

**Marr Community Council Forum
Gordon Arms Hotel, Huntly**

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

In attendance:

Eleanor Anderson, Strathbogie Community Council
Willie Anderson, Marr Area Partnership
Tony Gill, Huntly Community Council
Hilda Lumsden-Gill, Huntly Community Council
Jill Sowden, Community Planning Officer (Marr)

Piers Blaxter, Team Leader, Structure Plan led the seminar

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.

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 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”.

Issues

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

Concern was initially expressed that exercise would duplicate the capture of issues undertaken by Donald Boyd under the ATP and an assurance was given that the issues identified in the is document would be taken forward by the development plan process, where appropriate. Following this clarification the discussion centred on two main themes, issues relating to transportation and access and issues relating to economic development. Other issues were also raised.

With regards to transportation the significance of the train line from Huntly (and Inch) to Aberdeen and Inverness was stressed, both in the context of providing a means to transport goods, and in addressing issues of commuting. Improving the accessibility of the area through improved timetabling of rail services and other public transport improvements was seen to be important for the long-term future of the area. Development patterns were currently promoting increasing amounts of traffic on unsuitable roads, and promoting commuting.

In relation to economic development issues the discussion focused on the need to address the loss of young skilled and educated people from the area through providing opportunity for high quality employment opportunities. The supply of employment land in the area was seen to be a constraint on economic development.

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 vies 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 location of Huntly as the centre of Aberdeenshire and a mid point on a possible "A92 development corridor" strategy with which to compete, on quality of life issues, with the central belt. It was strongly felt that an aspiration for the next 25 years should be the development of Huntly as part of the "transport corridor" based scenarios.

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 on the evaluation of the different strategic options.

Meeting note by Piers Blaxter, 3 October 2006

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Appendix 1 Issues Captured from Marr (North) Community Councils etc.

Issues	Issues
Need to get hold of issues highlighted in the Huntly ATP Strategy- Talk to Donald Boyd the coordinator	Issues of housetype encouraging commuting Need to consider social and environmental sustainability
Need to promote local solutions to carbon neutral developments	Authentic tourism
Encourage renewable technologies	Retention of traditions- intergeneration
Development should follow the train line. Huntly is central in Aberdeenshire. Huntly as a growth pole	Retention of townscape and cultural heritage as a selling point
Improving access to the area	Attractiveness of Aberdeen to Tourists (not good)
Improving rail freight, others like timber.	Inverramsay Bridge to reduce traffic loading
Traffic loading on small rural roads	Need for public transport improvements. Promotion of alternatives
Need to retain quality employment through employment land	Need to retain the heart of the town- the town centre.
Long term economic future of the area	Agricultural economy, bigger and bigger units, impact on rural employment,
Loss of educated young people	Need to promote high quality employment opportunities – the knowledge economy
Need to maintain trades, in addition to professionals, lack of apprentices	