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**Supporting Statement
on behalf of
Aberdeen Football Club plc & Aberdeen
Football Club Community Trust**

**Proposed Stadium Development,
Kingsford**



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Aberdeen Football Club plc and Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust seek planning permission for the construction of new Community and Sports Facilities, Football Academy, (comprising outdoor pitches, pavilion, ancillary buildings), Stadium (20,000 capacity), ancillary uses, formation of access roads, parking and associated landscaping and engineering works on land at West Kingsford (North Of The A944 Road) Skene Road, Aberdeen (reference 170021/DPP).
- 1.2 Internationally recognised as one of Scotland's leading football clubs, AFC aspires to become one of Europe's elite clubs. This ambition matches the City of Aberdeen's stated vision for Aberdeen to be a dynamic, creative city of the future. The £50 million investment also sits well with the economic renaissance for the region which is being promoted by Opportunity North East.
- 1.3 Almost 17 years after the Club first embarked on its ambitious plans to provide a new stadium and training/community facilities of which Aberdonians can be rightly proud, Kingsford provides an exciting opportunity to finally turn the dreams into reality.
- 1.4 As part of the iterative process of determining the planning application, and following upon responses from statutory consultees and third parties, Aberdeen City Council as Planning Authority has sought clarification of certain aspects of the proposed development. Detailed technical responses have been provided.
- 1.5 This statement summarises the following key issues:
- 1 ***Why Pittodrie Stadium is no longer suitable in the modern age***
 - 2 ***The need for co-location of AFC training facilities and stadium***
 - 3 ***The site selection process***
 - 4 ***The transport strategy for Kingsford***
 - 5 ***The economic and community benefits arising from the Kingsford development***
 - 6 ***Consideration of potential impacts on Aberdeen City Centre***
- 1.6 It is submitted that when read in conjunction with the Environmental Statement and other supporting material, this statement reinforces the justification for approving this inspirational development.

2 WHY PITTODRIE IS NO LONGER SUITABLE

2.1 Put simply, Pittodrie, home to Aberdeen Football Club since 1899, is simply no longer suitable for top class, European and domestic football. As highlighted in the Environmental Statement, the current stadium and its surrounds present significant constraints to achieving the Club's vision and aspirations to compete at the top level in domestic and Europe competition in the future.

2.2 These constraints have been known to the Council since approximately 2000. Indeed the Club has worked closely with the Council since then to find a suitable site for relocation.

2.3 In summary, the constraints include:

- **failure to meet UEFA stadium criteria (such as width of pitch, location of substitute benches, shortfalls in changing rooms, medical, officials and media facilities) which are required to host European matches**
- **lack of available and professional standard training facilities**
- **lack of covered facilities in areas of Pittodrie Stadium which results in a poor spectator experience, and no weather protection for pre-match activities with local community groups**
- **inefficient hospitality facilities due to their location being in different areas of the stadium e.g. 8 lounges and hospitality boxes served by 6 separate kitchens**
- **limited facilities for AFC Community Trust activities, internally and/or externally, which restricts the growth of the Community Trust**

2.4 Given the age and condition of the existing Pittodrie facilities, it costs AFC in the region of £700,000 each year simply to maintain the integrity of these facilities in their current condition. Specific equipment in the stadium is beyond its normal life expectancy and in some cases, obsolete. By way of example, the failure of an aged electrical transformer in November 2016 resulted in an SPFL match against Motherwell FC to be abandoned. The Club had considerable difficulty securing a like-for-like replacement at a cost of £80,000.

2.5 In addition, the Club incurs ongoing costs leasing third Party training facilities around the city, including sites at Seaton, Balgownie, Countesswells and Milltimber, and travelling to and from these locations. These facilities are designed for school and/ or student sports and are ill-equipped for professional athletic training. Accordingly, the Club spends considerable monies on an annual basis preparing/improving the standard and maintenance of these grass pitches.

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- 2.6 The Club believes that retaining these current arrangements will severely reduce its ability to attract and retain playing and managerial talent and impact on its ability to deliver ongoing success. This, together with out of date stadium facilities, will lead to falling crowds and reduced revenue. As a one club city, this will reflect badly on Aberdeen.
- 2.7 The Club previously investigated redeveloping Pittodrie into a modern stadium facility.
- 2.8 In 2007/2008, the Council and AFC jointly commissioned consultants to prepare outline and then full business cases on the redevelopment/relocation of the Club. The business cases concluded that it is economically unviable to redevelop Pittodrie Stadium.
- 2.9 The Council and AFC agreed to focus upon a best value, deliverable solution for a new stadium, incorporating community facilities.
- 2.10 Redeveloping Pittodrie is still unviable. This is because:
- **As detailed in the Environmental Statement and further set out in Section 2 of this statement, the Club requires approximately 25 ha to accommodate a stadium and training facilities.**
 - **Pittodrie extends to only 5.7 ha and is constrained by residential development to the east, north and south east. AFC attempted to purchase the adjoining former gas holder site in the early 2000s, however it was sold to a residential developer for a higher price than the Club could afford.**
 - **The former gasholder site has now been redeveloped into residential flats. This is in line with the pattern of development of this area between King Street and Pittodrie, where former commercial sites, now surplus to requirements, are being redeveloped into residential or student accommodation uses. The Local Development Plan recognises this transition through its designation of the area as ‘Mixed Use’ rather than exclusively commercial or residential.**
 - **Redevelopment of Pittodrie would cause considerable upheaval for the Club, supporters and the surrounding area for a long period as it would have to be carried out in a piecemeal fashion, to enable matches to be continue to be played. European matches would require to be played outwith Aberdeen.**
 - **The Club requires to raise money to fund the construction of a new stadium. Its most valuable asset is the land it owns. The Pittodrie site is allocated in the Local Development Plan as ‘OP87’, for residential development. This reflects the Planning Permission in Principle that is in place. Redeveloping Pittodrie for a new football stadium would remove a key funding stream for the Club and**

would frustrate the vision of the Local Development Plan which is to see the site come forward for housing.

2.11 Relocation from Pittodrie is therefore inevitable if the Council wishes to see a thriving, successful AFC, competing at the highest levels of the game.

3 THE NEED FOR CO-LOCATION OF THE STADIUM, TRAINING AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

3.1 Co-location of the stadium, training and community facilities is central to the Club's redevelopment proposals.

3.2 Co-location brings the following benefits:

- **Economies of scale.** The single pavilion building proposed at Kingsford with the facilities described above will serve both the professional team and staff, AFC Community Trust staff and the youth football academy.
- **A reduction in the Club's carbon footprint.** There would be no commuting to and from stadium and training and community facilities during the normal working day for club staff and community participants (as is presently the case).
- **Reduction in financial outlays.** There would be no need for AFC or AFCCT to lease 3rd Party training and/ or community facilities under normal circumstances and our current maintenance / travel costs (at 3rd Party facilities) would be eliminated.
- **Efficient use of resources.** Operating days and times vary between stadium events. Being on one site prevents a "doubling up" of resources at separate sites and will enable AFC and AFCCT staff to manage and operate both the stadium and training /community facilities simultaneously and more efficiently.
- **Positive relationships.** The AFC Community Trust integrates closely with AFC staff on a daily basis to create strong relationships on a variety of issues. It has access to (limited) indoor facilities at the current stadium. Co-location will allow all community groups and training youth teams access to positive and inspirational role models including AFC management and footballers. It should be emphasised that AFCCT undertakes a wide range of sporting/participative activities beyond football without discrimination to gender, skills level, ethnic group, age, etc.

- **Education.** There will be greater scope for young person/youth academy player education with wider upskilling and employability training opportunities across different AFC and AFCCT Departments.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility.** Co-location will offer AFC & AFCCT corporate partners a better platform to engage with the Trust and the youth academy from a CSR perspective.
- **Better visitor experience.** Having the training, community and stadium facilities on one site will certainly enhance the “visitor experience” on both match and non match-days, due to the scale and range of accommodation and facilities on offer.
- **Heritage Museum.** The AFC Heritage Trust (a registered charity) has a historic collection available and co-location will provide an opportunity to create a dedicated museum to display “The Aberdeen Collection”. It will be an exciting new addition to the NE Scotland Tourist and Heritage trails in the north east, showcasing local social history, culture and sport.

3.3 It is challenging, if not impossible, to adequately deliver any of the above at Pittodrie at present.

3.4 Kingsford will provide the opportunity to deliver not only a new stadium and top class training facilities, but an enhanced community involvement which will benefit both the Club and the people of Aberdeen.

4 **SITE SELECTION PROCESS**

4.1 Kingsford has been identified as a suitable site for the new stadium and community facilities after a 17 year search. The Club has worked closely with the Council during this period, with the Council co-funding the early research into potential sites.

4.2 The Environmental Statement sets out the detailed site requirements for a new stadium and training facilities. These can be summarised as:

- **25 ha**
- **Easily accessible from the City Centre**
- **Free from physical constraints**
- **Suitable ground conditions**

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- 4.3 Chapter 4 of the Environmental Statement lists the sites which have been considered and assessed by the Club. These are:
- **Pittodrie (i.e. remain and redevelop)**
 - **Bellfield Farm, Kingswells**
 - **Loirston**
 - **Calder Park**
 - **Kings Links**
 - **Current AECC, Bridge of Don**
 - **Proposed AECC, Dyce**
- 4.4 None of the listed sites is located within the city centre. While it may be argued that the development creates significant footfall and should be located within the defined city centre in strict policy terms, the scale of site required for a 20,000 capacity football stadium and professional and community training facilities renders an Aberdeen city centre location impossible. In this way, the stadium is not unlike the new AECC.
- 4.5 Scottish Planning Policy advocates a sequential approach to the identification of sites for significant footfall developments and supports “out-of-centre locations that are, or can be, made easily accessible by a choice of transport modes”.
- 4.6 It should be noted that, in terms of newer Scottish football stadia, Inverness Caledonian Thistle’s Stadium is not located within Inverness City Centre and St Johnstone’s McDiarmid Park is not sited within Perth City Centre either.
- 4.7 To view the Kingsford site selection in context, this statement summarises the historic site search, all of which is known to the Council already.
- 4.8 Following the decision to leave Pittodrie in 2000, an application for outline planning permission was supported by the Council for a Regional Centre for Sporting and Leisure Excellence incorporating a 30,000 capacity football stadium at Bellfield Farm, Kingswells. The site was located within the Green Belt and was supported as a suitable Departure from the Local Plan, requiring notification to Scottish Ministers.
- 4.9 Permission was to be granted on the condition that the development would only proceed if Scotland was awarded the opportunity to host the Euro Championship football tournament.

The event was ultimately awarded to Austria and Switzerland. Planning Permission was not therefore granted, and the Bellfield Farm development did not progress.

- 4.10 AFC and the Council thereafter appointed consultants to critically examine whether a new stadium could be located at either King's Links or Loirston Loch. Both sites were in the Green Belt as it was recognised that given the land values of land allocated for employment or residential uses, land acquisition costs would render the project unviable.
- 4.11 The consultants identified Loirston as the preferred site because:
- its location near a junction of the proposed AWPR had advantages over Kings's Links and would help with an integrated transport policy for match days.
 - the capital costs of development would be £4m less at Loirston than King's Links.
 - King's Links is Common Good land and its release would be difficult. In addition the existing leaseholders at King's Links could prove costly to relocate.
- 4.12 In conjunction with the Council as landowners, the Club submitted a planning application for a 22,000 seat stadium at Loirston. The Council as Planning Authority supported the application as a suitable Departure from the Local Development Plan. The Council ***'considered that notwithstanding the conflict with green belt policy, the fact that the development complies with and supports other provisions within the development plan and the economic, social, sports and cultural benefits for the whole community of Aberdeen that would arise from the proposed development justify approving the application contrary to the provisions of Policy 28 'Green Belt' of the Aberdeen Local Plan...'***
- 4.13 The development was subsequently endorsed by Scottish Ministers.
- 4.14 A separate application to deliver the training and community facilities required by AFC was submitted and approved on adjacent land at Calder Park, which land was controlled by the Council.
- 4.15 Before development could commence at Calder Park or Loirston, the Council decided to locate the new 'City South' Academy on the western part of Calder Park. This left insufficient land for the training facilities required by AFC.
- 4.16 Events at Loirston/Calder Park forced the Club to once again review options for a new stadium and training facilities. They have revisited the previous list of sites and considered additional sites.
- 4.17 The constraints at Pittodrie Stadium remain and have been documented above. The constraints at the King's Links site also remains.

- 4.18 The sites at Loirston/Calder Park are no longer available.
- 4.19 Bellfield Farm is no longer available as it is now included within Site OP38 in the extant Local Development Plan for the development of 3000 houses. This development is underway.
- 4.20 The current AECC site at Bridge of Don, which was not available at the time of the previous site search, was assessed and rejected. The site is smaller than required. That, along with its location, does not make it feasible for the stadium and training facilities. In addition, the Council has identified the site as a mixed use development opportunity and a draft Masterplan has been prepared for a predominantly residential scheme. The Council requires a land receipt from the sale of the land as a contribution to offset the costs of the new AECC.
- 4.21 The proposed AECC site at Dyce was also assessed and rejected. The site is entirely occupied by the new exhibition and conference centre, the development of which is underway.
- 4.22 Aberdeenshire Council previously approached the Club in 2012 to encourage relocation within their administrative area, suggesting sites at Portlethen/Hillside, Blackburn and Balmedie as potential locations with good links to the AWPR. These locations were not seriously pursued by AFC for differing reasons, but it prompted the Club to consider whether there were other opportunities along the AWPR corridor, and at the junctions in particular, as this would provide the same transportation benefits identified as an advantage at Loirston.
- 4.23 Kingsford was identified as a potential location. Further site investigations and due diligence were therefore undertaken. It then became clear that Kingsford was of a sufficient scale to accommodate both a new stadium and training/community facilities, and the co-location ambition could be realised, bringing a number of benefits as set out in Section 2 above.
- 4.24 Kingsford also had the benefit of a landowner willing to sell the entire 25ha to the Club, and missives have now been concluded.
- 4.25 Kingsford shares many of the advantages identified at Loirston. It complies with SPP as it is accessible by various transport modes, as set out in the subsequent transport section.
- 4.26 The Environmental Statement and supporting information have detailed the economic benefits of building a new stadium with training/community facilities. The benefits of co-location are summarised in section 2 of this statement.
- 4.27 It has been demonstrated that remaining at Pittodrie is not a viable option.
- 4.28 It is submitted that the Council's justification for approving a new stadium in the Green Belt at Loirston applies equally to the Kingsford development.

5 TRANSPORT STRATEGY

- 5.1 Kingsford is 6.3 miles from Aberdeen City Centre (Bridge Street/ Union Street/ Union Terrace). It sits on the A944 dual carriageway, one of the main arterial routes out of Aberdeen to the West and an existing bus route. It is less than 0.5 miles from the junction of the AWPR/A944 junction. Core Path 91 runs along the frontage of the Kingsford site, providing a pedestrian/cycle route from Aberdeen to Westhill.
- 5.2 A Transport Assessment was submitted as part of the application documents, detailing the transport impacts of a new stadium and associated training and community facilities at Kingsford on the immediate and wider road network. Following discussions with the Council's roads officers and Transport Scotland, an Addendum to the original assessment has been provided which refines and supplements the initial findings.
- 5.3 Drawing on the findings from traffic and supporter surveys, a Transport Strategy Framework has been prepared which responds to the needs and demands of a regionally important sporting venue.
- 5.4 One of the key objectives of the Framework is to discourage car trips as far as possible. Parking provision within the application site is in accordance with the Council's parking standards which are designed to restrict private vehicle use. As the existing public transport provision to and from the Kingsford area is insufficient to accommodate the anticipated level of demand, the Club will provide an extensive network of special bus services on match days from identified pick up points in and around the city out to the stadium. Pedestrian and cycle movements have also been taken into consideration. The Framework is consistent with the strategy which was approved by the Council for the stadium proposals at Loirston.
- 5.5 The Transport Assessment and Addendum have demonstrated that the traffic generated by the stadium on match days can be managed appropriately for the type of development and frequency of occurrence.

6 THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS ARISING FROM KINGSFORD

- 6.1 The economic benefits of a having successful football club based in Aberdeen are significant and have long been acknowledged and accepted by the Council.
- 6.2 The business case commissioned jointly by the Council and AFC in 2008 concluded that the economic benefit of Aberdeen Football Club to the North East was in excess of **£6M** per year. It identified that a new stadium would significantly enhance this. Indeed it advised that the qualitative impact on Aberdeen would be dramatic.

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- 6.3 The Strategic Development Plan identifies construction of a new stadium as a key regional infrastructure project.
- 6.4 In 2015 Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (AGCC) and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) carried out an updated independent assessment of the economic contribution of AFC to the North East, based on a stadium move to Loirston. It also reviewed the social and community contribution which the Club has in a wider context, primarily related to the AFC Community Trust.
- 6.5 The AGCC/SCDI 2015 assessment was issued to both the Council and the Club. It concluded that the new stadium could contribute **£7.9M** to the regional economy each year.
- 6.6 Chapter 13 of the Environmental Statement considers the potential socioeconomic effects of the construction and operation of a new stadium and related facilities at Kingsford, in line with the scoping agreed with the Council.
- 6.7 In response to queries raised by the Council, an updated report has been provided which provides greater clarity and more detail on the methodology used in the assessment. This includes an independent assessment by AGCC which considers what the impact would be if the current planning application is refused and the Club was forced to remain in its current substandard facilities at Pittodrie Stadium.
- 6.8 The updated report identifies that the net additional GVA contribution from the development equates to **£14M** at the Kingsford level and **£106M** at the Aberdeen City level (long term).
- 6.9 In conjunction with the significant economic benefits of a move to Kingsford, the development will bring huge community benefits.
- 6.10 AFC won the ‘Best Professional Club in the Community 2015’ award from the Scottish Football Association. This is due to the work of AFC Community Trust, a registered charity (SC044720) which was formed in 2014 to provide support and opportunity to those in most need within the local area. It works with a wide section of society with ages ranging from 3 to over 100. There are more than 60 different community-related programmes – including many non football-related activities run by the AFC Community Trust that involve 12,000 participants and 92,000 participations annually.
- 6.11 The existing facilities available at Pittodrie Stadium simply cannot accommodate the current AFCCT programmes, nor can it accommodate the Trust’s ambitions for the future.
- 6.12 A blend of internal and external facilities is required for Trust activities during the calendar year, such as, training pitches, grass areas, covered accommodation, a learning centre, etc. At present facilities outwith Pittodrie Stadium are leased by the Trust, placing a further financial

burden on AFCCT and using monies which could otherwise be directly used for target user-groups in the local community.

- 6.13 The benefits of co-locating the stadium and training facilities have been identified above in greater detail, however the key part of this is the enhanced synergies between AFC and AFC Community Trust that can be created.

7 THE POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF RELOCATION ON ABERDEEN CITY CENTRE

- 7.1 Although Pittodrie is not within Aberdeen City Centre, concerns have been raised about the potential negative impact on the city centre of the Club relocating. This is despite the Council previously approving relocation to firstly Bellfield Farm, Kingswells, and then Loirston. The extant Development Plan identifies two potential sites for a new stadium, which are both out with the city centre (King's Links and Loirston).

- 7.2 It is submitted that relocation from Pittodrie will have little to no negative impact on Aberdeen City Centre. Indeed, there may be benefits, such as the removal of traffic from the city centre network.

- 7.3 The planning policy position is set out in the Halliday Fraser Munro Policy Statement on City Centre Impacts.

- 7.4 A recent independent AGCC survey of over 17,906 existing AFC fans (of which over 50% are season ticket holders) ascertained that 61% of respondents travel by car to Pittodrie, parking in surrounding streets, on the Beach Boulevard and within Aberdeen University and/or Aberdeen Sports Village car parks nearby. Given the location of Pittodrie, many of these cars travel through the city centre. Relocation to Kingsford, with the related public transport strategy, would remove many of these cars from the network, consistent with the Council's aim to reduce car borne traffic within the city centre.

- 7.5 The AGCC survey also assessed current spending activities by AFC supporters on match days and found that the approximate spend within the city centre was a tiny percentage (0.07%) of the North East's annual retail spend.

- 7.6 In any event, there is no information to support the perception that this spend would be "lost" following AFC's relocation from Pittodrie. Indeed, the transport strategy adopted by the Club, as detailed in Section 4, is focused on transporting people by bus to and from the city centre as quickly and easily as possible.

- 7.7 There is every likelihood that people's current pre and post-match behaviour pattern and spend will therefore continue after relocation to Kingsford.

- 7.8 With the ability to host international matches, European matches, rugby events (senior and/ or junior, male and female) and private functions, the new stadium is likely to attract additional visitors into Aberdeen, an upside which has received local support from the Aberdeen Hoteliers Association, Visit Aberdeen and the Chamber of Commerce, with a corresponding increase in retail spend in the city centre.