

# SDPA Bulletin – March 2011

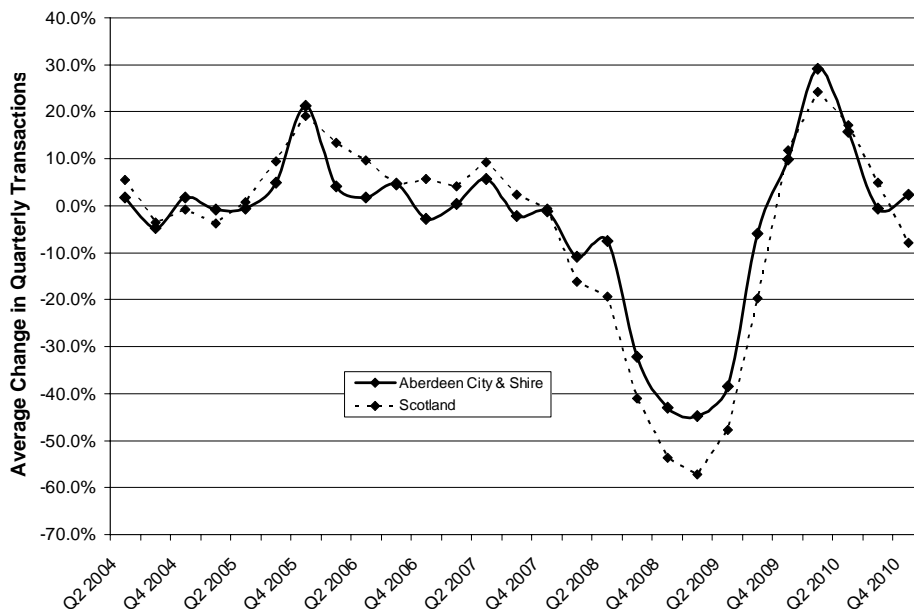
## 1 Housing Market Activity

1.1 This section provides 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

1.2 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 2010. In Q3 and Q4 2010 there were 2,471 and 2,446 transactions respectively in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. These figures represent a slight drop in year on year sales and are significantly lower than year on year sales in Q1 and Q2 (Figure 1). After three years of instability, sales volumes appear to have levelled out – albeit at a lower level than was achieved in the period 2002 - 2007.

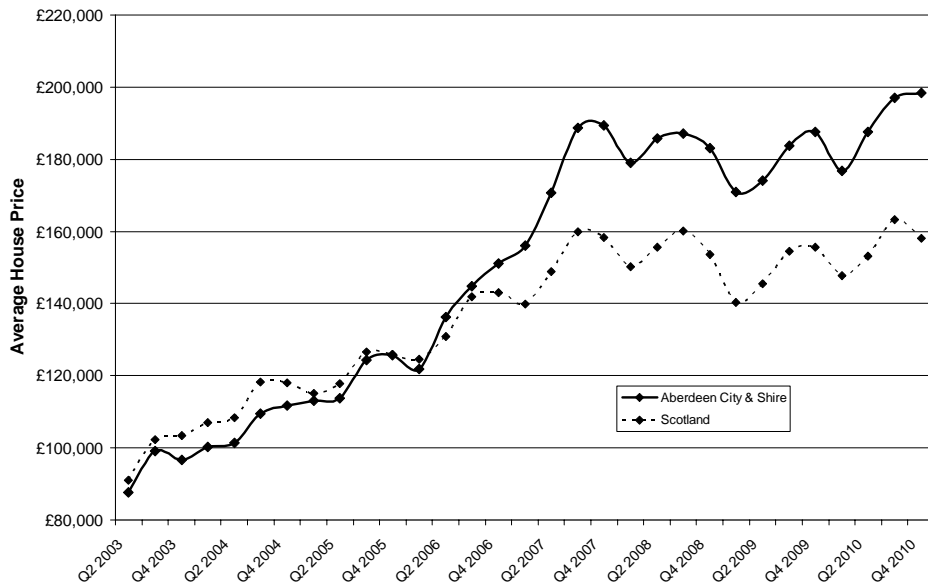
**Figure 1: Year on year change in the volume of transactions**



1.3 Figure 2 displays the average quarterly house price for sales in Aberdeen City and Shire compared to national averages. It shows that the average house price in Aberdeen City and Shire rose to £196,950 in Q3 and £198,401 in Q4 2010 - well above the national average of £163,360 (Q3) and £158,213 (Q4). Following a dip in Q1 2010 both the SDP area and nationally there is an upward trend,

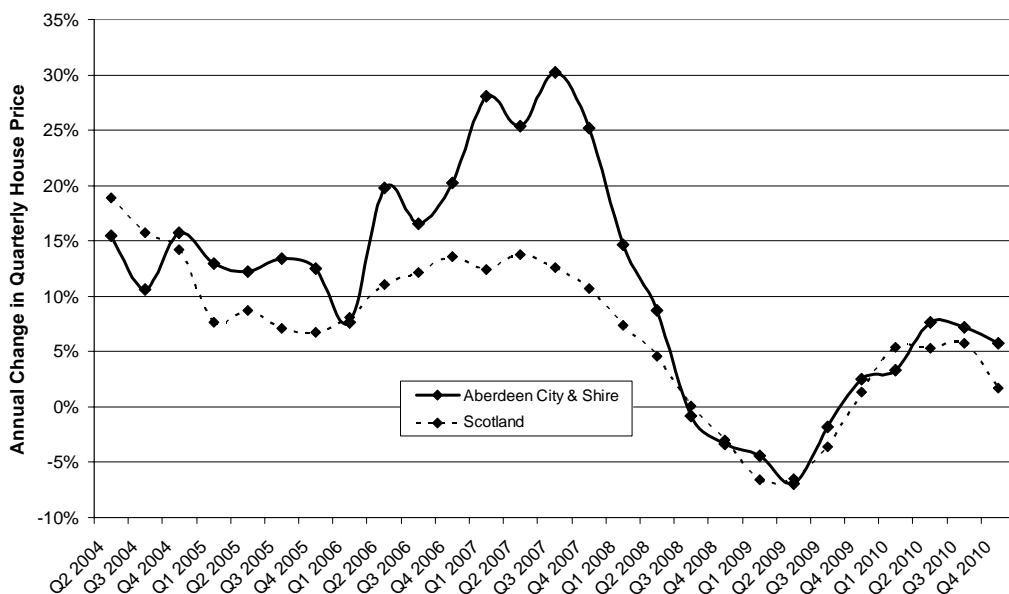
although there is divergence again in Q4 with a drop in Scottish average price, whilst they continue to rise in Aberdeen City & Shire. Prices in the last two quarters of 2010 were higher than the peak reached in 2007.

**Figure 2: Average quarterly house price trend (2003 – 2010)**



1.4 Further information contained within the bulletin shows that the earlier recovery in year on year change in quarterly house prices reported for both Aberdeen City and Shire and Scotland up to Q2 2010 has reversed. Both figures currently show slower rates of growth in average prices year on year compared to Q3 and Q4 2009 (Figure 3).

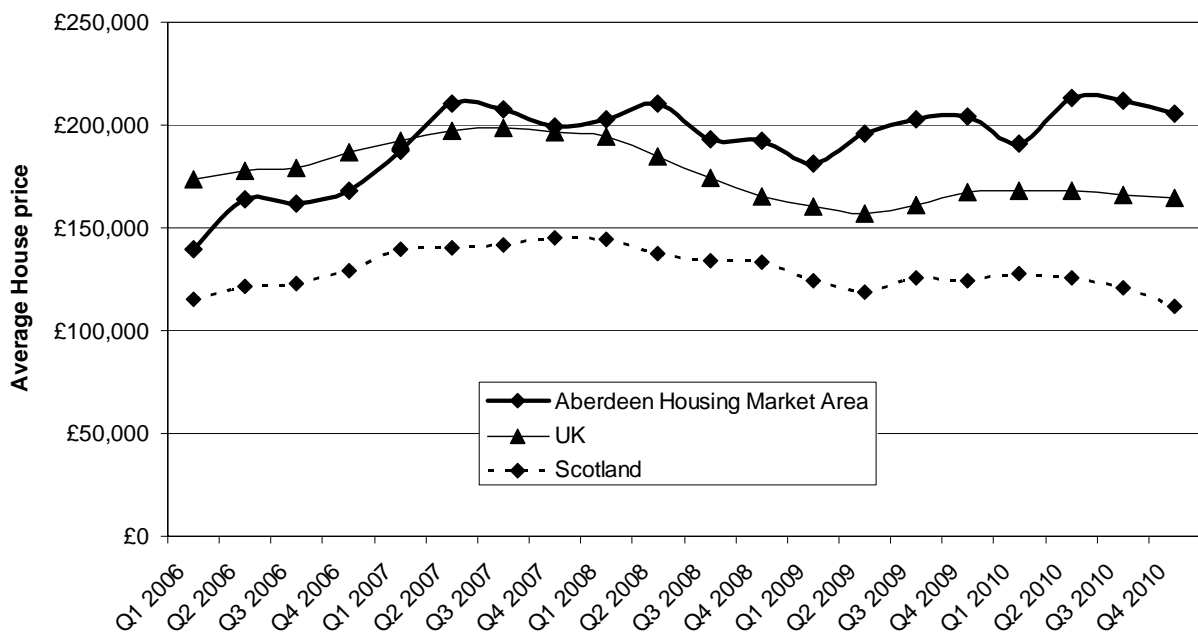
**Figure 3: Year on year change in house prices (Jan 2005-Dec 2010)**



### ASPC Housing Market Bulletin

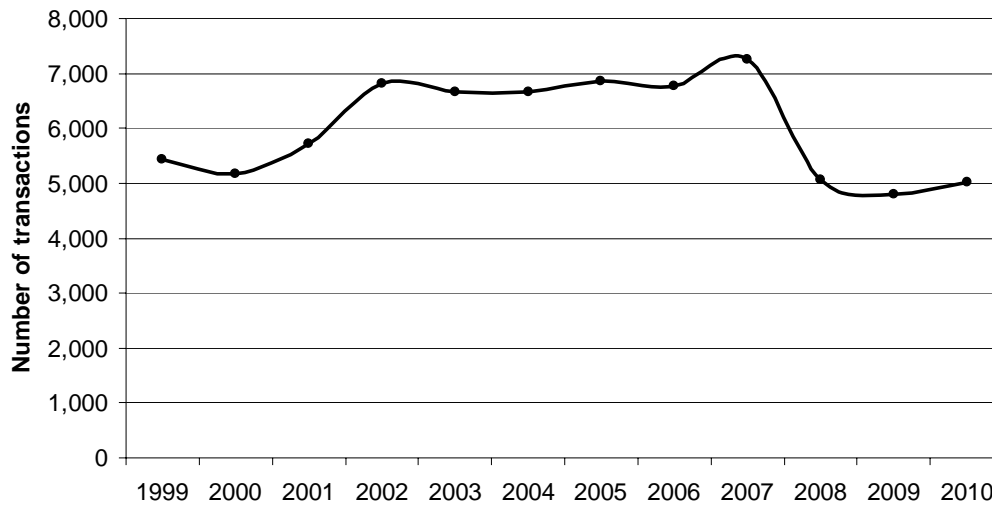
- 1.5 An additional source of information is produced by Aberdeen City Council who publish a housing market bulletin providing information based on the Aberdeen Housing Market Area (AHMA) only. The bulletin is updated quarterly using data supplied by Aberdeen Solicitors' Property Centre. The national house price figures are taken from HBOS.
- 1.6 Figure 4 shows that within the AHMA the average house price during the 3rd quarter of 2010 was £212,050, slightly down on the previous quarter. Prices fell by a greater margin in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter to £205,731. However, the AHMA average price remained well above the Scottish and UK averages.

**Figure 4: Average House Price – Aberdeen HMA, Scotland and UK**



- 1.7 During the last six months the number of properties on the ASPC register fell slightly from 1,999 at the end of Q2 2010 to 1,944 in Q3 then rose markedly to 2,356 in Q4. In the same period, the AHMA has seen the number of properties sold fall slightly from 1,403 in Q2 to 1,394 in Q3 and 1,076 in Q4 2010. However, as figure 5 shows, these amounts still represent an increase in the annual sales figure from 4,810 in 2009 to 5,017 in 2010.

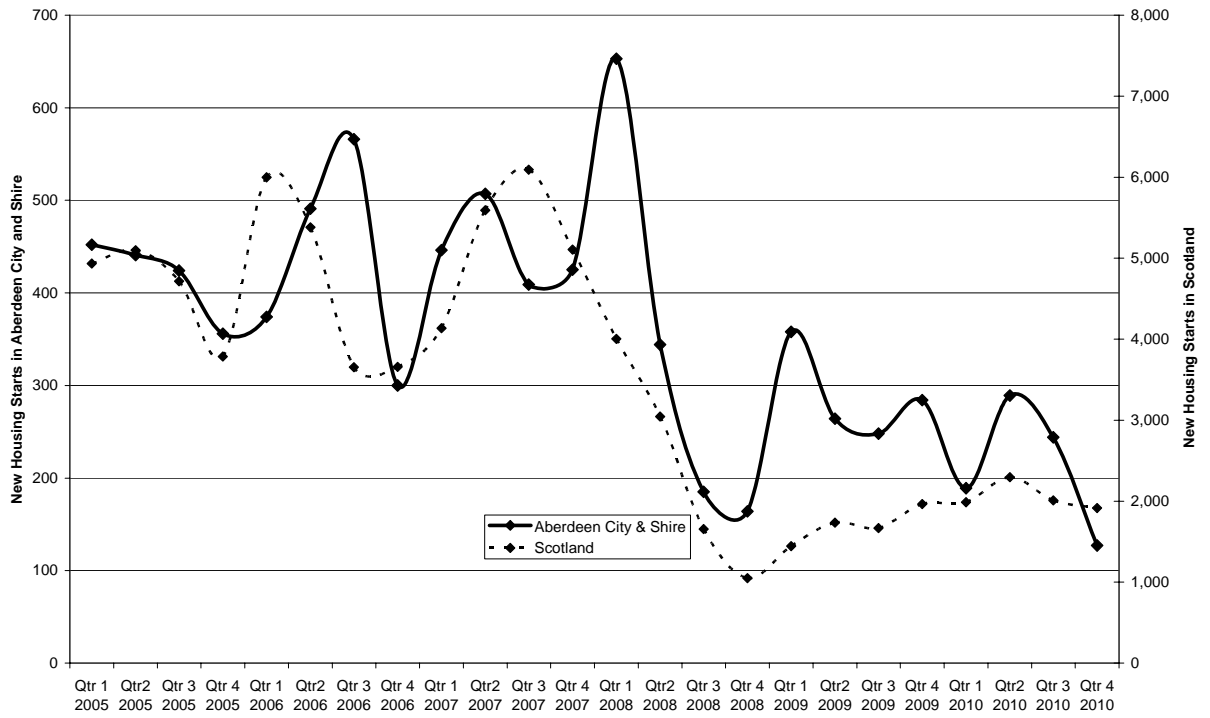
**Figure 5: Number of Properties Sold per Year (Aberdeen HMA)**



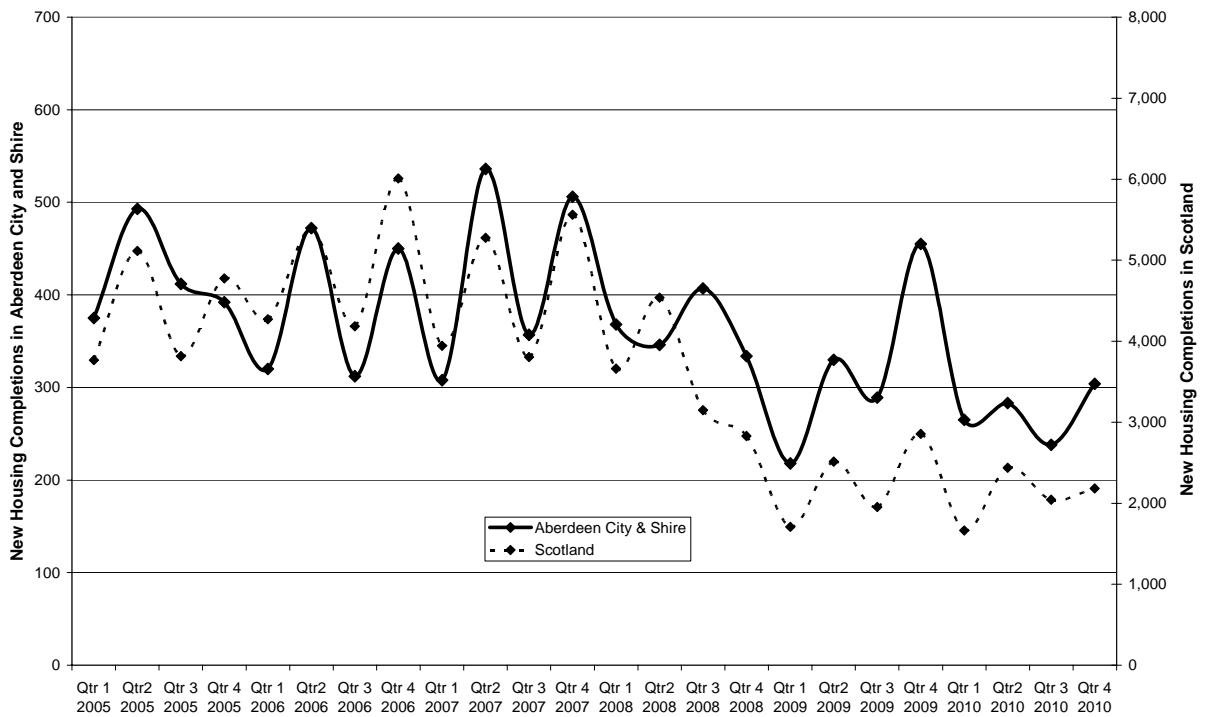
### **New house building**

- 1.8 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 6 and 7 below provide starts and completions data for both Aberdeen City and Shire against Scotland as a whole. It can be seen from Figure 6 that, after reaching a peak in Qtr2 2010 starts have reduced significantly over the second half of the year to a new low since 2005. New starts in Aberdeen City and Shire represented 6.6% of new house starts in Scotland in Qtr4 2010. Completions dipped in Qtr3 2010, but have since recovered to one of the healthiest positions since 2008. This seems to reflect the national trend (Figure 7), with Aberdeen City and Shire representing almost 14% of new house completions in Scotland during Qtr4 2010. Aberdeen City and Shire has approximately 8.8% of the population and households in Scotland so it can be seen that, although starts and completions are at a lower level than before the recession, relative performance is quite good.

**Figure 6: NHBC Housing Starts Data (Qtr1 2005-Qtr4 2010)**

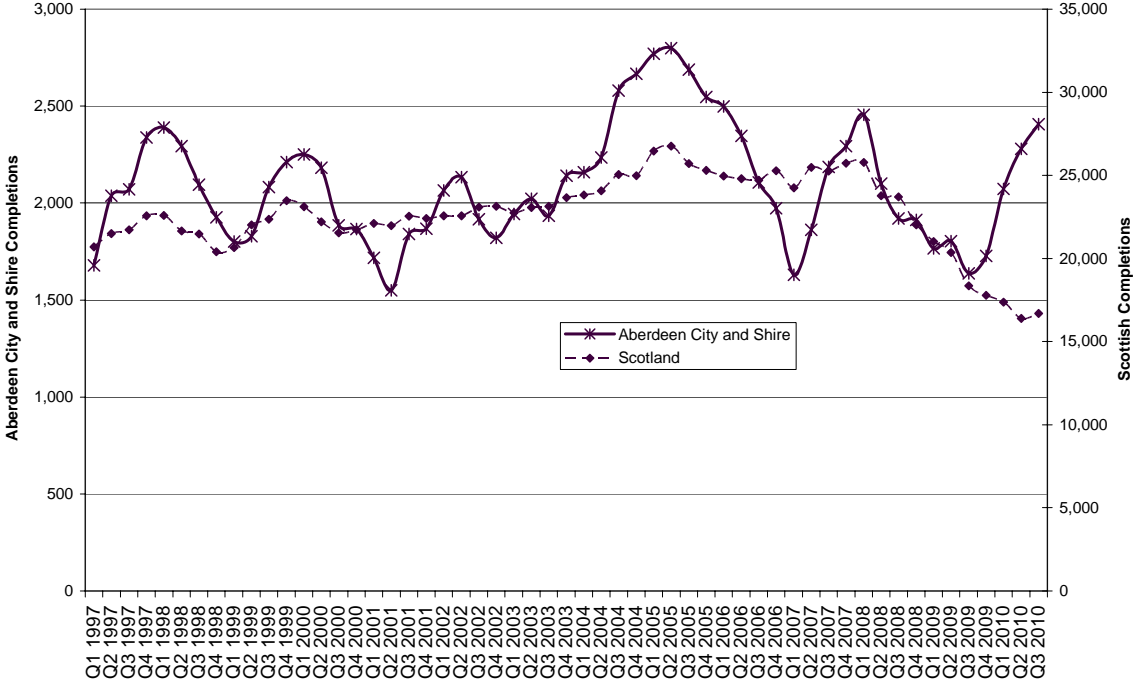


**Figure 7: NHBC Housing Completions Data (Qtr1 2005-Qtr4 2010)**



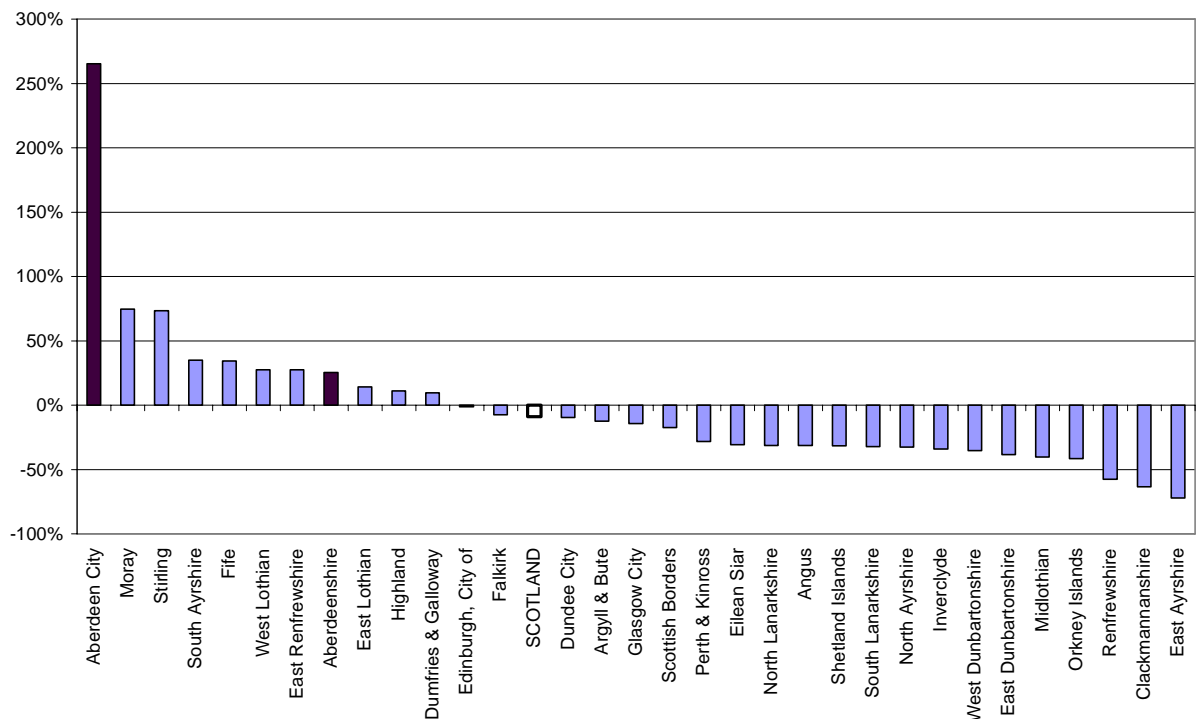
1.9 Figure 8 below shows the change in housing completions for Scotland and Aberdeen City and Shire since 1997. The figures (from the Scottish Government's 'Housing Statistics for Scotland') show that Scotland as a whole saw a potential bottoming out of completions over the year to September 2010. Completions in Aberdeen City Shire, however, appear to be recovering well and are up to levels above the long-term trend.

**Figure 8: Annualised Housing Completions to Qtr3 2010**



1.10 Figure 9 below shows the change in housing completions for Scotland and the 32 council areas. The figures show that Scotland as a whole saw a 9% fall in completions over the year to September 2010. Completions in Aberdeen City (+265%) and in Aberdeenshire (+25%) both rose, along with nine other council areas. Aberdeen City had by far the highest percentage rise (due to very low levels of completions in 2008/09 while Aberdeenshire had the highest number of completions of any council area in Scotland. Other areas of Scotland continued to see significant falls – Renfrewshire, Clackmannanshire and East Ayrshire in particular.

**Figure 9: Annual Change in Housing Completions to Qtr3 2010**



## Key Messages

- 1.11 A number of key messages can be drawn from the information presented above:
- Transactions in the housing market appear to have stabilised at a level below that achieved in the period 2002 – 2007, while price appear to be rising at around 5%pa;
  - Aberdeen City and Shire average house prices in the second half of 2010 surpassed the previous peak in late 2007, with a premium of £40,000 over the Scottish average.
  - New house completions are holding up well in a Scottish context, accounting for 14% of the national figures.

## 2 Cities Outlook 2011

- 2.1 The Centre for Cities, an independent urban policy think-tank, published 'Cities Outlook 2011' in January 2011. This study explores the impact of the recession and shape of recovery across 63 UK cities. For Scotland it gathers data at the local authority level, but only provides data for Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Therefore, no information on Aberdeenshire is presented.
- 2.2 Aberdeen is identified as one of five UK cities best placed for a private sector-led recovery (along with Milton Keynes, Reading, Leeds and Bristol) and given the right powers, freedom and investment could make an even bigger contribution to the national economic recovery.

- 2.3 Aberdeen features in several tables, showing public sector job losses expected to be amongst the smallest measured against the percentage of all jobs. With regard to employment generally, Aberdeen holds joint 2<sup>nd</sup> position with Worthing (78.5%) and just behind Aldershot with 78.6%. It is also in top position for the smallest percentage increase in unemployment claimants (Feb. '08 – June '09) and second smallest (Mar. '10 – Nov. '10). Aberdeen also has the 7<sup>th</sup> smallest welfare bill per capita.
- 2.4 The report further highlights that Aberdeen is one of only two cities in the UK with a positive 'churn rate' and indeed holds the number one spot. This is a calculation of the difference between business births and deaths as a percentage of total business stocks and means that more businesses were created than lost in 2009.
- 2.5 Aberdeen is in fourth position with regard to qualifications and 9<sup>th</sup> in terms of wages, also registering fourth position in earnings growth (2006-2010). For disparities within cities, Aberdeen achieves a low position in common with other small or medium cities, suggesting larger cities suffer greater inequalities.
- 2.6 The report does highlight that Aberdeen is one of the slowest growing cities by population, suffering population decline between 1999 and 2009. A final indicator on carbon dioxide emissions shows that Aberdeen is in a relatively poor position at eight places from the bottom with high emissions per capita.
- 2.7 In summary, the report concludes that Aberdeen holds the number one position for cities with the highest potential to grow. This is based on an assessment of the following factors:
- Claimant count (Nov. '10)
  - Employment rate (July '09 – June '10)
  - Potential public sector job losses by 2014-15
  - Residents with high level qualifications (2009)
  - Business stock per 10,000 population (2009)
- 2.8 This research complements other work by Experian reported to the last meeting of the SDPA which highlighted Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire as the most economically resilient areas of Scotland and among the most resilient in the UK. The full Centre for Cities report is available from [www.centreforcities.org](http://www.centreforcities.org).

### **3 Local Development Plans Update**

#### **Aberdeen City**

- 3.1 The consultation period for the Aberdeen Local Development Plan – Proposed Plan finished on 17 January 2011. The Proposed Plan is Aberdeen City Council's settled view on what should be included in the adopted Aberdeen Local Development Plan. There were over 1,500 representations from individuals, developers, land owners, key agencies and Community Councils. It



is the intention to put the representations and the summaries of all unresolved issues (called Schedule 4 documents) before Council on 26 April 2011 before submitting the Proposed Plan to Scottish Ministers. The Scottish Ministers will then appoint a Reporter to examine the Proposed Plan.

- 3.2 The third Aberdeen Local Development Plan Scheme was considered by the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee on 15 March 2011. The Development Plan Scheme sets out Aberdeen City Council's programme for preparing and reviewing its Local Development Plan. It also includes the Participation Statement which explains how local communities and other stakeholders are engaged and have the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of the Local Development Plan.

### **Aberdeenshire**

- 3.3 In Aberdeenshire, all representations have been summarised and evaluated, and a direction obtained from relevant committees with regards to the response to make to these. In all cases the advice of officers not to propose modifications prescribed by section 18 (5) of the Town and Country Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 was taken. This avoids the need for re-consultation on the plan and the resulting delay. A number of minor modifications have been made to the plan.
- 3.4 Infrastructure Services Committee will be asked for authority to submit the proposed Local Development Plan to Ministers for examination. This is anticipated to be on or shortly after 31 March 2011.
- 3.5 The examination of the plan is likely to take between 6 and 9 months. The reporters recommendations will, for all intents and purposes be final and binding on the authority. In the interim detailed work will be undertaken on the supplementary guidance supporting the plan to enable this to be authorised for use at the same time as the Local Development Plan is approved.

## **4 Housing Land Supply – Letter from the Chief Planner**

- 4.1 At the last meeting of the SDPA in December 2010 the SDPA agreed to send a letter to the Scottish Government's Chief Planner in response to his letter of October 2010 regarding housing land supply.
- 4.2 This letter was sent and the policy committees of both councils met in January 2011 and endorsed the response contained in that letter, highlighting the importance of the two local development plans to the release of land in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.
- 4.3 The strategy of the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009) is to facilitate sustainable economic growth in the area. Recent reports and evidence suggest that the area has weathered the recession comparatively well and is well placed for the prospect of growth over the next few years.

- 4.4 The structure plan made allowances for this growth and sites for these have been identified in the two local development plans. These plans will be going through a statutory process of examination which is likely to be complete by the end of 2011 or early 2012.
- 4.5 Both councils would like to be in a position to approve applications for high quality development as soon as possible following the adoption of the new local development plans on sites identified in the first phase of the respective plans. It is currently anticipated that this is likely to be late 2011 or early 2012 for the majority of sites, although the two councils may wish to consider whether or not sites with no unresolved objections (or objections which are not against the principle of development) could be approved earlier.
- 4.6 As a consequence of the lead-in time for these decisions to be made on that timescale, developers are encouraged to begin to progress schemes over the next few months.
- 4.7 For all sites of over 2Ha or 50 homes, statutory pre-application consultation is required over at least 12 weeks following the submission of a Proposal of Application Notice to the council. Following the submission of an application, the statutory target for the determination of such an application is four months. In the case of large applications, it may be that longer is required for determination. As a consequence, a Proposal of Application Notice would need to be submitted to the Councils by the end of May at the very latest if there is to be any realistic prospect of a determination at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.8 Developers are encouraged to take these indicative timetables into account when considering the timing of preparatory phases.
- 4.9 Much will depend on the quality of applications put to the councils. High quality applications which provide all appropriate background and supporting information and have fully taken the requirements of the development plan into account are likely to be much quicker to process than applications which do not.
- 4.10 Both councils want to facilitate the timely release of land for development as set out in the structure plan but the development industry must play its part in facilitating this with quality applications.

## **5 Sustainability Labelling within Building Standards**

- 5.1 Members will recall that at the last meeting of the SDPA a response was agreed to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Sustainability Labelling within Building Standards.
- 5.2 There were 61 responses to the consultation paper which are now available online (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/217736/0113054.pdf>), along with a brief

statistical summary (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/217736/0113241.pdf>). Responses range from individuals, companies and business organisations to environmental organisations and Building Standards services within councils.

- 5.3 Since the Scottish Government have targeted May 2011 for the introduction of any changes to the Building Regulations, it is anticipated that the results of the consultation will need to be announced very soon.

## **6 A Land Use Strategy for Scotland**

- 6.1 Members will recall that at the last meeting of the SDPA a response was agreed to the Scottish Government's consultation on a Land Use Strategy for Scotland.
- 6.2 The Scottish Government received 184 responses to the consultation exercise from a range of individuals and organisations and these have been published on their website (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/02/09115558/0>).
- 6.3 The production of the strategy is a requirement of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 which requires a strategy to be placed before the Scottish Parliament by 31 March 2011. With the Parliamentary recess commencing on 23 March, the strategy will need to be laid before then.

## **7 Amendments to the Development Planning Regulations**

- 7.1 The SDPA responded to a Scottish Government consultation on amendments to the modernised planning system at its meeting of December 2010. While some of the suggested changes were more controversial in nature or required more consideration before being implemented, those relating to development planning were deemed uncontroversial. The development planning changes are being taken forward prior to the end of this parliamentary term. These changes (relating to flood risk management plans and regional marine plans) were laid before the Scottish Parliament on 23 February 2011 and come into force on 1 April 2011. These do not impact immediately on the preparation of the SDP because these plans have yet to be prepared and may be some years away.
- 7.2 The amendments to the development planning regulations ([http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2011/138/pdfs/ssi\\_20110138\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2011/138/pdfs/ssi_20110138_en.pdf)) should be read in the context of the initial set of regulations published in 2008 ([http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2008/426/pdfs/ssi\\_20080426\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2008/426/pdfs/ssi_20080426_en.pdf)).

## **8 Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland**

- 8.1 In the December 2010 Bulletin it was reported that the Scottish Government had published "A Digital Ambition for Scotland" paper and that officers had responded to this to outline the importance of new development being served by future proofed technology.

- 8.2 The Scottish Government published “Scotland’s Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland” in March 2011 which picks up the point made by the SDPA and highlights recently published best practice guidance and advice to developers about the need to install digital infrastructure into all new domestic dwellings.
- 8.3 It was also reported that BT had launched an online competition (“Race to Infinity”) to gauge demand for broadband services and upgrade the five exchanges expressing the highest level of interest. Innerleithen in the Scottish Borders was the only Scottish exchange to be successful in this competition.

## **9 Planning for Waste**

- 9.1 At the last meeting of the SDPA it was agreed that the Chair would write to Scottish Ministers expressing concern at the apparent direction of waste planning policy and the importance of meeting the need for waste management facilities locally within a regional context.
- 9.2 Dialogue continued both with the Scottish Government directly and through CoSLA to seek to ensure that the proximity principle for waste was applied at a regional rather than a national level.
- 9.3 A letter was drafted and agreed by the Chair but in consultation with CoSLA it was agreed to hold off sending it pending further discussions with the Scottish Government.
- 9.4 The outcome of these discussions was largely positive and the Scottish Government have now published a revised Annex B to the Zero Waste Plan (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/waste-and-pollution/Waste-1/wastestrategy/annexb>). The document outlines the role of the planning system in delivering zero waste and provides the link between the Zero Waste Plan, National Planning Framework, Scottish Planning Policy and Planning Advice Note 63 – all of which had potentially contradictory messages.
- 9.5 The document also sets out additional waste management capacity requirements for the SDP area up to 2025 of 230,000 tonnes of capacity for source-segregated wastes and 320,000 tonnes for unsorted wastes, including thermal and biological treatment. It also identifies a 10-year rolling landfill capacity requirement of 6,500,000 tonnes.
- 9.6 Annex B will be used to inform the Main Issues Report for the SDP later in the year.
- 9.7 As a consequence of the above, the letter to Scottish Ministers was not sent.
- 9.8 Annex B will need to be taken into account in the preparation of the main issues report for the strategic development plan later this year.

## 10 Housing Need and Demand Assessment

- 10.1 Scottish Planning Policy requires planning and housing authorities to prepare Housing Need and Demand Assessments to inform their respective plans and strategies, forming a common evidence base across housing market areas.
- 10.2 The area's first Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) was prepared in its initial stages to inform the current structure plan and latterly to inform the two local development plans. The HNDA was assessed as 'robust and credible' on 15 June 2010, was reported to the SDPA in September 2010 in the Information Bulletin and has been published on the SDPA website (<http://www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk/AboutUs/HNDA.asp>).
- 10.3 Work started in mid-2010 on an update to the current HNDA. This swift update was required because Scottish Government guidance requires an HNDA to be published alongside a SDP Main Issues Report. Officers from the SDPA and both councils have been working on the update, with consultancy support provided to model housing need itself. The working group has reported to a project board (made up of the heads of service for planning and housing in the two councils, the project manager and the SDP Manager). Throughout the project a number of meetings have taken place of the Strategic Housing Market Partnership (made up of Council Officers from a range of services) Registered Social Landlords, the development industry, Scottish Enterprise and community representation). The partnership has contributed comments to the draft chapters and provided guidance and advice throughout.
- 10.4 A Draft HNDA was submitted to the Scottish Government's Centre for Housing Market Assessment on 11 March 2011. The role of the CHMA is to assess the draft HNDA against a set of process and output criteria to determine whether it is 'robust and credible'. Scottish Planning Policy states that, where an assessment is considered 'robust and credible' by the Scottish Government (CHMA), the approach used will not normally be considered at the development plan examination. Instead, the examination will focus upon the proposed development plan and its relationship with the findings of the assessment.
- 10.5 It is anticipated that the CHMA will take up to six weeks to assess the document and it is hoped that it will be assessed as 'robust and credible' by the end of April 2011.
- 10.6 The draft assessment identifies an increased forecast for new households and higher levels of housing need since the 2009-based study. Although the two assessments spanned a period of considerable economic uncertainty, it identifies a number of sources of optimism for Aberdeen City and Shire and its prospects for growth over the next few years.

10.7 In terms of housing need, the estimated need over the next 10 years increased from 707pa to 830pa across Aberdeen City and Shire between the two studies. This can be attributed to a range of factors but particularly important are the reductions in the supply of affordable housing through a reduction in new social rented lets as a consequence of economic uncertainty means that more people are staying in the social rented sector. At the same time that housing need has increased, the cuts to social housing budgets by the Scottish Government, as well as wider funding challenges to the development industry, mean that the challenges in meeting this level of need (or anywhere near it) have increased considerably.

10.8 The HNDA will inform the content of the SDP Main Issues Report and is an essential part of the evidence base for the plan. In addition, it will also inform the local housing strategies which will be prepared by both councils later in 2011 and early 2012.

10.9 The HNDA will be reported to the SDPA in more detail at its next meeting.

## **11 Audit Scotland – Modernising the Planning System**

11.1 Audit Scotland is carrying out a performance audit to assess whether recent reform and modernisation of the planning system is making it more economic, efficient and effective ([http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/fwd/pb\\_planning\\_system.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/fwd/pb_planning_system.pdf)).

11.2 As part of this research, each of the four SDPAs have been invited to be part of the evidence gathering sessions and were involved in interviews in early March.

11.3 The Audit Scotland report is due for release on 25 August 2011.

## **12 Carbon Capture and Storage**

12.1 Officers of the SDPA are participating in a Carbon Capture and Storage Programme Monitoring Board established by Scottish Ministers in relation to the Longannet proposal being taken forward by Scottish Power. The Longannet proposal ([http://www.scottishpower.com/carbon\\_capture\\_storage/](http://www.scottishpower.com/carbon_capture_storage/)) is to extract carbon dioxide (a gas which leads to climate change) from the flue gasses at the coal fuelled power station in Fife and make use of an existing gas pipeline to transport the gas to St Fergus, compress the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) at St Fergus into liquid form and pump it offshore to be stored in the Goldeneye field 150km offshore.

12.2 It is also understood that Scottish and Southern Energy ([http://www.sse.com/SSEInternet/index.aspx?id=23698&TierSlicer1\\_TSMenueTargetID=1370&TierSlicer1\\_TSMenueTargetType=1&TierSlicer1\\_TSMenueID=6](http://www.sse.com/SSEInternet/index.aspx?id=23698&TierSlicer1_TSMenueTargetID=1370&TierSlicer1_TSMenueTargetType=1&TierSlicer1_TSMenueID=6)) have also submitted a proposal for European and Westminster funding in relation to the Boddam power station near Peterhead which could potentially use some of the same

infrastructure. The proposal currently being considered differs in a number of respects from the one abandoned in 2007.

- 12.3 It is understood that the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) received nine 'NER300 CCS' funding applications from across the UK by the deadline of 7 February 2011, one of which would have been the application relating to Boddam.
- 12.4 Both of these projects are being considered for inclusion in the Main Issues Report as projects of national importance.

### **13 National Planning Framework 2: Monitoring Report**

- 13.1 The Scottish Government has started work on the National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2) Monitoring Report as part of its commitment to keeping the Framework under review. This will be published in 2011 and will monitor the progress made in implementing NPF2. In doing so it will also consider the key drivers of change and emerging issues to inform future revision of the Framework.
- 13.2 The 2011 NPF2 Monitoring Report will report on the progress made in delivering the strategy, helping to inform preparation of NPF3. Work is underway to gather evidence of progress made in implementing the development strategy and on identifying emerging issues which have arisen since the publication of NPF2.
- 13.3 The four SDPAs will have the opportunity to contribute to this in March 2011. Officers of the SDPA will highlight progress and identify emerging issues and possible future National Developments.

### **14 TAYplan – Proposed Development Plan**

- 14.1 The SDPA made a response to the TAYplan Main Issues Report in June 2010, highlighting a number of issues of cross-boundary interest, largely focused on transport, housing and national developments.
- 14.2 The TAYplan SDPA met on 16 February and agreed a proposed Strategic Development Plan for consultation. This decision requires the ratification of the four constituent councils and it is anticipated that consultation will take place from 6 June 2011 to 1 August 2011.
- 14.3 The proposed plan and associated documents, as agreed by the TAYplan SDPA are available on its website (<http://www.tayplan-sdpa.gov.uk/about-us/joint-committee/reports/2011-meetings>).
- 14.4 A report on the proposed plan will be submitted to the next meeting of the SDPA.



## 15 Structure Plan Proposals

15.1 A number of key proposals set out in the structure plan have made significant steps forward over the last few months.

### **A90 Balmedie to Tippetty Dualling Project**

15.2 On 27 January the Scottish Government announced that the Balmedie to Tippetty dualling project will proceed. This followed a public local inquiry in 2009 and consideration of the Reporter's recommendations. The Transport Minister concluded that whilst accepting the Reporter's findings of fact, the Scottish Ministers did not fully accept his conclusions and recommendations. The most significant recommendations rejected related to reviewing the design of the scheme to ensure provision of a grade separated junction to serve the Menie Estate. The Transport Minister concluded this was a matter for the developer to discuss with Transport Scotland, to determine the access requirements of the development and its impact on the trunk road as part of any detailed planning submission.

15.3 The date for delivery of the project remains uncertain. This is primarily due to the desire of Transport Scotland's to include the Balmedie to Tippetty dualling with the contract for the AWPR to achieve cost efficiencies.

### **Inveramsay Bridge and Network Rail Study**

15.4 On 10 February, the Transport Minister announced that tenders were being issued for design work to upgrade the A96 Inveramsay Bridge. This section of trunk road is recognised as a key constraint on the network and was identified as a proposal in the structure plan, reflected also in the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR). It is intended to have a contractor appointed to undertake the design work by late spring 2011.

15.5 The STPR identified the wider upgrade of the Aberdeen to Inverness rail route as a key priority and Transport Scotland instructed Network Rail to undertake a feasibility study with the following objectives:

- Achieve and end to end rail journey time of less than two hours;
- A regular clockface timetable;
- A daytime frequency of one train per hour in each direction, with additional short runnings close to either end of the route; and
- Consideration of additional stops at Kintore and Dalcross (Inverness Airport).

15.6 Whilst the final report has not been shared with Nestrans, Aberdeenshire Council or the SDPA, it is understood that indications are that the above objectives and Inveramsay Bridge upgrade could be delivered within the £250-500 million budget threshold anticipated in STPR. This appears to be good news for the north east. However, we must await Transport Scotland's acceptance of the final report and its publication in due course.



15.7 This update was reported to the Nestrans Board on 16 February, which agreed to seek assurances from Transport Scotland to share the final report and for officers to press for early progress on these projects.

#### **Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route**

15.8 The hearing in the 'Outer House' of the Court of Session in Edinburgh commenced on 22 February 2011 and ended on 7 March 2011. It is not known how long it will take before a judgement is made.

#### **Community Stadium**

15.9 Aberdeen City Council met on 23 February 2011 to consider the application by Aberdeen Football Club for a new sports and leisure stadium at Loirston Loch. After considerable debate on the proposal, the Council voted in favour of approval of the application which will now be referred to the Scottish Ministers.

#### **Third Don Crossing**

15.10 Also at its meeting of 23 February 2011 Aberdeen City Council considered a planning application for the Third Don Crossing and associated works which had been referred from the Development Management Sub-Committee of 17 February 2011. In this case the Council also voted in favour of approval of the application.

#### **Peterhead Prison**

15.11 An application for planning permission in principle for the demolition of the existing buildings and erection of a new prison within the existing site boundary of Peterhead Prison was submitted to Aberdeenshire Council by the Scottish Prison Service in November 2010.

15.12 The application was discussed by the Buchan Area Committee on 22 February 2011 which broadly welcomed the proposed development. The application was approved unanimously by a meeting of Aberdeenshire Council on 10 March 2011.

## **16 Cumulative Impacts of Development on the Transport Network**

16.1 Officers have been working with Nestrans and the two councils over recent months to take forward. An update report was presented to the Nestrans Board on 16 February 2011 and is attached as appendix 1.

16.2 Further work over the next few months will focus on refining the mechanism to deliver the identified strategic transport projects and this will be reported back to a future meeting of the SDPA. One of the options being considered is to prepare supplementary planning guidance associated with the structure plan and strategic development plan which would be consulted on alongside the main issues report for the strategic development plan later this year.

## **17 Quantitative Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment: A Tool For Spatial Planning Policy Development: Phase 1 - Feasibility Report**

17.1 Officers of the SDPA have been part of a review group set up by the Scottish Government to facilitate research to investigate the potential for the development of a tool to assess the greenhouse gas implications of spatial planning policy (including the National Planning Framework, Strategic Development Plans, Local Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance).

17.2 Stage one of the research is now complete and has been published (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/02/09142227/0>). It concluded that a tool is feasible to develop and Stage 2 (building the tool itself) has now commenced. Stage 2 is due to be complete in April 2011. Officers of the SDPA will continue to be involved in this second stage via the review group.

## **18 Electricity Interconnector**

18.1 On 1 February 2011, the First Minister announced a study to examine proposals for a potential subsea electricity cable linking Scotland to Norway (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/02/01100118>).

18.2 Scottish and Southern Energy will be working with three Norwegian companies and one Swedish firm to investigate the feasibility of the project which would increase the connectedness of the electricity network. Increasing interconnection between networks is likely to be an important feature of the electricity industry in Europe as the drive to maximise supplies of secure, low carbon sources of energy increases over the next two decades.

18.3 While a number of options are being explored, there is a technical preference for the shortest route, which would mean a landing point in the North East of Scotland. Peterhead has already been identified as a potential node in a sub-sea network and this project is being considered for inclusion in the Main Issues Report as a project of national importance.

## **19 SDPA Website Statistics (July – December 2010)**

19.1 The summary of web statistics for Q3 and Q4 2010 is set out in Figure 10 below. This shows a range of data on visitors and site traffic.

**Figure 10: Website Summary Statistics**

	<b>Q3 2010</b>	<b>Q4 2010</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>Visits</b>	1,727	1,966	+13.8
<b>Unique visitors</b>	1,049	1,009	-3.8
<b>% new visitors</b>	51.8	43.1	-16.7
<b>Page views</b>	6,006	6,986	+16.3
<b>Average pages viewed</b>	3.48	3.55	+2.1
<b>Average time spent at site</b>	2:44	2:47	+2.1
<b>Direct / Referral / Search (%)</b>	19 / 39 / 42	23 / 29 / 48	n/a

19.2 In total, almost 3,700 visits to the SDPA website were recorded in the six month period, with over 1,000 unique visitors each quarter. Despite a greater number of visits in Q4, the number of unique and percentage of new visitors was lower than Q3. This is likely to be due to increased traffic from council officers accessing the site to work on a specific project; the increase in page views may also be attributed to this project. However, other 'spikes' can be seen when committee papers are published and when e-notifications are sent to registered users. In Q4, two further periods where traffic increased were in the days after the AWPR press release and in the days prior to the initial deadline for the City LDP consultation.

19.3 The average number of pages viewed (3.5) and time spent on the site (2min 45sec approx.) are similar across each quarter, although this excludes time spent viewing PDF documents such as the structure plan itself. Between 19-23% of visitors accessed the site using previous bookmarks (or directly typing in the address), 42-48% used a search engine (e.g. Google, Bing, BT-yahoo) and 29-39% were referred via a link from another websites. Top referrals remained from Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, although SESplan, the Scottish Government and old NEST website also provided access points.

## **20 Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning**

20.1 The winners of the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning 2010 were announced in Edinburgh on 10 March 2011 (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Policy/awards/2010Competition>).

20.2 There were 33 entries in total and the overall winner was Scotia Homes for Glenside, its mixed use development at Rothienorman, in the Development on the Ground category.

20.3 The summary of the judges recommendations notes that they were -

*"...extremely impressed with the achievement of a mixed use development that fits well into the existing context, has been commercially successful and demonstrates the attitudes and behaviours that represent a positive planning culture.*

*The application of a design led approach, in consultation with the community, has resulted in the development of a distinctive place: One that draws on and works with the existing local building vernacular in terms of scale, materials and colours without appearing pastiche; and where standard approaches to road design have been challenged to create streets that are not dominated by the car, are well connected and that provide a mix of active uses with clear distinctions between public and private space. The house types built meet the local demand and the range provides flexibility of occupancy, not simply for private sale or social rent. The layout mixes residential with commercial providing for new ways of living and working. This longer term perspective has helped the commercial viability of the site through the recession, with the majority of the development now built and occupied. We felt this entry promotes the benefits of doing things differently and being innovative, for example working to change the attitudes of the company's sales team and contractors. The developer also showed a commitment to implementing lessons learnt in other projects across Scotland.*

*The Judges commend the variety of outcomes achieved by this development: a quality place, community involvement, commercial success and an enabling culture. We therefore consider this entry worthy of the recommendation for overall winner."*

20.4 A summary of the project has been prepared for the Scottish Government's good practice case studies which has been reproduced as Appendix 2 and is available from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/212607/0114441.pdf> .

20.5 The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan targets national recognition for the quality and design of new developments in the area. The development in Rothienorman reflects many of the aspirations of the structure plan in relation to the development of sustainable mixed communities.