

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

**Date: 18 September 2009**

**Title: Structure Plan Progress Report**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members of progress on the structure plan since the last meeting of the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) on 17 June 2009.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 At its meeting of 17 June the SDPA were advised that the Finalised Structure Plan had been deposited with Scottish Ministers on 27 February and that the deadline of 24 April for making representations and objections to Scottish Ministers had passed. A breakdown of the representations and objections, of which there were approximately 350, were given to Members.

**3 Progress since 17 June 2009**

- 3.1 As Members will be aware, Scottish Ministers approved the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan 2009 on 14 August 2009. The plan was approved as submitted by the SDPA with no modifications. The plan came into force on 17 August 2009 (see decision letter; Appendix 1).
- 3.2 The new Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan supersedes the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan (North East Scotland Together - NEST) approved by Scottish Ministers in December 2001. The only exception to this is that part of Aberdeenshire within the Cairngorms National Park where NEST will remain the Structure Plan until the new Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan is adopted (anticipated in November 2011). Furthermore the approved plan now forms part of the development plan and the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire local development plans currently in preparation will need to be consistent with it.
- 3.3 A press notice appeared on 14 August 2009 in the Press and Journal Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire editions in addition to the Edinburgh Gazette. In addition, a press release appeared on 14 August 2009 in the Press and Journal Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire editions. Also on the 14 August 2009 the SDPA website and Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council websites were updated to reflect the approval of the plan and copies of the decision letter and plan as approved were deposited in all public libraries throughout the area.
- 3.4 Members (and substitute members) of the SDPA were sent an e-mail early on the morning of 14 August giving notification of the plan's approval and an e-mail update to those registered on the SDPA website was sent at 10am.

- 3.5 The Scottish Government sent letters to all who commented on the Finalised Structure Plan informing of their decision. However, letters were also sent by the SDP team to all members of the Key Stakeholder Reference Group updating them on the Scottish Ministers decision.

#### Legal Challenge

- 3.6 A six week period for legal challenge to the approval of the plan by the Scottish Ministers expires on 25 September 2009. This opportunity for challenge is limited to the grounds that the plan is not within the powers conferred by the 1997 Act or that any requirement of the Act (or regulations) have not been complied with.

#### Publication of the Approved Plan

- 3.7 Although copies of the plan, as approved, have been deposited in all public libraries, Woodhill House and St Nicholas House a full graphic version will be published following the expiry of the period for legal challenge (assuming no challenge is made). However, the plan came into force on 17 August 2009.
- 3.8 The document will be available on the SDPA website, with printed copies kept to a minimum. The printing of the approved plan will come out of the SDPA budget and a charge is likely to be made for copies of the plan following an initial circulation of complementary copies to:
- Councillors
  - Libraries
  - Community Councils
  - Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire officers

#### Audio Format of the Approved Plan

- 3.9 Following a request from a visually impaired member of the public to Aberdeen City Council for an audio copy of their local plan, the possibility of preparing an audio version of the structure plan was investigated. The Grampian Society for the Blind prepared a version of the plan in an audio format which is now available as a double CD or from the SDPA website.
- 3.10 Making the plan available in this alternative format increases the accessibility of the plan, complementing the Crystal Mark already achieved (see below). In addition it evidences a commitment to equalities and human rights, as required by the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006.

#### Crystal Mark

- 3.11 The Plain English Campaign have confirmed that The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan is the only structure plan in the UK to have been given a crystal mark.

## **4 Structure Plan Implementation**

### Local Development Plans

- 4.1 One of the fundamental tools to implement the structure plan are the local development plans being prepared by the two councils. There is a legal requirement for consistency between the structure plan and local development plans, and more detail of the progress of both councils is provided in the 'Planning Update' report elsewhere on this agenda.

### Development Management

- 4.2 As part of the development plan (along with the adopted Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire local plans), the determination of planning applications will need to be made in the context of the new plan, with applications being determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.3 Reports have been submitted to both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire councils to inform Members of the implications of the new structure plan in relation to policy and planning application decisions as set out below:
- Aberdeen City Council - 19 August 2009
  - Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee - 20 August 2009
- 4.4 The implications for development management procedures and decision-making are being explored with both councils.

### Action Programme

- 4.5 The Scottish Ministers decision letter is an important consideration in the preparation of the Action Programme. Appendix 2 contains a draft framework for the Action Programme for consideration by Members. Consultation with potential delivery partners and stakeholders is ongoing. A more detailed version will be prepared for the next meeting of the SDPA in December.
- 4.6 The action programme will take each of the action points identified in the plan and give further detail as to the role to be played by the SDPA and others as well as resources and timescales for delivery. This will provide a clear framework against which monitoring will take place.

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 4.7 A Post-Approval Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement (Appendix 3) has been prepared in accordance with Section 18 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.
- 4.8 The document sets out the key facts in relation to the approved plan and outlines the SEA process that has been carried out in the preparation of the approved plan as required under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005:
- Taking into account the views of the consultation authorities in relation to the scope and level of detail appropriate for the environmental report;

- Preparation of an Environmental Report;
- Consultation on the Environmental Report;
- Taking the findings of the Environmental Report and the results of consultation into account when preparing the final plan;
- Justification for choosing the approved plan in light of all other reasonable alternatives; and
- Commitment to monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan.

4.9 The Post Adoption Statement concludes that the SEA process has had a positive impact on the approved plan however it was made clear from the assessment that the plan is of a strategic nature and therefore many of the environmental issues identified will require to be assessed in more detail as the plan is implemented through various related plans (such as the local development plans).

#### Structure Plan Dissemination

4.10 It is planned to hold events for a number of groups in October which will assist in the circulation of vital information regarding the implementation of the approved structure plan and the implications for all involved. Further details of the events will be distributed in due course however they will be primarily aimed at:

- Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Members;
- Development Management; and
- Developers and agents.

## **5 SDPA Website**

5.1 The SDPA website ([www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk](http://www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk)) was launched on 27 June 2008 to coincide with the designation of the SDPA by Scottish Ministers on 25 June and publication of the draft structure plan. In the intervening 15 months it has been regularly updated and has served a key role in allowing access to information on the work of the SDPA and the preparation of the structure plan. It has been designed to be interactive, in that representations to consultations were able to be made online and people can register for updates, with more than 115 doing so before the review commenced.

5.2 A review of the site has been carried out over recent months which has looked at the extent to which the objectives of the site have been met and identified areas for improvement.

5.3 The review included an analysis of web statistics and comparable sites as well as a user survey and content analysis.

5.4 The review has given rise to a series of recommendations for improvements to the site. These will be implemented over the coming months in parallel with a change in focus for the site from the preparation of the structure plan to its implementation and the start of work on the first strategic development plan. This will improve the accessibility of the information on the site and make the monitoring of site usage more meaningful.

## **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The printing of the approved structure plan is likely to cost less than £5,000 and this has been budgeted for in the current financial year.
- 5.2 It is estimated that the development of the website will cost around £2,000 which will be covered by the Scottish Government start-up grant.
- 5.3 There are no other financial implications arising from this report.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 It is recommended that the SDPA
  - (a) welcome the approval of the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan by Scottish Ministers;
  - (b) agree the costs detailed in this report; and
  - (c) otherwise note the content of this report.

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