

Review of Policy 3: Development in the countryside

1. Introduction

- 1.1 'Policy 3: Development in the countryside' addresses development in the countryside out with Aberdeenshire's settlements. It sets out the overarching objectives for development in these areas and provides the context for four pieces of supplementary guidance which address specific types of rural development in greater detail. The purpose of this paper is to examine Policy 3 in light of changes in the national policy and local context. It will consider whether it meets the requirements of Scottish Planning Policy and other national planning documents, and whether it forms a sound basis for managing development in rural Aberdeenshire.

2. Approach

- 2.1 The current policy is welcoming of development in the countryside, whilst recognising the potential impact rural living can have on climate change and sustainable development. It identifies two distinct areas within which different approaches to rural development apply – the Aberdeenshire Housing Market Area (AHMA) and the Rural Housing Market Area (RHMA). Policy 3 applies “greater control of development in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area, and promotes small-scale development, especially business development, in the rural housing market area.” This takes account of the need to promote economic development in more rural areas away from Aberdeen (including the regeneration priority areas) and limit development which will promote unsustainable commuting close to Aberdeen. This difference in approach is reflected in constituent supplementary guidance 'SG Rural Development 1: Housing and business development in the countryside' (SG RD1). SG RD1 limits development in the AHMA to:

- that permissible under the greenbelt supplementary guidance;
- that which contributes to the organic growth of identified settlements;
- the refurbishment or replacement of an existing or disused building;
- a single house associated with the retirement succession of a viable farm.

A more permissive stance is taken in the RHMA, where development associated with business, or the limited expansion of cohesive groups, is also allowed. The policy review for SG RD1 does not highlight a need for fundamental changes to this approach, so there is no need for a change to this element of policy 3.

- 2.2 Policy 3 is also used to “meet the needs of business proposals that, by their very nature, will need a rural location, such as minerals development, landfill development, wind energy and other renewable energy facilities.” The reference to landfill development seems to be an error as such developments are assessed under 'SG Safeguarding8: areas of search for waste facilities' rather than any of the pieces of rural development supplementary guidance. This reference should therefore be deleted. With regards wind energy and other renewables, these may be more appropriately dealt with under a new policy on climate change. This is logical given that, though renewable energy developments tend to take place in rural areas and can contribute to economic development and diversification, the primary reason for the

promotion of renewables is to mitigate climate change and improve energy security. The potential of a policy on climate change has been supported in other policy reviews, and will likely be identified as a main issue in the forthcoming LDP Main Issues Report 2013.

- 2.3 Policy 3 communicates little about Aberdeenshire Council's approach to mineral developments. Though the detail of this approach is contained within supplementary guidance, the opportunity exists to provide more information on this in policy 3 and its supporting text. Due to its relevance to minerals development, it would also be helpful if the policy's supporting text made explicit reference to policy 14 and associated areas of search for minerals.

3. Background

National context

- 3.1 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) highlights the significant role of planning "in supporting sustainable economic growth in rural areas." It identifies a need for planning authorities to support more opportunities for small scale housing in rural areas, as well as those developments which support economic growth and diversification such as tourism. However, "the strategy for rural development set out in the development plan should [also] respond to the specific circumstances in an area." For example, in more accessible and densely populated areas, SPP states that "most new development should be located close to settlements." Whilst "in less populated areas, small scale housing and other development which supports diversification and other opportunities for sustainable economic growth whilst respecting and protecting the natural and cultural heritage should be supported in a range of locations." Policy 3 takes a broadly welcoming approach to development in the countryside whilst acknowledging the need for a differing approach depending on proximity to Aberdeen. As noted above, the LDP takes a stricter stance towards development in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area, and a more supportive stance in the Rural Housing Market Area. This approach, which takes account of the differing circumstances and characteristics of rural Aberdeenshire, is fully compliant with that expressed in SPP. No changes to the policy are therefore required.

Strategic/regional context

- 3.10 The current draft of the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (2013) identifies much of rural Aberdeenshire as local growth and diversification areas. These areas lie outwith the strategic growth areas which is where the majority of development is focused. It is acknowledged that there will continue to be pressure for rural housing outwith existing settlements within the local growth and diversification areas. However the plan stipulates that 'local development plans, in line with Scottish Planning Policy, should approach this by focusing new housing in, or as an extension to, existing settlements, particularly those which are well served by public transport. This will help to create and maintain successful places and be more sustainable'. Policy 3 and associated supplementary guidance achieve this by limiting individual residential developments to 3 houses outside settlements, whilst concentrating development allocations in sustainable locations adjacent to existing and proposed services. Given this, there is no need for a change to the existing approach in policy 3.

4. Drivers of change

- 4.1 The above analysis has suggested that existing supplementary guidance on wind energy and other types of renewable energy development will be better dealt with under a new policy on climate change. The need for a new policy on climate change has been supported in other policy reviews, and will likely be identified as a main issue in the forthcoming LDP Main Issues Report 2013.
- 4.2 The review has also highlighted the need for reference to landfill to be removed. This appears to be an error as such developments are assessed under 'SG Safeguarding8: areas of search for waste facilities' rather than any of the pieces of rural development supplementary guidance.
- 4.3 It has also been proposed that some further information on our approach minerals developments should be provided in policy 3. This would be useful as the current policy is focussed on business and residential development in the countryside and, in so doing, fails to set out clear objectives for minerals developments in Aberdeenshire.

5. Recommendations

- All references to wind and other renewable developments, and associated supplementary guidance, should be deleted.
- Reference to policy 3 being applied to landfill developments should be deleted.
- The third paragraph of the supporting text for policy 3 should be replaced with the following:

“We will also use this policy to meet the needs of minerals development. Minerals are valuable finite resources that are crucial to several industries including construction. Minerals developments are supported in Aberdeenshire where negative impacts on the road network, the environment and communities can be minimised and mitigated effectively. Recognising the importance of these resources, areas of search for minerals are safeguarded against other types of development that may hinder mineral extraction. Our policy on areas of search for minerals is detailed in Policy 14 and SG Safeguarding7: Areas of search for minerals.”
- The following paragraph should be added to the main policy text:

“We will also support appropriate levels of minerals extraction in Aberdeenshire where impacts on the transport network, the environment and communities can be minimised and mitigated effectively.”

6. Summary of main points

- 6.1 This review has suggested that existing supplementary guidance on wind energy and other types of renewable energy development will be better dealt with under a new policy on climate change. Our policy approach to climate change will be considered in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Main Issues Report 2013. Minor modifications to the policy have also been proposed as follows:

- Reference to policy 3 being applied to landfill developments should be deleted.
- Additional information on our approach to minerals development should be added to the main policy and supporting policy text.

References

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

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

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

Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*