

Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan

Public Consultation Event - Laurencekirk

7pm-9pm on 21 August 2008 at Mearns Academy, Laurencekirk

Officers Present:

David Jennings	Strategic Development Plan Manager – Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority
Laura Robertson	Senior Planner – Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority
Alanna Lyle	Planner – Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority

1. Welcome and Outline of the Evening

Mr Jennings welcomed 14 members of the public to the 4th of 14 public consultation meetings in relation to the Aberdeen City and Shire Draft Structure Plan. He explained that the meeting was designed to gain the views of the public and that opinions expressed would be noted and used as a base of information when progressing the plan to Finalised Stage. However, it was also emphasised that this was not a substitute for written responses and attendees were encouraged to send these in by 12 September.

Mr Jennings introduced the officers present at the meeting and the roles they would be undertaking in addition to outlining the timetable for the evening and general housekeeping issues.

Mr Jennings informed the members of the public that a note of the meeting would be available from the Aberdeen City and Shire SDPA website at www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk in addition to sending out copies and future updates to those who register their name and address/e-mail details (Ms Robertson greeted members of the public and took a register of attendees).

2. Background information on preparing the draft plan

Ms Robertson provided information on structure plans and their strategic role in the development plan system. She stated that a structure plan provides a long term, strategic vision for the development of land in an area (in this case until 2030 for the North East of Scotland). She explained that the plan is not just important as a planning document, but also because of the way that proposals within the plan affect where people live and do business, how they move about and how the environment should be protected.

Ms Robertson explained that a new planning Act, which will introduce changes to the current planning system, is currently in the process of being implemented. She outlined a number of reasons for the new legislation which include speeding up the development plan process; increasing levels of public consultation and ensuring that plans remain up to date to reflect changing circumstances in the area that they serve.

Under the new Planning etc. (Scotland) Act, 2006, structure plans will be

replaced with strategic development plans. This new style plan will set a vision and spatial strategy for the City Region that it serves. In accordance with the Scottish Governments aspiration for “strategic focused, accessible, action-orientated and outcome driven” plans it is thought that strategic development plans will contain fewer detailed policies than is typically found in the current style of structure plan. Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils will be 1 of 4 City Regions which create these new style plans. This draft structure plan reflects the Scottish Governments aspirations for strategic development plans whilst adhering to the current, but soon to be replaced, planning legislation.

Ms Robertson continued to explain that the current adopted structure plan (NEST) which serves the North East of Scotland is outdated, only details how land is to be used until December 2010, no longer meets the aspirations of either council and has constrained the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils Local Plans.

Ms Robertson went on to provide a brief description with regards to previous consultation events which informed the current draft plan. The Councils released a formal notification of intent to begin preparing a new structure plan in February 2007. Prior to this date early internal consultation had taken place involving planning, education, transportation and economic development colleagues. Since February 2007, an agreed consultation strategy for developing the plan has been followed involving four main groups; the general public, community groups; people and organisations in the private sector and people and organisations in the public sector e.g. SNH, NESTRANS and ACSEF.

Ms Robertson explained that a dedicated strategic development plan team was established in March 2008 to progress the current draft structure plan to adoption and work on the new style strategic development plans following the implementation of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006.

In April 2008 the provisional draft structure plan was launched for discussion within the Councils at Committee meetings. After consideration of the comments received from each Council, an agreed draft structure plan was published for consultation in June 2008. As part of the implementation of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 the Strategic Development Planning Authority was established by the Scottish Government in June 2008 coinciding with the commencement of the draft structure plan formal consultation process. In addition to the draft plan there are a number of associated documents which are also out for consultation:

- Background Paper
- Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment
- Strategic Environmental Assessment

Ms Robertson explained that a new website has been created for the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority which holds all aforementioned documents for viewing/downloading and where online responses can be submitted. In addition to online responses, comments can be submitted to the Strategic Development Plan Team by fax, e-mail and letter until

the consultation period ends at 5pm on Friday 12th September 2008.

In addition to the draft plan consultation period, Ms Robertson detailed that there is currently an ongoing 6 week consultation on the Strategic Development Plan area. A draft boundary and justification were agreed as a basis for consultation by the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Committee at their meeting of 23 May 2008. She added that we are now seeking comments on this draft prior to a boundary submission to Scottish Ministers by 25th September 2008. The SDPA will meet on 18th September to consider the responses received to the consultation exercise and submit a proposal before the deadline.

Responses to the proposed boundary (which embraces all of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire with the exception of the Aberdeenshire part of the Cairngorms National Park) can be received online, by fax, e-mail or letter by 5pm Friday 29th August 2008.

3. The Draft Plan

Mr Jennings outlined the aspirations of the Scottish Government for new style strategic development plans to be strategic, focused, accessible, action-orientated and outcome driven. He added that the draft plan had been created to encompass such aspirations whilst adhering to the current, but soon to be replaced, planning legislation.

Mr Jennings explained the development plan hierarchy and the relationship between structure and local plans (emphasising that local plans contain a more specific level of detail). He added that Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils will be reviewing their local plans in the form of local development plans in accordance with the new planning legislation as part of modernising the planning system. Mr Jennings added that the previous structure plan was rigid, precise and prescriptive. The draft plan looks to move away and not prejudice any area of Aberdeen or Aberdeenshire. The plan aspires to be flexible and appropriate for the area that it serves.

In addition, Mr Jennings highlighted that the plan had received a Crystal Mark from the Plain English Campaign which ensures the document is clear, easy to read and jargon free.

Mr Jennings outlined the North East of Scotland local context with regards to housing demand in terms of the requirement for different house types as well as numbers, a history of population decline which is now rising however the demographics are showing an ageing population. There is a requirement to improve the quality of life and encourage regeneration in some areas. There is also a need to acknowledge that the economy requires growth and diversification whilst recognising the challenges faced by the oil and gas industry. The plan also aims to improve connections within the North East in terms of road/rail and communications whilst also recognising the need to take sustainable development and climate change into the equation.

Mr Jennings stated that the draft plans vision looks to make the area an excellent place to live, visit and do business. He acknowledged that there are many good things in the North East to build on but recognised that there are

courageous decisions which need to be made where there are issues which need resolved.

Mr Jennings explained the 6 main objectives of the draft structure plan:

- Economic Growth – the plan encourages growth and diversification in dominant industries such as oil and gas but also in sectors such as agriculture, forestry and fishing.
- Sustainable Development & Climate Change – we are following the broad targets set by the Scottish Government in terms of reducing emissions, mitigation measures and adaptation in addition to setting targets at a local level with the goal for communities to be sustainable in their age structure/level of facilities and services etc.
- Population Growth – the plan envisages balanced population growth over the entire North East region and in doing so create a vibrant place for people to live. Mr Jennings confirmed that the areas population has begun to rise again although Aberdeenshire has seen a population increase whereas Aberdeen City has seen a population decrease. Mr Jennings confirmed that the current population of the area is 440,000 and the plan intends for a rise to 480,000 although we aim for 500,000 in the longer term. Mr Jennings highlighted that although we aspire for population growth we also aim to rebalance the proportion of the population which is of working age (16-65).
- Quality of the Environment – the plan aims to ensure that new development maintains and improves the region's important built, natural and cultural assets and in doing so make the environment a selling point for the North East.
- Sustainable Mixed Communities – the plan aims to ensure that new development meets the needs of the community at the present time and in the future by ensuring that communities are accessible to all in terms of housing and services for example. Mr Jennings affirmed that we wish to create attractive places with associated facilities and infrastructure and move away from the historical trend of housing estates.
- Accessibility – the plan aims to reduce the need to travel by improving connectivity and choice of transportation in the North East.

Mr Jennings moved on to explain the draft structure plans spatial strategy which has 3 main strands:

- Local Growth & Diversification – ensuring that modest growth is developed in the right places, quantities and is suitable for all whilst providing opportunities for economic growth and diversification. It is envisaged that there will be an emphasis on growth, which respects the areas landscape character and local identity, near or adjacent to existing settlements.
- Regeneration Priority Areas – the plan recognises that some areas in the North East aren't living up to their potential however as a key strand of the spatial strategy the draft plan strives to bring these areas back to meeting their full potential by addressing inequalities, recognising the potential for tourism, encouraging concerted action by the public, private and voluntary sector in dealing with issues such as dereliction, improving economic performance and infrastructure improvements.

- Strategic Growth Areas – the spatial strategy outlines that the majority of development in the North East is aimed take place in 3 Strategic Growth Areas. This involves brownfield development in Aberdeen City, road and rail connectivity improvements in the Laurencekirk and Huntly corridors and Scottish Enterprises Energetica initiative in the corridor to Peterhead. It is envisaged that the 3 areas will require major infrastructure improvements.

Mr Jennings stated that the plan is focussed on delivery, providing quality not quantity with a higher level of standard in terms of environmental design, environmental quality, design and facilities. He advised that work is soon to commence on action programming which details who, what, why and where in terms of delivery and action required.

Focussing on the Laurencekirk area, Mr Jennings explained that 1000 homes have been suggested for the South of Drumlithie – Marykirk Strategic Growth Area until 2030 in three time periods. 500 homes are planned over the 10 year period between 2007-2016; 400 between 2017-2023 and 100 between 2024-2030. Outwith this development area further development will fall within the Local Growth and Diversification Area which determines that 12,400 homes will be built to 2030 in the Local Growth (Rural Housing Market Area). Local Development Plans will detail the specific details with regards to allocating land for housing.

Mr Jennings concluded by confirming that the constituent councils will work together to progress the plan whilst involving stakeholders, internal members of the Council, Councillors and the communities who will be affected by the changes proposed.

4. Question & Answer Session 1

1. A member of the audience queried whether the plan was contradicting itself where it aspires for sustainable mixed communities but if corridors are extended out towards Laurencekirk the main base of work will remain as Aberdeen therefore this will increase the pressure on the road network and degradation by encouraging commuter towns to exist.

Mr Jennings responded by confirming that the main aim is to facilitate growth and reinstating the train station at Laurencekirk is one part of this process. He stated that the plan does not wish to encourage commuting but if it does take place we wish it to do so in a sustainable manner.

2. A member of the audience queried whether it was assumed that residents living in proposed new housing developments would all commute by rail.

Mr Jennings confirmed that the plan did not assume this however sustainable mixed communities will be encouraged to have facilities such as employment which will reduce the need for commuting and promote sustainability.

3. A member of the audience asked whether the current and future pressure on the A90 had been acknowledged and whether a three lane dual carriageway was anticipated as additional housing will increase pressure on the A90 and on the already dangerous junctions.

Mr Jennings confirmed that he was aware of strategic infrastructure issues, however addressing infrastructure is key in delivering the draft structure plan and there will be a significant increase in the level of developer contributions to fund improvements. He added that the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route will relax pressure into Aberdeen and around Aberdeen.

4. A member of the audience queried how the plan would be delivered funding wise as the Strategic Growth Area from Laurencekirk to Huntly identifies two new schools and primary schools as a requirement. He asked whether the schools which currently require to be upgraded will be given priority over the new schools which are proposed.

Mr Jennings confirmed that funding will not be solely funded by the Councils and added that it was a case of tying infrastructure issues together and receiving developer contributions to assist in funding required infrastructure and facilities. He added that further details would be expected over the next few months and assured the audience that the Director of Education and other services have been heavily involved in discussing how new developments, schools and infrastructure etc will be delivered together.

Mr Jennings continued to state that five schools won't be built at one time, therefore housing developments need to be planned in order to decide where schools might be required in the future (size, pupil numbers etc).

5. A member of the audience queried whether other areas in Scotland have developed a similar plan.

Mr Jennings confirmed that all local authorities have structure plans, however only four City Regions exist in Scotland and the draft structure plan before them was taking the first step towards the new style strategic development plans. He added that the draft plan was written in the spirit of the new strategic development plans whilst adhering to the current legislation.

6. A member of the audience asked how growth will be achieved? Would migration play a role?

Mr Jennings responded by stating that the Scottish Government aspires for population growth and we must consider why people are encouraged to relocate to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. He added that the quality of life in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire is very high and the plan advertises and promotes this.

7. A member of the public queried how many of the plans in NEST (the current structure plan) had been implemented.

Mr Jennings confirmed that most if not all had been implemented. He added

that most of the housing allocations had come forward and in some areas this had happened faster than anticipated. He emphasised that in fact the plan area had started to run out of allocated housing land therefore it is important for the draft plan to release more land in order to allow the local development plans to allocate new sites.

8. A member of the audience stated that it all sounds good but that there was not enough emphasis on the importance of having infrastructure in place first before housing. He added that the plan does not seem to promote infrastructure first as a priority. He queried how more housing can be built if the infrastructure is not ready and no funds are available?

Mr Jennings assured the public that we are very aware of this critical issue and that new housing and capacity available in schools would be examined. He confirmed that it was recognised that Aberdeenshire Council has a role to play and added that the councils capital spend must be in line with private developer contributions in order to deliver new schools and infrastructure.

Mr Jennings added that if the audience thought this issue needs to be highlighted further in the plan then we would revisit this. He restated that the prioritisation of infrastructure is a key part of the plan and that both councils are aware of the sums of funding required.

9. It was stated that public transport isn't available in any of the areas around Laurencekirk.

Mr Jennings responded in saying that the requirement for ensuring access to public transport must be recognised as part of delivering Sustainable Mixed Communities.

10. It was suggested that most of the plan resists putting targets down however on page 17 there is a target for at least 30 dwellings per hectare in the SGAs. Does this mean there will only be flats in these areas? It was suggested that this will be a difficult target to achieve.

Mr Jennings responded saying that there has been a significant re-evaluation in terms of roads standards. He added that open space is included in this figure. He added that the draft plan is encouraging putting more thought into types of housing/design etc. He stated that in 2006/2007 85% of new housing was detached 4/5 bedroom houses which meant no variety was built (terraced, semi-detached etc). He added that there needs to be a variety of design in new housing developments to achieve sustainable mixed communities, a balanced demographic profile and assistance in providing more affordable homes.

11. It was suggested that by putting this target figure in the structure plan it would restrain local plans in having to attain this target.

Mr Jennings responded saying that there is latitude to have less than 30 dwellings per hectare, however we do wish to achieve this figure. Additionally he added that this figure is only applicable within the Strategic Growth Areas not

the Local Growth and Diversification Areas. He added that there have been mistakes made in the past to push for certain levels of development, however we acknowledge that there needs to be a mixture of housing design at a community level not just widely separated sites.

12. It was suggested that the roads standards do not help in achieving this target. The plan aims for a higher density of development but also achieving a high quality of environment?

Mr Jennings restated that low density does not guarantee a high quality of environment.

13. A member of the public queried whether the AWPR development would result in new towns being planned or whether small areas would be expanded.

Mr Jennings confirmed that we published similar questions within the Consultation Questions which were sent out with the draft Structure Plan to capture public thoughts on this issue. We would like to know whether the public believe there is a role for new settlements to help deliver the plan. He confirmed that no view has been taken on whether this is the correct approach however he added that this decision is not necessarily tied to the development of the AWPR.

14. A member of the audience queried the scale of the SGAs in terms of what settlements are in the corridor and what are out as the map did not specify the exact area.

Mr Jennings stated that the key diagram is not a map, however he approximated that 2 kilometres either side of the main road/railway would be included. The corridors are narrow to enable focus on public transport and accessibility. He added that the local development plans will allocate specific details.

15. A member of the public asked whether it had been taken into account that development will wipe out hundreds of acres of high quality agricultural land when extending the corridor south from Stonehaven.

Mr Jennings confirmed that this was taken into consideration as part of the process of developing the plan and that environmental objectives required to be reconciled when extending growth southwards.

16. It was suggested that the rate of growth suggested for area was not necessarily an increase.

Mr Jennings confirmed that this plan more than any plan before promotes growth close to Aberdeen and a significant increase of growth in Aberdeen itself.

17. A fear was expressed that a suburban corridor of floodlights on the A90 would occur and would destroy the environment.

Mr Jennings noted this concern but assured the public that a suburban corridor

is not the intention of this plan.

18. A member of the public questioned how many acres of farmland would be 'swallowed up' by development proposed in the draft structure plan. 100-150 acres? This would convert a rural landscape to an urban landscape.

Mr Jennings responded in saying that land would not necessarily be 'swallowed up' and it depends where land is allocated by the local development plans. Land allocations may be concentrated in one area or spread completely across a large area. The amount of land to be developed on is modest but Mr Jennings appreciated that it would be significant for the area chosen for development.

19. A fear was expressed that a Westhill or Portlethen 2 would be created.

Mr Jennings confirmed that the plan does not intend to achieve 'a Westhill' in terms of scale or quantity. The plan emphasises high quality in terms of design and environment.

5. Refreshments

At this point Mr Jennings suggested a short interval to break and encouraged members of the public to view the available literature and information on the display banners.

6. Workshop

See separate note.

7. Conclusion

Mr Jennings finished the meeting by thanking all members of the public for their attendance and restated that the closing date for responses to the draft plan is 12th September. He encouraged all attendees to add their name and address/e-mail to the register if they wished to be notified of the plans progression to adoption and to receive a copy of the minute of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 9:15pm.

Aberdeen City and Shire Draft Structure Plan

Consultation Questions

VISION & AIMS (5 minutes)

1. What do you think of the draft plan's vision on p.5?

It was felt to be an aspirational vision but questions the ability to deliver.
Infrastructure is paramount prior to development, must be considered at the beginning.
Generally seems quite good
Clarity of courage required – specifics or general.
Not all decisions will be popular

2. The six aims of the plan are also on p.5. Are these the right aims and do you agree that the first two should be identified as the main aims?

6 aims should be on an equal footing.
1 person felt that point 5 was by far the most important
Happy that the big picture is tackled first
Local issues follow from this
First two priorities seem appropriate.

SPATIAL STRATEGY (15 minutes)

3. Most development is proposed in the Strategic Growth Areas as outlined on p.7. Do you feel the following are appropriate?
 - a. Location (City and yellow corridors on the key diagram)

Yes might as well stick to the routes
Felt the development was proposed for the right places
Appropriate

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Consultation Questions

Infrastructure must keep up with the strategy.
Proportion of development in the city could be questioned
Mix of development required – cheaper housing required.

b. Scale of housing (table on p.22) and business land (table on p.10)

Definitely good for the housing to be in the city and good to make better use of Brownfield sites.
Felt it was ok to release agricultural land for housing of this scale.
Happy with general strategy
Business land important – as important as housing
Sustain Local Businesses
Not enough land being made available
Demographic must be maintained within new development.

c. Phasing for housing (table on p.22, column 2007-2016 etc)

The phasing is a nice way to do it but really the phasing will be driven by forces.

d. Approach to Strategic Growth Areas (p.7)

Need to allow employment outwith the city area too.
Employment land outwith the city needs to be encouraged.
Need for upgrading of A90 junctions
There is a need for an integrated system for the new infrastructure and railway so that they will work.
The key diagram puts lots of emphasis on housing, employment not shown. Need to split up numbers more accurately like with the housing numbers.

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Consultation Questions

4. The majority of Aberdeenshire is designated for Local Growth and Diversification as outlined on p.8. Do you feel the following are appropriate?

- a. Scale of housing proposed (table on p.22)

Should be dispersed over whole area.
The numbers will be easily absorbed.

- b. Phasing for housing (table on page 22, column 2007-2016 etc.)

No comments

- c. Approach to Local Growth Areas (p.8)

Need happy balance in sustaining communities and connectivity.
Agree with mix of housing.

5. Parts of Aberdeen City and some of Aberdeenshire's coastal communities have been designated as Regeneration Priority Areas as outlined on p.8. Do you feel the following are appropriate?

- a. Locations (hatched areas on key diagram)

The regeneration area should include Edzell Woods.
It is correct to include these areas as regeneration but it is essential to retain the village characters.

- b. Approach to Regeneration Priority Areas (p.8)

Need to focus on technology infrastructure.
Clarity Required – what does this mean?
Housing – employment which has priority

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Consultation Questions

OBJECTIVES (15 minutes)

6. Six objectives have been identified and associated issues outlined on p.9-18 - Please consider the objectives we have highlighted below, are these clear and will they help meet the vision?

- Economic growth
- Sustainable development and climate change
- Population growth
- Sustainable mixed communities
- Accessibility
- Quality of the environment

Emphasis on better design, better proportions.

Need to save energy – roof insulation, cavity wall insulation a lot of this is in accordance with building regulations.

More support for solar power.

Problem is the older houses no sort of grants

Need to promote tourism to encourage people to visit

Need for cycle routes and coastal walks – more emphasis and advertisement of their existence.

Yes they help meet the vision

Priorities –

1. Sustainable mixed communities
2. Sustainable development
3. Economic Need
- 4...

Considering all six, are there any others you can think of?

More emphasis on tourism /equestrian/cycling etc.

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Consultation Questions

7. A number of targets are shown for each objective. Using the same objectives as we highlighted for you in Q.6, consider whether any need to be changed or if there are any additional ones that we should set?

Good to have targets to monitor and see what has been achieved.

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO PRACTICE & PRESENTATION (5 minutes)

8. A wide range of proposals are outlined on p.20 - these are seen as critical in helping the area achieve its potential.
- a) Do you feel any others should be added – why?

Infrastructure is a big issue needs to be an emphasis on delivery – capacity at Waste Water Treatment Works etc the improvement of the infrastructure overall needs to be a proposal.
Too centered on Aberdeen City
Schools Development
Tourism – Leisure – Marine – Leisure Developments
Manufacturing Industry – food processing
Agriculture
Fishing

- b) Do you feel any should be removed – why?

No comments

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Consultation Questions

9. We have tried to produce a draft structure plan which is both clear and easy to read. Is the plan...

...very clear and easy to read

...quite clear and easy to read

...not very clear and difficult to read

...very difficult to read and understand