

**Formartine Community Council Forum
Meldrum Arms Hotel, Oldmeldrum**

**12 October 2006
Issues and Strategic Options
Meeting Note**

In attendance:

Dick Reville, Tarves Community Council
Bob Davidson, Tarves Community Council
Isabel Page, Meldrum Community Council
Aird Buist, Meldrum Community Council
Ingrid Knox, Turriff Community Council
Piers Blaxter, Team Leader, Structure Plan
Alison Hogge, Policy Planner, Structure Plan

Introduction and Context

Despite the low turnout (no telephone calls had been made to remind the community council representatives of the consultation exercise) 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 proposed content of the plan, 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. 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 highlighted the early actions that will have to be undertaken at this stage (a suite of documents required as part of the research, and their consideration at the strategic planning committee in December). He then 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, economic development issues, sustainability issues, water and drainage issues, transportation issues, and developer contributions.

With regard to housing concern about the number of dwellings granted planning consent that are some distance away from services was seen as a major issue, which is having an affect on the community. The need to take a long-term view of the development of the community was stated; along with who will pay for social infrastructure. Affordability of housing (e.g. houses for rent and the influx of migrants and the retired), integration of different house types, and improved housing layouts were also highlighted as significant concerns. Migrants from overseas will have cultural differences, such as family size, and that will have to be reflected in future housing types. The poor and bland design of dwellings was also highlighted as an issue that needs to be addressed.

The decline of North Sea oil industry, and the need to prepare for its decline was highlighted, with a warning that the North East is living in a false economy of the oil economy, and that there is likely to be a surplus of office accommodation in 20years time. It was stated that we should be 'planning for decline' in terms of developing future brownfield sites and whether to redistribute to where the new housing is. However, it was also reported that there is a need to release land for employment land (as landowners hoping for housing, which is of higher value), as well as the need to protect existing employment land from being redeveloped to another use. It was also highlighted that there is a need to improve people's skills, and promote local opportunities.

Sustainable development was also a key issue in terms of:

- Integrating housing and jobs to reduce congestion;
- Sustaining rural communities;
- Living in a low energy society – zero/low energy housing
- Lifetime standards

With regard to water and drainage concern about the need for drainage infrastructure in rural locations, and the reluctant of Scottish Water to adopt private infrastructure, as it constrains rural development.

Transportation issues were also raised, including the poor transport links within the area (cross country access) and the need for improved public transport that integrates new development with public transport.

The representatives also stated the need for a robust planning gain system, which is also robustly enforced. The need for transparency in developer contributions and using developer contributions in kind were also highlighted.

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 views 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, although with an option that includes the development of the main ports in the North East.

The main comments of the groups’ opinion on the seven strategic options are listed below:

- Will any weighting be given towards any problems
Yes, all options will be assessed, and everything will have equal weighting.
- Support was given to the “new settlement” option.
- Support was given to the “new transport corridor route” to the north
Need an alternative means to cross the River Don, but this option will cost a lot of money.
- Any thought given towards a rural settlement strategy?
This is not a strategic issue, and the team is being asked by law to only consider land use planning at the city region level.

Could have local autonomy?

Yes, which could be part of the local plan strategy, and providing that it does not upset the structure plan strategy.

- Introduce new railway lines and stations

Costs too much, and the old lines do not exist in some places, whilst others are now paths.

Could have dedicated tarmac routes for public transport – guide buses, but these routes do not move freight.

It was also suggested that an information leaflet on the structure plan process and content would be very welcomed to allow community councils to disseminate information to members of the public.

Mr Blaxter supported this, but said that it is unlikely that such a leaflet will be published before 2007. The leaflet is likely to follow the Development Plan Scheme.

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 Alison Hogge 16 October 2006

Appendix 1

Issues Raised in discussion

Integration of housing and jobs- for sustainability, to stem congestion	Sustainable development- sustaining rural communities
Redistribution of employment land	Low energy society- zero energy houses-
Economic decline- false economy of the oil economy	Approval of houses distant from services- inefficient
Surplus of office space in 20 years	Social reasons for sustaining houses
Have to take account of job prospects	Should be building low energy houses – recognising the embodied resources in existing development
Planning for decline- development of brownfield sites	Design- lifetime standards
If planning for decline – do you redistribute to where the new housing is?	Bland designs and fads in design
Better layouts of housing schemes- need for social infrastructure	Affordability of housing
Need to integrate social infrastructure	Terraced housing has advantages
Integration of different house types	Houses for rent- affordability
Migrant workers-economic benefits but may be issues with rented accommodation- cultural differences (family size)	Skills development- need to promote opportunities, need to promote local opportunities
Poor transport infrastructure- need to integrate development with public transport	Cross country access terrible - only the radial routes are good
Migration of folk with capital to the area forcing up prices- folk retiring here- family links draw people here	Planning gain – need a robust system robustly enforced
Need to release land for employment land- hope value for residential	Transparency in developer contributions
Appropriate uses in the right places	Developer contributions in kind
Large-scale retailing has strategic implications.	Need to protect existing employment land
Drainage infrastructure and the need for it in rural locations	Reluctance of Scottish Water to adopt private infrastructure - constrains rural development
Flexibility (within limits)	Adequate social infrastructure - need to develop communities on a long term

	plan- take a long term view of the development of the community
Need to identify who pays for social infrastructure	Tying developers to what is shown in a masterplan.