
TARLAND VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This Village Design Statement describes the village and environs of Tarland, Aberdeenshire at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It highlights some of the individual and collective characteristics that make the village distinctive and has been compiled by the residents in conjunction with a local steering group, the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland and the Rural Design Group. The APRS secured funding for the exercise and managed the process for the Village Design Statement. Neil Adams Architect produced the report.

It is intended that the Village Design Statement be used as a document for all who bring change to the village or wish to alter it. It should be read in conjunction with the Scottish Executive's policy document – 'Designing Places'. Particular note should be taken of the references to the importance of the context in which design must take place and the benefits and effects that accrue from a well designed environment.

WHO IS IT FOR?

This Village Design Statement is addressed to:

- The local planning authority – who guide and make decisions concerning changes to the character of the village
- Developers and their designers –to explain what residents would prefer to see in their village
- Residents and local businesses – in order that alterations and extensions remain in sympathy with their surroundings.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Village Design Statement should function as a supporting document to the Local Plan and provide a basis for the work of the local community council.

The recommendations are not exhaustive, nor are they permanent. It is expected that a continuous process of review and updating will be undertaken by the local steering group/community council in order that the Village Design Statement remains a vital and relevant source of village opinion.



LOCATION

Tarland village lies in the middle of the Howe of Cromar, a natural hollow of land on the eastern edge of the Grampian Mountains, between the Rivers Dee and Don, close to the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park. The village of Tarland lies some thirty miles due west of Aberdeen, the economic centre of the region, and four miles north-west of Aboyne, the nearest significant town.

The surrounding land is predominantly agricultural in character and Tarland has over time developed a range of amenities suited to the needs of this rural area, as well as a number of sporting and recreational facilities.

HISTORY

The Cromar area, as elsewhere in Aberdeenshire, is rich in prehistoric remains. Culsh Earth House and Tomnaverie Stone Circle are two conspicuous attractions and there are other sites of great antiquity in the vicinity. The settlement of Tarland, however, is probably only four or five hundred years old, having grown about the crossing point of drove roads, where cattle rested on their way to lowland markets.

A market was established here and various mills developed to exploit the ready supply of fast flowing water. This water was also a component of the illicit whisky trade, for which Tarland became famous in the eighteenth century. Tarland became a garrison post after the Jacobite rebellions of the eighteenth century. By all accounts, the village's early beginnings were a little on the wild side.

By the start of the nineteenth century the basic form of Tarland had been established, with small terraces of cottages lining Melgum Road - the main street joining the market stance to the village square - and larger, detached dwellings appearing in their own grounds nearby. By the end of the nineteenth century, after a long period of agricultural improvement, much redevelopment had taken place. This legacy is evident in the sturdy granite buildings that today form the core of the village.

Twentieth-century developments, mainly of housing, have infilled and extended the settlement, with varying degrees of success. A number of commercial buildings and a school have been built, but the main development pressure has been towards converting Tarland into a dormitory suburb. Despite this, the essential character of this hardy Victorian village has remained unchanged, and it exudes a quiet charm.

Potential developments focus on the national need for more housing – a fact that is not met with universal enthusiasm by the local population. One of the most cherished attractions of Tarland is its essentially friendly, small-town feel. The enthusiasm of the primary school children for their environment is an obvious measure of the quality of the environment – a characteristic many feel would be lost if the village became too big.



LANDSCAPE SETTING

The Howe of Cromar lies immediately adjacent to the proposed Cairngorms National Park, an area of outstanding natural beauty and ecological distinctiveness.

The high hills and moors that encircle Tarland form an attractive backdrop to the village, especially in late summer when the heather is in bloom. Gently rolling arable land dominates the middle levels, with large stands of coniferous trees forming wind breaks that are characteristic of the area. At lower levels there are substantial belts of mature broadleaf trees, many of which hide Tarland from the distant view, creating the illusion that much of the Howe is uninhabited.

At its lowest level the valley is an open floodplain. Because of this the original settlement of Tarland was built on the gently sloping ground to the north of Tarland Burn, so as to be well clear of periodic inundations. Recent developments have been built in this area, some of which have suffered as a result.

The combination of arable land, forest and mountain create a pleasing prospect from every approach, best seen from the “Queen’s View” to the north. This landscape is a constant source of delight when travelling the roads of the Howe and is a significant part of the rural character of the village.

Views out of Tarland to the surrounding hills are extremely important. The sense of openness and exposure produced by these views is a major characteristic of the village which, when set against the sensation of enclosure created by built-up parts of the village, creates an exhilarating contrast.

WILDLIFE

Though most of the Howe of Cromar is an efficiently managed man-made landscape, there are ample reserves for wildlife of the region to flourish. Extensive moors, heathland, woodlands, hedgerows, rivers and wetlands ensure that a wide variety of native plants and animals survive in safety.

There has been much monitoring of local resources and studies of the effects of agriculture by the Macaulay Institute, carried out in association with the principal landowners in the area, The MacRobert Trust.

The success of various conservation policies has resulted in a particularly rich diversity of flora and fauna – a resource of which the local community is rightly proud and which it seeks to exploit through the means of wildlife trails and other initiatives.



SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The original settlement of Tarland is typically Highland, with a ribbon of small scale, stone-built cottages constructed close to the road, behind which lie scatterings of outbuildings. Between these houses, and within some others, occasional commercial enterprises have developed. The open Market Stance area to the north and the rectangular village square to the east are, however, more English in character – the former having some characteristics of a village green – the latter, with its ruined church and graveyard, village hall, shops and hotels, having some qualities of a market town.

Outwith this central area, clusters of Victorian villas and cottages extend a short way into the countryside, some surrounded by woodland. Much of the land between these areas has been infilled by twentieth-century housing developments of one and two storey detached and semi-detached styles, often in cul-de-sac arrangements. The suburban nature of many of these developments is unsympathetic to the village context, but most are small in scale and have been contained within the fairly tight village envelope. This containment has helped Tarland retain a sense of intimacy and community that has often been lost elsewhere.

Other features of the village are a generous playing field near its centre, a golf course, a well respected primary school, the Tarland Burn to the south and attractive woodland walks on the edge of the village. Beyond the village and all around the Howe lie a scattering of farms and private houses, often built into the sides of steeply sloping hills and protected by shelter belts of trees. These settlements, while frequently remote from the village environs, look to Tarland as the focus of the local area.

Settlement Guidelines

Reject large-scale or inappropriate developments within or outwith Tarland

Require new developments, wherever possible, to be sited within the village curtilage

Promote housing developments which reinforce the intimate character of the village

Develop or improve redundant commercial sites and outbuildings as a matter of priority

Maintain the scale of surrounding buildings and spaces and reinforce their character

Encourage conservation measures to respect and enhance the historic core of the village

Maintain and improve existing public open space and protect it from all forms of development

Maintain views of prominent landmarks within the village and ensure views out of the village to the surrounding landscape are protected



BUILDING FORM

The traditional buildings at Tarland's core are mostly simple, unadorned cottages built of local granite. They are low in scale, one or one-and-a-half storeys in height, though two, and even three storey buildings appear around the Square. Elsewhere are fine examples of granite built Victorian terraced houses and villas, simple in form, with slated roofs and timber doors and windows. The details of such buildings are usually minimal and restrained, though occasional eccentricities add variety to the scene.

The regimented layout of buildings around the Square gives way to more random housing patterns on the roads out of town, though there remains a consistency of materials and scale that unifies the whole. This informality of layout and low scale is a response to the harsh winter climate, and is reinforced by numerous small lanes that link parts of the village and provide sheltered walkways between buildings.

This practical arrangement ceases in the housing estates at the periphery of the village, where standardised estate layouts and house types give an overwhelmingly anonymous appearance. This is particularly evident on the approach to the village from the west, where a row of "anywhere" houses is in full view. Fortunately for Tarland, most of these suburban areas are relatively small and moderately well hidden, though much more could be done to disguise them.

Most shops in the square and elsewhere in the village fit in well with the traditional building forms, as does the one remaining example of a stone mill building (now sadly disfigured). Newer commercial enterprises, however, such as the garage and petrol station are unsightly elements. In addition there are other, less distinguished buildings – mostly of late twentieth-century origin.

Building Form Guidelines

Use local natural stone and timber wherever possible in all new developments

Discourage the use of synthetic materials such as plastic windows and doors, etc

Maintain the existing low scale of buildings wherever possible. One or one-and-a-half storey houses and shops are more in keeping than two storey types

Consider each development on its merits, setting and relationship to surrounding buildings

Retain steep pitched roofs with a scale and height that is in proportion to surrounding buildings. Avoid the use of "Kit House" details and use simple, traditional eaves and verge details wherever possible. Encourage the use of chimneys

Integrate commercial and social buildings into their surroundings with particular care



OPEN SPACE & BOUNDARIES

Tarland's principal open spaces are the Market Stance and the Square, both of which have distinct characteristics. The former has been partly developed in recent times and no further encroachment should be allowed. It is an unusual and historic feature, very useful for informal recreation purposes. The latter is a strong "urban" space that has been the focus of much recent debate. If improvements are proposed here, great care must be taken to preserve the functional character of the environment.

Other notable spaces include the playing field near the village centre and the golf course, both of which must be protected, since they also contribute to the feeling of openness experienced within the village. Less well-known spaces include the riverside walk by the Tarland Burn, and the footpaths of Muirton and Drummy Woods.

A network of lanes, footpaths and bridges links parts of the village. This is a useful and interesting feature that contributes to a sense of surprise when moving about the village. It could easily be extended to provide safe, sheltered walkways in the future.

Tarland's boundaries to the north and east are well controlled by farmland, woodland and the golf course, but to the west there is a less distinct boundary that would be greatly improved by a woodland shelter belt. To the south, on the flood plain, lies an area proposed for future housing. Any development here would require particular care.

Open Space and Boundaries Guidelines

Protect all existing public open spaces within the village from further development and maintain all stands of mature trees. Plant new stands of native trees wherever possible

Maintain the "urban" quality of the Square. Maintain and improve all footpath links

Enhance the riverside walk to the south with tree planting and other landscaping

Incorporate flood prevention measures into any further development of land by Tarland Burn. Extensive landscape screening should be an integral part of any new works

Reinforce the village boundary to the west by planting shelter belts of native trees

Ensure existing views from within the village towards the surrounding landscape are protected. Ensure views of the church spire and Alastrean House are not obstructed from outwith the village

Incorporate pedestrian links within new developments and extend the existing footpath network

Provide low walls, fences or hedges in preference to open frontages or blank walls



RURAL ECONOMY

In the past Tarland's prosperity was based entirely upon an agricultural economy, but in more recent times there has been a diversification of sources of income. Though there are a range of local employment opportunities, (many of them with The MacRobert Trust), a significant number of local people now work outwith the village, while many others are retired. The expansion of new housing has brought in a wave of "incomers", many of whom work and shop elsewhere, with the result that much of the focus of the local economy has shifted away from the village.

This has created an imbalance that is typical of the rural scene today. Local businesses have found it hard to compete with distant supermarkets; families find it hard to shop for provisions; young people find entertainment lacking; and older people find the dearth of rural transport a difficulty. Factors such as these can create stressful conditions.

Nevertheless, Tarland may be better able to adapt to changing circumstances than other places. With the growth in the understanding of ecological issues and an interest in non-urban living, and as more people start to work from home, opportunities arise to service local enterprises. Small businesses and industries which realise the value of a quality location and workforce now find it easier to relocate. The internet is changing the way people interact, and the ability to distribute goods and services has improved.

Tarland is well placed to take advantage of these developments. It lies reasonably close to Aberdeen and is well served with roads. It has a variety of amenities that are the envy of other rural communities, and it lies within an area of outstanding natural beauty. The overall fabric of the village is flexible and readily allows for expansion, conversion and alteration, and there are sites within the village boundary that could be developed for new commercial enterprises of a small to medium scale. Provided the guidelines listed in this report are addressed and the wishes of the inhabitants respected, there is every reason to believe that the future holds much promise.

Rural Economy Guidelines

Protect all existing agricultural land from development

Encourage light industrial / commercial enterprises in appropriate locations. Existing commercial premises should be re-used as much as possible

Commercial developments should not affect the mainly residential nature of the village

Encourage domestic alterations and extensions for home working use. They should, however, reflect the character of adjacent buildings and the village as a whole

Encourage new commercial initiatives such as a Farmers Market, an Illicit Whisky display, an Internet Café, a micro supermarket, etc



SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

A number of initiatives to help maintain Tarland's prosperity have started in recent years. These include proposals for the improvement of the Square, the development of woodland trails, improvements to the access to Tomnaverie Stone Circle, and others. There has also been development of various small sites around the village for housing – some of which have met with vociferous opposition. Tarland is changing, though not everyone sees such change as being for the better.

Nevertheless, most residents accept that development is an important part of the evolution of every community, and that blind resistance would be counterproductive. Specific suggestions received during the consultation period included:

- *The extension of the network of footpaths and wildlife trails outwith Tarland and into the Howe of Cromar*
- *The provision of interpretive signs and information boards at strategic points around the village and in the Howe*
- *The provision of proper parking facilities for visitors at the Culsh Earth House and other tourist attractions in the area*
- *An improvement scheme for the Square that would retain its hard landscape features whilst making it a less barren environment*
- *An improvement scheme for the east end of the Square, including the road by the Aberdeen Arms Hotel, the drinking fountain and the grassed area by the entrance to the ruined church*
- *The provision of more native tree landscaping to perimeter areas of the village*
- *The provision of an Internet Café or other social facility for young people*
- *The provision of commercial business units and workshops for the establishment or relocation of small businesses*
- *The development of a regular event, such as a Farmers Market, which might attract business from outwith the area*
- *The development of more active tourist-oriented activities, such as walking tours, trail biking, etc*
- *The wish that any development taking place is carried out in a considerate and well designed manner, that will enhance the neighbourhood in which it is sited, and which will be an asset and pleasure to the community*

CONCLUSION

The Tarland Village Design Statement was created by local residents under the guidance of the Community Council and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland. It has been endorsed by the people of Tarland through the process of a public workshop and subsequent discussions and it should be consulted by all parties wishing to effect change within Tarland and the Howe of Cromar.

Reference material used in the preparation of the Village Design Statement included:

- Village Design, Parts 1 & 2 – The Countryside Commission 1996
- Aberdeenshire Local Plan (Marr Area) – Various versions
- The Tarland Development Group – Tarland Square Proposals 2000
- ‘Designing Places’ – Scottish Executive 2001

Special thanks are due to:

- The Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission)
- Mrs Marjorie Craig and the children of Tarland Primary School
- Aberdeenshire Council, particularly Councillor Bruce Luffman and Allan Garvie

For further information please contact:

- Peter Argyle, Chairman,
Cromar Community Council
Loch Coull House, Tarland, Aboyne, AB34 4TR
Tel: 013398 81180
- Joan Geddes, Director,
The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland/Rural Design Group
Gladstone’s Land, 483 Lawnmarket, Edinburgh EH1 2NT
Tel: 0131 225 7012
- Neil Adams
Neil Adams Architect
76 Colinton Road, Edinburgh EH14 1AT
Tel: 0131 443 5332

This Village Design Statement was funded by the Russell Trust with in-kind support from the MacRobert Trust.

September 2002
