



22nd July, 2020.

Planning Policy Team
Infrastructure Services
Aberdeenshire Council
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
Aberdeen AB16 5GB.

Dear Sir /Madam,

Proposed Housing Development at Gourdon, Site O.P. 1,
As Shown on Plan, Page 676, of Settlement Statements
For Kincardine and Mearns, Appendix 7E.

I am writing to request that the proposed development site, OP1, be removed from the Local Development Plan, as it represents an extremely unwelcome overdevelopment of the upper part of the village, which will considerably detract from the amenity of the village rather than add to it.

Previously, the Council has stated that they were not of a mind to approve this site for development, for the reason that it would constitute an undesirable loss of amenity as regards the open outlook to the sea. This, I would have thought, might have led them to consider this area as the one for protected status rather than the one below the braes, an area where any development would have no impact of that nature, whatsoever. It is odd that a similar site, (P6, map, page 681), closer to Inverbervie, is to be given protected status, yet not the one at Gourdon.

The Council have stated quite clearly that they wish to “preserve the amenity of the settlement “ and “ maintain the character of the village in its coastal setting “, and, while I wholeheartedly agree that this is a commendable approach, I cannot for the life of me see how this can be achieved by the building of forty- nine houses, initially, in this particular location. It would seem to me, and I would imagine to any sensible person, that the Council’s aim, as stated above, and the proposed development are totally incompatible.

The open outlook to the landward side at the entrance to the village has already been lost, to the detriment of the visual amenity there, and to approve a similar development on the seaward side would render that entire area totally closed in, and give the village a semi-urban feel at that point.

When new housing schemes, such as this, are proposed, much is said about how they will provide an “attractive gateway “ to the village. I would argue, and I feel most people would agree, that there is no more attractive a gateway than currently exists, with the beautiful open aspect across green fields to the sea, and I cannot for the life of me see how that can be improved upon by the building of a large scheme of modern- looking houses in a style and design that in no way, shape, or form will blend in with the existing appearance of the tradition village.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand why the Council can change position so dramatically, and now be in favour of promoting this development,

and the question has to be asked why this reversal of opinion on their part can have taken place. If the proposed housing development was unacceptable just a short while ago, for the reason given above, then, as nothing in that respect has changed or ever will change, it has to remain unacceptable still.

At this stage, there are a few important points that need to be considered. It hardly needs to be said, and especially, I would have thought, not to any planning organisation, that there are basically four types of human settlements: cities, towns, villages and scattered rural communities, and people chose to live in one of these, or, possibly, in a dwelling by themselves in the open countryside.

Putting aside the fact that some people are obliged to live in a certain place because of their employment rather than by choice, there are people who prefer city life, people who chose the smaller urban conurbation, those who prefer life in a small village, and others who chose to live in a more rural setting, and it is to be welcomed that these choices exist to satisfy the different needs of different people.

Gourdon happens to fall into the village category, and being a small village is what Gourdon does best, and I would argue that is how it ought to remain. Villages develop organically over time, with the odd house here and there, and not with big developments that appear relatively quickly, which means that the large-scale housing scheme of today is not something that suits the traditional village, and it is very surprising indeed that the planning departments of modern day councils, such as Aberdeenshire, are not able to recognise this.

You cannot, on the one hand, possibly state that you wish to maintain, and preserve, the character of any long-established village settlement, then, on the other, continue to put your weight solidly behind ongoing development schemes that fundamentally are so alien to the concept of what a village essentially is.

The unique charm of a place like Gourdon lies in the fact that it remains recognisably a village and still retains much of its original character, the very thing that gives it its appeal, and the very thing that Aberdeenshire Council stated that it was committed to preserving. I can no better illustrate this than tell of a meeting I had recently when I was engaged in conversation by a B.T. engineer working near my house.

The reason that this gentleman stopped to speak was to say how much he loved both the look, and the feel, of the village. He came from Ipswich, and had travelled, he said, all over Britain, and had never before been aware that a village such as this still existed, with so much old-fashioned looks, charm and friendliness of its people. He was delighted to know that places such as this were still to be found, and thought that we were so lucky to live here in such a beautiful, unspoiled place.

I did not have the heart to tell him that the village that he so much admired the look and feel of, was in danger of losing a large part of what had so much appealed to him, because of the determination on the part of the local Council not only to support what might be regarded as unnecessary development, but to actively encourage it.

Quite why the Council is so determined to promote so much continuing development in a small village like Gourdon is a bit of a mystery which is never really properly explained.

There are generally two reasons given; firstly, that the Council has a quota of new houses to fill because of the millions of houses that are required, year on year, to satisfy the needs of Britain's growing population, and, secondly, that ongoing housing development is required to regenerate a community.

It is a puzzle as to why local councils, at the behest of the government, insist that eye-watering numbers of new houses require to be built when government figures inform us that the birth rate is not rising, and that we have far too few young people of working age, paying national insurance, to support a growing elderly population. Government statistics point out that any population increase in Scotland, and Britain as a whole, is largely due to immigration, and yet it seems unlikely in the extreme that all the new houses being planned are primarily for immigrants and the elderly.

With regard to the second point, it really is necessary for people to begin to look closely at, and to actively challenge, this spurious idea, so heavily promoted by the Council, that the building of houses does anything remotely to regenerate a community.

A community can only be regenerated by the introduction of opportunity for employment on a reasonably large scale. It cannot be done even by the setting up of small business parks with businesses employing a relatively small number of people, and certainly not by the mere building of houses. The very concept is essentially flawed, and would be totally risible if it were not for the fact that this notion is accepted, rather unthinkingly I fear, by so many people as being fact, and comes, therefore, to be seen as somehow desirable. It is odd, indeed, that the Council continues to associate itself with such a nonsensical idea.

Gourdon was formerly a place where the vast majority of people had employment within the village itself, either in the fishing industry or in the jute mill, which I believe employed somewhere between eighty and ninety people. The mill is long gone, and the fishing industry is a mere shadow of what it was formerly.

Nowadays, most people find employment elsewhere, which is pretty much standard practice these days, as times have changed, not just for Gourdon, but for villages all over the country. The truth, perhaps, is that, for the time being at least, they simply cannot go back to what they once were, and cannot be arbitrarily regenerated in the manner the Council wishes, and so readily states they can, and certainly not by the means they espouse. Attempting to do so is akin to wishing to breathe life into a corpse, and, unfortunately, has pretty much the same success rate.

Regeneration by house-building is a pure myth, and it is time that this was recognised as such. More housing schemes do not necessarily protect the village shop and post office, nor the local bus service. It also needs to be asked whether the village requires regeneration in the first instance, or whether it has reasonably successfully adapted, as many small communities have, to its new and altered status as essentially a dormitory settlement, and, in the words of our First Minister, that would perhaps appear to be the “new normal”.

There is, however, one extremely important and very practical reason, specific to this village, why more large-scale house building should not be encouraged in Gourdon, and a reason which cannot, and should not, be ignored.

That is the not insubstantial problem of the increase in motor vehicle traffic that would result from more houses being built. Gourdon is essentially what you might call a “closed” village, in the sense that there is but one and the same way in and out. It does not have the luxury of a through road where, in theory, any amount of expansion might be possible, though not necessarily desirable, and, as with any oversubscribed facility, the result is unacceptable congestion.

The village seriously struggles to cope with the volume of traffic that exists at present, and to knowingly add more would be downright foolhardy, and

grossly lacking both in good judgement and in consideration towards the people currently living there, and would, in no uncertain terms, be hugely detrimental to the very "amenity of the settlement", something that the Council has previously stated was their desired aim to avoid.

Although the proposed housing is at the entrance to the village, traffic from there will inevitably travel up and down the brae on a regular basis, as it always does, and will not, I can assure anyone who might think otherwise, be confined to the top of the village. I have lived here long enough, and in the perfect location on the first bend in the brae, to know that that is an inescapable truth.

I would hope, therefore, for the reasons I have outlined, that the Council would reconsider their position on this matter very carefully indeed, and would abandon any idea of supporting this proposed development, and any in the future that would be similarly so detrimental to the amenity of the village and its inhabitants.

Yours faithfully,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of William Heath.

William Heath.

(1950) words