

# **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 5 DECEMBER 2007**

## **NEW CUMNOCK**

### **Report by the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support**

#### **1 PURPOSES OF REPORT**

1.1 The purposes of this report are:-

- (a) To seek approval from the Cabinet to work with our Community Planning Partners to identify and implement a mechanism for the preparation and implementation of a Whole Town Strategy for New Cumnock. This would be a pilot for the approach which might apply to certain other small towns in East Ayrshire over time, as appropriate; and
- (b) In recognition of the proposal to further develop such an approach, to seek a remit to the Depute Chief Executive/ Executive Director of Corporate Support to submit a report to a future meeting of the Cabinet presenting proposals for the development of an overall strategy and approach for the wider regeneration of our towns and villages.

#### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. The small town of New Cumnock, located in the south of East Ayrshire, continues to suffer from a spiral of decline following the demise of the deep coal mining industry during the 1970s and 1980s.
- 2.2. In recent weeks, the issues that are faced in the community, in particular the significant numbers of derelict and vacant properties located primarily along the principal streets and in the centre of the community, have been highlighted.
- 2.3. In response to these circumstances, the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support and Councillor Buchanan, in his capacity as one of the Council's spokespersons for Environment and Regeneration, attended a public meeting in New Cumnock on 29 October 2007 when many of these issues were highlighted by the community. The Corporate Management Team at its meeting on 31 October discussed the issues that had been highlighted at the public meeting and agreed that an Officer Group be established to develop a mechanism whereby the issues faced by the community may be best identified and addressed. It was further agreed that a preliminary report be prepared by the Officer Group and submitted to Cabinet in order that the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support may return to the community at an early date to outline the proposed approach to be adopted by the Council.

### 3 CONTEXT

- 3.1 *National:* The COSLA Small Towns report published in 2006 highlighted the need for policy to be developed at a national level which addresses adequately the issues faced by small towns including :
- maximising their economic potential;
  - tackling their levels of disadvantage; and
  - addressing physical regeneration and market failure.

The report argues that clarification is needed on :

- how small towns relate to and engage with city/metro regions and their rural hinterlands;
  - how they relate to rural policy agendas; and
  - how Community Planning agendas can be focused on identifying and addressing the issues and opportunities in a holistic way.
- 3.2 *Ayrshire:* In response to this developing debate the Ayrshire Economic Forum remitted the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan Team to lead an Officer Group to consider how best to develop an approach to small community regeneration. The Officer Group will report in the near future and this report to Cabinet reflects the current thinking of the Officer Group.
- 3.3 Small communities in Ayrshire are important. They are a key feature of how the economy and society function and they shape much of the character and landscape of the area. Some of these small towns are fulfilling their potential, others, including New Cumnock, are not. However, all are assets with potential for some development and to a large extent they are the base upon which the future development of Ayrshire, outwith the main urban centres, can be built. Approximately 38% of the population of Ayrshire live in the major towns of Kilmarnock, Ayr/Prestwick and Irvine whilst 54% of the population live in smaller communities with populations of over 600 residents.
- 3.4 If we are to create sustainable communities which contribute to the Ayrshire economy, then we need to define a framework or strategy that will act as a focus and catalyst for private and public sector investment and other interventions by public agencies in order to realise a sustainable transformation of the communities.
- 3.5 The Scottish Executive's 2006 regeneration policy statement ("People and Place") identified the whole of Ayrshire as one of 2 regional priorities for regeneration and also makes specific reference to the requirement to regenerate the former coalfield areas. The policy statement makes a commitment to work with local partners to support and pursue major regeneration opportunities with a regional impact. Ayrshire's small communities, specifically those within the Coalfield Communities Initiative Area, represent such an opportunity.
- 3.6 *East Ayrshire:* The vision, contained within the Community Plan is that "East Ayrshire will be a place with strong, vibrant communities...". This sets the strategic context against which the development of a strategic framework for the development of our small towns and villages will be set. The Community Plan also recognises that the most important partnership is the one between the community planning partnership and the people living in our communities

and that success will only be achieved by encouraging and assisting the community to get involved in every step of the process. In addition, the Regeneration Outcome Agreement provides a particular focus on the most disadvantaged communities in the local authority area, one of which is New Cumnock. The development of a strategic way forward within East Ayrshire is discussed in Section 5 below.

- 3.7 *New Cumnock*: New Cumnock is relatively remote from large population centres and experiences high levels of multiple deprivation including high population loss, high unemployment and low skills levels. For example, between 1961 and 2001 the population of New Cumnock fell from 5,508 to 3,165. The 2001 Census indicated that the percentage of households where no-one aged 16-74 had qualifications or were in full-time education was 52.23% compared to 38.4% for East Ayrshire as a whole. It has a poor urban fabric with many derelict properties and vacant sites. The Planning and Economic Development Division has identified 10 derelict and vacant sites requiring priority attention, some of which represent groups of buildings. The settlement boundary of the town is also now much greater than is probably appropriate to accommodate the current population.
- 3.8 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2006 indicates that one of the four data zones within New Cumnock lies within the 5-10% most deprived areas in Scotland. This data zone has a population of 859. Two other data zones are in the 15-20% most deprived areas and these have a population of 1,396. This means 2,255 (75%) people in New Cumnock are living within the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.
- 3.9 During the 1980s and 1990s a number of environmental improvement and other projects were implemented in the town and whilst these did have a short term positive impact, they were not set within an integrated strategy to create a sustainable community that considered physical, economic and social issues together
- 3.10 The town no longer has an obvious role. Nearby opencast coal mines provide some employment but other local employment opportunities are now very limited. A strong community spirit nevertheless, remains and this will be a crucial factor in developing and realising a sustainable regeneration strategy for the town.

#### **4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OVERALL APPROACH IN AYRSHIRE**

- 4.1 As stated above, a strategic approach to preparing a regeneration framework for Ayrshire's small communities is in preparation and it is anticipated that it will identify:
- The Policy Context;
  - The Definition of the Process; and
  - The Prioritisation of Small Communities in Ayrshire - all with an evidence base and funding requirements.
- 4.2 Best practice elsewhere is being reviewed and a number of key principles with potential for transfer and application to small community regeneration in Ayrshire are being identified.

- 4.3 The central proposition is that regenerating small communities in line with community aspirations needs people, businesses and organisations with the capability, assets and wealth generating potential to work together creatively with other agencies to an agreed and locally determined plan. This approach to regeneration of small communities is being developed on the basis of work and experience in other parts of the country, modified to suit the Ayrshire circumstances. It is fundamentally about sustaining engaged and empowered community partnerships.

## **5 THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC WAY FORWARD FOR EAST AYRSHIRE**

- 5.1 The preparation of holistic whole town strategies is, in principle, consistent with the overall Vision for the East Ayrshire Community Plan. However, it is important that East Ayrshire develops an appropriate strategic way forward giving due consideration to the developing national and Ayrshire contexts described above and that, most importantly, is set in the context of the Community Plan and its identified themes as well as the proposals for the establishment of Local Community Planning Forums. It is recommended therefore, that a detailed report on this issue is presented to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

## **6 NEW CUMNOCK - A PROPOSED PILOT PROJECT**

- 6.1. The circumstances and opportunities in New Cumnock are such that it is appropriate to initiate the process of preparing and implementing an overall strategy for its regeneration immediately but to do so in a way that complements the wider overall approach being developed for Ayrshire and contributes to the development of an overall strategic approach for East Ayrshire. It is appropriate therefore to approach the preparation of a whole town strategy for New Cumnock as a pilot project.
- 6.2. It is suggested that a 3-Stage approach should be adopted as follows and in accordance with the draft project plan attached to this report (Appendix 1). For those new elements of work identified below the start date is assumed to be 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2008.
- 6.2.1. **Stage 1:** Undertake a full baseline study or audit so that the circumstances of New Cumnock are fully collated. Elements would include physical, social and economic issues.

As part of the Stage 1 exercise, an understanding of the wider area and regional context would be established. This would include looking at the Community Plan and wider strategic planning frameworks as well as other projects that may be of relevance such as possible developments related to the Galloway Forest Park, The Biosphere Reserve, the Coalfield Environment Initiative and Dumfries Estate.

It is expected that Stage 1 could be progressed substantially within a 12 week period.

6.2.2. **Stage 2:** This would include the preparation of a Draft Strategy and Action Plan as a basis for detailed consultation with partners and crucially with the community.

It is expected that Stage 2 could be prepared within 8 weeks of completion of Stage 1.

6.2.3. **Stage 3:** This involves the development of detailed community participation and empowerment. The Draft Strategy and Action Plan will form a basis for the discussions with a view to preparing a Whole Town Strategy for the creation of a sustainable community.

The development of community participation and empowerment would run consecutively with Stage 1. It is important that the community is engaged fully in the preparation of the baseline study or audit and to ensure that the community's perspectives and priorities are built into the health check. This will ensure that the community can take ownership of the process from the outset and then fully and meaningfully engage with Stage 2 and Stage 3.

It is expected that this would be an on-going process.

6.2.4 An **Early Action Plan** would be progressed concurrently.

Key elements of this Early Action Plan would include:-

- **Working with the Community** – Mechanisms to involve the community in a structured way from the start of the process will be identified and implemented including the establishment of a Liaison Forum and the further development of community support. It is proposed that the process of developing and implementing a Whole Town Strategy will be community owned/driven and partnership led. It is also envisaged that the process will be “bottom –up” with community capacity building built in from the start of the process.

It is expected that substantial progress in developing the mechanisms and putting them in place can be made within the initial 12 week period but this would also be an on-going process.

- **Derelict Buildings** – Key properties requiring attention have been identified and records updated. Discussions will be held with owners with a view to identifying and agreeing actions that can be undertaken in the short term.

It is expected that, subject to the participation of the property owners, the initial discussions will be completed within 6 weeks. Indeed, work is already in hand.

- **The Public Sector Estate Portfolio** – Opportunities presented by the Council's Estate ownership and its functions will be identified and progressed. This includes preparing a detailed inventory of land and property ownership and identifying opportunities for change and improvement.

The identification of related opportunities resulting from the procurement as necessary and demolition of housing at Cairnhill will be the subject of a separate report to Cabinet in the very near future and subject to approval, the relevant recommendations will be incorporated within the Early Action Programme.

At the same time, potential opportunities presented by assets in the ownership of other public agencies and Community Planning partners will be identified.

It is expected that the conditions survey within the inventory of Council owned assets will be undertaken within 4 weeks.

- **Economic Regeneration** – An initial scoping exercise to identify opportunities for economic regeneration, which will be key, but which will take longer, will be undertaken. This will include opportunities that relate to the possible development of the tourism potential of the area and opportunities that might be supported by the new LEADER (Liaisons Entre Actions de Development de L'Economie Rurale) programme, a strategy for which is also under preparation. This is a European Union funding initiative which, unlike previous EU rural funding systems is available to all of rural Scotland – including all of Ayrshire. A pan-Ayrshire LEADER application is currently being prepared for the 2007/13 Programme.

It is expected that the initial exercise will be undertaken within 10 weeks.

- **Funding** – The identification of funding sources to support the implementation of the strategy and early Action Plan will be crucial in achieving the desired outcomes and will be considered as part of the Early Action Programme.

It is expected that this will be progressed within 12 weeks.

- **Delivery Mechanisms** – The establishment of a clearly defined process to ensure project delivery is also crucial and will be considered as part of the early Action Programme.

It is expected that this will be progressed within 12 weeks.

## 7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no legal implications resulting directly from this report but there may be as matters progress on derelict buildings issues.

## **8 FINANCIAL/PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. The work proposed will contribute to our asset management arrangements.
- 8.2 The procurement of specialist services to progress the development of the Whole Town Strategy and to develop the community engagement process may be identified as being desirable as the project progresses and if this is the case then the implications will be quantified and will be presented for consideration to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

## **9 COMMUNITY PLANNING ISSUES**

- 9.1 The proposals to prepare a Whole Town Strategy for New Cumnock with a view to creating a sustainable community and to achieve this by working with Community Planning Partners are consistent with the Objectives of the Community Plan. The Community Plan is, however, thematic in its approach whilst the proposal to prepare an integrated strategy for individual communities is area-based. Therefore, this report recommends that a separate report be prepared and presented to a future Cabinet meeting considering a strategic way forward for East Ayrshire.

## **10 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:-
- (a) Notes the current position regarding the development of an approach to the preparation of whole town strategies for small communities both nationally and within Ayrshire,
  - (b) Authorises the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support to:-
    - (i) Work with our Community Planning Partners to progress the development of the proposed mechanism for the preparation and implementation of a Whole Town Strategy for New Cumnock on a pilot basis;
    - (ii) Develop those opportunities identified in this report that might form elements of an Early Action Programme;
    - (iii) Continue to inform and engage with the community of New Cumnock in progressing the above;
  - (c) Remits to the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support to submit to future meetings of the Cabinet, updates on progress in preparing the Early Actions identified in this report and in developing and implementing the Whole Town Strategy for New Cumnock and, as necessary, to seek approval to incur expenditure to implement associated works; and

- (d) Remits to the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support to prepare and present to a future meeting of the Cabinet a report on the development of a strategic way forward for East Ayrshire regarding the preparation of holistic whole town strategies.

**Elizabeth Morton**  
**Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support**

27 November 2007  
DAH/EM

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- (1) COSLA Small Towns report

**Implementation Officer: Elizabeth Morton, Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support**