



NORTH EAST STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE: 10th September 2004

STRUCTURE PLAN MONITORING - HOUSING & COMMUNITY

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Monitoring is a statutory requirement in terms of the structure plan. It helps to identify whether policies are working as intended and whether they remain relevant to their context. The importance of monitoring is highlighted in *PAN37: Structure Planning* which states that “regular monitoring of the relationship of the plan to changes in the wider policy environment, development pressures and political priorities is essential if the plan is to remain relevant” (PAN37 para 35).
- 1.2 This report advises Members of the results of the monitoring exercise to assess the performance of the structure plan in relation to the ‘Housing and Community’ theme over the period January 2002 to December 2003. This report also proposes a mechanism by which the results of the monitoring can be assessed and an appropriate response determined for consideration at the next meeting of this committee.

2 Background

- 2.1 The structure plan has a base date of January 2000 and was approved by Scottish Ministers in December 2001. A monitoring framework was subsequently agreed by this committee in June 2003 and the first monitoring report (a pilot exercise conducted by Aberdeenshire Council covering the ‘Transport and Environment’ theme) was published in February 2004. Although housing land supply has always been monitored on an annual basis, and population and housing forecasts produced (until recently) every two years, this report represents the first attempt to monitor the ‘Housing & Community’ theme of the structure plan, including the performance of its policies. Further monitoring reports can be expected during 2005.
- 2.2 It is now three years since the structure plan was approved by Scottish Ministers and this seems an appropriate time to take a structured assessment of the housing section in the terms set out above.

3 Key Findings and Discussion

- 3.1 The full monitoring report is attached as Annex 1 but some of the key findings include:
- 3.2 **TIMESCALE** – The structure plan, a strategic document, is now almost five years from its base date and in terms of housing, provides direction for another six years in detail and a further five indicatively. This contrasts with more recent guidance in the form of *SPP3: Planning for Housing* which points

to the value of looking at least 20 years ahead when planning for housing at the strategic level. This longer-term perspective would have the benefit of facilitating infrastructure provision and increasing community / developer confidence about the future direction and scale of growth.

- 3.3 LOCAL PLANS / HOUSING LAND SUPPLY – Both Councils have now published Finalised Local Plans. The City Local Plan is currently on deposit until 30 September, while the Aberdeenshire Local Plan Inquiry started on 31 August. Progress in achieving adopted plans by both Councils, however, has not been as swift as would have been hoped. One of the consequences of this has been delays in the release of Phase I sites in both Housing Market Areas which has had an impact on the land supply situation. Land supply issues have also been raised at a national level with the publication of the Barker Review and the Scottish Executive’s assessment of its relevance to Scotland.
- 3.4 DESIGN – Design has risen up the agenda significantly over the past few years, a policy emphasis which, although recognised in NEST, does not receive the prominence it has since achieved in guidance emerging from the Scottish Executive.
- 3.5 LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGIES – Local Housing Strategies were published earlier this year by both Councils to replace the Housing Plans mentioned in NEST para 3.27. There is a need (reflected in statements by the Minister) to ensure that Local Housing Strategies and Structure Plans are integrated and complement each other.
- 3.6 BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT – Aberdeen City have achieved significant success in securing the redevelopment of brownfield sites over the past few years and large sites are continuing to come through the system. Concerns have been raised, however, concerning the protection of urban greenspace for future generations and the balance between brownfield and greenfield development.
- 3.7 HOUSING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE – A significant number of consents have been granted by Aberdeenshire Council under NEST Policy 12. Departures from NEST Policy 12, however, represent a significant proportion of all structure plan departures. These factors point to issues which need to be considered in more detail.
- 3.8 POPULATION & HOUSING FORECASTS – Forecasts suggest an increased need for housing in the structure plan area compared to that envisaged by NEST, although the level is below that forecast in 2001 (largely due to re-basing on the 2001 Census, both in terms of overall population as well as age structure).

4 Issues Arising from the Monitoring Report

- 4.1 In order to formulate a response to this monitoring report, there are a number of issues which need to be taken into account.
- 4.2 Firstly, although this is a structure plan monitoring report, it is not necessarily the case that the resolution of the issues highlighted requires to be done through the structure plan. Consideration will have to be given to the range of implementation arrangements available.

- 4.3 Secondly, although the time horizon of NEST has been raised as an issue, the Scottish Executive are proposing to prepare a Planning Bill during the next parliamentary session which will (among other things) implement their proposals regarding the replacement of structure plans with city-region plans. Any decision relating to the timescale over which changes to the strategic guidance contained in the structure plan need to be made must be seen in the context of the Scottish Executive's proposed timetable. Further clarification will be sought on this point from the Scottish Executive and will be reported back to the next meeting of this committee.
- 4.4 Thirdly, during the preparation of this report and the associated monitoring statement, the results of the 2004 Housing Land Audit and 2004 Population and Household Forecasts were not available. Data has been inserted at the last minute but this has not enabled a time for reflection, comparison or discussion. This will be important in feeding into any decisions to be made and means that it would be inappropriate to propose any substantive response in relation to these issues at the current time.
- 4.5 Fourthly, a number of potentially important pieces of information are still awaited (expected in the next few months) relating to both a new study of housing need and Scottish Executive policy in relation to planning for rural development. Both of these will need to feed into an assessment of whether / what action is required in response to this report on the key issues of housing in the countryside and affordable housing.
- 4.6 Each of these factors suggest that it would be inappropriate to propose any substantive response to this monitoring report at this meeting.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 As a result, it is proposed that the period between now and the next meeting of this committee (December 2004) be used to:
- a) Consult with key stakeholders on the implications of this monitoring report and the most appropriate way forward.
 - b) Assess forthcoming information, including that about housing need;
 - c) Consider the issues raised in the monitoring report on housing in the countryside.
- The objective of this would be to report back to the December meeting with recommendations on the response to be made and any action to be taken.
- 5.2 There are likely to be a range of possible statutory and non-statutory responses but the decision as to the appropriate implementation mechanism will need to be focused on the package of change required and the timescales within which any changes need to be made.
- 5.3 The debate (informed by the monitoring report) as to the nature and scale of any change required will be limited to the housing section of NEST (p29 – 37) and in the context of the structure plan strategy. This will include issues relating to the plan horizon, structure plan requirement, allocations, design, housing in the countryside, the format and mechanism for any change and the timescale over which change is required.

- 5.4 In order to ensure that the December meeting of this Committee is not hindered from taking action by procedural issues (due to the timing of relevant parent committees), it is proposed that appropriate authority is obtained from parent committees at their December meetings.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The monitoring has shown that a number of issues exist which require a considered response. The nature and scale of that response has yet to be determined but should be informed by discussions with stakeholders and the information which is currently outstanding. This will be presented to the December meeting of this committee. In the interim, it is suggested that relevant policy committees should be advised of the position and appropriate arrangements made to implement the outcome of any decisions taken in December.

7 Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that:

- 1. the Committee note the results of the 2004 'Housing & Community' monitoring report.**
- 2. the Committee authorise discussions between Officers and key stakeholders to consider the implications of this monitoring report. These would include:
 - a) housing forecasts and requirements;**
 - b) appropriate implementation mechanisms;**and that Officers report on the outcomes of these discussions to the next meeting of this Committee.**
- 3. an assessment is made of emerging information in relation to housing need and that this be reported back to the next meeting of this Committee.**
- 4. Aberdeenshire Council considers the issues raised by housing in the countryside, particularly in relation to the high level of departures from NEST Policy 12 and report back to the next meeting of this Committee.**
- 5. parent Committees be encouraged to delegate appropriate authority to enable any recommendation to the December meeting of this Committee (in response to this monitoring exercise) to be implemented.**

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