

Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan

Strategic Options Meeting with Communities and Stakeholders - Alford

Meeting Note

8 May 2007, 7.00pm

Vale Hotel, Alford

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A meeting was held on 8 May 2007 to discuss and record opinions on the different strategies that could be followed in the next structure plan – the strategic options. In addition, issues regarding the scale and timing of future development were raised and discussed.

2. The Audience

- 2.1 The following interests were represented at the meeting. A full list of attendees is provided at appendix 1.
- Murhead Nursing Home
 - Community Planning Officer
 - Tenant Participation Officer Aberdeenshire Council
 - Cluny Midmar Community Council
 - Golf Club Alford

3. The Content

- 3.1 Mr Piers Blaxter, Team Leader of the Structure Plans Team for Aberdeenshire Council, introduced himself and the other planning officer in attendance. He welcomed the audience and noted that the meeting was one of a series of workshops being held across the region, designed to capture views on possible strategies for the next structure plan (the Strategic Options). It was explained that views would be sought on the issues of where development should occur, when it should occur and how much development should be promoted.
- 3.2 Mr Blaxter explained that the views recorded from the meeting would be part of the evidence base of information that would be presented to elected members in September 2007, to help them decide on a preferred option for the strategy of the draft plan (the preferred strategic option). He stated that a meeting note for tonight's meeting would be available on the website (www.acssp.net) and would allow attendees to see how their views had been recorded. A report summarising the results of all of the meetings held on the Strategic Options will also be placed on this website; this report should be available by August 2007.

- 3.3 It was noted that a technical assessment of the various Strategic Options would also be undertaken as a separate process and that this would provide additional information for elected members to consider. Mr Blaxter suggested that the views of communities and stakeholders were needed to ensure that the draft plan would reflect something of the aspirations of groups and individuals from the region.

Background information on preparing the structure plan

- 3.4 Mr Blaxter provided some information on structure plans and their role in the planning system. He noted that structure plans form part of a Development Plan – something that, amongst other things, provides a set of rules to help make decisions on planning applications. He contrasted a structure plan with the other part of the Development Plan – a local plan – and noted that a structure plan is not as detailed in specifying the location of future development. A structure plan instead provides a long term, strategic vision for the development of land in an area. It was stated that the Councils’ next structure plan is being prepared with the intention of providing a 25-year vision for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.
- 3.5 After outlining the role of a structure plan, Mr Blaxter noted that a new planning Act, which will introduce changes to the current planning system, had recently been passed. Mr Blaxter listed a number of reasons why the new legislations had been written – to speed up the structure and local plan preparation process; to minimise repetition between the two plans; and to increase the level of stakeholder and community consultation earlier in the plan making process.
- 3.6 Under the new Planning etc. (Scotland) Act, 2006, structure plans will be replaced with a new style of plan – a strategic development plan. He noted that such a plan would concentrate on setting a vision, or “spatial strategy”, for the development of land across a City Region. As such, it is thought that the new documents will contain fewer detailed policies than is typically found in a structure plan.
- 3.7 It was stated that the regulations necessary for preparing a strategic development plan had not yet been drafted. As such, the two Councils are still preparing a structure plan, albeit one that will be in the style of the new documents; it is hoped that the end product can be converted into a strategic development plan.
- 3.8 Attendees were then reminded of the documents that had been published so far, in aid of producing the next structure plan (these are available from the website: www.acssp.net). Mr Blaxter also informed the attendees that the Strategic Environmental Assessment scoping report has recently been published. The document sets out how the council will measure environmental performance against the structure plan.
- 3.9 Mr Blaxter provided some information on the timetable for the production of the plan, taken from one of these documents – the Development Plan Scheme. He noted that the council is engaging the members of the community now, rather than at the draft plan stage, which had not been done before. Mr Blaxter also noted that the process of writing the draft plan would not begin until after elected members had decided upon a preferred strategic option. He further noted that this decision, in addition to being based on the views of stakeholders and on a technical assessment of the Options, would also be made in view of the draft vision for the plan.
- 3.10 Mr Blaxter then drew the audience’s attention to the draft vision, as stated in the Issues Report (one of the documents already published, as part of the plan-making process). He noted that the main elements of this vision provide a basis for

evaluating the Strategic Options, in the first group exercise that the attendees were to take part in. The themes of climate change (e.g. actively planning for climate change, such as flooding) and creating a critical mass of development were highlighted as being of particular interest. The notion of critical mass was explained as the amount of development necessary to make new community services and facilities viable, or to keep existing services and facilities going.

The scale of future development

- 3.11 The issue of the scale of future development was then introduced and a discussion on the “working hypotheses” of the planning team ensued. Three “working hypotheses” were suggested:
- the idea that the next structure plan should only seek to accommodate 75% of development within the strategy, with the rest accommodated as local need in a local development plan;
 - the idea that two thirds of development should be suggested for one theme of an Option (the “most” component) and one third in another (the “significant” component); and
 - the idea that there are three possible options for growth: slow growth, continuity or high growth.
- 3.12 Mr Blaxter asked a series of questions on the amount of new development currently taking place in the region and if the balance of City and rural development is right. Details of the responses to these questions can be found in Appendix 2.
- 3.13 The discussion progressed to focus on the first of the three hypotheses (the idea that 75% of development should be allocated by the strategic plan). The following bullet points summarise the issues discussed:
- Would support slightly more than 25% of new development in rural areas.
 - Future generations are unlikely to be able to afford a house in Alford. Mr Blaxter suggested that that could be reflected in the local need argument. A significant proportion of “local need” housing development would have to be affordable homes.
 - When Mr Blaxter was asked if it would be possible to meet the need for affordable housing, he said that most of the demand for housing land is near to the City, and providing sufficient land in this area would reduce pressure, and consequently competition for land in peripheral areas. Alternatively, land could be zoned for affordable housing, or a requirement made for a percentage of new dwellings to be affordable. Shared ownership could be another possibility, as the profit made on selling the house can be re-invested by the social landlord.
- 3.14 The discussion then moved on to discuss the third of the three hypotheses (the possible options for growth). The following bullet points summarise the issues:
- Should keep the Shire growing, but although developers have complained that there is a lack of land allocations, if development is released all over the Shire, it will lead to incrementalism. Mr Blaxter suggested that the council can target where development can grow (e.g. where critical mass projects are required, such as new infrastructure, rails or roads) through the local plan.
 - The issues of schools at overcapacity, the closure of shops, and the decline in population in some settlements, can make it difficult to start up a business. Mr

Blaxter said that critical mass is an issue. He added, you could only get a new school through a public/private scheme or by growth of the town (i.e. it is paid for by the developer), but the new development could change the character of the area. It was raised that the character of Alford is already changing, and that Alford should keep growing. Mr Blaxter suggested, if the growth pole strategy was developed, Alford would be included.

- Mr Blaxter concluded that the group favoured moderate/high growth in order to achieve critical mass for service improvement..

The Group Exercise

- 3.13 Mr Blaxter then introduced the group exercises. He explained that the purpose of the first exercise was to gauge a group's opinions on their preferred and least preferred Strategic Option. Due to the low number of participants, Mr Blaxter ran through some of the options with the group.
- 3.13 Results from the exercises are to be found at appendix 3. The group identified options 5 and 8 as their preferred option, with Option 4 as their least favoured option.
- 3.14 After this exercise, it was asked how much development is required to upgrade the sewage works? Mr Blaxter noted that a lack of vision or long term planning for the town frequently caused problems. Mr Blaxter provided an example of this lack of long-term thinking – 6 sewerage pipes were dug for 6 individual houses, but there should only have been one large pipe to serve all 6 houses if it was known they were to be built . The benefits of masterplanning for large sites were also discussed.
- 3.15 Mr Blaxter asked the group if they could 'sign up' to the idea of long term strategic masterplanning? In response it was suggested that it does require public knowledge of what the council is doing. A short discussion on public participation and how to increase numbers attending such events (e.g. to identify champions to inform other people) then took place.
- 3.15 The second exercise, involving the distribution of development, was not undertaken.

Timing of future development

- 3.16 After the group exercise, a brief discussion was held on the timing (or phasing) of development to be promoted by the plan. Mr Blaxter explained that the issue of phasing was being considered simply – in terms of whether the plan should be front-loaded (with land being released at the start of the 25 year plan period), back-loaded (with land released at the end of the plan period), or whether development should occur at a sustained rate.
- 3.17 A scale of between 1-10¹ was introduced to gauge opinion on when land should be released for development. Attendees suggested 6 (sustained back-loading) as their preferred rate of release.
- 3.18 One of the attendees provided an example for this figure, adding there should be some caution when releasing land for development, as 30 years ago, land was released in Elgin for development at one unit ahead of demand, but the site remained unoccupied until the market picked up.

¹ 1 indicates a desire for the plan to undertake extreme front loading and release a large proportion of land for development at the beginning of the plan period while 10 indicates a desire for the plan to release a large proportion of land at the end of the plan period.

- 3.19 This was taken as giving support to a sustained rate of release. Mr Blaxter suggested that even if sites were front-loaded, the market would still dictate which sites are developed. However, strategic control of land release could be lost.
- 3.17 Mr Blaxter brought the meeting to a close and outlined the next steps for producing the structure plan. He reminded attendees that the results from the group exercises would be used to inform a recommendation to elected members, on a preferred strategic option. He further stated that a note of the meeting would be placed on the website: www.acssp.net and that the attendees are unlikely to hear anything on the structure plan until the New Year, when the draft is published for comment. Attendees were thanked for their contribution and the meeting was brought to a close.

Appendix 1

The planning team in attendance during the meeting were as follows:

Piers Blaxter, Team Leader (Structure Plans Team), Aberdeenshire Council

Alison Hogge, Policy Planner (Structure Plans Team), Aberdeenshire Council

The following individuals also attended the meeting:

Name:	Interest/organisation:
Charles Lawson	Muirhead Nursing Home & Community Planning Officer
Jill Sowden	Aberdeenshire Council
Gordon Ross	Cluny Midmar & Monymusk Community Council
Bruce Alexander	Alford Golf Club
Julie Alexander	Alford Golf Club

Appendix 2

The scale of future development

Question from Mr Blaxter	Answer from the audience
Is the council allowing too much development?	Houses are selling quickly, so there is the demand.
Should the council be meeting that demand?	If the population is rising, then the council will have to meet the demand.
Is the city/rural balance of development correct?	There is a slow down in the City; people are moving to the Shire, as not enough development is occurring around the edge of the City.
Is there a need to recognise the need to accommodate demand in the City as well as local need (i.e. to ensure there is opportunity for areas outwith the strategy to be self sufficient). Do attendees supported development for local need?	Yes. In the 1970s there was concern that Alford would become a ghost town, but now it has grown.

Appendix 3

Over the following pages, information is provided on the responses set down by groups of attendees, when undertaking the exercise to evaluate their preferred Option.

The Options referred to in the following tables are as follows:

- Option 1:** Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in Edge of City Settlements.
- Option 2:** Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in the existing transport corridor.
- Option 3:** Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in a new transport corridor.
- Option 4:** Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in growth poles across Aberdeenshire.
- Option 5:** Most of the growth in Aberdeen City and significant growth in new settlements.
- Option 6:** Most of the development in the existing transport corridor, significant development in Aberdeen City.
- Option 7:** Most of the development in the existing transport corridor, significant development in growth poles across Aberdeenshire.
- Option 8:** Most of the development in the existing transport corridor, significant development in a new transport corridor.

A table to show the good points recorded in the evaluation of preferred Strategic Options

Option Chosen as Preferred Strategic Option	Good Points of the Option					
	It reduces resource use and impacts on climate through...	It would be good for environmental quality because...	It would be good for the economy because...	It would be fair because...	It would increase choice and quality of life because...	Other remarks
Option 1	No Comment	No Comment	Commuting is a key issue. People live in Alford, but work in the City. However, if more employment land is provided, this could boost local opportunities for business.	Need a mix of development. Should enable settlements with business land with more land, and have housing nearby.	No Comment	No Comment
Option 2	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 3	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 4	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 5	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 6	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 7	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>

Option 8	No comment	No comment	<p>A lot of development is proposed for Peterhead, which would increase employment land, provided people are there to do the work.</p> <p>It would improve the opportunity for rail. The AWPR would then just carry traffic around the City.</p>	No comment	No comments	No comment
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A table to show the bad points recorded in the evaluation of the least preferred Strategic Options

Option Chosen as Preferred Strategic Option	Bad Points of the Option					
	It does not reduce resource use and impacts on climate because...	It would have impacts on environmental quality because...	It would not be good for the economy because...	It would not be fair because...	It would not increase choice and quality of life...	Other remarks
Option 1	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>

Option 2	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 3	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 4	No Comment	No Comment	People will commute to Aberdeen regardless.	No Comment	No Comment	No Comment
Option 5	Objectors said the AWPR would encourage development at every junction and that it would become a development corridor.	No comment	No comment	No comment	No comment	No comment
Option 6	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 7	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>
Option 8	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>	<i>Not Evaluated</i>