



BY EMAIL

Mr I Johnston
Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan
15 Links Road
Prestwick
KA9 1QG

Our Ref: JDS/lm

4 October 2004

Dear Mr Johnston

Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan

Please find enclosed SAC's submission in respect of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan.

I understand that George Massie from Jenkins and Marr had previously agreed with you an extension to the deadline for submissions, I therefore trust that this is in order.

If you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Janet D Swadling
Corporate Affairs Director

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RESPONSE BY SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION

SAC is in its centenary year. Over the past one hundred years SAC has served the needs of Scotland's rural industries, primarily the agricultural sector, with distinction, through its research, education and consultancy services. Now at a time of very significant change in Scotland's rural sector, those services are more important than ever.

SAC's business operations are structured within four divisions; Consultancy Services; Education and Training; Research and Development and Corporate Affairs. The business currently operates from a large and dispersed estate comprising land and buildings on three campuses located at: -

1. Ayr [Auchincruive]
2. Aberdeen [Craibstone]
3. Edinburgh [Kings Buildings and Bush Estate]

Each of these campuses has a mixed use of properties including Educational, Administrative, Research and Development, Storage and various specialist uses. Associated land including farmland, woodland and gardens is abundant, particularly at Auchincruive near Ayr. In addition the estate includes 8 Veterinary Centres, one of which is on the Auchincruive campus.

THE BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PLAN

SAC is currently seeking, through a Business Transformation Plan, to transform its business and estates to meet the demands of the 21st Century and to respond to the needs of its key stakeholders, including the Scottish Ministers. This Plan builds on previous reports by Deloitte, which analysed the future markets for SAC's services and appraised various options for the delivery of those services. It aims to respond positively to the concerns of stakeholders with regard to the local provision of education courses in the North East and West of Scotland. The central themes of the Plan are: -

- A reduction in excess estate
- The retention of only those assets which are required for SAC's core business
- The continuation of education facilities in three geographical areas: - Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire and Edinburgh, building on the hub and satellite model set out in the Deloitte report, so that SAC is not entirely reliant on its own facilities and infrastructure
- Partnership with other educational institutions.
- The consolidation of Research and Development functions to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and the future development of partnerships with other research organisations.
- The development of an affordable estates solution, which modernises SAC's facilities across Scotland for the benefit of clients and staff.

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A 'Partnership Model' for delivery of SAC's services and particularly its educational provision has been developed which aims to maintain integration over dispersed sites. This provides the basis of this financially sustainable strategy for SAC's business, balancing an investment programme alongside the release of value from existing estates while significantly reducing ongoing running costs. The 'Model' will be based around the provision of education facilities on campuses, which are not owned by SAC, allowing the potential to take advantage of the integration of staff and student facilities and benefit from economies of scale. This is similar to the situation which exists on the Kings Buildings campus in Edinburgh where SAC shares both the building and campus with Edinburgh University an approach that adds considerably to the student experience and to cost efficiencies. The Minister for Environment and Rural Development endorsed this strategy in a letter to the Chairman of SAC on 15 September 2003.

Three key principles have therefore provided the context to the development of this Partnership Model for estates development: -

- The need to significantly reduce the overall size of the SAC's estate
- The provision of a rationalised and fit –for –purpose estate; and
- The development of partnerships with other educational institutions.

Of relevance to this response to the consultative draft of the Ayrshire Structure Plan is that part of the strategy which deals with the Auchincruive campus at Ayr.

SAC ESTATES STRATEGY FOR AYR [AUCHINCUIVE]

SAC will dispose of land at Auchincruive, which is surplus to requirements as part of the implementation of its development plan, retaining only those areas that are core to the future business. Alternative uses for surplus land will be considered through a development brief process, identifying potential options in order to maximise returns prior to sale.

This Land Sale Strategy will be implemented through a Master-planning Group, which has now been in existence for some two years. The Group is led by SAC and includes membership from Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, South Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Council. The Local Planning Authority's representation provides advice both in terms of local economic development and planning issues. Regular updates on progress are provided to the Ayrshire Economic Forum, of which SAC is a member.

In January 2004 SAC was invited to join the Auchincruive All Party Working Group, chaired by South Ayrshire Council. This invitation was warmly accepted as SAC believe engagement with local politicians during the redevelopment of Auchincruive will ensure a wide appreciation of the issues involved and also confirms SAC's commitment to Partnership working with key stakeholders and the wider community.

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SAC has now published its Business Transformation Plan and received support from SEERAD in the form of a capital grant of £5M for new education facilities in Ayr.

Full details of the plan are available at <http://www.sac.ac.uk/mainrep/pdfs/transformation.pdf>

The release of the Auchincruive Estates is essential for the implementation of the education plans to work with partners in the provision of the development of a joint education campus. It is only by means of working in partnership that the costs are viable into the future.

SAC intends to continue to have a presence on the Auchincruive Estate in the future since its consultancy and poultry research staff will remain based there.

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SAC's RESPONSE TO THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

1. SAC commends the Councils decision to produce a replacement joint structure plan rather than simply carrying out a review of existing policies. SAC recognises that this is needed to address the difficult economic circumstances, changes in legislation and the emerging environmental agenda all of which have already impacted on their core businesses.
2. SAC supports the Vision Statement and believes it sets the correct agenda for action in the life of the Plan. While the Plan recognises that the planning system cannot, on its own, solve all the persistent economic problems facing Ayrshire, it can build on a wide range of spatial opportunities that can shape a future land use framework and thus set a context and stimulate broader economic initiatives. SAC firmly believes that the redevelopment of their Ayr campus at Auchincruive presents an opportunity for the planning system to demonstrate innovative partnership working to bring future economic activity and both business and housing opportunities.
3. SAC supports the plan's aim to set aspirational population targets to arrest decline and then grow the population and commit to achieving this objective.
4. SAC supports the seven principal aims of the Spatial Development Strategy and in particular the intention to develop and strengthen the strategic role of a Core Investment Area focussing on Ayr, Irvine and Kilmarnock. While SAC supports the concept of Investment Corridors care must be taken not to diminish the strategic role of the Core Investment Areas.
5. SAC is committed to the role of Ayr as a core town and believes that an unique opportunity exists at Auchincruive to develop its potential by providing both business and residential development opportunities within a high amenity landscape setting. Such mixed-use redevelopment of previously used land is highly sustainable and in keeping with government objectives.
6. SAC has a long and distinguished record of supporting rural communities. The asset realisation strategy for Auchincruive is key to providing essential elements of funding to allow SAC to continue to develop its support for rural communities. The full range of SAC's businesses impact positively on the contribution rural areas make to the wider Ayrshire economy.
7. SAC believes that land at Auchincruive can be developed to provide high amenity, sustainable housing, linked to a mixed- use development, with the potential to provide high amenity business space. Such an approach will positively assist in the retention of population but more importantly will be a catalyst for the attraction of new residents to new work opportunities in a high amenity rural setting. Design Briefing and Design Guidance prepared in partnership with all relevant stakeholders can ensure best fit with the landscape and the high priority given by the Scottish Ministers to sustainable development. SAC believes such

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an approach should be supported and viewed as compatible with the strategy objectives of Safeguarding the Character and Setting of Communities.

8. SAC, in the light of the foregoing, broadly supports the **Criteria For New Housing Release** as set out in **Schedule 2** and the aspirational targets for new housing provision. However the allocation of only 500 houses in **Schedule 3** to the Core Investment Area appears to contradict the wider aims of the strategy.

9. SAC supports the concept of a bio-mass or co-fired power station and recognises the potential for such an approach to support rural communities.

SAC welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of the emerging Structure Plan and views its operations and businesses as key elements in the Ayrshire economy. Partnership working is key to SAC's Business Transformation Plan and accordingly SAC wish to be involved in the further development of the Structure Plan and would welcome any opportunities for further dialogue.

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