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Finalised Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan published today

The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority today submitted a finalised structure plan to Scottish Ministers.

The submission – which follows approval of the plan last week by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils – marks the start of an eight-week period when representations and objections can be made to the plan.

Submissions must be made by the 24 April deadline and should be sent directly to the Scottish Government.

SDPA chairman Councillor Scott Cassie said: “Today’s publication marks an important milestone in the preparation of a new structure plan for the North East.

“We have gone to great lengths to carry out considerable consultation and community engagement to develop the plan and make sure it is right for this region. I truly believe in its aspirations to grow the City and Shire into a world-class place for its residents, visitors and businesses.”

Chairman of Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee Peter Argyle said: "I am very pleased that the new structure plan has been submitted to Ministers and published exactly on schedule.

"Our ambition and vision for the North East are clearly described in the 27 pages of the Structure Plan document, which is designed to be flexible and able to respond to changing circumstances whilst at the same time setting a clear strategy for the next twenty years.

"It also reflects our confidence in the North East of Scotland and our determination to focus on delivering a sustainable economic future for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City."

The new structure plan marks a radical departure from previous documents by focusing on development needs over the next 20 years. It lays out objectives, targets, delivery mechanisms and monitoring arrangements to ensure the policies and proposals are achieved.

And it stresses throughout that development must be driven by the principles of sustainability to make sure that growth enhances the environment and is a credit to the region. Everyone involved in the development process needs to show a commitment to quality – aiming for excellence.

The plan aims to:

- deliver a robust framework for investment decisions to deliver economic growth and diversification;
- address the urgent challenges of sustainable development and climate change;
- ensure the region has enough people, homes and jobs to support the level of services needed to enhance quality of life;
- protect and enhance the area's natural and built environment;
- create sustainable mixed communities in growth corridors, regeneration areas and in existing shire settlements, employing the highest standards of design and construction; and
- make the most efficient use of the transport network to ensure travel is minimised, and make walking, cycling and public transport attractive choices.

The draft plan states: "Aberdeen City and Shire is recognised as an attractive place to live and work, with a high-quality environment, above-average incomes and low unemployment.

"However, there are significant differences in wealth and opportunity between some of the region's communities, and future events – for example, changes in North Sea oil and

gas production, the effects of climate change, and the reduction in worldwide resources – will threaten everyone’s wellbeing if we do not take action.

“By 2030, Aberdeen City and Shire will need to have adapted to a very different world. We need to face up to the challenges ahead to be able to maintain and improve the attractiveness of the region as a place to live and do business.”

Spatial strategy

The document emphasises that all parts of the City and Shire will be involved in delivering the plan’s vision but says different areas will play different roles.

The strategy has been developed to promote environmentally sustainable development in the locations which best cater for business needs – and where there is clear potential for public transport growth, and opportunities for significant public and private sector investment in schools, community facilities, roads and railways.

Three Strategic Growth Areas have been pinpointed as the prime focus for 75-80% of development by 2030:

- **Aberdeen City** – earmarked for 50% of all new development over the plan period, with preference given to brownfield sites but where more than half will need to be accommodated on greenfield sites;
- **Huntly to Laurencekirk** – in line for significant development along the 66-mile road/rail corridor, where bus and road improvements and the Crossrail proposals will better serve the needs of commuters, shoppers, students and visitors.
- **Aberdeen to Peterhead** – pinpointed as an area with important strategic assets and a prime area for economic growth and diversification, with infrastructure projects vital to delivering growth.

Further growth is proposed in Regeneration Priority Areas to ensure they realise their potential, with economic renewal targeted on: the coastal communities between Peterhead and Fraserburgh and beyond; from the Angus border to Inverbervie; and within Community Regeneration Areas in Aberdeen City.

Regeneration Priority Area priorities include:

- growing the local economy;
- improving employment opportunities and business competitiveness;
- providing better accessibility; and
- enhancing environmental quality.

Beyond the strategic growth and the regeneration priority areas, the structure plan envisages modest growth in existing settlements, with a focus on mixed housing, smaller homes for sale or rent, and high levels of affordable homes – respecting at all times the character of each area.

The finalised structure plan does not pinpoint specific sites for development. Detailed land allocations and localised development policies will be contained in Local Development Plans, which each council will formally begin drafting soon.

Economic growth

The document says that, while oil and gas will continue to be important to the City and Shire economy, traditional industries must continue to be supported and diversity will be essential to guarantee future prosperity.

New business ideas will be sought from the region's universities, research organisations and innovative workforce, and a high-speed fibre-optic or equivalent telecommunications infrastructure will be developed.

The plan states that a strong service sector, and especially retail and tourism, will have a vital role to play in guaranteeing future vitality and viability and retail provision will be promoted.

A marketable supply of at least 60 hectares of employment land will be available at all times in Aberdeen. In the strategic growth areas in Aberdeenshire, 60 hectares will be available at all times – and outside these areas employment land to meet local needs will be identified through the Local Development Plan. A proportion of the land available must be of sufficient quality to attract company headquarters.

Sustainable development and climate change

The structure plan's objective is to lead the way to a reduction in the consumption of resources, cuts in CO2 emissions and adaptations to cope with climate change.

New developments will have to use resources more efficiently and reduce the region's global footprint – with the aim of all new buildings achieving zero net carbon dioxide emissions by 2016 and no new development on land at risk from flooding.

Sustainable energy sources must be tapped more effectively and the environmental performance of new buildings will have to demonstrate a step change from older structures.

New water-efficient technologies will be employed to protect the River Dee – the region's main source of drinking water – from over-exploitation. And measures will have to be stepped up to reduce landfilling of waste.

Population growth and housing allowances

The structure plan maps out mechanisms to boost the North East population by 40,000 by 2030 – because a falling and ageing population deters investment, impacts on service quality and delivery, and depresses the local economy.

The plan states: “A falling population will not help us achieve our vision and aims. We need at least a stable population but to make the vision a reality, we need the population to grow to allow the economy of the area to fulfil its potential.

“Increasing the population by almost 40,000 (a 9% increase) over 24 years will be a significant challenge for the North East and we will only achieve it if we work towards our aims and objectives with our partners.”

Achieving this level of population growth will require an increase in housebuilding from recent 2,200-per-year average levels to 2,500 homes a year by 2014 and at least 3,000-a-year by 2020.

The structure plan calls for quick progress in preparing Local Development Plans in both City and Shire and for the release of land as quickly as possible at the start of the structure plan period, with appropriate levels of consultation.

Housing allowances for Aberdeen City are set at a target of 10,000 units on brownfield sites up to 2030, 5,000 in regeneration areas and 21,000 on greenfield sites.

The Shire allowance up to 2030 totals 36,000, comprising:

- Huntly – Pitcaple 1,000
- Inverurie – Blackburn 6,500
- Portlethen – Stonehaven 5,600
- South of Drumlithie – Laurencekirk 1,000
- Peterhead – Hatton 2,200
- Ellon – Blackdog 3,800
- Local growth in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area (AHMA) ie areas other than those listed above) 3,700
- Local growth in the Rural Housing Market Area (RHMA) ie areas other than those listed above) 12,200

Accessibility

A key objective of the plan is to make sure all new developments contribute towards the need to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

New homes, places of employment and services should be located so that walking, cycling and the use of public transport are easy.

The plan adds: “Improving bus and train services will make sure that people will be encouraged to use more environmentally friendly forms of transport. Improving access to the North East is also essential to developing a strong economy.

“Local Development Plans will identify and protect land from development to make sure that transport proposals identified in the local and regional transport strategies can be developed.”

Environmental quality

The plan emphasises the vital need to secure development which enhances the environment.

The document states that the natural, built and historic environments of the North East are among its key assets – and that causing damage or decline would undermine the high quality of life that the region offers its residents and businesses.

The plan states: “The built, natural and cultural environment is a valuable resource, but one which needs to be protected. The way in which sites are chosen, and high-quality design, will make sure that development does not lead to the decline of the North East’s built, natural and cultural assets.

“Biodiversity, wildlife habitats and landscape can be vulnerable to the impact of new development. As a result, we need to focus on maintaining and improving them, especially where there are plans for development.”

Sustainable mixed communities

Too often, the plan says, development in the City and Shire has failed the tests of sustainability, diversity and community focus.

The document states: “We must not allow this to continue. If we are to achieve our vision, we must set the highest standards for urban and rural design, the mix of land uses, using land more efficiently, and re-using previously developed land.”

Future communities need to offer mixed house types, sizes, tenures and prices – on greenfield, brownfield and regeneration area sites, to begin to close the gap between prosperous and disadvantaged areas. They must also offer a range of services, facilities and shops to be sustainable and reduce the need to travel.

The plan says: “If we want to allow people to have a choice of where they want to live, developments must provide a wide range of options, from starter homes to large detached houses. Providing affordable housing is also critical to the delivery of sustainable mixed communities.”

Putting the plan into action

An action programme will be developed to ensure the aims and visions are achieved, involving close partnership between the public and private sectors.

This will involve mapping out timescales for major developments, masterplanning exercises, guidance for developers to help them deliver the programme, annual monitoring reports, and two-yearly reviews of progress.

The plan recognises that the capacity of roads, schools and sewers must increase to accommodate the proposed new development, and that investment is needed in community facilities.

Key developments

The document points out that completing key developments already in the pipeline will be vital to delivering the structure plan vision, including:

- the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and other associated measures including improvements at the Bridge of Dee;
- dualling between Balmedie and Tipperty and further improvements to the A90 (north);
- improvements to the Haudagain roundabout, a third crossing of the River Don and other associated measures;
- a ring of new park-and-ride services around Aberdeen linking to the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route;
- replacing the Inveramsay rail bridge and further improvements to the A96;
- road and rail improvements, such as Crossrail – including reducing journey times to Edinburgh, Glasgow and beyond;
- putting the Aberdeen airport masterplan into practice;
- better links between Aberdeen and the communities on the north coast of Aberdeenshire;

- initiatives by the universities, colleges and research organisations;
- the 'Energetica' initiative;
- improving the facilities at Peterhead Harbour;
- major proposals to regenerate some of the city region's most disadvantaged areas;
- a new community stadium;
- the city centre masterplan, including proposals to pedestrianise part of Union Street;
- a new prison in Peterhead;
- upgrades to the electricity grid; and
- upgrading of Peterhead power station.

What happens next?

Ministers will consider any objections and determine whether an Examination in Public (EiP) is needed.

That would require a public inquiry-style hearing in front of a planning reporter, who would hear evidence from the Strategic Development Planning Authority and objectors and then report back to Ministers identifying any necessary modifications.

If no EiP is needed, Ministers will consult on any proposed modifications, consider any objections to these, and then approve the plan with or without changes. It is hoped that approval will take place before the end of 2009.

ENDS