

Review of SG LSD5: Public open space

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper will review policy SG LSD5: Public open space and assess whether any changes are required to the policy for inclusion within the next Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. The ethos of the policy is to ensure that all new developments have an adequate provision of surrounding open space, coinciding with the requirements of the Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Space Strategy. The policy offers direction to development management when assessing what is deemed to be an acceptable provision of open space in new developments. National and regional policies will be assessed to identify whether any adjustments need to be made to SG LSD5 to ensure it remains a sound tool for determining planning applications.

2. Policy Approach

- 2.1 The current policy has a section detailing criteria of the open space requirements that should be satisfied for new development to be approved, (and also a section detailing specific criteria of when development will be refused). Clearer understanding of both sets of criteria is then elaborated upon within the Reasoned Justification.
- 2.2 To provide a general overview, new development should be approved under SG LSD5 if:
- the information within the Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Space Strategy has been taken into consideration and applied;
 - a 40% provision of open space has been provided, where possible, for major developments;
 - at least 120m² of open space is provided per dwelling for smaller developments.

Development should be refused if it would lead to a loss of public open space - unless it is ancillary to the principal use of the site or for an essential community facility.

- 2.3 Once agreed on the provision of open space, it is also mandatory that the developer has arranged for the open space to be maintained and kept in good condition which would usually be formalised by a Section 75 agreement.
- 2.4 Areas of open space which are of particular significance are identified for protection within the settlement statement maps. SG LSD5 does however still apply to all areas of open space, not only those designated in the LDP. What constitutes as public open space is also detailed within the Reasoned Justification.

3. Background

National context

- 3.1 Scottish Planning Policy identifies the link between Scotland's health and the provision of good quality open spaces within settlements. The provision of open space and recreational areas should give more people access and the opportunity to exercise and improve their health and general physical well

being. Well linked networks of open space are not only beneficial to local residents but also to the environment through the role they play in nature conservation and biodiversity. SPP urges planning authorities to support, protect and enhance open space and opportunities for sport and recreation.

- 3.2 SPP desire consistency between the development plan, open space strategy, core paths plan, local transport strategy and outdoor access strategy. For new developments, there should be an emphasis on incorporating new and enhanced access opportunities through the site, linking to wider access networks. Green networks should also be protected and enhanced through policies within local development plans.
- 3.3 SPP urges planning authorities to undertake an audit of open space, which includes private and public open space, as well as formal and informal. The open space should meet the needs of the community whilst the audit should understand the quality, community value, accessibility and use of existing open space, not solely the quantity. The information gathered from the audit should inform an open space strategy detailing the vision for new and improved open space. The open space strategy should then inform planning decisions and development plans whilst detailing the need for developer contributions. Open space audits and strategies should be reviewed in line with the preparation of a new development plan.
- 3.4 Those open spaces identified in the open space audit and strategy that are valued and functional, should then be identified and protected within local development plans, SPP states. Open space which is not identified in development plans should still be prevented from development to ensure there is no loss of amenity. If development was to go ahead on open space, this must be justified with support from the open space audit, demonstration that the development would not contribute to an open space deficit and it should be proven that there is no alternative site. If development was approved, replacement open space should be provided.
- 3.5 Specific requirements for open space provision should be set out by planning authorities to give developers a clear indication of what is required for each development. Planning authorities and developers should work in cooperation to ensure that open spaces are well designed to a high standard, capable of adaptation and can enhance networks between open spaces to avoid fragmentation. The long term management and maintenance should be agreed between the planning authority and developer.
- 3.6 SPP emphasises the importance of open spaces being accessible, safe, welcoming, appealing, distinctive and well connected. Statutory equal rights should be a consideration to ensure that everyone can use the open space, regardless of their age, gender or disability. The two dominant constraints on accessibility are physical constraints, and the social and cultural constraints. These should be considered when planning the siting and design of open space, as well as encouraging the access via green networks and paths.
- 3.7 Planning Advice Note 65 provides further advice and clarity on the protection and enhancement of current and new open spaces. The PAN offers advice to local authorities in the preparation and implementation of open space strategies with examples of good practice.
- 3.8 One of the priorities of the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2 is the promotion of a 'greener Scotland'. In order to successfully 'green the environment' NPF2 highlights the important role that local authorities have to play in promoting open space networks, facilitating countryside access and

developing core path networks. The importance of planning for the environment is highlighted as it can aid environmental enhancement by strengthening green infrastructure and improving urban and rural biodiversity. It is imperative that economic development is integrated with the promotion of environmental quality and the sustainable management of environmental resources.

- 3.9 Both Designing Places and Designing Streets from the Scottish Government emphasise the importance of place, high standard design and sustainability. Open space must be provided in the hope that it should maximise the environmental benefits of any development.

Strategic/regional context

- 3.10 The Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan 2013 promotes the creation of sustainable mixed communities where different land uses are not dealt with in isolation, but instead collectively as a whole creating a healthy mix. The SDP envisages sustainable mixed communities incorporating retail, employment, education, health, leisure, open space, transport and housing to obtain modern successful developments. These would be communities with a strong sense of place and high quality environment where people can live and work.
- 3.11 The Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Space Strategy was approved in January 2011 and is referred to in criterion 1 of SG LSD5. This document details the hierarchy of open space which all new open space should reflect. The Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Space Strategy has been informed by the Open Space Audit which was carried out in 2008.

4. Drivers of Change

- 4.1 SPP now states the elements of open space which should be the most important considerations alongside ensuring equal rights to access. Open space should be safe, welcoming, appealing, distinctive, well connected and accessible to everyone regardless of age, gender or disability. It should be made clear in SG LSD5 that these features are expected in new and existing public open space.
- 4.2 The implementation of green networks and their synchronisation with open space is encouraged within SPP and should be reflected in the new local development plan. The ongoing discussion and potential creation of a draft policy on green networks for inclusion in the next local development plan could be referred to in a revised SG LSD5.
- 4.3 Corresponding to SPP, the Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Space Strategy will be reviewed during the development plan development process and will consider the outcomes from the monitoring of the open space audit.
- 4.4 The provision of 120m² of open space per dwelling for smaller developments which is currently required should be reviewed. Smaller developers find it increasingly hard to deliver this provision of open space despite the land allocations factoring in the land take required for this.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 As a result of this review, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Further reference is made to the key elements of open space that should be considered by developers. The following extract should be included within the Reasoned Justification of SG LSD5:

“Public open space should be safe, welcoming, appealing, distinctive, well connected and accessible to all, irrespective of age, gender or disability. In terms of accessibility, consideration should be given to the physical, social and cultural constraints when planning the siting and design of open space.”
- Remove all reference to the Aberdeenshire Local Plan (2006) throughout SG LSD5 as the preceding plan at the time. At the time of publication the previous plan will be the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012.
- The provision of public open space within small scale developments should be altered for inclusion in a modified criteria 2)ii). Providing 120m² ‘per dwelling’ is considered too excessive for small, and even single, residential developments. It could be more suitable to apply open space provision on the basis of allocated sites, linking in with the existing open space provision throughout the settlement. The review of the Open Space Audit could have implications on this as it will detail the current amount of open space in each settlement.
- The policy will be divided between SG LSD5 and a new safeguarding of open space SG. SG LSD5 will continue to express what public open space is required for new developments and the safeguarding SG will protect the existing public open space from further development.

6. Summary of Main Points

- 6.1 Overall, SG LSD5 remains a robust policy in helping to deliver open space within new developments. There have been no major changes within national or regional policy to suggest a significant change to SG LSD5. The review of the Aberdeenshire Open Space Audit and the Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Space Strategy will further inform this policy by providing an overview of the existing open space provision within Aberdeenshire. The open space requirements for windfall developments of less than 50 dwellings should be reviewed as this has been undeliverable for some developers. Further recommendations are detailed in this report although none are of such significance that they initiate a ‘Main Issue’.

References

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (2013) *Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan*

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

Aberdeenshire Council (2011) *Aberdeenshire Parks and Open Spaces Strategy*

The Scottish Government (2008) *Planning Advice Note 65: Planning and Open Space*

The Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*