

INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE - 2 DECEMBER 2004

RETAILING IN ABERDEENSHIRE. THE 2004 ABERDEEN & ABERDEENSHIRE RETAIL STUDY AND 'ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF RETAIL DEVELOPMENTS IN ABERDEENSHIRE - A GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS'

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the outcomes of the Councillors' seminar on retail planning held on 11 June 2004.
- 1.2 To seek adoption of "Assessing the Impact of Retail Developments in Aberdeenshire - a guide for applicants", for use as supplementary planning guidance.
- 1.3 To inform members of the outcomes of the 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study and agree the referral of that study to the North East Strategic Planning Committee (NESPC).
- 1.4 To seek approval for the charging for copies of the 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study.

2 Background

- 2.1 An information note entitled 'Retail Issues in Aberdeenshire' was presented to this Committee on 28 July 2003, highlighting the high level of interest in major retail proposals throughout Aberdeenshire.
- 2.2 Up until now guidance on retail applications has been based on the publication, "Retail Impact Analysis, a Guide for Developers", which was published in November 1989 by the Grampian Regional Council. On the 27 November 2003 this Committee considered the production of an updated guide for applicants, "Assessing the Impact of Retail Developments in Aberdeenshire – A Guide for Applicants". At that time the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the Guide pending a seminar for Councillors. This seminar was held on 11 June 2004. A copy of the guide has been placed in the members library.
- 2.3 Feedback from the Councillors' seminar on retailing indicated that the event was worthwhile and the subject matter had been well covered and breakout sessions on an area basis provided officers with a clear indication of Councillors' concerns and views on the interpretation of policy. A summary of those views is provided in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.4 At the seminar support was given for policies that support the town centre. However, concern was expressed about the need to maintain the attractiveness of town centres through regeneration and encouragement of quality independent traders. It was recognised by members that while superstores provide greater choice and can be significant employers, they can also have significant impacts on independent traders. Because of their scale such developments were thought best sited at accessible locations. Some communities have no shops, and there is a need to promote entrepreneurs both to enhance existing town centres and to provide much needed

facilities. A pragmatic and flexible approach such as has been demonstrated in Westhill and Ellon was commended. While independent traders add to the quality of retail mix it was suggested that some small shops contribute to their own demise through failing to respond to the demands of the customer.

- 2.5 At the Councillors' seminar despite concerns expressed that National Guidance contained in NPPG8 was inappropriate to towns of the scale found in Aberdeenshire, the existing policies were supported by members, provided they are implemented in a pragmatic and realistic manner.
- 2.6 In regard to the proposed supplementary guidance ("Assessing the Impact of Retail Developments in Aberdeenshire - a guide for applicants") it was acknowledged by members that the use of a standard methodology for assessing impact on vitality and viability was desirable, but that uniform interpretation of the policy cannot be applied throughout Aberdeenshire. The increased attention given to qualitative considerations was welcomed, although there was some concern voiced over issues of the displacement of retail activity from one centre to another.
- 2.7 This guide has been prepared principally to assist applicants seeking planning permission for large retail proposals in Aberdeenshire, and to assist Development Control Officers in their assessment of these applications. The proposed supplementary planning guidance highlights the expectations of Aberdeenshire Council and sets out the basis for the assessment of retail applications. The guide was evaluated as part of the retail study and was deemed to be an important tool for the benefits of applicants and the planning authority. A number of minor improvements were made to the guide in response to the feedback received.
- 2.8 On 27 November 2003 this Committee also agreed participation in the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study, in partnership with Aberdeen City Council and Scottish Enterprise Grampian. The objectives of this study were to examine retailing patterns and issues, amplify the inter-relationship between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire in terms of retail uses and to update the previous work undertaken in the 1999 Aberdeenshire Towns Shopping Study. The 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study has now been published and a copy has been lodged in the members' Library.
- 2.9 Aberdeen City Council considered the 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study at their Policy and Resources Committee on 29 September 2004, at which time it was agreed that the Study should be reported to NESPC. A copy of the report has been placed in the members library.
- 2.10 The 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study updates the separate studies carried out previously for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and provides information on retail catchments, expenditure flows between catchments, centre turnover and leakage to assist the evaluation of retail proposals in planning terms and an assessment of retail capacity within Aberdeen City Centre and other centres within the region. The study highlights a range of issues affecting retailing and has provided both Councils with an updated baseline for retailing in the North East, which will assist the Councils in their assessment of future retail proposals and future policy making. The study also makes a number of recommendations concerning future retail strategy and policy.
- 2.11 Within the study there is an emphasis on the collection of detailed primary data. This included a large-scale household survey of shopper attitudes and behaviour (over 3,000

interviews undertaken), the collection of retail floorspace data from the Regional Assessor and an extensive analysis of property trends and surveys of operators, agents and investors in retail property.

- 2.12 Other recommendations, as they apply to Aberdeenshire, include the need to bring forward a retail strategy in line with the strategic vision for retailing in the North East; in addition a number of recommendations are made which will influence the interpretation of the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan retail policies. These relate to the extent of some town centres and the way in which retail impacts are assessed. These changes are not so great as to require immediate modification to the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan but will influence future policy development.

3 Proposals and Discussion

- 3.1 To note the outcomes of the Councillors' seminar on retail planning held on 11th June 2004.
- 3.2 To adopt "Assessing the Impact of Retail Developments in Aberdeenshire - a guide for applicants", for use as supplementary planning guidance. The proposed supplementary planning guidance takes account both of changes in the policy context of the development plan and of changes in Scottish Executive guidance (National Planning Policy Guideline 8 "Retailing and Town Centres") that has occurred since the Grampian Regional Council guidance was published.
- 3.3 To inform members of the outcomes of the 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study and seek the views of NESPC on the strategic issues that impact across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. As a number of the issues are of a strategic nature it is appropriate that these are firstly jointly reported to both Councils at an appropriate future meeting of NESPC and thereafter taken forward as part of the strategic planning process.
- 3.4 It is proposed to charge for copies of the 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study. Prices are outlined in **Appendix 2** of this report.

4 Area Implications

- 4.1 At the Councillors' seminar clear differences were noted between retail issues in the town centres of the main settlements in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area and the Rural Housing Market Area. In Garioch and parts of Formartine and Kincardine and Mearns the issues identified were related to providing quality to encourage local spending (rather than travel to Aberdeen) and accommodating expansion in response to growth. Issues identified in Banff and Buchan, Buchan and Marr related to arresting decline and increasing attractiveness to retailers.
- 4.2 The proposed supplementary planning guidance applies to the whole of Aberdeenshire.
- 4.3 The 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study applies to both Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and detailed information is provided on all of the major towns within Aberdeenshire.

5 Policy Implications.

- 5.1 'Assessing the Impact of Retail Developments in Aberdeenshire - a guide for applicants' supports the existing policies pertaining to retailing in both the Structure Plan and Finalised Local Plan. Future policy development will be founded on this study.
- 5.2 The findings of the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study will improve the information base against which existing retail policies are judged and will influence the development of future retailing policy.

6 Staffing Implications

- 6.1 None

7 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retailing Study was delivered on time and to budget. Due to the specialist nature of the study it is not anticipated that sales will have major impact on revenue budgets.

8 Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 While the proposed supplementary planning guidance 'Assessing the Impact of Retail Developments in Aberdeenshire - a guide for applicants' will not directly contribute to sustainability, it supports Development Plan policies which contribute to sustainability. Development Plan policies on retailing promote town centres as the most sustainable location for retail activity, making the best use of existing infrastructure and reducing the need to travel by concentrating such development and providing the opportunity for linked trips.
- 8.2 Shopping is a major generator of travel. The Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study will enable current shopping patterns to be assessed with a view to reducing the need to travel.

9 Consultations

- 9.1 Consultations have taken place with the Directors of Transportation & Infrastructure, Finance and Law & Administration over the content of this report.
- 9.2 Seven consultancies active in the field of retail planning were asked for their views on the proposed supplementary planning guidance. Generally there was support for the approach being taken, and a number of minor improvements were made in response to the comments received.

10. Recommendations

It is recommended that the committee:

- 10.1 Note the feedback from the Councillors' seminar.**
- 10.2 Approve the use of 'Assessing the Impact of Retail Developments in Aberdeenshire - a guide for applicants' as supplementary planning guidance for developers submitting applications for retail development.**
- 10.3 Note the outcomes of the 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study as they apply to Aberdeenshire and seek the views of NESPC on the issues as they impact across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.**
- 10.4 Allow for the sale of the 2004 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Retail Study as set out in Appendix 2**

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APPENDIX 1

<p>Comments in relation to town centres</p>	<p>Banff and Buchan and Buchan</p> <p>The town centres are slowly dying and instead of new good quality shops coming in it is charity shops that are replacing them. Variety in the Town Centre is a must.</p> <p>There is a major need to regenerate the town centres. There should be section 75 agreements to ensure supermarkets put money towards and help regenerate the town centres.</p> <p>The role of town centres need to change and develop niche market shops. The towns need good quality shops such as cafes with outdoor seating and wee gift shops. The town centre should be used as a social area and should be a safe area. Quality shops sustain the town centre.</p> <p>A good town centre brings in jobs and money.</p> <p>In some towns the geography of the town centre is the problem. For example in Fraserburgh it was not possible to site a supermarket in the town centre.</p>	<p>Garioch and Formartine</p> <p>Recognition that town centres are important for those who do not have access to private cars for example the elderly.</p> <p>Some concern about the role of independent traders since these contribute to the quality of retail mix with the town centres.</p>	<p>Kincardine and Mearns and Marr</p> <p>A town centre has to be attractive if it is to survive.</p> <p>We can be over protective of old-fashioned, failing undertakings</p> <p>One way of increasing its vitality is to increase the number of people living within it. Need to retain/encourage as much commercial use as possible, the best way of reconciling these two aims is to keep retail uses at ground floor level, and allow residential uses on the floors above.</p> <p>We tend to concentrate on the quantitative, whereas we should be giving qualitative considerations greater significance.</p>
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	Banff and Buchan and Buchan There is a need to have a shopping master plan (in addition to the Fraserburgh Masterplan). There is a need to plan for retailing, if not we will loose the whole thing. There is a need to get a strategic approach in place, need to plan long term for the required space.	Garioch and Formartine Significant doubts (by most members) that the policies contained in NPPG8 are appropriate/applicable to towns the size of those found in Garioch and Formartine. Comments that potential for using CPO is very limited due to the lack of finance available for implementation	Kincardine and Mearns and Marr Uniform solutions can't be applied throughout Aberdeenshire. There should be a standard methodology for assessing impact on a town centre's vitality and viability. We should identify sites for supermarkets. If we don't give shoppers what they want they'll go elsewhere. A solution to the problem might be masterplanning. Planning Authorities are being encouraged to look further into the future; this will reduce incrementalism that characterises so much of our town centres.
How should the Local Plan address the lack of sites identified for new retail development in policy terms?			Supermarkets provide greater choice, but they are not as good as they are cracked up to be. The provision of in-store services such as banking and pharmacies can kill off such services in the surrounding area. Supermarkets can be a major employer, albeit on a part-time basis. For example what would happen to Portlethen, if Asda moved to Stonehaven? The best place for food shopping might be an accessible location outwith the town centre.
Comments in relation to Supermarkets	Supermarkets should be out of town and easily accessed. Supermarkets are now a 'social experience.'		
Comments on the need for a more flexible approach to retail applications	The council needs to be more flexible in retail cases.	A flexible approach should be adopted for the interpretation of policy. Pragmatic approach should be supported as per consenting retail development at Westhill and at Ellon. Existing town centres are highly dependent upon the private car and reliance on other modes will always be very limited. Practical considerations indicate that public transport will not be an important mode in Aberdeenshire.	

	Banff and Buchan and Buchan Some of the little shops sometimes contribute to their own demise. They do not open late enough and only open when most people are at work. In the past they have dictated what they want and not what their customers want. They need to convenience the public rather than themselves. Portsoy is a thriving community with a variety of shops and bakers etc. Some villages suffer and don't have any shops and often no post offices. Concerns of the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act on small, local shops.	Garioch and Formartine Some concern about the role of independent traders since these contribute to the quality of retail mix with the town centres.	Kincardine and Mearns and Marr
Independent retailers			
Comments on the smaller settlements		There is a need to encourage entrepreneurs. For example in Turriff a family opened a shop that has helped the local shops by drawing in new customers to the town centre. These people need to be encouraged.	
Comments in relation to tourism	There is a need for entertainment in the Town Centres - this draws people in. A good retail development attracts tourists and is the hub of a town. Supermarkets do not attract tourists and many people only really need to go to a supermarket once a week.		
Concern over Retail Impact		Concern about displacement effects (retail impacts) between town centres within Aberdeenshire.	
Need for attractive shop fronts	The town centre needs to look nice or shop owners will not come into the town. Need to re-examine the shop fronts, they are dirty and dull and need to be brightened and cleaned up.		

APPENDIX 2

SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED CHARGES FOR THE 2004 ABERDEEN AND ABERDEENSHIRE RETAIL STUDY.

The following charging regime has been adopted by Aberdeen City Council after consultation and is proposed for parity for Aberdeenshire Council.

Volume 1: Overview of Retailing in North East Scotland – £15 + (£2 postage and packing)

Volume 2: Aberdeen City Centre – £15 + (£2 postage and packing)

Volume 3: Retail Locations in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire – £25 + (£5 postage and packing)

Volume 4: Policy Review and Recommendations – £15 + (£2 postage and packing)

Appendices – £20 + (£5 postage and packing)

Executive Summary - £10 + (£2 postage and packing)

Cost of Complete Set of Documents - £90 + (£12 postage and packing)