



## Aberdeen City & Shire – Building on Energy

By Rita Stephen, ACSEF development manager. ACSEF (Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Forum) is a public private sector partnership to enhance delivery of economic delivery in the area

**Not surprisingly when you bring 130 business leaders together to discuss the vision for the future economic growth of our region, the recurring themes are delivery, measurement and accountability.**

ACSEF's economic summit under the theme of Building on Energy was held in Aberdeen in May and the aim was to enthuse and excite the private sector about our vision for the future and the activities already underway. The outcome is the development of an economic manifesto, the vision and priorities of which are shared by both the public and private sectors.

At the time of writing, this blueprint is being put together and how we will deliver, how we will measure what we deliver and the best models for delivery are central to it.

ACSEF is one of several local economic forums in Scotland which were set up to bring all the players in economic development together to provide a more joined-up approach. We are confident that the forum is raising the bar and what we are achieving is truly ground-breaking. For the first time we are bringing businesses right into the heart of economic development. Our forum is much more than a talking shop – it is focused on delivery.

While ACSEF can set the agenda for economic growth and create the right conditions, it is businesses themselves that will deliver growth. They are the ones that generate the wealth and through a series of engagement with key businesses in the area, culminating in the economic summit, we have shaped a vision and identified strategic priorities that, when met, will help us realise that vision.

At the economic summit, business leaders told us that our vision had to be more ambitious.

We are now aiming by 2025 to become recognised as one of the most robust and resilient economies in Europe with a reputation for opportunity, enterprise and inventiveness that will attract and retain world-class talent of all ages.

We want to be the location of choice for high value oil and gas and renewable energy organisations and a first choice for organisations of all sizes operating in other high value, quality niche markets

With improved accessibility, an attractive environment and the best hospitality, we aim to make Aberdeen City and Shire one of the most

interesting and enjoyable locations in the UK in which to visit, live, work and grow up.

Delegates at the summit also told us that the biggest challenges we have to overcome are in the development of our infrastructure, attracting skilled people and speeding up decision making in planning.

They think the greatest opportunities for our economy will be exploiting our intellectual property and internationalising our business base.

A symbol of our success would be becoming top of the quality of life league table closely followed by attracting more corporate HQs and developing a fully integrated transport network.

The economic manifesto will capture these priorities, set targets and look at how we deliver projects and initiatives that achieve the targets. But the role of the private sector does not stop there. We still need businesses to work with us on an ongoing basis. ACSEF wants to identify projects that will deliver a step-change in economic growth by evaluating them against set criteria such as their potential impact on growth and our priorities, their impact on quality of life and what support would be required from ACSEF. We want to be seen as the entry point for projects and then fast-track them through the early stages of development.

Aberdeen City and Shire continues to outperform other regions in Scotland and even the UK. Our recent economic review revealed that economic growth is around 2.4%, compared to 2.2% across Scotland and that Gross Value Added (GVA) is the third highest in the UK at £21,638 per head. Average weekly earnings in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire have risen by 30%, making them higher than anywhere else in Scotland.

There are a significant number of international players now basing their eastern hemisphere headquarters in Aberdeen, making it one of the most influential energy cities in the world. Within Aberdeenshire, as well as company development, there has been significant capital expenditure for example in Peterhead Power Station and St Fergus Gas Terminal.

There have also been several positive signals that outwith energy, the region's economy is performing well. Most notably the volume and value of fish landings has increased, there have been key engineering spin-offs from the energy sector and significant investment and interest in retail activity across the region.



Rita Stephen, ACSEF development manager

This all augers well for the future but we do have challenges. We need to build on our energy success and credentials, attract skilled people and quality business and develop our infrastructure to make sure our economy is robust enough for the next generation.

Key for us going forward will be to continue to support the Western Peripheral Route and NESTRANS' strategy for a modern transport system, develop the proposal for Energetica - an energy corridor to the north of the city and focus on the delivery of our operational plan.

We need this manifesto and we need your support for it.

As business leaders, employees and individuals you have a role to play in delivering our vision for long-term prosperity. ACSEF can strive for a pro-business climate that will help to grow, internationalise and diversify our business base, to create a region-wide infrastructure with excellent connectivity that will sustain the economy well into the next generation.

Your continued active engagement will help us influence, facilitate and deliver the projects we need to secure our long-term prosperity. ■

*Rita Stephen has spent more than 15 years in economic development in Aberdeen City and Shire. Before becoming development manager for ACSEF, Rita was head of economic development for Aberdeen City Council. Prior to that she was principal European officer at Grampian Regional Council. She has also run her own sales and marketing business and worked for three years in Madrid for a large international training agency.*