

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper is intended to review the current policy approach to town centre and retail development in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012 and assess it in light of changes in national policy and the local context. This policy reinforces the settlement strategy of the plan by controlling the location of shops and other commercial proposals to create sustainable communities and to reduce the need to travel. It also supports 'destination shops' that are themselves visitor attractions, as a means of sustaining the rural economy. This review will assess whether this policy remains a sound tool for determining planning decisions for town centre and retail development in Aberdeenshire.

2. Policy Approach

- 2.1 Policy 2 identifies the importance of existing centres have in providing a diverse range of serves and activities, and promotes a sequential process to site selection for proposals in urban areas. The policy also recognises that Aberdeenshire is largely a rural area and supports retail developments in the countryside that are associated with a new or existing tourist destination, which will not have a significant adverse effect on town centres.
- 2.4 Policy 2 refers to the following supplementary guidance to assess the appropriateness of retail and commercial proposals within an urban or rural area:
- SG Retail1: Town centres and retailing; and
 - SG Retail2: Retail development in the countryside.

3. Background

National context

- 3.1 Scottish Planning Policy recognises town centres as key economic and social hubs which provide a focus for civic activity through the provision of employment and services. Town centres contribute to sustainable economic growth by having goods and services clustered together within close proximity of one another. The SPP acknowledges that the planning system has a significant role in supporting successful town centres through its influence on the type, siting and scale of development, and measuring the viability and vitality of these centres gives an indication of the health of a town centre.
- 3.2 It also encourages development plans to identify a network of centres, which range from town centres and commercial centres to other local centres, which provide the context for the assessment of new development using a sequential approach. A retail impact analysis is required for retail and leisure proposals over 2,500sqm outwith a defined town centre, and all retail, leisure and related developments should be accessible by walking, cycling and public transport.
- 3.3 In relation to rural development, SPP emphasises that the planning system has a significant role to play in supporting sustainable economic growth in rural areas. It urges development plans to promote economic growth activity and diversification in rural areas, paying particular attention to tourism and farm diversification.

- 3.4 With regards to sustainable transport and land use, NPF2 encourages retail activity to be situated in locations which minimise reliance on the private car. Consequently, this ties in with the requirements of SPP requesting a sequential approach and the aspiration of retail being clustered together within town centres. It also encourages rural development in order to promote sustainable growth, economic diversification and community development.
- 3.5 Further national planning advice is provided in Planning Advice Note (PAN) 52: Planning in Small Towns, PAN 59: Improving Town Centres and PAN 73: Rural diversification.

Strategic/regional context

- 3.6 The Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (Proposed SDP) promotes retail development as a key economic growth opportunity. It emphasise the importance of town centres and enhancing their vitality and viability, and promotes the use of a sequential approach in identifying sites for new retail development.
- 3.7 The Proposed SDP also recognises that the retail sector is one of the principal components in the creation of sustainable mixed communities and should be one of the main considerations when preparing masterplans and development briefs. Proposals for new retail development should therefore be assessed on their potential impact on existing retailers and in meeting the future needs of the local community.
- 3.8 In terms of rural development, whilst developments outwith settlements are likely to be supported, the Proposed SDP continues to emphasise the importance of town centres and the role that retail services can play in enhancing their vitality and viability.
- 3.9 In relation to accessibility, the Proposed SDP also requires all new developments to contribute towards reducing the need to travel and especially by private car.
- 3.10 Aberdeenshire Councils Framework for Regeneration 2010 is referenced within the Proposed SDP as a tool that encompasses the regeneration and improvement of town centre vitality throughout Aberdeenshire.

4. Drivers of Change

- 4.1 Other policy reviews on supplementary guidance SG Bus2: Office development and SG Retail1 suggest that encouraging a sequential test for site selection for office development could aid regeneration and limit derelict space within our town centres. This represents a main issue and would require Policy 2 to make reference to “office developments”. Further clarification would be required in the supporting text explaining that this refers to office developments, although whether this refers to class 2 only or includes class 4 business developments would need to be debated.
- 4.2 The design of developments within town centres features heavily in the SPP, noting that it should integrate successfully and create effective links with the surrounding urban fabric. However, this would be more appropriately considered under Policy 8: *Layout, siting and design of new development*. As such, it would not be necessary to amend the policy.
- 4.3 The review of SG Retail1 and SG Retail2 also identified that the construction of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR), which is forecast to be

completed by 2018, will increase pressure for larger 'destination' retail, if not within settlements on the periphery of Aberdeen, at its junctions. Such proposals will be assessed under this policy. Nonetheless, the policy states quite clearly that development proposed outwith town centres must not significantly adversely impact on the viability and vitality of town centres and that they are associated with a "tourist destination". As such, no change to this policy is required.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 In light of the review of SG Bus2: *Office development* and SG Retail1, it is anticipated that 'Town Centres and Retailing' will be a topic for inclusion in the Main Issues Report. This is due to the demise of the town centre, the need for the delivery of regeneration and the potential impacts the AWPR will have on the retail sector within Aberdeenshire.

6. Summary of Main Points

- 6.1 Policy 2: *Town centres and retailing* seeks to manage the location of shops and other commercial proposals in order to safeguard the vitality and viability of existing town centres. The policy currently conforms to national and regional policies and forms a sound basis to inform planning decisions regarding town centre and retail developments. However, the review of SG Bus2 and SG Retail1 has demonstrated a need to actively regenerate existing town centres to ensure they retain their vitality and viability by accommodating a mixture of uses. As such, it is anticipated that 'Town Centres and Retailing' will be a topic for inclusion in the Main Issues Report to investigate options to apply a sequential test for site selection for class 2 and possibly class 4 office developments.
- 6.2 It is also envisaged that the AWPR will have a significant effect on the retail sector with an anticipated demand for out of town developments.

References

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (2013) *Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan*.

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

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

Scottish Government (2012) *Town Centre Review*

Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*

Scottish Government (2009) *National Planning Framework for Scotland 2*.