

## **REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 30 APRIL 2009**

### **ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN MAIN ISSUES REPORT**

#### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report presents the Main Issues Report of the Local Development Plan, and associated documents, and seeks authority to publish them for public consultation, in line with the timetable within the Development Plan Scheme previously agreed by the Committee.

#### **2 Background**

- 2.1 Over the past year the Policy Planning team has been working to produce a series of options, including a set of preferred options, which will form the basis of the Local Development Plan. These are options both for development of new approaches to certain policy areas (such as rural development and enabling development), and for the development and growth of settlements. The options developed have been derived from intensive and targeted consultation with a variety of groups, including Community Councils, the Citizens Panel and representatives of the development industry. Councillors have also been closely involved in this process through seminars held both at Area Committee and whole Council levels.
- 2.2 The Main Issues Report is a key statutory document associated with the new system of development planning introduced by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. It builds upon, and presents options for the delivery of, the Finalised Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan. It is anticipated that the Structure Plan will be approved by the time the next step in the Local Development Plan process is required, the production by Aberdeenshire Council of a Proposed Plan. The options presented in the Main Issues Report are likely to be sufficiently flexible to allow any changes to the Finalised Structure Plan to be accommodated.
- 2.3 Associated with the Main Issues Report are two further supporting documents, the Interim Environmental Report associated with the Strategic Environmental Assessment, and the Monitoring Report. Both of these require to be published at the same time as the Main Issues Report. Copies of these documents have been lodged in the Members' library for reference.
- 2.4 In March the Committee approved a Development Plan Scheme that set out a demanding timetable for the production of the Local Development Plan. This timetable included a period of six weeks for consultation with communities over the options contained in the Main Issues Report. Information was made available to Community Councils and, through the website, to the general public from December 2008 to promote early discussion on the options for development. A concerted press campaign has been adopted to promote

awareness of the development plan process. Officers have also undertaken, or are about to hold, meetings with Community Council Forums to ensure that they are aware of and ready for the consultation on the Main Issues Report, and for the process that follows thereafter.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 It is requested that the Committee agrees the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Main Issues Report for public consultation for a six week period from 18 May to 6 July 2009.

### **4 Discussion**

- 4.1 The content of the Main Issues Report has been the subject of detailed discussion with Councillors since February. These discussions have provided feedback and criticism and resulted in revisions to the contents. While the document is wholly officer recommendations it is hoped that what is being presented represents a reasonable interpretation of the aspirations of Councillors for the forthcoming plan. At the very least it should provide a sound platform for the consultation process and the informed discussion of alternatives.
- 4.2 In the final development of the Main Issues Report, not least to reflect opinions voiced at the seminars, changes have been proposed which in some cases vary from those presented and discussed in February and March. These include:
- Additional allocations of land at Banff, Macduff and Fraserburgh to address the criticism that the Local Development Plan is not providing additional opportunity over that presented in the Aberdeenshire Local Plan.
  - Additional land allocations in Huntly to ensure that sufficient development land is provided both to meet the strategic requirement for development land and overcome critical thresholds associated with primary schooling.
  - Revision of allocations in the Kincardine and Mearns “regeneration” area to better reflect an appropriate scale of growth for these communities.
  - Revision of some allocations to provide enhanced opportunities for the provision of affordable housing.
- 4.3 The options presented within the Main Issues Report have no materiality in terms of the Development Management process. They remain the professional advice of officers as to the way in which development could take place. It is important that the impartiality of Councillors is maintained throughout the consultation process to ensure that there can be no suggestion that decisions have been made in advance of the consultation itself. Consultees must have sufficient opportunity to influence the decisions that Councillors will ultimately make for the sites and policies to be included in the Proposed Plan and associated supplementary guidance. Ultimately there is nothing within the Main Issues report which is not open for robust discussion, the only absolute being that the Proposed Plan must comply with the Structure Plan.

- 4.4 The options presented are not accompanied by the large volume of detailed survey work that has been used by officers to come to their recommendations. This information is largely available through other sources and would not add any further to the process at this stage. There is a risk of overcomplicating the consultation in what is already a complicated process by providing too much information. The widest possible engagement is hoped for by keeping things simple and seeking responses from the widest possible range of stakeholders, including the public, to the options presented.
- 4.4 The consultation process will be supported by a series of 20 public meetings at venues across Aberdeenshire from the 25 May to the 18 June 2009. The focus of these meetings will be to explain the options presented and to encourage engagement.
- 4.5 Copies of the Main Issues Report and supporting documents will be directly mailed to approximately 320 community and industry stakeholders. Copies will be lodged in Libraries and Area offices. A section of the Council's website will be dedicated to the consultation, including the provision of opportunity to make representations directly on-line. A leaflet will be produced to explain the consultation and its place within the wider development of the Local Development Plan. The existing press campaign will be continued to maximise awareness of the process. All representations will be acknowledged and a personal response generated as soon as practicable thereafter.

## **5 Area Implications**

- 5.1 All Areas will be given equal opportunity to engage on the Main Issues Report.

## **6 Policy Implications**

- 6.1 There are no policy implications from publishing the Main Issues Report for consultation. It has no material status in determining planning applications.

## **7 Staffing Implications**

- 7.1 Servicing the consultation will fully occupy the Policy team now and for the next six months. There are no further staffing implications from this report.

## **8 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Additional consultancy assistance is being sought to assist and speed up the administrative task of cataloguing representations made to the Main Issues Report. This support has been estimated to cost no more than £13,000 and is being taken from existing budgets (Line 34).

## **9 Sustainability Implications**

- 9.1 All documentation is being printed on stock with a high recycled content, and responders are being encouraged to respond to the consultation by electronic means.

## **10 Consultations**

- 10.1 Detailed discussions have taken place with the Directors of Transportation and Infrastructure, Education, Learning and Leisure and Social Work and Housing on the content of this report and their comments have been incorporated.

## **11 Recommendations**

**The Committee is recommended to:-**

- 1 Agree to the publication of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Main Issues Report for public consultation for a period of 6 weeks commencing 18 May 2009.**
- 2 Agree to the publication of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Monitoring report and Environmental Report to support that consultation.**
- 3 Agree to the publication of an explanatory leaflet to support the consultation.**

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**Director of Planning and Environmental Services**

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