

ABERDEEN CITY & SHIRE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AUTHORITY

Date: 23 September 2011

Title: Strategic Development Plan – Main Issues Report

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) to undertake consultation on a main issues report as part of the preparation of a strategic development plan for the area.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan was approved by Scottish Ministers in August 2009 and sets a framework for the development of the area to 2030. That plan received widespread support for its visionary strategy and that it broke the mould of previous structure plans.

- 2.2 The new planning act replaced the duty to prepare a structure plan with one requiring the SDPA to prepare a strategic development plan. The SDPA's development plan scheme (2011/12) identifies the need to submit a strategic development plan to Scottish Ministers by August 2013 (four years after the approval of the structure plan. This plan will replace the current structure plan and the main issues report is a significant step in working towards that target.

- 2.3 Guidance on the preparation of strategic development plans is provided in Scottish Government [Circular 1/2009](#) which emphasises that main issues reports:

"...are key documents in terms of front-loading effective engagement on the plan, and aligning development planning with SEA. They are the principal opportunity within the plan preparation process for productively consulting stakeholders on the content of the plan and for involving the wider public. Main issues reports are not draft versions of the plan, but should concentrate on the key changes that have occurred since the previous plan and on the authority's big ideas for future development. They should identify a preferred option and reasonable alternatives, and be informed by a sound evidence base. Content that the authority proposes to retain from the existing plan, or which does not have a significant environmental or other effect, should be identified but with limited discussion." Scottish Planning Policy (2009), para 45

- 2.4 Issues relating to the content of the main issues report have been discussed with stakeholders on a number of occasions and were discussed at the joint SDPA / Nestrans workshop on 25 March 2011 and a Members seminar on 11 June 2011 (to which all members of both councils were invited).

3 Early engagement

- 3.1 Officers have been engaging with the Key Agencies and other stakeholders over the past year to identify the nature and scale of change required to the current structure plan. This has taken the form of two workshop sessions and a number of topic-based sessions as well as an opportunity for Key Agencies to comment on an early draft of the main issues report itself.
- 3.2 A Members seminar was held on 11 June 2011 to which all members from both councils were invited. Although attendance was limited, the opportunity was taken to explore a number of themes which had been identified for possible change in the main issues report.
- 3.3 An opportunity was also offered to community councils and others (via the SDPA website and an email to registered users) to contribute ideas to the process. A small response was received to this and these were considered in the preparation of the main issues report.
- 3.4 All of these mechanisms were helpful in informing the content of the main issues report and emphasised that the desire was for an evolution of the current structure plan rather than changes of a more significant nature.

4 The main issues report

- 4.1 The main issues report is a discussion document rather than a draft plan and as such focuses on areas where change is required rather than those where no change is proposed. A draft main issues report is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The two drivers for change identified in the main issues report are facilitating development in challenging economic time and responding to the challenges and opportunities of climate change. These have both influenced each of the issues identified in the report.
- 4.3 With the exception of the delivery of new waste management infrastructure (where the policy position of the Scottish Government has changes since the structure plan), the changes proposed in the main issues report are of a relatively minor nature – reflecting the desire to roll the plan forward in an evolutionary way. Many important issues are not touched upon, or given very brief mention, because it is not thought that the position set out in the structure plan needs to change.
- 4.4 While the delays to the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route have been very disappointing and damaging to the local economy, it remains a critical piece of infrastructure. The Scottish Government and both councils are committed to its delivery as soon as practically possible and it remains vital for the implementation of the current structure plan and forthcoming strategic development plan. It is to be hoped that the legal process will be swiftly concluded so that work can begin on the ground.
- 4.5 A number of new proposals are suggested for inclusion in the strategic development plan, along with the retention of all existing proposals contained in

the structure plan. These encompass energy infrastructure, transport interventions and environmental enhancements, with the Scottish Government recognising that some of these are of potentially national as well as regional significant.

- 4.6 With its role as a discussion paper it is important that fixed positions are not taken at this stage but that an open discussion with communities and stakeholders is able to take place. While a range of issues and options have been identified at this stage, it is possible that more will be identified through the engagement on the report.
- 4.7 The main issues report itself will have a 'Crystal Mark' from the Plain English Campaign in recognition of its clarity. It is hoped that this will help individuals, communities and stakeholders to engage with it. The text will also be available in audio form either on CD or to download from the SDPA website.

5 Supporting documents

- 5.1 A range of supporting documents have been prepared, either to inform the preparation of the main issues report or to assess it for its impacts on a range of interests. These are included as additional appendices to this report as set out below:

Appendix 2	Monitoring Statement
Appendix 3	Housing Need and Demand Assessment
Appendix 4	Climate Change Study
Appendix 5	Transport Background Paper
Appendix 6	Structure Plan Risk Assessment
Appendix 7	Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment
Appendix 8	Strategic Environmental Assessment
Appendix 9	Habitats Regulations Assessment
Appendix 10	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

- 5.2 It is recognised that some of these are lengthy documents but are key to informing and assessing the main issues report.
- 5.3 A key document is the monitoring statement which monitors progress with the delivery of the current structure plan as well as identifying issues emerging from changes to government policy. As such it is one of the key documents to inform the main issues report. Two other documents which fulfilled this role are the housing need and demand assessment (prepared in partnership with housing and planning services in the two councils and a wider group of stakeholders) and the climate change study.
- 5.4 Each of the supporting documents will be published alongside the main issues report and be available at all public libraries and on the SDPA website.
- 5.5 The development plan scheme made reference to two documents not attached to this report, a retail study and a draft action programme. Those progressing the Business Improvement District (BID) in Aberdeen, the Energetica initiative and the SDPA were all looking to produce related studies with significant

elements in common. In order to avoid wasting resources a phased approach was taken. A report was prepared to inform the BID with input from the SDPA (<http://www.aberdeenbid.org/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=84&SID=32>). It was decided that this would be used as a key building block for a further look at retail issues over a wider area. In relation to the draft action programme it was decided to include much of this material within the main issues report itself rather than in a separate document at this stage.

6 Consultation

- 6.1 The development plan scheme sets out the how we intend to engage with stakeholders and communities on the main issues report. Even though the extent of change required to the current plan is now thought to be limited, it is proposed to run a twelve week consultation from 7 October to 31 December 2011 as previously agreed. While we will organise sessions in both Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, these are likely be informal in nature and focus on answering questions people may have – helping them to respond to the document. These events will take place in November 2011.
- 6.2 An advert will be placed in the Press and Journal and a range of local newspapers covering the area. A notice will be placed on the ‘tellmescotland’ website as well as a press release being issued and details placed on the SDPA website. Notification will also be given to all on the SDPA contacts database, enclosing a copy of the main issues report itself.
- 6.3 The main issues report and all supporting documents will be easily available from the SDPA website and on request as well as at public libraries throughout the area.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that the SDPA note the contents of this report and approve the publication of the main issues report (found in Appendix 1) and associated documents (Appendices 2 – 9) for consultation.

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