Review of SG LSD1: Masterplanning

1. Introduction

1.1   The purpose of this paper is to examine SG LSD1: Masterplanning 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 addressing development layout and design in Aberdeenshire.

2. Approach

2.1   The intention of the current supplementary guidance is to improve the standard of layout, siting and design of new developments by requiring developers to engage in a holistic design process which will inform subsequent planning applications. The policy sets out various scales of development at which different types of design document will need to be submitted and approved to allow planning permission to be granted:

- o   Criterion 1 requires that, for "very large developments including more than one site" (usually of >600 residential units with supporting infrastructure), a development framework should be submitted and agreed by the Local Area Committee.

- o   Criterion 2 requires that, for "individual large-scale development sites (usually >50 houses), or constituent parts of a development framework," a masterplan should be submitted. It also requires that, "in the case of medium scale development (>4 houses) sites or constituent parts of a masterplanned area" a design statement should be submitted.

2.2   The policy then goes on to state that, for sites where a development framework or masterplan has been approved, the design of the development should accord with that framework or masterplan. However, this criterion is duplicated in 'SG Layout Siting and Design 2: Layout, Siting and Design' which seems unnecessary, particularly as they should be used in conjunction with each other.

2.3   Criterion B requires developers to demonstrate that, "within the process of generating the appropriate development framework, masterplan and/or design statement adequate steps have been taken explicitly to consider the relationship with the existing village or town, and to engage the local community in a manner that is in proportion to the scale and type of development proposed." Whilst the reference to demonstrating consideration of the "the relationship with the existing village or town" gives some indication of what is required in terms of the content of these design documents, it is so limited in this regard that it is questionable whether it is worthy of retention. It also jars with the procedural focus of the rest of the policy. Given this, it would therefore be appropriate for this element of the policy to be deleted. Clearer reference should also be made to the detailed advice on creating masterplans and design statements contained in associated planning advice. A minor modification to SG LSD1 will therefore be required.

2.4   The reasoned justification goes on to explain why the masterplanning process has been introduced, and gives further explanation of the circumstances, based on the scale of development proposed, when the different types of design document will be required. However, the requirement for masterplans for all developments of 50 units and above is placing considerable strain on staff resources due to the number of masterplans being produced. Also, raising/changing the threshold at which masterplans are required would allow the

limited staff resource to concentrate on the most significant developments. Potential alterations to this threshold will be discussed further in section 3.

2.5   There the reasoned justification also fails to clearly explain the sequence in which masterplans and frameworks should be submitted for approval (development framework prior to masterplan). A minor modification to the reasoned justification will be required to clarify these matters.

3. Background

<u>National context</u>

3.1   The Scottish Government has placed considerable emphasis on improving architecture and urban design as part of its "place-making agenda." Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) emphasises the importance of high quality design which creates sustainable places of a distinctive character and identity. National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2) also highlights the importance of good design and design policies to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and the regeneration of improved areas. This commitment to design can also be seen in 'Designing Places' and 'Designing Streets' which communicate the Scottish Government's policy approach to improving development design. Designing Streets moves the emphasis of street design away from engineering standards and the facilitation of vehicular movement towards place and the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. However, although it is of relevance to the content of masterplans, given the procedural focus of SG LSD1 it is of limited relevance to this policy review.

3.2   Designing Places sets out the Scottish Government's broad aspirations for development design and the role of the planning system in delivering them. It emphasises the importance of the development plan in providing clear design policies and forming the basis for more detailed design guidance such as masterplans and development briefs. It also highlights the importance of collaboration in the design process. This supplementary guidance accords with these aims by ensuring that detailed design guidance is produced for developments, and that these are the subject of a collaborative process including developers, Aberdeenshire Council and local communities.

3.3   PAN 83 Masterplanning further promotes the use of masterplans as a means of improving development design and delivering successful and sustainable places. It supports the use of masterplanning in a variety of circumstances, however it cites them as being most appropriately used in areas of large scale change, for small sites which will cumulatively have a significant impact, or where there are particular sensitivities associated with the site. This could form the basis for a more nuanced approach where the determination of the need for a masterplan is assessed on a site-by-site basis. In certain circumstances this will mean that relatively small sites will require a masterplan (for example if the associated settlement was particularly small, or the development was adjacent to a conservation area) however in most cases it would mean that only the largest developments would require a masterplan.

3.4   PAN 83 also highlights the importance of establishing a clear vision for development sites and communicating this in a development and/or design brief. Having an agreed brief is important as it sets out a clear vision for the development and allows consensus to be reached at the earliest stages of the design process. Briefs are not widely used for sites in Aberdeenshire, however they may be an appropriate means of establishing the parameters for masterplans for the most significant sites.

<u>Strategic/Regional Context</u>

3.5 One of the main aims of the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan 2009 and the Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan is to "help create sustainable mixed communities, and the associated infrastructure, which meet the highest standards of urban and rural design and cater for the needs of the whole population." Both plans identify the use of "supplementary guidance to provide more detail on the appropriate mix of properties, urban design principles and community facilities," as a means of helping to achieve this. Although SG LSD1 does not require masterplans and other design documents to be formally adopted as supplementary guidance, by requiring them to be produced and, in the case of development frameworks and masterplans, approved prior to the submission of a planning application, SG LSD1 demonstrates a commitment to the formulation of guidance which establishes and explains development mix and design principles. It therefore broadly satisfies this requirement.

4. Drivers of change

4.1 The current policy broadly meets the requirements of national and strategic policy. However the analysis in section 2 and 3 has highlighted the potential need for a modification to the current policy approach. It has been proposed that masterplans should only be a requirement where a significant change to a settlement is proposed, either individually or cumulatively, or where there are particular sensitivities associated with the site. This would lead to a more nuanced approach to the determination of the need for a masterplan, where this need is assessed on a site-by-site basis. As sites are identified in the settlement statements this would be an appropriate place to articulate the need for a masterplan or framework. Consequently the policy should be modified to refer to the need for development to accord with an approved masterplan, as required by the settlement statements, and to impose a requirement on all non-allocated sites over the threshold of 50 houses to prepare a masterplan.

4.2 It has also been suggested that briefs should be more widely used, though only for the biggest sites. While this would allow consensus on the vision and principles for development sites to be established at the earliest stages in the design process it is already commended as an integral part of the preparation of design statements and masterplans.

5. Recommendations

- Replace criteria 1 and 2 of the policy with the following

  "1) if the need for a development framework for the site has been identified in a settlement statement, the applicant(s) have submitted a development framework and it has been agreed by the Local Area Committee"

  "2) if the need for a masterplan for the site has been identified in a settlement statement, the applicant(s) have submitted a masterplan and it has been agreed by the Local Area Committee"

  "3) in all cases a design statement has been submitted in support of the planning application"

- In line with the review of SG LSD2, add the following text as criterion 4:

"if a masterplan, development framework, development brief, design brief, design statement or design code has been produced for the development site, the development accords with it"

- To introduce a criteria 5 which refers to major applications for sites which are unallocated to be supported by, and accord with, a Development Framework or masterplan as agreed appropriate by Aberdeenshire Council

- Delete section 'b' of the policy

- Remove the reference to planning advice from the policy and add text to the reasoned justification clarifying that detailed advice on creating masterplans and design statements is provided in associated planning advice.

- The following statement should be added to the reasoned justification:

    "When a development framework is required, it is expected that this will be approved prior to the approval of masterplans for any of the constituent sites"

- To delete the section on 'Different scales of development'.

6. Summary of main points

6.1 This supplementary guidance broadly forms a sound basis for addressing development design. It requires that developers of various scales of site engage in a holistic design process which will produce a development framework, masterplan or design statement. The requirement to engage in such a process, particularly prior to applying for planning permission, will help to improve design quality across Aberdeenshire. However, the analyses in section 2 and 3 have highlighted some relatively significant changes in approach which should be the subject of debate in the forthcoming main issues report. These significant changes are as follows:

- o Masterplans are currently required for developments of 50 residential units or more. Given limited staff resources, a more nuanced approach is appropriate where masterplans should be required in areas of large scale change, for small sites which will cumulatively have a significant impact, or where there are particular sensitivities associated with the site.

- o Briefs should be required for the largest development sites. This would allow consensus on the vision and principles for development sites to be established at the earliest stages in the design process.

References

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

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (2012) Proposed *Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan*

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

Scottish Government (2001) *Designing Places*

Scottish Government (2010) *Designing Streets*

Scottish Government (2008) *Planning Advice Note 83:Masterplanning*

Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*