

THE NORTH EAST STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE: 05 March 2004

**NEST MONITORING: EVALUATION BY EXAMPLE OF THE APPROVED
METHODOLOGY**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the NEST monitoring which has been undertaken within Aberdeenshire Council and confirm the detailed approach adopted.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 31 August 2001 The North East Strategic Planning Committee (NESPEC) approved broad principles for an integrated monitoring framework that involved setting a series of indicators relating to the aims, objectives and policies of NEST. Consultation on the detail of the monitoring proposals occurred, involving the Structure Plan Issues Forum and groups such as NESTRANS, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Local Economic Forum (now the North East Scotland Economic Forum) and the North East Housing, Planning Alliance and on 23rd June 2003 NESPEC approved a more detailed monitoring proposal. At this time it was recognised that the format for monitoring was untried and would, by necessity, evolve with practice.
- 2.2 The first of the three thematic monitoring papers, covering the issues of “Economy and Transport” is appended. This report includes: an overview of changes in policy and legislation since the approval of NEST; an overview of strategic changes associated with the economy and transport since the approval of NEST; and an analysis of the performance indicators identified in the integrated monitoring paper.
- 2.3 While this monitoring paper relates only to the Aberdeenshire Council area it should be viewed as a robust test of whether the monitoring scheme proposed provides sufficient information to enable the committee to make decisions on the need to review the plan as part of both authorities commitment to continuous plan making.

3. NEST Monitoring

- 3.1 When the monitoring proposal was presented to NESPEC it was identified that it would evolve through its preparation and it is accepted that the targets set in the monitoring proposal are highly aspirational and may need to be modified to reflect reasonable levels of performance. As is stated in the monitoring proposal, failure to meet a target may be indicative of a policy failure, a changing environment or an over ambitious target.
- 3.2 By using this method the following conclusions were arrived at. Of the eleven indicators that were identified for the purpose of monitoring the economy and

transport theme most make use of information that is already collected, and readily available. In some instances it has not been possible to report on the selected indicators within Aberdeenshire (Take up of Brownfield Land for Business Development, Completions and Commitments of New Office Floorspace, Reducing the Need to Travel and Conditions Imposed to Mitigate Transport Impact), as they require the implementation of specific data acquisition strategies. Monitoring of Accessibility of Development has occurred using a different data source than anticipated, while the indicator Diversity of town centre uses provides baseline information for this year and therefore limited analysis.

- 3.3 One of the most significant changes in planning policy since the adoption of NEST has been the introduction of Scottish Planning Policy and in particular SPP1 “The Planning System”, SPP2 “Economic Development” and the recently released draft of SPP 17 “Planning for Transport.” Draft SPP17 in particular introduces new requirements for the “City Region level” (the specification of maximum car parking standards). However the introduction of these Scottish Planning Policies has not required changes to be made to NEST. Other significant changes since the adoption of NEST include the commitment given by the First Minister that the Scottish Executive will deliver the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Project as a strategic road, bearing a large part of the cost.
- 3.4 From the outset it has been recognised that assessing demand for employment land is often difficult. NEST requires a marketable supply of employment land to be maintained throughout the plan period, and while there is some concern regarding the level of industrial land in the North East (in terms of the quantity, choice and quality) there is an adequate supply of employment land available in the North East. In Aberdeenshire the average annual take up is 12 hectares. All of the Aberdeenshire settlements identified within NEST Policy 2 currently have sufficient employment land allocations and additional allocations identified within the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan will increase allocations in appropriate locations to allow for a continuous 7 year supply of employment land. Specialist employment sites such as the St Fergus Gas Terminal and North Collielaw continue to be safeguarded for appropriate employment uses.
- 3.5 All business development in Aberdeenshire on allocated sites from January 2002 to December 2003 occurred on Greenfield sites, this is not to be unexpected due to the low prevalence of Brownfield sites in Aberdeenshire. NEST identifies the difficulties of locating new business development on Brownfield land and as stated in the NEST report of survey vacant Brownfield sites not previously allocated for industrial use are unlikely to be redeveloped for industrial and business purposes due to competing demands from other higher value or more appropriate uses, especially housing.
- 3.6 In Aberdeenshire town centre health checks were undertaken for the first time during the summer of 2003, for this reason there was no analysis of this indicator at this time.
- 3.7 There continues to be pressure for retail development within the major Aberdeenshire settlements. Since the adoption of NEST only 2 out of 7 approved retail developments in Aberdeenshire over 500m² GFA were

located within a town centre, the other 5 approvals were located out of centre. However it must be noted that not all new retail development can be accommodated in town centres due to the nature of many Aberdeenshire town centres there are a limited number of sites of a sufficient and suitable size. It is considered that NEST Policy 15 remains valid; however there are issues relating to the availability of town centre sites for large retail developments.

- 3.8 At present it is not possible to monitor completions and commitments of new office floorspace across Aberdeenshire, modification of the development control database functions will allow this indicator to be monitored in future years.
- 3.9 The average number of house completions located further than 1km from a public transport route in 2002 and 2003 was 6.6 percent. As an interim measure until specific data acquisition systems are available this indicator was assessed using information relating to household completions, rather than approvals. Given that permissions are valid for a period of 5 years there may be a number of 'older' completions within these figures, which were not assessed against NEST policies it is envisaged that this figure will be reduced in future years as applications are assessed against NEST policies.
- 3.10 Since the approval of NEST no development on land safeguarded for transportation proposals in Aberdeenshire has in anyway affected their potential. At present it is not possible to monitor the Conditions Imposed to Mitigate Transport Impact across Aberdeenshire, although a modification of the development control database functions will allow this indicator to be monitored in future years. Information required to assess reducing the Need to Travel is not available until 2005 and no reporting on this indicator has occurred.
- 3.11 In terms of approved departures there were no departures in relation to employment land or retail for the period 01 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 and the eleven departures to Policy 31 Connecting Communities can all be attributed to a single area within Aberdeenshire (Banff and Buchan) listing a departures against NEST Policy 31 where there have been departures against NEST Policy 12 (House Building in the Countryside Beyond the Greenbelt).
- 3.12 No changes are required as a result of this monitoring paper.

4. Lessons Learned

- 4.1 The monitoring framework is robust.
- 4.2 The validity of the conclusions of monitoring North East Scotland Together can only be confirmed by reference to the structure plan partner organisations.
- 4.3 Change within the wider social and economic context is not so great to invalidate monitoring at annual intervals.
- 4.4 There is a need for specific data acquisition strategies to be in place.

4.5 The implementation of monitoring systems requires effort in initial stages; however once that initial work is undertaken the effort required to conduct monitoring is greatly reduced.

5. Recommendations

5.1 That the method demonstrated within the NEST monitoring report on Economy and Transport for Aberdeenshire is adopted as the model for future monitoring reports.

5.2 That the committee note the content of the NEST Monitoring Economy and Transportation (Aberdeenshire Council) report.

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