

**Banff and Buchan Community Council Forum
Fife Lodge Hotel, Banff**

9 October 2006

**Issues and Strategic Options
Meeting Note**

In attendance:

Mr I Owen, Fordyce and Sandend Community Council

Mrs F Alderson, Community Planning Officer, Aberdeenshire Council

Piers Blaxter, Team Leader, Structure Plan

Introduction and Context

Despite the disappointing turnout (telephone calls made over the previous week had confirmed at least 5 other attendees) Mr Blaxter engaged with Mr Owen and Mrs Alderson concerning the strategic planning issues that faced the West of Banff and Buchan area. Despite the small audience, Mr Blaxter made a presentation before seeking views on the strategic planning issues facing the area.

He highlighted the need to produce a new strategic land use plan, identifying some of the changes that had occurred in the North East since the publication of the last Structure Plan, and the introduction of the new planning regime that would govern its production.

He emphasised the need for change in the way that Planning Authorities drew up the development plan and the focus on early engagement, which the Scottish Executive are promoting. The event that evening was an example of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire's desire to engage with communities at a stage in the process that was meaningful.

He then went on to describe the plan that was to prepare, noting that it was to be a plan about strategic direction rather than detailed policies and that its focus would be on the Aberdeen City Region. The need for areas such as Banff and Macduff to engage with the process is to ensure that their more prominent neighbour does not disadvantage them. He explained that all citizens in the area had an interest in the content of the plan, and in the future of the region.

Finally, he briefly touched on the timetable for the new plan, noting that it was anticipated that a finalised plan would be published in the summer of 2008, but that it may take a year or more to gain final approval. He outlined the proposals for consultation, emphasising that the current "research" stage of the plan was concerned with scoping what issues and strategic objectives should be considered for further analysis.

Issues

Mr Blaxter then sought views on the issues facing the area, capturing them as they arose in the discussion. A list of the issues raised is presented as appendix 1.

Discussion was wide ranging, but covered four principal themes; housing issues, rural development issues, economic development issues and transportation issues.

With regard to housing concern about the impact of house price rises in the area was seen as a major issue, having an effect on affordability. Both holiday homes and the buy to let sector (particularly to house migrant workers) were seen as contributing to this, but by far the biggest factor inflating house prices was lack of availability of sites in rural areas, where there was high demand for housing, but over prescriptive policies restricting its development.

Related to this was the issue that the “countryside was full of houses but empty of people” and suggestions that more needed to be done to encourage tele-working and the use of new technologies to encourage business back to rural areas.

The need for the region to diversify away from the North sea oil industry, and to market its sub-sea expertise globally was highlighted, with a caution that there was a need to maintain quality of life and the attractiveness of the area to ensure that high quality jobs did not just move away from the area. Skills development was seen to be an important aspect of this, and in particular access to education facilities.

Transportation issues were also raised, including the poor transport links from the area to both Inverness and Aberdeen and the need for improved inter-urban public transport options to facilitate access to the employment market.

Strategic Options

Mr Blaxter concluded the meeting with a discussion of “strategic options” and sought views on the range of strategic options that were being proposed for future consultation and evaluation.

He explained that a suite of these “strategic options” was being built up 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).

He went on to describe how time and scale could be considered quite simply, but that the location dimension was significantly more complex. Time could be considered by views of whether development should occur at the start of the plan period, be sustained throughout the plan period, or be favoured at the end of the plan period. Scale could be considered by views on whether we should be planning for only the forecast population increase, or differing levels of population increase to reflect different vies on economic aspiration.

Location, however, cannot be considered in simple terms. Mr Blaxter proceeded to explain how the Planning Officers had identified 8 basic “strategies” which could be followed for development and how combinations of these strategies could be filtered against a number of factors to come up with a small number of “strategic options” on which consultation could take place. These include what the Scottish Executive considered should be done in the area to promote national interests, what other existing plans and strategies were trying to achieve, and against some basic planning constraints (such as ability to provide waste water facilities or the volume of development land required).

He presented seven possible strategic options, noting that this was “work in progress” and that, following consultation; change was anticipated to the range of options being considered. He advised that preliminary analysis suggested that a “new settlement” option would probably be required to be added to the analysis.

Conclusion

Mr Blaxter concluded the meeting thanking attendees for their time and noting that he hoped to be back in February to address a wider audience, including local business interests and other communities of interest on the evaluation of the different strategic options.

Meeting note by Piers Blaxter 9 October 2006

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Appendix 1

Issues Raised in discussion

Affordable housing	Economic draw of towns – not just commuting to Aberdeen but also to major towns (egg Inverurie)
Need for development sites to promote rural development	Car dependence – no transport choices-need for inter-town transport
Desire for rural living needs to be accommodated	Countryside full of houses but empty of people
Opportunities for teleworking in rural areas	Holiday homes
Buy to let and migrant workers impact on rented sector,	Housing seen as a pension fund
Prescriptive policies for rural housing forcing up the price	Migrant workers should be welcomed, may be being exploited?
Tourism	Need to invest in service skills in tourism- culture change
Need for the area to develop non-north sea industries	Need for low skilled jobs in the economy
Apprenticeships	Accessibility to education facilities
Skills levy on developers	