

Infrastructure Stakeholder Meeting: Issues for the Main Issues Report

18 April 2013

Committee Room 5 Aberdeenshire Council

Attendees:

Piers Blaxter PB (Aberdeenshire Council – Policy)

Alan Davidson AD (Aberdeenshire Council – Policy)

Nicolas Lopez NL (Aberdeenshire Council – Policy)

Susanne Steer SS (Scottish Water)

Alison Wilson AW (SEPA)

Nicola Abrams NA (SEPA)

Jill Paterson JP (Aberdeenshire Council – Legal)

James Kemp JK (BT Openreach)

Peter MacCallum PM (Aberdeenshire Council – Roads)

Deborah Young DY (SSE)

Keith Thomson KT (SSE)

Rab Dickson RD (Nestrans)

Kirsty Chalmers KC (Nestrans)

Amy Phillips AP (Transport Scotland)

Sandra Henbenton SH (Network Rail)

PB introduced the LDP team members present.

PB provided an overview of the local development plan (LDP) process. The previous process and outcomes were outlined. The timetable from the development plan scheme was circulated to show the proposed timescales. It was stated that the expected date of adoption for the next LDP is 2016, and the Main Issues Report (MIR) will be published in October 2013.

PB advised that the purpose of this meeting is to scope the main issues, and provided an overview of the policy review and consultation processes which had already identified potential main issues.

SG Developer Contributions 1: Developer Contributions

PB highlighted minor proposed changes to the policy, including updates to reflect the publication of the new circular on planning obligations – Planning Circular 3/2012: Planning Obligations. A further update is necessary to reflect current processes in the approval of masterplans. Apart from this, no significant changes are proposed.

PM identified a potential issue with the identification of sites which have very high infrastructure costs, and are therefore difficult to deliver.

PB responded that bid forms had been amended to address the issue of viability. However there is an issue with greater scrutiny on the deliverability of projects as

developers may be unwilling undertake work to demonstrate deliverability without certainty on the allocation of their site.

PM stated that elected members needed to have a greater knowledge of deliverability and the financial ramifications of making allocations. Sites adjacent to towns with spare infrastructure capacity are cheaper to deliver, however the political dimension in decision making has made the allocation of these sites difficult. For example, Stonehaven has underused infrastructure but the local community and councillors did not wish to support development there.

AP highlighted the importance of delivery/infrastructure issues being addressed throughout the bids process.

PB noted that, in response to delivery concerns, a significant over-allocation of housing land had been made. An additional 15,000 units had been allocated in the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan 2009 (Structure Plan) which should provide a sufficient buffer even when a number of sites were proving difficult to deliver.

JP stated that councillors need to be better informed on the additional costs associated with developing infrastructure, such as the fit-out and staffing of new schools.

PB agreed with this, however he stated that this was not really an issue for the LDP.

SG Developer Contributions 5: Methodologies for the calculation of developer contributions

JP stated that the current policy needs a rewrite as the lack of figures makes it extremely difficult to use.

PB suggested that contribution figures could be detailed in a planning advice schedule of figures, allowing ease of update and re-publication.

JP agreed that this would be her preferred approach, however the Scottish Government have been pressing for such details to be included in the development plan. Inclusion of contribution figures in the development plan would make them more robust to challenge from the development industry as they would be policy, rather than advice, however any updates would necessitate going through a consultation process. This is onerous given the regularity with which minor changes would need to be made, and would also risk the “re-opening of old wounds” and inviting further objection from the development industry.

PB agreed that further thought would need to be given to our approach to this.

KC and AP raised the issue of Strategic Transport Fund (STF) contributions, stating that this should be referred to in the policy.

PB asked whether it is necessary given the existence of supplementary planning guidance.

KC and AP responded that it is important to show the linkages between this policy and other guidance such as that produced on the STF.

JP highlighted the difficulty of using the plan to assess what developer contributions apply. It is confusing that details of the contributions are split over schedule 3 and the settlement statements, it would be easier if the contributions for each site were just identified in the settlement statements.

PB responded that it was necessary to have details of the contributions in the plan for adherence with the relevant legislation, however it would be possible for more detail on contributions to be provided in the settlement statement.

JP commented that perhaps greater clarity was required in schedule 3 – e.g. highlighting the areas need to provide STF contributions rather than individual settlements.

SG Developer Contributions 2: Access to new development

PB outlined proposed changes to the policy, including amending the text to clarify that the policy applies to small scale development. The requirement for developments to be close to public transport was also identified as contradicting policies promoting rural development. PB also suggested that road standards should be detailed in the policy to provide clarity and certainty for developers.

PM and AP felt that detailing road standards in the policy would not be helpful, particularly as there is greater flexibility with standards on secondary roads in towns, where as access points on main roads and roads in the countryside would need to meet strict standards. Instead it was suggested that a reference to the DMRB standards should be introduced, which PB agreed to.

General discussion was had on the requirement for developments to be proximate to public transport, or deliver major improvements to public transport services in scale with the development. This was identified as being a particular issue as contributions to an improved dial-a-bus service are insufficient to constitute a major improvement to public transport services.

PM stated that he did not have an issue with single house developments not being close to public transport, but it was more of an issue for larger developments.

It was agreed that the requirement for being close to public transport would apply to windfall sites, but not sites brought forward through the rural development policies.

3.d. SG Developer Contributions 3: Water and waste water infrastructure

Discussion was had around the need to clarify terms in the policy. Specifically, it was determined that amendments were required to ensure that 'Development Impact Assessment' and 'Water Impact Assessment' are used correctly.

3.e. SG Developer Contributions 4: Waste management requirements for new developments

PB highlighted proposed changes to the policy, including the alignment of phraseology with the Zero Waste Plan and an increased emphasis on waste reduction.

NA was pleased with the changes, though suggested that greater clarity was required on what needed to be provided as part of a Site Waste Management Plan. NA also questioned whether Development Management (DM) had actually been requesting Site Waste Management Plans from developers.

PB and AD suggested that they had not been requesting them as some DM officers are not aware of the requirement. However it was suggested that the new LDP should include a list of assessments required from developers as an aid to DM in that regard.

PB highlighted the potential difficulty of encouraging a reduction in waste given the regulatory nature of policy. NA suggested that perhaps there should simply be a change in the tone of the policy, and SEPA would be happy to assist in the drafting process.

3.f. SG Safeguarding4: Safeguarding transportation facilities

AP stated that Transport Scotland will not support the safeguarding of land for road upgrades until the publication of road orders due to the legal risk associated with the blight of land.

PM suggested that land around major junctions on trunk roads could be safeguarded given the likelihood of the need for upgrade at some point in the future.

Discussion was had around the approach taken by City of Edinburgh Council with regards improvements to the rail link from Edinburgh to Glasgow. City of Edinburgh Council employed a softer approach whereby locations for upgrades were identified, but not safeguarded per se. SH agreed to forward details of the approach.

4. Other main issues

Discussion was had on other potential main issues to be debated in the Main Issues Report.

KC asked what approach the LDP would take to strategic routes for cycling.

PB responded that core paths and areas to be developed to create green networks would be protected in the plan. It would also be an aim of the plan to facilitate the creation of local green networks. PB stated that, given its limited remit, the LDP could not be expected to assist in the creation of long distance regional foot and cycle paths.

NA highlighted the implications Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) could have for the policy, spatial strategy and site issues.

PB responded that he thought SFRA would not be directly referenced in policy, but would impact on the formulation of the plan including the spatial strategy and the selection of sites.

NA noted that there is a risk that windfall sites may not be covered by Strategic Flood Risk Assessment if we just focus on preferred sites, rather than broad areas where development is likely to come forward.

PB asked DY and KT what their approach to development planning is, were they reactionary or was it important that they were consulted to ensure that their infrastructure could meet new demand.

DY and KT confirmed that SSE's approach to serving new development is broadly done on a site-by-site basis, however it would be useful if SSE were a consultee on the LDP.

PB asked JK what implications the LDP would have for BT.

JK noted that BT tends to find it easier to connect new developments on the edge of towns as they are close to existing infrastructure. Developments which are more remote are more difficult and expensive to connect due to them being distant from existing infrastructure.

PM suggested that it may be wise for the settlement strategy for the next LDP to be linked to the roll out of high speed broadband.

PB suggested that this was a good idea, but wasn't sure whether there was sufficient information to do this.

JK will look into this issue and provide information on the roll out of broadband.

PM asked whether there was a sufficient hook in the plan to ensure that developments accord with Designing Streets.

PB noted that Designing Streets is directly referred to in policy 'SG LSD2: Layout, siting and design.'

PM also highlighted an issue with planning applications not according with masterplans.

PB responded that there is a policy requirement for developments to accord with masterplans, however DM should ensure this requirement is implemented.

DY and KT stated that the LDP should highlight the importance of grid upgrades being undertaken by SSE.

NA asked what approach the LDP would take to the provision of new waste infrastructure i.e. energy-from-waste plants.

PB highlighted existing planning applications for energy-from-waste plants which would be able to process all of the waste produced in the region. There is therefore no need for the identification of new sites or the provision of new policy.

5. Bids

PB instigated a discussion on our approach to the assessment of bids, and provided information on the constraints we will consider as part of the assessment.

PB asked whether we should consult the various organisations prior to the MIR, or just at the MIR stage.

NA stated that SEPA could become involved at any point depending on Aberdeenshire Council's preference.

PB suggested that we pass over the bids early having screened out those which are definitely not going to be supported.

NA agreed, and also highlighted that if Aberdeenshire Council undertake a strategic flood risk assessment then SEPA would only have to check the results of the assessment.

It was also agreed that the bids would be passed to Transportation and Scottish Water for review prior to the MIR, though Scottish Water would only identify any 'show stoppers' from their perspective.

It was also agreed that bids close to the trunk roads would be passed to Transport Scotland for review.

PB thanked everyone for their time.