

PROPOSED NEW HOLIDAY LODGE AT COLLIESTOWN FARM TORPHINS

ADDENDUM TO PLANNING AND BUSINESS CASES

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out the background to our thinking in proposing this particular approach to diversifying our farming operation at Colliestown Farm.

Our decision to invest in building a holiday lodge is rooted in our experience of the locally available accommodation and the accessibility for disabled visitors to our area. We have several friends who prefer not to visit or holiday in this area as they have found this area of Aberdeenshire to offer only a restricted supply of wheelchair accessible accommodation. This has been confirmed in feedback from local tourist groups such as Visit Aberdeenshire.

Additionally, our family experience of early onset Parkinson's has highlighted the inaccessibility of our own farmhouse for disabled or mobility restricted visitors. Through these two considerations we identified an opportunity to diversify the farm while increasing disabled accessible accommodation and attracting visitors to the area.

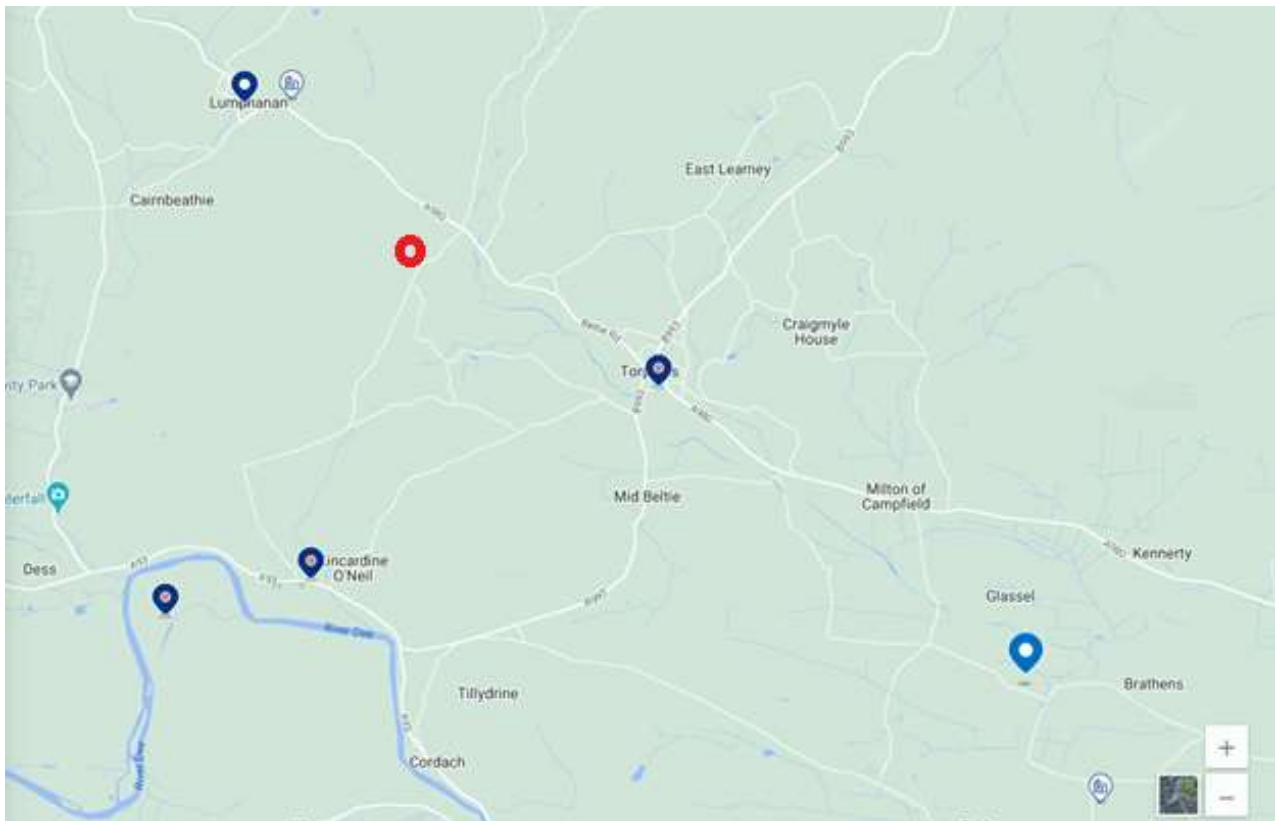
BACKGROUND

To inform our business plan, and demonstrate alignment with Council policy on Tourist Facilities, we have prepared the following notes which we trust suitably justifies the benefits of our development to the local community and in attracting tourism to our area of Royal Deeside.

Situated in rural Aberdeenshire halfway between the villages of Torphins and Lumphanan, Colliestown Farm (location identified by the red circle on the map below) extends to c.70 acres - including 30 acres of arable ground and 34 acres of rough grazing on the North East slope of Stott Hill.

Torphins is a rural village in Aberdeenshire with a current population of 1400. The village is serviced by the Pharmacy, a Scotmid Co-op supermarket, and Platform 22 as well as a hairdresser, charity shop, Chinese take away and a local pub / Indian restaurant.

Located 3 miles to the West of Torphins, Lumphanan is a rural village with a population of 530. The village contains a pub with accommodation (The Macbeth Arms), a local store, Tea Shop and a hairdresser.



Source: Booking.com search results

Our experience of researching and advising friends and family of locally available holiday accommodation is that we are often required to recommend accommodation as far away as Elrick and Westhill due to the scarcity of bedspace availability, and in particular lack of disabled accessible accommodation in our local area.

LOCALLY AVAILABLE ACCOMMODATION

Reviewing locally available accommodation we have looked at:

- Booking.com
- Hotels.com
- Visit Aberdeenshire (visitabdn.com)
- VisitScotland.com
- AirBNB
- Google.com

Torphins:

Since the closing of the Learney Arms in Torphins as a hotel, there is only one available option for accommodation in the village which is a cottage which can accommodate a maximum of four persons in two rooms. There are steps up to the front door (as is usual with this age of accommodation in the area) which is not suitable for either general disabled access or wheelchair accessible.

Lumphanan:

In Lumphanan the MacBeth Arms has four double / twin rooms available for accommodation in the centre of the village. Dating from the late 1800's the building does not have a lift to allow disabled access to the rented accommodation which is located on

the first floor. With a public house on the ground floor the accommodation may not be deemed to be suitable for family holidays. There is a step up into the ground floor and the upper floor can only be accessed by stairs - so the property is not wheelchair friendly.

Kincardine O'Neil:

Accommodation in the village of Kincardine O'Neil is provided by the Deeside Snug Apartments. These comprise two single bedroom apartments (both having double beds) and a third apartment with two bedrooms (with double beds) available in the centre of the village. None of the apartments are step free from kerb to accommodation with the larger apartment accessing the pavement via a single step and the two single apartments being on upper floors. None of these are entirely suitable for disabled access or wheelchair accessible.

Glassel:

At Glassel the Ben Macdui Chalet has three bedrooms and can accommodate six people. This is the largest accommodation provision in the area, without looking further afield at the larger villages of Aboyne and Banchory. There is however ramped access to the chalet decking and interior for disabled visitors. This is therefore the only tourist accommodation in the area that is wheelchair friendly.

Wider Area:

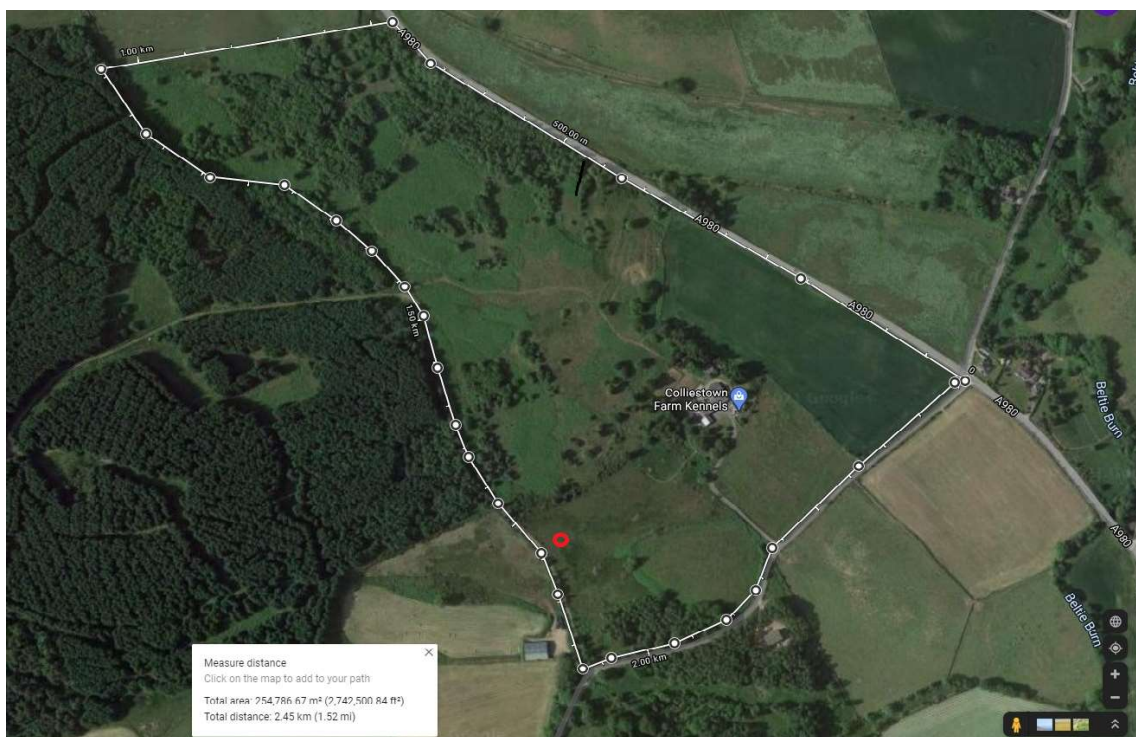
A significant number of the existing hotels and rental accommodation in the wider area are unsuitable for disabled access and/or wheelchairs, with the age and design of the buildings preventing access to all areas without encountering steps. With high demand throughout the year, availability of local accommodation has also been problematic with many options booked up months in advance.

Additionally, there are very few local accommodation opportunities for guests to stay in the rural environment outside of villages, so that visitors may fully appreciate the beauty of the local landscape which is one of the strongest points for attracting visitors to Aberdeenshire. **These are key objectives of both Visit Scotland and Visit Aberdeenshire.**

With **no** disabled accessible accommodation available in the immediate area around Colliestown Farm, and limited availability in the wider area, there would be extremely limited impact on the currently available accommodation offer.

PROPOSED LOCATION

As shown on the plan below, the proposed location for the new accommodation is on the South - Western boundary of the farm, with views down the glen towards Torphins.



- Colliestown Farm (AB31 4JN)



The area of the farm known within the family as the Thistle Field (See photo above showing the proposed location and ground condition in winter) is very rough hill ground with significant large boulder outcrops and several very wet areas. These ground conditions make this ground unsuitable for growing crops or the year-round grazing of cattle or sheep.

From the proposed position, access would be via an existing forestry track owned by the farm which connects to 'Pitmurchie Road', which runs southwards from the A980 to the A93. The access track would join the road on an outer bend which provides clear visibility in both directions. This removes the tourist traffic from the farm drive without adversely impacting on the Pitmurchie Road.

In terms of sustainable transport, the local bus service (Bus route 201) between Banchory and Braemar runs along the A980 at the end of Pitmurchie Road.

Further, The Deeside Way linking Aberdeen and Ballater follows the old railway line (just north of the A980) and is currently being upgraded. It is accordingly conveniently accessible for walking or cycling into the local villages or to the main Deeside towns beyond. This will allow safe options for travel off the main roads.

Looking at the local accommodation, there are very few options for visitors looking to stay in the countryside and as such we feel that we would be adding to available options and not impacting on the viability of the accommodation offers currently available.

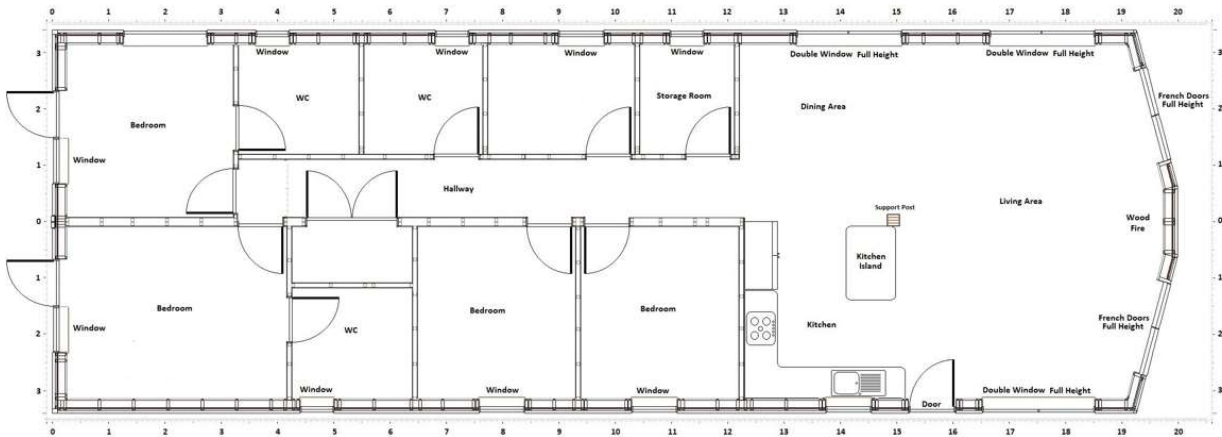
The mains utilities supplies (water and electricity) run up Pitmurchie road and over the eastern side of the proposed site location. There is accordingly direct access to services from the proposed site without crossing third party ground or restricting access for connection.

Having separation from the main farmhouse and steading grouping will provide a peaceful environment in the countryside and provide the best experience for guests. The proposed location would also allow for future development opportunities to enhance the experience provided to guests. The site would also be close enough to enable convenient access for maintenance, cleaning, and security.

We would additionally look to enhance the immediate area through the development of bio-diverse and sustainable local flora and fauna which will provide an aesthetically pleasing and relaxing environment for guests. To this end we have already planted over 200 native species of trees and hedgerows, and there are plans to further develop and enhance the immediate area around the proposed location.

Our Proposed Design

The proposed design would be fully disabled accessible with no steps from exterior to interior and a level floor design throughout including wet-room showers and exterior decking to maximise accessibility and therefore flexibility for the guests to the lodge.



The accommodation would comprise 4 bedrooms with en-suite facilities fully DDA compliant. The bedrooms would be supported by storage facilities, as well as a spacious open plan Living / Dining / Kitchen facility.

The communal living area would be light and open with the doors accessing the structure giving level access to the adjacent decking and surrounding ground.

The building envelope would be a highly insulated timber frame structure and being a single-story design with a shallow roof pitch, the structure would sit below the horizon of Stott Hill. The exterior of the structure would be clad using locally sourced waney edge larch board which over time will silver and soften into the surrounding hillside.

Enhancing the Local Area

By providing new accommodation that is fully disabled accessible and suitable for larger groups we would aim to support and promote the shops, restaurants, facilities and activities in the local area through marketing materials and recommendations.

Local activities that we could promote to visitors would include:

- Golf
- Fishing
- Hillwalking
- Mountain Biking / road cycling
- Ski and Snow Sports
- Watersports
- Castle Trail
- Whisky Trail
- Art Retreats
- Yoga Retreats
- Craft and activity days
- History and Heritage

As well as providing accommodation for tourists, we would also look to support the local community through providing accommodation for guests attending local functions or events (e.g. weddings, funerals, family gatherings) where the venues themselves have limited capability to accommodate overnight guests.

These could include:

- Ballogie House, Ballogie
- Coe Cathedral, Aboyne
- Raemoir House, Banchory
- Kincardine Castle, Kincardine O'Neil.

Reviewing the prices of local accommodation, there is a wide variety of per night charges depending on capacity and time of year. Our pricing policy would look to align to the local market rather than setting out to undercut the current offer to improve our own occupancy.

By building the proposed lodge utilising savings rather than taking a loan we would be less focussed at short term recuperation of the initial outlay and much more at developing a long-term sustainable diversification of Colliestown Farm.

SUMMARY

The main points which suggest the proposal is both policy compliant, and which have been fed into our Business Plan are as follows:

The local accommodation currently available is limited in capacity, availability and particularly accessibility for disabled visitors.

- We would be providing a modern accommodation for modest size groups (up to 8 guests) in a rural setting which is not currently available in the local area.
- Our design is a fully disabled and wheelchair accessible building on one level throughout with no steps from the drive or throughout the interior or external decking of the structure.
- Our location is easily accessible for visitors arriving and departing by car, public transport, bicycle, or indeed walkers.
- We are looking to build a structure with a low environmental footprint, but with a high-quality finish. It would also be located on poor quality rough ground unsuitable for raising cattle, sheep, or growing crops.
- Ongoing revitalisation of the area surrounding the building to increase the biodiversity and attraction for visitors.