

Review of SG Bus1: Development of Business Land

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to examine the content of SG Bus1: Development of business land and consider any relevant changes in the national policies and local context. It will consider whether this SG still meets the requirements of Scottish Planning Policy and other national planning documents, and whether it forms a sound basis for making planning decisions regarding designated employment land throughout Aberdeenshire.

2. Background

National context

- 2.1 The Economic Development advice within Scottish Planning Policy states that *a flexible approach should be taken to ensure that changing circumstances can be accommodated and new opportunities realised* (SPP, 2010). SPP encourages the removal of unnecessary barriers to development and ensuring the provision of enough scope for economic growth and expansion.
- 2.2 SPP urges planning authorities to ensure that there is a provision of marketable employment sites and locations readily available, of varying sizes, to aid economic development throughout the country. While SPP requires a degree of flexibility to ensure that changing circumstances can be accommodated, the LDP currently allocates a very generous employment land supply in a wide range of diverse locations. Furthermore, SPP supports the integration of employment generation opportunities with associated supporting infrastructure and housing development.
- 2.3 In terms of brownfield land, SPP directs planning authorities to utilise this underused resource as potential sites for new development, allowing the land to be back in productive use and creating more attractive environments. To enable redevelopment opportunities, SPP encourages local authorities to exercise their compulsory purchase powers to ensure the reuse of derelict or underused buildings and previously developed land.

Strategic/ regional context

- 2.3 Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan 2009 places emphasis on ensuring that there is ample provision of employment land available within the city and the shire. The structure plan asserts that for Aberdeen City and Shire to have a competitive economic advantage, it is vital that there is enough of the right type of land for business use available in the right places.
- 2.4 The Aberdeen City and Structure Plan 2009 requires Aberdeenshire to identify at least 60 hectares of land available to businesses at all times throughout the region, of which at least 20 hectares should be available in the strategic growth areas and should be of a high class standard.

3. Policy Approach

- 3.1 The current policy, SG Bus1: Development of business land, states that:

We will approve new employment uses, subject to other policies, on land allocated or identified on the proposals maps, or most recently used for this purpose.

- 3.2 The intention of this policy is to ensure that employment land designated in settlement maps is indeed used for employment purposes. While there is some overlap with SG Safeguarding5: Safeguarding employment land, both policies remain pertinent in their own right. SG Bus1 can facilitate the development of business/employment land, whereas SG Safeguarding5 can be utilised to deter development that is not intended for business use on designated employment sites.
- 3.3 The policy accords with SPP in that it identifies and maintains a varied selection of employment land designations throughout the region, and meets the targets set out by the Structure Plan. The employment land allocations are derived from an annual Employment Land Audit which is carried out by Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future. The Employment Land Audit provides up-to-date and accurate information on the supply and availability of employment land, and this information then informs the Local Development Plan. The Action Plan is used as a mean to monitor how these allocations will be made effective throughout the duration of the plan.

4. Drivers of change

- 4.1 For clarity, “land allocated or identified on proposals maps” should be expanded upon to state it applies to both existing (BUS) and new employment (EMP) allocations. Strategic reserve land would not apply to this policy, as it is not land that is to be developed during the life-time of this plan, but it is considered under SG Safeguarding5: Safeguarding employment land.
- 4.2 Further clarity could be provided by amending “employment uses” to “business uses” in the policy to coincide with the title of this policy. However, ‘employment uses’ covers industrial, business and any other employment uses listed under the Use Classes Order. Therefore, the title could be changed to reflect both business and employment land. Offices are covered under SG Bus2: Office development.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Provide clarity that the policy applies to both existing (BUS) allocations and new (EMP) allocations, but not to strategic reserve land and change the title of the policy to SG Bus1: Development of business and employment land.
- 5.2 These modifications are of minor significance and do not constitute a “main issue” for discussion within the Main Issues Report.

6. Summary of main points

- 6.1 This supplementary guidance currently demonstrates an element of clarity and precision. Alongside SG Safeguarding5: Safeguarding employment land, both policies cover the key points associated with the development of business land throughout Aberdeenshire. This policy acts as facilitator to the

development of business land, corresponding with SPP and the current Structure Plan. The overall aim of the policy is to ensure that existing and allocated employment sites within the plan are only used for appropriate employment uses.

The following minor actions are proposed:

- Provide clarity that the policy applies to both existing (BUS) allocations and new (EMP) allocations, but not to strategic reserve land; and.
- change the title of the policy to SG Bus1: Development of business and employment land.

References

Aberdeenshire Council (2012) *Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012*

Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*

Strategic Development Planning Authority (2009) *Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan*