

The case for Craibstone as the base for SRUC/SAC Consulting in NE Scotland

Compiled by Aberdeen staff and students – April 2016

Set in acres of glorious woodlands, the site offers a quiet and relaxing base where you can unwind by exploring the secluded grounds and enjoying the woodland walks and wildlife watching. Craibstone Estate allows easy access to the 'Granite City' of Aberdeen with its cultural, sporting and leisure amenities as well as Aberdeen beach with its amusement park for family entertainment. Nearby attractions include Royal Deeside, Castle and Coastal trails and Falconry Centre to name but a few and it's central location make it ideal for exploring Grampian's Distilleries. Relax in the lounge bar or build up a sweat in the multi-gym; sauna & steam room or perhaps take a stroll through the walled garden (ideal for barbecues); Arboretum and woodland walks.



Background

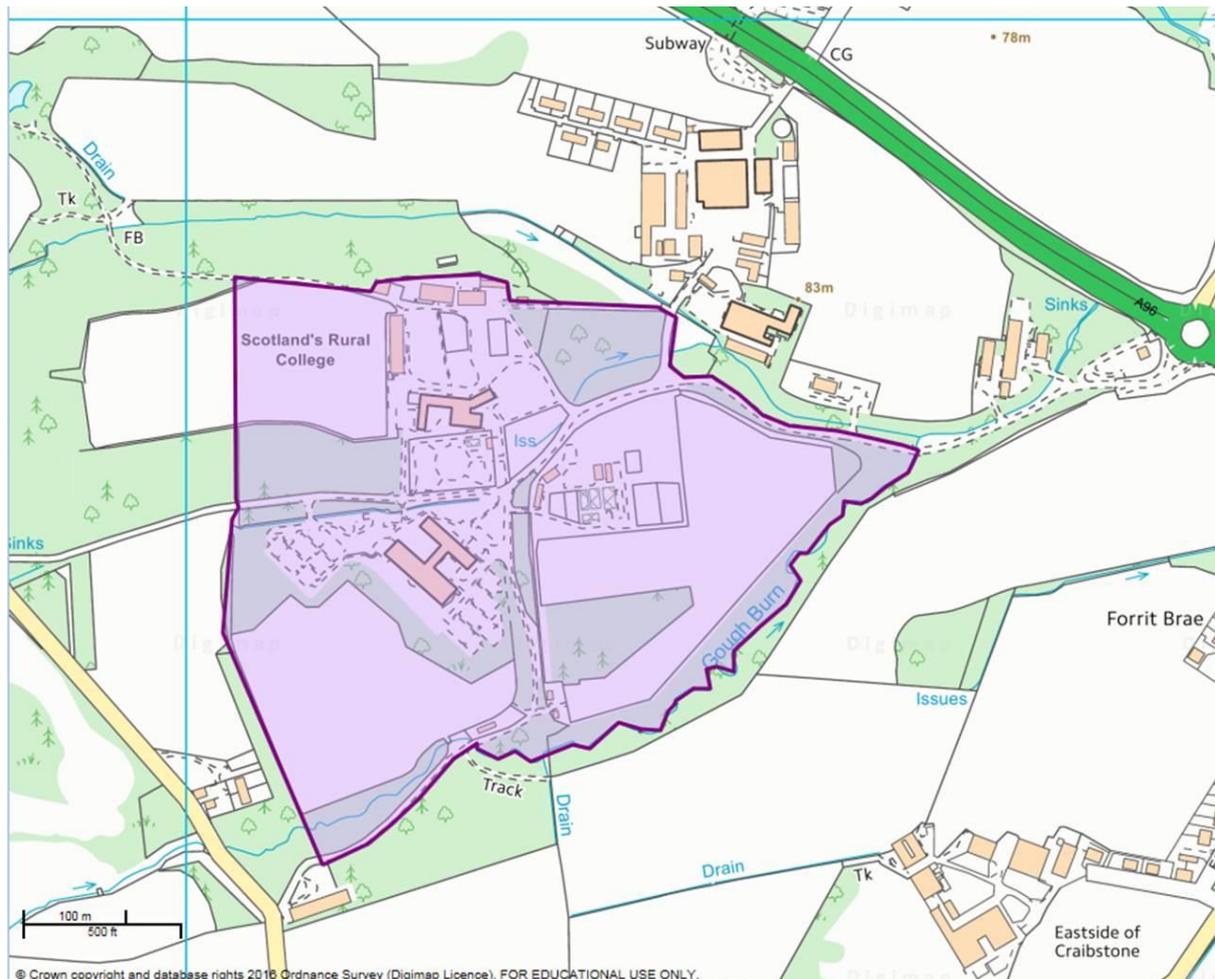
Following discussion and debate about the future of SRUC in NE Scotland, it is felt by staff and students that the existing campus offers the best learning experience, based around the state of the art modern Ferguson Building, and close proximity to researchers and SAC Consulting specialists.

Accepting that development partners, Cala Homes, plan to develop a significant part of the estate which is surplus to requirements, it is felt that a new assessment of current needs must now take place. These may well differ from previous, outdated assumptions, and a possible window may now exist to do so with the current downturn in oil and gas activity in NE Scotland. The Aberdeen City Local Development Plan has 5 year windows to review development proposals and house building requirements. If it is deemed that SRUC requires more land than previously suggested to Cala, then it would be appropriate for Cala to identify alternative land to enable them to meet the proposed house numbers in their bid. There may well of course, be such a severe recession about to hit Aberdeen, signalling that demand for housing is wildly optimistic and the numbers proposed may not be required in the short to medium term.

The prospect of an alternative campus was mooted for Thainstone, but the enormous cost and distance from Aberdeen, coupled with the extreme constraints and lack of control have suggested that this option is no longer viable, hence we need to look at a “Plan B”!

Propose that Craibstone Campus should encompass:

Ferguson Building, associated car parks, adjacent woodland, walled Lillian Sutton garden, existing residential halls site and quadrangle, Woodlands field and, horticulture Complex along with some land adjacent to the horticulture unit to expand our footprint with associated facilities should future requirements deem that desirable.



Craibstone Campus moving forwards:

- Currently an attractive campus with trees and quiet open space.
- SRUC owns the campus with NO outstanding debt on any land or buildings.
- Proposed footprint would encompass fit for purpose buildings which have a sound fabric and acceptable maintenance costs.
- Buildings currently are financially self sustaining through commercial and property rents / student fees / SAC Consulting overheads etc.
- Ownership is important when facing scenarios when bio-security is vital ie foot and mouth.
- Adjacent to Aberdeen Airport
- Proximity to Aberdeen allows students to easily access all the facilities offered by a bustling University town.
- Increasing demand for hiring out lecture rooms at weeknds and outside term times.
- Accessible and appropriate for NESCOL Animal Care and Vet Nursing which become SRUC courses from August 2016.
- Will be very accessible with the new AWPR opening in 2017.
- Future Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre will be located 500m from Craibstone at former Rowett site, and present additional learning oportunities.
- Has the modern well equipped, fit for purpose Ferguson Building as a hub.
- Attractive safe location for present and future students.
- Adequate car parking which is essential for a rural college.
- Proven attractive location for other businesses to co-locate with us.
- The design of Ferguson Building means it can be expanded, altered or adapted for future needs relatively cheaply.
- Access to Brimmond Hill, Tulloch farm and Craibstone Golf Course are all assets.

Accommodation at Craibstone:-

- Craibstone has 98 rooms for students in Halls and 8 additional bedrooms on campus.
- Student demands during term time has necessitated twinning up some of the rooms.
- These rooms are also occupied at other times but does fluctuate with the local economy.
- Being in close proximity to Aberdeen city is a great advantage.
- Maximises income for the campus, and revenue can be invested back into the student experience.
- Facilities including canteen, gym and bar facilities are great assets for promoting networking and engendering a campus experience.
- Halls of residence are important to encourage students to interact.
- Aberdeen is the most northern SRUC campus in Scotland serving Orkney, Shetland and the Islands where campus accommodation is important.

Learning and Courses at Craibstone:-

- Set in a rural wildlife oasis is vital in promoting Craibstone courses.
- Potential to promote courses and recruit more students once uncertainty is ended.
- Excellent teaching facilities.
- Has developed a strong reputation as a centre for excellence in Agriculture; running agricultural courses from Certificate through to MSc level and also developing apprenticeships with Ringlink
- A stronghold for Rural Business management courses from HNC level through to MSc level
- Encompasses other aspects of land management in Countryside and Environmental Management courses – NC HNC– BSc
- Currently developing a strong reputation within related industries as a centre for excellence in distance learning providing a range of HNC and MSc courses
- As of August 2016 will double its full time equivalent student numbers by including Animal Care and Veterinary nursing to its delivery portfolio.

Our Student Views on Craibstone:

Students organised a survey via Survey Monkey and over 100 responded as follows:

Craibstone campus is considered to have a 'rural' setting with large green open spaces and woodland. How important is this to you?

- 71% Agree

How well is Craibstone situated as a campus location and for accessing Aberdeen city centre?

- 80% Agree that it is well situated for them.
- 10% Prefer to be in city location.
- 10% Prefer to be in a more rural location.

There are nearly 100 rooms on campus for students. Is it important that the campus offers accommodation for students during the academic year?

- 78% say Vital and 17% say important = 95%

How well situated is Craibstone campus for your transport requirements?

- 87% say Craibstone is well situated.

How important is free car parking to a rural college?

- 89% say it is important.

What are your views on the leisure facilities at Craibstone?

- 48% say they are fine but need investment
- 30% say they would like more facilities.
- 22% say they are happy with current provision.

So overwhelmingly our students **DO NOT** want a city centre located campus

They like Craibstone but want see investment in recreational facilities

The Financial Case:

While it may not be possible for members of staff at Craibstone to get access to totally accurate financial figures, it is possible to make some educated assumptions.

- Halls and cottages bring in around £430,000 per year.
- 20 Mackie Hall rooms are currently mothballed so a potential additional income of around £64, 000 per year could be released.
- NCIMB, NovaBiotics, two life science companies, oil related and engineering companies are all located on the campus generating an estimated income of £255,000 per year. However, not all of these would be preserved in a reduced footprint.
- Student fees coming to Aberdeen (inc NESCOL) for around 300 students at £5600 suggests an anticipated income stream of £1,680,000 for SRUC
- The total income for the current Craibstone campus can be estimated to be at least **£2,365,000** .

The current halls at Aberdeen are structurally sound and fit for purpose, but could do with some cosmetic modernisation considering that uncertainty over Craibstone has meant little investment in the halls over the last decade. Mackie requires roof repairs and Hunter requires a new heating system. Sutton Hall is relatively new. All upgrades however, are modest and appropriate, bearing in mind their constant use and revenue generated.

Next Steps:

- Explore ways of making Craibstone Campus more robust.
- Locate more SRUC/SAC Consulting staff to the NE Campus.
- Do we need to have a separate Stonehaven office with the AWPR imminent and Craibstone 15 mins drive away?
- What is the footfall at SRUC Thainstone outside Fridays?
- Look at growing the activity at Craibstone and increase income.
- Consider co-locating Mill of Craibstone Vet labs to the Ferguson Building.
- A post mortem room may need to be built, but since we don't now incinerate, they may be successfully co-located.
- Would link well with the recent addition of animal care and veterinary nursing to the Education programme.
- Their current Vet buildings are old and in need of investment so presents an opportunity to reduce the footprint.
- The horticulture unit and adjacent land should be redeveloped and create facilities for student machinery workshop, crop trials facilities lost at MacRobert farm and about to disappear at Sunnybrae.
- This will allow the majority of the Trials Team equipment to return to Craibstone and terminate the lease at Saphock.
- Efficiency will be significantly improved as the Trial Team footprint will be drastically reduced.
- Investigate the question of farm land for grass herbage work and other crop trials work which could ideally be serviced from Craibstone.
- This needs to be located within an easy commute of the hub.
- Dust down "Ferguson 3" plans and consider their merit for any new vision.
- Aberdeen University is now No 1 for environment and soil research. SRUC Craibstone needs to be part of that success story and collaborating in a much greater way.

These views have been carefully collated and encompass the overwhelming views of staff and students at Craibstone who have contributed to this document over March 2016.

This exercise is completely in line with SRUC core values:-



Respect - everyone's contribution

Innovate – for success

Support – each other

Excel – in everything we do

“I am very concerned that the value of my degree will be undermined if SRUC continue to take decisions against the needs of their core customers, the students, and thus destroy the good reputation of the institution. I also feel that the college should make a concerted effort to make better use of its farming facilities, and ensure student interaction with the farms - it is currently possible to get an agricultural degree from SRUC without ever touching a farm animal. “

(One of our students)!

“We recognise that it is vital that the organisation is fit for purpose, with an estate that is equally suited to the future delivery of our vision and that is also financially sustainable. We are excited by the opportunities to strengthen what we can deliver for Scotland and beyond in the whole rural and agricultural landscape”

(Janet Swadling - Interim Chief Executive, SRUC – 5th February 2016)

Scotland's Rural College Student Association



31st March 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of Scotland's Rural College Student's Association, I take this opportunity to endorse the survey which has just taken place at Aberdeen during March 2016.

It is the best and most comprehensive snapshot of student opinion on the question of campus location that has been conducted in recent years and has resulted in some very clear findings.

The students at Aberdeen devised and ran the whole process themselves and also chased up members to enable us to gauge opinion. This has always been difficult when organised meetings have been held due to competing demands on student time and turnout has been poor and unrepresentative.

Bearing this in mind, we were happy to support this initiative and hope the results can be used to assist decision making in relation to this matter.

Yours Sincerely,

Gary McGillivray,
SRUCSA Vice President.

Scotland's Rural College Student Association



31st March 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of Scotland's Rural College Students' Association (SRUCSA) I support the findings of this report conducted at SRUC Aberdeen in March 2016.

Since November 2014 there have been formal proposals for SRUC to move its Northeast campus away from Craibstone. This report brings together previous work and is the most comprehensive detail of staff & student opinion on the matter; concluding a clear desire to remain at Craibstone. I hope the results can be utilised constructively in the decision-making process.

This has been a student-led initiative and both the student & staff unions have worked together to put forward a strong case for SRUC to retain Craibstone as its Northeast base.

Kind regards,

Alex Robb

SRUCSA President