

Structure Plan Community meeting - Special Interest Groups

Tuesday 7th November 2006

**Venue: Committee Room 2, The Town House, Broad Street, Aberdeen.
18:00 – 20:00**

Present:

Richard Bush (Aberdeen City Council)
Sandra Bruce on behalf of Aberdeen Women's Alliance, Disability Advisory Group, Ethnic Minority Forum & Pride in Aberdeen (Community Planning & Regeneration, Aberdeen City Council)
Hamish Cattanach on behalf of the Youth Action Committee (Community Planning & Regeneration, Aberdeen City Council)
Toby Coke (Aberdeen City Council)
Clare Findlay (Youth Action Committee)
David Jennings (Aberdeen City Council)
Lavina Massie (Civic Forum)
Ken MacLennan (Gypsy Traveller Education and Information Project)
Abdul Latif (Aberdeen Mosque)
Hilda Smith (Ethnic Minority Forum)

1. Introduction

Mr Bush introduced himself and the other representatives from Aberdeen City Council (Planning and Infrastructure). He welcomed everyone and explained the purpose and agenda for the meeting.

The current structure plan (North East Scotland Together)

Mr Bush explained that the current structure plan was approved in 2001. Since then changes have occurred in the North East, for example, the price of oil has risen and there is increased confidence in the economy of the area. The current structure plan is robust but does not look, in any detail, beyond 2011. In this context, both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council are currently considering drawing up a new structure plan for the North East, although no formal decision has yet been taken.

The Planning (etc) Scotland Bill

Mr Bush explained that a new planning regime is being brought in by the Planning Bill. This will place an emphasis on sustainable development. The Bill will also require plans to be short and concise. Public involvement will have a much higher priority, and communities will be encouraged to get involved earlier in the planning process i.e. before a planning application is lodged. Mr Bush highlighted that, as the Bill has not been passed by Parliament, a new structure plan would be commenced under the current legislation but it will adopt the spirit and culture of the proposed new system. Mr Bush informed the audience that one main difference is that a new structure plan would not be too detailed. Rather it would be a spatial plan that will consider cross authority issues, for example, housing land supply, industrial land or waste. For example, how much land will be available, where development will go (in the north east), and when it will be released. Issues

that would impact on the city alone would be a matter for a Local Development Plan.

Timetable

Although no formal decision has yet been taken by either Aberdeen City Council or Aberdeenshire Council, both have a statutory duty to prepare development plans on a rolling basis. Mr Bush stated that, should a decision be taken to prepare a new structure plan, the plan would not be formally commenced until after the completion of the Public Inquiry into the Finalised Aberdeen Local Plan, which is scheduled to finish on December 8th 2006. Both Councils are engaging with stakeholders (at meetings such as this) regarding issues and options that a new structure plan could address. It is envisaged that a notice of intent and an issues report will be prepared by January 2007. A further round of consultation exercises would take place in spring 2007 where the pros and cons of the strategic options would be evaluated. A decision would be taken sometime after May 2007 (local government elections) on the form of a draft plan (consultation in early 2008) and a final plan by summer 2008. The plan would then have to be submitted to the Scottish Ministers for their approval.

2. Discussion

Mr Jennings facilitated the group discussion that sought to capture the issues that a future strategic land use plan for the north east should address. These are detailed in appendix 1. These issues will be fed into the main issues report that will help influence the plan and will be available for the public to view in the New Year.

The following indicates the flow of the discussion:

Equality

1. The plan needs to tackle inequality and discrimination in the north east. It must comply with the 2002 Race Equality legislation.
2. Ensure that the plan is inclusive and allows disadvantaged groups access to facilities.
3. There needs to be provision of alternative sites for nomadic travellers.
4. Provide suitable accommodation for women fleeing domestic violence.
5. Provide affordable leisure activities that are easily accessible.
6. Address the gender pay gap.

Housing

1. Encourage younger people to stay in Aberdeen. Tackle population drift by providing affordable housing in the city.
2. Increase the amount of affordable family units, not just single person properties. Encourage more families to live in the city.

Young people

1. Provide a youth café in the city centre. Tackle the binge drinking culture.

2. Encourage skills training for young people.

Transport

1. More affordable and inclusive transport provision.
2. Should we have pedestrian priority in the city centre? Should we have trams?
3. Ensure that public transport is safe so that people don't feel intimidated and afraid to use it at night.

Environment

1. Tackle the negative image of the city. Make Aberdeen a more pleasant place.
2. Increase the vibrancy of the city centre.
3. Ensure that new development is sustainable and environmentally friendly. Have high design standards.

Employment

1. Areas of employment should be near to where people live.
2. Diversify the local economy. Don't rely too heavily on the oil and gas sector.

3. Strategic Options

Mr Bush continued the meeting with a discussion of "strategic options" and sought views on the range of strategic options that were being proposed. Mr Bush explained that these "strategic options" were being derived from three planning dimensions: time (when in the plan period development should take place); scale (how much development should be promoted); and location (where development should be located). Mr Bush explained that the purpose of the meeting was not to evaluate the strategic options, as this will be done in a further round of consultation in due course. Rather, he was seeking views on whether the right set of options were being proposed and whether there were any other options that should be considered.

4. Other options?

1. It was highlighted that the strategic options need to be sustainable. They must also comply with other strategies such as community Plans and Transport Strategies.
2. It was also noted that certain strategies would provide more opportunities for directing resources towards regeneration projects. The idea of having a strategic option that would facilitate urban regeneration was emphasised as being a particularly good idea.
3. A strategic option that would address the need for the provision of a nomadic traveller's site was seen as being beneficial. Mr Bush suggested that this could be achieved by having a vision in the next structure plan that would support this at the lower level Local Plans.
4. The next structure plan also needs to be fit for purpose i.e. the strategic options need to be realistic and achievable. It must also comply with anti-discrimination legislation.

5. AOCB

A request was made for the slides from the presentation to be made available so that the individuals present could report the information back to the organisation(s) they represent. This request was respectfully declined because no formal decision to prepare a structure plan has yet been taken and the discussions to produce the strategic options are being held at an officer level only at the present moment. It is considered inappropriate for the information to be given an official status, as may be the case if they were given to the general public, and this may also lead to the information being misinterpreted. Mr Bush advised that all the information on the possible strategic options would be made available when they are made available for public consultation in the New Year, should the two Councils agree to commence a new structure plan.

Appendix 1 - List of Issues Captured

Build places that are safe, buildings that are accessible, energy efficient. Think about the future of the planet. Ethical planning.	Look at short-term halting sites for gypsy travellers. Provision of alternatives to official sites for gypsy travellers.
Equality. Planning in the North East does not address equality. Impact assessments – tackle discrimination. Commission for Racial Equality. The plan needs to involve special interest groups, get a dialogue with communities of interest e.g. disability groups, gypsy travellers etc. The plan needs to comply with the race equality scheme to tackle inequality issues. 2002 legislation. Address the issues of discriminatory practices in planning. Legislative requirement to look at policies in the plan to see if they cause discrimination. Question the policies and strategies to see if particular groups are being disadvantaged.	Youth café in the city centre. Tackle binge drinking, anti-social behaviour. Give young people an alternative leisure choice to improve the culture of the city. Provide facilities for excluded groups, young people etc. in the centre of town. A cultural hub for young people, provide an alternative for young people to pubs and clubs in Aberdeen.
Affordable housing. Encourage young people to stay in the city for the long-term. Enable younger people to get onto the housing ladder. Attract younger people into the city. Target young, single people with the provision of affordable housing.	Tackle the negative image of Aberdeen. Create a more positive, friendly city. Make the city more exciting, encourage diversity. Draw more people into the city. Redesign the city centre, make it a more attractive environment, increase city centre vibrancy.
Encourage skills training for young people.	Provide affordable leisure activities. Cheap and easy access to leisure.
Transport provision needs to be more affordable. Use trams in the city centre? Pedestrian priority in the centre?	Employment opportunities near to where people live. Child care – women tend to need to work close to where they live, co-location of work places and childcare facilities.
Safe transport, bus stations at night.	Provision of affordable family housing, not just focus on single person units.
Provision of facilities for women fleeing domestic violence. Hostel accommodation not always appropriate, need independent, individual units. Domestic abuse services need to be available for minority groups.	Address the gender pay gap. Have a balance between bringing in migrant workers and train up the indigenous population. Get people involved in industries, diversify from oil and gas. Liase with the private sector, create schemes for skills training. Ensure development is deliverable.

Make new developments accessible, prevent exclusion e.g. disabled people. Provide facilities in the city for people with immobility issues. Ensure a more inclusive society.	Economics – design standards that last for the long-term. Environmentally friendly development, sustainable development balanced with economic restraints.
Ensure that new development is not dilapidated in the long-term, high design standards.	Address the issue of diversity. Be visionary, forward-looking, nurture the notion of including disadvantaged groups.
Change is needed. Planners need to be aware of issues such as inequality. The plan should facilitate change, be forward-looking.	Using developer contributions to address some of the losses that would occur if development went ahead. Try to ensure resources to provide social facilities.
Citizenship – provide facilities for people with an impairment. Listen to and involve groups.	Ensure the plan is inclusive, allow disadvantaged groups to access facilities.
Training for planners to make them aware of diversity issues. Involve people with disabilities in the process from the beginning, involvement not just consultation.	