

# Municipal Buildings Site, Falkirk

## Planning Statement

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this planning statement is to provide planning advice in support of the marketing of the site of the former Municipal Buildings in West Bridge Street, Falkirk. It provides guidance on development plan policy, design and access considerations, flood risk and drainage, and likely developer contributions.

### 2. Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The site is 3.65 hectares in size. It occupies a prominent location at the western entrance to Falkirk Town Centre with vehicular access from West Bridge Street. To the west lie relatively low density 1930s residential properties along Camelon Road and Burnbank Gardens, together with the Category B listed Kilns House and its grounds, which are part of the Arnohill and Dollar Park Conservation Area. To the east lie two and three storey commercial properties and 4 storey retirement flats along the west side of Wellside Place. To the north is the main railway line leading into Falkirk Grahamston Station. To the south is West Bridge Street. Topographically, the site slopes significantly down from east to west. There are core paths adjacent and various entry points around the edge have facilitated pedestrian access across the site over the years. There are a significant number of mature trees within or immediately adjacent to the site boundary.
- 2.2 Historically, the site was occupied by Westbank, a large private mansion together with extensive grounds. Westbank Clinic was erected on the south-east corner of the site in 1959, with the Municipal Buildings and Town Hall following in 1965. The clinic has been demolished, and clearance of the remaining civic buildings is well advanced, leaving residual areas of car parking and landscaped areas with some trees.

### 3. Development Plan Policy

- 3.1 The Development Plan relevant to the site comprises [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#), the [Falkirk Local Development Plan 2 \(LDP2\)](#) and associated [LDP2 Supplementary Guidance](#).
- 3.2 Within LDP2, the site lies within the identified Falkirk Town Centre boundary. [LDP2 Policy JE07 \(Town and Local Centres\)](#) and NPF4 Policy 27 (City, town, local and commercial centres) are therefore relevant. In general terms, these policies seek to support the vitality and viability of the Town Centre through application of the town centre first principle and promoting a diverse range of appropriate town centre uses and regeneration opportunities, with a particular emphasis on residential development to support town centre living.
- 3.3 Although not subject to any specific proposals, the site is identified in LDP2's [Falkirk Town Centre Major Area of Change Development Guidance](#) as a potential redevelopment opportunity, and brief guidance on key development parameters is offered as follows:
- High quality frontage/landscape treatment required to West Bridge Street at this important gateway to the Town Centre.
  - Site lies between two conservation areas – quality of design and materials critical to protecting and enhancing their setting.

- Opportunity to improve pedestrian link connecting the Town Centre to the canal via Bleachfield.

3.4 The Arnothill and Dollar Park Conservation Area lies immediately to the west as identified on Map 1. The Category B-listed Kilns House also lies to the west. Falkirk Town Centre Conservation Area lies to the east and south of the site. LDP2 Policies [PE07 \(Listed Buildings\)](#) and [PE08 \(Conservation Areas\)](#), and NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places) emphasise the importance of protecting the setting of conservation areas and listed buildings. Trees within the conservation areas are also afforded statutory protection (see paragraph 8.4 below). [Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans](#) have been prepared for each of the two adjacent conservation areas.

3.5 Apart from the above site-specific provisions, there are various generic design and use-specific policies in both NPF4 and LDP2, and Supplementary Guidance notes, which will be relevant to the redevelopment of the site. These are referred to as appropriate through the following text.

#### **4. Falkirk Town Centre Vision and Masterplan**

4.1 In August 2023, the Council approved a [Falkirk Town Centre Vision and Development Framework](#). The document provides a framework for the regeneration and repurposing of the town centre in the context of the declining role of retailing. One of the four key sites which the document focuses on is the Municipal Buildings site, and indicative sketches are provided showing how the site could be developed, illustrating the contribution which it could make to repopulating the town centre, enhancing the western approach to the town centre, and improving access and green links.

4.2 The indicative sketches do not represent a prescriptive idea of how the Council sees the site being developed, but the document nonetheless expresses aspirations as to the role of the site in the wider revitalisation of the town centre which prospective developers should take on board.

#### **5. Potential Uses**

5.1 Although Policy JE07 allows flexibility for a range of town centre uses on the site, there is a strong presumption in favour of redevelopment for residential use, reflecting the future role of the site as identified in the Falkirk Town Centre Vision and Development Framework. Given the level of property vacancies in and around the High Street, and the negative effect on the centre's vitality and viability, the Council wishes to concentrate the development of any new footfall generating uses such as leisure, cultural, office and retail within this core area, rather than more peripheral areas such as the Municipal Buildings site. In parallel with this, both NPF4 and LDP2 strongly encourage an increased residential population in town centres to support their function. The residential character of much of the site's surroundings also points to residential use.

5.2 [LDP2 Policy HC02 \(Windfall Housing\)](#) supports housing development on windfall sites within the Urban Limit subject to a number of criteria. These criteria should be capable of being satisfied, subject to satisfactory resolution of access, drainage and flooding matters. In terms of NPF4 Policy 16(f), which deals with windfall housing, although criterion (iii) would not appear to be met, in other respects NPF4 would be supportive of reuse for residential purposes. NPF4 Policy 9 supports the sustainable reuse of brownfield land. The site also

benefits from a high level of accessibility to local services and so redevelopment for housing offers a close fit with the 20 minute neighbourhood concept as outlined in NPF4 Policy 15.

## 6. Access

### Active Travel and Public Transport

- 6.1 In accordance with [LDP2 Policy IR06 \(Active Travel\)](#), the design of the site should facilitate active travel, particularly through the safeguarding and improvement of strategic path routes in the vicinity of the site. Three core paths lie within or immediately adjacent to the site (002/722, 002/773 and 002/743), as shown on Map 1. The first two form the Bleachfield route which connects the Forth and Clyde Canal to the Town Centre, while the third provides a connection from Bleachfield via Brockville to Hope Street and Grahamston Station. Redevelopment of the site should facilitate the widening and improvement of 002/772 and 002/723 to a full three metre wide standard. While improvement along the existing line of Bleachfield around the northern edge of the site is an option, a potential realignment to create quality active travel routes through the site potentially offers a better solution. The priority should be to create safe, convenient and high quality connections.
- 6.2 Otherwise, the site layout should maintain good pedestrian permeability across the site, picking up existing entry points, including from Burnbrae Gardens and the public path along the south side of Kilns House, and creating new connections where appropriate (see Map 1).
- 6.3 The site enjoys good access to public transport services, with a bus stop and layby on the West Bridge Street frontage of the site, and Grahamston railway station around 400m to the east. Convenient connections to these facilities should be maintained.

### Vehicular Access

- 6.4 The main vehicular access to the site will be taken from West Bridge Street. The Council's Roads Development Team advise that the current junction causes concern in terms of road safety and would not be compliant with current design standards. A roundabout would provide the best solution to create a safe junction with appropriate speeds and flow rates, together with the ability to travel west without going round the one-way gyratory system. The alternative would be a traffic signal-controlled junction. The form of junction will be determined through the planning application process, informed by the Transport Assessment which will be required in association with any redevelopment proposals.
- 6.5 Options to provide a secondary vehicular access to the site are constrained. Full vehicular access to the site from Burnbrae Gardens would not be acceptable given that Kilns Road has a section of substandard carriageway width without any footway provision. However, this could provide the most appropriate option for the required emergency access.
- 6.6 Notwithstanding the constraints on provision of a secondary access, the layout should otherwise adhere to the principles contained in '[Designing Streets](#)'.
- 6.7 Vehicular access to the open space lying to the west of the site and to the rear of houses on Camelon Road must be maintained. This is to allow future maintenance of the open space/trees by the Council, who will retain ownership of this area. Ideally this would be at the most westerly path entry point shown on Map 1.

## Parking

- 6.8 Parking requirements for new development will be as set out in the [National Roads Development Guide](#) (subject to the Council's adopted variations).

## **7. Design**

- 7.1 Detailed proposals will need to have regard to a range of design policies and guidance including:

### NPF4 Policies

- Policy 14 Design, quality and place

### LDP2 Policies

- [PE01 Placemaking](#)
- [PE17 Open Space and New Development](#)
- [HC04 Housing Density and Site Capacity](#)
- [IR06 Active Travel](#)
- [IR13 Low and Zero Carbon Development](#)
- [IR14 Heat Networks](#)
- [IR18 Waste Management in New Development](#)

### Supplementary Guidance

- [SG02 Neighbourhood Design](#)

- 7.2 Specific design objectives to be addressed on the site include:
- A sensitive approach to the topography of the site.
  - Managing the transition in character of the site from the lower density residential environment of the west to the more elevated, higher density mixed use development to the east.
  - A coherent landscape and open space strategy, which retains and incorporates as far as possible the trees and tree groups of value within the site.
  - Providing a high quality frontage to West Bridge Street which presents an attractive and welcoming approach to the Town Centre.
  - Dealing sensitively with the interfaces with existing development to the west and east of the site so as to foster continuity, integration and permeability.
  - Creating attractive active travel linkages across the site, as referred to in paragraphs 6.1-6.3 above, linked to the landscape strategy.

## **8. Open Space, Landscaping and Trees**

- 8.1 [LDP2 Policy PE17 \(Open Space and New Development\)](#) requires that new development should contribute positively to the provision of open space in the area and support the objectives of the Open Space Strategy. The equivalent NPF4 policy is Policy 21 (Play, recreation and sport).
- 8.2 It is expected that landscaped amenity open space will be provided within the site to assist with the design objectives above. Such landscaped open space should help with the structuring of the development and may be appropriate along the West Bridge Street frontage, along key internal routes, and as focus points to provide identity and legibility. It should also facilitate the retention of trees of value which are to be retained within the site.

Attention is drawn to the conceptual approach to open space in the Falkirk Town Centre Vision & Development Framework, with a green 'spine' providing the main connection through the site. The provision of open space adjacent to the grounds of Kilns House may also be necessary to provide a suitable setting and protection for the mature trees within the conservation area.

- 8.3 The recreational needs of the development, however, are expected to be met off-site. In terms of play areas and parks, Dollar Park lies within 400 m of the site. Sports areas are available at Woodlands and Sunnyside which are around 700-800m distant. These facilities are generally of a good quality, although the Dollar Park play area is expected to need an upgrade in the foreseeable future and a contribution is likely to be sought in accordance with [SG05 Green Infrastructure and New Development](#). Access to wider natural greenspace/green corridors is provided by the nearby Forth and Clyde Canal.
- 8.4 There are a number of mature trees within or adjacent to the site which are of significant townscape value. As noted previously, trees or tree groups of particular value within the site should be retained and integrated into the new development where possible. A tree survey will be required. In the meantime, the Council will assess the existing trees using available information, and embark on a process to legally protect those trees of sufficient value through designation of a tree preservation order. It should be noted that trees within the Arnothill and Dollar Park Conservation Area, immediately adjacent to the west of the site, will require to be retained within an appropriate setting and with an adequate root protection zone. The health and stability of other trees which lie just outwith the site boundary should also be considered. The provision of new trees within the proposed development will be required to enhance the landscape quality of streets and spaces and as compensation for any tree loss. The relevant policies are [LDP2 Policy PE20 \(Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows\)](#), NPF4 Policy 6 (Forestry, woodland and trees). [SG10 Trees and Development](#) offers further detailed guidance.
- 8.5 There are two memorial trees within the site (grid references NS 288328 680089 and NS 288344 680110). If it is not practical to retain them in their present location, they should be replaced with similar species of tree either within the development site, or other appropriate location to be agreed with the Council.

## **9. Drainage and Flood Risk**

- 9.1 A sub surface culverted watercourse runs northwards through the site close to its western boundary, as shown indicatively on Map 1. A Scottish Water combined sewer follows a near identical flow path parallel and to the west of this watercourse. It should also be noted that there are multiple surface drainage gullies located at various points along the boundary of the current car parking area of the site.
- 9.2 SEPA flood maps indicate that areas along the western and south western boundaries of the site are at risk of surface water flooding, associated with the culverted burn. A Flood Risk Assessment is therefore likely to be required. Reference should be made to the Council's [Planning Application Advice on Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage](#). The relevant Development Plan policies are [LDP2 Policy PE24 \(Flood Management\)](#) and NPF4 Policy 22 (Flood risk and water management).
- 9.3 Consultation with Scottish Water will be required regarding the drainage strategy for the site. Attention is drawn to the abovementioned Council Advice on Flood Risk and Surface

Water Drainage, and [Scottish Water's Surface Water Policy](#). Relevant Development Plan policies are [LDP2 Policy IR10 \(Drainage Infrastructure\)](#) and NPF4 Policy 22 (Flood risk and water management).

## **10. Developer Contributions**

- 10.1 Under [LDP2 Policy IR02 \(Developer Contributions\)](#), developers are required to contribute to the provision, upgrading and, where appropriate, maintenance of infrastructure where development will create or exacerbate deficiencies in, or impose significantly increased burdens on, existing infrastructure. Guidance on the calculation of contributions is set out in [SG13 Developer Contributions](#).
- 10.2 In respect of education contributions, there are no current capacity issues in the relevant catchment schools, and so contributions are unlikely to be required. However, there are capacity issues in respect of nursery provision and contributions for this aspect of provision are likely to be required. The current rate as at February 2023 is £1,556 per house and £470 per flat. Rates are updated for inflation each April. It should be noted that Policy IR02 makes provision for education contributions to be waived for flatted development of up to 50 units within the Town Centre boundary.
- 10.3 NHS Forth Valley has not identified any specific primary healthcare capacity constraints in the town of Falkirk, so there is unlikely to be a requirement for healthcare contributions.
- 10.4 In respect of open space contributions, [SG05 Green Infrastructure and New Development](#) sets out the relevant requirements, which are calculated following a local open space audit. Such an audit has yet to be prepared. However, as noted in paragraph 7.3 above, it is expected that contributions will only be sought in respect of play spaces. The rate is £600 per house and £300 per flat. One bedroom flats are exempted. As with education contributions, contributions are waived for flatted development of up to 50 units in the Town Centre.
- 10.5 Contributions may be sought for off-site transport infrastructure where the need for this is demonstrated through the Transport Assessment.
- 10.6 Affordable housing will be required at a rate of 15% of the total number of units, as set out in [LDP2 Policy HC03 \(Affordable Housing\)](#). Further guidance is provided in [SG06 Affordable Housing](#). The Council's preference will normally be for social rented housing provided on site in conjunction with a RSL partner, but other mechanisms are provided for in SG06. Early discussion with the Council's Housing Service is advised.

Map 1 : Municipal Building Site

