

Crathes Drumoak & Durris Community Council Comments on Crathes/Drumoak Schools Options

CDDCC have examined the future requirements of Drumoak Primary School in the light of current developments within the settlement boundary and the school's catchment area, and in the light of the Aberdeenshire Education & Recreation Option Appraisal meeting of 7th March 2005 at Drumoak School. CDDCC recognise that the existing school facilities are inadequate for the current school role, and this situation will continue for the foreseeable future until a new school to meet today's educational standards is provided.

Two options have been presented

Option A - Upgrade the existing school site to 120 pupil capacity

Option B - Replace the existing school with a 120 pupil capacity on a new site.

This report examines both options and suggests a preferred option, in the light of the following planning assumptions.

- 1) Housing demand along the North Deeside Road between the Aberdeen City Boundary and Banchory will continue to be high due to the quality of the local environment, as already reflected in the local plans for the Crathes and Drumoak settlements.
- 2) The Drumoak settlement boundary will continue to be under development pressure for the foreseeable future, and in the light of the Reporter's findings during the CALP local enquiry, there is some boundary expansion capability.
- 3) The Drumoak settlement is bounded by two pipeline wayleaves - one to the east and one to the west of the settlement - hence settlement expansion to the size of a new town such as Westhill or Kingswells will not be possible.

Figure 1 shows the current settlement boundaries of the Aberdeenshire Local Plan.

Area P is designated for future expansion of the cemetery which is approaching occupancy capacity.

Area A has been granted planning permission for 34 houses which are now under construction, and area EmpB, originally set aside for business, has now been rescheduled for housing and granted permission for a further 35 houses. These are scheduled for commencement on completion of area A.

Area fh1, future housing, has currently been removed from the plan, as it was considered that the school infrastructure is currently unable to support this expansion.

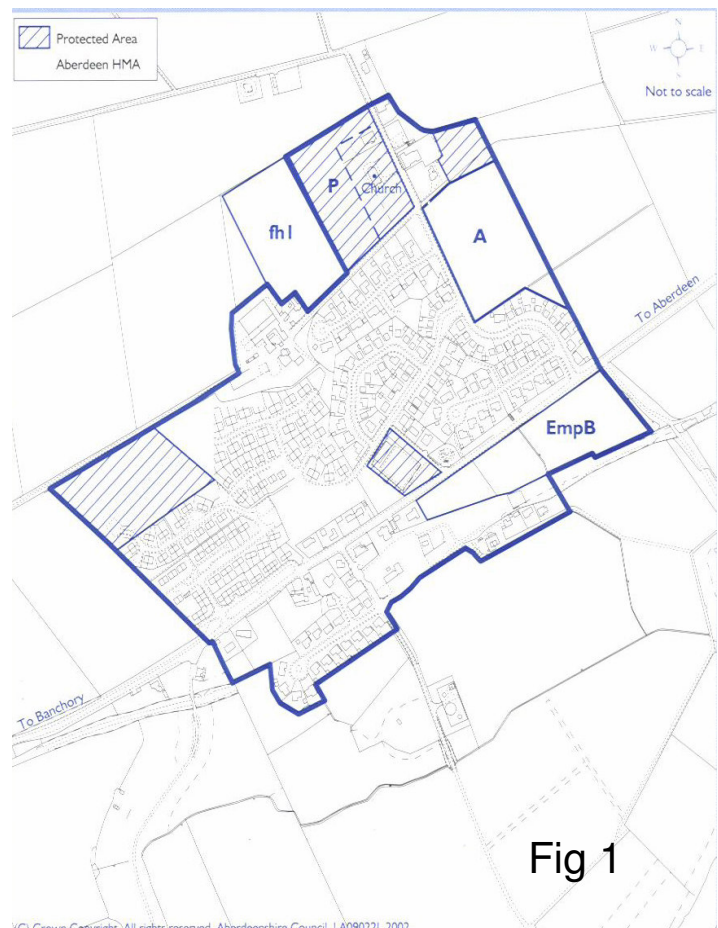
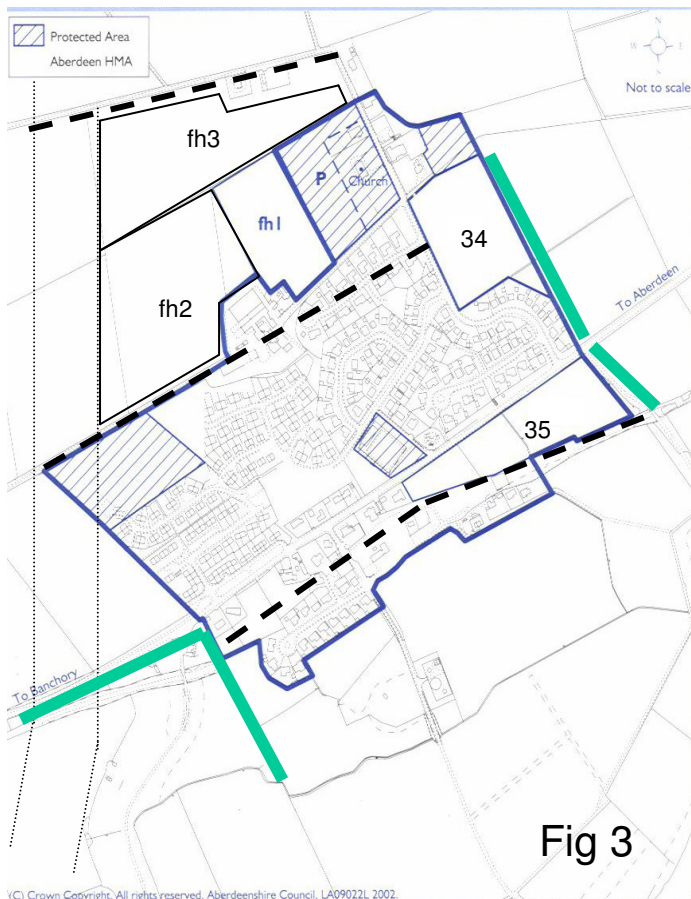
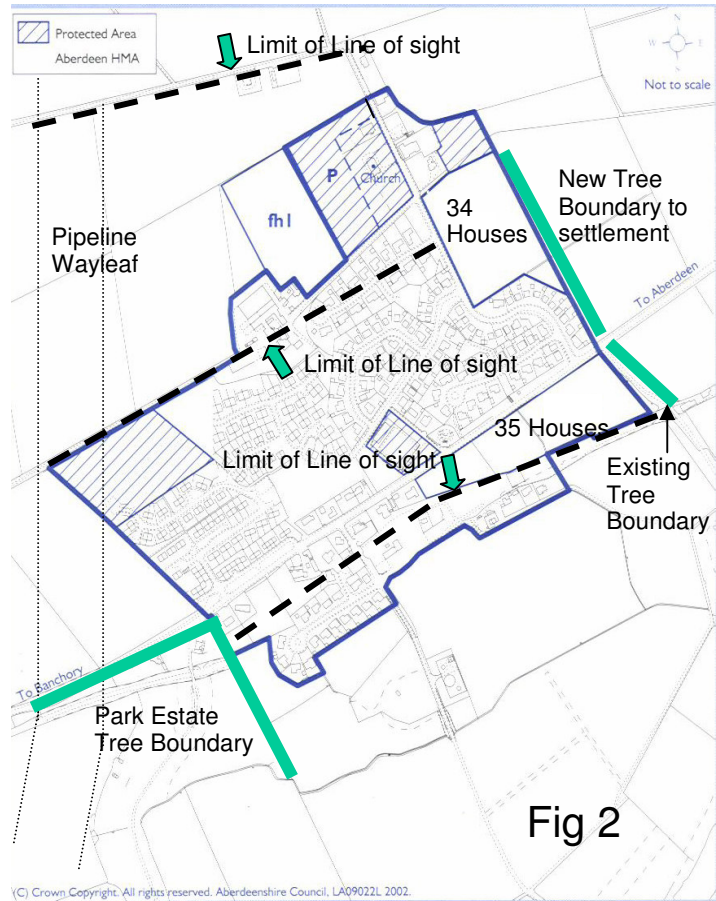


Fig 1

Figure 2 examines the potential for future settlement expansion of Drumoak within landscape constraints, so that the greater landscape of the Lower Dee Valley remains intact.

The settlement boundaries are well defined by trees to the eastern end of the settlement, by the mature trees of the Park Estate, and by the western pipeline way-leave. In addition, there are three slope changes that provide line of sight limits, two facing to the south, and one facing north. These provide an envelope within which additional housing could be developed without impacting on the overall Dee valley landscape. These potential housing areas are designated fh1, fh2, and fh3 in **figure 3** below.



Thus, in Figure 3 it can be seen that further housing developments can readily be accommodated, without detracting from the local landscape. Casual inspection of the land available in the three or four tranches indicates that some 100 – 110 houses of mixed types might well be accommodated. Furthermore, if their development were carefully phased to match school roll capacity, a new custom built school of 120 pupil capacity would be able to operate at high capacity throughout the planning time frame and beyond.

The location of this potential housing to the north of the main area of the settlement adds to compactness of the Drumoak settlement, and minimises pedestrian interface with the traffic on the A93.

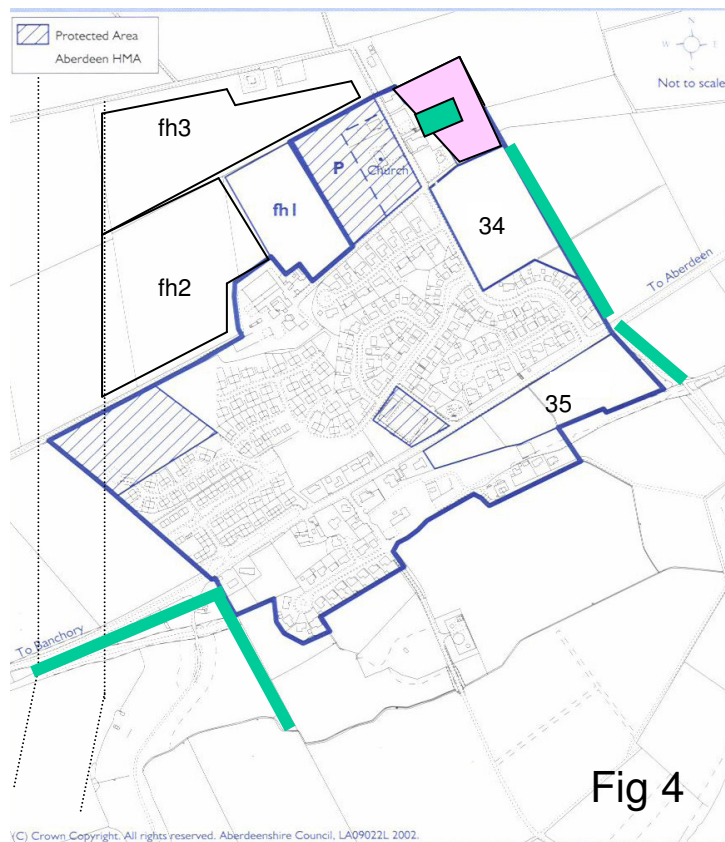


Figure 4 shows the location of a new school (shown in green) next to the existing school, opposite the church. Additional land (shown in pink) will be required from Mr G Wight for the school and for recreation purposes.

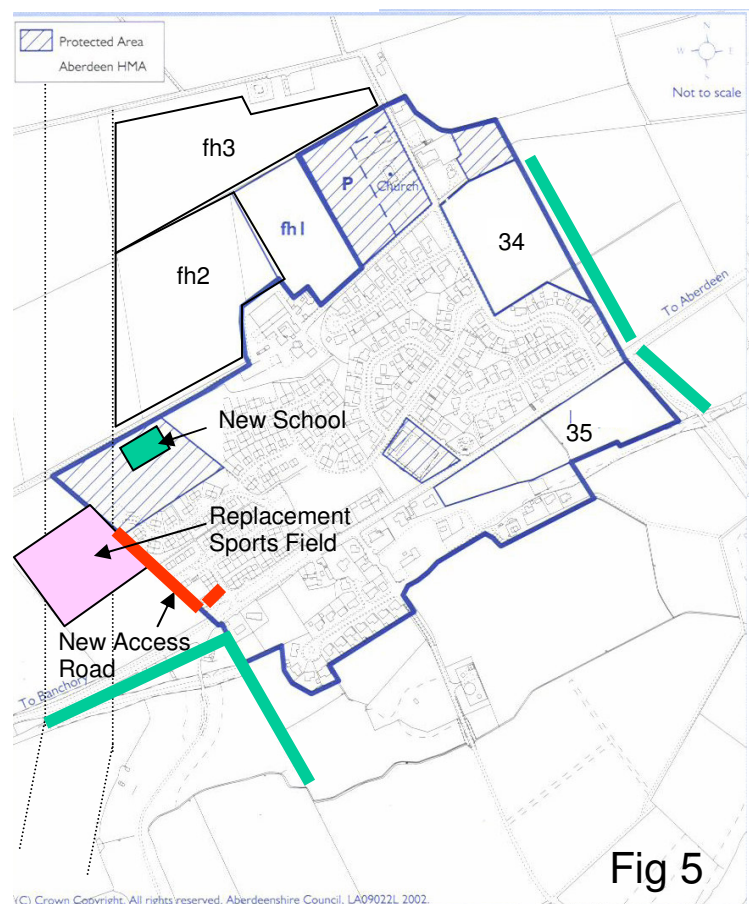
The close proximity of the new school to the existing school may provide cost savings; for example by converting the existing permanent facilities into a nursery or by utilising the hall as a dining room and so forth.

However, building the new school adjacent to the existing school could be disruptive, and it is likely that any such gains will be offset by measures taken to minimise the educational disruption, e.g. if the pupils have to move temporarily during phases of the construction.

Figure 5 Shows the proposed location for the new school. A limited range of other locations are available, but none have the advantages of the proposed site. For example the school could be situated to the south of the caravan site, but this adds to the separation of the school from the centre of the likely school population and introduces a major crossing of the A93 for the majority of the pupils.

Similarly it might be possible to site the new school immediately above the Church Hall, but this is very close to the electricity sub-station and close to a blind corner on the “Switchback Road”, which like many others is experiencing significant traffic growth. The location on the periphery of the community does not help the safety case.

The proposed location has none of these disadvantages, and has a number of advantages:-



- 1) Siting the school on the existing Keithmuir Park owned by Aberdeenshire Council eliminates costly land negotiations and potential delays thereby enabling an early start to construction. This is a considerable advantage given the current condition of the school's existing facilities
- 2) The level nature of the site (a football pitch) and the mature nature of the remainder of the park will minimise levelling and site clearance costs and facilitates construction speed.
- 3) Not all the site will be required for the school, and the existing children's playground areas might be retained to provide recreational facilities for the pupils.
- 4) The location is very secure as it is sited in the heart of the community, and any further housing developments (fh1 – fh3) will enhance this sense of community.
- 5) The majority of the children attending school will be able to walk through residential areas to gain access thereby reducing their presence on the busy A93 and Sunnyside Drive.

Against these advantages, the community – and the school - lose a football pitch. However a replacement sports ground (the pink area) could be made available. It is located in the pipeline wayleave. Transco have no objection to such a proposal provided access was available in the event of an emergency, and cite the cases of other sports grounds and golf courses etc. As any building development is excluded from the wayleave, its acquisition should be in line with agriculture rather than development land prices.

A new school brings other advantages to the community.

- a) The provision of modern indoor sporting facilities which are available for the general public will add considerably to the community's well being particularly the youth of the community and the senior citizens. It will also help to integrate the large number of incoming residents into the community
- b) Currently the only facility is the Community Hall located at Park. This hall is in need of major renovation to bring it to an acceptable standard; consequently it suffers from low utilisation. It also requires major fabric maintenance as the roof is verging on an unsafe condition.
- c) The hall is actually owned by Aberdeenshire Council, and its disposal for redevelopment could provide the funds for the establishment of the replacement football pitch.

In conclusion CDDCC, in consultation with the Drumoak School Board, support the proposal for a new school on a new site and submit that consideration should be given to Keithmuir Park as the preferred site for the reasons stated above i.e.:-.

- ❖ It places the school at the heart of the community.
- ❖ It will enhance the indoor recreational facilities for the entire community.
- ❖ It causes minimal disruption to children's education.
- ❖ It is likely to be the most economic location
- ❖ It is quickly "doable"