

**Buchan Community Council Forum
Saplinbrae House Hotel**

**25th September 2006
Issues and Strategic Options
Meeting Note**

In attendance:

Hamish MacDonald, Deer Community Council
Bill Fowlie, New Deer Community Association
Helen Young, Deer Community Council
Sarah Purdie, Buchan Community Enterprise Group
Karen Cook, Buchan East Community Council
Andrea Masson, Buchan East Community Council
Steph Swales, Aberdeenshire Council Community Planning Officer
Kathlyn Greig, Deer Community Council
Andy Mundie, Peterhead Community Council
David Darron, Mintlaw Community Council
Andrea Buchan, St Colms Community Council

The seminar was led by Piers Blaxter, Team Leader, Structure Plan

Introduction and Context

The context for the meeting was provided by a presentation by Piers Blaxter. He welcomed those whom he had met before, and apologised for going over some of the same ground for those who were new to the topic.

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 last Structure Plan was published, and the introduction of the new planning regime that would govern its production.

He emphasised the need for change in the way that the development plan was drawn up, 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 be drawn up, 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. Action programming was noted as a means of ensuring that the plan would be implemented.

After a brief discussion of the timetable for the new plan, which saw the agreement on a "strategic option" next summer, a draft plan by Christmas 2007 and a "finalised" plan by summer 2008, Mr Blaxter identified the early actions that were to be undertaken in the period to January 2006, including the identification of a range of "strategic options" and possible issues for inclusion in the plan.

Before starting the exercise and discussion he provided an update on the proposals for consultation and engagement that had been considered by the Community groups earlier in the year. He noted that everyone he had talked to

had endorsed the proposals for early engagement on issues and strategic options, and that only two people out of the hundreds that he had spoken to in both the City and Shire thought that the proposals had not gone far enough.

The consultation arrangements had been endorsed by both the Key Stakeholders Reference Group and the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Committee with only a couple of changes, relating to representation on the various consultation forums. He gave the example that the Key Stakeholder Reference Group now included specific community representatives, and that a greater emphasis on youth involvement was proposed.

He then introduced the exercise for the evening, which involved the capture of those planning issues that the Community Council groups present thought were important to their area. Mr Blaxter outlined the process by which issues would be captured from a wide range of groups and then tested against whether they were “strategic” or not before consideration for inclusion in an “Issues Report”.

Issues

A list of the issues captured from the meeting is provided at Appendix 1.

Much of the discussion centred on issues associated with the current restrictive policies on housing in the countryside with this policy being perceived to be restrictive and having a real impact on rural development and affordability of housing. It was a generally held view that, providing sympathetic design and siting, housing was an appropriate rural land-use. Inadequacies and restrictions of the current policy, particularly the cluster policy and the constraints on steading developments were reserved for particular criticism.

A second, related theme that emerged from the discussion was that of the lack of development opportunities in communities generally, and the impact that this was having on the ability of communities to sustain vital services and retain young people. The spectre of a “highland clearance” caused by planning policy was raised, forcing a move of population away from the rural areas into the larger towns. The impact of wastewater disposal constraints on development was noted.

High house prices and lack of access to affordable housing in the area was noted, with the observation being made that much of this problem was being caused by the impact of people moving into the area, to enjoy the high quality of life that the area provides, yet being able to commute into Aberdeen to work. The question was raised as to whether more housing would just lead to more commuting, or whether it would stimulate local economic development. The dangers of promoting a development pattern which was dependent on the extensive use of the private car in a world of spiralling fuel prices was noted.

Other transportation issues were also raised, particularly the need for good transport linkages to Aberdeen City, and capitalising on the benefits that the AWPR would bring.

A number of issues relating to how the plan was drawn up and implemented were also raised, such as the need to sort out social facilities to serve growth in households before planning permission is granted, the use of common sense in the allocation of development sites to ensure that development can actually take place.

A clear concern was made that the timescale for developing a new land use plan was too long to address some of the serious problems that the area faces. Immediate problems require an immediate response.

Strategic Options

Continued the meeting with a discussion of “strategic options” and sought views on the range of strategic options that were being proposed.

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 views on economic aspiration.

Location, however, cannot be considered in simple terms and 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 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) to come up with a small number of “strategic options” on which consultation could take place.

Discussion following Mr Blaxter’s Presentation concentrated on the Aberdeen focus of the proposed strategies and raised the question of “what’s in it for Buchan?” Mr Blaxter identified the key to this discussion to be how much flexibility should be given to the area to meet its own needs rather than the needs of the city region. He also identified that, as citizens of Aberdeenshire, the attendees have an interest in the development of the City region plan, as the economic strength of the North east as a whole was closely linked to the economic health of the City itself.

A clear preference was expressed for the Aberdeen City / New transport Corridor to Peterhead spatial strategy as bringing the greatest benefits to the area.

Conclusion

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

Meeting note by Piers Blaxter, 27 September 2006

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Appendix 1 Issues Captured from Buchan Community Councils etc.

Development in the countryside- lack of opportunity	High house prices
Lack of community infrastructure	Affordable housing
Need to sort out social infrastructure before planning is passed	Suffocating communities due to lack of development
Impact of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route	Lack of housing plots
Lack of tourist industry, Lack of marketing	Some communities are being stifled by lack of development
People have to go to villages rather than in the countryside	“Highland clearance” occurring in rural areas- forcing people away
Need to move faster [with changing the policies], because of changing circumstances	Some rural sites are appropriate for housing and should be released
Roads, transportation, improvement of links to Aberdeen	Affordable housing- housing for commuters?
Road traffic risks	Water supply constraints
Immediate needs need to be resolved, perhaps we can't wait for the Strategic Plan	Must change rural housing policy
Need to be responsive to change	Rural housing encourages rural development
Need to sustain existing communities	Maintenance of social infrastructure (old folk)
Need to encourage youth to stay, give them a reason to stay in the area	Design / layout quality needs to be improved
Sensible use of land- sites - lack of common sense in site allocation	Need to be innovative in engaging with youth.