

SDPA Bulletin – March 2010

The SDPA Bulletin is designed to keep members up-to-date on issues relating to the work of the SDPA where no decisions are currently required.

Bulletins are produced to accompany each meeting of the SDPA as well as being circulated between meetings where appropriate.

1 Scottish Planning Policy

- 1.1 The Scottish Government published Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) on 4 February 2010 (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/0>). The new publication supersedes 15 Scottish Planning Policies, 4 National Planning Policy Guidelines, one Planning Advice Note and one Circular. Publication follows two rounds of consultation during 2009 and meets a commitment by the Scottish Government to publish a consolidated SPP in 'Delivering Planning Reform' (October 2008).
- 1.2 The SDPA responded to the second of the two consultations and the Scottish Government made positive changes as a consequence of each of the points made.
- 1.3 The SPP covers the purpose and core principles of planning, development plans, development management, community engagement, sustainable economic growth, sustainable development, 18 subject policies and outcomes.
- 1.4 The SPP is a material consideration to be taken into account in development plans and development management decisions, replacing 21 previous documents in this role. As such it will be an important consideration in the preparation of the first strategic development plan for the area over the next few years.

2 National Planning Framework 2

- 2.1 The Scottish Government have recently re-published the National Planning Framework's Action Programme (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Policy/npf/action-plan>). The amendments made include those responding to the comments made by the SDPA at its September 2009 meeting.
- 2.2 Monitoring the actions in the National Planning Framework Action Programme set against the SDPA will be reported to the June meeting of the SDPA, as previously agreed.

3 TAYplan Main Issues Report

- 3.1 The SDPA covering Dundee, Angus, Perth and Kinross and North Fife (TAYplan) has recently approved a Main Issues Report and associated documents (<http://www.tayplan-sdpa.gov.uk/about-us/joint-committee/items-for-ratification-by-the-constituent-councils>). Although this decision needs to be ratified by the constituent councils, it represents an important step towards the preparation of its strategic development plan. Consultation on the Main Issues Report is due to commence on 12 April 2010, with a 12 week period for responses.
- 3.2 As an adjoining area, it is appropriate for the SDPA to respond to this consultation. A draft response will be presented to the next meeting of the SDPA on 18 June 2010, in advance of the close of consultation on 2 July 2010
- 3.3 This is the first Main Issues Report to be published by an SDPA. SESplan are due to publish their Main Issues Report later in the spring, with Glasgow and the Clyde Valley's publication expected towards the end of the year.

4 Local Development Plans

- 4.1 The consultation period for the Aberdeen City's Local Development Plan Main Issues Report ended in December 2009. Just under 1,000 representations were made making around 16,000 individual comments. Responses to these representations are being progressed and will be reported to the City Council's Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee shortly.
- 4.2 An updated Local Development Plan Scheme for the City has been approved and published. This sets out the programme for preparing and reviewing the Local Development Plan and what is likely to be involved at each stage. The scheme includes a participation statement stating when, how and with whom consultation on the plan will take place, and the proposals for public involvement in the plan preparation process. This Scheme differs from the first (published last March) in that it provides an update on the consultation stages carried out so far. The overall programme remains the same, with a Proposed Local Development Plan expected for release in September 2010 and adoption in April 2012.
- 4.3 Aberdeenshire Council has now summarised all 27,000 comments received on the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Main Issues Report, and has assessed all issues that relate to policy matters. These, and a complete set of draft policies, have been presented to Area Committees for their views and will be further discussed by the Infrastructure Services Committee (ISC) on 29 April 2010. A similar process is being followed for settlements with Special Area Committee meetings being held in March and April and an ISC meeting to be held in April.
- 4.4 The scale of the submissions made has resulted in slippage to the programme proposed in the Aberdeenshire Council Development Plan Scheme 2009, and a replacement has been brought forward and agreed by ISC. This proposes publication of the Proposed Plan in early July 2010 and an examination in early 2011, with adoption possible later that year.

5 Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

- 5.1 On 21 December 2009 the Scottish Ministers decision to proceed with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) was announced, following consideration of the findings and recommendations of the public local inquiry.
- 5.2 The public local inquiry was carried out between 9 September and 11 December 2008, with closing submissions lodged in January 2009. The report of the inquiry runs to over 580 pages and is available on the Scottish Government website, along with the Scottish Ministers' decision letter (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Transport/Road/AWPR>).
- 5.3 Affirmative Orders were laid before the Scottish Parliament on 15 January 2010 and MSPs voted to approve them on 3 March 2010 (all six votes were around 108 votes to 2 in favour). The six Affirmative Orders and 12 other Orders will be published at the same time along with a Decision Notice. Publication of the Decision Notice (expected in the next few weeks) marks the start of a six week period for legal challenge to the Court of Session.
- 5.4 The two main elements of work required prior to the commencement of construction of the road are developing the detailed design for the road and the appointment of a suitably qualified contractor. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth confirmed in a parliamentary statement of 13 January 2010 that it was hoped that a contractor could be appointed in 2010/11 and that construction would start in 2011. However, a detailed timetable is not yet available.
- 5.5 These announcements represent a significant step forward for this project which is critical to the future development of the area.

6 Third Don Crossing

- 6.1 In addition to the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route, another key infrastructure project is the Third Don Crossing. This proposal is highlighted in the structure plan as helping to deal with congestion and allow growth in and to the north of Aberdeen.
- 6.2 A detailed planning application was submitted on 29 January 2010 for the construction of a new bridge over the river Don, single carriageway road (2.4 km long) with associated footways and segregated cycleways.
- 6.3 The application is still at an early stage but a decision can be expected later this year unless the application is called in by Scottish Ministers.

7 Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative

- 7.1 In line with one of its key objectives (sustainable mixed communities), the structure plan targets an improvement in the quality and design of new developments, recognising the potential of the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative (SSCI). The plan identifies working with partners through the SSCI as one way of achieving this.

- 7.2 It was reported to the June 2009 meeting of the SDPA that one of the eleven proposals selected as an SSCI 'exemplar project' by the Scottish Government is a submission by the Grandhome Trust for a site at Grandhome and Whitestripes (to the west of Bridge of Don in Aberdeen). The site has been identified as a 'preferred area for development' in Aberdeen City Council's Main Issues Report.
- 7.3 A charrette (an intensive and interactive design process) is being held for the site, led by Turnberry Consultants and DuaneY Plater-Zyberk in collaboration with the Scottish Government. This will take place between 17 and 23 March 2010 and the SDPA has been invited to participate, along with a range of other stakeholders.
- 7.4 The output of the charrette will be a draft masterplan for the site which it is hoped will help push forward the design agenda in the area which includes the Aberdeen Design Campaign and the proposed Design Review Process.
- 7.5 A verbal update will be given at the SDPA meeting of 26 March 2010.

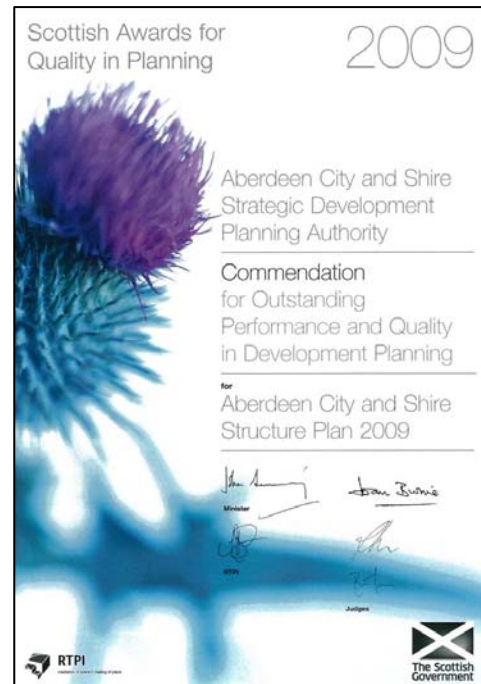
8 Union Terrace Gardens

- 8.1 Considerable media attention in recent weeks has focused on the future of Union Terrace Gardens in Aberdeen in light of the proposals being advanced by Peacock Visual Arts and Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future (ACSEF). The Peacock Visual Arts proposal already has full planning permission, while the ACSEF proposal is much larger in scope and at a much earlier stage in the development process.
- 8.2 According to its consultation literature, the ACSEF proposal would:
- create at least 5 acres of city square and gardens;
 - allow walk on, walk off street level access from all 4 sides;
 - improve accessibility to green space;
 - create at least 2.5 acres of all weather covered space beneath the square and gardens at concourse level;
 - incorporate key aspects of the heritage within the current gardens, including the arches, viaduct and Union Street Bridge at concourse level;
 - cover the road and railway; and
 - provide easy access to rail and bus
- 8.3 The structure plan makes it clear that the city centre is important to the wider city region as well as Aberdeen itself. This is emphasised by the priority it gives to completing a city centre masterplan and putting it into practice.
- 8.4 Significant changes to improve the city centre could potentially be supported by the structure plan but any proposal must be considered in the context of the development of the city centre as a whole. The city centre development framework and subsequent masterplan(s) will provide that broader framework for considering these issues. Any planning application for the ACSEF or any other proposal would have to be assessed against the structure plan as a whole.

9 Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning 2009

- 9.1 The December 2009 Bulletin reported that the SDPA had made a submission for the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning and had been shortlisted in the 'Development Plan' category.
- 9.2 Presentations and interviews took place in October 2009 while the award ceremony itself took place in Edinburgh on 11 March 2010.
- 9.3 The SDPA received a commendation for "outstanding performance and quality in development planning", with the judges commenting that they –

"were impressed with the document which represents the new breed of development plans, prepared in the spirit of the new legislation. The plan is clear, concise and focuses on priorities for the area. It was prepared using a robust project management approach that ensured the key milestones were achieved and overall delivery was well within the timescales envisaged for the new system. Through partnership working the planning authorities made efficient use of their people resources. The aspirational targets set a challenge to all parties to step up to the mark and the 'how to meet targets' sections provide a clear link to delivery via the local development plan".



- 9.4 The SDPA released a press release to mark this achievement and it is proposed to promote this further over the coming weeks both locally and further afield.

10 Communications Strategy (ACSEF / Nestrans / SDPA)

- 10.1 A workshop was held in November 2009 for members of the SDPA as well as the Nestrans and ACSEF Boards. The purpose of the event was to consider how better to communicate the joined-up nature of regional strategies to diverse audiences and move towards a strategic approach to communication.
- 10.2 Work has progressed, with discussions held with Aberdeen City and Shire's Economic Development and Public Relations services. This has resulted in Aberdeenshire Council's Public Relations service preparing a brief for a two-stage approach towards the development and delivery of a communications strategy.
- 10.3 Phase 1 is intended to focus on the development and planning of the campaign, including the production of materials, while Phase 2 will be the delivery of the campaign.

11 Population Projections

11.1 The December 2009 Bulletin reported the publication of the 2008-based population projection for Scotland. On 3 February 2010 the General Register Office for Scotland published projections for council areas. The results of the new set of projections are summarised in Figure 1. This shows the total population of Aberdeen City and Shire increasing from 451,860 in 2008 to 514,983 in 2033, representing an increase of over 63,000 (14%). The population of Scotland is projected to increase by 7% over this period. The majority of growth is projected in Aberdeenshire (amounting to a 54,000 increase), with approximately a 9,000 increase in population within Aberdeen City.

Figure 1: Projected (principal) population of Aberdeen City and Shire (2008 based):2008-2033

	2008	2013	2018	2023	2033
Aberdeen City	210,400	214,409	217,079	219,012	219,630
Aberdeenshire	241,460	252,794	263,895	275,248	295,353
Aberdeen City & Shire	451,860	467,203	480,974	494,260	514,983
Scotland	5,168,500	5,189,094	5,211,403	5,232,601	5,544,410

11.2 The figures for Aberdeenshire are well above the national average, with the projections suggesting a 22% increase, the 5th highest increase in Scotland. Aberdeen City is just below the national average with a projected increase of 4%. It should be noted that these are trend-based projections which do not take into account the strategy of the structure plan for more balanced growth between the two areas.

11.3 Figure 2 below shows an increase in population in each of the three age-bands, although the change in those over the age of retirement is particularly noteworthy.

Figure 2: Projected changes in population by age bands (2008-2033)

	Aberdeen City and Shire		Scotland
	No.	%	%
0 – 15	3,289	4.1%	-1.5%
16 – retirement	32,783	11.4%	2.2%
Over retirement	27,051	32.3%	31.4%
Total	63,123	14.0%	7.0%

11.4 Figure 3 compares the 2008-based projection with previous GROS 2006 projections. It shows that the population under the 2008 based model is considerably higher than previously projected.

Figure 3: Comparison between projected population for Aberdeen City and Shire

	2013	2018	2023	2028	2031
2006-based Projection	458,740	464,103	467,801	468,928	468,253
2008-based Projection	467,203	480,974	494,260	505,732	511,525
Change	+ 8,463	+ 16,871	+ 26,459	+ 36,804	+ 43,272

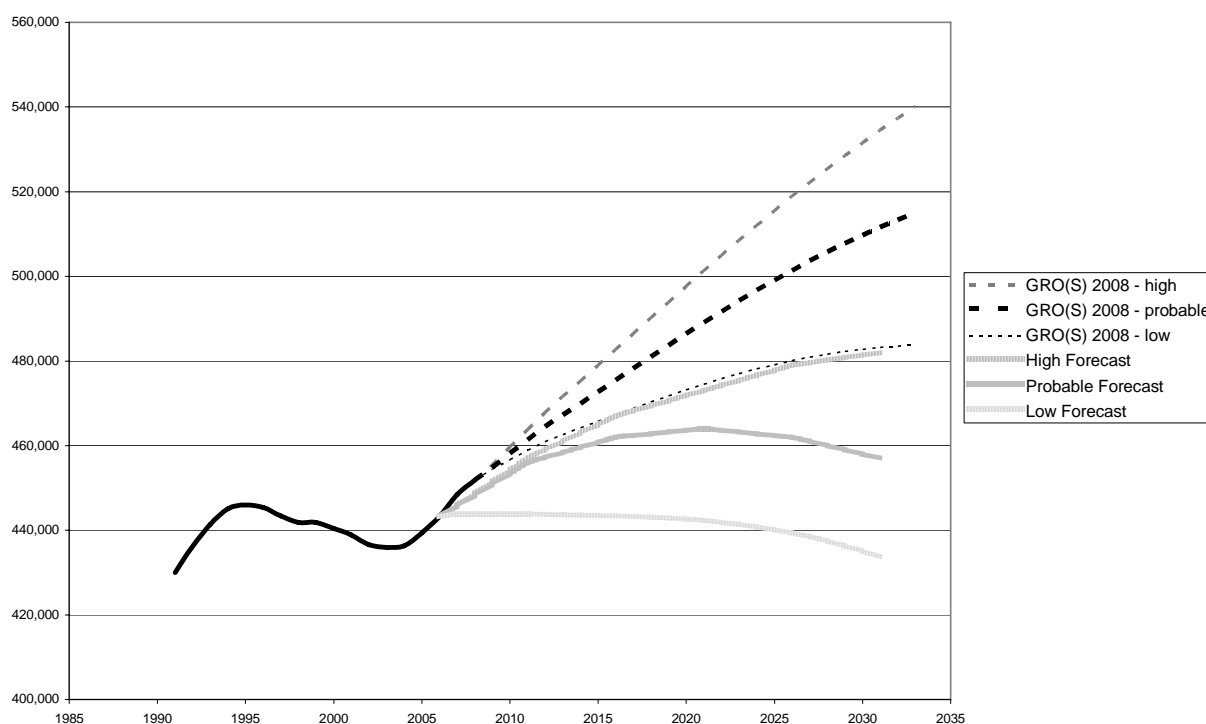
11.5 Changes in the projections for Aberdeen City account for the majority of this, with a move from a projected decline in population under the 2006-based projections to projected growth under the 2008-based projections. A further key factor is that the population in mid-2008 (on which the projections are based) was around 8,700 higher than the 2006-based projections assumed.

11.6 The data presented thus far is from the GROS principal projections; these use assumptions about fertility, mortality and migration which are thought to be most likely to occur over the next 25 years. A number of "variant" projections are also produced for high and low migration projections, using the same fertility and mortality assumptions as the principal projection but assuming higher or lower levels of net in-migration to Scotland.

11.7 Figure 4 shows the difference between the three projections. As can be observed there is a large difference between the growth of population over the period between the three scenarios. Figure 4 also shows the growth forecasts contained in the 2006-based forecasts prepared by the two Councils.

Figure 4: Comparison between GROS population projections and Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Forecasts (2007)

Aberdeen City & Shire	2031	Change (2006 – 2031)
Strategic Forecasts (2006-based) – Low Case	433,693	- 9,447
Strategic Forecasts (2006-based) – Probable	457,000	+ 8,716
Strategic Forecasts (2006-based) – High Case	482,000	+ 33,316
GROS (2008-based) – Low Migration	483,178	+ 40,038
GROS (2008-based) – Principal Projection	511,525	+ 68,385
GROS (2008-based) – High Migration	534,460	+ 91,320



11.8 The GRO(S) population projections are one of a number of inputs which inform strategic planning in the area. They indicate what could happen on the basis of a number of assumptions and are trend-based. They are not policy-based

forecasts of what the government expects to happen. The recently approved structure plan adopted a high-growth strategy and, in line with Scottish Planning Policy, provided a generous supply of land to accommodate that growth. This ensures the medium-term robustness of the plan and will enable any implications of these new projections to feed into the work being taken forward on the first strategic development plan.

- 11.9 The SDPA will work with both councils over the next year to explore the projections in more detail to inform the Main Issues Report for the strategic development plan in 2011. This will be further informed by the GRO(S) household projections (due to be published in May 2010) and the population and household projections for strategic development plan areas in the autumn.

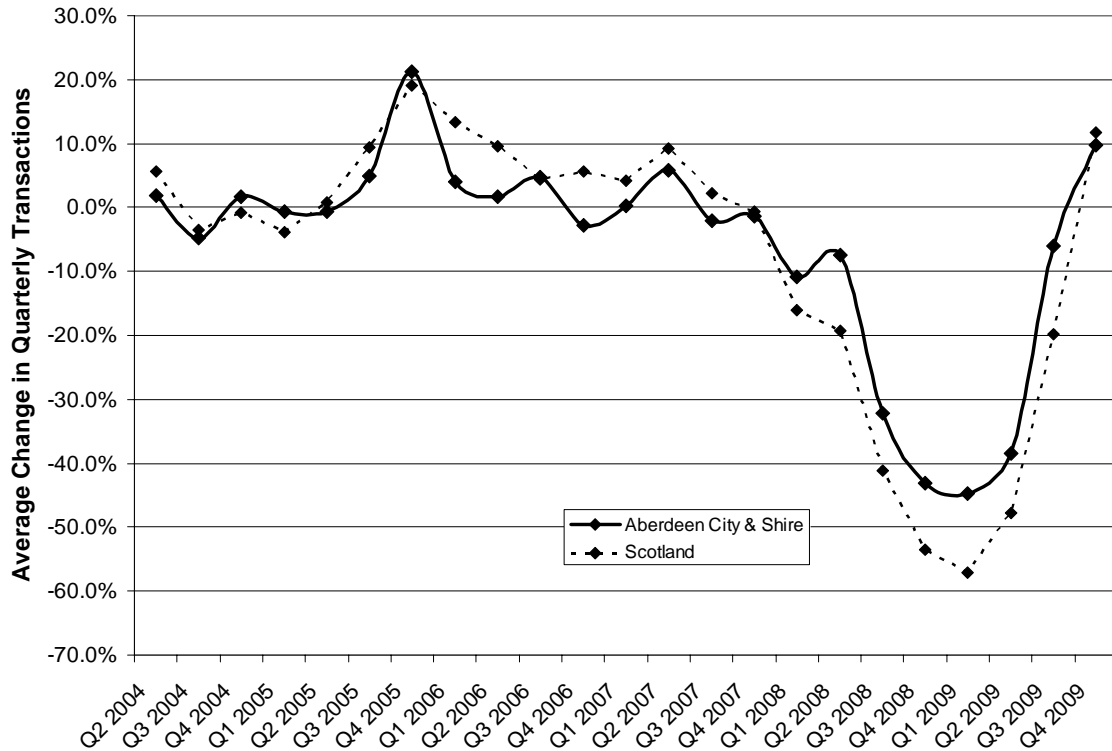
12 Housing Market Activity

- 12.1 The purpose of this section of the bulletin is to provide an update on activity within the Aberdeen City and Shire housing market. This combines intelligence on housing market activity from various sources including data from the Local Authority Housing Bulletin, the Aberdeen Solicitors Property Centre and the National House Building Council.

Local Authority Housing Bulletin

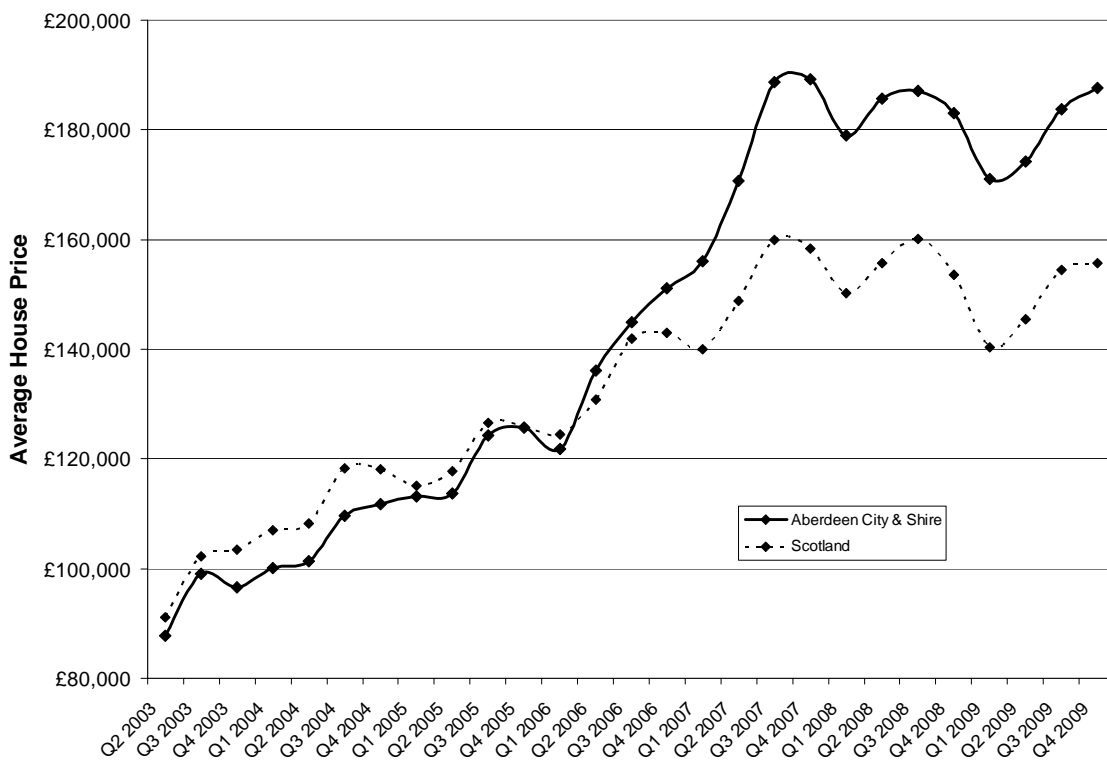
- 12.2 The Local Authority Housing Bulletin collates a range of time-series statistics on the volume of transaction and house prices by council area in Scotland. The bulletin is produced by the Scottish Government Centre for Housing Market Analysis (CHMA), based on Registers Office for Scotland data, with the latest edition covering the period to end December 2009. In Q4 2009 there were 2,391 transactions in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire representing a 10 % increase in year on year sales, but a 38% decrease on Q4 2007 (Figure 5). The trend in 2009 saw a continued quarterly rise in transactions throughout 2009, ending in a slight fourth quarter fall in sales from a high of 2,484 in Q3 2009. These figures suggests that the region is following national trends in terms of transactions with the rest of Scotland experiencing a 12% increase in transactions on Q4 2008 figures, but a 48% decline compared to Q4 2007.

Figure 5: Year on year change in the volume of transactions



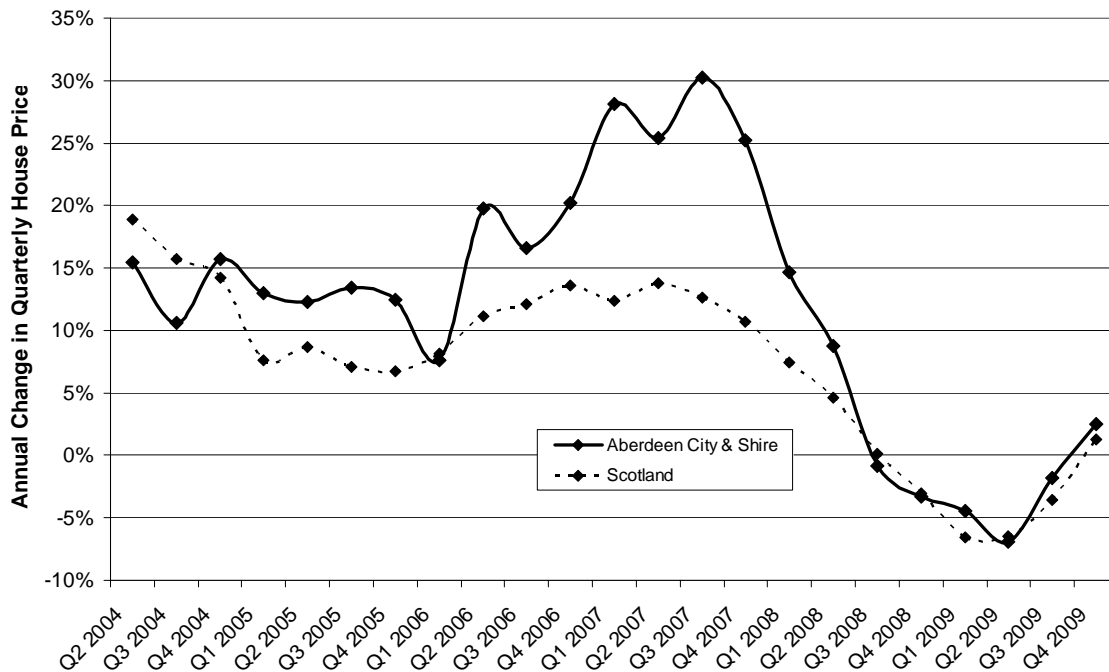
12.3 Figure 6 displays the average quarterly house price for sales in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire compared to national averages. It shows that the average house price in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire combined is £187,575 - well above the national average of £155,618. Furthermore, the data suggests that both the SDP area and nationally there is an upward trend with prices increasing from the Q1 2009 level, throughout the year, including Q4 2009.

Figure 6: Average quarterly house price trend



12.4 Further information contained within the bulletin shows that the continuing negative year on year change in quarterly house prices reported for both Aberdeen City and Shire and Scotland in Q2 2009 has reversed with the SDP area slightly above the national trend (Figure 7).

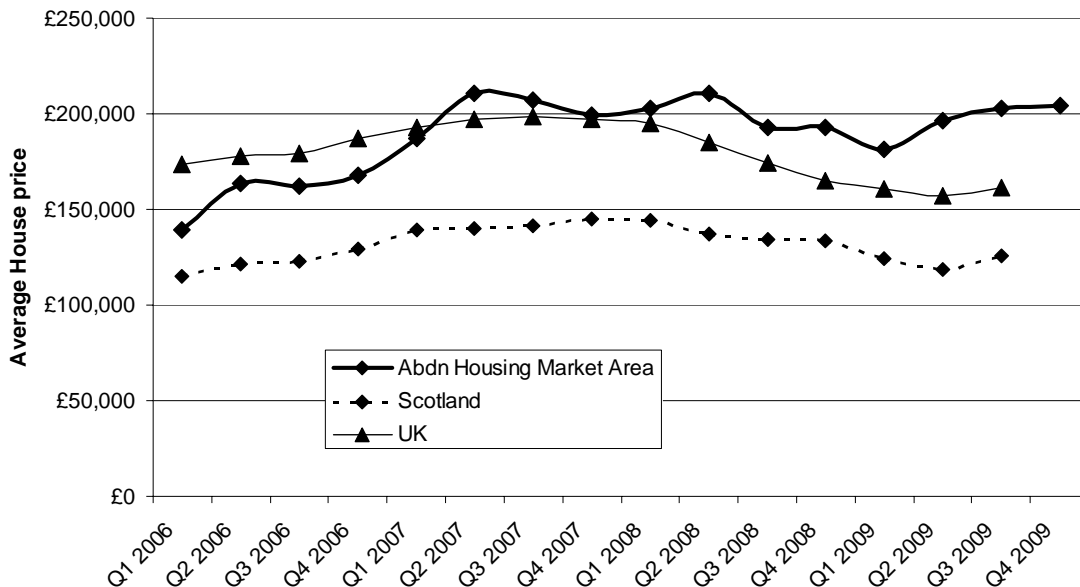
Figure 7: Year on year change in house prices (Jan 2005-Jun 2009)



ASPC Housing Market Bulletin

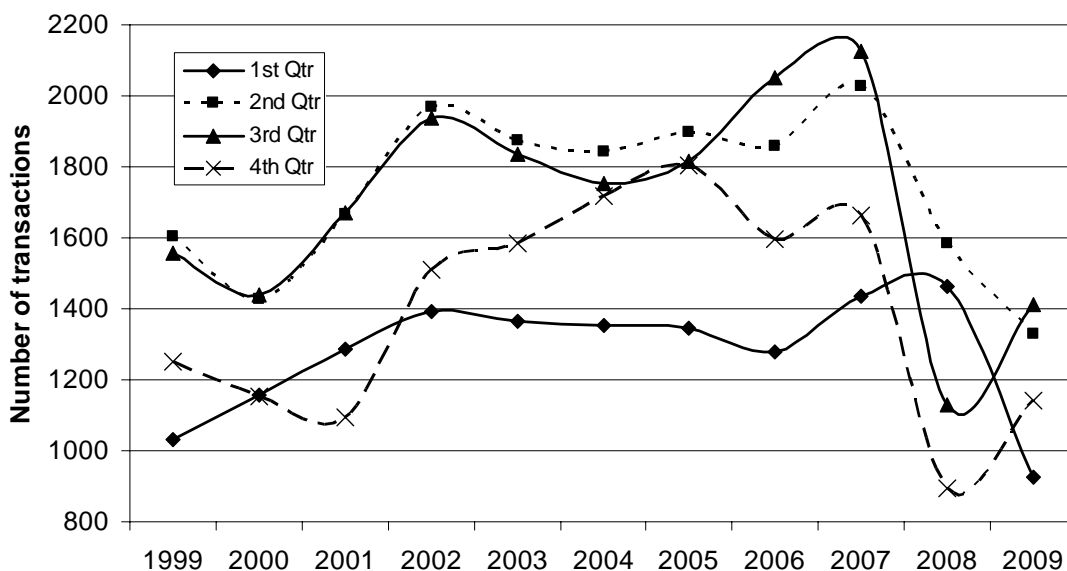
12.5 An additional source of information is produced by Aberdeen City Council who publish a housing market bulletin providing information based on the Aberdeen Housing Market Area (AHMA) only. The bulletin is updated quarterly using data supplied by Aberdeen Solicitors' Property Centre. The national house price figures are taken from HBOS. This data shows a similar trend to that contained in the CHMA bulletin, with both an increase in the numbers of transactions and average house price. Figure 8 shows that within the AHMA the average house price during the fourth quarter of 2009 is £204,130, an increase on the previous quarter figure of £202,712 and a continuation upward trend throughout 2009. The AHMA average price is well above the Scottish and UK average, which is also following an upward trend.

Figure 8: Average House Price – Aberdeen HMA, Scotland and UK



12.6 During the quarter there was a decrease in the number of properties on the ASPC register, from 1,522 to 1,255. Furthermore, the AHMA has seen a decrease in the number of properties sold during the quarter from 1413 in Q3 to 1,143 in Q4. As can be observed in figure 9, each quarter displays distinct seasonal trends with different levels of sales. The number of sales in Q4 2009 has shown an increase on the same quarter in 2008, and represents the second consecutive quarter increase after a similar upward trend in quarter 3 2009.

Figure 9: Number of Properties Sold per Quarter (Aberdeen HMA)



New house building

12.7 The National House Building Council (NHBC) produces statistics on UK new house-building derived from its 20,000 registered builders, who construct over 80% of the new homes built in the UK. As such, they represent a source of detailed, up-to-date information on new home construction and the house-building industry. Figures 10 and 11 below provide starts and completions data

for both Aberdeen City and Shire and Scotland as a whole. It can be seen from Figure 10 that new housing starts have increased during Q4 of 2009 after a small dip in quarter three. This follows the trend for Scotland as a whole, with new starts in Aberdeen City and Shire representing 14.6% of new house starts in Scotland in the second half of 2009. Completions have rebounded after a drop in Q3 2009 following the national trend (figure 11), with Aberdeen City and Shire representing over 15.9% of new house completions in Scotland during Q4 2009. The level of completions in Q4 2009 within Aberdeen City and Shire show a strong rebound from the start of 2009.

Figure 10: NHBC Housing Starts Data (Qtr1 2005-Qtr4 2009)

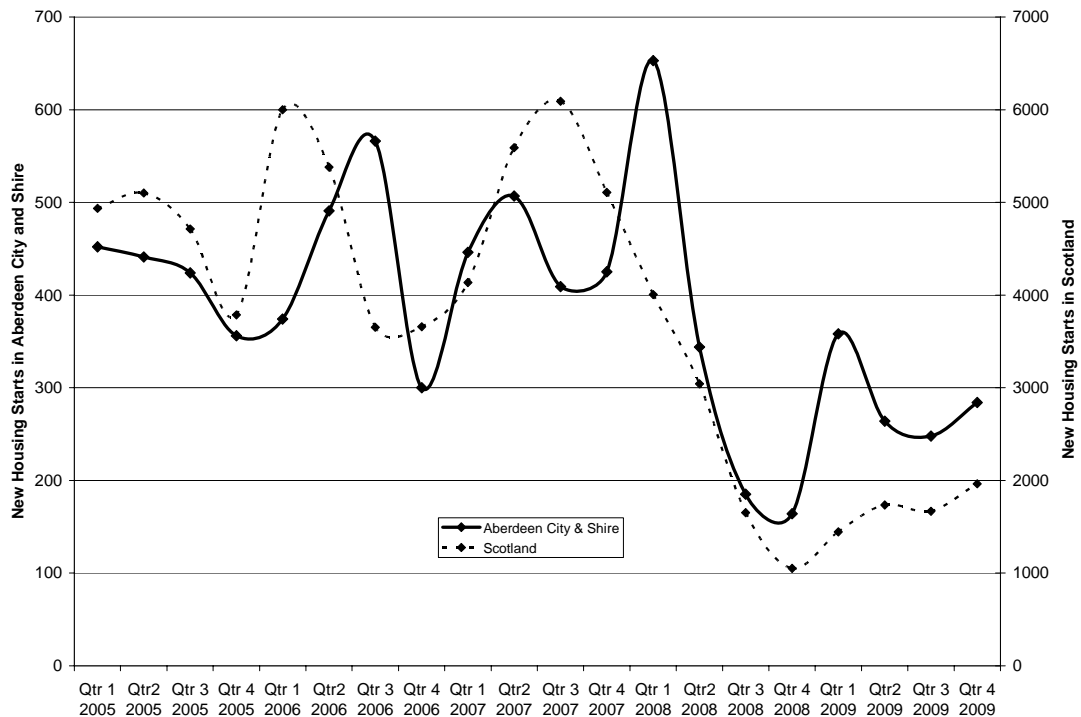
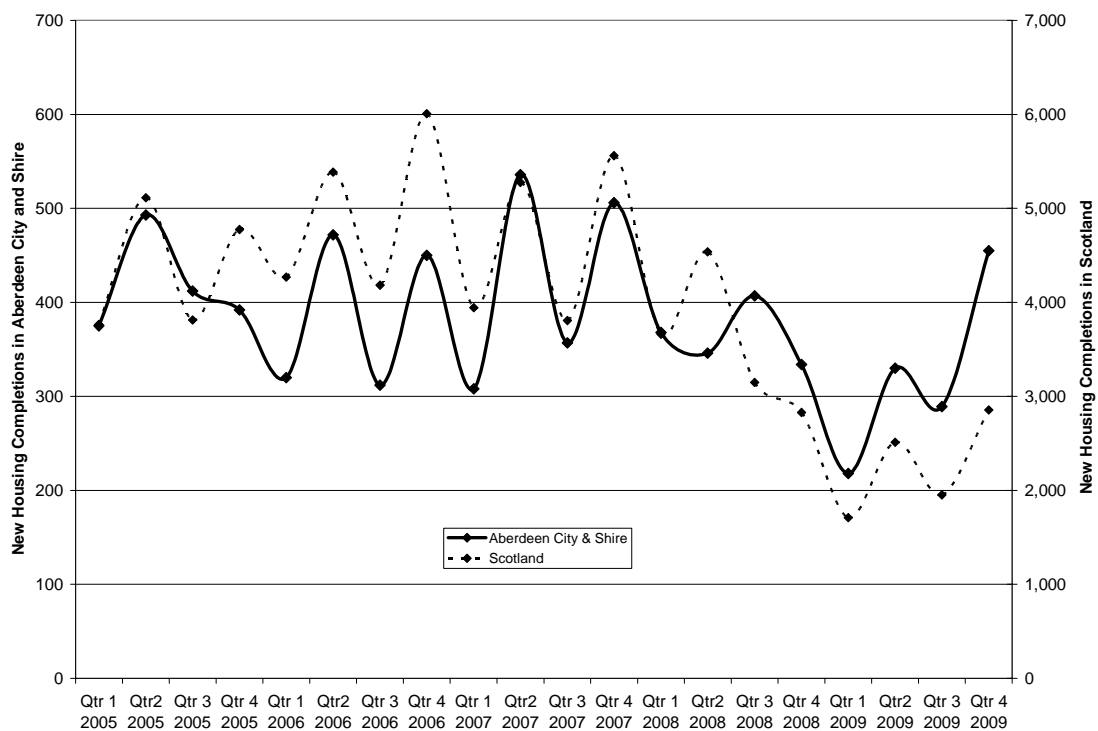
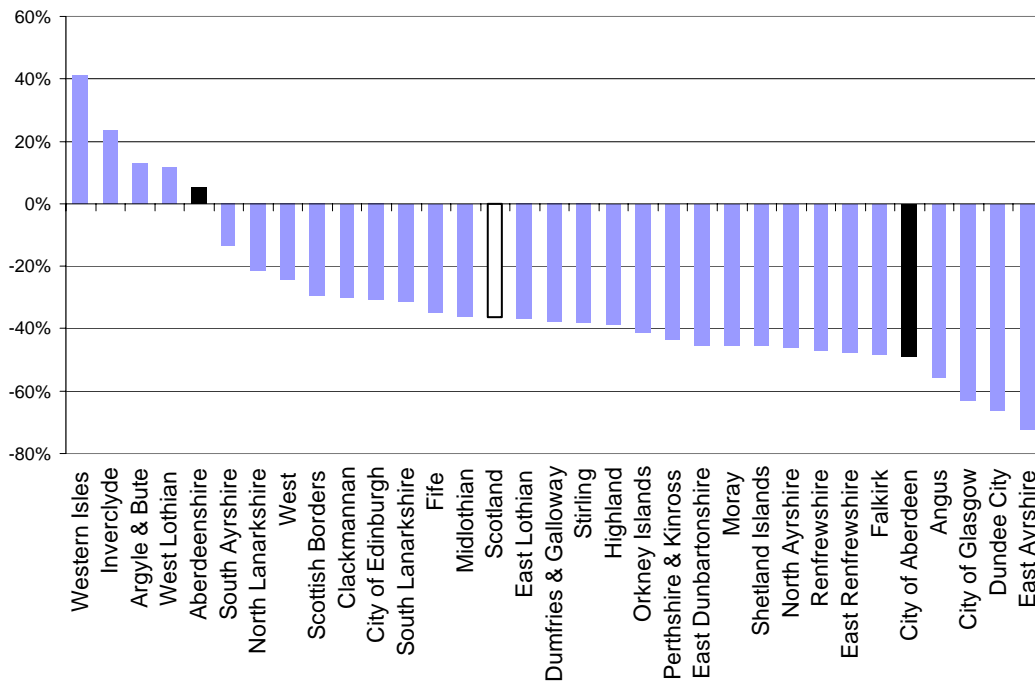


Figure 11: NHBC Housing Completions Data (Qtr1 2005-Qtr4 2009)



12.8 Figure 12 below shows the change in housing completions for Scotland and the 32 council areas. It can be seen that Scotland as a whole saw a 36% fall in completions over the past year and that the Western Isles, Inverclyde, Argyle & Bute, West Lothian and Aberdeenshire were the only areas to see a rise. Although completions in Aberdeenshire increased (5.5%), in Aberdeen City they fell by more than the Scottish average (-48.8%). Other areas of Scotland continued to see significant falls – over 60% in Glasgow, Dundee and East Ayrshire.

Figure 12: Annual Change in Housing Completions to Quarter 4 2009



Key Messages

12.9 A number of key messages can be drawn from the information presented above:

- Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire appear to be following the Scottish market in terms of house prices and transactions, with average prices appearing to be increasing at a faster rate;
- Housing transactions are rising after declining over the preceding year;
- House prices are still significantly higher than those for Scotland or the UK as a whole; and
- Both new house starts and completions show signs of an upward trend, with new starts in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire accounting for 14.6% of national starts, and completions are 15.6% of the national figures.

13 SDPA Website Statistics (October 2009 – December 2009)

- 13.1 A review of the SDPA website was reported within the Structure Plan Progress Report at the September 2009 meeting of the SDPA. The implementation of the recommendations contained within the report have been progressed over recent months, including the improvements to website statistics monitoring. The implementation of an industry recognised web analytical tool was put in place in early October 2009 with data available from this point.
- 13.2 The following presents the first results, highlighting the key indicators of SDPA website usage during the period October 2009 to December 2009, with summary statistics provided in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Website Summary Statistics

	Q3 (2009/10)
Unique Visitors	1,066
New Visitors	1,066 (100%)
Unique Visits	1,717
Average number of visits	1.6
Average time spent at site	3:24 minutes
Total Page Views	7,681
Unique page views	4,786
Average pages viewed	4.5
Access - Direct / Referral / Search	34 / 30 / 39
Document Downloads	N/A

- 13.3 In total 1,066 unique people visited the SDPA site during the last three months of 2009, with all users being classed as 'new' as of the beginning of October 2009.
- 13.4 1,717 visits to the SDPA website were recorded during the period, with each spending an average of 3:24 minutes and visiting an average of 4.5 pages. 34% of visitors accessed the site using previous bookmarks (or directly typing in the address), 36% used a search engine (e.g. Google, Bing, BT-yahoo) and 30% were referred via a link from another websites (Figure 14). Top referrals were from both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council web addresses, highlighting the close relationship between the work of the local authorities and the work of the SDPA.

Figure 14: Top traffic sources

Source	Page Views	Percentage
Typed or Bookmarked / direct	581	33.8%
google / search	566	33.0%
aberdeencity.gov.uk / referral	193	11.2%
aberdeenshire.gov.uk / referral	176	10.3%
bing / search	29	1.7%
banchoryleggart.co.uk / referral	24	1.4%

- 13.5 In total, 78 page titles were viewed a total of 7,681 times, with 4,786 unique views. As expected, the top page was the home page accounting for 30% of views, with other popular pages being the introduction to the 'Development

Plan' (9%), the 'About Us' page (7%) and the 'Structure Plan' page (5%). Figure 15 displays the top ten pages, with the remaining 68 pages accounting for approximately 30% of the total views.

Figure 15: Content by Title

Page Title	Page Views	Percentage (%)
Home	2,310	30.1%
Development Plan	672	8.8%
About Us	562	7.3%
Structure Plan	351	4.6%
Current Work	318	4.1%
Current News	275	3.6%
Structure Plan Approved	259	3.4%
Local Plan	216	2.8%
Emerging Structure Plan	210	2.7%
Development Plan Schemes	189	2.5%

- 13.6 It is currently not possible to measure the number of downloads of documents and files due to technical issues, so it is not possible to report on indicators such as the number of times the structure plan has been downloaded in PDF or audio format. These indicators would be a good demonstration of both the usage and interest in our online services. As the structure plan is the primary document that is hosted on the website it is linked to many locations and so it is not possible to report the interest or web activity in the pages leading to it. It is, however, possible to report that 31 unique visitors navigated to the audio download section, although whether they downloaded this version is unknown. We are currently working on this issue, and it is anticipated that we should be able to report on such downloads in future bulletins.
- 13.7 A rolling quarterly summary of web statistics will be reported in future bulletins throughout the year (as set out in Figure 13 above), with annual figures being reported in the Annual Report.