

Review of Policy 4 Special types of rural land

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to review the overarching Local Development Plan (LDP) Policy 4: *Special types of rural land*. The policy relates to the coastal zone and green belt which are sensitive in nature and require greater protection. This paper will review the policy in light of changes to national guidance and local context, and consider whether it continues to provide a suitable basis for managing development that is appropriate in these areas.

2. Policy Approach

2.1 Policy 4's overarching objectives involve protecting the special and intrinsic character of the coastal zone and green belt. A '*presumption against development*' is taken with regard to proposals what would affect and erode the quality of these areas.

The policy identifies that development may be permitted in the green belt where the proposal is appropriate and compatible with its natural setting and characteristics. Acceptable development includes building extensions, proposals associated with agriculture, forestry, recreation or nature conservation, conversion of vernacular buildings or accommodation for a worker associated with a primary industry.

The policy refers to the following supplementary guidance for further details regarding what development is acceptable in the coastal zone and greenbelt.

SG Special types of rural land 1: Coastal zone (STRL1)

SG Special types of rural land 2: Greenbelt (STRL2)

The LDP provides maps of the Greenbelt in the proposals maps, and the coastal zone maps are provided in the supplementary guidance.

3. Background

National context

Scottish Planning Policy (2010) provides the core national direction for guidance relating to both the coastal zone and greenbelt.

With regard to the green belt, SPP acknowledges the designation as an important means of directing development to the most appropriate locations in order to manage the growth of cities more effectively, and reduce the negative impacts of unplanned expansion. It also highlights the role of the green belt as an accessible means of recreation and gateway to the countryside. Therefore, it is important that development should only be permitted where it contributes to the protection and enhancement of the green belts character.

SPP states that development associated with agricultural use, forestry, horticulture, recreation or essential infrastructure is permissible in the green belt, particularly where it supports the rural economy.

SPP also provides guidance relating to the development of coastal zones along with National Planning Framework 2. They emphasise the local and national importance of coastal areas in terms of landscape and ecological importance, as well as being desirable locations tourism and recreation. This creates the need for an appropriate balance that protect the sensitive coast whilst utilising the opportunities for economic benefit.

In addition, coastal zone policy is also under the direction of the Marine (Scotland) Act which has introduced a new marine planning system and a National Marine Plan which is currently in progress. It is proposed that the new National Marine Plan will sit

along side and work with land use plans as well as ensuring accordance with National Planning Framework 2.

Strategic/regional context

The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009) provides the direction for planning issues at the regional level that require a more strategic approach. The green belt and coastal zones geographically overlap both Aberdeen Shire and City Councils and are of regional importance.

The Structure Plan identifies that within Aberdeenshire a number of coastal areas lie within 'Regeneration Priority Areas'. Whilst it is intended that these areas are the focus of economic regeneration, this could as a result put greater pressure on the fragile coastal environment. This has the potential to cause a conflict of policy.

The structure plan also asserts that development should not be permitted in locations that are vulnerable to coastal (or river) flooding as per the 'Indicative River and Coastal Flood Map for Scotland' or as established by a flood risk assessment.

The Structure plan states that '*The green belt around Aberdeen will continue to play a vital role in protecting the character and landscape setting of the City*' and acknowledges that it provides access to a '*high quality environment*'. However, it adds that that the green belt '*will need to change to meet the growth this plan seeks to achieve*'. The Structure plan ordered a review of green belt boundaries by both authorities which was carried out in 2010 in order to release green belt land for the expansion of Aberdeen City. As a result, the current green belt boundaries have been amended in response to the review and should not be subject to further change.

4. Drivers of change

4.1 Policy 4 outlines the fundamental overarching principles that ensure the protection of special types of rural land that are of significant environmental and cultural value. The policy supports limited development where it will not threaten or degrade the setting and character of these areas.

These basic principles continue to apply in terms of national policy for which Policy 4 is considered compliant. As highlighted above, and explored in more depth in the review of STRL1, the policy may require to be amended to take into consideration the National Marine Plan when it is adopted. Policy regarding the coastal zone will be required to accord with this. However, at this stage no change is deemed to be necessary.

In addition, through the review of STRL1, it is recommended that the boundaries of the identified coastal zone are reviewed to more accurately represent the sensitive coastline and fragile ecology. Currently, the coastal zone extends significantly inland meaning the STRL1 often competes with other policies most notably rural development 1 (SGRD1).

It has also been proposed that the coastal zone does not geographically overlap with the rural development policy (SGRD1) and it may for the purposes of clarity, be useful to state this in the main policy.

The current synopsis of the green belt in Policy 4 is adequate and no further amendment is considered necessary.

5. Recommendations

5.1 On the basis of this information the following recommendations are to;

- Amend Policy 4 to emphasise STRL1 as the principal means for considering development in the coastal zone.
- Provide maps for both the Greenbelt and Coastal zone in the proposals maps and supplementary guidance for consistency and ease of use.

6. Summary of main points

6.1 Policy 4 (*Special types of rural land*) outlines the fundamental principles that help determine what development is appropriate in the coastal zone and green belt. The policy highlights the intrinsic value of these areas and the importance of ensuring development does not negatively affect their character and setting. It is considered that the policy is currently consistent with national guidance and should be retained as it currently stands with a small addition. It is proposed in the review of STRL1 that a revision of the coastal zone boundary is carried out in order to make it more accurate and reflective of the characteristics for which it is intended to protect. Therefore, it is recommended that Policy 4 is amended to include a line stating that STRL1 is the principle policy for the assessment of proposals in the coastal zone. In addition, it is recommended that both the green belt and coastal zone maps are provided in the supplementary guidance.

References

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

Aberdeenshire Council (2012) *Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012*
Marine (Scotland) Act 2010

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

Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*