

The Council is responsible for preparing a new Local Development Plan (LDP) which will act as the framework for determining planning applications in the area. It will allocate land for uses such as housing, retail and industrial, and set out policies relating to these uses. The LDP will promote some sites for development and protect others from development.

The first stage in this process is the preparation of a "Main Issues Report" (MIR). The MIR was published in December 2009 and the consultation period ran from 22nd January 2010 to 19th March 2010. The MIR sets out key areas of change across five "Main Issues", with options to respond to these issues.

Who came?

The Planning Forum was held in the Vineburgh Community Centre, Irvine, from 6.00pm to 8.00pm on Wednesday 3rd March. There were individual members of the public participating, along with representatives from local developers, local businesses and various community interest groups. The wide range of interests represented allowed for a constructive and lively debate. Some local Councillors also attended to listen to the discussion. The summary of the debate, set out below and overleaf, has been formally recorded and will be taken into consideration as we move to the next stage, the Proposed LDP.

What happened?

Margaret Ferrier, Team Leader of the Development Plans section of the Council's Planning Services, introduced the event and delivered a presentation.

Margaret outlined the LDP preparation process and provided a timeline for its production. She then went on to explain the Main Issues Report, examining the Vision and the five Main Issues:

1. **New Uses for Old Sites**, which deals with the oversupply of vacant and derelict business and industrial land;

2. **Future of our Town Centres**, which looks at the role and function of our town centres, how we stem the loss of retail spend to other areas, and improve the environment of our centres;



3. **Rural, Coastal & Island Development**, which explores how we both protect and promote our coastal and rural assets for biodiversity, outdoor recreation and tourist attraction;
4. **How Much Housing and Where?**, which looks at the housing requirement for North Ayrshire, where this should be built, and deals with other issues such as housing design and affordable housing;
5. **Providing Infrastructure**, which considers matters such as the A737/A78, new waste facility provision and the Magnum Centre.

After an explanation of the five Main Issues, everyone broke into groups - facilitated by members of the LDP team - to investigate the issues in more detail, and provide their views on the issues and the options set out to deal with them in the MIR.

The Vision

Attendees were, in most cases, supportive of the content of the Vision. However, it was widely stated that the infrastructure to support the Vision needs to be in place. This includes employment opportunities, road upgrades, school and medical facility capacity.

Some participants felt that more emphasis should be placed on the leisure and tourism potential of North Ayrshire. There was also



support for setting out in the Vision an aim of greater use of sustainable modes of transport - i.e. walking, cycling and public transport.

New Uses for Old Sites

Most attendees agreed that there was an oversupply of business/industrial land within Irvine and Kilwinning and that some of these sites should be considered for alternative uses. It was felt that there should be a focus on fewer "core" sites, which offer good transport links and have available infrastructure for larger scale development, such as Riverside Business Park.

Some participants felt that there was tension between the tourism potential of the area and areas of heavy industrial use. An example provided was the proximity of Irvine Beach Park to Irvine Industrial Estate. Whilst there was support for being more flexible in uses permitted on business/industrial sites, it was felt that further heavier industrial uses at Irvine Industrial Estate should be avoided, to help improve the approach to the attractive coastal area.



Future of our Town Centres

Attendees generally supported the introduction of a Town Centre Hierarchy, although it was felt that town centre uses should be concentrated on as few streets as possible. The benefits this brings are focusing footfall and activity over a smaller area, rather than spreading activity over a wider area and therefore diluting multiple trips to different shops.

It was noted by a number of attendees that competition from newer retail destinations such as Silverburn and Braehead would continue to be the case, regardless of designating Irvine as a “Prime Centre” for North Ayrshire.



Participants wanted to see town centres more accessible by car, with more short term car parking. There was a feeling that, at present, public transport users tend to use the High Street area of Irvine, whilst private transport users focus their shopping at the Rivergate and Retail Park area.

Some attendees felt that small scale improvement schemes for town centres (such as pavement upgrades, new shop fronts etc.) would have limited impact on what they felt to be the more important issues in our town centres - too many empty units, and a poor range of shops.

In relation to developer contributions for town centre improvements, most attendees felt this could secure much needed additional funds. There was a suggestion that a requirement for contributions should not only include residential development, but commercial developments also.

Rural, Coastal & Island Development

There was some support for further golf facilities within North Ayrshire, however some attendees were concerned that a saturation point may have been reached.

There was also recognition that there was a need for further hotel accommodation within Irvine, but more investment in tourist attractions to encourage occupancy is required.



Preferred Options for Housing

The MIR does not make confirmed allocations for housing development. The preferred options set out in the MIR are areas that have been identified, in principle, as acceptable for housing development on environmental grounds. Most of the areas are not considered to have sensitive landscapes, are not at risk of flooding and do not have any environment designations, for example.

The total housing requirement originally identified for Irvine & Kilwinning to 2025 was 3,500 housing units. The housing land supply (at March 2009) was 2,400 units, meaning the LDP will need to provide sites to deliver an additional 1,100 units for Irvine & Kilwinning, if that option were carried forward.

However, because of the number of brownfield sites in the Irvine & Kilwinning area, and the close proximity of the 3 Towns, these two housing market areas have been merged. A total additional housing requirement of 2,900 housing units for the Irvine Bay area as a whole is therefore the preferred option.

Not all of the preferred options are needed for new housing. The selection criteria (appendix 4 of the MIR) will provide the basis for choosing which of the sites should be allocated in the next stage of the process, the Proposed LDP.



There were mixed feelings in relation to the loss of some of the Irvine Beach Park. Some participants were satisfied to see

some land lost, if the remaining facilities were improved and the result was a better “destination” to attract visitors. Others felt that no further open space in the area should be lost.

There was support for the Coastal Park Framework. Attendees generally felt that it made sense to provide a continuous link along the Irvine Bay coast, with tourist attractions developed at key points on the route. The safety considerations and access links at Ardeer were highlighted.



How Much Housing and Where?

There was clear support for reuse of brownfield sites before turning to areas of countryside for new development.

Attendees generally support more direction on which sites should be developed first, but had concerns over how this could be implemented.

Participants were keen to see any new affordable housing offering shared equity.

Attendees felt that new housing allocations should be made closest to public transport

facilities - in particular railway stations.

In terms of design, many people felt that pedestrian footpath links and connectivity were quite poor in new developments. There was a wish to see this improved.

Some participants wished to see more sites dedicated for use by travelling people.

Providing Infrastructure

In relation to infrastructure, some participants felt the focus on renewable energy could result in an opportunity to attract new business and industry to North Ayrshire.

There was a willingness to accept more small scale wind turbine developments, rather than large scale windfarms.

Some participants wished to see any replacement Magnum facility offering the same level of services as the existing Magnum, but there was support for a more central location.

Irvine Bay Regeneration Company

The Irvine Bay Regeneration Company (IBRC) was set up in 2006, and is co-funded by Scottish Government, North Ayrshire Council and Scottish Enterprise.

The objective of IBRC is to shape the creation of the physical conditions and local infrastructure that will lead to the successful regeneration of Irvine Bay.

Current projects include proposals for a mixed use development at Harbourside, Irvine, and physical improvements to the Howgate, Kilwinning.



What Happens Next?

Subsequent to the consultation period, all the responses and submissions will be collated and assessed. This process is designed to be transparent, and there will be a clear decision making trail.

A Proposed LDP will be prepared, which will contain site allocations for uses such as housing, employment and retail, with a series of policies to govern such uses. The target for publication of the Proposed LDP is December 2010.



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