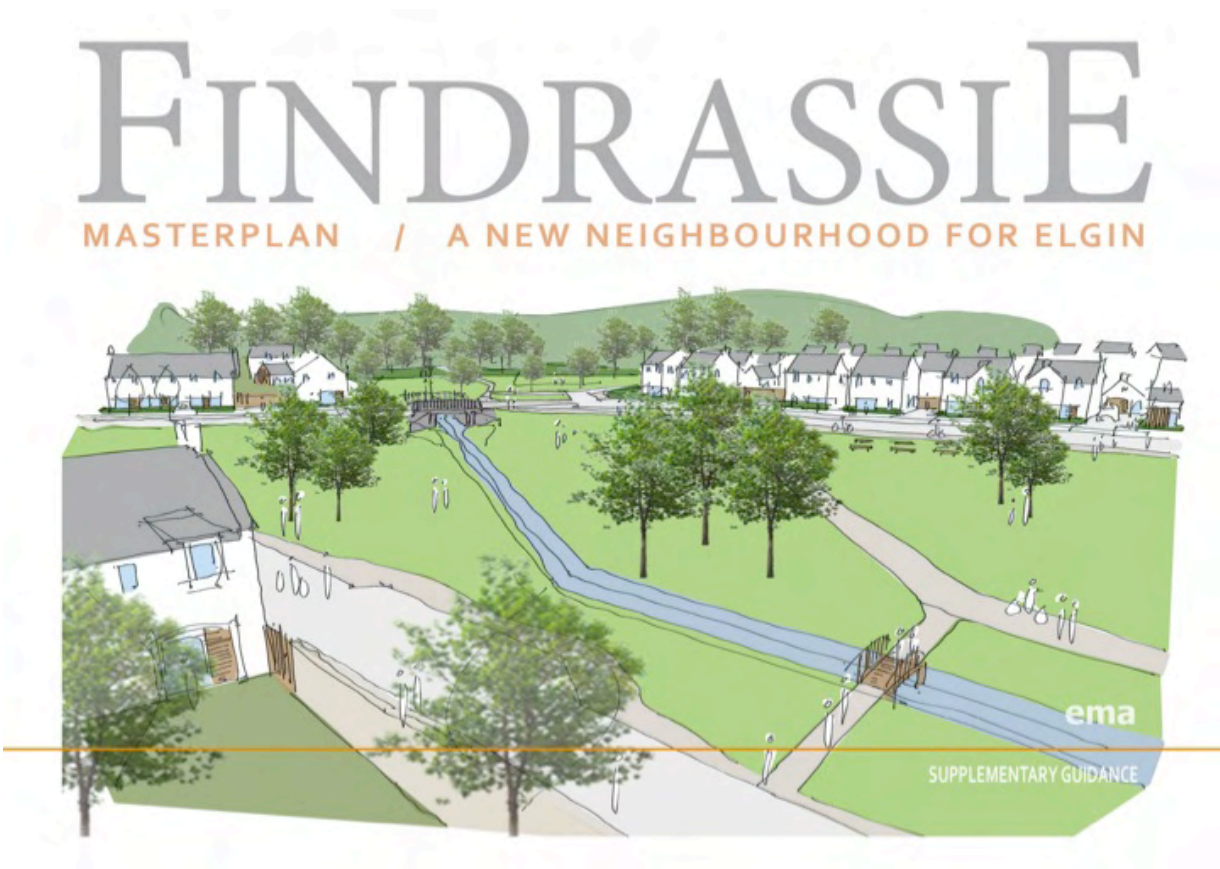


Design Forum – Project Appraisal



Project Ref/Title: **MOR 03 Findrassie, Elgin North**

Issue Date: **17th November 2015**

Planning Authority: **Moray Council**

Planning Status/
Ref: **Pre-Application**

Client / Developer: **Pitgaveny**

Lead Designer(s): **EMA Architects + Masterplanners**

Project/ Category: **Masterplan / Mixed Use**

Location Type: **Edge of Settlement**

1.0 Scope of Appraisal

(This section indicates the purpose of this appraisal report. It indicates the status of this advice relative to that of statutory and other consultees for the planning submissions intended.)

- 1.1 The Design Forum workshop series is intended to support and inform the establishment of the intended masterplan for Findrassie. This final workshop will form A&DS's concluding appraisal of the project. The aim of the session is to assess the developed proposals, based on the overall aims and ambitions for the project as set out and developed throughout the design process, and in line with the Council's aspiration for achieving a high quality development at Findrassie.

2.0 Background

(This section indicates the role that A&DS have had in engaging with the project, the stages of engagement and those involved. This section highlights the proposals that were current at appraisal stage. This section also highlights the focus of attention during the workshop series, including the scope of topics that have been covered and that have given rise to A&DS's advice)

- 2.1 A&DS's engagement on the project arose out of a request from Moray Council for advice on a number of masterplans that are to be prepared for large land allocations identified in the Moray Local Development Proposed Plan. Moray Council is seeking assistance in designing new neighbourhoods in Elgin with a sense of place and identity that are gateways to the town. Through the Proposed Plan the Council is raising the profile of design and it is the Council's desire that the masterplan for Elgin North is a benchmark for subsequent masterplans. Their aspiration is for a high quality development that encapsulates qualities of a successful place set out in Scottish Planning Policy and Designing Streets and which is connected and distinctive, embracing the identity of Elgin. In addition the site is a gateway to the north (a popular tourist route) and the Council advised that the development should reflect this.
- 2.2 An initial workshop was held with A&DS on 18th June 2014 in Elgin with the Local Planning Authority, Smiths Gore and the masterplanners at that time (OPEN). The workshop included a site visit and provided an opportunity to understand the context for the proposals, including the visions and ambitions for the development of the site, constraints and opportunities, and to discuss the emerging concepts that were beginning to be developed, with a view to informing further discussions at future workshops.

New masterplanners (EMA) and landscape architect (Ian White) were subsequently appointed by Smiths Gore in early 2015 to take the project forward, and a second Design Forum workshop on the project was held with the new team and Local Planning Authority on 24th April 2015.
- 2.3 The project is at finalised masterplan stage. The planning authority have held regular meetings with the landowner's project team, generally following an

internal stakeholder meeting. Internal stakeholder meetings have included council officers from transportation, education, housing, development management, development plans and occasionally other services where their input has been needed (e.g. flooding, land and parks).

The LDP was formally adopted on 31st July 2015. The site is identified in the LDP for residential development of 1500 houses (100 ha) and 12ha of employment land. The LDP sets out that residential and employment land must be masterplanned together. The Council's recommendation to the Reporter to alter the wording of the site designation text for R11 and I8 (Findrassie) to allow a mixed use development rather than segregation of employment land on I8 was not accepted.

An application for 435 houses was approved immediately to the south of the site (R5) – planning application reference 08/02766/FUL. There are two places where links can be made through this development to connect into Findrassie.

- 2.4 The intention is for the Findrassie Masterplan to form Supplementary Guidance (SG) to the LDP, setting out proposals for a mixed use development including a site for a primary school, local hub, 1500 dwellings (including affordable housing), employment land and associated landscape and open space. The SG has been through an extensive programme of community and stakeholder consultation and proposals are reported to have been very well received by the local community, local authority, committee members and within the local press.

3.0 Summary Appraisal

(This section provides a summary of A&DS's appraisal of the project as presented at the Appraisal Workshop and records the Panel's level of support as: level 1- potential exemplar, level 2 - well considered. Unsupported: level 3 - with potential, level 4 - outcome at risk.)

3.1 Summary

- 3.1.1 The Project Team, Council and landowner are to be congratulated for their high level of ambition for the development of Findrassie and for the substantial progress that has been achieved so far. The design led process and collaborative working between parties is considered exemplary – significantly the dedication, approach and commitment shown by the Local Authority represents national best practice in our experience and has gone some way to ensure the benchmark envisaged can be achieved. All involved are encouraged to continue to work together to ensure that the potential for the development of a high quality place for Findrassie is realised.
- 3.1.2 We support the concept for the masterplan and landscape led approach, which generally appear to be appropriate for the development of the site. The designs have developed positively over the forum series and the Panel note

and welcome the significant level of progress that has been made by the Team, which has allowed a more detailed level of discussion. Many of our previous comments have been addressed, however some detailed aspects of the design would benefit from further development and clarity, particularly detailed elements of the Design Code, which will help to create a more concise enforceable document for the landowner and Planning Authority.

- 3.1.3 For these reasons the project is assessed to be category 2 “well considered” with potential to progress to category 1 “potential exemplar” subject to further detailed development of the project as advised in relevant sections below.

4.0 Appraisal by Topic

(This section indicates a concluding analysis and appraisal of the proposals in terms of the topics discussed during the Design Forum Workshop Series. Further advice is included where applicable)

4.1 Masterplan concept and vision

- 4.1.1 Greater clarity has been provided on the overall concept and wider vision for the masterplan. Additional explanation of the varying characteristics across the key character areas has helped to define this, however it was considered that further work to the Design Code was needed to capture and more clearly explain the concept and varied character across the site and the guidance should be more specific to aid future delivery as intended. The local authority will ultimately be responsible for securing delivery of the vision through the granting of permission for individual applications, the guidance documents need to be clear and robust to ensure that the high aspirations for the development can be realised through its delivery.
- 4.1.2 We support the Team and landowner in their stated commitment to retain an interest in the long-term stewardship of the site and to work with developers in reviewing forthcoming proposals for individual parcels of development as the project moves forward and as part of the ongoing evaluation of the development plan for the site. It was considered that the stewardship of the site will be significantly improved through a continued long-term interest which will help to realise the vision over time. Notwithstanding this commitment to long-term support, a sufficient level of coding/guidance is necessary to provide the Local Authority with the necessary means to assess applications for forthcoming developments, and ensure that the masterplan can be implemented as intended, particularly if landowner circumstances were to change in the future.
- 4.1.3 **Further advice:**
- *The guidance documents would benefit from being clearer about what the fixed and variable elements of the masterplan are intended to be. Further information is provided in the final section of the SG, however the Team*

are encouraged to pull out the key elements for each character area up front to provide a focus on what is distinct and interesting in each.

- We support the ambition for the inclusive process envisaged moving through to the delivery phases, where there is a mutual understanding – but from the Local Authority's perspective there needs to be a sufficiently robust guidance to make sure the document will work to secure delivery of the quality envisaged through the statutory planning process.*

4.2 Landscape framework

- 4.2.1 The landscape framework has developed positively since the previous workshop. The Panel support the way in which the landscape is intended to provide an overall framework to help bind the varying character areas across the masterplan together and to create a coherent identity for Findrassie.
- 4.2.2 Previous concerns over the potential compartmentalising effect of the proposed woodland strip planting forming residential parcels have now been addressed and the intended use of these areas clarified through further development of the draft guidance documents, including a strategic overview of the landscape framework and other proposed landscape elements across the masterplan.
- 4.2.3 Further information has been provided on the varying landscape characters and their proposed interfaces with the existing landscape, e.g. Findrassie Wood and the Sey Burn. However, the current guidance requires an additional level of information to more clearly demonstrate the character intended for each area and to set out further detail on how it should be delivered and achieved in practice: how development will avoid over-urban compartmentalising of the landscape and how edge and boundary treatments will reinforce the connection and relationship between character areas and the wider parkland areas for example. Though not available in advance, an initial glance at the landscape guidance document tabled at the workshop suggested it might provide some of the detail necessary and it was suggested that this should be fed into the Design Code to help provide the clarity needed, including who will be required to deliver what and the phasing of delivery. A 'green thread' through the residential blocks has been introduced – again detail needs to be provided and incorporated in the design code.
- 4.2.4 The site topography was described as being unchallenging and the Team advised that development should in the main be able to use earthworks and follow existing contours and that anything requiring artificial retention was likely to be by exception only. It was suggested that this should be made more explicit within the code. It was also suggested that the illustrations within the code should more clearly communicate that the site is not flat. The inclusion of valley sections within the guidance to describe how the development in the different character zones is intended to respond to the gradual sloping topography could be helpful for example.

4.2.5 Further advice:

- *The strong landscape led vision needs to be carried through into the detailed design of the landscape for the individual character areas as they come forward and also in developing the other landscape layers across the site, e.g. SUDS that work with topography, edge and boundary treatments, soft landscaping and coherence between front gardens and parkland, how to reinforce the landscape led approach and add to the overall character of the place.*
- *Further detail defining the landscape design, soft landscaping and boundary treatments, and what development will be required to deliver them, needs to be incorporated into the design code document.*

4.3 Streetscape, parking and infrastructure

- 4.3.1 There is good level of technical information provided in the guidance with regards to road standards however there is potential for this to be overlooked due to the length of the document and position of this content towards the end of the guidance. Given its importance, this technical information should be brought forward into the Design Code so that it is more accessible and straight forward.
- 4.3.2 The guidance defines the different street types however the Design Code does not currently give a clear sense of what the proposed streets will feel like within the different character zones. The images provided of shared surface streets show detailing and materials of variable quality and expense; however there is a danger that the quality and detail intended for Findrassie will not be achieved in practice, as the minimum requirements are not clearly set out in the code. Currently applicants might simply opt for the cheapest option. The code would benefit from further understanding of the streets and character envisaged for each area to give a clearer emphasis of what is required and where – what the character is and how the street design, and materials and soft landscaping support delivery of it.
- 4.3.3 The panel were not convinced that the quality and character envisaged would be achieved by simply paving the streetscape – total shared surface is not necessarily the best use of resource to achieve the desired character. There are opportunities for SUDS and landscape design to work within the streetscape in a functional way to benefit the masterplan and add more integrity to the overall landscape framework. Subject to their adoption by the Local Authority, SUDS and trees could be used within the streetscape to help narrow down sight lines and slow traffic speeds for example, in addition to providing a functional use as bio-retention and treatment as part of the SUDS network. The sloping site topography appears to work in favour of SUDS being brought into the heart of the landscape. It was noted that there appeared to be good scope for swales to be incorporated into the woodland planting strips running north south and that these might also provide

opportunities for interpretation of the site and its links to the work of Thomas Telford and the Spynie Canal.

4.3.4 The design of the car parking was noted to be a key consideration in contributing to the character of the streets and the overall feel of the masterplan. The guidance states a preference for the majority of parking to be provided to the rear and side of properties in detached garages. The Panel felt that on-street parking solution could work comfortably and not detract from a development of this density and questioned why integral parking was necessary. Clarity is needed in terms of what is meant by this, i.e. integral is a feature of a house rather than a parking solution, which is often confused as front curtilage parking. Where front curtilage parking and integral garages are allowed this should be described more explicitly and illustrations provided to show how it can be done well, to avoid the potential for undesirable outcomes.

4.3.5 **Further advice:**

- *Technical information at the rear of the document should be brought forward into the Design Code so that it is more accessible and straight forward.*
- *Further rationalising of what is important in the Code by example of key corners and landmarks would be beneficial, we anticipate most will be good 'corner turning' buildings with a few key landmark locations.*
- *Key aspects need to be specified and drawn in more detail, including dimensions, and provided up front in the document. A bullet point 'check list' of the parameters describing the essence and character of particular areas and details for each zone, e.g. boundary treatment, streetscape frontages and planting, and architectural features would help to tie the whole plan together.*
- *Ironsides Farrar are to review guidance to see if it is possible to incorporate SUDS into the green spines.*
- *The parking strategy would benefit from being more explicit in terms of stipulating where integral garages to the front of plots are allowed, to limit how and where this happens.*

4.4 **Mixed-use**

4.4.1 The Panel are disappointed that the Council's recommendation to adjust the Proposed LDP to allow for a mixed use development rather than segregation of employment land on I8 was not accepted. Notwithstanding, the Panel note and welcome the variety of mixed uses that have been incorporated within the main core of the masterplan. The potential for food retail and flexible ground floor commercial space along the northern edge of the central green spine is supported. Extension of this green spine across Lossiemouth Road to link with the proposed employment area to the east, and introduction of retail and commercial space at the eastern gateway into Findrassie from Lossiemouth Road, should further assist with tying the masterplan together

and encourage connectivity. It was queried whether the level of retail shown was in practice deliverable and whether particular types of retail might be best concentrated in an area, eg. specialist retail around the hub to channel footfall, with other retailers catered for on Lossiemouth Road.

4.4.2 The scale of the central open space looks more balanced now with the scale of the housing around, a mix of activities and events along its length should help to break down the scale of the space further. The hierarchy of functions proposed across the spine that runs east-west will help to define the nature and character of this space, with community facilities proposed along its length to draw activity and movement along it.

4.4.3 We note that the Team have explored possible alternative locations for the proposed primary school along the central open space and that the Local Authority are content with its proposed location at the western edge of the space. Whilst recognising financial constraints there could be advantages to bringing forward the timing for the development of the school to help establish the character of the masterplan at an early stage and add value to the place, and in setting a benchmark for quality for future phases of development. There are examples where this has been successfully achieved elsewhere, where school buildings have been used for other community uses temporarily (eg. health centres, or multi-purpose visitor centres) until such time as they are required.

4.4.4 Further advice:

- *More explicit guidance should be included within the Code to define required dimensions for floor to ceiling heights to ensure the potential for creating flexible ground floor commercial space is retained where indicated in the masterplan.*
- *Opportunities for commercial space to be located above ground floor might also usefully be explored.*

4.5 Duffus Road

4.5.1 We note that the proposed location of the entrance from Duffus Road into Findrassie is supported by the Local Authority. The design of the entrance has developed positively and appears to create a stronger entrance sequence into the area, with key focal points (Gate Houses) marking the entrance location and early vistas and connectivity to open spaces and Findrassie Wood beyond to help create a more positive experience for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles entering the site. The Gatehouse at Fochabers was noted to be a possible precedent.

4.5.2 Further advice:

- *As elsewhere in the document the gateway at Duffus Road would benefit from a strong precedent image that captures the essence of what is intended for the space.*

4.6 **Design Code, phasing and delivery**

- 4.6.1 We welcome the development of a Design Code to accompany the masterplan. The document will be critical for conveying the detail of what is to be delivered and a key document for the Local Authority in assessing forthcoming detailed applications for the site. A good level of information is contained within the Code, the largely graphical layout is helpful in conveying the overall character and quality being sought across the whole development. However, the Panel found the Code complicated and difficult to use in its current form. The document was noted to lack specificity, reading more like guidance than coding; it was considered to be too lengthy in parts and generally too difficult to pull out the key details that support delivery of the varied character envisaged across the site; and there is currently so much imagery and information that it introduces a lack of clarity and, in some cases, contradictions. The code will deliver the quality and control what is delivered by the market – the ‘must haves’ and hierarchy need to be clearer, along with commonalities across phases and expectations and differences that define the qualities of the individual character. Some rationalising, re-structuring and editing of the information in the Code is needed, alongside more specific imagery, to provide clearer and more concise direction for applicants as well as making it easier for the Local Authority to enforce the key principles of the masterplan.
- 4.6.2 We welcome the level of affordable housing (25% of new homes in each phased development/application) proposed at Findrassie and support the intention for these to be fully integrated within the new community, including 10% of affordable homes which are to be provided near primary routes to allow accessibility to public transport and local amenities for elderly, ambulant disabled and wheelchair users. Currently the Code does not stipulate how the percentage of affordable housing should be spread within each phase/application, leaving the possibility that affordable housing will be grouped together within each phase. Guidance should be included in the Code to detail the intention that affordable housing be spread equally spread within each phase of development in order for this to be truly integrated across the site.
- 4.6.3 We support in principle the provision for self-build plots within the masterplan to give the opportunity for added diversity across the site. Some general principles for areas of self-build are contained within the guidance and in the Code where these are intended. However, self-build areas, as something quite specific, should be covered in more detail where applicable. For example, the Northern Edge character area appears to allow the potential for what might effectively become a double-fronted house. The panel suggested that additional guidance be provided in the Code to highlight desired frontages and boundary treatments and to give greater direction about how the intended fronts and backs of plots should be defined. It was suggested that the principle of self-build might also extend to the design of the central green space areas within these parts of the site where, for example, provision might

be made to enable the future residents to come together to agree the detailed design of these spaces at a later date. Spiers Wharf was cited as an example of where this approach was being pursued elsewhere .

4.6.4 **Further advice:**

- *The design code needs to set out a clear hierarchy of critical elements and non-negotiables – editing and refining the document so that each section clearly sets out the absolutes that are needed to deliver the quality envisaged. The addition of a bullet point summary at the start of each section would aid ease of understanding and usability of the document and more clearly set out what's required.*
- *The key elements critical to the different characters needs to be highlighted more clearly. More specific drawings, illustrating key dimensions and details should be included. Common details could be summarised up front in a single section and then one or two pages included to cover the distinct approach expected in each of the character areas; information and detailing that is common across character areas need not be repeated. Content on the character areas can focus on what is distinct and interesting in each – e.g. 'this boundary treatment here, this frontage, streetscape, paving and planting here' etc. – making this information more specific and accessible. Pulling some content into tables might also help.*
- *The images and illustrations need to work harder – some of the images shown are not what is intended - a single image or illustration should be sourced or drawn that communicates what is intended and how to do things well, to more clearly communicate the intent and avoid ambiguity.*

APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

5.0 Attendance at Appraisal Workshop

Project Team

Debbie Mackay	Smiths Gore Planning Consultants and Project Managers
Craig Main	EMA Architects + Masterplanners
Ian White	Ian White Landscape Consultants
Hugh Ross	Ironside Farrar Ltd.

Planning Authority and Stakeholders

Eily Webster	Moray Council, Planning Officer, Development Plans
Gary Templeton	Moray Council, Principle Planning Officer, Development Plans
Keith Henderson	Moray Council, Principal Planning Officer, Development Management

A&DS

Kevin McGeough	A&DS Design Forum Lead
Ewan Anderson	A&DS Design Forum Panellist
Nicola Garmory	A&DS Design Forum Panellist
Stephen O'Malley	A&DS Design Forum Panellist
Steve Malone	Facilitator [A&DS Design Advisor]
Fiona Stirling	A&DS Design Advisor

APPENDIX 2 – KEY IMAGES

The attached imagery presented by the Project Team at the Appraisal Workshop is a snapshot of design development current at the conclusion of the workshop process. Please note that this material is not exhaustive and that the full extent of the proposals appraised is not recorded here. Please refer to A+DS if you have any query as to the full scope and status of the material presented and appraised.

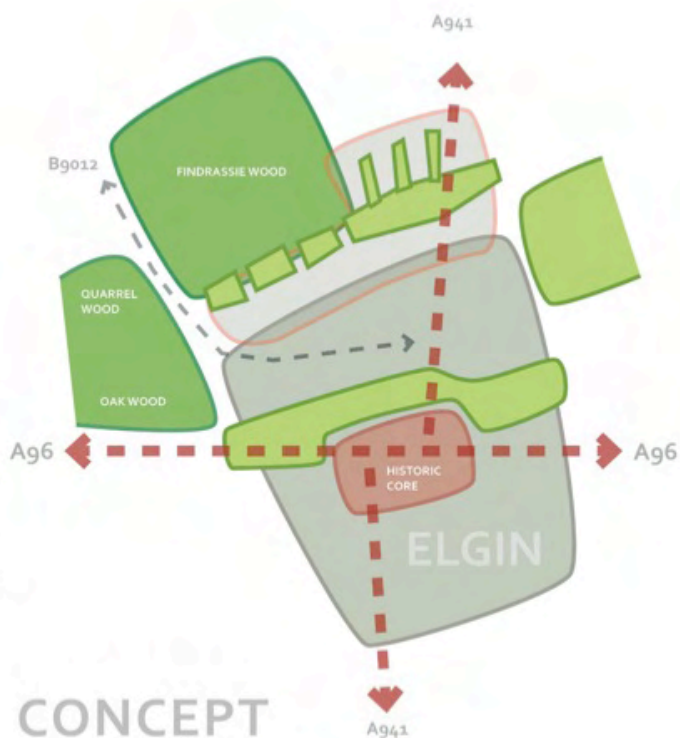
THE VISION



THE VISION

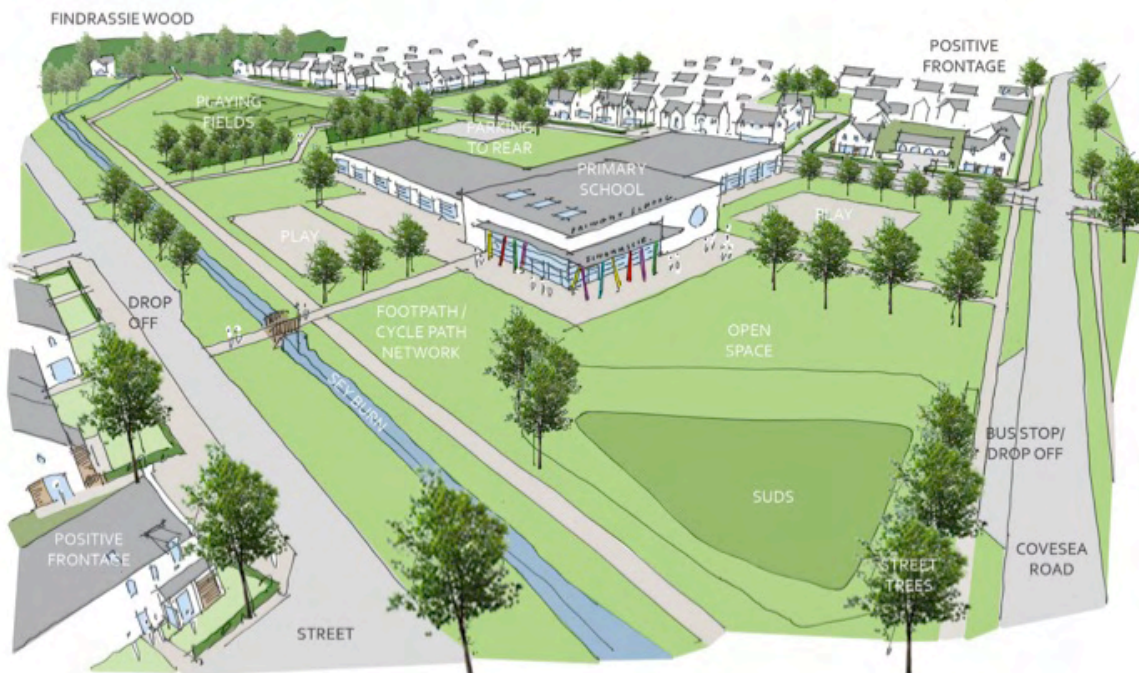
FINDRASSIE IS:

- A desirable place, the development of which is embedded in the landscape and is reflective of the traditional pattern of development, open space and built form of Elgin;
- An attractive northern gateway(s) into the city akin to the western approach;
- A place where opportunities for social interaction are created through a mix of residential, commercial, community and recreational uses and walking, cycling and local food production are encouraged;
- A distinctive place where people identify with where they live and one another helping to create communities;
- A place where people can live throughout their lifetime.





SCHOOL WITHIN CONTEXT



DUFFUS ROAD



DUFFUS ROAD



NORTH / SOUTH CONNECTIONS

