

ANGUS COUNCIL**PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE**

11 JUNE 1998

**SUBJECT: CONSULTATION PAPER ON A REVISED UK STRATEGY FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT "OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE"****REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORT**

Abstract: This report considers the document "Opportunities for Change" consultation paper on a revised UK strategy for sustainable development and provides a suggested response.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:-

1. Agree the comments made in this report and agree to its submission to the Scottish Office as the Council's response to the consultation paper on a revised UK strategy for sustainable development "Opportunities for Change".
2. Refer this report to the Policy and Resources Committee.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Government have issued a consultation paper "Sustainable Development: Opportunities for Change" which seeks to review and revise the UK sustainable development strategy published in 1994 by the previous government in response to Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. A copy is available in the Members' Lounge, The Cross, Forfar.
- 2.2 A further consultative document relating to Scotland is also awaited. It is expected it will bring together sustainable development in an action plan for Scotland and show how the Government's strategic approach is being put into practice.
- 2.3 In the UK consultative paper the Deputy Prime Minister described sustainable development as "a new and integrated way of thinking about choices right across Government, and throughout society, so that we can all share in the highest quality of life now, without passing on a poorer world to our children". He also stressed that we all have something to contribute - business and trade unions, voluntary bodies and local authorities, families and individuals.
- 2.4 The Government is seeking views and ideas for incorporation into the new strategy which it intends to publish before the end of the year.
- 2.5 The paper:-
 - sets out the Government's vision of sustainable development, and what it is doing to put it into practice;
 - explores what further action might be taken, by each of us, to achieve sustainable development, and
 - poses some questions, on which comments and suggestions are invited.

Within the document sustainable development is seen as “a very simple idea. It is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come”.

2.6 The government's vision of sustainable development is based on four broad objectives.

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources;
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

The consultation paper does not seek to cover every policy related to sustainable development and quality of life, such as wider policies on the economy, education or employment but concentrates on areas where the main sustainable development objectives interact.

2.7 The paper is based on themes which bring together some of the most important economic, environmental and social objectives:-

- it looks at ways to encourage the development of goods and services which meet people's needs but involve the use of fewer natural resources;
- it considers how to promote sustainable communities for people to live and work in;
- it considers policies to manage and protect our environment and resources;
- it examines ways to send the right signals, through prices, regulations, and information for the public;
- it briefly reviews where international action needs to be taken.

2.8 The Strategy will set policies not just for next few years but for the next 20 or more.

3 DISCUSSION

(Paragraph numbers appearing in brackets refer to those used in the consultation paper)

3.1 The publication of this paper and the development of the Sustainable Development strategy for the UK is generally welcomed. The wide range of topics and issues covered within the paper do however lead to lack of detail which makes it difficult to gauge the governments intentions.

3.2 Sustainable development principles should underpin all others and this consultation paper will need to take cognisance of the responses to other consultation documents recently circulated. These include the Draft Guidance on Road Traffic Reduction Act; Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland; National Planning Policy Guidance of Natural Heritage; Consultation on Developing Proposals for National Parks in Scotland and the merger on agri-environment measures for agriculture, all of which have previously been reported to committee.

3.3 The twenty plus years time horizon due to be given to the Strategy is welcomed but it should be recognised that local authorities are sometimes hampered in pursuing sustainable development practices due to lack of resources and the short term nature of financial planning.

- 3.4 The important role local authorities have in progressing sustainable development, often in partnership with others, is clearly illustrated by reference to the themes used (see para 2.7). Various local authorities departments will have a role to play in each of the theme areas.
- 3.5 Angus Council is using a corporate approach in dealing with the issues faced by the Council and is developing a series of strategies including a Youth Strategy, Rural Strategy and a Community Regeneration Strategy. These will all assist in the move towards sustainable development.
- 3.6 The consultation paper makes reference to economic growth on a number of occasions (para 7, para 15, para 16). Paragraph 15 on page 6 say the "consultation document is about identifying opportunities for change - change that will promote economic growth", (amongst other things). Rather than economic growth, which implies the economy is getting bigger, the emphasis should be on economic development, which implies things will get qualitatively better. Recognition is also needed that where the carrying capacity of the environment is threatened, this would provide an absolute limit on activities etc.

Sustainable Goods and Services

- 3.7 The report suggests some key indicators of sustainable development (para 16). These need to be easily understood and their significance recognised by the general public. Similarly ways of improving the situation need to be clear to the general public. For example CO₂ emissions are difficult to relate to on a domestic scale, whereas reducing energy consumption by say 10% is easily understood. Clear consumer information (para 31 and 89) via labelling has an important role to play if consumers are to be able to make informed decisions and exert pressure through their purchasing preferences. Consideration could be given to providing information on input measurements eg how much energy is required to produce a particular product as well as information on how much energy a product consumes when in use.
- 3.8 The suggestion that a new approach to foster dialogue between consumers and producers to find practical solutions to consumer concerns (para 31) should be encouraged at sectoral rather than national level as this would allow potentially better focusing on areas of concern.

Building Sustainable Communities

- 3.9 The elements outlined in the paper for building sustainable communities include considering "how to encourage employment, decent housing, good health, and access to services and recreation, in ways which make good use of natural resources, protect the environment, promote social cohesion, and contribute to local, regional and national prosperity" (para 32). These are all issues which are already being addressed through the Angus Rural Strategy which is endorsed by the Council and covers the whole of the Angus Council area. The Council works with other agencies and via the Angus Rural Partnership to implement the Rural Strategy.

- 3.10 Promoting sustainability in the construction industry (para 46) could be achieved incrementally by requiring higher energy efficiency standards in new buildings and by extending the existing improvement grant system to encourage higher energy efficiency of existing stock. Consideration could also be given to introducing a greenfield site tax, or promoting recycled materials or those with low “embodied energy” or low transport costs.
- 3.11 There is a need to recognise that in rural areas such as Angus the continued provision of essential services for the maintenance of rural communities puts increasing pressure on local authority resources (para 49). A key service for the prevention of social exclusion, particularly for those without a car, is public transport, a service which the Council is finding increasingly costly. In an effort to ascertain localised needs and generate transport solutions the Council helped establish, and now contributes to, the Angus Transport Forum. This group has a wide membership ranging from private individuals, community groups etc to public transport operators.
- 3.12 Tourism is a vital element within the rural economy (para 50). In many European countries taxes are imposed on tourism for caravan sites and hotel occupation for example. A similar measure could be introduced with administration undertaken by local authorities and income used to develop local sustainable tourism enterprises or for the implementation of safeguarding measures for habitats etc.
- 3.13 Raising the profile of sustainable development in local communities (para 59) and assisting in the implementation of initiatives at the local level puts additional strain on local authorities and requires resourcing from central government.

Managing the Environment and Resources

- 3.14 A means of assisting the environmental and social goals of energy policy whilst also meeting economic objectives (para 67) is through raising awareness. On a domestic scale, easy to understand information on eg how much energy is being used per household by type/size or through Eco-feedback type initiatives would encourage energy saving and provide real cost savings to households at the same time. Greater investment and encouragement of renewable energy resources is also required.
- 3.15 To move towards a more sustainable management of our water resources (para 71) there would appear to be a need to reduce the amount of water abstraction by agriculture. This would help to alleviate ecological problems resulting from increasing levels of abstraction and the continuing high use of nitrogen based fertiliser.
- 3.16 Caution is urged in pursuing the proposal of using National Parks as models for the sustainable management of the wider countryside (para 78) as the pressures experienced in existing National Parks are far greater than those generally experienced in Scotland and may not therefore be best suited to the Scottish situation.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications ensuing from this report.

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 All departments have been consulted via their representatives on the Environmental Strategy/Local Agenda 21 working group.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The consultation paper on a revised UK strategy for sustainable development "Opportunities for Change" as issued via the Scottish Office is welcomed and it is noted that it is one of a range of discussion documents currently or recently circulated. It is the drawing together of all these elements, some of which cover key components, eg transportation, which should form a sustainability strategy. Consultation on an action plan for sustainable development in Scotland is also expected shortly.
- 6.2 As the document says all sectors of society have something to contribute to delivering sustainable development. The broad spectrum of work undertaken by local authorities means they have a key role to play with all departments involved. Whilst recognising that working towards sustainable development is largely about an integrated way of thinking, government needs to acknowledge that the practical elements of implementation, particularly consulting and involving the wider community and general public, requires additional resources and longer lead-in times.
- 6.3 Comments on the various aspects of the paper are contained in section 3 of this report and it is suggested that this report be submitted as the Council's response to the paper.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/PC/SP
2 June 1998

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