

City and Shire launch public consultation to help deliver vision for the region's future

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA), on behalf of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire councils, launched a public consultation today (October 7) to discover what residents and stakeholders think of potential changes to its blueprint for the future.

The consultation, which will last for 13 weeks, encourages people to give their views on a new report focusing on the issues facing the region as it looks to maintain and enhance its attractiveness and continues to develop sustainably until 2035.

The SDPA and both councils had previously agreed a Structure Plan in 2009 mapping out their long-term plan but in accordance with changes in Scottish planning laws the Strategic Development Planning Authority must now submit a Strategic Development Plan to Scottish Ministers in 2013.

Using the current structure plan as its foundation, the new report – which was discussed by City and Shire councillors at a meeting of the SDPA on 23 September – focuses on the main issues arising in the past two years which must be addressed in the strategic plan. The report offers an insight into how both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire can tackle the impact of the global recession and climate change in order to deliver the aspirational vision of the region's future.

Highlighted in the report are a list of new groundbreaking proposals designed to generate sustained economic development, including plans for a strategic transport fund, the development of Peterhead as an electricity transmission hub and making provision for carbon capture and storage.

Chair of the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority Councillor Peter Argyle said: "This main issues report marks a significant step in delivering a strategic development plan to Scottish Ministers in 2013.

“The report proposes a new way of dealing with the effects of new developments on the transport network and highlights the importance of making changes to the way we manage our waste as well as a range of exciting proposals.

“We want to hear the views of communities and others with an interest to help us prepare the proposed strategic development plan next year.”

Vice chair Councillor Kate Dean said: “This report makes it clear we want to roll forward the plan we made in 2009. But time moves on and this report highlights the new challenges we face and some of the options to deliver our long-term vision for the North-east.

“It is important residents’ voices are heard as this plan will be integral to maintaining Aberdeen City and Shire’s status as a great place to live for generations to come.”

The purpose of the strategic development plan

The new strategic development plan aims to set out a framework to develop Aberdeen City and Shire up to 2035. The document will map out a framework for the delivery of new homes, businesses, transport infrastructure and facilities to ensure continued prosperity.

It will replace the structure plan, which was agreed by councillors from both councils and approved by Scottish Ministers in 2009, taking into account two major new influences in the form of climate change and the challenging economic times of recent years.

The main issues report highlights the areas of the existing structure plan where changes may be needed and offers new proposals to target transport improvements, continued economic development and managing waste and recycling levels in line with national guidelines.

The public consultation wants to get people involved, encouraging debate ahead of preparing the proposed plan for submission to Scottish Ministers in 2013.

Sustainable economic growth

The main issues report recognises that the current structure plan was positive about new development and ambitious in its vision – supporting a significant improvement in the quantity and quality of new development. While not immune to the impacts of global financial turmoil, the area has been one of the most robust in the UK.

The strategic development plan must take into account the economic challenges facing the region, which although less marked than elsewhere cannot be ignored.

The main issues report emphasises a need to develop better transport systems in order to deliver growth as well as the need for improved digital infrastructure (such as super-fast broadband). The proposals highlighted in the report also emphasise the importance of sustainable economic growth, emphasising projects which can have a major impact on mitigating the effects of climate change.

Supporting development

With public sector money already committed to a large number of critical transport projects, including the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR), the Haudagain roundabout, Aberdeen to Inverness rail improvements and the A90 Balmedie to Tippetty dual carriageway, the report recommends alternative funding methods are a necessity.

In order to sustain development the report highlights a groundbreaking proposal to generate more than £80 million for a strategic transport fund to deliver additional vital transport projects for the area. The details of the strategic transport fund (developed in partnership with Nestrans and Transport Scotland) is subject to a separate consultation also launched today (October 7).

All housing, business, industrial, retail and commercial leisure developments (subject to criteria) will be expected to make a contribution to the fund, which would be designed to create an estimated £86.6million central pot to improve transport projects expected to be completed by 2023.

Developers working in the city and main development corridors in Aberdeenshire would pay a fixed amount (depending on the nature and scale of development) to pay for the action needed. Under the present guidance the formula for contributions would equate to average contributions of £2,064 per house unit and £62,010 per hectare for non-residential uses.

Areas of transport infrastructure identified as potential benefactors, include:

- Bridge of Dee improvements
- New rail station at Kintore
- Improvements to the junction capacities to the A96 and upgrading the AWPR at Kingswells North Junction
- Upgrading A944 junctions and safety improvements on the access road to the A93
- Improvements to junction capacities on the A956 and A90 and a River Dee link

- Parkway, Persley Bridge and Parkhill junction capacity improvements
- Bus priority measures and frequency improvements
- Extra bus services linking new development to important employment destinations

Nestrans as the Regional Transport Partnership would hold and administer the fund in a ring-fenced account.

The monies in the account will only be available for delivering strategic transport projects in the identified locations, including detailed assessment, development and design work. An annual report will be published clearly setting out the balance sheet of the fund and the projects progressed during the year.

The consultation into the strategic transport fund runs in parallel with the strategic development fund for six weeks and will conclude on 18 November. Homes for Scotland, Grampian House Builders Committee and chartered surveyors across the North-east have already been consulted and given feedback.

The main issues report also emphasises that with the decline in Scottish Government funding for affordable housing it will be vital to focus on delivering what is achievable rather than aiming for the unattainable and that the delivery of affordable housing will only be achieved with significant levels of housing provided by the private sector.

Managing Aberdeen City and Shire's resources efficiently

The report states the plan's vision will continue to emphasise the confident and courageous decisions needed to lead the way towards development being sustainable, including dealing with climate change.

The long-term aim remains to generate 100% of the electricity the City and Shire needs from renewable sources by 2020, with detailed proposals for energy and water efficiency. However, the report says the strategic plan must recognise the Scottish Government published its Zero Waste Plan in 2009, which sets down guidelines for just 5% of waste being sent to landfill by 2025 with recycling rates of at least 70% of all waste.

In order to meet the targets imposed by the Scottish Government, the main issues report proposes Aberdeen City and Shire seek significant new waste-management facilities in a range of locations and use a number of innovative technologies to process and treat waste. To meet the extremely challenging targets the plan notes there is an urgent need to put the zero waste plan into practice.

New projects proposed for inclusion in the strategic plan

The structure plan included major projects such as the AWPR, Balmedie to Tipperty (A90) carriageway, a new community stadium in Aberdeen and prison in Peterhead.

The new report highlights a range of additional major projects to attract investment, support growth and deal with climate change - helping achieve the vision for Aberdeen City and Shire.

• Carbon Capture and Storage

This proposal focuses on capturing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from Peterhead Power Station (as well as locations outwith the area) and transporting it to St Fergus to store under the North Sea. This would significantly reduce emissions to the atmosphere which would otherwise contribute towards global warming. It would also provide an economic boost and jobs for the area. Peterhead and Longannet Power Station in Fife could capture and store around 30 million tonnes of CO₂ over 10 years. This would not only be important regionally but to Scotland as a whole and could generate significant investment and jobs.

• Electricity Transmission Hub

This proposal allows Peterhead to become a focal point in the electricity transmission network with links to England and other European countries as well as offshore renewable generation. These plans would see onshore converter stations built near Peterhead as well as onshore and offshore power cables.

One project would see Peterhead become a leading exporter of energy to north-east England with a 365km cable capable of carrying 1800MW of electricity. The cable would require a transformer plant to convert alternating current (AC) to direct current (DC) and back again. The transformer plant would be a significant development and would involve a sizeable new building to house it.

As well as the link to England the plan would also like to include support for Peterhead to become home to a sub-sea link between Scotland and Norway allowing two-way flow of renewable energy across the North Sea. Peterhead would appear to be a natural choice for the joint venture between Scottish and Southern Energy and four European partners for the NorthConnect project.

• **National Renewables Infrastructure Plan**

A national plan was published by the Scottish Government in July 2010 identifying 11 major locations which could support a globally competitive offshore renewables industry. The report identifies Aberdeen and Peterhead Harbours as a “subsea cluster”, capable of utilising its expertise in serving the energy sector through installing, operating and maintaining windfarms using land near the ports.

What happens next?

The 13-week consultation period on the main issues report into the strategic development plan will last until 6 January 2012, after which responses will be reviewed and a proposed strategic development plan prepared.

The six-week consultation on the strategic transport fund will last until 18 November 2011.

To take part in the consultations visit www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk or email team@aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk

A proposed version of the strategic development plan will be published in September 2012 before a further consultation is carried out ahead of an anticipated submission to Scottish Ministers in June 2013.

The plan will then be examined by Scottish Ministers with approval of the plan expected by June 2014.

ENDS

Notes to editors

The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) is a partnership between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire councils and has a key role in guiding development over the next 25 years. Its vision is to create an even more exciting, modern and sustainable European city region - an excellent place to live, visit and do business.

The SDPA was designated by Scottish Ministers on 25 June 2008 and is one of 4 city-region planning authorities in Scotland. Its primary role is to prepare and keep up-to-date a strategic development plan for the area. It does this by engaging with both stakeholders and communities - all with an interest in the future of the area.