing things digitally is our preference. Tick the box if you are not happy to receive correspondence via email:

Tick the box if you would like to subscribe to the Aberdeenshire LDP eNewsletter:

Fair processing notice

Please tick to confirm your agreement to the following statements:

By submitting a response to the consultation, I agree that Aberdeenshire Council can use the information provided in this form, including my personal data, as part of the review of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. This will include consultation on the Main Issues Report (including any subsequent Proposed Plan).

I also agree that following the end of the consultation, i.e. after 8 April 2019, my name and respondent identification number (provided to you by Aberdeenshire Council on receipt of your submission) can be published alongside a copy of my completed response on the Main Issues Report website (contact details and information that is deemed commercially sensitive will not be made available to the public).

The data controller for this information is Aberdeenshire Council. The data on the form will be used to inform a public debate of the issues and choices presented in the Main Issues Report of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021. It will inform the content of the Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan.

Aberdeenshire Council will only keep your personal data for as long as is needed. Aberdeenshire Council will retain your response and personal data for a retention period of 5 years from the date upon which it was collected. After 5 years Aberdeenshire Council will review whether it is necessary to continue to retain your information for a longer period. A redacted copy of your submission will be retained for 5 years beyond the life of the Local Development Plan 2021, possibly until 2037

Your Data, Your Rights

You have got legal rights about the way Aberdeenshire Council handles and uses your data, which include the right to ask for a copy of it, and to ask us to stop doing something with your data.

If you are unhappy with the way that Aberdeenshire Council or the Joint Data Controllers have processed your personal data then you do have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Officer, but you should raise the issue with the Data Protection Officers first. The Data Protection Officers can be contacted by writing to:

- [REDACTED], Data Protection Officer, Aberdeenshire Council, Business Services, Town House, 34 Low Street, Banff, AB45 1AY

If you have difficulty understanding this document and require a translation, or you need help reading this document (for example if you need it in a different format or in another language), please phone us on 01467 536230.

Which document(s) are you committing on?	Main Issues Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Draft Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Strategic Environmental Assessment Interim Environmental Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your comments

Barratt North Scotland (Barratt Homes) are responding to the Aberdeenshire Main Issues Report (MIR) in respect of Site GR116 at Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene, seeking its inclusion in the Proposed Local Development Plan (Proposed Plan) as a future housing site. The submission seeks the removal of the Old Skene Road site from the countryside and inclusion of the site within the settlement boundary with a designation for residential development for 45 new homes for development within the first plan period.

The site owners, [REDACTED], have entered into an agreement with Barratt Homes to take this site forward through the planning process to development on the ground. Barratt Homes is an award winning House Builder with a proven track record of delivering quality housing developments within Aberdeenshire and across Scotland. The Home Builders Federation (HBF) recently awarded Barratt the maximum 5 Star housebuilder rating for the 10th year in a row, and they are the only major developer to achieve this. The involvement of Barratt Homes at this early stage in the site promotion exercise demonstrates developer commitment to this location and adds to the overall effectiveness of the site, which will be a key consideration for Aberdeenshire Council in assessing housing sites.

The site has an indicative capacity of approximately 45 units. A number of plans accompany the submission document to illustrate how this capacity has been reached. Appendix 1 – Figure 1 illustrates the key site considerations, while an indicative landscape development framework plan is included within Appendix 1 – Figure 2.

It is also important to note that during the promotion of the site through the last LDP (Site Ref: Ga018), the Council clearly acknowledged within the MIR (2013) that *'the site is well screened by vegetation'*. This same level of screening and associated woodland has not changed, as such the proposals will remain well screened and would not have any negative impact on the nearby listed buildings.

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) supports this representation (Appendix 1 of this submission), and concludes that the site would not impact on the setting of the countryside or listed buildings, would avoid coalescence, and would preserve and enhance the identity, character and setting of Kirkton of Skene. The LVA confirms that the proposed layout of the residential development safeguards the vista from the east, towards the Category B listed Skene Parish Church. Further commentary is provided within Section 4 of this report.

There is ample capacity in Skene Primary School to accommodate the likely additional educational requirements arising from a development of the scale envisaged for this site. Further justification is set out within Section 4 of the submitted report. The report also provides a detailed site description and an initial analysis of technical matters.

The delivery of 45 new homes will help sustain the range of important existing services within Kirkton of Skene, supplying new customers to the shop and pub to ensure they continue to make a positive contribution to the village community in the long term.

The submitted representation clearly demonstrates the effectiveness and deliverability of the site and concludes that the site is suitable for inclusion within the Proposed Local Development Plan for residential use. This representation should also be read in conjunction with wider Barratt Homes representations to the Aberdeenshire MIR.

4. Site Details

Name of the site (Please use the LDP name if the site is already allocated)	Land off Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene
Site address	Land off Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene
OS grid reference (if available)	NJ 80470 07550
Site area/size	4.2ha/ 10.5 acres
Current land use	Agricultural
Brownfield/greenfield	Greenfield
Please include an Ordnance Survey map (1:1250 or 1:2500 base for larger sites, e.g. over 2ha) showing the location and extent of the site, points of access, means of drainage etc.	

5. Ownership/Market Interest

Ownership (Please list the owners in question 3 above)	Owned and under option
Is the site under option to a developer?	Yes
	If yes, please give details. The land is under option to Barratt North Scotland.
Is the site being marketed?	No
	If yes, please give details

6. Legal Issues

Are there any legal provisions in the title deeds that may prevent or restrict development? (e.g. way leave for utility providers, restriction on use of land, right of way etc.)	No
	If yes, please give details
Are there any other legal factors that might prevent or restrict development? (e.g. ransom strips/issues with accessing the site etc.)	No
	If yes, please give details

7. Planning History

Have you had any formal/informal pre-application discussions with the Planning Service and what was the response?	Yes
	If yes, please give details. Formal discussions took place with ██████████ ██████████ in relation to the Schedule 4 response from the previous LDP examination not being forwarded to the Scottish Government Reporter for consideration. The bid ref was Ga018.
Previous planning applications	Please provide application reference number(s), description(s) of the development, and whether planning permission was approved or refused: Planning ref APP/2008/1132 for the erection of 18 homes to the immediate north of the bid site was granted permission on 05/03/2012 and has subsequently

	been complete. A further application, APP/2010/2111, for the erection of 2 homes was granted permission on 05/03/2012 and has subsequently been completed.
Previous 'Call for sites' history. See Main Issues Report 2013 at www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp	Please provide Previous 'Call for sites'/'Bid' reference number: Ga017 (for 250 units) and Ga018 (for 30 units).
Local Development Plan status www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp	Is the site currently allocated for any specific use in the existing LDP? No If yes, do you wish to change the site description and or allocation?

8. Proposed Use

Proposed use		Housing
Housing	Approx. no of units	35 - 45 units
	Proposed mix of house types	Number of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detached: TBC dependant on market demand. Semi-detached: TBC dependant on market demand. Flats: TBC dependant on market demand. Terrace: TBC dependant on market demand. Other (e.g. Bungalows): TBC dependant on market demand.
		Number of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 bedroom homes: TBC dependant on market demand. 2 bedroom homes: TBC dependant on market demand. 3 bedroom homes: TBC dependant on market demand. 4 or more bedroom homes: TBC dependant on market demand.
	Tenure (Delete as appropriate)	Private
Affordable housing proportion	25%	
Employment	Business and offices	n/a
	General industrial	n/a
	Storage and distribution	n/a
	Do you have a specific occupier for the site?	n/a
Other	Proposed use (please specify) and floor space	n/a
	Do you have a specific occupier for the site?	n/a
Is the area of each proposed use noted in the OS site plan?		n/a

9. Delivery Timescales

We expect to adopt the new LDP in 2021. How many years after this date would you expect development to begin? (please tick)	0-5 years	√
	6-10 years	
	10+ years	
When would you expect the development to be finished? (please tick)	0-5 years	√
	6-10 years	
	+ 10years	
Have discussions taken place with financiers? Will funding be in place to cover all the costs of development within these timescales	N/A	
	Barratt are funded centrally and have the resources to deliver development sites within the timescale stated, without the requirement for external finance.	
Are there any other risk or threats (other than finance) to you delivering your proposed development	No	
	If yes, please give details and indicate how you might overcome them:	

10. Natural Heritage

<p>Is the site located in or within 500m of a nature conservation site, or affect a protected species?</p> <p>Please tick any that apply and provide details.</p> <p>You can find details of these designations at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.environment.gov.scot/ • EU priority habitats at http://gateway.snh.gov.uk/sitelink/index.jsp • UK or Local priority habitats at http://www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/advice-and-resources/habitat-definitions/priority/ • Local Nature Conservation Sites in the LDP's Supplementary Guidance No. 5 at www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp 	RAMSAR Site	No
	Special Area of Conservation	No
	Special Protection Area	No
	Priority habitat (Annex I)	No
	European Protected Species	No
	Other protected species	No
	Site of Special Scientific Interest	No
	National Nature Reserve	No
	Ancient Woodland	Yes
	Trees, hedgerows and woodland (including trees with a Tree Preservation Order)	Yes
	Priority habitat (UK or Local Biodiversity Action Plan)	No
	Local Nature Conservation Site	No
	Local Nature Reserve	No
	<p>If yes, please give details of how you plan to mitigate the impact of the proposed development:</p> <p>The development would be laid out to take cognisance of the Ancient Woodland and other trees and hedgerows in order to ensure no negative impact.</p>	
Biodiversity enhancement		
<p>Please state what benefits for biodiversity this proposal will bring (as per paragraph 194 in Scottish Planning Policy), http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00453827.pdf) by ticking all that apply. Please provide details.</p>	Restoration of habitats	Yes
	Habitat creation in public open space	Yes
	Avoids fragmentation or isolation of habitats	Yes
	Provides bird/bat/insect boxes/Swift bricks (internal or external)	Yes
	Native tree planting	Yes

<p>See Planning Advice 5/2015 on Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement at: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/19598/2015_05-opportunities-for-biodiversity-enhancement-in-new-development.pdf</p> <p>Advice is also available from Scottish Natural Heritage at: https://www.snh.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development/natural-heritage-advice-planners-and-developers and http://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/.</p>	Drystone wall	Yes if appropriate
	Living roofs	Yes if appropriate
	Ponds and soakaways	Yes if appropriate
	Habitat walls/fences	Yes if appropriate
	Wildflowers in verges	Yes if appropriate
	Use of nectar rich plant species	Yes if appropriate
	Buffer strips along watercourses	No watercourses on site
	Show home demonstration area	Yes if appropriate
	Other (please state):	n/a
	<p>If yes, please provide details:</p> <p>Site context and location offer and opportunity to significantly improve biodiversity habitats on a site that is presently limited in this respect. The exact nature of that improvement will be considered at the detailed design stage.</p>	

11. Historic environment

Historic environment enhancement		
Please state if there will be benefits for the historic environment.	N/A	
	If yes, please give details:	
<p>Does the site contain/is within/can affect any of the following historic environment assets? Please tick any that apply and provide details.</p> <p>You can find details of these designations at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://historicscotland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Viewer/index.html?appid=18d2608ac1284066ba3927312710d16d http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/ 	Scheduled Monument or their setting	No
	Locally important archaeological site held on the Sites and Monuments Record	No
	Listed Building and/or their setting	Yes
	Conservation Area (e.g. will it result in the demolition of any buildings)	No
	Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes	No
	Inventory Historic Battlefields	No

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/master/default.aspx?Authority=Aberdeenshire 	<p>If yes, please give details of how you plan to mitigate the impact of the proposed development.</p> <p>The site is directly immediate to 5 designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kirkton House (B-Listed); - Kirkton House Walled Garden (B-Listed); - Parish Church of Skene (B-Listed); - Kirkton House, Dovecot (B-Listed); - Skene Churchyard (C-Listed). <p>The proposed development will be sensitively designed and laid out so as not to have a negative visual impact on these designations. This will follow the design of our previous site to the immediate north which took account of views of the Parish Church of Skene from Westhill to the east. Deliberately, there was no buildings within the line of sight.</p>
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12. Landscape Impact

<p>Is the site within a Special Landscape Area (SLA)? (You can find details in Supplementary Guidance 9 at www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp)</p>	<p>No</p> <p>If yes, please state which SLA your site is located within and provide details of how you plan to mitigate the impact of the proposed development:</p>
<p>SLAs include the consideration of landscape character elements/features. The characteristics of landscapes are defined in the Landscape Character Assessments produced by Scottish Natural Heritage (see below) or have been identified as Special Landscape Areas of local importance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNH: Landscape Character Assessments https://www.snh.scot/professional-advice/landscape-change/landscape-character-assessment • SNH (1996) Cairngorms landscape assessment http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/review/075.pdf • SNH (1997) National programme of landscape character assessment: Banff and Buchan http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/review/037.pdf • SNH (1998) South and Central Aberdeenshire landscape character 	<p>If your site is not within an SLA, please use this space to describe the effects of the site's scale, location or design on key natural landscape elements/features, historic features or the composition or quality of the landscape character:</p> <p>The site is bound on 3 sides by mature tree planting which will ensure that there is no negative impact on the landscape. Where there is no boundary planting (to the SE corner) the backdrop of the mature trees will limit any visual impact when viewed from Old Skene Road to the east. In addition, any visual receptors from adjacent Listed Buildings outlined above will be taken into account in the detailed design stages.</p>

assessment http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/review/102.pdf	
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13. Flood Risk

Is any part of the site identified as being at risk of river or surface water flooding within SEPA flood maps, and/or has any part of the site previously flooded? (You can view the SEPA flood maps at http://map.sepa.org.uk/floodmap/map.htm)	No If yes, please specify and explain how you intend to mitigate this risk:
Could development on the site result in additional flood risk elsewhere?	No If yes, please specify and explain how you intend to mitigate or avoid this risk:
Could development of the site help alleviate any existing flooding problems in the area?	No If yes, please provide details:

14. Infrastructure

a. Water / Drainage		
Is there water/waste water capacity for the proposed development (based on Scottish Water asset capacity search tool http://www.scottishwater.co.uk/business/Connections/Connecting-your-property/Asset-Capacity-Search?)?	Water	TBC – SW will require WIA to confirm
	Waste water	TBC – SW will require DIA to confirm.
Has contact been made with Scottish Water?	Yes If yes, please give details of outcome: Response awaited.	
Will your SUDS scheme include rain gardens? http://www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org/campaigns/greener-gardens	Yes Please specify: To be confirmed at the detailed design stage and based on compliance with prevailing technical standards and Scottish Water adoption requirements.	
b. Education – housing proposals only		
Education capacity/constraints https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/parents-carers/school-info/school-roll-forecasts/	Please provide details of any known education constraints. Is additional capacity needed to serve the development? Both Skene School and Westhill Academy are showing sufficient capacity in the 2016 School Roll Forecasts and as such there are no known constraints.	
Has contact been made with the Local Authority's Education Department?	No If yes, please give details of outcome:	
c. Transport		

<p>If direct access is required onto a Trunk Road (A90 and A96), or the proposal will impact on traffic on a Trunk Road, has contact been made with Transport Scotland?</p>	<p>No If yes, please give details of outcome:</p>
<p>Has contact been made with the Local Authority's Transportation Service? They can be contacted at transportation.consultation@aberdeenshire.gov.uk</p>	<p>No If yes, please give details of outcome: However, the existing access in place was designed to accommodate additional development.</p>
<p>Public transport</p>	<p>Please provide details of how the site is or could be served by public transport: There are two bus stops around 0.5 miles/ 5-minute walk to the west of the site adjacent to the playing fields. These are served by Stagecoach bus routes 220, X17 and 218. The buses pass along the Old Skene Road to the north of the site and in that respect there is scope for a new bus stop within 400m of the site.</p>
<p>Active travel (i.e. internal connectivity and links externally)</p>	<p>Please provide details of how the site can or could be accessed by walking and cycling: The site is easily accessible from the village centre and the amenities contained therein. There are good cycle routes from the site towards Westhill to the east and towards settlements to the west, north and south. In addition, a core path runs along Old Skene Road to the immediate north east of the site, as well as to the immediate south west adjacent to Kirkton House allowing for easy access by foot to Westhill and the surrounding area.</p>
<p>d. Gas/Electricity/Heat/Broadband</p>	
<p>Has contact been made with the relevant utilities providers?</p>	<p>Gas: No, the village is not served by mains gas. If yes, please give details of outcome(s):</p>
	<p>Electricity: No If yes, please give details of outcome(s):</p>
	<p>Heat: No If yes, please give details of outcome(s): Unsure what this refers to.</p>
	<p>Broadband: Yes If yes, please give details of outcome(s): Services available locally</p>

Have any feasibility studies been undertaken to understand and inform capacity issues?	Yes Please specify: Initial service enquiries have been submitted. Responses awaited
Is there capacity within the existing network(s) and a viable connection to the network(s)?	TBC Please specify: Mains service connection points are available locally. Initial service enquiries have been submitted. Responses awaited.
Will renewable energy be installed and used on the site? For example, heat pump (air, ground or water), biomass, hydro, solar (photovoltaic (electricity) or thermal), or a wind turbine (freestanding/integrated into the building)	Yes If yes, please specify the type of renewable energy technology(s), if it is to provide electricity and/or heating (i.e. space heating and/or hot water), and the scale of provision (To supplement off-site connection all the way to 100% energy provision (off-grid)): This will be dependent on the technology and standards at the time.
e. Public open space	
Will the site provide the opportunity to enhance the green network? (These are the linked areas of open space in settlements, which can be enhanced through amalgamating existing green networks or providing onsite green infrastructure) You can find the boundary of existing green networks in the settlement profiles in the LDP	Yes Please specify: The design stage will identify how green networks, linking into the existing retained woodland on the periphery of this site, can be an integral part of the development.
Will the site meet the open space standards, as set out in Appendix 2 in the Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Spaces Strategy? https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/6077/approvedpandospacesstrategy.pdf	Yes Please specify: The final layout will meet Council policy in relation to Public Open Space.
Will the site deliver any of the shortfalls identified in the Open Space Audit for specific settlements? https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/communities-and-events/parks-and-open-spaces/open-space-strategy-audit/	Not applicable Please specify:
f. Resource use	
Will the site re-use existing structure(s) or recycle or recover existing on-site materials/resources?	No If yes, please specify:
Will the site have a direct impact on the water environment and result in the need for watercourse crossings, large scale abstraction and/or culverting of a watercourse?	No If yes, please provide details:

15. Other potential constraints

Please identify whether the site is affected by any of the following potential constraints:

Aberdeen Green Belt https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/20555/appendix-3-boundaries-of-the-greenbelt.pdf	No
Carbon-rich soils and peatland http://www.snh.gov.uk/planning-and-development/advice-for-planners-and-developers/soils-and-development/cpp/	No
Coastal Zone https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/20176/4-the-coastal-zone.pdf	No
Contaminated land	No
Ground instability	No
Hazardous site/HSE exclusion zone (You can find the boundary of these zones in Planning Advice 1/2017 Pipeline and Hazardous Development Consultation Zones at https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/planning-advice/ and advice at http://www.hse.gov.uk/landuseplanning/developers.htm)	No
Minerals – safeguarded or area of search https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldpmedia/6_Area_of_search_and_safeguard_for_minerals.pdf	No
Overhead lines or underground cables	No
Physical access into the site due to topography or geography	No
Prime agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3.1) on all or part of the site. http://map.environment.gov.scot/Soil_maps/?layer=6	Yes 3.1 although not currently in agricultural production.
'Protected' open space in the LDP (i.e. P sites) www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp and choose from Appendix 8a to 8f	No
Rights of way/core paths/recreation uses	No Core path runs along Old Skene Road to the immediate north east of the site, as well as to the immediate south west adjacent to Kirkton House. The site will not impact on this.
Topography (e.g. steep slopes)	No
Other	No (please specify)
If you have identified any of the potential constraints above, please use this space to identify how you will mitigate this in order to achieve a viable development:	

16. Proximity to facilities

	Local shops	400m	400m-1km	>1km
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How close is the site to a range of facilities?	Community facilities (e.g. school, public hall)	400m	400m-1km	>1km
	Sports facilities (e.g. playing fields)	400m	400m-1km	>1km
	Employment areas	400m	400m-1km	>1km
	Residential areas	400m	400m-1km	>1km
	Bus stop or bus route	400m	400m-1km	>1km
	Train station	400m	400m-1km	>1km
	Other, e.g. dentist, pub (please specify)	400m	400m-1km	>1km

17. Community engagement

Has the local community been given the opportunity to influence/partake in the design and specification of the development proposal?	Not yet
	If yes, please specify the way it was carried out and how it influenced your proposals:
	If not yet, please detail how you will do so in the future: If the site is preferred at MIR stage, then we anticipate meeting the local Community Council to discuss our proposals. If the site is allocated we will engage with the local community as necessary.

18. Residual value and deliverability

Please confirm that you have considered the 'residual value' of your site and you are confident that the site is viable when infrastructure and all other costs, such as constraints and mitigation are taken into account.	I have considered the likely 'residual value' of the site, as described above, and fully expect the site to be viable: Please tick: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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If you have any further information to help demonstrate the deliverability of your proposal, please provide details.

The proposed development is an extension to our earlier development immediately adjacent. Having worked closely with the landowner over a number of years, we are aware of the issues that may impact on viability and deliverability. As a consequence, we are confident that the site is deliverable.

19. Other information

Please provide any other information that you would like us to consider in support of your proposed development (please include details of any up-to-date supporting studies that have been undertaken and attach copies e.g. Transport Appraisal, Flood Risk Assessment, Drainage Impact Assessment, Peat/Soil Survey, Habitat/Biodiversity Assessment etc.).

This c. 10.5 acre site is a sensitive in-fill proposal in the village of Kirkton of Skene. The 'oven-ready' site is promoted on behalf of Barratt North Scotland and [REDACTED] for approximately 35-45 homes as a continuation of the previous development of 20 homes which Barratt built to the immediate north of the subjects (Kesson Gardens). The site is easily accessible by foot to the local play park as well as the village centre itself due to footpaths in place at the west of the site and through Kesson Gardens to the north. There is an existing vehicular access point SUDS pond in place which will be able to accommodate the development.

The site formed part of two bids to the 2017 LDP (30 and 250 homes). Whilst the 250 home bid was considered but not preferred by the Council, the 30-unit bid was not included in the Schedule 4 and subsequently not forwarded to Scottish Government Reporter for consideration at Proposed Plan stage. The Reporter chose to allocate a number of small-scale sites across the Aberdeen Housing Market Area and we believe that this site would have been allocated to provide much needed private and affordable homes had it been before her, particularly at a time when the Reporter acknowledged that delivery rates were below previous expectations.

Demand for housing in the village is high and indeed the location of the site, being on the doorstep of Westhill and close to Aberdeen, is not constrained by marketability. Additional homes in the village will help to strengthen and enhance the existing services in the village (shop, pub, public hall) as well as help enhance the school rolls at Skene School and Westhill Academy.

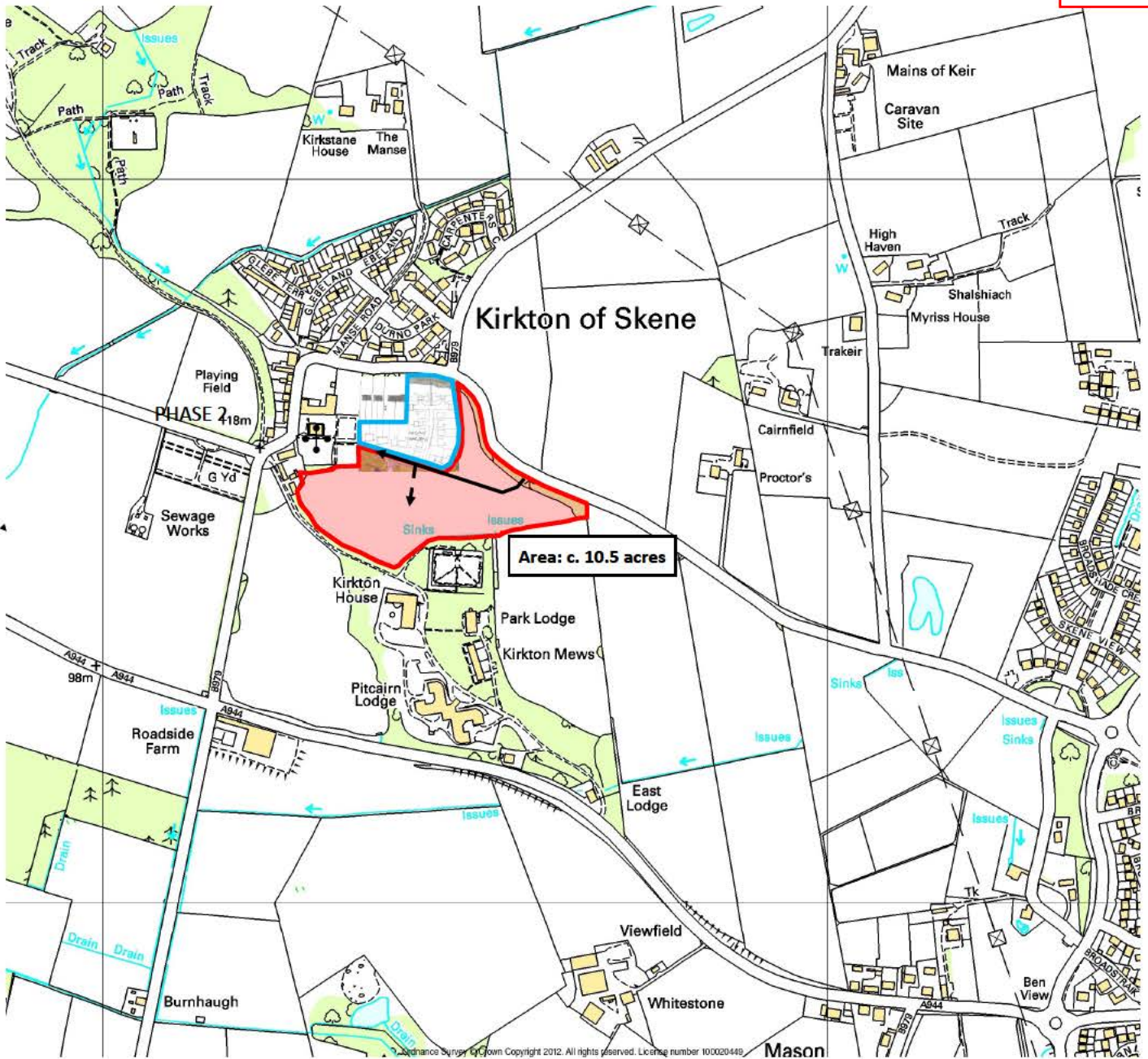
Crucially, given the lack of homes forecast to be complete of the remainder of the current LDP in the immediate vicinity it is even more important to allocate a small site such as this to help fill the current supply shortfall. The stark position of housing land supply in Westhill/Kirkton of Skene is illustrated in the Draft Housing Land Audit 2018 which confirms that from 2020 there is no housing completions forecast and only 12 completions proposed until that point as a result of the settlement strategy. This is a critical issue for an area with an acute housing demand.

By virtue of its setting, surrounded on all sides by mature trees and by taking account of the existing field boundaries in place, the site will avoid coalescence with the modern housing scheme at the western edge of Westhill. The detailed design stage will take full cognisance of the constraints of the site, and ensure that there are no visual impacts on adjacent Listed Building, retain views through the site and will not negatively impact on the mature tree belt which surrounds the site, whilst ensuring that there is an appropriate amount of open space and that the homes will not be impacted by the mature tree belt.

Please tick to confirm your agreement to the following statement:



By completing this form, I agree that Aberdeenshire Council can use the information provided in this form for the purposes of identifying possible land for allocation in the next Local Development Plan. I also agree that the information provided, other than contact details and information that is deemed commercially sensitive (questions 1 to 3), can be made available to the public.

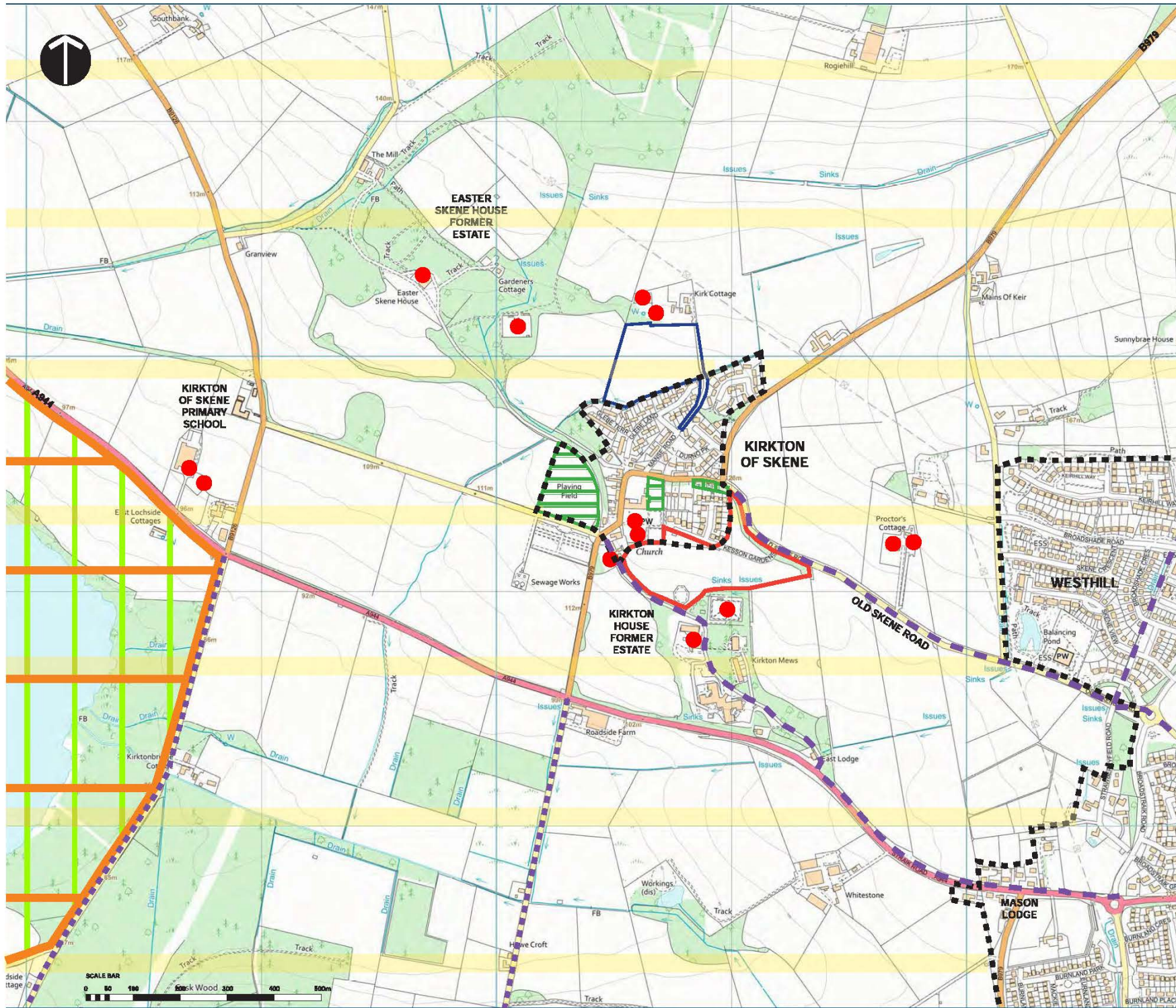


KEY:

-  **PREVIOUS BARRATT DEVELOPMENT (20 UNITS)**
-  **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT ALLOCATION**
-  **EXISTING ACCESS ROAD**
-  **PROPOSED ACCESS ROAD**

ABERDEENSHIRE LDP—DEVELOPMENT BID OPTION —30/03/2018
LAND OFF OLD SKENE ROAD, KIRKTON OF SKENE
BARRATT NORTH SCOTLAND





- LEGEND**
- SITE BOUNDARY - DEVELOPMENT BID SITE GR116
 - SETTLEMENT FORM
 - WATERCOURSE
 - MATURE WOODLAND COVER
 - AGRICULTURAL FIELDS
- PLANNING POLICY**
(TAKEN FROM THE ABERDEENSHIRE LDP 2017)
- SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY
 - COUNTRYSIDE
 - GARDEN AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPE - DUNECHT HOUSE GDL
 - LOCAL NATURE CONSERVATION SITE - LOCH OF SKENE
 - LISTED BUILDING
 - PROTECTED LAND
P1: To conserve the playing field as an important local amenity;
P2: To conserve the area of open space;
P3: To conserve the play area and area of open space as an important local amenity

- CORE PATH NETWORK
- CORE PATH NETWORK - ON ROAD LINKS
- DEVELOPMENT BID SITE GR127



Future Housing Development on Land at the Old Skene Road, Kirkton of Skene

figure 1
planning policy & landscape context