

**Buchan Community Council Forum
Mintlaw Academy, Mintlaw
24 April 2013**

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

At this meeting approximately 30 members of Community Councils across Buchan were briefed on the Local Development Plan preparation process, and the need to identify 'main issues' for the forthcoming Main Issues Report.

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.

Issues:

The discussion which followed focused on wind energy developments, existing housing allocations, building affordable homes, undeveloped allocations, rural roads, and climate change. PB and Alison Hogge, the local policy planner for Buchan, were available to answer questions.

It was suggested that the policy on wind energy should establish a minimum distance between a house and a wind turbine. PB stated that he is aware of other local authorities trying to implement a policy in this form, but added that a separation distance is a crude proxy for impact and does not account for topography. However, he acknowledged that there is a need to discuss policy relating to the individual sensitivity of the house. Another member of the Forum queried the potential mental impacts wind turbines may cause, and PB reported that NHS "almost" agrees in relation to potential stress issues. PB added that the Council is likely to receive many varying comments on this topic and elected members will get a clear idea what the issues are. PB concluded stating he believes the current policy works, but that there is a need for debate.

A Forum member suggested that the starting point for the review of the Local Development Plan should be the existing housing allocations. PB explained there needs to be certainty in the Plan, that the debate regarding current allocations has been had, and that significant work is being undertaken to deliver these sites. PB pointed out that although Community Councils can identify sites for development it is the landowner that needs to agree to develop it. However, if attendees believe an area of protected land has been omitted, or if what is being built does not meet our highest design expectations to let us know.

A Forum member asked whether the local authority could build their own affordable homes. PB advised that the Council already does this and that they are currently the only ones currently building affordable homes as the Scottish Government has reduced the grant funding for social housing associations. In light of this, it is not viable for these associations to be building affordable houses. However, PB added that developers can make cash contributions as an alternative, although this is not a favourable option. PB further added that being too restrictive (i.e. insisting on too many affordable houses) is likely to result in the developer not building at all. Nonetheless, PB advised that we are seeking a variety of house types and acknowledged there is a gap between the 1-2 bedroom and 4+ bedroom houses. In

light of this PB suggested there is a need to think radically and incentives house builders into building homes for people on modest incomes (i.e. for households on an income of £40K a year).

Later in the meeting a Forum member suggested the used of “shared equity” schemes (i.e. houses which are delivered on a part rent / part buy basis). Another Forum member reported that these have been used in Cruden Bay and Mintlaw. PB advised that the Government have promoted the “MiNewHome” scheme to assist in the provision of shared equity housing. However, he advised that according to the Scottish Government uptake of this has been slow. PB also noted there are other schemes, such as deferred payment, and noted examples where house builders have take a shared equity role (e.g. as is happening in Portlethen) for five years to allow people time to buy out the their share.

It was queried by a Forum member on whether control can be exercised on plots that remain un-built within developments, as this often results in untidy environments. PB identified that that market demand for housing has been depressed, resulting in house builders not building the homes they have planning permission for. PB further explained that once construction begins it becomes an ‘effective site’ and they can take as long as they like (i.e. there is no time limit to complete the development). However, PB advised that a formal notice could be issued if the site becomes too untidy.

Comments were raised in relation to street lighting and road adoption, but PB advised that this falls under a roads construction consent document, which links with the Council’s local transport strategy.

Concern was also raised by a Forum member on the capacity of the rural road network. PB advised that this is discussed with the Council’s roads departments and explained that it is the capacity of the junction and not the road itself that is the problem. PB also advised that road maintenance is dealt with by the roads departments, adding that the local development plan is only about land use strategy.

It was queried by a Forum member how climate change is anticipated (i.e. how is it planned for). PB explained that it is about knowing the unknowns. He added that the Foresight Group looked at when climate change is likely to peak, which is forecast to be by 2050. As such, this is a long term problem that we need to resolve. PB discussed whether we need to think about the settlement statements, flood resilience, layout design, are roads wide enough for snowplough through streets.

Next steps:

PB advised that the Main Issues Report will be written in August 2013 and that he would welcome submissions from Community Councils by the end of June 2013. However, PB added that if Community Council’s are unable to provide comments by then, they can formerly comment when the Main Issues Report is published in October 2013.

PB noted that public meetings will be held during the 12 week consultation period, which is programmed to end on 1 February 2014, and recommend attendees visit the website and subscribe to Twitter (@shireldp) to be kept up to date.

PB thanked attendees for their time.