

Review of SG LSD4: Infill Development

1. Introduction

- 1.1 SG LSD4: Infill Development addresses development on sites within settlement boundaries which have no specific land use allocation. The purpose of this paper is to examine SG LSD4 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 making planning decisions on infill development in Aberdeenshire.

2. Approach

- 2.1 The current policy supports infill development subject to other policies and the following criteria:
 - 1) the nature of the development will not erode the character or amenity of the surrounding area through over or under-development; AND
 - 2) the development will not interfere significantly with the existing or proposed use of neighbouring sites, or with the accessibility of future potential development areas; AND
 - 3) the development will not cause the loss of a significant area of open space, allotments or woodland important to the community.
- 2.2 Criterion 1 of SG LSD4 is concerned with ensuring that the scale and density of infill developments is reflective of the surrounding context.
- 2.3 Criterion 2 addresses the potential for infill development to be incompatible with surrounding uses or block access to future development sites. This criterion provides a degree of protection to neighbouring uses and allocated development sites.
- 2.4 Although SG LSD4 can be used to address applications for change of use or conversion in settlements, this is not made clear in the text or title. Minor amendments may be needed to clarify this.
- 2.5 Criterion 3 is specifically concerned with stopping infill development from taking place on important areas of open space and woodland. However, although this issue is clearly relevant to infill development, it is also dealt with under 'SG LSD5: Public open space' and 'SG Safeguarding 3: Protection and conservation of trees and woodland.'

3. Background

National context

- 3.1 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) recognises the important contribution that infill sites can make to the housing land supply. It also provides support to residential development within settlements ahead of developments outwith settlements given the opportunity they provide "to make effective use of existing infrastructure and service capacity and to reduce energy consumption." Many infill sites are also brownfield sites, and SPP also states that the "redevelopment of...brownfield sites is preferred to development on greenfield sites."

- 3.2 SPP provides similar support for business development in settlements and on brownfield land. It also encourages local authorities to take a proactive approach to supporting the redevelopment of vacant sites via the use of compulsory purchase and land assembly powers.
- 3.3 SPP also recognises that proposals for infill sites “should respect the scale, form and density of the surroundings and enhance the character and amenity of the community. This is a stronger statement on the contribution of infill developments to the character of communities than expressed in SG LSD4 which states that such developments should “not erode the character or amenity of the surrounding area.” However, there may be cases where a change of use proposal would not provide an enhancement to the character or amenity of the surrounding area, but would be as appropriate to its surroundings as the previous land use. The policy would become unnecessarily harsh if it was to discriminate against such proposals, so a change to reflect SPP in this regard would be inappropriate.
- 3.4 In addition, SPP states that “the individual and cumulative effects of infill development should be sustainable in relation to social, economic, transport and other relevant physical infrastructure.” The current supplementary guidance does not address the impact of infill development on infrastructure and services. This is, in part, addressed elsewhere in the LDP and Structure Plan through policies on developer contributions, access, the strategic road network and water and waste infrastructure. However, given the impact of, in particular, larger infill developments on infrastructure and services, it may be more appropriate for large proposals within settlements to be dealt with via bids to the LDP rather than through the infill policy.
- 3.5 The National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2) also supports the redevelopment of vacant and derelict land.

Strategic/regional context

- 3.6 The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan 2009 does not specifically address infill development. It does, however, reflect the SPP by giving priority to development on brownfield sites across the region. The structure plan also states that “such redevelopment should respect the character of the local area, improve the quality of the environment, use high-quality design and include a mix of uses.”
- 3.7 The Strategic Development Plan adopts the same stance to the structure plan by prioritising the re-use of brownfield land.

4. Drivers of change

- There is a need to reduce unnecessary duplication within the plan.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Criterion 1 should be replaced with the following:

“the proposal respects the scale, density and character of its surroundings, and will not erode the character or amenity of the surrounding area.”
- Criterion 3 should be deleted.
- The title of the supplementary guidance should be changed to:

“SG LSD4: Infill and Change of Use”

Minor modifications to the main supplementary guidance text and the reasoned justification to refer to change of use and conversion will also be required.

6. Summary of main points

6.1 SG LSD4 generally forms a sound basis for assessing planning applications on infill development. However, this report has identified a small number of amendments to the policy which would allow it to fully address proposals for change of use and conversion, reduce duplication, bring it in line with Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) and allow better control over large development proposals within settlements. A further alteration to ‘SG LSD2: Layout, siting and design’ has been proposed which would address the potential negative impacts of development proposals on neighbouring properties. The following actions are proposed:

- Criterion 1 should be amended so that it reflects SPP’s aspiration that infill development should “enhance the character and amenity of the community.”
- Criterion 3 should be deleted as the issues of loss of woodland and open space are dealt with elsewhere within the plan.
- The title of the supplementary guidance and the main policy text should be changed so that it clearly addresses proposals for change of use/conversion in settlements in addition to infill development.

References

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 (2009) *National Planning Framework for Scotland 2*

Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*