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EMBARGO: NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2009

BLENDING OLD AND NEW WILL CREATE 'LIVING' COMMUNITY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

Plans for 'a proper new town with a real heart and soul' near Shotts in Lanarkshire were unveiled today/yesterday. [Wednesday]

Hazledene Homes Ltd proposes to build an £85 million waterside community that will blend in with the rolling landscape and integrate with surrounding towns and villages, stimulating much-needed regeneration.

The £20 million first phase of the proposed development comprises 120 new homes on brownfield land with longer-term plans to create a community of more than 1,000 flats and houses.

These will, so far as possible, be constructed by local builders and tradesmen, bolstering much-needed employment.

Torboothie, with rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh and just three miles from the M8 - Scotland's busiest motorway - will become what the developers describe as 'a happy and sustainable community' designed to integrate with nearby Shotts and its transport infrastructure, schools, leisure, shops and healthcare facilities.

Hazledene Homes is undertaking a three month local consultation exercise before submitting an application for planning permission in principle for the first phase.

Local councillors have voiced their support for the project and the Edinburgh-based developer is keen to inform and liaise with as many people as possible in surrounding communities. A series of public meetings to explain the plans in detail is to be organised.

Labour Councillor Jim Roberston, deputy provost of North Lanarkshire Council, said the proposed development would be of 'huge benefit' to the Shotts area.

He added: 'This is just the kind of development we need here. It will undoubtedly help bring more people to the area and will provide much-needed local employment.'

'I am particularly impressed by the careful consideration that is being given in the plans to environmental aspects and the fact that it will repair the scars left by previous industrial activity. All in all it's a first-class development.'

Councillor Malcolm McMillan, SNP, said: 'This has the potential to give the Shotts area a wonderful boost. We have been suffering in Shotts from depopulation with falling rolls in both the primary and secondary schools. The new Torbothie could well be the answer to many of these problems and I welcome it wholeheartedly.'

Independent Councillor Charlie Cefferty said: 'Torbothie is in serious need of redevelopment and my preferred option is definitely housing.'

Shotts Golf Club and the Glasgow to Edinburgh link to the West Coast main railway line form the northern boundary of the proposed new development.

The award-winning architect Malcolm Fraser, of Edinburgh, promises that the new Torbothie will be 'a real place with a heart and soul' and not the usual 'suburban creep that has blighted so much of Scotland'.

The 111-acre site, which lies to the east of Shotts, has been designed specifically to fit in with the North Lanarkshire Local Plan and would become a key element of the East Motherwell Village Expansion Area. It will take between 10 and 15 years to complete.

The new community, which in its entirety will cost around £85 million, will be built around The Voe, a picturesque lochan on former industrial wasteland, creating a new waterside development of 'special character' complete with pier and small harbour for pleasure boats. This focal point of the project is inspired by traditional waterside settlements such as Inverary, Ullapool and East Neuk fishing villages in Fife.

Mark Shaw, chief executive of Edinburgh-based Hazledene Group, said: 'In its totalitnat around 1,400 homes - including the 400 or so in the existing Torbothie area - this development has the potential to become a small town able to support the adjacent public facilities between it and Shotts, but also able to support small local shops and other community services at the heart of the new Torbothie.'

The first phase of the new community will be built largely on brownfield land and above old mine workings. The architects say that it provides an opportunity to use The Voe as a focus for enhancement of the landscape, including 'the healing of scars' left behind by a demolished ironworks and coal-washing plant.

The Voe is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The developers have already commissioned a protected species survey which revealed that the waterside provides a habitat for wildlife such as otters and water voles as well as birds including reed buntings, skylark, snipe and grey wagtails while the lochan itself is a breeding ground for freshwater mussels.

Given the ecological significance of the area, the developers and architects have gone to great lengths to ensure the new community will support and enhance both wildlife and landscape.

The site comprises three naturally distinct topographical areas, each of which will have its own square, and all converging at The Voe. On the floodplain to the south of The Voe the developers plan a public park that will provide another focal point for the community as a whole.

At the heart of the new community will be the high north bank of The Voe with its long views and established waterside. Each square will have its own shop or cafe and bounded by three-story apartment blocks.

Around these areas and throughout the community there will be new terraced houses, all with gardens and front doors leading to streets and meuses. And on the edges of the new community the developers plan larger detached houses built to low-energy design and with layouts that afford the sunniest outlooks.

Together, Malcolm Fraser says, the design of the new Torbothie offers 'urban and social cohesion and the delivery of an exciting, sustainable and highly desirable community based on architectural principles of community, and relationships to landscape, sunshine and views'.

Mr Shaw added: 'The proposed development has outstanding potential for the economic and social renewal of the area in general and for Shotts in particular.'

The plans represent one of the most exciting and ecologically sensitive new township developments in Scotland, transforming an area that largely comprises industrial wasteland.

Key to the development's attraction are designated transport links from Torbothie to nearby Shotts. This includes a landscaped corridor to Shotts station as well as pedestrian and cycle paths giving commuters access to buses and the high street.

Hazledene Homes plans a major consultation exercise on the proposed development, seeking views from educational institutions, community groups and cultural and heritage interests.

Mr Shaw said: 'We believe our proposals fully complement the council's vision for the North Lanarkshire area and offer an outstanding opportunity to deliver a critical mass of investment for the Shotts/Torbothie area, helping to reverse years of decline and dereliction.'

Hazledene Homes Ltd is part of Hazledene Group, Edinburgh, one of Scotland's most forward-looking property development companies. As well as the Torbothie project, the group is currently involved major building projects in Aberdeen, Inverness and Renfrewshire.

Malcolm Fraser Architects, Edinburgh, is one of Scotland's most innovative and creative design firms. The practice follows the principle is that good design and volume house-building are not mutually exclusive. It is recognised for its award-winning leisure and cultural buildings, but also has won awards for housing including The Drum at Bo'ness - the only development of its kind to receive the

Saltire Award, the oldest architectural accolade in Scotland - and Princess Gate at Fairmilehead in Edinburgh, shortlisted for the Scottish Building of the Year.



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