

IRVINE, 3 June 2005 - At a Meeting of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee in Committee Room 1, Cunninghame House, Irvine at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Councillors Thomas Barr, John Moffat and David Munn (North Ayrshire Council); Robert McDill, James Raymond and George Smith (East Ayrshire Council); and Helen Moonie, Robert Campbell, Edward Bulik and Margaret Toner (South Ayrshire Council).

In Attendance

I. Johnson, Structure Plan Manager, J. Esslemont, Senior Policy Advisor, A Knox, Transport Policy Officer and N. Wallace, Policy Officer (Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan); A. Neish, Head of Planning and Building Control and J. Kane, Head of Roads and Transportation (East Ayrshire Council); I. McLarty, Head of Planning and Building Standards, K. Murray, Head of Infrastructure, R. McVeigh, Transportation Manager and M. Ingram, Principal Engineer (Transportation) (South Ayrshire Council); B. MacDonald, Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) and R. Forrest, Planning Services Manager (Development and Promotion); J. Mason, Principal Engineer (Property Services); and M. Anderson, Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Chief Executive's) (North Ayrshire Council).

Chair

Councillor Thomas Barr (North Ayrshire Council) in the Chair.

Apology for Absence

Councillor Eric Ross (East Ayrshire Council).

1. Chair's Remarks

The Chair sought the Joint Committee's views on the appropriateness of receiving a presentation from Scottish Power on windfarm issues and, after discussion, it was agreed that a general presentation on technical issues associated with windfarms could be received.

2. Presentation by Prestwick Airport: Windfarm Issues

The Joint Committee received a presentation from C. Wylie, Senior Controller and S. Ferguson, Senior Telecommunications Manager, Prestwick Airport on the operational impact of current and potential windfarm development, together with issues surrounding suggested mechanisms to mitigate against possible radar interference.

The Chair, on behalf of the Joint Committee, thanked the representatives of Prestwick Airport for their presentation.

3. Presentation by Scottish Power: Windfarm Issues

The Joint Committee received a presentation from K. Renton, Project Manager (Whitelee), Scottish Power on the proposed use of "data fusion" to overcome radar interference associated with windfarm development.

The Chair, on behalf of the Joint Committee, thanked Mr. Renton for his presentation.

4. Minutes

Submitted the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Committee held on 4 March 2005.

The Joint Committee agreed to confirm the Minutes, subject to deletion of the content of paragraph 6(2).

5. Matters Arising

With reference to item 5, the Joint Committee (a) noted that the Structure Plan Manager would seek feedback on the outcome of a meeting which was to have taken place between Nicol Stephen MSP, Minister for Transport, and representatives of Strathclyde Passenger Transport on Kilmarnock to Glasgow rail services; and (b) agreed that this be reported to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

6. Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 2025: Update

Submitted a report by the Structure Plan Manager on progress towards finalisation of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 2025.

At its meeting on 4 March 2005, the Joint Committee was advised of additional studies required prior to finalisation of the Joint Structure Plan 2025, namely (i) Waste Management, (ii) Scottish Water Constraints, (iii) Windfarm Policy and Prestwick Airport; and (iv) Access to Ayrshire. The Joint Committee agreed that progress be reported to the next meeting.

Work has commenced on the preparation of a Joint Waste Management feasibility study, with consultants reporting to a small Steering Group of officials. It is anticipated that a preferred consultant will be appointed in late June, with the feasibility study available by September 2005.

The 3 Ayrshire Councils have agreed to fund jointly the running of Scottish Water's strategic model and W.S. Atkins have been appointed as consultants to undertake the work, with technical advice from IT specialists in Scottish Water. The results, which are expected by early August 2005, should provide a clear indication at a strategic level, not only of the issues surrounding Scottish Water constraints, but the costs necessary to overcome these difficulties.

A meeting has been arranged in early June 2005 with the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the broader context of the issue of windfarm policy and Prestwick Airport. Further information has also been requested from Glasgow Airport. Further attention has also been drawn to the broader issues surrounding renewable energy.

A research study on Access to Ayrshire has recently been proposed by the Scottish Executive. There is, as yet, no completion date but, in the interim, an exercise is underway with Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT) to gain further data on accessibility to confirm potential development locations.

Due to the timing of the various studies, it is proposed that a Special Joint Committee be arranged in late September/early October 2005 to examine the proposed Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 2025 in detail and determine whether the Plan should be recommended to the 3 Ayrshire Councils for approval.

The Joint Committee agreed (a) that it be remitted to the Structure Plan Manager to arrange necessary panel meetings over the summer period; (b) that it be remitted to the Committee Administrator, in consultation with the Structure Plan Manager, to arrange a suitable date for a Special Joint Committee to take place in late September/early October 2005; and (c) otherwise, to note progress to date.

7. Glasgow and Clyde Valley 2005 Structure Plan Alteration: Consultative Draft

Submitted a report by the Structure Plan Manager on a major alteration to the existing Glasgow and Clyde Valley Structure Plan 2005 and seeking views on the consultative draft.

The Glasgow and Clyde Valley 2005 Plan alteration assumes a higher rate of economic growth in the Glasgow and Clyde Valley area than the UK average, with the potential to create 50,000 more jobs and households than previously envisaged. Given the close integration of the West of Scotland economy, this growth scenario would be beneficial to the Ayrshire economy and can, therefore, be supported.

The alteration recognises a need to ensure compatibility in cross boundary transportation links and to address gaps in transport infrastructure. In terms of transport, it recognises the significance of the A737 route, in addition to improvements necessary on the wider rail network. Likewise, road improvements to the M74 through Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire are of relevance in supporting and attracting future investment to the national port facility at Hunterston. Prior to the final Plan submission, however, clarification is required on the implications for the capacity of the existing rail network between Paisley and Glasgow of the potential for over 2000 new houses in the Bishopton area.

Concern remains at the extent of recent retail development proposals and of the emergence of new sub-regional/leisure complexes and their impact on smaller traditional town centres. It is noted that the scale of some "local town centres", such as Pollok and Easterhouse, are of a scale equal to, or larger than, the sub-regional centres identified. The further expansion of local centres on a scale similar to Pollok and Easterhouse could significantly alter shopping patterns across the West of Scotland to the detriment of retailing facilities in Ayrshire. Further clarification on the scale of retail expansion within town centre and out of centre retail locations is therefore necessary.

The need to ensure compatibility across boundaries for windfarm development is important and there have been concerns previously that the scale and cumulative impact of current proposals will have an adverse impact on landscape, the natural environment and aviation interests. Concern remains that the potential areas of search identified in the alteration may put economic and environmental resources at risk.

The Joint Committee agreed (a) to approve the report as the comments of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee on the consultation draft alteration of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Joint Structure Plan 2005; (b) that it be remitted to the Joint Structure Plan Manager to submit the report as the views of the Joint Committee to the Convenor of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Joint Committee; and (c) that the comments within the report be forwarded to the 3 Ayrshire Authorities for their interest.

8. SPT/Westrans Joint Transport Strategy

Submitted report by the Structure Plan Manager on the production of a final draft of the SPT/Westrans Joint Transport Strategy.

The West of Scotland Transport Partnership, Westrans, in conjunction with Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT) published a consultative draft Joint Transport Strategy (JTS) in May 2004. The Joint Committee submitted a formal response to the consultative draft in September 2004, noting a number of issues and observations. Following the consultation exercise, Westrans and SPT undertook to revise the JTS to reflect the comments made.

It is anticipated that, if the proposals within the Transport (Scotland) Bill, which is currently before the Scottish Parliament, come to fruition, statutory Regional Transport Partnerships will be created. It is expected that the minimum duty for the new organisation will be to prepare a Statutory Joint Transport Strategy and it is likely that the Joint Transport Strategy will be the basis upon which the statutory Regional Transport Strategy will be developed.

The policy context of the Joint Transport Strategy has been more widely acknowledged in the final draft and the links to economic development, community planning, social inclusion and land use planning policy all made more explicit. The JTS now also considers a wider range of additional issues, including freight, cycling, walking and taxis, amongst other elements, which were not part of the original draft.

Attempts have been made to simplify the JTS document and improve the diagrams in order to make it easier to read. The objectives of the Strategy have been amended to more closely reflect the Scottish Executive's 5 key priorities of accessibility, integration, safety, environment and the economy, with an emphasis placed upon stimulating modal shift from the car to sustainable transport modes.

The Strategy is based upon a series of actions, identified as the "core of the strategy". These are supported by key proposals which are deemed to be of more significance in enhancing accessibility in the West of Scotland. The scope of the proposals has been extended beyond that identified in the consultative draft, to incorporate a wider range of schemes, including improving the Kilmarnock to Barrhead rail line.

A more holistic view of the existing infrastructure constraints and limitations on the transport network of the West of Scotland has also been taken into account in the final draft of the JTS. In particular, there is a more comprehensive acknowledgement of the capacity restrictions which exist on the rail network and the problems which affect the strategic road network across the partnership area.

There has been an attempt to widen the scope of the JTS to be less focussed upon Glasgow and its immediate hinterland in order to reflect the whole partnership area in greater detail. There remain a number of areas which require further attention, namely:-

- (i) there has been no mechanism developed to appraise and prioritise the project list, which makes it difficult to identify the partnerships priorities;
- (ii) there has been no attempt to cost the projects identified, which makes it difficult to identify the scale of the resources required to implement the Strategy and, therefore, to prepare bids for funding;
- (iii) arrangements for monitoring the progress of the Strategy are not clearly outlined, with no definitive targets set, and this will make it difficult to ascertain whether the JTS has been successful in achieving its objectives; and
- (iv) there is no policy or proposal specifically to address problems relating to rural accessibility and this requires to be explored in more detail as the document is developed in the future.

The Joint Committee agreed (a) to note the changes which have been made to the consultative draft of the JTS during the preparation of the final draft; and (b) to approve the comments within the report, for submission by the Joint Structure Plan Manager to Westrains and SPT.

9. National Windfarm Policy

Submitted report by the Structure Plan Manager on items considered at the Joint Committee meetings held in December 2004 and March 2005 relating to wind energy.

The Joint Committee agreed to defer consideration of this matter pending a formal decision by South Ayrshire Council on its Windfarm Policy.

10. Potential Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve

Submitted report by the Structure Plan Manager on proposals for a potential Biosphere Reserve based around the Galloway Forest Park.

In 1970, the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) launched the "Man and the Biosphere Programme", which established a series of Biosphere Reserves throughout the world. In the United Kingdom, 8 areas of high ecological quality, representative of their region, were originally designated as biosphere reserves, including an area comprising Merrick Kells, Silver Flowe and Cairnsmore of Fleet in Dumfries and Galloway. Only one of the 8 original UK Biosphere Reserves in the UK, Braunton Burrows in Devon, is currently recognised as a "new look" reserve and is now regarded as an exemplar of how to assess the other 7 reserves.

Biosphere Reserves do not convey any statutory designation, although they are regarded as a material consideration in planning applications and, although no funding is available through UNESCO in connection with the designation, the title "Biosphere Reserve" may make it easier to gain funds for conservation activities and may be useful in promoting tourism.

Consultants were appointed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Forestry Commission Scotland to assess the potential of the Biosphere Reserve in Dumfries and Galloway. As a result of this assessment, SNH and the Forestry Commission Scotland are proposing the creation of a Biosphere based on the Galloway Forest Park and the nature reserves in designated sites on the higher ground above the forest, extending into both South and East Ayrshire. An initial meeting of stakeholders was held in January 2005. An executive summary of the consultants' report is appended to the report for information.

An action plan has also been prepared by the consultants which identifies Scottish Natural Heritage as the key lead for most of the actions. The Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee, together with South and East Ayrshire Councils have also been asked to enter into detailed discussions to establish the technical feasibility of taking such a project further.

The Joint Committee agreed (a) that it be remitted to the 3 Ayrshire Authorities to seek formal agreement in principle on progressing the project; and (b) thereafter, that a joint meeting at political level be sought to discuss the issue with Dumfries and Galloway Council.

11. Biomass in Ayrshire: Study of Resources

Submitted report by the Joint Structure Plan Manager on the scale of the wood fuel biomass resource available to Ayrshire as measured by its potential for electricity generation.

Biomass, particularly wood fuel, is attracting new prominence as a carbon-neutral renewable energy resource and is a fuel already well established in other EU countries for heating, combined heat and power and as bio-ethanol for transport fuel. Biomass offers potential as part of a portfolio of energy resources, helping to achieve Scotland's renewable energy targets, as well as providing opportunities for business diversification in the wood fuel supply chain. Ayrshire has a substantial wood and timber resource which appear to offer considerable potential as a fuel feedstock for renewable energy production. An appendix to the report attempts to quantify the amount of biomass fuel which might be available for use in Ayrshire from a variety of sources and to assess its contribution to total energy needs.

Biomass fuel arises from a number of sources, namely, sustainable managed woodlands, primary processing products, aboricultural arisings, waste wood, purpose grown energy crops (short rotation coppice) and black liquor. The total average annual supply of available biomass wood fuel in Ayrshire during 2003 - 2021, from all sources, is around 110,000 odt per annum, with woodlands contributing over 90% of the total. The maximum electricity generating capacity supported by the available biomass supply would be 25 MW, which could support up to 25,000 households and 125 jobs. If utilised for electricity generation, the biomass supplies forecast would make a small but significant contribution to renewable energy targets, representing between 2.1% and 3% of Ayrshire's total electrical energy consumption needs.

Noted.

12. Structure Plan Team Accommodation: Prestwick

Councillor David Munn referred to the future of the current Structure Plan Team accommodation in Prestwick.

Councillor Moonie indicated that the matter was under consideration by South Ayrshire Council and that the outcome would be conveyed to the other Ayrshire Authorities in due course via the appropriate mechanisms.

Noted.

13. Dates of Future Meetings

The Joint Committee noted (a) that the next meeting will be held on Friday 2 September 2005 at 2.00 p.m.; and (b) that Members of the Joint Committee will be advised of arrangements for a Special Meeting to be held in late September/early October 2005.

The meeting ended at 4.10 p.m.