

**Marr (South) Community Council Forum
Burnett Arms Hotel, Banchory**

**5th October 2006
Issues and Strategic Options
Meeting Note**

In attendance:

Judith Ayleth, Marr Area Partnership
Linda Clark, Banchory Community Council/Banchory and District Initiative
Sheena Duffy, Mid-Deeside Community Council
Jean Henvetty, Banchory and District Initiative
Charles Insch, Finzean Community Council
Richard Lattimer, Cluny Midmar & Monymusk Community Council
Mrs. M Milne, Mid-Deeside Community Council
Frank Sheridan, Feughdee West Community Council
Keith White, Banchory Community Council

Apologies:

Andrew Walker, Birse and Ballogie 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 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 be a plan about strategic direction rather than detailed policies and that its focus would be on the Aberdeen City Region. In response to questions, the point was emphasised that the new Strategic Land-use plan would be different to a Structure Plan, for it would set a common strategic vision for the region, which public bodies such as Scottish Water would need to consider. It was stressed that the new plan would enable local development plans to adopt a more flexible approach to addressing local needs.

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 noted that issues would be captured from a wide range of groups and then tested to see whether they were “strategic” or not, before being considered for inclusion in an “Issues Report”.

Issues

A list of the issues captured from the meeting is provided at Appendix 1. Concern was expressed about the timing of the process to develop a new Strategic Land-use Plan. It was suggested that after the recent adoption of the Aberdeenshire Local Plan (ALP) and given the fact that the current Structure Plan (NEST) contained detailed policies until 2011, no new plan was needed. In response, it was noted that the preparation of a new plan would not prejudice the use of the current plans; the nature of land-use planning as a continual process was stressed. The timetable for the new Strategic Land-use Plan was reiterated, with it being noted that a local plan required to deliver the strategic plan will also be needed before 2011.

A lively discussion arose about the need to maintain affordable housing in the area. The question was raised as to whether there was an obligation to accommodate young people with aspirations to own property, when they had alternative options available to them (i.e. when they could remain living with parents). The point was made that it would be desirable to offer everyone an opportunity to live within his or her community. The high value of land was raised as a key issue in providing affordable housing. Related to this, discussion focused on how encouraging the growth of home working could affect the price of rural property. It was opined that this could lead to an increase in prices, although it was also suggested that this might not occur, given the preference of some for urban living.

With regard to views on housing in the countryside, it was suggested that a mechanism for making land available outwith settlements was needed, as part of a solution to the problem of providing accommodation for rural workers. It was suggested that it was too easy for developers to use good quality agricultural land for housing and that mechanisms to restrict this were needed. The point was made that a justification on the sustainability of using a given plot of land for housing might be needed.

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 views 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 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.

A discussion on how we should plan for the future arose. It was suggested that it might be sensible to plan for economic decline over the next 25 years, given the region’s dependence on the oil industry. This, it was suggested, would impact on the scale and timing of future development. It was noted that the flexibility suggested with regard to scale of housing development was all weighted towards planning for more housing than is currently predicted – it was opined that this does not take into account the possibility of economic decline. Against this, it was suggested that if the economy were to decline in the future, lower house prices might be needed to encourage inward migration and prevent overall population loss.

With regard to the range of strategic options presented, it was suggested that it might be desirable to focus development along the transport corridor between Portlethen and Laurencekirk. The point was made that this appeared to be a “flavour” of the transport corridor strategic option presented. Mr. Blaxter reiterated the point that the options presented were just one way of envisaging the strategic development of Aberdeen City and Shire and that no decisions have been made.

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, 5th October 2006

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Appendix 1. Issues Captured

Issues

Why do we need the houses?	Housetype- lack of diversity of house types
How to maintain affordability of housing- more shared equity?	No opportunities for young people to live in area due to affordability and availability
Cost and affordability	Scarcity and high value of land,
Commuting and the location of development- concentration in corridors	Innovative ways of working
New town?	Protection of employment land- need to say no
Dormitory settlements?	Flexible to allow businesses to expand on site in rural areas
Latent labour pool- not on the unemployment register- the figures on employment level do not tell the truth about rural worker availability	Granularity- statistics too coarse grained. Pockets of deprivation do not show up
Low wages not up to house prices	Home working could INCREASE house prices!
Need to provide choice	Tourism, need to promote year around tourism, diversity of activity- localised
Decline of the oil industry (decline of Council incomes) (risk of PFI failure)	Too much (and profound) reliance on oil
Need to maintain jobs	Oil industry is mobile
Insufficient account of possible decline of economy – economy is the most important thing	Have to plan for decline OR growth-
Need for more rented housing	Need for housing in the countryside (rather than finding a loophole) (it is the easy option for the developers to develop Greenfield sites)
Impact on the countryside from new housing	Reusing existing sites
Design quality- get away from the museum countryside- foibles of the planner?	Sustainable design- increased energy conservation- go beyond the minimum building regulation