

CHAOS PLANNED FOR ST ANDREWS

Fife Council's Draft Structure Plan proposes a huge expansion for the town. The Council's vision for 2026 is a nightmare, threatening our quality of life:

- Traffic gridlock in the centre will become far more frequent
- The 'green bowl' setting of the town could be destroyed
- Madras College will become even further overloaded.

By 2026, if the Draft Structure Plan goes ahead:

- St Andrews will be swamped by up to 1800 new houses
- There may be 4000 new houses in the St Andrews Housing Market Area which covers the eastern part of the St Andrews and East Fife Local Plan.

Even these figures may be underestimates. In practice, actual numbers of houses built on a site usually exceed the number planned, e.g. Lawhead North: 10 houses planned, 18 built. This reversal of previous policy has not been thought through. Fife Council's sums do not add up. They do not say how the town's already overloaded centre and facilities might cope with such a huge expansion.

A 'DOUBLE MUIR'?

In 1993 the Muir Group published plans for a 30% increase in the size of the town. The town feared their 'urban village' would mean 1000 houses on our southern hillside. After a huge public outcry, the plans were withdrawn. In practice Fife Council's new plans may well amount to a 'double Muir'.

RECALL THE STRATEGIC STUDY?

Published in 1998, after several years' work, this study by Fife Council said:

- **St Andrews at its landscape capacity and no major expansion should take place**
- **The quality of the town's environment is under threat from traffic congestion.**

What has changed? Is the town centre less crowded? Has the southern hillside leapt a mile further south? In fact the problems that new development would cause have got worse, not better: congestion is more frequent and more of the suitable housing land has been used.

WHY HAS FIFE COUNCIL CHANGED POLICY?

One reason appears in a Scottish Executive document called *The National Planning Framework*, which emphasises making economic gains from 'the international profile of St Andrews as a leisure destination and centre of academic excellence'. This has been read as a green light for a development boom. Although this document was produced without any consultation with either the residents of St Andrews or its Community Council, its prescription seems to have been followed slavishly, and without adequate thought on its implications. St Andrews can contribute to the Scottish economy, but the town is not a resource to be exploited without reference to its residents.

BUT SURELY WE NEED AFFORDABLE HOUSING?

We do indeed. Fife is proposing that 45% of the houses in new developments should be affordable. But what does this mean? Recent years have seen expensive 'affordable housing' built in the town, which is often sold on at market price in no time. This achieves very little, and wastes the town's scarce supply of suitable housing land.

Affordable must mean affordable in perpetuity. This can be achieved (e.g. through housing cooperatives). Housing for rent needs to be encouraged. We backed the claim for 'Pressured area' status under Section 45 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 which allows suspension of the Right to Buy.

SCHOOLS

Fife has 5 of the 6 largest secondary schools in Scotland, but the Draft Structure Plan makes no move to bring us more into line. It should be requiring the Local Plan to identify a site for a new school near the Tay bridgehead. Reducing the amount of bussing required would clearly help the children who have to spend hours travelling, and would also bring planning gains for St Andrews, particularly near the Kilrymont Building. Supposedly Fife Council is committed to green transport policies!

ST ANDREWS WORLD CLASS

The Structure Plan seeks to 'provide the framework for the level of long-term growth for St Andrews', with the town being 'an economic driver for the whole of Fife'. These aspirations are based on repetitive mention of the 'knowledge economy' and the need to develop St Andrews 'as a world class destination'. Residents appear to take a back seat, with new shops 'focussing on tourism and visitor-related retailing'. Repetition of empty jargon cannot hide the lack of coherent thought. Adding the cars from 1800 new houses to our present traffic will produce frequent gridlock long before 2026. The extra cars from still more tourists and golfers will probably be unable to get near the town!

STUDENT HOUSING

The Community Council recognises that the University is crucial to the town and that students need affordable, well-maintained accommodation, but is concerned that the number of houses in St Andrews occupied by students has risen sharply in the last 15 years to over 700 – well over 10% of properties. Continuing at this rate of increase until 2026 would have severe implications for the town. Any moves by

the University to provide more housing for its students should be encouraged, as they could do much to alleviate the housing problems of the town.

OTHER NOTABLE OMISSIONS

The undeveloped coast

The Draft Structure Plan omits Fife's previous policy that resisted any development of natural coastline. What is on the hidden agenda?

Rail link

The Structure Plan fails to grasp the best hope for reducing the scale of the traffic problem. Reinstating the rail link also offers a way for the tourism to expand without suffocating the town. Professor Hazel of E-Rail Ltd, who has worked on the Edinburgh South Suburban scheme, showed how such projects can be made viable by linkage to (appropriate) associated development. The Local Plan shows an (incomplete) line on a map, but, rather than protecting this route from other development, all the Structure Plan can manage is the (rather garbled) clause 'Further consideration of transport link options to the rail network to St Andrews, through the review of Local Transport Strategy'. Far from being a vision for 20 years, this will not inspire anyone for 20 seconds.

Conservation Areas

Unlike the 2002 Plan, such areas are not even defined in the glossary of the new Structure Plan, and the section on the built environment now has no accompanying policies. The requirement for high housing densities in town centres will also not assist conservation, and will encourage inappropriately tall buildings.

NOT JUST A DOUBLE WHAMMY!

At the present time Fife Council is holding consultations on both

- The Draft Fife Structure Plan
- The Draft St Andrews and East Fife Local Plan.

Not content with giving you these two highly important plans at the same time, it is also seeking comments on

- The Local Transport Strategy
- The East Area Transport Plan

COMMUNITY COUNCIL CREST

- Supplementary Guidance on Affordable Housing
- Creating a Better Fife* – the draft Fife Design Guide.

Many will feel that they are trying to bury the bad news for the town under a mountain of paper.

DETAILS ON THE WEB!

The Fife Council web-site takes great persistence, but, for easier access, there are some direct links on the Community Council website at:

www.louisxiv.demon.co.uk/standrewscc

PUBLIC MEETING

Fife Council is holding a meeting to discuss all the above documents from 7p.m. to 9 p.m. on Wednesday 20 April at Madras College (Kilrymont Building). Do not expect comprehensive discussion of the many matters on the table!

WRITE NOW!

Say what you think of the Structure Plan.

By May 2, tell Fife Council your views, including:

- how much extra traffic St Andrews can take
- the importance of preserving the southern hillside
- how many more houses St Andrews needs and can manage with its constrained town centre and services
- what sort of housing we need, and how we can get it
- the need for a new secondary school in North Fife
- the need to reinstate the rail link by 2026.

Send a letter (it need only be brief) to

Consultation Development Services,
FREEPOST K111
Glenrothes
KY7 5BR

Head your letter **Objection to Structure Plan** or **Comments on Structure Plan** as appropriate.

PROPOSED NEW HOSPITAL FOR ST ANDREWS

NUMEROUS SITE WARNINGS IGNORED

Community Council involvement in the new hospital saga goes back to December 1993. Repeatedly it has warned successive health trusts that choosing a hospital site on the southern hillside would provoke major planning problems, including a renewed threat of the Muir Group building up to 1000 houses there. For many years, we had seats at the table, and, in particular, provided input for the Outline Business Case for the hospital. In 2003, the NHS went its own way, effectively excluded us from the team, and chose the Largo Road site. Repeated requests for the detailed reasons for the choice were left unanswered. We now find that some of the reasons were very flimsy indeed, perhaps making the long silence more understandable.

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE SITE?

Since 1993 the Community Council has played a key role in helping to prevent the St Leonards Fields site being used for housing. This stance has met with wide popular support. In July 2003, the NHS declared St Leonards Fields to be a non-starter, but the point was never proven. Last November, the NHS's application acknowledged St Leonards Fields as the 'preferred location of Fife Council'. Since then, in the Local Plan, Fife Council has switched allegiance, reversing a position it is believed to have held for 10 years.

IS ST LEONARDS FIELDS VIABLE?

It was argued in the 1990s that the St Leonards Fields site was too small, but the arguments were weak, and in 2002 it became the preferred site. In 2003 the consultants Jones, Lang Lasalle used various arguments to attempt to exclude it. We were not beyond persuasion, had a compelling case been made. Like most such reports, however, the case appeared to be selected to justify a pre-chosen conclusion. The main factor in the mind of the NHS is probably cost, but this will depend on whether St Leonards Fields is zoned for housing in the Local Plan.

WOULD A CHANGE OF SITE CAUSE DELAY?

The Community Council warned repeatedly that choice of a controversial site would delay the project. Fife Council has to assess whether the Environmental Assessment meets the requirements of the European legislation, and this is doubtful. It seems unlikely that the submitted plans can be accepted in their current form. As the Green Belt Forum has noted, the buildings would loom over the Largo Rd, creating an 'industrial tunnel' at this entrance to the town. Having waited 12 years, the town should not be panicked into acceptance, but should ensure a satisfactory solution is found.

SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WITH THE LARGO ROAD SITE

- **Losing a swathe of the southern hillside** between the Largo Rd site and Grange Road. Following the choice of the Largo

Road site, the draft Local Plan designates some of this land for industry, and makes a whole swathe of this Area of Great Landscape Value vulnerable to future development.

- **Resurrecting Muir's rejected proposal.** The Muir Group's provision of part of the land suggests it sees the hospital as the Trojan Horse, opening up the southern hillside not for industry but for housing.
- **Less convenient than St Leonards Fields** for those parts of town where car ownership levels are lowest. Diverting buses is possible, but more expensive for patients.
- **Blighting the view of the southern hillside** with buildings, and also a large car park, bus-turning area and possible park-and-ride.
- **Increased traffic dangers on Lamond Drive** which many of those travelling from the East Neuk to the site would use. In the 1990s the Council spent £250,000 remodelling Lamond Drive to make it safer following a fatality.
- **Pulling trade from the town centre stores.** The knock-on effects would include a boost to Morrisons at the expense of the town centre.
- **Loss of a designated light industrial site** which forms part of the proposed site. It is not clear where a suitable replacement can be put.
- **Too close to the Largo Road TETRA mast.** This seems ill-advised when an increasing number of people fear it may be a health risk.

We owe it to future generations to

SAVE THE SOUTHERN HILLSIDE if there is an alternative site.

Send your comments on the Largo Road application to
Ms E Cook
Fife Council, County Buildings
Cupar, KY15 4TA

THE LOCAL PLAN – A DEVELOPER'S WISH-LIST

COMMUNITY COUNCIL REACTION TO THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN

Many residents will react with anger to the Draft St Andrews and East Fife Local Plan. Unlike previous Local Plans, it looks like a developers' wish-list. The well-documented views of St Andrews residents are discarded to achieve externally-proposed goals. While the Structure Plan refers deceptively to between 1000 and 1800 houses for the town by 2026, the Local Plan finds sites for 1000 by 2016, and points out another 750 for later! One result will be to increase the population of the town by 2300 (or 16%) by 2016.

DON'T SWALLOW THE BAIT!

Consulting now on the draft Local Plan makes no sense at all. The Local Plan is required to identify sites for whatever number of houses the Structure Plan specifies. So, until the Structure Plan is finalised, no one knows where the goalposts stand for the Local Plan! Do not be tricked into suggesting sites for the totally unrealistic number of 1800 new houses!

GREEN BELT

The Green Belt proposed in the Local Plan shows how little Fife Council believes in the concept. Protecting the green southern hillside has long been a major goal, and so we want the inner Green Belt at the edge of current development. The proposal, however, leaves a swathe of hillside inside the Belt as a sitting duck for developers. On the Craigtoun Rd the Green Belt narrows to just a few metres. No attempt is made to protect the view of the town from the Strathkinness High Road.

YET MORE HOUSING

The Local Plan also proposes 180 houses for St Leonards Fields (and they tell us it's too small for a hospital?), 60 for the Grange Road above Irvine Crescent and 10 for Carron Lodge.

BUSINESS SITES

History suggests the Local Plan is labelling much more land for business use than is realistic, and that surpluses are liable to find other uses!

BASSAGUARD

Rather than greenfield sites, the town needs to retain existing central sites used by local tradesmen. The Community Council opposes the ill-judged proposal to sell off Bassaguard for still more housing.

WESTERN EXPANSION

During the Strategic Study, one of the options was a western bypass financed by a huge housing development. The resulting uproar produced over 900 responses to the Study. Yet the draft Local Plan proposes 350 houses for the Northbank site by 2016, and perhaps a further 200 houses thereafter. Nothing could show more clearly the indifference to local opinion.

THE KINNESS VALLEY

We back a contour-based approach to developing the town, and therefore welcome the prospect of some housing development on the relatively low-lying land in the Kinness valley between the Craigtoun Road and the Strathkinness Low Rd. The Local Plan, however, reduces a good idea to an absurdity by envisaging no fewer than 150 houses at Craigtoun Rd South and 250 at Craigtoun Rd West by 2016, with perhaps a further 550 houses at the latter site thereafter.

CYCLING

More progress is being made in St Andrews with anti-motoring measures, than with positive alternatives. Cycle lanes have maintenance problems and are not child-friendly. The Local Plan should promote the creation of off-road cycle routes where feasible.

SAY WHAT YOU THINK OF THE LOCAL PLAN

By May 2, tell Fife Council your views, including:

- where development is and is not acceptable
- which views should be protected
- where the Green Belt boundaries should be
- how greener transport can be promoted;

Send a letter (it need only be brief) to

Consultation Development Services (STEALP)

FREEPOST K111

Glenrothes

KY7 5BR

Head your letter 'Objection to (or comments on) St Andrews and East Fife Local Plan'.

REMEMBER THE STRUCTURE PLAN IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LOCAL PLAN!

FIGHT FIRST ON THE STRUCTURE PLAN!