

**ABERDEEN CITY & SHIRE
STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AUTHORITY**

Date: 9 March 2012

Title: Water supply and waste water issues

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) on the ongoing discussions with Key Agencies regarding water abstraction from the River Dee and waste water disposal in Aberdeen City and Shire.

2 Background

2.1 The SDPA agreed the publication of a Main Issues Report at its meeting of 23 September 2011. At that meeting it was agreed that references to water abstraction and waste water issues would be added to the text and a report on these issues be presented to the SDPA at its next meeting.

2.2 A verbal update was provided at the December 2011 meeting of the SDPA as, due to the timing of meetings with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Water, a written report was not possible within the required timescale.

3 Water abstraction from the River Dee

3.1 The current structure plan (at para 4.10) recognises that the River Dee is the region's main source of drinking water and is protected under European legislation as a Special Area of Conservation. It therefore highlighted that managing the use of this resource is important, with targets set for all new development to use water-saving technology and to avoid having to increase the amount Scottish Water are licensed to abstract from the River Dee as a result of the new development proposed in the plan.

3.2 The Action Programme (Action 14) required the preparation of a position statement on water abstraction issues and this was completed in 2010 by a working group made up of the SDPA, Scottish Water, SNH, SEPA and the two councils. The output of this work is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

3.3 The Main Issues Report took this forward and highlighted the introduction of sustainability labeling within Building Standards and the ability to use this mechanism to push higher water efficiency standards in new development. This was seen as a key way of minimising abstraction demands on the River Dee.

3.4 The response to the Main Issues Report from SNH has once again highlighted the issue of abstraction from the River Dee, particularly in the context of the preparation of a Habitats Regulations Appraisal. Where it cannot be concluded

that a plan will not adversely affect the integrity of a European Site, the Habitats Regulations provide that the plan may only be adopted or approved where there are no alternative solutions and for imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

- 3.5 SNH is currently of the opinion that it is not possible to say beyond reasonable scientific doubt that the abstraction required to service the development contained in the plan would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the River Dee SAC.
- 3.6 Their response to the consultation suggests four possible remedies to this position:
- reducing the housing and employment allowances;
 - identify alternative sources for water supply;
 - caveat the allowances until more information is available (either in the plan or action programme); or
 - being in a position by the time the plan is approved (and ideally by the time the proposed plan is published) to say that the plan will not adversely effect the integrity of the River Dee SAC.
- 3.7 Work is ongoing primarily between SNH and SEPA focused on improving the information base required to make more definitive conclusions about the ability of the River Dee to accommodate the development planned for the later phases of the development plan. It is hoped that the outcome of this work will be to conclude that the plan will not adversely effect the integrity of the River Dee SAC.
- 3.8 However, it is recognised that the information base available may not be adequate to make conclusions beyond reasonable scientific doubt in the required timescales. To cover for this eventuality alternative solutions are also being explored, primarily focused on the caveat option which would enable more time for the information to be made available.

4 Waste water issues

- 4.1 Scottish Water is responsible for the transport, treatment and disposal of waste water. Mains sewers are 'Part 3' assets where developers are required to upgrade the pipes if they wish to connect to them and there is insufficient capacity to meet the increased demand brought about by the new development.
- 4.2 Whereas historic development discharged to combined sewers (taking both surface water as well as sewage), new development separates these to limit the amount of water requiring treatment at sewage works. The surface water from the development proposed by the structure plan and two local development plans will primarily be dealt with by ways of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and only waste water from new buildings will enter the mains system. Developers will have the option of either bypassing the current network of mains sewers or upgrading them where capacity is insufficient for the development proposed.

- 4.3 The purpose of combined sewer overflows (CSO's) is to release extremely dilute sewage, primarily surface water, into water bodies in times of heavy rainfall when the sewers are unable to cope. Scottish Water has plans to invest in some of their assets in the Aberdeen area to improve water quality and is working closely with SEPA to identify areas for improvement in order to meet Water Framework Directive objectives over the next few years.
- 4.4 As a consequence of the above, new development will not have an adverse impact on the sewer network, while Scottish Water are working to rectify existing network deficiencies where these have an unacceptable impact on water quality.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 Scottish Water, SEPA and SNH are all 'Key Agencies' in the preparation of the strategic development plan. All three have been engaged in the process to date, commented on the Main Issues Report and are committed to continue to be involved as the plan progresses to the proposed plan stage later this year and on towards approval and implementation.
- 5.2 Issues around water abstraction from the River Dee are strategic in nature and their resolution over the coming months is critical to the progress of the strategic development plan. A short-life working group is looking at these issues and will arrive at interim conclusions around the information base over the next few months. This will feed into work on the preparation of the strategic development plan and will be reported to the SDPA at its meeting in June 2012.
- 5.3 Issues relating to the capacity of the mains sewer network at times of heavy rainfall are not a strategic planning issue and the strategic development plan does not have a role in the resolution of any current problems. Developers will be required by Scottish Water to mitigate the impact of any additional development to ensure that it does not exceed the capacity of existing infrastructure and lead to environmental discharges. Scottish Water investment plans recognise the need to address existing problems and officers are happy to highlight any specific instances to Scottish Water to help inform their investment priorities.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that the SDPA note this report and the ongoing work taking place in the context of the preparation of the strategic development plan and associated assessments.

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