

AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLANNING STEERING GROUP
30 APRIL 2009

Monitoring the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan - Monitor 2008

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To present MONITOR 2008, the fifth in a series of monitoring reports prepared by the Ayrshire Joint Planning Unit to monitor structure plan policy and the second in the current series which has focused on monitoring progress of policy within the approved Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan: Growing A Sustainable Ayrshire.

BACKGROUND

- 2 The second Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan was approved by Scottish Ministers in November 2007. Until replaced by local development plans, the joint structure plan will continue to be the basis for planning policy in all three councils. To be successful planning policy requires to be monitored on a consistent basis and since its inception the joint structure plan has monitored strategic policy every two years to reflect the changes in the wider policy environment, pressures for development and changing government priorities. Monitor 2008, therefore, builds on successive monitoring statements first published in 2000. In each monitoring report the opportunity has been taken to refresh the set of indicators used to highlight current issues. A summary of all key findings can be found at the introduction of Monitor 2008 and a set of indicators charting progress against national sustainable objectives is included at the end.

KEY FINDINGS

- 3 This paper does not seek to replicate all findings of Monitor 2008, nevertheless it is important to highlight those aspects considered to be of most significance or where particular attention should be paid in developing not only the new local development plans but other related policy initiatives.

Sustainable Use of Resources and Climate Change

- 4 The effects of climate change are already being experienced as CO₂ emissions continue to rise globally. The increases in emissions from within the transport sector are in contrast to declines within other sectors of the economy. Nevertheless, the implications of mitigating climate change in the future will place not only a greater need to reduce emissions from these sources but also in developing climate change adaptation measures across a wide range of other topics. The enactment of the Climate Change Bill currently progressing

through parliament will shortly require an alignment of all policy tools placing carbon reduction at the heart of future objectives. This will have major implications for future local development plans, for example with land use adaptation policies to climate change, flooding and sea level rise.

- 5 The contribution of wind farms to meet national renewable targets has increased in recent years. In addition to encouraging a broader approach to renewable energy schemes it will also be important to encourage greater energy efficiency within new and existing development. Almost 90% of current installed wind farm capacity is within the Areas of Search identified by the Joint Structure Plan. Beyond these areas the impact of proposals on many the most valued landscapes remains a concern and additional supplementary planning guidance has been prepared (see Item 5).

Protecting Natural Resources and Enhancing the Environment

- 6 The improvement in bathing water quality reported in previous monitoring reports has been reversed, half of monitored bathing waters failed in 2007, in part because of heavy rainfall within the river catchments. Air quality is generally good and there are no air quality management areas within Ayrshire. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan has recently been reviewed and a revised Action Plan prepared, this establishes an agreed set of actions relating to both habitats and species which are currently being implemented.
- 7 The Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy, approved in 2003, provides the context for tree planting and woodlands in the landscape and their development as an economic resource. However with the loss of direct grant aided woodland funding, monitoring has confirmed a significant drop in planting from previous high levels in 2004/2007. It is expected government will produce new guidance on future woodland development later in the year with the Ayrshire councils already identified as capable of significant increases in woodland cover. Government advice is expected on this later in the year.
- 8 With the adoption of the local plans in North, South and East Ayrshire the landscape designations promoted in the first joint structure plan, together with the local boundaries of a green belt for Ayr, Prestwick & Troon and the sensitive landscape areas have now been confirmed. The second joint structure plan promotes further safeguards for landscape protection around the three main towns.

Well Being

- 9 Whilst there continues to a general growth in income within households, the average gross disposable income per head in both North and East Ayrshire remains below the Scottish average. Life expectancy is increasing, however the general picture hides spatial inequality with many residents having a life expectancy significantly below the Ayrshire and UK average. On a more positive note, the employment rate has increased with more people in employment and less unemployed than was the case 10 years ago. Whilst the skills within the workforce have improved, the proportion of 16-19 year old that are not in education, training or employment (NEET's) show some of the highest levels within Scotland, and the Scotland average is significantly above other OECD countries.

Sustainable Communities and Equity

- 10 Monitoring undertaken since 2000 suggests that while the economic circumstances of the population is improving in absolute terms the relative position and the disparity with other parts of Scotland remain. The need to address this differential has already been recognized by all councils through a wide range of initiatives. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain if the cycle of poverty, unemployment, low skills, bad health, and poor housing is to be broken. Whilst the impact of the current recession on the scale of available private and public sector investment is not captured by this monitoring statement it is known to be having a direct effect on physical regeneration.
- 11 The perception of Ayrshire as a good area to live is shared by 90% of the residents. Crime recorded is lower than the Scottish average and there has been a significant improvement in road safety. Access to basic services such as post offices, local supermarkets is also perceived to be good although access to outpatient's services, as noted in previous monitoring statements, continues to be a concern.
- 12 The relative accessibility of residents to employment opportunities, when compared with other council areas in the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport area, remains relatively poor - particularly if the mode of transport is by public transport - and emphasizes the need for further investment in improving transport linkages to job opportunities. There has been no significant shift in the mode of transport used to travel to work over the last ten years with only 27% of trips by non-car modes.

Contextual Indicators

- 13 Monitor 2008 highlights that in common with many regional economies in Europe Ayrshire continues to undergo a restructuring of its employment base. This has seen a shift away from manufacturing (a drop of almost 50% since 1995) toward service industries. Whilst the trend has been of job losses in some sectors there has been significant growth in total employment - an increase of 10% since 2000. In the future it is hoped this more diverse economy will be more resilient to economic change, yet as the tables show the creation of additional jobs in sectors which offer good employment growth prospects presents significant challenges. The recent improvement in the survival rates of new companies is encouraging and a positive step in helping to grow indigenous business.
- 14 The growth in passenger numbers passing through Glasgow Prestwick International Airport in recent years has stabilized at around 2.4 million, though freight tonnage passing through the airport has fallen.
- 15 As the wealth within the community has grown so has expenditure on retail goods. The growth in non-convenience expenditure has been significant and this is forecast to continue in the short to medium term. This growth will encourage the expansion of additional floor space and may contribute toward the regeneration of town centres.

- 16 The buoyancy of the private sector housing market has in recent years been an important driver in the economy as well as supporting regeneration initiatives, providing affordable homes and funding infrastructure. Along with the rest of Scotland and the United Kingdom, recently there has been a significant drop in the volume and value of house transactions as a consequence of the current recession. The scale of change has been dramatic, with house volumes and the value of house transactions dropping by over 50%. The underlying requirement for new housing driven by social and economic factors remains however, and the trends in the housing market will be monitored closely to ensure that the planning system is in a position to react quickly to future changes.

CONCLUSION

- 17 Monitor 2008 shows that despite further improvement to the environment and a general satisfaction with "quality of life" issues the problem of a poorly performing economy continues to be the dominating feature. This is compounded by the current recession. Monitoring statements prepared since 2000 illustrate that some simple improvements can be achieved within a relatively short period, for example in waste recycling and road safety figures, when the pace of change can be accelerated with government initiatives, clear and identifiable targets supported by appropriate additional financial resources. However, the fundamental issues identified in Monitor Report 2008 of a poorly performing economy and the attendant social consequences still present significant challenges that will provide the background context for local development plans and indeed broader council initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION

- 18 The Steering Group is asked to:
- note this report and approve Monitor 2008 for circulation;
 - give authority to the Ayrshire Joint Planning Unit Manager to make any further textual changes as necessary to Monitor 2008 prior to final publication on the web site; and
 - identify any specific topics they would wish to be addressed for the next meeting in November 2009.

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