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John Swinney MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance & Sustainable Growth
Scottish Government
St Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

12 December 2007

Dear Mr Swinney

We are writing to support the decision by Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services Committee to refuse the Trump International Golf Links Scotland's (TIGLS) planning application for a golf course resort and housing development at Balmedie north of Aberdeen. The proposal would have seen the destruction of one of the most spectacular dune systems in Scotland, an area of great landscape, amenity and wildlife value, part of which is legally protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) owing to its national importance for nature conservation.

The Scottish Government has since made the decision to call-in the application and to further scrutinise the proposal. We note that the Director of the Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland, Dr Veronica Burbridge, has stated that members of the planning profession are concerned to see that the way in which this case is handled doesn't appear to challenge the integrity of the planning system and that "Ministers will need to ensure that the scrutiny of the case is impartial and is based on planning law". We are fully supportive of these comments and urge you to take them fully into account in the way that you decide how to handle this planning application.

We also note that, so far, the democratic system of decision-making has been entirely consistent with the implementation of local and national planning policies and legislation. The locally elected officials have adhered to the adopted Aberdeenshire local plan and the rigorous environmental and development standards expected by their electorate to protect 'public goods' such as SSSIs, undeveloped coast and Areas of Landscape

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Significance, have been rightly upheld. Conversely, it should be highlighted that TIGLS has failed to undertake effective consultation with stakeholders and consistently refused to compromise. The decision to refuse the application does not eliminate the opportunity to develop this site nor does it restrict the potential to create a world-class golf course.

The issue of environmental impact formed a core element of debate by the Council and a vote on the issue found 9 out of 14 Councillors opposed to development on the protected dunes. The developers own Environmental Statement acknowledges that there will be a very significant adverse effect on the natural heritage values associated with the dune system. We request that the Scottish Ministers should, at the very least, undertake further assessment of the environmental effects of those parts of the proposed golf courses which impinge on the dune system.

The progress of the TIGLS application would appear to be at odds with the spirit of the new Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. Government announcements about this Act have indicated that it is the most significant change to the planning regime in Scotland for decades, heralding greater community engagement and consultation, supported by the recently published planning advice note PAN 81 on Community Engagement. The approach of the applicant has so far been completely contrary to this new legislation and guidance. Member bodies of Scottish Environment LINK have tried unsuccessfully, at meetings and by letter, to discuss with the developer the potential to modify the development in order to avoid damage to the dune systems. It should be noted that the area being sought for the protection of amenity, landscape and wildlife values is only a small area of the proposed large scale development of the Menie estate.

We believe, given the unusual circumstances, it is important that the final decision on this proposed development should be delegated to an independent public inquiry reporter. This will help to allay any public concern that there has potentially been too great a level of political involvement in this case.

We call upon Scottish Ministers to ensure that the potential impacts of this proposal on the biodiversity and natural landforms of the dune system as well as their public enjoyment and study, are fully taken into account, along with the wider

issues which arise from such proposed major departures from the structure and local plans for the area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anne McCall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Anne McCall
LINK Planning Task Force Convenor

This letter is supported by the following LINK member bodies:

Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group
Buglife
Friends of the Earth Scotland
John Muir Trust
Marine Conservation Society
Plantlife
Ramblers' Association Scotland
RSPB Scotland
Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society
Scottish Council for National Parks
Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association
Scottish Raptor Study Groups
Scottish Wildlife Trust
WWF Scotland