

Growing Ayrshire
Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 2025:
Consultation Draft

The Stewart Milne Group is firmly established as Scotland's leading privately owned housebuilder. It has seen a period of successful progression since its initial origins in the North East of Scotland in 1975. Now well into the 21st Century, the Group's aim is to continue its expansion across Scotland and throughout the UK.

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited is an integral part of the Group and has contributed hugely to the success of the Homes business in the Central Belt with the acquisition and management of strategic land. The operating Company (Homes) in the Central Belt now turns over in excess of £75m per annum.

This response by Stewart Milne Holdings Limited responds to several questions presented by the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee in their letter of the 21 June 2004.

For ease of reference, the relevant questions are presented prior to the formal response.

Question 1: Does the Vision Statement set the correct agenda for the future?

Since the approval of the previous Ayrshire Structure Plan, a National Planning Framework for Scotland has been prepared and although it is appreciated that this framework is a non statutory policy document, it sets out a long term vision for Scotland to 2025. In addition to the preparation of this Framework, it is significant that in 2003 the Ayrshire Economic Forum, a public/private sector partnership, prepared an economic development strategy 'Ayrshire: Scotland's Western Gateway' which highlighted how Ayrshire could make a major contribution to the growth of Scotland.

Within this general policy context, it is considered prudent to prepare Ayrshire for growth in an attempt to not only stabilise the population at current levels, but potentially increase the numbers of those residing within this Plan area. Indeed, Paragraph 1.6 of the Draft Structure Plan acknowledges that "substantial private housing development has taken place, and in some parts there is already an emerging shortage of land".

Significantly, Paragraph 1.7 continues "the recent publication of the 2001 Census has given a more immediate picture of an increasing requirement for new housing despite a slow down in population growth, and an ageing population with a loss of those more economically active. If projected to the future this will compromise the ability of the area to realise its economic potential and thus contribute fully to national growth".

The projected decline in the Ayrshire population is a matter that must be addressed by the emerging Structure Plan if future growth of the Region, as envisaged in the National Planning Framework and by the Ayrshire Economic Forum is to be realised. Within this context, it is considered that the Vision Statement presents a sensible agenda for the future and as such, decides to plan for growth.

Question 2: Future population projections based on recent performance suggest that Ayrshire will face a considerable loss of population. Is this trend acceptable, should there be an attempt to stabilise the population at current levels, and is this realistic?

This issue has been part addressed in the response to Question 1. Indeed, Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would agree with the Joint Committee that there remains persistent and unacceptable problems of a falling population, unemployment and social disadvantage and hence, there is an urgent need to raise prosperity through increased access to opportunity in order to help secure an improved long term economic future in a rapidly changing world economy.

Within the above context, we would therefore support the Joint Committee's view that there is a pressing need to address the issue of falling population in order to support future economic growth and revitalise communities in Ayrshire.

It is agreed that population projection is not an exact science or a forecast of what will happen as it is based on past trends being projected to the future. Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would therefore support the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee in their attempt to stabilise the population at current levels and hence endorse the plans approach to minimise population loss by setting an aspirational target to arrest decline and then to grow the population. Such an approach by the Committee can be seen to contribute positively to national aspirations of population growth.

Consistent with the above, Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would agree with the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee that in order to stabilise the population at current levels, this can only be achieved with improved accessibility both within Ayrshire and to the surrounding employment opportunities. In this regard, the Spatial Development Strategy is in principle supported by Stewart Milne Holdings Limited.

Question 3: Are the seven principle aims of the Strategy appropriate?

In general, the seven principle aims cover the main issues that require to be addressed by the emerging Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan. Indeed, Stewart Milne Holdings Limited strongly support the Committee's current intention to maintain the population at or about current levels. With respect to the remaining aims, it is considered that reference to the requirement for additional housing should be specifically inserted. In this regard, it is considered that the second aim should be amended as follows:

'To promote strong and vibrant communities by realising their potential for growth through the provision of appropriate levels of additional housing'.

Question 4: In what way and to what extent should the Gateway Locations be developed to attract investment? Are there other locations that might be considered as Gateway opportunities?

It is considered that the strategy to identify Gateway Locations, Core Investment Areas and Investment Corridors constitutes an appropriate attempt to promote future sustainable development within Ayrshire. Within this context, the strategy must recognise that in order to maximise potential, all parts of Ayrshire have a vital contribution to make to the area's future prosperity and quality of life. In such a strategy, the roles of Service Centres and Local Communities is therefore important.

In this respect, it is considered that future development at the Gateway Locations as identified in Paragraph 2.19 of the Draft Structure Plan should therefore be supported.

Question 5: Do you agree that the area surrounding Ayr, Irvine and Kilmarnock should be the main focus of future development?

In principle, it makes logical planning sense to promote future sustainable growth to the existing main settlements within the Structure Plan area. However, one must recognise that there are both benefits and disbenefits associated with concentrating most of the additional housing and employment opportunities within the Core Investment Area (i.e. Ayr, Irvine and Kilmarnock) and as such, whilst in principle such a strategy is considered appropriate, in practice problems may occur. In this respect, consistent with the broader strategy currently advanced in the Draft Structure Plan, additional development should be promoted to appropriate communities outlined in Schedule 1.

Question 6: Six Investment Corridors have been identified. Is the concept valid, do they cover the correct areas or are there other areas that should be included?

The Investment Corridor approach is supported by Stewart Milne Holdings Limited so far as the opportunity is realised within the Investment Corridors to link investment in business development with the provision of complimentary housing. Within this context, it is considered that developing economic opportunities supported by the provision of additional housing will where appropriate, capitalise on the accessibility advantages of certain settlements within the Structure Plan area and thereby contribute to sustainable development including the provision of public transport options. With regard to the latter matter, it is suggested that specific recognition should be given to specific settlements within the Investment Corridors which are well placed to fulfil future growth.

To conclude therefore on this matter, the concept of Investment Corridors is generally supported and as presented by Paragraph 2.27 of the Draft Structure Plan in the main they cover the correct areas. As highlighted above, it is suggested that specific settlements should be identified within the Investment Corridors for future development. In this respect, it is considered that the settlement of Mauchline should be identified for future significant growth within the M74 Link Corridor.

Question 7: How can the potential of Ayr, Irvine and Kilmarnock be realised?

These main settlements within the Plan area will clearly be required to subsume a proportion of the future housing and business land requirements. Notwithstanding, and as supported by the Investment Corridor approach, substantial proportions of the remaining housing and business land requirements should be promoted to certain settlements within appropriate Investment Corridors in order to present a critical mass to support associated infrastructure. Within this context, settlements such as Mauchline which would greatly benefit from a bypass and the reopening of a passenger rail link will require significant levels of additional population/housing land in order to enable the delivery of such essential infrastructure.

With regard to the future potential of Ayr, Irvine and Kilmarnock, we have no further detailed comments.

Question 8: A hierarchy of communities has been established in Schedule 1 based on their function: do you agree with the classification?

Schedule 1 briefly outlines the community hierarchy within Ayrshire and Stewart Milne Holdings Limited have no objections to identifying Ayr, Irvine and Kilmarnock as Core Investment Area Towns.

However, with regard to the Service Centres and Local Communities designations little differentiation is provided. Indeed, with specific regard to Mauchline, although this settlement is identified as suitable for future significant development, it is only identified as a Local Community irrespective that the adopted East Ayrshire Local Plan supports in principle a bypass and the reopening of a passenger rail link. Although Stewart Milne Holdings Limited support the identification of Mauchline as a significant development opportunity, it is suggested that further specific guidance should be provided by the emerging Structure Plan to augment this specific designation. A similar exercise may also be required for certain other settlements.

It is considered that such an approach will appropriately classify within the emerging Structure Plan the specific settlements within the identified Investment Corridors which are more suitable to accommodate significant future housing and business developments. It is therefore suggested that a re-examination of Schedule 1 be undertaken with a more comprehensive classification of settlements appropriate for future development being identified.

Question 9: In what ways can rural areas support the overall aim of developing the economy?

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would have no specific comments to make on this issue.

Question 10: Should more housing be built in the countryside?

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited have no specific comments on this matter.

Question 11: In addition to the transport proposals identified what other development of the transport system would be appropriate?

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited support the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee's contention that improvements, removal of constraints and new capacity additions at key points in the communications networks create economic opportunity as well as allowing that opportunity to be realised, accessed and developed. Within this context, the requirement for a bypass for the settlement of Mauchline is in principle supported.

With specific regard to rail investment, whilst the principles identified in Paragraph 2.51 of the Draft Structure Plan are supported, it is considered that specific new passenger rail halts should be identified within the Structure Plan. Indeed, Paragraph 2.51 specifically highlights the requirement for a small number of passenger halts to link with housing land release.

It is considered that the settlement of Mauchline would clearly benefit from the reopening of a passenger rail line. Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would request that a specific designation for a rail halt at Mauchline be included within the emerging Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 2025.

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited have no specific comments with regard to port investment or Glasgow Prestwick International Airport.

Question 12: In addition to the regeneration proposals identified, are there other opportunities for community regeneration and what are the most appropriate mechanisms for their achievement?

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited have no specific comments on this matter.

Question 13: How much future housing should be planned for in the future and where should that housing be located to ensure success?

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited support the Council's Investment Corridor approach in order that the emerging Structure Plan can adequately promote housing investment in locations which improve housing choice and facilitate economic regeneration. Within this context, we would support in general the Council's current Spatial Development Strategy which supports enhanced opportunities for housing and business development in order to make Ayrshire increasingly more attractive to economic investment and as a location in which to live. In this regard, Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would support the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee's conclusion that it is not a viable option for Ayrshire to meet future housing demand up to 2025 from existing housing allocations. (Paragraph 3.11)

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would also support the Committee's view that in order to allow Ayrshire to share more in the national growth forecast for housing in Scotland as a whole, the emerging Structure Plan should seek to make greater housing allocations than may simply be required to meet the current trend of out-migration projected into the future. Such an approach by the Joint Committee is considered sensible, prudent and constitutes sound sustainable planning.

In principle, Stewart Milne Holdings Limited would therefore endorse the Committee's provision for an additional 22,000 houses in the period to 2017 and up to 37,000 in the longer Plan period up to 2025. (Paragraph 3.13). The approach to stabilising the population from the 2005 figure of 362,000 is therefore supported.

With regard to identifying the most appropriate locations for this future housing, the principle of Schedule 2 (Criteria for New Housing Release) is supported so long as the most appropriate settlements within the recognised Investment Corridors are chosen.

In general, the criteria identified within Paragraph 3.16 of the Structure Plan are supported by Stewart Milne Holdings Limited. Within this context, and having regard to the criteria and the support advocated by the Investment Corridor approach, it is considered that the settlement of Mauchline is extremely well placed to receive future significant growth including substantial new housing.

Question 14: How should strategic policy address variable needs and delivery mechanisms for affordable housing?

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited consider that any requirement for future affordable housing within the Ayrshire area should be based on an up to date and robust assessment of housing needs. This should be based on the relevant guidance and advice contained within SPP3. With respect to the delivery of such housing, we support the position of Homes for Scotland all as outlined in their response to this Draft Structure Plan.

Questions 15 – 27

Stewart Milne Holdings Limited have no specific comments on the above questions.