

## **Structure Plan Community meeting - North**

**Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006**

**18:00 – 20:00**

**Venue: Room 128, Summerhill Education Centre, Lang Stracht, Aberdeen**

### **Present:**

Richard Bush (Aberdeen City Council)

Ian Cox (Kingswells Community Council)

Athol Garden (Rector, Bankhead Academy)

Helen Graham (Middlefield Community Project)

David Jennings (Aberdeen City Council)

Gary Purves (Aberdeen City Council)

Carolann Ritchie (Middlefield Area Resident Action Group)

Roseleen Shanley (Bankhead Academy Environmental Committee)

Tom Straiton (Kingswells Community Council)

Kevin Thurlow (Aberdeenshire Council)

### **1. Introduction**

Mr Bush introduced himself and the other representatives from Aberdeen City Council (Planning and Infrastructure). He welcomed everyone and explained the purpose and agenda for the meeting.

#### *The current structure plan (North East Scotland Together)*

Mr Bush explained that the current structure plan was approved in 2001. Since then changes have occurred in the North East, for example, the price of oil has risen and there is increased confidence in the economy of the area. The current structure plan is robust but does not look, in any detail, beyond 2011. In this context, both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council are currently considering drawing up a new structure plan for the North East, although no formal decision has yet been taken.

#### *The Planning (etc) Scotland Bill*

Mr Bush explained that a new planning regime is being brought in by the Planning Bill. This will place an emphasis on sustainable development. The Bill will also require plans to be short and concise. Public involvement will have a much higher priority, and communities will be encouraged to get involved earlier in the planning process i.e. before a planning application is lodged. Mr Bush highlighted that, as the Bill has not been passed by Parliament, a new structure plan would be commenced under the current legislation but it will adopt the spirit and culture of the proposed new system. Mr Bush informed the audience that one main difference is that a new structure plan would not be too detailed. Rather it would be a spatial plan that will consider cross authority issues, for example, housing land supply, industrial land or waste. For example, how much land will be available, where development will go (in the north east), and when it will be released. Issues

that would impact on the city alone would be a matter for a Local Development Plan.

### *Timetable*

Although no formal decision has yet been taken by either Aberdeen City Council or Aberdeenshire Council, both have a statutory duty to prepare development plans on a rolling basis. Mr Bush stated that, should a decision be taken to prepare a new structure plan, the plan would not be formally commenced until after the completion of the Public Inquiry into the Finalised Aberdeen Local Plan, which is scheduled to finish on December 8<sup>th</sup> 2006. Both Councils are engaging with stakeholders (at meetings such as this) regarding issues and options that a new structure plan could address. It is envisaged that a notice of intent and an issues report will be prepared by January 2007. A further round of consultation exercises would take place in spring 2007 where the pros and cons of the strategic options would be evaluated. A decision would be taken sometime after May 2007 (local government elections) on the form of a draft plan (consultation in early 2008) and a final plan by summer 2008. The plan would then have to be submitted to the Scottish Ministers for their approval.

## **2. Discussion**

Mr Jennings facilitated the group discussion that sought to capture the issues that a future strategic land use plan for the north east should address. These are detailed in appendix 1. These issues will be fed into the Issues Report that will help influence the plan and will be available for the public to view in the New Year.

The following indicates an indication of the flow of the discussion:

### Housing

1. Will the trend in growth continue once policies to address climate change take effect? Increased taxation might encourage people to live together.
2. Should housing be encouraged in areas where the only option is to travel to school by car/bus? Perhaps fit housing into the existing infrastructure (not the other way around).
3. Need to force developers to build affordable housing, to provide housing for those that can't afford expensive houses.
4. We need to increase the amount of rented property, more Council properties to rent.
5. It is fundamental that we need to address issues of equality, to make things more equal than they are now. There are still pockets of deprivation in the city (despite low unemployment etc).

### Schools

1. Synchronise holidays; if you don't it can make Council's look foolish. This also has economic impacts as it forces people to take time off work.
2. Encourage housing to be built in catchment areas of schools that have spare capacity. This would be a good idea but we need to make sure that we don't create inequality (unequal communities).

3. If we don't locate development close to schools this may lead to transport problems.
4. Young people want to be properly engaged.

#### Economic development

1. It is jobs that ultimately encourage people to locate/stay here. Is there anything that land use planning can do? Provide more employment.
2. Develop the knowledge economy.

#### Transport

1. The poor state of infrastructure hinders the achievement of ensuring the vitality of the North East.
2. We need a clear and coherent transport strategy.
3. There is a need to be a little imaginative with regard to transport alternatives. For example, should there be trams in the city centre?
4. Protect opportunities for future infrastructure development.
5. Cycling – we need to be able to travel to work/school using bicycles, and feel safe doing this.
6. We also need to promote walking.
7. Rail connections (both locally and inter-regionally) are poor. There needs to be improvements to market the region to businesses.
8. If we were to support cross-rail, we should direct housing developments to appropriate locations along its route.

#### Environment

1. We live in a nice part of the world. We need to preserve the natural environment to maintain that.
2. We need to encourage recycling and wildlife preservation.
3. Conservation is important and we need to encourage biodiversity. We also need to think about climate change and how we will address ecological issues.

### **3. Strategic options**

Mr Bush continued the meeting with a discussion of “strategic options” and sought views on the range of strategic options that were being proposed. Mr Bush explained that these “strategic options” were being derived 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). Mr Bush explained that the purpose of the meeting was not to evaluate the strategic options, this will be done in a further round of consultation in due course. Rather, he was seeking views on whether the right set of options were being proposed and whether there were any other options that should be considered.

### **4. Other options?**

Two points were raised in response to the strategic options which had been presented:

1. The notion of a new settlement was considered favourable by some in the audience. It was suggested that this would allow future generations the chance to experience the lifestyle currently enjoyed by residents of, for example Kingswells, where there is a peaceful village setting within easy reach of the main urban area. It was also suggested that a new settlement would mean that new development would not be located within existing settlements and therefore would not have an adverse impact on the lifestyle enjoyed by residents of the existing areas.
2. Regeneration was raised as an important issue. It was suggested that urban areas that are less desirable needed to be regenerated to address issues of deprivation and inequality in the city. It was highlighted that, whilst the north east has relatively low levels of unemployment, there are still pockets of underprivileged communities and this needs to be tackled urgently. Several members of the audience stressed that a strategic option must enable economic sustainability as well as environmental sustainability.

## **5. AOCB**

It was pointed out that some of the topics discussed were quite complex and some of technical terms were confusing to members of the general public. It was suggested that a briefing pack, setting out background to the meeting, would have been helpful in advance. Mr Bush acknowledged this and advised that the Council would look to prepare pamphlets, in plain English, which could be distributed to members of the public outlining the role of a structure plan in terms of the overall planning system.

A request was made for the slides from the presentation to be made available so that the individuals present could report the information back to the organisation(s) they represent. This request was respectfully declined because no formal decision to prepare a structure plan has yet been taken and the discussions to produce the strategic options are being held at an officer level only at the present moment. It is considered inappropriate for the information to be given an official status, as may be the case if they were given to the general public, and this may also lead to the information being misinterpreted. Mr Bush advised that all the information on the possible strategic options would be made available for public consultation in the New Year, should the two Councils agree to commence a new structure plan.

## Appendix 1 - List of Issues Captured

Population decline in the north east. Do we Plan to reverse population decline?	International energy centre. Provide adequate supply of employment land to retain younger people.
Tackling climate change, energy conservation	Integrating migrants, providing services for migrants
Affordable housing – the need to provide more low-cost housing and spread it throughout the City. Social cohesion, prevent pockets of affluence or social deprivation. Create more of a diversity e.g. private and rented housing. Tackle the stigma attached to affordable housing. More Council properties to rent. Reduce inequalities.	Transport provision. Improve rail-links between the north east and the central belt. Promote sustainable transport. Develop the cross-rail system and encourage new housing near transport corridors. A clear strategy for developing a high quality road/rail infrastructure to promote the north east. Explore innovative means of transport e.g. trams, mono-rail etc.
Tackling the decline in traditional industries e.g. fishing, agriculture	Direct new housing, schools to more accessible locations
Development of alternative energy sources e.g. wind farms, bio-fuels etc. Monitoring the consumption of agricultural land for housing developments	Reduce the number of schools or more efficient use of existing buildings; increase facilities for the whole community. Putting development near to schools and community facilities.
Managing the school's estate, tackling changing demography, fewer younger people. Try to retain young people. Encourage young people to be ambitious/aim high.	Encourage the north east as a centre of excellence in terms of energy e.g. alternative energy, knowledge economy; develop links with oil industry.
Promoting sustainable modes of transport e.g. more cycle lanes, better walking facilities	Engaging with “hard-to-reach” groups e.g. young people. Changing prejudices.
Balance between preserving the North East and allocating land for development	Promote recycling, encourage wildlife preservation