



Review of Community Engagement on Community Facilities in Banff and Macduff

Final Report

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1.0 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Discussions regarding the sale of Canal Park in Banff to Tesco and the consequent development of new leisure and community facilities in Banff and Macduff have been ongoing since 2002. The broad timeline for these discussions, based on a document provided to IBP by Aberdeenshire Council, has been as follows:

| Date | Milestone |
|--------------|--|
| 2002 | Expressions of interest sought for the site. |
| Spring 2003 | Offers received and Tesco awarded preferred bidder status |
| Spring 2004 | Initial public consultation |
| January 2005 | Tesco apply for planning permission |
| March 2008 | Planning Application considered by Aberdeenshire Council |
| June 2008 | Scottish Government confirms that they did not wish to call the matter in. The missives for sale of land require Tesco to use all reasonable endeavours to achieve planning consent; a pre-condition of such planning consent would be a Section 75 agreement concerning a number of matters including Planning Gain. |
| March 2009 | Aberdeenshire Council Policy and Resources Committee agreed to provide and support two associated projects (the Banff “Better Life” Centre and a range of sporting and leisure facilities in Macduff). Funding allocation was £9.86m to be offset by a capital receipt from Tesco of £7.5m. |
| March 2010 | Tesco confirm that their Board had approved the Canal Park development. The Council lodged a Common Good Order with the Court of Session as Canal Park is on Common Good Land. |
| March 2011 | Court of session grants approval for disposal of land subject to replacement facilities being provided; missives and planning consent stipulate that replacement facilities would have to be in place before Tesco could take possession of Canal Park. Tesco advise that they would not be commencing until April 2012. |

| Date | Milestone |
|--------------------------|---|
| May 2011 | Tesco advised that they wished to start on site and build a store in parallel with the reconstruction of Council facilities. They were advised by Aberdeenshire Council that they needed to provide a robust business case for such a variation and such information was not forthcoming. |
| November 2011 | Tesco contended that the requirements placed on them were onerous and sought to re-negotiate these with Aberdeenshire Council. Some relaxation on Planning Gain issues was offered by Council Officers but no concessions were made regarding the sale price of the land and the indexation of this. |
| February 2012 | Aberdeenshire Council's Policy and Resources Committee agreed certain changes to the Section 75 agreement. The Council agreed in principle to the advance construction of the Banff Better Life Centre subject to resolution of certain questions regarding revenue funding and capital costs of the project. Concerns over the latter prevented this work moving forward. |
| April 2012 | Tesco indicated that they wished a phased development programme to be allowed to allow for simultaneous build of the Tesco development and the agreed replacement facilities. Tesco's solicitors wrote to Aberdeenshire Council indicating that they were going to withdraw their current planning application and submit a new one. |
| June 2012 | Aberdeenshire Council's Policy and Resources Committee agreed a number of steps including: instructing Officers to provide a report on management arrangements for the Better Life Centre; delay proceeding with the retendering of Banff and Macduff sporting facilities until the bargain of sale for Canal park had been concluded; review the scope of the Banff and Macduff sporting facilities and investigate the feasibility of re-locating the Drop-In Centre at Macduff (part of the "original" proposals) to a facility linked to Macduff Primary School |
| July 2012 - October 2012 | It was agreed that design changes to the new Tesco store would be treated as a variation to the existing planning application; this revision was approved in October 2013. |

- 1.2 The agreement entered into between Aberdeenshire Council and Tesco requires Tesco to obtain a range of consents including planning consent, roads construction consent, listed building consent and conservation area consent. It is understood that only listed building consent is now outstanding. A 12 week period commencing on the date of issue of the last of the consents is to elapse without any party having an interest to do so mounting a judicial challenge against the granting of any of the consents. Aberdeenshire Council is due to receive the purchase price 15 working days after the date for any such challenge has elapsed. The Council then has a period of 21 months (extendable at the Council's option to 30 months) to provide the replacement facilities.
- 1.3 These replacement facilities are detailed in the Section 75 agreement and also in the Common Good Order that the Council requires to obtain from the Court of Session authorising the sale to Tesco. Any changes to these facilities would require both the Section 75 agreement (between the Council and Tesco) and the Common Good Order to be amended (the latter requiring agreement of the Court of Session).
- 1.4 Agreement was granted by the Council's Policy and Resources Committee to review the community facilities to be provided, and to report back on this review, involving appropriate community engagement. A full description of the declared rationale and objectives for the engagement activity is detailed in full later in this report. However, based on internal documentation and IBP's interviews with Council Officers, the following points are noted:
- Considerable time had now elapsed since the initial work (including but not limited to, community engagement activity) on which the existing plans were based; accordingly, it was felt to be conceivable that alternative needs and wants may have emerged.
 - The approach adopted (in Aberdeenshire and elsewhere) of co-location of leisure and community facilities with schools and other facilities had become much more common over the previous decade and had not formed part of the initial community engagement.
 - Council Officers had doubts over the financial viability and long-term sustainability of the Better Life Centre components of the plans.

The Council noted the risks that were inherent in terms of any change to the preferred replacement facilities requiring revised agreement between the Council and Tesco and the Court of Session. However, it was understood by the Council that any variation to the proposed replacement facilities should demonstrably meet the current needs of the communities concerned.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

1.5 The overall aim of this report is to evaluate the engagement activity that was undertaken, having regard to the following specific objectives that were set out in the Council's brief to IBP:

- Consideration of whether the engagement activity was promoted effectively to encourage full participation of all interested stakeholders.
- Assessment of whether the engagement process was robust and fair.
- Assessment of whether the declared outcomes reflected fairly the views of those that were engaged.
- Identification of any gaps in the engagement process.

Following on from this, recommendations were sought as to how any such gaps could be rectified.

1.6 Specifically, the engagement process was reviewed against the National Standards for Community Engagement. The National Standards provide a useful template against which a process of community engagement may be reviewed. They may be summarised thus:¹

| Standard | Indicator |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. INVOLVEMENT | We will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement. |
| 2. SUPPORT | We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement. |
| 3. PLANNING | We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken. |
| 4. METHODS | We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose. |
| 5. WORKING TOGETHER | We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently. |
| 6. SHARING INFORMATION | We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants. |
| 7. WORKING WITH OTHERS | We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement. |
| 8. IMPROVEMENT | We will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants. |
| 9. FEEDBACK | We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected. |
| 10. MONITORING AND EVALUATION | We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement. |

1.7 The Council itself has a procedure for consultation on capital projects and we have also briefly considered the fit of the engagement activity with this procedure. More generally, we also reviewed the Cost Value Matrix that the Council uses in appraising projects of this nature.

¹ Full details of the National Standards for Community Engagement may be found at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide/NationalStandardspdf>

1.8 The review comprised a mix of interviews with relevant officers alongside a detailed review of documentation. Those officers interviewed were as follows:

- Kate Bond - Head of Service (Customer Communications and Improvement)
- Margaret-Jane Cardno - Area Manager (Banff & Buchan)
- Lynne Gravener - Consultation and Engagement Officer
- Kate James - Senior Community Learning Worker
- Stephen Pert - Principal Architect
- Allan Whyte - Head of Property and Facilities Management

1.9 A full index of the documentation reviewed is contained in Appendix 1. In summary, this contains a mix of: external documentation; internal procedural documentation; internal approval papers and correspondence; documentation associated with engagement events; internal papers relating to the analysis of the finding and media coverage.

1.10 Chapter 2 which follows sets out a summary of the engagement process and within that Chapter we highlight any potential gaps in the engagement process, having regard to the objectives set out above. Chapter 3 then reviews the process that was undertaken against each element of the National Standards for Community Engagement, again with the overall purpose of identifying gaps in the engagement process. Chapter 4 briefly summarises some other issues arising out of the engagement and Chapter 5 details IBP's overall conclusions regarding the engagement process along with suggestions for continuous improvement with respect to future engagement activity.

1.11 Before proceeding, a brief note on the definitions used within the report should be made. “Engagement” is recognised as reflecting a range of approaches to community involvement and dialogue, typically between communities (whether of “place” or “interest”) and those involved in the design and delivery of public services. These approaches have a range of levels of depth and intensity in terms of the extent to which decision-making is shared. The National Standards for Community Engagement define the term thus:

*“Developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public body and one or more community group, to help them both to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences”.*²

The activity reviewed herein complies with this overall definition of “community engagement”. However, in a narrower sense, it may be defined as a “consultation”, this being a sub-set of engagement. “Community consultation” may be defined thus:

*“The dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.”*³

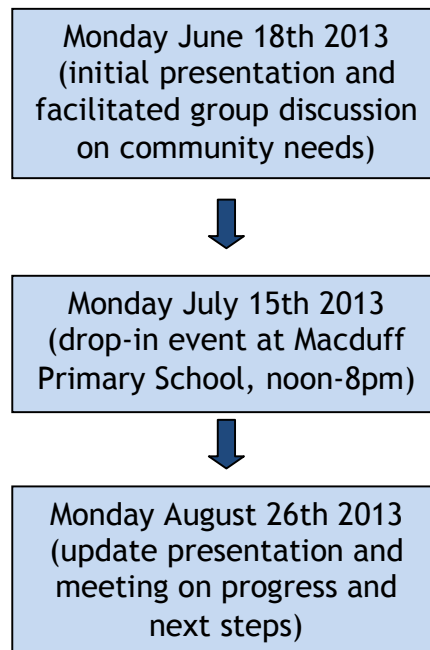
The term “community” is often seen in purely geographical terms but it is appropriate to take a wider approach to this, recognising that as well as communities of “place” there can be specific communities of “interest”, which can be defined by particular characteristics of groups (e.g. by age, gender etc.) or by other factors such as usage or interest in particular services.

² National Standards for Community Engagement, Scottish Government

³ As defined by the Consultation Institute, quoted in Elected Member Briefing Note No. 19, The Improvement Service

2.0 SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

- 2.1 The central part of the engagement process was a series of public meetings/events in Banff and Macduff between June and August 2013. This overall process is summarised below:



As noted later in this section, however, the process of engagement was not confined to these “formal” public events.

- 2.2 Arrangements to move forward with community engagement activity began in May 2013, with responsibility for overall design and facilitation of the process being allocated to the Corporate Communications team. The need for the engagement activity to take place appears to have been given particular impetus by signals from Tesco that they now wished to move forward quickly with the project.

2.3 Approval for the engagement activity was set out firstly in a paper to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee of 13th June 2013, which agreed the following recommendations:

- That Council Officers conclude the sale of Canal Park and associated opportunities to Tesco Stores Ltd.
- That Aberdeenshire Council lead on all aspects of the project (including "community involvement")
- That there be a review of the Banff and Macduff community facilities

The report to Policy and Resources Committee detailed a revised cost framework for the "existing" proposals, reflecting increased cost estimates since approval had previously been granted.

2.4 The report to Policy and Resources Committee noted the following specific points, with respect to the scope of community engagement:

*"Due to the time taken to reach this stage, there is now an opportunity to review the provision of facilities. This is to ensure that current thinking with regard to the **scope and location** of leisure and community facilities is best met". **Author's emphasis***

"Taking the project forward must build upon and involve the already established commitment of the community."

These statements effectively set out the broad aims and scope for the community engagement.

2.5 This paper also noted that:

“Banff Academy did not feature in the original works proposed and there is now an opportunity to revise this”.

It further notes that:

“The review could look at the feasibility of linking the sports and community facility at the school in lieu of the Banff Better Life Centre”.

It also suggests that:

“The review could also look at the facilities for Macduff, in particular the inclusion of a linked community facility at Macduff Primary School.”

2.6 We understand that an internal planning paper (“Proposal for Banff & Macduff Engagement Event” was produced for this event, detailing information on: purpose; venue; time; invites; format; options to be presented to the event for discussion; details of how the event would run and arrangements for promotion and invitation.

2.7 The recruitment process for this initial meeting appears to have been suitably extensive, involving the following:

- Issue of a formal invitation card to an identified group of stakeholders in the form of service users.
- Networking by community development staff to issue this invite to interested parties / groups
- Handing out of invitations on-street
- Extensive coverage of the event in the local press, encouraging participation.

This approach appears to have been successful in generating a substantial level of interest in the event; we understand that there approximately 300 participants, excluding Council representatives.

2.8 The format of this session was as follows:

- Short introduction by the Council’s Chief Executive
- Presentation of an initial range of options by Council Officers, including Question and Answer session
- Facilitated discussions in groups of approximately 8-10 people, with these tables being asked to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the various plans.

The key output of these discussions for further analysis was a transcription of the notes taken by facilitators; these were, in turn, summarised by the Council’s Corporate Communications team. In addition to this, the questions and answers from the relevant session were transcribed and a short summary of key points was prepared.

2.9 Participants at this initial session were invited to sign up for an email newsletter providing updates of progress. We understand that this newsletter was issued to all of those that signed up to be kept in touch and it is published on the Council’s website. The newsletter summarised the key points from the discussions and set out the planned next stages including dates and details of the second formal engagement event. Other information, including facilitators’ notes and copies of the “Questions and Answers” were also made available on the Council’s website.

2.10 The Council’s document “Proposal for Banff and Macduff Engagement Event 2” sets out details of this subsequent “Showcase” event including purpose, venue, time, invites and format. The purpose is described thus:

“To show how the plans for replacement facilities have been developed responding to the feedback that was received at the event on June 17th”.

This somewhat “undersells” the depth of engagement of this session as it involved a greater degree of further interactivity and feedback from those attending.

2.11 Graphical material setting out three options was provided for this event, which appear to have been refined following the above-mentioned briefing notes.

The “Banff” options presented were as follows:

- Banff Option A:
 - Better Life Centre (including 4-court games hall, gym, a range of additional facilities)
 - Deveron Terrace (grass football pitch, all weather tennis courts and practice area, changing pavilion).

- Banff Option B:
 - Range of facilities including: 4-court games hall, 2 squash courts, aerobics room, fitness suite, community and meeting rooms, full-size all weather pitch, 3 all-weather tennis courts and kids’ zone tennis practice area, all weather running track, tarmac cycling track and refurbishment of Banff Academy PE facility
 - Co-located with Banff Academy

- Banff Option C:
 - “Devron Centre” situated at Banff Academy including: 4-court games hall, 2 squash courts, aerobics room, fitness suite, community and meeting rooms, all weather running track, tarmac cycling track and refurbishment of Banff Academy PE facility
 - Deveron Terrace (grass football pitch, all weather tennis courts and practice area, changing pavilion).

The “Macduff” options presented were:

- Macduff Option A:
 - Myrus (changing pavilion, full-size all weather pitch and full-size grass pitch)
 - Macduff drop-in centre (large community room, smaller rooms, social area and changing facilities in toilets)

- Macduff Option B:
 - Myrus (changing pavilion, full-size all weather pitch and full-size grass pitch)
 - Macduff Primary School (two general purpose community rooms, social area, multi-use sports hall and changing facilities and toilets)

- Macduff Option C:
 - Myrus (changing pavilion and 2-court sports hall, full-size all weather pitch with floodlighting, full-size grass pitch)
 - Macduff Arts Centre (sound recording studio, music equipment, film / digital projection equipment, stage and lighting equipment.

This event was held on a drop-in basis between noon and 8pm on Monday July 15th. We understand that options were laid out in graphical form and that a number of senior Council officers were on hand during the day to answer questions.

- 2.12 This graphical material highlights where changes were made to the initial range of options presented, with examples including: additional facilities (e.g. two squash courts), additional storage, movement of some internal facilities, and separation of athletics track from football field. In addition, an option was developed to allow for a proportion of the Banff facilities to be retained in the Town Centre.
- 2.13 This event again attracted what we would consider to be a very reasonable level of response for a single-day event of this nature; the Council’s subsequent e-Newsletter indicates that over 150 people attended the event (which was held at Macduff Primary School). Whilst this is a considerably lower number than the 300 that attended the initial event in June, such a drop-off is not uncommon in our experience, with the greatest level of participation being at the outset where potential participants are most keen to have their input.

Certainly, our understanding is that all of those that had left details from the previous event were again invited and there was a considerable degree of promotion of the event within the local press coverage that has been provided to us.

2.14 Attendees at this drop-in event were able to provide their feedback in two ways:

- Firstly, they could place a “coloured dots” on the elements of the various options that they liked or thought worked well (we understand that the graphics were periodically “refreshed” to prevent participants being unduly influenced by “likes” indicated by previous participants).
- Secondly, they were able to complete comments slips that asked for comments on the various options.

2.15 With respect to the “coloured dots” the instruction in the material provided to participants was to:

“Add coloured dots to the list of facilities to indicate what you like”

The dots, therefore, were not about “voting” for specific locations. Rather, they were a mechanism to allow people to highlight what facilities contained within options were important to them. We understand that this purpose was briefed to officers at the event and to participants as they arrived. These were then recorded and show that a given number of dots were placed beside courts in halls, football pitches, running tracks and so on.

- 2.16 Secondly, the comments that were made were classified as to whether they were “positive”, “negative” or “neutral”. IBP have reviewed the coding of these comments and believe that they have been appropriately coded. The analysis shows a significantly higher proportion of positive comments for Banff Option B and Macduff Option C. We understand that the analysis of these comments was one of the key data sources used in assessing respondents’ preferences with respect to location. However, we believe that a more refined coding of these comments would be beneficial, identifying common themes from the various comments and clearly demonstrating how these have been factored into the choice of preferred locations.
- 2.17 A subsequent newsletter was issued following this event, which invited people to visit the Council’s website for further feedback. It is noted that the Council’s website contains full details of the various options as well as the newsletter itself and, on a separate page, details of the feedback gathered at this specific event.
- 2.18 The final of the three community engagement events (on August 26th) had a somewhat different focus in that the purpose was not to seek further feedback but rather to set out the findings of the previous aspects of engagement (including the “Showcase” event and other discussions) and to detail the next steps in the process and how people could continue to be involved.
- 2.19 Attendance at this event was estimated at around 50 people suggesting that only a relatively “hard core” may have been represented; this is, however, still a respectable attendance for an event of this nature and it is noted that previous participants had been provided with information as to the Council’s plans through the newsletter and Council website. Specifically, detailed plans were placed on the Council’s website and these were very heavily covered within the local press.
- 2.20 This event set out the options that had been presented at the previous “Showcase” event and briefly summarised the outcomes of that second event, based on the “coloured dots” and “feedback comments” exercises. It was noted that Banff Option B and Macduff Option C were to be taken forward as the preferred options, largely based on this feedback, but with some further amendments based on specific elements of feedback from the “Showcase” session. Key (provisional) dates for the next steps in the process were detailed.

- 2.21 Whilst the three events described in detail above represented the main part of the public consultation, it is noted that a range of other stakeholders were involved in a variety of ways.
- 2.22 Elected members were discouraged from playing an active role in the public discussions but have been engaged with throughout, both through formal Council Committees that have discussed and agreed plans and also on a more informal basis in terms of discussions with Council Officers.
- 2.23 We also understand from our discussions with Council Officers (and indeed, from other sources including aspects of press coverage) that a range of other groups have been involved in discussions with the Council. This has included primarily users of the existing facilities. It is clear that The Council has engaged constructively when approached, being open to discussions with such groups and, indeed, organising “study visits” to other facilities. We were also convinced from our discussions that feedback from such groups had been taken into account although we believe that there would be benefit in formally documenting such feedback.
- 2.24 IBP believe that there would have been a benefit to the Council providing some appropriate mechanism for respondents to comment on the process of the various aspects of the engagement as well as on the substance of the issues described; this feedback could be considered useful in seeking to continually improve practice. This said, it is possible to identify any “challenges” to the process from the transcribed Questions and Answers that were prepared as well as from the interviews that we conducted with Council Officers. Having reviewed this material, we have identified five areas where such challenges were made / issues raised and we have commented on each of these over the page.

| Challenge / Issue Raised | IBP Comment |
|--|--|
| <p>General timing of the engagement activity</p> | <p>Some concerns were expressed by participants about the time that it had taken to get to the current stage and also about the reasons why there had not been engagement about the facilities required prior to June 2013. The Council's response to questioners noted the uncertainty of timings in complicated projects of this nature, involving multiple parties. Those Council Officers that we spoke to indicated that the engagement activity moved forward quickly as soon as it became apparent that there was greater impetus to the Council's discussions with Tesco.</p> |
| <p>Specific issues on timing of events</p> | <p>We understand from discussions with Council Officers that there were occasional concerns raised about the specific timings of events, both during the summer months and on Mondays (indeed, we understand that this was one of the considerations in the second event being a "drop-in" format). Some concern was raised that such timings may not have suited certain groups. However, it was clear that the events took place over a number of months and that the Council actively encouraged those people and groups that could not attend events to get in touch and provide feedback and were very open to receiving such feedback. This said, there may have been a benefit in having some formal "alternative" method of individuals or groups providing feedback. In addition, particularly in the absence of such an alternative and also given the importance of consultees having access to relevant visual material and support from Council officers, it could potentially be argued that there would have been benefit in holding the "Showcase" event on more than one day.</p> |

| Challenge / Issue Raised | IBP Comment |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Range of options being considered | The Council appears to have been very clear throughout that it was not discarding the “original plan” and that this plan was up for consultation alongside other plans that were being put forward. |
| Involvement of young people | In its response to questions at the first meeting on the involvement of young people, Council Officers noted that young people were at the initial event (and were provided with appropriate advocacy support). Some young people also took part in the subsequent “Showcase” event although the feedback from this event was not identified by such demographic factors. The facilities are for the communities as a whole but young people will clearly be significant users and it would be reasonable to suggest that there should be more widespread and deeper involvement of young people in developing plans as they move forward. |
| Requirement for feedback | The Council has made a commitment to keeping participants and the wider community informed about the outcomes of the engagement and how it is being taken forward. Since the commencement of this engagement activity in June 2013 we believe that the Council’s efforts represent an example of good practice. |

3.0 REVIEW OF PROCESS AGAINST NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Involvement: we will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement.

3.1 There is a considerable body of evidence that the engagement process complied with the “involvement” indicator. For example:

- A comprehensive list of existing user groups were identified and invited to the events (and involvement of such groups has been widespread)
- As well as formal invitations, Council staff, including its Community development team, engaged proactively with groups considered to have an interest to encourage their involvement.
- Wider attempts were made to engage the community at large, particularly through the very extensive and visible press coverage in the local community, which has commonly included comments from Council Officers encouraging as wide an involvement as possible.
- The Council also used its website and social media presence to encourage participation.

3.2 The only “gap” that might reasonably be identified here would be for broader and deeper involvement of young people (although it is accepted that some young people have contributed to the process, including representatives of the Aberdeenshire Youth Council).

Support: we will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.

- 3.3 The Council has been responsive to individuals and groups that have expressed particular barriers to involvement although we understand that such requests have been rare. Basic steps, such as providing disabled-friendly venues have been undertaken and, as described previously, groups such as young people have been provided with advocacy support. The approaches taken in the first two engagement events have also helped to overcome any reticence that some participants may have had about contributing in a large “public meeting” style event; specifically, participants have had the opportunity to comment both in small groups and individually. When the “barriers” have been circumstantial (e.g. timings, availability etc.) then Council Officers have been very receptive to engaging with stakeholders in a different manner.
- 3.4 The only criticism that we would make under the “support” heading would be that it would be beneficial for the availability of such support to be communicated proactively to participants in the engagement.

Planning: we will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

- 3.5 The purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement are set out in the paper to Policy and Resources Committee of 13th June. In addition, comprehensive internal briefing papers have been produced for each of the main public events, covering issues such as: purpose; venues; timings; agenda; resource requirements and other key issues.

Methods: we will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

- 3.6 In IBP’s experience, those planning engagement activities need to consider a number of factors in the choice of methods that are fit for purpose. Key considerations include: cost; information required for participants to make an effective contribution; depth of response required and how best to encourage involvement.

3.7 The principal approach taken here has been a qualitative one. That is to say, feedback has been sought from interested individuals and groups but without seeking a formal, statistically robust sample size for responses to closed questions about respondents' preferences. Such an approach would have required some form of structured survey. In this case, we believe that the broad approach adopted by the Council has been appropriate for the following reasons:

- The complexity of the issues under review required consistent explanations and support from Council Officers that could not practically have been provided in the context of such a formal survey.
- The required process has been both deliberative and developmental; it has required careful consideration of the pros and cons of the various issues and an iterative process in terms of the refinement of options.

3.8 Within this overall framework, the approaches of small group discussions and individual responses have been appropriate although, as noted in Section 2, some caution is required in terms of how certain aspects of feedback (particularly from the "Showcase" event in July) is analysed.

Working Together: we will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

3.9 The methods used to encourage participation in the formal events are noted (including the provision of facilitators who were briefed fully). Throughout the process, the Council has been very clear about the various steps of the engagement. In addition, and again as noted previously, it has been open to encouraging a dialogue with stakeholders in whatever way is appropriate for them, including outwith the framework of the three "formal" events.

Sharing Information: we will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

3.10 We believe that the Council can consider its efforts under this heading as representing an example of good practice, with the evidence for this including:

- Provision of background information on the context for the project from senior Council Officers.
- Openness of Council Officers to public question and answer sessions and a willingness to provide answers to individuals' specific questions
- Willingness of Council Officers to engage with groups and individuals outside of "formal" events, including arrangement of "study visits" elsewhere.
- Provision of graphical information to describe the range of options at the various events.
- Support of individual Council Officers to clarify any points at the various events.
- Provision of various aspects of plans and feedback on the Council's website (and we understand that this information could be made available on request in hard copy format).

3.11 One minor criticism that we understand to have been levelled in relation to the theme of information is that little information was provided prior to the first of the formal engagement events. However, we understand that this was a deliberate decision to encourage members of the communities concerned to look in an objective and fresh way at the needs of the community; this seems a reasonable approach. In addition, the "dialogue" represented by the engagement needs to be looked at in terms of the process as a whole and, clearly, this extended well beyond that single event and comprehensive information has been provided between and since the various events.

- 3.12 We understand that broad indicative costs for each option were provided at the July Showcase meeting. However, the focus of the feedback sought has primarily been on the needs of the various communities and their preferred facilities. The rationale for this was to ensure that financial issues did not cloud judgements as to the needs of the communities, particularly given that there were relatively modest differences in the capital costs of the various options; again, this seems reasonable.

Working with Others: we will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

- 3.13 The nature of the engagement thus far has been such that it has not yet been appropriate to involve “other” stakeholders; as noted previously, stakeholders such as elected members have been engaged with and we would not classify these as “others” and the engagement generally extended beyond specific user groups to involve other groups such as the Community Council. In our discussions with Council Officers, it was clear that they were mindful of the need to involve external stakeholders, such as Sport Scotland, as the process moved forward.

Improvement: we will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.

- 3.14 This was not a key focus of the engagement. However, the process has been a developmental one throughout, with participants being provided with information and engaged in deliberative discussions with Council Officers and with each other.

Feedback: we will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

- 3.15 The provision of feedback represents another example of good practice for the engagement. The evidence to which the Council can point to for this includes:
- Feedback newsletters provided directly to participants
 - Comprehensive information on the outcomes of the events set out in a transparent way on the Council’s website
 - Very extensive coverage of the process in the local press
 - The final of the three meetings having a focus on feeding back results with, in particular, senior Council officers being available to take questions
 - Provision of plans in the offices of the Banffshire Journal.
- 3.16 The only minor point that we would make here is that the feedback information from the July “Showcase” event is not, at the time of writing, included on the relevant page of the Council’s website

Monitoring and Evaluation: we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purpose and meets the National Standards for Community Engagement.

- 3.17 The involvement of IBP in this review of the engagement process is itself evidence of a commitment to monitoring and evaluation of the engagement. We believe that Council Officers have been willing to listen to feedback from participants and to tweak the process accordingly (with the “drop-in” approach to the July “Showcase” event being a good example of this).
- 3.18 However, as noted previously, it would have been appropriate to put in place more proactive mechanisms for participants to provide feedback about the process as a whole.

4.0 OTHER ISSUES

- 4.1 Aberdeenshire Council's Policy and Procedures manual includes a section on Consultation on major capital investment projects (Aberdeenshire Capital Projects, 1.7. 5 Consultation). This is not prescriptive as to the nature of any such consultation but simply indicates that appropriate consultation is required with relevant stakeholders. The engagement carried out thus far complies with this.
- 4.2 In addition, in our discussions with Council officers it was noted that projects of this nature usually include an option assessment on the basis of a "Cost / Value Matrix". It would be appropriate for the Council to complement the community engagement activity described herein with the completion of this analysis. A consultation of this nature should be seen as part of the decision making process and, whilst it should help to inform the completion of the Cost / Value Matrix, it would be perfectly appropriate for other issues of a technical and financial nature to be included in such an analysis.
- 4.3 As part of our investigations for the review, we were provided with brief information outlining the results of the engagement activity that was carried out for this project back in 2004 (although we have not reviewed any detailed information on the methodology that was adopted). It would be reasonable for the observer to question why the engagement activity carried out in 2013 has reached significantly different conclusions from that carried out in 2004.

The key point to note here is that, certainly based on the information that IBP has seen, the 2004 consultation was narrower in focus, containing a range of "closed" questions and not apparently including any feedback from broader deliberative discussions. The information provided to us contains only a proportionate indication of responses to the various questions and not the absolute numbers of respondents. It is also unclear on the basis of involvement and representation on which the results are based (one example would be that 32% of respondents were members of Banff Tennis Club, which appears disproportionately high).

Given such questions, allied to the significant passage of time, the Council's approach of encouraging a fresh look at the needs of the community appears justified.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

OVERVIEW

- 5.1 In this final chapter, IBP set out our conclusions regarding the engagement activity, relating this back to the objectives initially set out for the review (as described in Chapter 1). In addition, we have set out some suggestions for continuous improvement in the approach that the Council takes in the future for community engagement activities of this nature.
- 5.2 In the first instance, we believe **it is reasonable to conclude that the engagement activity “was promoted effectively to encourage full participation of all interested stakeholders”**. This promotional activity was extensive, including direct invitation to stakeholders with a particular interest in the focus of the engagement and wider promotion of engagement events (particularly within the local press); throughout, the Council has been open to engaging with stakeholders outwith the framework of the “formal” engagement events. As noted below, we believe that there are modest steps that the Council could take in the future to ensure that potential participants that may have barriers to participation are able to take part but we have found no evidence that stakeholders have been at all discouraged from active participation. The level and depth of engagement, particularly in the “formal” events but also through the more informal discussions that we have described, is impressive for communities of this size.
- 5.3 The initial terms of reference for the review ask for an assessment of whether the engagement was “robust” and “fair”; it is appropriate to consider these issues separately.

5.4 There is no specific definition of “robust” in the project brief. IBP would, however, suggest that a “robust” process could be summarised as one which:

- Involved the right people
- Asked appropriate questions
- Used appropriate data gathering methods
- Analysed results objectively and drew reasonable conclusions from the data provided.⁴

In the foregoing analysis, we have identified that **the engagement was robust in terms of involvement, issues considered and the methods used**. However, we believe it **would be appropriate for the Council to ensure that the rationale for its conclusions in terms of the separate but related issues of facilities and location of issues is more fully described**, particularly with respect to how the outcomes of the July “Showcase” event have been taken into account. We comment further on this below.

5.5 A “fair” process would be one in which background information is set out accurately and objectively, where all participants are able to express their views and where these views are taken into consideration (it is appropriate to reiterate that this is a “consultation” where views are sought and need to be taken into account but without this meaning any abdication of responsibility on the Council’s part for taking decisions in line with the law and its agreed internal decision-making processes). A “fair” process would also be characterised by openness to others’ ideas and by the absence of “leading” material and statements. The range of methods used in the different “formal” events as well as the opportunity for additional small-scale discussions are noted; in particular, the mix of small group discussions and individual feedback sheets has been an appropriate one. Council Officers have presented comprehensive information to engagement participants and, whilst it is unavoidable that individual Officers may have their own views on particular options, it is clear that they have sought to ensure that they do not allow such views to unreasonably influence participants in the engagement. Again, **we conclude that the process has been a fair one**.

⁴ These points reflect a range of the key elements of the National standards for Community Engagement.

- 5.6 The third specific objective of the brief requires an “assessment of whether declared outcomes reflected fairly the views of those that were engaged”. In many respects, **there is a clear trail of evidence that shows how the views expressed in the various events have been reflected in revisions to material and amended options presented to subsequent events.** With respect to the July drop-in event, we have reviewed the classification of comments made regarding the various options and these are supportive of the conclusions drawn in terms of the Council’s preferred option. We do, however, believe that, as noted above, **the rationale for this could be more clearly described,** demonstrating clearly how the results of the “dots” exercise on preferred facilities and the broader feedback comments have been taken into account in the conclusions that were drawn.
- 5.7 The final objective calls for the “identification of any gaps in the engagement process”. The approach that we have adopted in the foregoing analysis of reviewing the engagement against the National Standards for Community Engagement provides a useful framework for this and we have suggested a number of gaps under the heading of “Areas for Continuous Improvement” below. It is important to consider what learning points arise out of any engagement activity. However, **we have seen no evidence to suggest that any such gaps have had a material impact on the robustness and fairness of the approach undertaken** or on the ultimate conclusions that were drawn.

AREAS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- 5.8 There are some specific additional actions that we would suggest be taken forward with respect to this specific engagement activity:
- The Council’s Cost / Quality Matrix is yet to be completed and we believe it would be appropriate for this to be done, with the results of the engagement activity feeding into this.
 - Appropriate attempts should be made to broaden the involvement of young people in the engagement process (ideally, this should be undertaken as soon as possible).

5.9 A range of broader issues also emerge in relation to continuous improvement of the engagement process (in its widest sense) and we would present the following suggestions for consideration:

- Future engagement activity should, as a matter of routine, set out clearly and proactively the support that can be made available to any participants that could have any difficulties in engaging to ensure that they are able to play a full part in the engagement.
- In future “drop-in” events (such as the July drop-in event undertaken for this engagement) consideration should be given (subject to understandable resource constraints) to hosting these over multiple days, ideally spread over a longer time period.
- It would also be appropriate to ensure that an appropriate “parallel” approach to taking part in an engagement of this sort is available to those that are not able to take part in formal events for any reason and that the availability of this is communicated proactively.
- Future engagement events should provide participants with an appropriate opportunity to provide the Council with relevant feedback about the engagement process (i.e. not just the substance of matters at hand) to further assist continuous improvement of approaches to community engagement.



Appendix 1

List of Documentation Reviewed

External Documentation

National Standards for Community Engagement, Communities Scotland.

Internal Procedural Documentation

Aberdeenshire Capital Projects, 1.7. 5 Consultation (extract from Policy and Procedures Manual);

Aberdeenshire Council Cost / Quality Matrix for appraisal of capital projects.

Internal Approval Papers and Correspondence

Canal Park, Banff Chronology;

Email from Head of Service (Customer Communications and Improvement) to colleagues dated 22nd May 2013;

Paper to Policy and Resources Committee, 13 June 2013;

Proposal for Banff & Macduff Engagement Event 2, Monday July 15th 2013, Macduff Primary;

Proposal for Banff & Macduff Engagement Event 3, Monday August 26th 2013, Banff Academy;

Report to Aberdeenshire Council, 26 September 2013.

Documentation Association with Engagement Events

Invitation card for meeting of 17th June 2013;

“Community Meeting - Key Script” - information for meeting of 17th June 2013;

Banff and Macduff Q & A, 17th June 2013 (briefing paper for Council Officers);

Graphical Material and Feedback forms for Engagement Event 2, 15th July 2013;

Feedback newsletter issue 1;

Feedback newsletter issue 2;

Banff & Macduff Engagement Event, Monday 26th August, supporting slides.

Internal Papers Relating to Analysis of Findings

Canal Park Analysis of Questionnaires (from 2004 consultation);
Banff & Macduff - Engagement Event feedback (from 17 June event);
Banff & Macduff Q and A, 17 June 2013 - Questions and Answers (transcription of Questions and Answers from event);
Banff & Macduff Engagement Event, 17 June 2013 - Questions and Answers (transcription of Questions and Answers from question sheets left at event);
Analysis of “dots” and coding of comments to positive, negative and neutral from July 15th event;
Detail of coding of comments on options from July 15th event;
Canal Park Replacement Facilities, Officer Meeting, 8th November 2013.

Press Coverage

“Concern as Tesco plan still on shelf”, source and date not known;
“Tesco views now online”, Banffshire Journal, July 2 2013;
“Keeping you in the picture”, Banffshire Journal, July 9 2013;
“Leisure ideas go on show”, Banffshire Journal, July 9 2013;
“Speedy progress promised for centre / What are the facility plans?”, Banffshire Journal, July 9 2013;
“Banff and Macduff Community Council provides an update on the projects and issues affecting the twin towns”, Banffshire Journal, July 9 2013;
“Many questions still to answer on Tesco deal”, Banffshire Journal, July 9 2013;
“Sports and leisure facility options unveiled to public”, Banffshire Journal, July 16 2013;
“New centre would penalise the over-50s” (Letters page), Banffshire Journal, July 16 2013;
“People power as Tesco’s sport options are unveiled”, Banffshire Journal, July 16 2013;
“Every little helps in public consultation”, Banffshire Journal, July 23 2013;
“Concerns over handling of Common Good Fund” (from Letters page), Banffshire Journal, July 23 2013;
“Views on leisure facilities move forward”, Banffshire Journal, August 6 2013;
Plans under way after community talks”, source not known, August 9 2013;
“Banff and Macduff Community Council provides an update on the projects and issues affecting the twin towns in its monthly column”, Banffshire Journal, August 13 2013
“Final leisure plan set to be unveiled”, Banffshire Journal, August 20 2013;
“Delight as £12m of good news delivered”, Banffshire Journal, August 27 2013;

Press Coverage (continued)

“Final sports hub plans are revealed”, Banffshire Journal, August 27 2013;
“Sporting Spotlight”, Banffshire Journal, August 27 2013;
“New sports proposals revealed”, Press & Journal, August 28 2013;
“Residents have clear vision of their preferred option for leisure and community facilities”, The Advertiser, August 30 2013;
“Gagging fears on leisure proposals”, Banffshire Journal, September 13 2013;
“Councillors stripped of land vote”, Press & Journal, September 27 2013;
“Councillors “to get no say” on sports facilities”, Press & Journal, September 30 2013;
““Once in a lifetime” chance for towns’ sports provision”, Press & Journal, October 10 2013;
“Community facility plans going public”, Banffshire Journal, October 15 2013;
“Council to lodge blueprints for series of sports centres”, Press & Journal, November 6 2013.