

Marr Community Council Forum

Stewarts Hall, Huntly

21 March 2013

Local Development Plan Process and Identification of Main Issues

At this meeting 11 members from Community Councils in Marr were briefed on the Local Development Plan (LDP) preparation process and the current stage of identifying main issues to be included in the Main Issues Report (MIR). Piers Blaxter (PB) the Policy Team Leader was available to answer questions and Katie Crerar, Policy Planner for Marr took the meeting note.

Summary of issues raised

The issues of town centre regeneration and green networks were discussed during the presentation and conversation continued afterwards about windfarms, layout and design of housing particularly in rural areas and affordable housing.

The first issue that was raised was in relation to town centre developments and how to encourage regeneration. PB advised that we can do some things to incentivise development in town centres however internet shopping and large supermarkets have had and continue to have, a big impact on town centres. It is not exclusively retail we need to encourage back into town centres, but offices and other businesses that will attract people and services back. One issue that has already been raised and being contemplated as a main issue, is whether office developments should also be subject to the sequential test (usually required for retail developments where proposals for out of town developments must demonstrate there is no appropriate town centre location for their business). This may be a lever for encouraging business and people into town centres. PB highlighted that whilst Huntly is self resilient, other places have far more serious problems in relation to this issue.

Green networks were also discussed and it was highlighted by a forum member that there needs to be a focus on useable green networks within rural areas. Currently, trying to walk between places in the countryside can be difficult – fields are farmed up to the edges and there are no pavements along roads meaning children often cannot walk to school. The forum member stated that there is a need for routes and paths that allow you to get from one place to another without having to walk along the side of the road. It was also suggested that creating more functional core path and green networks could help get away from over dependence on cars.

PB explained that the open space strategy has sought to encourage more 'wild' land as a means of providing open and green space which does not require the same level of maintenance and cost. However, if there is a greater requirement for particular types of open/green space, then this can be promoted through the strategy. In addition, this can be promoted through the core paths network.

Wind farms were also discussed as an issue in Aberdeenshire as well as parts of Marr. It was highlighted that the current policy is not adequate for the level and variety of wind farms applications that are being received. One forum member stated that impacts on households needed greater consideration. PB assured the forum members that this is already a 'Main Issue' and will continue to be discussed and worked on.

It was also highlighted that the design of development proposals in the countryside should be improved. Some developments have window to window design which whilst may work within a more urban setting, is not necessarily appropriate within the rural context.

Finally it was asked what the definition of affordable housing is. PB explained that there are a number of housing tenures and types which would constitute affordable housing. Generally it is the provision of housing available at a cost that is below market value and affordable for people on modest incomes. Affordable housing to rent must be managed a registered social landlord.

PB thanked attendees for their time.