

Review of Policy 8: Layout, siting and design of new development

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to examine 'Policy 8: Layout, siting and design of new development' in light of changes in the local and national policy 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 the layout, siting and design of development proposals in Aberdeenshire.

2. Approach

- 2.1 Policy 8 highlights poor standards of development design as being of significant concern both locally and nationally. In response to this, policy 8 requires developers to engage in a holistic and effective process from which high quality design can emerge. This involves the production of design documents such as masterplans and development frameworks, and engagement with the public when developing designs. It also involves the use of a standardised process of assessment. The policy reviews for the relevant supplementary guidance – 'SG LSD1: Masterplanning' and 'SG LSD2: Layout, siting and design' - have sought to maintain this broad approach, so no changes are required to this element of policy 8.
- 2.2 Policy 8 also requires new buildings to “produce ever-lower proportions of greenhouse gases through their siting, layout and design, and the installation of new technologies.” It then goes on to state that “supplementary guidance will provide a standard to achieve the council’s target of carbon neutrality by 2016; a process to enable savings to be demonstrated; a specified and rising proportion of greenhouse gases to be avoided through the installation and operation of low and zero-carbon generating technologies for all new buildings; and any exceptions.” This is expanded upon in 'SG LSD11: Carbon neutrality' which sets out specific carbon emissions standards that need to be met by new buildings. It has been proposed that climate change will be dealt with more broadly in a new policy, and the approach taken will be the subject of debate in the forthcoming main issues report. It has also been proposed in the review of 'SG LSD8: Flooding and erosion' that flooding would be more appropriately dealt with under the climate change policy. Reference to this supplementary guidance can therefore be deleted from policy 8.
- 2.3 Aberdeenshire Council’s approach to open space provision is also addressed in Policy 8. A general requirement for at least 40% of each development site being devoted to open space is identified, however “in each case the actual proportion will take account of the location, function and characteristics of the new development proposal and site; the function of the open space proposed; and, where appropriate, the function and characteristics of existing open space in the area.” SG LSD5 requires developments of 50 units or less to provide 120 sqm per unit which is clearly different from the 40% requirement. The policy review for SG LSD5 has also suggested that 120 sqm requirement should be reviewed for small sites as they are often unable to deliver, or it is unnecessary for them to deliver, this much public open space. It may therefore be desirable to add a further caveat to policy 8 stating that the 40% on-site requirement generally only relates to major development sites. The review of SG LSD5 has also identified a need for the policy section safeguarding open space to be moved into a separate

piece of supplementary guidance. However this does not necessitate a change to policy 8.

2.4 In addition to the above, policy 8 covers the following supplementary guidance:

SG LSD3: House extensions

SG LSD4: Infill development

SG LSD6: Public access

SG LSD7: Community facilities

SG LSD9: Hazardous development

SG LSD10: Contaminated land

Whilst the issues raised in these pieces of supplementary guidance are only touched upon in policy 8, this allows the policy to be sufficiently concise. Clear reference is also made to each piece of supplementary guidance in the main policy. The policy reviews for the above also don't highlight any new issues which warrant a change to policy 8.

3. Background

National context

- 3.1 The Scottish Government has produced two policy documents - Designing Places and Designing Streets - as a means of improving standards of development layout, siting and design. Designing Places identifies "six qualities – identity, safe and pleasant spaces, ease of movement, a sense of welcome, adaptability and good use of resources" - which underpin good urban and rural design and the creation of successful new places. Policy 8 sets out its support for good design, and provides the context for supplementary guidance which addresses these issues and set out a process for achieving good design and assessing design quality. In doing so, policy 8 broadly accords with Designing Places.
- 3.2 Designing Streets considers detailed issues around street design and layout. Policy 8 is too broad in nature to address these issues in any detail. However, other policy reviews have identified relevant supplementary guidance and planning advice as being in accordance with Designing Streets.
- 3.3 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) emphasises the importance of high quality design which creates sustainable places of a distinctive character and identity. SPP also sees the provision of good quality and usable open space as being an important element of the layout, siting and design of new developments, and as having a role in the creation of an "environment where physical wellbeing is improved and activity made easier." National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2) also highlights the importance of good design and design policies to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and regeneration. Policy 8 addresses all of these issues and provides a framework for supplementary guidance which ensures that good design and high quality open space are integrated into new developments. It therefore accords with SPP and NPF2 in these respects.

Strategic/Regional Context

- 3.5 The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan 2009 ("the Structure Plan") and the Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan ("the SDP") identify high quality design as being integral to the creation of sustainable mixed

communities; tackling climate change, and; maintaining and improving our environment. To help tackle climate change, both plans state that new developments should be “designed and built to use resources more efficiently” This is addressed in policy 8 and associated supplementary guidance through a requirement for new buildings to produce lower levels of greenhouse gases.

4. Drivers of change

- 4.1. Other policy reviews have suggested that a new policy on climate change should be produced, and that supplementary guidance on flooding and erosion should be dealt with under this policy. It is therefore appropriate for existing references to this supplementary guidance to be deleted from policy 8.
- 4.2 It has also been suggested that the text on open space should be modified to clarify that the 40% requirement only applies to larger developments.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 References to ‘SG LSD8: Flooding and erosion’ should be deleted.
- 5.2 The last paragraph of the explanatory text should be replaced with the following:

“We will generally expect at least 40% of major development sites to be devoted to good quality open space, as defined in the glossary, with smaller sites having to provide a proportionally smaller amount of public open space. As set out in supplementary guidance, in each case the actual proportion will take account of the location, function and characteristics of the development proposal and site; the function of the open space proposed; and, where appropriate, the function and characteristics of existing open space in the area.”

6. Summary of main points

- 6.1 Policy 8: Layout, siting and design forms the basis for a suite of guidance aimed at improving the quality of development across Aberdeenshire. Whilst this review has suggested that the policy is generally sound, the following minor modifications are proposed:
 - References to ‘SG LSD8: Flooding and erosion’ should be deleted.
 - The text on open space should be amended to clarify that the 40% requirement only relates to major developments.

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 (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*