



Masterplan Framework for former Machrihanish
Airbase.

For Machrihanish Airbase Community Company
(MACC)

FINAL REPORT

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ryden was instructed by Machrihanish Airbase Community Company (MACC) to produce a masterplan framework document outlining the strategic vision for the former Machrihanish Airbase site.

1.2 MACC is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It is owned and controlled by the local community (defined as those living within the postcode area of Kintyre (PA2 8)). The company was established in March 2008 with the intention of acquiring the Machrihanish Airbase site under Community Right to Buy legislation. This followed the Ministry of Defence's decision to formally close and dispose of the site. The overarching objectives of MACC¹ are to:

- *Manage the community land and assets for the benefit of the community and public in general following principles of sustainable development, where sustainable development means development which meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and;*
- *Advance community development and rural regeneration following principles of sustainable development as outlined above.*

1.3 The purpose of this document is to provide, a strategic guide for future development, taking into account the long-term aspirations of MACC, the wider community and Argyll & Bute Council. It identifies key land uses, environmental and infrastructure issues and is not intended to be overly prescriptive. More detailed matters will be the subject of future planning applications, although this document will provide a clear development framework.

1.4 The remainder of this document is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 – Background
- Chapter 3 – Site Details
- Chapter 4 – Site Context
- Chapter 5 – Conclusions

¹ Machrihanish Airbase Community Company, Business Plan for the Community Ownership of Machrihanish Airbase, June 2012

2 SITE DETAILS

Location

- 2.1 The former Machrihanish Airbase site is located around five miles to the north west of Campbeltown and three miles to the north east of Machrihanish Village, on the western side of the Kintyre Peninsula, within the Argyll and Bute local authority area as shown in Appendix 1 (Location Plan).
- 2.2 Campbeltown lies south west of Glasgow, around 137 miles by road. Campbeltown Airport is within the site providing flights to and from Glasgow International Airport with a flight time of approximately 45 minutes.

Land Ownership

- 2.3 Ownership of the site transferred to MACC in May 2012 and prior to this it was owned by the MOD.

Description

- 2.4 The airbase site is situated on low-lying ground and covers an area of approximately 409 hectares (1,011 acres). The key components of the site are:
- A runway with associated taxi ways and aprons;
 - A small civilian airport terminal building and other associated aviation buildings;
 - Large aircraft hangar, known as the Gaydor Hangar, along with aircraft refuelling and storage facilities;
 - A number of military related residential and support buildings which vary in age and type and includes 1940s barrack accommodation, 1980s warehouse and administration blocks and 1990s residential blocks.
- 2.5 The runway, at 3,049m in length, splits the site almost symmetrically and effectively allows for industrial areas as well as office and residential uses on both sides of the runway (as detailed on Appendix 2). Several facilities currently occupy the site and it is anticipated that these will continue to operate, while incorporating additional uses throughout.
- 1) North of the runway includes the area leased to Wind Towers Ltd for the manufacturing of wind turbines, office buildings

(including MACC's headquarters), accommodation blocks, mess facilities and storage units.

- 2) The runway and terminal building are leased and operated by Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) for civilian aircraft use, providing a 'lifeline' service to Glasgow with two return flights daily on weekdays. As noted on the masterplan (appendix 2) the area currently being used for aviation purposes is highlighted, as well as the area intended for future expansion of aviation usage.
- 3) South of the runway includes the 6,887 sq m Gaydon Hangar, custom built US Navy Seals training facility and jet fuel storage facilities.
- 4) To the South-West of the runway, an area is leased to Niri as part of their land-based fish farm; this is highlighted on the masterplan (appendix 2) as 'land based aquaculture'.

History

- 2.6 Machrihanish Airbase served as an operational airbase during both World Wars and was in operation up until the mid-1990s. During this time, it was used by the RAF, US Airforce, US Navy and NATO forces. In 1994, the US Airforce ceased operations, followed by the RAF in 1996, leaving only occasional NATO use. The site was then passed to Defence Estates to manage and was effectively mothballed. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) then took the decision to sell the site in 2009. MACC completed its community purchase of the site for £1 in May 2012.
- 2.7 During its use as a military airbase, the site was subject to a number of related military developments. Most significantly during the late 1950s and early 1960s and it was during this time that the runway was extended to c. 3,000 metres, making it one of the longest in Europe at that time. Further development was undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s, with new residential accommodation for military purposes constructed in later years along with purpose built mess facilities and Navy SEALs complex.
- 2.8 The loss of military operations from the airbase site and the subsequent closure had a significant impact on the local economy. This resulted in the decision to set up MACC in order to investigate the potential purchase of

the site, with the purpose of creating sustainable economic opportunities for the local community to off-set the impact of the airbase closure.

Planning History

- 2.9 The site was developed as an airbase under the ownership of the MOD and as such was considered 'crown' land. At the time of development, crown land was exempt from normal planning legislation and therefore development within the site did not require planning consent. As a consequence, the majority of the buildings on the site do not have a documented/agreed use in planning terms and a change of use is required for non-military uses. The following planning applications have been submitted, which are mostly related to the wind tower factory development with the most recent application being for the use of the Gaydon Hangar as an aquaculture facility.

Table 1: Historical Planning Applications

Ref	Address	Details	Date Received	Date Validated	Status
14/00839/ PP	Gaydon Hangar, Machrihanish Airbase, Campbeltown, Argyll, PA28 6NU	Use of former military hanger as aquaculture closed containment production facility for salmon	01/04/14	22/04/14	Pending Consideration
13/01707/ CLWP	Building 175A Machrihanish Airbase Campbeltown Argyll PA28 6NU	Use of existing storage warehouse space for domestic and commercial goods storage, use of existing indoor firearms shooting range and associated armoury and office space for shooting firearms and housing associated registered firearms dealer business and use of existing office space and workshops for commercial offices and workshops.	02/08/13	02/08/13	Application Permitted
11/01845/ NMA	Vestas Celtic Wind Technology RAF Campbeltown Argyll And Bute PA28 6NU	Non Material Amendment to planning application reference 09/00854/DET (Alteration and extension to manufacturing facility) - installation of boiler flues	16/09/11	16/09/11	Application permitted
10/00539/ NMA	Red Building Vestas Celtic Wind Technology RAF Campbeltown Argyll And Bute PA28 6NU	Non material amendment to planning consent 09/00854/DET - construction of temporary side walls to facilitate phased construction of the red building	23/03/10	23/03/10	Application Permitted

10/00591/ NMA	Blue Building Vestas Celtic Wind Technology RAF Campbeltown Argyll And Bute PA28 6NU	Non material amendment to planning consent 09/00854/DET for alteration and extension to manufacturing facility - reduction in internal floor area, reconfiguration of external elevations and addition of external flues/chimneys	23/03/10	23/03/10	Application Permitted
09/00854/ DET	Vestas Celtic Wind Technology RAF Campbeltown Argyll And Bute PA28 6NU	Alteration and extension to manufacturing facility	11/6/09	24/06/09	Application Permitted
03/00262/ DET	Vestas - Celtic Wind Technology RAF Machrihanish Campbeltown Argyll PA28 6NU	Installation of replacement roof and cladding	13/02/03	20/02/03	Application Permitted
02/01917/ DET	Vestas - Celtic Wind Technology RAF Machrihanish Campbeltown Argyll PA28 6NU	Erection of external lighting columns	06/11/02	14/11/02	Application Permitted
01/01112/ DET	Vestas - Celtic Wind Technology RAF Machrihanish Campbeltown Argyll PA28 6NU	Erection of wind turbine manufacturing facility incorporating tower production, assembly area, administration and storage.	27/06/01	27/06/01	Application Permitted
00/01126/ DET	Vestas - Celtic Wind Technology RAF Machrihanish Campbeltown Argyll PA28 6NU	Wind turbine manufacturing facility incorporating tower production (Class 5), assembly production (Class 5), administration (Class 4) and storage (Class 5).	17/07/00	17/07/00	Application Permitted

Source: Argyll & Bute Council

2.10 In summary, the former airbase site at Machrihanish is within close proximity to Campbeltown with both road and air links to Glasgow. The site was developed as a military airbase and a number of assets remain, including the runway. Following the effective closure of the site by the MOD, it was purchased by MACC, a local community group with the purpose of re-using the site for the benefit of the local community.

3 POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Framework 3

- 3.1 National Planning Framework 3 (NPF 3), published June 2014, sets out the Scottish Government's long-term strategy for Scotland which is to *"create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth"*.
- 3.2 NPF 3 is positioned at the top of the development plan hierarchy meaning that all strategic development and local development plans must take it into consideration during plan preparation. The vision outlined for Scotland in NPF 3 is:
- A successful, sustainable place;
 - A low carbon place;
 - A natural, resilient place;
 - A connected place.
- 3.3 Rural communities which are sustainable and economically active are considered an important part of this vision. Coastal and island communities, such as Campbeltown and Machrihanish, are recognised as being well placed to build on existing strengths and develop new opportunities to support sustainable economic growth, reduce population decline and deliver social benefits.

Scottish Planning Policy

- 3.4 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) outlines the Scottish Government's national planning policies. It identifies four planning outcomes which supports the vision set out in NPF 3 as outline above. The underlying policy principles now include *"a presumption in favour of development that contributes to sustainable development"*.
- 3.5 **Promoting rural development** is a key policy for the Scottish Government, and in specific relation to the subject site, SPP states at paragraph 75 that the planning system should:
- *"In all rural and island areas promote a pattern of development that is appropriate to the character of the particular rural area and the challenges it faces;*

- *Encourage rural development that supports prosperous and sustainable communities and businesses whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality”.*
- 3.6 Furthermore, in remote rural areas, where new development can often help to sustain fragile communities, plans and decision-making should generally:
- *“Encourage sustainable development that will provide employment:*
 - *Support and sustain fragile and dispersed communities through provision for appropriate development, especially housing and community-owned energy;*
 - *Include provision for small-scale housing and other development which supports sustainable economic growth in a range of locations, taking account of environmental protection policies and addressing issues of location, access, siting, design and environmental impact”.*
- 3.7 Another relevant policy in SPP is **“Supporting Business and Employment”** (paragraph 92) with focus on:
- *Promoting business and industrial development that increases economic activity while safeguarding and enhancing the natural and built environments as national assets:*
 - *Allocating sites that meet the diverse needs of the different sectors and sizes of business which are important to the plan area in a way which is flexible enough to accommodate changing circumstances and allow the realisation of new opportunities: and*
 - *Give due weight to net economic benefit of proposed development.*

Development Plan Context

- 3.8 The current development plan for the Argyll & Bute Council area comprises:
- Argyll & Bute Structure Plan – Approved (with modifications) 15 November 2002
 - Argyll & Bute Local Plan – Adopted 6 August 2009

Argyll & Bute Structure Plan Policies

- 3.9 Policies in the Structure Plan which are relevant to the airbase site include:
- STRAT S1 1 Sustainable Development
 - REC SI 3 Argyll Isles Development Area
 - REC SI 4 Renewable Energy Investment
 - STRAT CP 1 Coastal Transhipment

Argyll & Bute Local Plan (Adopted)

- 3.10 The adopted Argyll & Bute Local Plan (6 August 2009) identifies the former airbase site as an Area for Action (AFA 14/7) for strategic redevelopment and inward investment opportunities. In addition, supplementary planning guidance, namely the Machrihanish Airbase Development Brief, was published by Argyll & Bute Council in May 2009. This development brief outlines the planning requirements for the re-use of the former military assets to *“ensure the development potential of such assets is used as far as possible to support the local economy and to maintain and provide additional jobs for the local population.”*
- 3.11 Therefore, the development brief provides general support for uses on the site which will support and create employment. Uses not acceptable are retail (other than small-scale local provision) and housing, although the brief does recognise that there may be opportunities in the long-term for residential development next to existing housing and where this associated with employment needs.

Argyll & Bute Proposed Local Development Plan

- 3.12 Argyll & Bute Council is currently in the process of preparing a Local Development Plan (LDP) for the area which will replace both the existing structure and local plans. This is at an advanced stage with consultation on the Proposed Local Development Plan having closed on 29th April 2013. Responses to the Proposed LDP were reported in January 2014 with unresolved objections to be submitted to the Scottish Government for Examination. The new LDP is anticipated to be adopted imminently.
- 3.13 The Proposed LDP designates the former airbase site at Machrihanish as the following (as shown in Appendix 3) :
- **New Strategic Business and industry Area (AFA 14/7)** - as a new strategic business and industry area, Policy LDP 5 – Supporting the Sustainable Growth of Our Economy is applicable. This policy is supportive of new industrial and business

development “*which helps deliver sustainable economic growth*”. The site’s designation as an Area for Action (AFA 14/7) requires the following course of action:

Strategic; redevelopment and inward investment opportunities; green technologies hub

- **New Masterplan Location (MAST 1/10)** - as new masterplan location (MAST 1/10), a masterplan approach to development is required with green energy hub and strategic business site listed as the associated action proposed for the subject site.

- 3.14 It is clear that, planning policy at both a national and local level supports the re-use and re-development of the subject site for the purpose of creating and sustaining the local economy. Other uses such as residential are also acceptable, in principle, on a small scale.

Flooding

- 3.15 SEPA has commented that small areas of the masterplan area lie within the 1 in 200 fluvial risk area associated with Machrihanish Water and that this together with surface water flood risk could have some implications for the developable area or the requirement for measures required to mitigate for flood risk. However, their opinion is that flood risk is not a significant constraint for the majority of the site. With this in mind, this possible constraint to the south of the runway should be assessed by prospective developers.

Archaeology

- 3.16 West of Scotland Archaeology has indicated that there may be development constraints imposed by archaeological assets due to be recorded sites and findings in the area, and the potential for well-preserved assets in the dune system and the coastal land behind it. Therefore, archaeological interests may be potential constraints to future development and the implementation of the masterplan. Any potential impact would require to be evaluated in advance of the determination of any planning application. It is recommended that prospective developers enter into pre-application discussions with West of Scotland Archaeology.

4 CONSULTATIONS

4.1 As part of the process for producing this masterplan framework documents, consultations were held with the local community and Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) as the operator of the airport.

4.2 A public event was held at the airbase site on Saturday 7th June 2014 in order to garner the views of the local community on the proposed uses for the site. At the public event, information was made available relating to the history of the site and potential development options. Furthermore to help inform the members of the public an opportunity to have a guided tour of the site was provided. At all times during the event, a number of MACC Board members and representatives from Ryden were at hand to answer any questions. In addition, a feedback form (Appendix 4) was made available for members of the public to complete. A number of completed forms were submitted and details of the responses can be found in Appendix 5. Overall, the proposals were viewed as positive by the members of the local community who attended and provided feedback. The most important positive aspect of the proposals were considered to be:

1. Job opportunities (97%)
2. External investment (89%)
3. New opportunities for local people (78%)
4. Attracting new people (75%)
5. New housing (31%)

4.3 HIAL was consulted on a separate basis to seek their views on the proposed uses. As they operate a civilian airport from the site, they are keen to ensure that flights are not restricted and building height will be a factor in this. With this in mind, HIAL requested that no buildings should be constructed at either end of the runway and the safeguarding areas are protected. In terms of uses, water or waste industries which may attract birds should be avoided along with landscaping for the same reason. Industries which may produce smoke should also be avoided as this can

interfere with visibility. In addition, any lighting should be shielded so as not to distract pilots.

- 4.4 The outcome of the consultations has been generally positive and raised important queries for the future use of the site. Initial consultation with the Council on this draft report has also been undertaken and these discussions have been very positive.

5 DEVELOPMENT VISION

- 5.1 The site of the former Machrihanish Airbase provides a unique opportunity within the South Kintyre area to provide sustainable economic opportunities for the local community. MACC's objective in purchasing the site was to maximise the benefits for the local community and to mitigate against the past periods of economic decline. It is important to note that the remote location of the subject site and nearby settlements, including Campbeltown - which is rural in nature - does not provide easy access to alternative employment opportunities.
- 5.2 The airbase site with its 409 hectares of land and associated assets will be utilised to support and develop the existing local skills base, and provide opportunities for inward investment. This will capitalise on the unique infrastructure and accessibility of the site by air, road and sea.
- 5.3 The presence of a functional runway and operational airport on-site, provides a valuable asset to further develop national and international links, particularly for the transportation of cargo related to existing and future industrial opportunities. In addition, the site is easily accessible to and from Campbeltown Harbour providing sea links to UK and Irish ports and beyond.
- 5.4 Furthermore, the considerable length of the runway, remote location and sea links has resulted in Campbeltown Airport being identified by the UK Government as one of eight potential locations for the UK's first spaceport. Other factors which will be considered in the development of a spaceport, to be operational by 2018, are suitable weather conditions, good transport links, environmental issues and the ability for segregated airspace for space flights.
- 5.5 The size and nature of the site lends itself to suit a variety of uses which will support economic growth in the area (as illustrated in the draft development framework in Appendix 2) and these include:
- *Industrial/ light industrial /storage– including (but not limited to) renewables manufacturing, aquaculture production and storage facilities:*
 - *Office/ leisure / other commercial - which could potentially include hospitality and conference/event facilities as well as research and development facilities;*

- *Active and non-active aviation – including the potential development of a spaceport;*
 - *Retained space - to provide open greenspace, buffer zones and land enhancement;*
 - *Land Based aquaculture*
 - *Temporary uses such as motorsport and other events. These would be held on an infrequent basis as a means of providing income to MACC. Impact on local residents in terms of noise etc will be taken into consideration when planning such events and require early consultation with the local community and Argyll & Bute Council.*
- 5.6 Due to the range of uses proposed on the site, retained spaces or “buffer zones” should be created between the various uses, most notably it was worth identifying a strategic buffer zones between the business/ storage/ light industrial areas and land based aquaculture. The buffer zone could take the form of landscaping or mounding; material stripped on pre-development could be usefully incorporated into some naturalistic looking bunding with planting of some appropriate salt tolerant ground cover. It should be noted that the buffer zone could come into conflict with birds overhead and should be implemented in consultation with MACC, Argyll & Bute Council and other relevant statutory authorities.
- 5.7 The draft development framework has been guided by planning policy, the objectives of MACC and feedback from consultations. It is not intended to be prescriptive but provide a high level overview of the potential uses for the site and constraints likely to apply to development proposals. The content of the plan demonstrates overall conformity with the Council’s emerging Local Development Plan. Due to the site being exempt from normal planning legislation at the time of development, proposals being brought forward are likely to require to obtain a change of use from non-military uses.
- 5.8 The proposed LDP designates the base area AFA 14/7 as a strategic business and industry area. This is captured within designation MAST 1/10 which requires a strategic masterplan to be prepared to guide development within the area. The area has been clearly defined in the masterplan. On either side of AFA 14/7, land uses move from; industrial areas to business and storage towards light industrial.

- 5.9 Access to the site is currently provided from the north with an internal road layout. Going forward, careful consideration will be required to minimise conflict between commercial/industrial traffic which is the key driver for this site and the small element of residential use proposed.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Machrihanish Airbase Community Company (MACC) instructed Ryden to provide a strategic masterplan framework document for the former airbase site at Machrihanish. The site, located five miles to the north west of Campbeltown, is around 409 hectares in size and comprises a number of assets including an operational runway.
- 6.2 The existing assets and potential for further development make it suitable for a mix of uses, both in terms of scale and character. The subject site is accessible by road, and importantly for global investment by sea and air. It is worth stressing that having an operational airport is a unique selling point which could encourage investment.
- 6.3 Furthermore, promotion of the site for sustainable economic development is, in principle, supported by planning policy and the local community. The range of uses proposed in the draft masterplan development framework are done so at a strategic level. Detailed proposals for development in accordance with this framework will require planning consent.
- 6.4 The draft masterplan framework reflects that the subject site is well placed to provide sustainable economic development opportunities to support and sustain Campbeltown and the wider Kintyre Peninsula, as well as encouraging inward investment.