

Structure Plan Community meeting - South

**Date: Thursday 2nd November 2006
18:00 – 20:00**

Venue: The Hilton Treetops Hotel, 161 Springfield Road, Aberdeen, AB15 7AQ

Present; Richard Bush (Aberdeen City Council), Colin Cranfield, Naomi Cunningham (Aberdeen City Council), Alan Findlayson, David Jennings (Aberdeen City Council), Seamus McInnes

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 8th 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 Issues

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 main 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:

Resources

1. Waste management- we need to use more sustainable methods of tackling waste disposal. Presently bottles are being transported to Alloa for recycling. It was queried whether incineration of waste was still an option. District heating systems were also discussed to power council buildings and schools, however argued that they were possibly too dirty for the residents who live near them.
2. Energy generation- as the energy capital of Europe we should be focusing on renewable sources. Aberdeen needs to look beyond oil and must retain the skills of the oil sector by offering a high quality of life. It is especially important to attract and retain those with skills in renewable energy.

Culture, heritage and landscape

1. Preservation of culture and environmental heritage of the region. Need to invest and protect the landscape. The wooded landscape character of the region must be preserved.

Health

1. Challenges of an ageing population- NHS provisions must be increased.
2. Health service in Aberdeen needs to be improved, the overall healthcare in the region must be revised.

Planning

1. The city and Shire should be managed better and they should work together to produce better linked solutions. This is especially an issue when two areas are close together and have similar needs, such as Cove and Portlethen.
2. Availability of the current structure plan should be improved to help interested members of the public understand issues.

3. Migrant population, influx? The effects of the increase in population must be assessed and addressed.

Housing

1. Quality of housing needs to improve.
2. Some residential areas are becoming over-developed.
3. Affordable housing is a pressing issue. Developer contribution?
4. Expand the boundary of the city to help spread housing demands over a wider area.
5. Need to address the housing needs of the older population. Would it be possible to convert part of Union Street for elderly people. This would keep these people in the city centre and allow them to feel like part of the community. The city centre should be mixed use, a 'holistic use' of buildings.
6. Retain and provide for family population in Aberdeen City Centre- Need to promote mixed communities in all areas.

Transport

1. Monorail system? A sustainable transport system is vital to future development. Persisting with present transport modes will ring severe costs in years to come, such as impacts on quality of life and health.
2. Rail link to Ballater?
3. There are so many pressing issues for planning, but improving infrastructure will address many of these problems by providing opportunities for people and raise their quality of life.
4. Ban cars in the city centre?
5. Congestion charge?
6. Aberdeen in the transport 'hub' that serves a much wider area. This must be remembered and improvements to transport infrastructure must be made to the wider area not just Aberdeen City Centre.
7. Airport expansion. Airport should be expanded to accommodate freight.
8. Motor railway for the north of Scotland?
9. The Harbour should be used more for transport and heavy goods transit. There is no container terminal in the port.

Community Facilities

1. Youth facilities needed- more sports halls and regional sporting grounds. Sport overall should be a priority. A sports council could be set up. Open space to be provided for sport use.
2. Planners should have more control over development. Presently developers tend to dominate and simply build housing. Instead they should be forced, through the development plans to substantially contribute to community facilities. Developers are making a profit out of increasing the population in the areas that they are developing, so they should improve its facilities. Public worried about developments like 'Easterhouse' being created with no community facilities. Increasing developer contribution would help reduce the chances of this happening.

3. Community facilities should not be dependent on finance from developers. The council should fund them, possibly through an increase in council tax.

Open Space

1. Open space needs to be increased and protected, It should be used to prevent coalescence between residential sites. Argued that the local plan has ignored the work 'coalescence'.
2. Wildlife corridors should be created throughout the city. These should be in places that people can access without a car. The car dominates many outdoor activities and we should be promoting healthy lifestyle and non-car modes of transport.

Economy

1. Are commercial rates in the city centre too high to attract businesses?
2. Need to develop city centre retail. Union Street needs to be updated. The large out of town shopping centres are drawing consumers out of the heart of the city and this must be discouraged.
3. Cottage industries need preserved.
4. Tourist attractions need to be supported.
5. Protect and enhance heritage sites.
6. Where is the next industrial site going to be situated?
7. Industrial sites should be located near residential areas to reduce travel.
8. Existing industrial sites should be upgraded and reused rather than building new ones.

Regeneration

1. Argument for the regeneration of Cove as well as Portlethen. One member of the audience was concerned that there is merely a focus on the regeneration of Portlethen, when Cove is also in need for new facilities.

3. Options

- Some members of the audience were unhappy with option 3, 'The Transport Corridor'. They argued that the option was just the same as the WPR and not really a new option. David highlighted that the WPR is not being viewed as a transport corridor and that the option being discussed are purely theoretical and about a new corridor.
- An audience member argued that option 4 'Transport Development Growth Poles' was simply impossible and that there was no infrastructure available to support development in these areas.
- Argued that focusing development around the WPR will take development out of the city and lead to degradation of the City Centre.
- Another member countered this argument by stating that abandoning development on out of town sites was wrong, as it would be detrimental to surrounding towns.

4. Other options?

1. Consider new development in Aberdeen City Growth Poles (suggested last night too)- however questioned whether the sites would coalesce.
2. Need to concentrate on improving infrastructure to encourage use of existing facilities, not create new ones.

5. AOCB

Appendix 1 - List of Issues Captured

Waste Management- sustainable methods. More localised management facilities to tackle waste. Presently bottles go to Alloa. Is incineration still an option? Localised incinerators to power council buildings/ schools etc. District heating systems. But possibly too dirty for residents who live near them.	How will we generate energy in the future? Climate change. Renewable energy needed. As energy capital of Europe, we must focus on renewable sources. Need to retain skills of energy sector, esp those with renewable skills- need to look beyond oil.
Preserving culture and environmental heritage of the region- effect on tourism. Wooded landscape character needs preserved.	Transport. Aberdeen the 'hub' of the area and therefore, it should not just focus on the centre, but the wider areas.
Challenges of ageing population. NHS. provisions	Migrant population, influx?
Housing quality, over-development in residential areas.	Retain family population in city centre. Need mixed age communities for sustainability.
Affordable housing. Developer provision?	Monorail system. Not putting in a sustainable transport system will bring severe costs. E.g. impact on peoples lives and health.
Health service in region needs improved in the centre of Aberdeen. Revisit overall healthcare of the area.	Rail link to Ballater?
Sport overall should be paramount. Need sports provision in local areas. Sports council? Open space for sports need to be increased. Youth facilities- sports hall, regional sporting facility	Priority of these issues is a problem. Adequate infrastructure will bring solutions for many of planning issues. It will provide opportunity for people and raise quality of life.
Open Space increased- non-coalescence between residential sites. Local plan seems to ignore the word 'coalescence'.	Wildlife corridors through the city. Places people can use without access to a car. Activities are dominated by the car. We need to promote a healthy lifestyle. Ban cars in the city centre? congestion charge?
Are commercial rates in the city centre	Develop city centre retail. Union Street

too high?	needs to be improved. Large out of town shopping centres draw consumers out of the heart of the city and this should be discouraged. Viability of city centre may be affected by banning cars in the city centre.
Current structure plan should be provided to interested members of the public, in order to help them understand issues.	<p>Planners should have more control over development. Developers tend to dominate, and simply build housing. Developers should be forced, through the plan, to contribute substantially to community facilities. The developers are taking land and making a profit, they are increasing the population of the areas they are developing, so they should contribute to that area's facilities. Developments like 'Easterhouse' are a danger, with no facilities, increasing developers contribution will help alleviate this occurrence.</p> <p>Developers are needed to provide housing in the city.</p> <p>Community facilities should not be dependent on finance from developers- this money should be available anyway through Council finances- increased council tax could provide these facilities.</p>
Expand the boundary of the city. Would help spread housing demands over the wider area.	Management of the City and the Shire. They should work together and be better linked instead of producing separate solutions. This is especially an issue when two areas are close together and have similar needs, such as Portlethen and Cove.
Where is the next industrial estate going?	Cottage industries preservation. Rural support? Tourist attraction support.
Address housing needs for the elderly population. Convert part of Union Street for elderly accommodation, to keep the elderly central and allow them to be part of the community. Mixed use in the city centre. Holistic use of buildings.	Protect and enhance heritage sites.
Transport- trade between Inverness and Aberdeen depends on the road that links them. By improving and upgrading it tourists will be attracted.	Airport expansion. Airport should be expanded to accommodate freight. Location of industrial development should be near residential areas to

Motor railway for North of Scotland. Harbour to be used more for transport and heavy goods. No container terminal in the port.	reduce travel between areas. Existing industrial sites should be upgraded and reused rather than building new ones.
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