

Main Issues Report 2013

Valued Views Position Paper

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This position paper intends to provide an overview of *Supplementary Guidance Landscape 2: Valued views* (SG LC2) which was introduced to reflect locally valued views and landscapes in Aberdeenshire, and afford them some protection from developments that may have an adverse impact on their quality and character. It also supports SG: Landscape Character1 (SG LC1) which supports the conservation of the characteristics of the wider landscapes within Aberdeenshire. This paper will assess how SG LC2 is currently being interpreted and applied as well as establishing whether it is achieving its objectives. Finally it will identify different options for improvement to help determine the most appropriate course of action.

2. National context

- 2.1 Part 1.1 G of the European Landscape Convention (2000) states that '*All action taken to define, implement and monitor landscape policies should be preceded and accompanied by procedures for participation by members of the public and other relevant stakeholders, with the aim of enabling them to play an active role in formulating, implementing and monitoring landscape quality objectives*'. The valued views policy could be considered under this description, as a means of reflecting community and publicly valued views and landscapes.
- 2.2 Scottish Planning Policy 2010 (SPP2010) also states that '*International and national designations can be complemented by local designations which protect, enhance and encourage the enjoyment and understanding of locally important landscapes and natural heritage*'.
- 2.3 Whilst the valued views policy reflects the core values of a local landscape designation, its' focus relates to the 'view' as opposed to the wider landscape or landscape features. This provides a much more subjective outcome which is not always easy to define and would not necessarily be considered a 'landscape designation'. However, SGLC2 aims to protect locally important views and to – as now stipulated by SPP - '*safeguard and enhance the character and quality of landscapes which are important or particularly valued locally or regionally*'.
- 2.4 Local landscape designations, particularly those that have had input from local stakeholders are actively encouraged by both the Landscape Convention and SPP2010. The valued views policy provides the closest equivalent within Aberdeenshire, which is still consistent with national policy.
- 2.5 SPP adds that '*The reasons for designation should be clearly explained and the on-going relevance and function of local designations should be considered when development plans are prepared (SPP)*'.
- 2.6 A new draft Scottish Planning Policy (SPP2014) is currently out for consultation and is considered here. It maintains that '*Plans should address the potential effects of development on landscapes and natural heritage, including the cumulative effects of incremental changes*'. In addition, it continues to promote the use of locally determined landscape designations; however authorities '*are encouraged to limit non-statutory local designations*

to two types – areas designated for their landscape value and nature conservation sites’ (SPP2014).

- 2.7 It highlights that designations can be particularly beneficial to:
- *‘safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally; or*
 - *promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character and special qualities of local landscapes; or*
 - *safeguard and promote important local settings for outdoor recreation and tourism’.*

3. Current approach

- 3.1 SG LC2 was introduced to supplement the Landscape Character Policy (SGLC1) which identifies the qualities and characteristics of all Landscape Character Areas (LCA) within Aberdeenshire. It does this by providing some protection to specific locally valued views for which particular development may have an adverse impact upon.
- 3.2 SGLC2 stipulates development that will negatively impact on a view point or ‘valued view’ as identified in Appendix 1 should not be supported. Proposals should be of an appropriate scale and design and in a suitable location that does not affect the overall integrity and quality of the view. In addition, a development should not have a negative impact on the characteristics and features for which the view is valued. The purpose of this policy is to identify views that are of local significance which the community at large would like to see protected and enhanced in the public interest. However, the designation does not carry the same material weight to that of national or could be expected for a local landscape designation. This is partly due to the process in which the policy was devised. Local landscape designations are more defensible where they are undertaken in accordance with guidelines stipulated by SNH which are examined further in this paper.
- 3.3 The intention of the valued views is to support SG LC1 but the policy focuses on visual impact and the whole view as opposed to particular landscape features. It is concerned with the aesthetics of the landscape, rather than with the components that make up a specific landscape character type. It considers the view of a “thing” from a “place” and thus differs significantly from modern interpretations of landscape character.
- 3.4 SG LC2 identifies a list of ‘valued views’ in Appendix 1 to which the policy applies. However, the Appendix does not provide any further information on the views, providing significant difficulty interpreting the policy.

4. Policy Issues/Discussion

- 4.1 Local designations, particularly those that have had input from local stakeholders are actively encouraged both by the Landscape Convention and Scottish Planning Policy. However, it is uncertain whether valued ‘views’ are considered as part of this on the basis that they focus on the visual view from a point to a place as opposed to a landscape.
- 4.2 As it stands, SGLC2’s aim of protecting the aesthetic nature of “locally valued” views is appropriate and consistent with the aims of national policy. Identified views have a significant element of subjectivity which has created

uncertainty regarding how much material weight they carry and how robust the policy is.

- 4.3 The current list of 'valued views' in Appendix 1 has been identified by elected members in conjunction with community councils. Whilst local input is promoted through national policy, the identified views are in many cases unclear and unspecific. The views are from a range of locations, some of which are difficult to pinpoint and are potentially inaccessible, such as the '*view looking to Muchalls from mid-way across the moor*'. In addition, a large proportion of views are from roads which again are non specific and do not identify an actual point or place from which the view can be publicly seen and enjoyed. This means it is difficult to establish if a proposal meets criteria 1 of the policy where it should not '*have an adverse impact on the viewpoint for a valued view*'.
- 4.4 In addition, the list of valued views appears to be incomplete, creating inconsistency. No valued views have been identified in the Banff and Buchan Area of Aberdeenshire and at least one well known viewpoint (the Queens view, overlooking Deeside) has been omitted. This therefore creates difficulty in applying a policy which does not relate to the whole Aberdeenshire area.
- 4.5 Some views themselves are also referenced in very general terms such as '*countryside to east of Inverurie*'. This is considered more representative of an area of landscape rather than a valued view. Valued views' that are more consistent with landscape features should be identified within the Landscape Character Areas policy. In addition, there are also some valued views which are already nationally designated for their landscape or historic qualities. In these instances, inclusion within the valued views policy may not be required as they are already protected at a higher level such as designed landscapes or scheduled monuments (some of which are in prominent landscape locations).
- 4.6 Appendix 1 of the policy identifies the list of valued views. However, it does not provide any supplementary information relating to the qualities and features which elected members and local people are so keen to protect. There is no explanation as to why the valued view was identified and what the key characteristics of it are. This makes it difficult to determine if a development will have an impact on the view or not. For example, there are now valued views in which wind farms have been built. Is the view with wind farms still of value? This provides a very subjective question, highlighting the ambiguity associated with this policy. In addition, '*the Falls of Dess from the footpath*' is enclosed within a woodland setting. The view does not extend beyond the surrounding trees, and the 'view' is presumed to be the falls. Due to the contained nature of the location of this particular 'view', it is unclear what the purpose of specifying it in the policy is. This demonstrates that there is a distinct lack of information to support and implement this policy effectively. A summary table of the valued views is attached in Appendix A to this paper which identifies some of these issues.
- 4.7 Valued views' should be identified in terms of a view from a point to a place, landscape or feature. Ambiguity regarding what a 'valued view' actually is and where it is from creates greater difficulty in assessing the potential impacts of a proposal on that particular view. In light of these issues, it is considered that the current policy is not fit for purpose and may require a substantial overhaul. Therefore, different options are explored through the following section.

5. Options for change

5.1 Retain and Review

- 5.1.1 The first option for change would be to completely revise the current list of identified 'valued views'. In order to alleviate the uncertainty that currently exists, reviewing the list of views will improve clarity in relation to what the policy aims to do and how it should be applied. This could still be undertaken in consultation with elected members', however much greater direction from the planning service would be required.
- 5.1.2 This could be done by establishing a consistent approach, including an appropriate methodology to enable the identification of a more robust and coherent set of views. The methodology should stipulate that views must be identified in terms of a point to a place, landscape or feature. Views should be identified as specific viewpoints from which the view can be fully enjoyed and experienced. Therefore, this should not include views from the side of a road that has no amenity to enjoy the view. Viewpoints should also be publicly accessible and the focus of each view must be identified along with justification for its protection. Viewpoints identified on Ordnance Survey maps could be used as a guide in this instance. These measures will play an important part in creating a robust set of views that are identified using the same criteria.
- 5.1.3 Whilst the valued views policy is not strictly a landscape designation, SNH's '*Guidance on Local Landscape Designations*' provides useful guidance on how to identify locally valued landscapes. As mentioned above, some of the valued views are already designated in other capacities (such as through scheduling) and the landscape guidance states that an '*important factor to consider is the range and extent of other designations and approaches which may be equally or more effective than designation in delivering the desired objectives*' (SNH). The purpose of this would be to avoid identifying views that are already protected to a higher level for which being a valued view would add no real significance. A summary table of the valued views can be found in Appendix A of this document which identifies potential views to be retained, reviewed or removed.
- 5.1.4 In addition, SG LC2 does not currently provide maps or further information detailing the location of the views and why they are of value. The 'valued views' have been mapped on the Aberdeenshire Council's GIS systems but these are only indicative. Therefore, as part of the review, it is recommended that valued views are more specifically identified, visited, and photographed. Further guidance could be prepared as an appendix to the supplementary guidance or as separate planning advice which includes maps of the valued views along with photographs demonstrating the 'view' that the policy aims to protect and why (i.e. what needs to be protected). This would enhance the understanding and interpretation of the policy. It is not intended that the maps identify the entire scope of the view but to highlight the viewpoints from which the protected views can be seen and enjoyed in their entirety.
- 5.1.5 This option would allow the creation of a more robust policy which could more actively protect valuable views. In addition, it would provide a clearer basis which could be used in decision making.

5.2 Remove and Replace

- 5.2.1 An alternative option would be to remove the valued views policy and replace it with a new local landscape designation. The difference in this approach compared with the review of the existing policy would be the increased focus

on the landscape rather than the view. A landscape approach may be a more suitable medium for exploration of locally valued landscapes. Whilst SG LC1 identifies the different landscape character types, qualities and sensitivities, a local landscape designation could complement this by identifying more specific locally valued landscapes. SNH's 'Guidance on Local Landscape Designations' states that *'an all-landscapes approach is not in itself a substitute for identifying and taking action for landscapes which merit special attention...within this...approach, local landscape designations can continue to play an important role in protecting and enhancing these landscapes'* (SNH, 2006). It adds that designations are particularly helpful *'to safeguard important landscapes and landscape features which are particularly valued and may have limited capacity for change'*.

5.2.2 In order to produce a more effective policy that holds sufficient influence in terms of decision making, it is considered that any designation should be developed in accordance with SNHs' guidance. This not only provides an established methodology, but gives greater weight to the final policy. The Guidance states that local landscape designations *'are particularly attractive because of the simplicity of the concept and the potential they have to act as a focus for the development of clear and practical planning and management measures'* (SNH).

Potential Methodology

5.2.3 SNH acknowledges that every region is different and *'local authorities are encouraged to develop an approach which suits their particular circumstances – be it the designation of small beauty spots or isolated landscape features or more extensive landscapes'*. This permits some flexibility in relation to how exactly a landscape designation would be progressed within Aberdeenshire taking into account what the main purpose of it would be.

5.2.4 SNH's guidance identifies a list of possible steps (table below) that can be used in developing and reviewing local landscape designations.

Strongest links to	Key Steps	Relevant parts of this guidance
Community plan process and consultation	1. Describe the key characteristics and qualities of the landscapes of the local authority area	Section 3
	2. Develop objectives to underpin all-landscape approach	Section 2
	3. Review role of, and need for, local landscape designation	Section 2
Development plan process and consultation	4. Develop criteria to select areas of search for designation	Section 3
	5. Identify and agree areas of search	Section 3
	6. Identify and agree specific areas for designation	Section 3
	7. Identify and agree boundaries for each area to be designated	Section 6
	8. Develop planning and other policies for each designated area	Section 5

5.2.5 Fundamentally, there are two stages involved in identifying local landscape designations: describing all landscapes and then identifying those that should be designated. The 'all-landscape' approach identified in key steps 1 and 2 has already been carried out through SG LC1 and 12/2012 *Landscape*

Character Advice for small scale development. This therefore provides a key starting point from which a local landscape designation could be developed.

- 5.2.6 Aberdeenshire’s former Local Plan (2006) identified ‘Areas of Landscape Significance’ which were a form of local landscape designation. These areas could potentially provide a basis on which to develop the new designation. They are still informally used, and could provide a useful tool for initial consultation and engaging with the public on the issue. However, the criteria used to identify these areas is now unknown and there is no justification for re-using these boundaries without significant review. They were also based on issues of ecological quality, and gave additional weight to landscapes which were deemed to be ecologically rich regardless of their local landscape value.
- 5.2.7 SNH’s guidance identifies two types of criteria which should be taken into consideration when selecting potential areas for inclusion within the designation which are outlined in the tables below. There is no single method for identifying landscapes and local authorities can amend these criteria as they see fit.

Landscape Criteria

Criteria	Description
Significance	To what extent do the character and qualities of a particular landscape have special importance in the context of the local authority area?
Representiveness	To what extent do the character and qualities of a particular landscape contribute to the distinctive local or regional identity of the local authority area?
Relative Merit	To what extent do the character and qualities of a particular landscape merit designation compared to other parts of the local authority area?

Practical Criteria

Criteria	Description
Need	To what extent will designation provide for more effective safeguard, management or promotion of the special attributes of the area being considered for designation?
Integrity	Is the area to be designated both coherent enough and of sufficient size to make it practical to develop policies for its protection, management and promotion?
Support	Is there sufficient support for the area to be designated, among both communities and other stakeholders within the proposed area?

- 5.2.8 SNH states however that *'While this process should be structured and informed by professional advice, such judgements require wider public debate, both to inform decisions on the character and qualities of their landscapes which local people agree to be particularly important'*.
- 5.2.9 This wider public debate will *'Ultimately... be tested through consultation on the development plan, or other relevant plans and strategies'* (SNH, 2006). In this instance, the concept of a local landscape designation could be consulted on as part of the Main Issues Report (MIR) however the actual designated areas would not. Due to time constraints, they would have to be consulted at a later stage, probably in the course of development of specific supplementary guidance for inclusion in the development plan. Therefore, if the principle of a local landscape designation is supported through the Main Issues Report consultation, the designation making process could be started.
- 5.2.10 The length of time to complete such a project provides another potential issue. It is suggested by SNH that this could take between 6 and 12 months to complete. It is possible that the principle of a landscape designation could be proposed and consulted on as part of the MIR, however factoring in the time to consult on the actual designated areas is likely to be very challenging,

5.3 Remove

- 5.3.1 The final option would be for the removal of the valued views policy altogether with sole emphasis being placed on the use of LCA's. Current monitoring figures indicate that the Landscape Character policy is being used significantly more than the valued views policy and this would continue to provide a suitable basis for assessing development proposals' potential landscape impacts. This would result in SG LC1 being a single SG within landscape conservation.
- 5.3.2 The Landscape Planning Advice (12/2012) supporting SG LC1 identifies sensitivities within each landscape character area which coincide with the former ALS'. This provides a degree of guidance in relation to areas within particular landscapes that may be sensitive to development as well as extensive guidance on to what is appropriate in the context of each LCA.
- 5.3.3 By using SGLC1 and the planning advice that is already in place, part of this approach could involve a simple restructure of this information by emphasising the 'sensitivities' within SG LC1 (which are currently identified in the planning advice). This would provide a way of highlighting them within each landscape in a clear and concise way which could also be more easily interpreted. This could also provide an interim solution to the absence of a valued views policy, while a more comprehensive local landscape designation is progressed.

6. **Conclusions**

- 6.1 It is considered that whilst the intention of the current valued views policy is appropriate, it is not achieving its objective. The identified valued views are not fit for purpose and an improvement to this approach is required.
- 6.2 The option of reviewing the list of views in Appendix 1 in order to identify an improved and consistent set of views would provide a significant improvement from the current policy. However, it continues to be difficult to implement such a policy whereby the focus is on a 'view' which is subjective and vulnerable to misinterpretation. In addition, this would not provide greater policy weight and may result in the policy being somewhat unused.

- 6.3 The second and preferred option would be the development of a local landscape designation. This provides the most robust option and means of managing and protecting valuable landscapes. If undertaken in accordance with the guidelines set out by SNH, there is a much greater chance that the designation would carry greater weight in terms of decision making. This is fundamental whereby a policy cannot be effective if it does not hold any influence.
- 6.4 This option, however also presents the most resource intensive. There will be a need for professional landscape support and will require considerable input. It may be more efficient to consider the part of the final option, which includes removing the valued views policy and adding the new landscape designation policy in at a later stage.

References

- Aberdeenshire Council, 2012. 12/2012 Landscape Character Advice for small scale development
- Aberdeenshire Council, 2006. *The Aberdeenshire Local Plan*
- Aberdeenshire Council, 2012. *Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan*
- European Landscape Convention 2000
- SNH, 2006. Guidance on Local Landscape Designations, Natural Heritage Management
- The Scottish Government, 2010. *Scottish Planning Policy*
- The Scottish Government, 2013. *Scottish Planning Policy Consultation Draft*

Appendix A

Valued View	Potential Recommendation	Details
1. Countryside to east of Inverurie, above Oldmeldrum road	Review	Very general. This appears to be more of a 'landscape' feature than a 'valued view'.
2. Designed Landscape at Keithhall	Remove	The designed landscape is already nationally protected and does not require further local protection.
3. Views of Bennachie from A96, B9170 Oldmeldrum, Horses road, Keithhall, Belthenie and New Deer.	Review	There are a number of views here which should be reviewed and separated for clarity. In addition, specific view points should be identified that are publicly accessible and not from a road.
4. Views of Keithhall and Inverurie from Horses road, Keithhall	Remove /Review	Again Keithhall is nationally designated so should be removed. View of Inverurie from Horses road will be reviewed. In addition, when considering a valued view incorporating a settlement, there are naturally likely to be more changes as a result of development than of a natural landscape view. This will be considered in the review.
5. Views of Dunnydeer (Dunnideer?) Hill Fort from the surrounding area	Review	Dunnideer Fort is a scheduled ancient monument which affords it greater protection than the valued views policy. However, a point from which it can be seen and enjoyed needs to be identified. More a "sensitivity in the landscape"
6. The view across Peterhead Bay from South Road	Review	Need to specify viewpoint - there is a layby.
7. The view of River Ugie Estuary from North Road, Peterhead	Review	Need to identify viewpoint
8. The view overlooking the sea from Harbour Street, Cruden Bay	Review	Does this view include enough land which would warrant its protection as a 'valued view'?
9. The views toward Mormond Hill	Remove	This is more of a landscape feature and reference should be made to it as sensitivity in the landscape character advice.
10. The view overlooking the harbour from Cruden Bay Golf Course	Review	Golf course not publicly accessible but car park is. However, not wholly appropriate point to enjoy a view from.
11. The view coastward from Clola to Hatton Road	Review	Need to identify viewpoint and potentially the 'view' – presuming it is the coast, not Hatton Road.
12. The view of St Fergus Gas Terminal, from A90 particularly at night	Remove	Can time of day be stipulated? People are much more likely to 'view' it during the day. Is it a Landscape feature?

13. The view eastwards from Culsh Monument towards Peterhead	Retain	Identifies point and 'view'. However, the monument is 23 kms from Peterhead (as the crow flies) and is B listed so in this case the viewpoint is protected.
14. The view of Slains Castle from Cruden Bay	Review/Remove?	Need to identify viewpoint. Slains Castle is scheduled which affords it significant existing protection.
15. The Ythan Estuary from the A975 and associated stopping places	Review	There are a number 'view points' here, which should be reviewed to identify one key 'point'.
16. Balmedie Beach	Remove	Significant development has already occurring here so may provide difficulty in justifying greater protection. This is not a view per se and should be identified within the landscape character.
17. The River Ythan at Ellon	Remove	Again, this is not a view from a point and more of a landscape feature so should be highlighted in relation to landscape character. Protected land.
18. Prop of Ythsie at Tarves from the surrounding area	Review	Need to identify key viewpoint as surrounding area too broad. Prop of Ythsie does not appear to be scheduled but could be considered a landscape feature.
19. Auchterless Kirk from the B992	Review	Need to identify viewpoint. Potential Settlement objective, protect the setting of the church.
20. From the Learney Hillon on the B993 as you descend towards Torphins, of Deeside – in particular, Mount Keen and Lochnagar	Review	Need to identify viewpoint. Lochnagar and Mount Keen both within Cairngorm National Park.
21. The setting of Tarves village on the brow of the hill	Review	Need to identify viewpoint.
22. From the top of Suie Hill on the Alford to Kennethmont road looking north-west	Review	View looking to where? What is the view of? Need to establish if there is there a viewpoint on Suie Hill. It appears the view could also extend outwith Aberdeenshire.
23. The Ladder Hills from the top of the Glacks on the Muir of Fowlis/ Glenkindie Road.	Review	Need to identify viewpoint
24. Over Alford from the junction of Greystone Road/Gallowhill towards Bennachie	Review	Need to identify viewpoint

25. From top of Dess Road looking down to Lumphanan	Review	Need to identify viewpoint. In addition, when considering a valued view incorporating a settlement, there are naturally likely to be more changes as a result of development than of a natural landscape view which will be taken into consideration in the review.
26. The Falls of Dess from the footpath	Review/Remove?	Not currently mapped, very small view which is located within woodland. Potentially not so much a 'view' as a feature. Waterfall is also part of River Dee SAC which affords it greater protection than a valued view.
27. Over the River Dee from Sunset Seat, Banchory	Retain?	✓ (identifies view point and subject of the view)
28. To east of Kincardine O'Neil where the road to Torphins joins the Deeside Road	Review	Need to identify what view is of.
29. The approach to Aboyne from the east (just past the caravan park)	Review	Need to identify viewpoint. In addition, when considering a valued view incorporating a settlement, there are naturally likely to be more changes as a result of development than of a natural landscape view which will be taken into consideration in the review. Potential Settlement statement objective.
30. The view from the A920 Huntly – Dufftown Road looking south/ south-west	Review	Need to identify view point
31. The view of Johnston Tower from the Cairn O'Mount Viewpoint	Retain	✓ (identifies view point and subject of the view)
32. The view of Strathfinella/Cairn O'Mount from Garvock Hill (<i>Is it Hill of Garvock?</i>)	Retain	Seems to identify view from a point (although slightly general) to key features.
33. The view of the Black Hill from Stonehaven Golf Course	Review	The view of Black Hill is special, but need to identify a point from which the best view of it can be seen. Options considered have been a layby to the north and from the harbour.
34. The view of the mouth of the River Esk from the A92, and from the stretch of the B class road from Northwaterbridge to Marykirk	Review	Need to identify viewpoint
35. The view of the river North Esk from the public road between Forebank and Morphie	Review	Need to identify viewpoint
36. The view of Meikle Carewe/Curlethney hill skyline from Black Hill	Review/Retain?	There appears to be a summit of Black Hill (War memorial) and 'view', so could be retained. GGP also suggests there are 12 wind turbines on Meikle Carewe – does this make it not valued anymore? Can we identify views with wind farms as valued?

37. Parish Church from Newton Hill to Findon Ness	Review	Need to identify viewpoint
38. The view of Cookney Church from the B979	Review	Need to identify viewpoint
39. The view from the Slug road, Stonehaven to Kerloch	Review	What is the view?
40. The view from the A92 to Inverbervie	Review	Need to identify viewpoint
41. The view from Gobbs Farm, Arbuthnott to the sea	Review	Is this a publicly accessible point? An attempt has previously been made to look at the view; however it could not be established what the view was supposed to be of.
42. The view looking to Muchalls from mid-way across the moor	Review	Too broad and potentially inaccessible. Need to identify viewpoint.