

**Garioch Community Council Forum
Gordon House, Inverurie
6 March 2013**

**Local Development Plan Process and Identification of Main Issues
Meeting Note**

At this meeting approximately 20 members of Community Councils across Garioch were briefed on the Local Development Plan preparation process and the need to identify 'main issues' for the forthcoming Main Issues Report.

Issues:

Mr Piers Blaxter (Policy Team Leader) (PB) gave a presentation on the need and timetable for the next Local Development Plan, and shared his staff's early thoughts on what may constitute "Main Issues" deserving further detailed debate in the Main Issues Report proposed for October 2013.

As part of a general question and answer session, which also covered topics associated with the current application of policy to Wind Turbine developments, the following questions specifically related to the Local Development Plan and the forthcoming Main Issues Report (MIR).

The issue of whether bonds should be required for the decommissioning of wind turbines was raised. PB highlighted that this was the kind of question that could be asked, in reference to a potential main issue on wind energy. And this was opined to be a good thing by the Community Council member. Darren Ross (Area Planning Officer) added that the legal view is that conditions currently applied to consents are competent in dealing with the decommissioning and removal of turbines.

Demographics was raised as a potential main issue by one Community Council member in reference to the lack of suitable housing being built for an ageing population. PB responded that there are many older people who are asset rich but cash poor and wish to downsize. However, there are often not enough small houses being built in appropriate locations to accommodate them. PB highlighted the dichotomy in modern house building in Aberdeenshire where large detached "executive" homes and (proportionally small amounts of) social housing was being built. He questioned whether there was therefore a need for a greater mix of housing which was affordable by design, and would appeal to a range of buyers including the elderly. PB also highlighted the impact of the lack of the small units being built on the second hand housing and rental markets. Due to a lack of supply and high demand, prices are being pushed up. The lack of supply of small units is also potentially having an impact on the attraction of young professionals to the area.

A community council member asked how much affordable housing was being provided in comparison to need. PB responded that only 10-15% of new housing was "affordable", compared to a need for around 40%. PB added that there are two solutions to this continuing underprovision— either we get more funding from the Scottish Government for the construction of social/Council housing, or build more housing without subsidy which is affordable by design.

The issue of more housing being built in Westhill, despite assurances that a cap was being put on house building in this area, was raised. PB responded that a recent appeal decision may have given the impression of a change of policy but that the current view is that only limited residential growth could be allowed in Westhill due to a lack of capacity in Westhill Academy and the local road network. However, PB

highlighted a potential main issue around the continued growth of the subsea cluster which could be traded off against its impact on the road network.

Another community council member highlighted a perceived “easy ride” being given to major housebuilders, whereby they are allowed to build huge numbers of executive housing, where small developers are made to “jump through hoops.” The community council member also highlighted the need for a greater social mix in new developments and more houses for those wishing to downsize. A perceived lack of strategic planning in Aberdeenshire was highlighted. Particular reference was made to the construction of housing to the west of the A96 at Inverurie which would stop it being dualled in that location. PB responded that, when planning decisions were made in that regard, the intention to dual the whole of the A96 could not have been foreseen. The existing bridge across the Don was also identified as a constraint to dualing the A96 in that location. An alternative route for the dualing of the A96 to the west was also noted as having potential advantages as it would allow for the long term expansion of Inverurie to the west without the town being bisected by a trunk road.

A community council member also highlighted the need to ameliorate congestion issues in Westhill. Two suggestions were made – either extend the dualing of the A944 or run a tram service along that road to Aberdeen. PB identified the potential cost of a tram service as being a significant constraint and questioned whether the scale of Westhill could support such a proposal. Another community council member also highlighted that Westhill already has a regular bus service to Aberdeen.