

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Committee: 9 June 2008

Draft Structure Plan

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the agreement of Committee on a draft structure plan (and associated documents) for consultation as well as the proposed consultation arrangements.

2 Background

- 2.1 The preparation of a new structure plan for the North East formally started on 23 February 2007, although engagement with communities and stakeholders started in late 2006. Engagement has involved two rounds of formal consultation on an issues report and a provisional strategy as well as numerous community, stakeholder and Councillor workshops. A 'Provisional Draft' structure plan was published on 2 April 2008 and formed the basis of consultation on the content of a draft plan with both Councils. Responses to that consultation were considered at the meeting of this Committee on 23 May 2008.

3 Draft Structure Plan

- 3.1 Since the Committee last considered a version of the plan, amendments have been made to secure a 'Crystal Mark' from the Plain English Campaign, clarify parts of the text which lacked precision, improve the clarity of the key diagram and take on board comments from Members in relation to:
- strategic developments which may be justified outwith the strategic growth areas (such as minerals);
 - new ideas not just coming from universities;
 - the proposed community stadium; and
 - the Blackdog to Ellon section of the strategic growth area to Peterhead.
- 3.2 In relation to the discussion at the meeting of this Committee on 23 May 2008, it is proposed to address the topic of potential new settlements through a consultation question rather than through a reference in the draft plan itself.
- 3.3 The text of the draft plan attached at Appendix 1 has been approved by the Plain English Campaign for its clarity. As a consequence, the draft plan will be able to display a 'Crystal Mark'.
- 3.4 One consequence of attaining the Crystal Mark has been that the plan now contains a three-page glossary (which has not been presented to Members before) to explain words and phrases that we would not otherwise have been able to use. However, this should make the plan even more accessible.

- 3.5 Officers are currently working up a graphic designed version of the plan that will be used for the consultation process. Including the front and rear covers, key diagram and glossary, the published document will be 28 pages long.

4 Associated consultation documents

- 4.1 In addition to the draft structure plan, a number of additional documents need to be published alongside it. These are outlined in the paragraphs below.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 4.2 In accordance with the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, the draft plan has been subject to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process. This is designed to ensure that environmental issues are taken into account during the preparation of a plan and that decisions on the plan are made in a way that explicitly recognises the potential environmental impacts. The SEA has been through a number of stages already (and been reported to this Committee), including the preparation of a scoping report which was sent to the SEA Gateway for comment from the 'consultation authorities'. The assessment identifies a range of positive and negative 'significant effects' on the environment (such as water abstraction from the River Dee and air quality in Aberdeen), with the plan itself containing mitigation measures.
- 4.3 The Environmental Report (Appendix 2) will be published alongside the draft plan, sent to the 'consultation authorities' and be open to comment during the consultation period. Any comments made will be taken into account during the preparation of a finalised plan.

Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment

- 4.4 A commitment was made in the Development Plan Scheme to equal opportunities and the assessment of the draft and final plan to make sure they do not discriminate against anybody. An Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EqHRIA) is used to assess the draft plan for this purpose. The assessment did not identify any negative impacts.
- 4.5 An EqHRIA (Appendix 3) has been prepared on the basis of the draft plan, will be published alongside the draft plan and be open to comment during the consultation period. Any comments made will be taken into account during the preparation of a finalised plan.

Background Paper

- 4.6 A Report of Survey was published in February 2007 which set out factual and statistical information on the North East in relation to its population, households, environment, economy, transport and housing. In relation to some of the information contained in the Report of Survey (where it impacts on the content of the draft plan), there is a need to provide an update by way of justification. The main elements covered by the Background Paper (Appendix 4) are recent population and household forecasts / projections, the agreement on the principle of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and an updated Urban Capacity Study for Aberdeen City.

5 Proposed consultation arrangements

- 5.1 If agreed as the basis for consultation, it is proposed to publish the draft plan and commence consultation as soon as possible. In practice, given the turn-around time for printing the documents, this is likely to be Friday 27 June 2008.
- 5.2 In light of the holiday period during July and the first part of August, it is appropriate to extend the consultation period beyond six weeks. A ten-week consultation is proposed which would give a closing date of 5 September 2008 for responses.
- 5.3 In addition to press releases, adverts will be placed in the Press & Journal, one of the Aberdeen free papers and 13 weekly papers throughout Aberdeenshire to announce the publication of the draft plan and the consultation period.
- 5.4 Copies of the plan will be widely distributed to community councils and existing contacts as well as being available at libraries, offices of the two Councils and information points. Copies of the plan and associated documents will also be available on CD. If requested and practical, arrangements will be made to translate the plan into other languages or make it available in an alternative format.
- 5.5 A website will be launched to coincide with the start of the consultation period, with existing sites either containing a link or re-directing people to the new site. Reflecting the formal designation of the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) on 25 June 2008, the website will be the first online presence of the SDPA (www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk). Responses to the consultation can be made online through a form on the website.
- 5.6 Around 14 public meetings will be organised throughout the area from 11 – 29 August, leaving one clear week before the deadline for consultation responses. It is recognised that the first week of this coincides with the last week of the school holidays. However, meetings will be organised in such a way as to give people in these areas an alternative date and location outwith the holiday period. Although the main purpose of these meetings will be to inform, answer questions and encourage written responses, the opportunity will be taken to seek feedback on the plan as a whole.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 It is recommended that the draft structure plan (Appendix 1) and associated documents (Appendices 2 – 4) be agreed as the basis of consultation as outlined in this report.

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