

**Kincardine and Mearns Community Council Forum
St Leonards Hotel, Stonehaven**

**11th October 2006
Issues and Strategic Options
Meeting Note**

In attendance:

Alan Venters, Stonehaven Sport
George Carr, Catterline, Kinnett and Dunnottar Community Council
David Fleming, Stonehaven and District Community Council
Jilly Abershot, Arbuthnott Community Council
George Swapp, Councillor (Mearns North), informally representing Mearns Community Council
Bob Flann, St Cyrus Community Council

Piers Blaxter, Team Leader, Structure Plans (Aberdeenshire Council) led the seminar, assisted by
Kevin Thurlow, Policy Planner, Structure Plans (Aberdeenshire Council)

Introduction and Context

The context for the meeting was provided by a presentation by Piers Blaxter. He welcomed all in attendance and introduced both himself and his colleague, Kevin Thurlow, who was to make a note of the discussions.

The presentation highlighted the need to produce a strategic land-use plan, following some of the changes that had occurred in the North East since the last Structure Plan was published, and given the forthcoming introduction of the new planning regime that would govern the production of any new plan.

Mr Blaxter emphasised the need for change in the way that the development plan was drawn up, and the focus on early engagement that 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 provide strategic direction rather than detailed policies and that its focus would be on the Aberdeen City Region. He noted that the relationship between the strategic plan and future local plans is to differ from the current relationship between structure plans and local plans. Specifically, it was stated that policies in local plans would only have regard to the statements of a Strategic Development Plan; they would not seek to accord with them.

Mr Blaxter gave a brief summary of the timetable for the new plan, which envisages the agreement on a "strategic option" next summer, a draft plan by Christmas 2007 and a "finalised" plan by summer 2008. He further noted that this timetable might have to be extended if Aberdeen City Council's Local Plan Inquiry is not concluded by the end of December 2006. He then identified the early actions that were to be undertaken in the period to January 2007, including the identification of a range of "strategic options" and possible issues for inclusion in the plan.

Before starting the exercise and discussion, Mr Blaxter provided a brief update on the proposals for consultation and engagement that had been considered by the Community groups earlier in the year. He reiterated that community consultation was proposed in two main areas; consultation on the possible “strategic options”, when views would be sought on the pro’s and con’s of possible patterns of development, and consultation on a draft plan.

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”. The process of capturing, discussing and evaluating the views of Community Council members was referred to as the scoping of issues. Following a question regarding the meaning of this phrase, “scoping” was said to refer to the practice of deciding which issues are to be thought of as strategic.

Issues

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

It was suggested that the layout and design of new housing developments, and the lack of a mix of housing types within them, was failing to promote social inclusion. It was stated that such developments have not provided for the development of a community spirit between residents. To this, it was noted that the act of encouraging a mix of housing types within new housing developments could have drawbacks relating to their integration with transport networks. It was suggested that residents of “affordable” houses would require greater access to public transport and that dispersing such individuals would present problems relating to this. It was opined that the needs of occupiers should be considered in encouraging mixed-tenure, mixed-type housing development.

A lively discussion arose regarding the need to balance the provision of housing in the countryside with the provision of housing in urban areas. It was suggested that current planning policies are making it unduly difficult to build “affordable” housing, i.e. housing within the budget of low paid rural workers, within rural areas. Mr Blaxter made the point that if equity were sought between the price of rural and urban land, this would have the unfortunate effect that housing developers would develop rural locations in preference, as it would be cheaper for them to do so. This was noted, but it was suggested that current arrangements were skewed too far in favour of encouraging urban housing development. A desire to encourage small-scale community development was expressed. Mr Blaxter noted that a recent statement of Scottish Executive Policy known as SPP 15 (Scottish Planning Policy 15) was more welcoming to rural housing and this would be taken into consideration.

A further discussion arose relating to the issue of balancing strategic considerations with local views. It was suggested that the grant of planning permission relies heavily on the interpretation of development plan policies, to

the detriment of focusing on what communities really want for their area. Mr Blaxter stressed that Community Councils should be given a say in what should happen to their community, but added that a vision for the area was still needed. The difference between future Strategic Development Plans and current Structure Plans, regarding the different relationship with Local Plans (as mentioned above), was reiterated and he opined that the issue would be addressed by the forthcoming Planning (etc) Scotland Bill.

Strategic Options

Mr Blaxter 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 vies on economic aspiration.

Location, however, cannot be considered in such simple terms and Mr Blaxter proceeded to explain how the Planning Officers had identified 8 basic “strategies” which could be followed for development. He then explained 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.

Mr Blaxter then introduced a number of “options” that had been identified up to this point, as a result of exercises undertaken with groups of key stakeholders and with officers of the two Councils. These were combinations of the 8 basic “strategies”, but were not to be thought of as the final options to be consulted upon, at this stage. He asked the attendees whether or not any basic “strategies” had been overlooked.

With regard to the “options” described, it was suggested that keeping infrastructure “fit for purpose” should be part of the criteria for determining the acceptability of any strategic vision. Mr Blaxter stressed that the technical appraisal of the “options” would occur later on in the process and that the current focus was on taking something forward for further discussion and consultation. In addition, it was opined that development along a transport corridor should not create a continued strip of development, but that settlement boundaries should be respected.

Conclusions

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, on the evaluation of the different strategic options. The importance of community council attendance at this next meeting was stressed, in order that the views of all relevant parties could be included.

Meeting Note by Kevin Thurlow, 16th October 2006

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Appendix 1

Kincardine and Mearns community Councils

Issues

Sporting facilities and open space- town cramming	Not building “communities”
No space in new social infrastructure- masterplanning?	There is a place for both affordable and high end market occupiers have different needs which need to be considered.
Layouts of development do not encourage social benefits-holistic design	Providing opportunities for people to work and live locally-
Diversity of house types need a range of types in each development	Need to decant of business parks away from Aberdeen
Reduce the need to travel for work and leisure.	Don’t want dormitories
Correlation between income and travel distance?	Rural development- insufficient opportunity- blanket ban not helpful- does not maintain rural development
Tight clustering of rural houses is not appropriate	Balanced communities in the countryside
Balance of houses in rural areas and urban areas not correct- need development in the rural areas to sustain them and maintain viability	Dispersed development is not efficient
Redress the balance of planning by infrastructure	Waste water biggest constraint on development in the Mearns
Planning gain- have to insist on social infrastructure- need for transparency and clear public benefit	More affordable housing including for rent etc).
Housing in the countryside too tight	Opportunities for folk to stay where they have lived their life
Need for affordable housing to demonstrate a range of sizes- diversity	Micro communities in cul de sacs
Need for social facilities , schools, crèches etc, meeting rooms etc etc etc	More powers for community councils? Influence and local authority for the community council
Local determinism rather regional imposition	Need to consider the settings of settlements and protect them from inappropriate development
Environmental stewardship- more	Developments in areas of sensitivity

than preservation, improvement “development”	can be inappropriate
Transport needs to be integrated into the plan	Lack of trust in the planning system- more scrutiny of applications- outcome is different from the plan
Need for radical solutions to sustain town centres but still accommodate the car- need for intervention	Lack of integration of transport and planning
Bring people into smaller areas to encourage folk to spend money in these areas	