

Applicants Statement to Support the Planning Application for the change of use of the ground adjacent to 2 Duke Street Portgordon

We would be grateful if the history of the area of ground at the side of our house could be considered as part of our planning application as it has not always been a green corridor area. The land is currently owned by The Moray Council whose Estates Department have agreed to the sale, confirmed in May 2022.

Prior to 1977, the area had long been used as a private yard for industrial/commercial purposes (as noted from photographic records), leased by the Crown Estate Commissioners to a tenant. There had also been a building on the site.

In 1978 and then in 1979 the railway line to the west and then the east of the site was purchased by Moray District Council for the specific purpose of providing amenity areas such as a play park, bowling green and country type walks.

The land at Duke Street immediately west of No 2 was purchased by Grampian Regional Council Roads Department from The Crown Estate Commissioners in January 1977 for the specific purposes of constructing a road improvement, linked to the removal of the existing railway bridge.

Following our approach to Moray Council's Estates team in 2021, there was subsequent consultation and site meetings with Moray Council Roads Service who confirmed that on the basis that the existing substandard footway was rerouted at our expense and that visibility was maintained at the junction, Roads were prepared to declare the area was surplus to their requirements.

Following the land sale consultation phase, in their letter dated 25-05-2022, the Estates Team agreed to the sale of the land subject to planning permission.

It is appreciated that in the 2020 Local Plan, both the railway line and the grassed area west of 2 Duke Street are categorised as an 'ENV5 Green Corridor' area. However, while it is recognised that land use can change over time, the land purchased by the Roads Department in 1977 was not purchased specifically for amenity value. Indeed, during 2019 and 2020 due to financial constraints, Moray Council took the decision to stop cutting the grass in this area and, had it not been for our intervention in maintaining part of the area ourselves over this 2-year period, the area would have been left to grow wild, with no apparent alternative maintenance plan in place. This indicates to us that the area was not considered to be of high public amenity value and undermines the case for protection under the local plan.

The Moray Council's "Moray Food Growing Strategy 2020" guidance document, developed to support the Moray Local Development Plan 2020, aims to ensure that there are more opportunities for people who would like to grow their own food. They recommend a variety of food growing spaces and many communal open spaces have been identified within this document as potential food growing sites.

There is a community garden in Portgordon at which we volunteer, but there is no allotment provision and at the moment there does not seem to be a plan to provide this in our area. The purchase of the land next to our house would allow us to grow the fruit and vegetables to sustain our family and also to have the space to compost our garden waste and some of the household waste as well as the positive impact the garden would have on our mental health and that of our visiting friends and family.

Audrey and Derek Murray, 2 Duke Street, Portgordon, AB56 5RH

Applicants Statement to Support the Planning Application for the change of use of the ground adjacent to 2 Duke Street Portgordon

We feel passionately about increasing the biodiversity of the area and this space would give us the opportunity to increase the area for birdlife, insects, bees, and amphibians which are all present in our existing small garden. We envisage using a variety of plants and flowers as well as creating small habitat areas for these creatures. The Moray Food Growing Strategy states as one of its actions to prepare and demonstrate how food growing can be integrated into green and blue networks to support biodiversity enhancement as well as to deliver allotment sites and food growing areas.

We noted the previous concerns of the Planning Department about the re-routed path impacting on the tree roots and have since commissioned an Arborist to complete a tree survey and report. The option of rerouting the path between the trees using a whin dust construction would support the requirement to protect the trees.

There were no objections to the previous planning application, (22/00905/APP), from neighbours, or the Hall Committee and we do have local support to see the ground used to grow food and increase the biodiversity of this area. We have been given compliments for 26 years now from villagers appreciating the floral display we have maintained at the side of our house and have shown our commitment to maintaining this area.