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PROPOSED EXTENSION – KINGSWELLS HOUSE– PLANNING AND LISTED BUILDING CONSENT STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

This document is a design statement to outline the proposals for the alteration and extension of Kingswells House. Kingswell House is a Category B Listed (LB15681) building, and was originally the centre of a substantial estate, situated outside of historic Aberdeen. What remains of the Kingswells Estate, is now largely surrounded by the Prime Four commercial development but is also enclosed by Kingswells Home Farm to the immediate North and The Lodge, and Ardene House Veterinary Hospital to the west. The site and building have witnessed great change over the years, but the site and building have, more recently, become 'lost' with the surrounding Prime Four development now dominating the local built landscape. The Use Category of Kingswells House is currently Class 10 – Non-Residential Institution (Religious), having been so since 2006 (ACC Application 060155). This application proposes to secure a Change of Use to Class 4 – Business. Along with the Change of Use, it is proposed to replace the existing extension (garages) with a high quality, contemporary replacement, along with minor interior alterations, and separate maintenance/restoration works.

HISTORY OF KINGSWELLS HOUSE:

A full history of Kingswells House, and the estate, is provided in a Heritage Statement, produced by Ian Davidson (Accredited Conservation Building Surveyor and Architectural Historian), which has been provided to accompany, and should be read in conjunction with, this document.

EXISTING EXTENSION AND RECENT AMENDMENTS:

Before 1855, a separate built structure existed at the northwest side of the main building. The existing extension appears to have been originally formed as part of the extensive re-working of the building in and around 1855, although it is shown as rectangular in form on the OS Map of 1864 (please see Heritage Statement). The form has been significantly altered since this time and bears only passing visual resemblance to circa 1855 structure that would have existed here. The current extension features a straight but angled wall, protruding out from the northern jerkin headed gable of the existing building. This wall has two large garage door openings within it which have been added sometime within the last 75 years. Below are two images: one, the extension as it stands, and two, an aerial view from 1948 © Canmore which shows this elevation as a curved form, without openings, and with northernmost element of the extension as a pitched roof form. The current extension has a completely flat roof which has become overrun with biological growth through lack of maintenance.



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The existing garages adjoin the existing building at the jerkin headed gable (right) and have been significantly altered in recent years and are now a poor-quality addition to the main building.



The 1948 aerial shot shows the extension here as a curved form, without openings, and with a pitched roof element to the rear (north). This has since been significantly altered and adapted.



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The flat roof of the extension, and the granite which forms the parapet, have seen significant biological growth form due to lack of maintenance.



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DESIGN PROPOSALS:

The main design principle for the proposed replacement extension to Kingswells House is to provide a high-quality piece of contemporary architecture, with clean modern lines, using materials that are appropriate to the site and surroundings. The extension will house open plan office space required by the applicants as part of their business, this space is essential to them in providing a clear, open workspace that is not facilitated by the layout of the existing building. The applicants are keen to retain the layout of the existing building, which is suited to individual offices, meeting rooms and archiving spaces. Internally, the only amendments proposed are to upgrade the internal doors around the stair core to achieve compartmentalisation requirements. This will be undertaken in line with Institution of Fire Engineers Guide to the Fire Resistance of Historic Timber Panel Doors.

As noted, the extension forms a necessary space for the viability of the business within this setting. Prior to the purchase of the building in 2020, the site had been largely neglected following the Summerland Trust's decision to sell the property and had lain empty since they initially vacated the site prior to putting it up for sale. Initially marketed for sale in 2019, Kingswells House was eventually sold at auction, when no buyer was originally forthcoming. In providing the extension, the entire building can be considered a viable workspace for the applicant's business. Subsequently, being in continuous use in this way will serve to protect the building from further degradation through neglect and lack of occupation. The design of the extension itself will protect the character and appearance of the existing building by being subordinate in scale and form, and although it is located on the main elevation, this is in line with the traditional courtyard style of the building, and forms a replacement for the existing, low-quality garages which currently occupy this area (along with their earlier iterations). We believe this proposal to be fully in keeping with Historic Environment Scotland's Guidance on Extensions as per their Managing Change in the Historic Environment Document.

The proposed extension is pushed back (further north) from the angled line currently occupied by the existing extension. This decision has been taken so that it no longer ties back to the jerkin-gabled projection which forms a prominent part of the earlier (pre-1855) section of the house. Instead, the structure moves to the north to tie back to the subservient kitchen and laundry areas, which were added as part of the significant alterations of 1855 – along with the initial incarnation of the extension itself.

The new extension is a single storey addition, utilising a flat roof design to ensure it remains low slung and subservient. The design ensures that, like previous iterations of built forms in this area, it is not visible on the east elevation, but protrudes to the front of the main house in court office style seen here previously. The main body of the extension features a 'band' of zinc cladding running up from



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the northwest corner and forming a small canopy over the west and south elevations before returning to ground in the southeast corner. Set back from this 'band' of zinc, the south and west elevations feature larch cladding with a large, glazed opening along this southwestern corner. The main body of the extension is separated from the laundry and kitchen areas of the existing building by a smaller 'link' area which is set in from the main body of the extension on both north and south elevations and will sit lower than the main element to create a 'break' between the two forms.

The proposals utilise this palette of zinc and larch on the elevations as a deliberate contrast to the existing building. The existing building is currently clad almost entirely in a cement render – likely from its redevelopment in 1855 – which is overlaid on top of an older lime harling. The applicant plans to undertake maintenance/restoration work in this regard which would see the removal of the cement render (which has been causing issues with damp due to its lack of breathability) and the damaged lime render below and replace this with a new lime harling and lime wash. A section of ground which currently abuts the existing north wall of the laundry is proposed to be retained away from the façade to prevent damp in this area also. It is proposed that granite downtakings from the existing extension would be used to face any retaining wall in this area and/or other walls necessary as part of the garden improvements. The retention will be continued along the northern side of the property to extend in line with the proposed extension to ensure damp does not become a reoccurring issue in this area.



The view from the southwest shows the extension pulled northward from the existing form to remove the connection to the jerkin headed gable.



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The contemporary, contrasting nature of the design is evident in the design. A sedum roof is included in the proposals along with a single large flat rooflight over the main extension.

POLICY:

The site lies in the Aberdeen City boundary on land allocated for business. It seems to lie directly on the boundary between sites OP29 and OP63. OP29 is allocated as Prime Four Business Park (50Ha), Business Zone/Green Space Network – Opportunity for development of business land which will attract high quality business or be suitable for company headquarters. OP63 is again allocated as Prime 4 Business Park Phase 5 Extension (12Ha). The proposed Change of Use from Class 10 (Non-Residential Institutions - Religious), to Class 4 (Business) is therefore, suitable in this location. The Planning Policies relevant to this application are outlined below:

National Planning Framework 4 Policies as follows:

Policy 1 – Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises:

When considering all development proposals significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises.



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Policy 7 – Historic Assets and Places:

a) Development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place. The assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change, including cumulative effects and provide a sound basis for managing the impacts of change. Proposals should also be informed by national policy and guidance on managing change in the historic environment, and information held within Historic Environment Records.

c) Development proposals for the reuse, alteration or extension of a listed building will only be supported where they will preserve its character, special architectural or historic interest and setting. Development proposals affecting the setting of a listed building should preserve its character, and its special architectural or historic interest.

Policy 13 Sustainable Transport

b) Development proposals will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the transport requirements generated have been considered in line with the sustainable travel and investment hierarchies and where appropriate they: i. Provide direct, easy, segregated and safe links to local facilities via walking, wheeling and cycling networks before occupation; ii. Will be accessible by public transport, ideally supporting the use of existing services; iii. Integrate transport modes; iv. Provide low or zero-emission vehicle and cycle charging points in safe and convenient locations, in alignment with building standards; v. Supply safe, secure and convenient cycle parking to meet the needs of users and which is more conveniently located than car parking; vi. Are designed to incorporate safety measures including safe crossings for walking and wheeling and reducing the number and speed of vehicles; vii. Have taken into account, at the earliest stage of design, the transport needs of diverse groups including users with protected characteristics to ensure the safety, ease and needs of all users; and viii. Adequately mitigate any impact on local public access routes.

f) Development proposals for significant travel generating uses, or smaller-scale developments where it is important to monitor travel patterns resulting from the development, will only be supported if they are accompanied by a Travel Plan with supporting planning conditions/obligations. Travel plans should set out clear arrangements for delivering against targets, as well as monitoring and evaluation.

Policy 26 Business and Industry



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a) Development proposals for business and industry uses on sites allocated for those uses in the LDP will be supported.

c) Development proposals for business and industry uses will be supported where they are compatible with the primary business function of the area. Other employment uses will be supported where they will not prejudice the primary function of the area and are compatible with the business/industrial character of the area.

e) Development proposals for business and industry will take into account: i. Impact on surrounding residential amenity; sensitive uses and the natural and historic environment.

Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2023 Policies as follows:

Policy NE5 - Trees and Woodland

Development should not result in the loss of, or damage to, trees and woodlands. Development proposals will seek to increase tree and woodland cover and achieve the long-term retention of existing trees and woodlands that the planning authority consider worthy of retention. Particular emphasis is placed on the protection and ongoing management of Ancient Woodlands. Where tree removal takes place or is necessary for good arboricultural reasons, replacement planting will be required to ensure an overall net gain in tree cover. Development that does not achieve this will not be supported. Buildings and infrastructure should be sited to allow adequate space for a tree's natural development, taking into account the predicted mature height, canopy spread and future rooting environment. Where applicable, root protection areas should be established, and protective barriers erected prior to any work commencing. See relevant Aberdeen Planning Guidance for more information.

Policy D1 – Quality Placemaking

All development must ensure high standards of design, create sustainable and successful places, and have a strong and distinctive sense of place which is a result of detailed contextual appraisal. Proposals are required to ensure: Quality architecture, craftsmanship and materials; a well-considered layout, including biodiverse open space, high quality public realm and landscape design; a range of sustainable transportation opportunities ensuring connectivity commensurate with the scale and character of the development.



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Successful places will sustain and enhance the social, economic, environmental, wellbeing and cultural attractiveness of the city. Proposals will be considered against the following six essential qualities: distinctive; welcoming; safe and pleasant; easy to move around; adaptable; resource efficient.

A design strategy will be required to be submitted that demonstrates how a development meets these qualities. The design, scope and content will be proportionate to the scale and/or importance of the proposal.

Policy D6 – Historic Environment

Development must protect, preserve and enhance Aberdeen’s historic environment, including its historic fabric. There will be a presumption in favour of the retention and appropriate reuse of historic environment, historic assets, and heritage assets that contribute positively to Aberdeen’s character. Appropriate developments, including new features and fixings, must be designed to respect the character, appearance and setting of the historic environment and protect the special architectural or historic interest of listed buildings, conservation areas and historic gardens and designed landscapes. Stone cleaning will only be supported if in line with local and national guidance. Proposals which have the potential to impact on historic environment, historic assets, and heritage assets, or a significant element thereof, will be required to ensure the effective recording, assessments, analysis, archiving and publication of any reports or records to an agreed timeframe. The physical in situ preservation of all scheduled monuments and archaeological sites is expected. Developments that would adversely impact upon archaeological remains, of either national or local importance, or on their setting will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, where there is no practical alternative site and where there are imperative reasons of over-riding public need. In any such case, the applicant must at their own expense: take satisfactory steps to mitigate adverse development impacts; and ensure suitable investigation and recording is completed; and where the preservation of the site in its original location is not possible, arrange for the full excavation and recording of the site in advance of development and the publication/curation of findings, and, where appropriate, associated events for the public benefit.

Policy B1 – Business and Industrial Land

The Council will, in principle, support the development of the business and industrial land allocations set out in this Plan. Land zoned for business and industrial uses on the Proposals Map, including already developed land, shall be retained for Class 4 (Business), Class 5 (General Industrial) and Class 6 (Storage and Distribution) uses and safeguarded from other conflicting development types. Other uses which may be suited to a business and industrial location, such as car showrooms and bus depots,



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shall be treated on their own merits. The expansion of existing uses within these locations will be permitted in principle. Where business and industrial areas are located beside residential areas, we will restrict new planning permissions to Class 4 (Business). Buffer zones, which are appropriately sized and landscaped, may be required to separate these uses and safeguard residential amenity. Low amenity 'bad neighbour' uses must have regard to surrounding uses and their potential impact on the environment and existing amenity. In all cases, conditions may be imposed restricting levels of noise, hours of operation and external storage. New business and industrial land proposals shall make provision for areas of recreational and amenity open space, areas of strategic landscaping, areas of wildlife value and footpaths, in accordance with the Open Space Strategy and any approved non-statutory planning guidance, planning briefs or masterplans. Within existing business and industrial areas, there shall be a presumption in favour of retaining green, open and landscaped spaces. Facilities that directly support business and industrial uses may be permitted where they enhance the attraction and sustainability of the city's business and industrial land. Such facilities should be aimed at meeting the needs of businesses and employees within the business and industrial area rather than the wider area.

Policy B2 – Business Zones

In areas that are identified as Business Zones on the Proposals Map, only Class 4 (Business) uses shall be permitted in order to maintain a high-quality environment. Facilities that directly support business uses may be permitted where they enhance the attraction and sustainability of the Business Zone for investment. Such facilities should be aimed at meeting the needs of businesses and employees within the Business Zone rather than the wider area.

CONCLUSION:

Although Kingswells House has a long and complex history, other than the Change of Use to Class 10 – Non-Residential Institution (Religious), the only other change made to the building in the 20th Century that has been subject to Planning Permission/Listed Building Consent has been the replacement of the original conservatory with the uPVC replacement in 1987. This change, along with others such as the forming of the garage openings and addition of the stainless-steel flue along the south elevation have detracted from the quality of the building.

The proposals that form this application are part of a long history of change, but seek to address the more recent decline in fortunes of the house and site, with a long term plan in place for the building, facilitated by its use as a business premises, involving a schedule of restoration/maintenance works



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including the removal and replacement of the cement render on the existing building, and works to maintain the slate roof.

Previous informal discussions regarding these proposals have been taken with the Council's Roads department. It has been made clear that the existing entrance to the site, whilst suitable in this regard, would not be compliant as an egress, due to the lack of visibility splay afforded along the A944 by The Lodge and the boundary wall to this property. The applicant has discussed the use of the existing access road that forms their driveway, and continues through Kingswells Home Farm to the north, exiting at Prime Four, as an alternative to this, but use of this through Kingswells Home Farm has been denied by the owners of Home Farm, as has the offer to purchase some of the land forming Kingswells Home farm, to create a new egress to the north onto the Prime Four Development.

This situation, and having exhausted possible alternative options for site egress, effectively leaves Kingswells House 'landlocked' unless it remains under Use Class 10 (where the existing entrance/exit could continue to be used without being subject to Planning Requirements). It was clear at the time of occupation by The Summerland Trust, and by the lack of proposed buyers when put up for sale, that this is not a viable continuing use for the site and building. The risk that the site and building will not secure a Change of Use is a great threat to the future of this listed building. The Heritage Statement that accompanies this application confirms that the property has exceptional heritage value and states that, were this risk realised, the loss would be an unacceptable loss to the heritage of the region. It is clear therefore, that this risk of loss outweighs the lack of a fully compliant visibility splay to the road, and that an exemption should be made in this regard in the same way that it would be regarding a Listed Building's ability to fully meet all current requirements with Building Regulations surrounding accessibility, fire escapes or alike.

Were the building to remain under Use Class 10, and used to house a congregation/group, then the use of this junction as an exit, would not be subject to any continuing requirements regardless of the number of vehicles that may then use it. The applicant's business currently employs 16 people, who, following the Coronavirus Pandemic, continue to work a successful hybrid system consisting of a combination of office and home working (minimum 1 day in office per week). This means that the potential traffic from the site, will be reduced in so far as is practicably possible. The expected number of vehicles accessing and exiting the site each day is 4-5 on average, 7 max (if there are new starts). This is less than the most recent Class 10 Use under the Summerland Trust, where the site was used as accommodation as well as for Spiritualist Meetings and Seances during which a larger number of attendees could be present. The Change of Use will therefore improve the situation in this regard, whilst, as previously mentioned, ensuring that the risk of loss of this regionally important historic building is mitigated through continued use and proposed maintenance.



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When used by the Summerland Trust, this Séance Room alone was set out for at least 20 people to attend. The Change of Use would reduce this potential occupancy, with limited staff present.

Ensuring the Change of Use and providing a viable work environment in the provision of the extension will continue a long history of adaption and change at Kingswells House. Approving this application will also address the recent degradation and neglect of the building by safeguarding its viability as a business premises with an owner who has a genuine desire to ensure that a property of exceptional heritage value is retained well into the future.

The proposal is compliant with relevant Policies of both National Planning Framework 4 and The Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2023 which are noted above. The proposals are also designed around the specific history of the building and in accordance with the principles described in Historic Environment Scotland's Managing Change in the Historic Environment – Extensions and should therefore be approved on this basis.



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View looking north towards the extension. This replicates the courtyard style of the existing and previous extensions, utilising high quality materials in a contemporary fashion.



View looking southeast towards the extension from the existing landscaped area and showing some of the proposed small retaining wall which would be formed by the existing downtakings.