

# Review of Policy 12: Landscape Conservation

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to review the overarching Local Development Plan (LDP) Policy 12: Landscape conservation. The policy aims to protect the special characteristics of Aberdeenshire's landscapes which are sensitive in nature by promoting development that is appropriate to its landscape surroundings. 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 and guiding development that is appropriate in these areas.

## 2. Policy Approach

- 2.1 The current policy aims to promote the protection, management and planning of special landscapes and views in order to preserve and enhance their quality, particularly those of local and regional importance.
- 2.2 The current approach to landscape character has been guided by Scottish Natural Heritage's Landscape Character Assessments. The policy states that the Council will '*plan for and promote the improvement and protection of all landscapes*' by using landscape character areas. This is a significant change in approach from the previous landscape policy in the Aberdeenshire Local Plan (2006) which identified areas of landscape significance for which greater protection and higher standards were sought. This change was noted and debated as a main issue in the 2009 Main Issues Report
- 2.3 The new approach considers the characteristics of every landscape character and identifies within each of the 37 Landscape Character Areas (LSC) the different opportunities, sensitivities and vulnerabilities of each landscape as well as ensuring development is only permitted where it is appropriate to, and does not adversely affect, the character of the landscape.
- 2.4 The policy acknowledges the importance of Aberdeenshire's landscapes as a valuable asset to the region which is now facing a number of different pressures. The aim of this policy is therefore to ensure that developments are only permitted where they are sensitive and compatible with their surrounding landscape.
- 2.5 The policy refers to the following supplementary guidance to provide detail as to how this will be achieved;  
*SG Landscape 1: Landscape character*  
*SG Landscape 2: Valued views*  
Maps of the different landscape character areas are provided in the supplementary guidance and planning advice (12/2012) has been prepared which details the characteristics, sensitivities and features of each LCA as well as more detailed maps.
- 2.6 The current policy and supplementary guidance does not provide maps of valued views.

### **3. Background**

#### National context

- 3.1 The European Landscape Convention 2000 was ratified by the UK in 2006 and is a key policy consideration in relation to landscape policy development. The aims of the convention are to *“to promote protection, management and planning of all landscapes, including natural, managed, urban and peri-urban areas, and special, everyday and also degraded landscape”* (Scottish Government, 2009). These aims underpin Scottish Planning Policy’s guidance relating to landscape and natural heritage.
- 3.2 SPP acknowledges that landscapes are changing, and the aim should be to encourage development that can make a positive impact whilst preserving its individual character. It highlights that the sensitivities of different landscapes should determine the level of development they are able to accommodate and states that the siting and design of a proposal should be informed by the local landscape character. SPP adds that *‘areas of wild land character in some of Scotland’s remoter upland, mountain and coastal areas are very sensitive to any form of development or intrusive human activity’*.
- 3.3 SPP also states that *‘International and national designations can be complemented by local designations which protect, enhance and encourage the enjoyment and understanding of locally important landscapes and natural heritage’*. Therefore locally informed landscape designations can be used to protect and maintain the human perception of valued landscapes. The purpose of these designations should be clearly explained and identified within the Local Development Plan.

#### Strategic/regional context

- 3.4 The proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (2013) stipulates that councils should take particular account of landscape - as well as other natural heritage features - in the development plan and when assessing proposals. It highlights that landscapes, and in particular, features within landscapes, may be vulnerable to the impacts of development and there should therefore be a focus on maintaining and improving these features in such cases.

### **4. Drivers of Change**

- 4.1 Policy 12’s key principles are consistent with the aims of national policy to protect and enhance valuable landscapes and to strive for developments that are compatible and appropriate with their surroundings.
- 4.2 The policy has introduced a new procedure with regard to the protection and enhancement of landscape and considering the potential implications of development. The previous Aberdeenshire Plan (2006) identified areas of landscape significance which were deemed important for their physical landforms and environmental assets. These areas were afforded greater protection than other areas and were subject to a more stringent policy. By inference and exclusion it identified landscapes where development would be acceptable if it detracted for the landscape and could be developed with less care for design.
- 4.3 However, Policy 12 and its associated supplementary guidance provides a more overarching approach and takes into account all landscapes and their characteristics throughout Aberdeenshire. It places more emphasis on identifying what is and is not appropriate within each landscape character area to enable development that is compatible in scale and design with its

surroundings. This approach has so far provided a sound basis on which to assess and determine landscape impacts and it is not suggested that any significant changes are required.

- 4.4 Planning advice 12/2012 which supports SGLC1 and is referred to in Policy 12 provides an importance point of reference for identifying the characteristics, sensitivities and features of each landscape and should be considered when assessing a proposal. Policy 12 currently states that 'we will publish planning advice separately', however this should be updated to reflect the current position of the advice.
- 4.5 Policy 12 does not make specific reference to valued views other than referring to the supplementary guidance. It is suggested that the aim of the valued view supplementary guidance could also be outlined in the policy.

## **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1 On the basis of this information, it is recommended that
  - The final paragraph of policy 12 is amended to highlight the planning advice 12/2012 *Landscape character advice for small scale development* has been published and should be referred to.
  - A paragraph is included outlining the purpose and aim of the valued view policy. Local designations do not carry the same material weight to that of a national or international designation; however they are important on a more local scale and consideration of them should be encouraged.

## **6. Summary of Main Points**

- 6.1 Policy 12 *Landscape conservation* aims to promote the protection, enhancement and effective planning of Aberdeenshire's landscapes. It highlights their intrinsic value and the importance of ensuring development does not negatively affect their character and setting. The policy has taken a landscape character framework approach through SG LC1 which identifies the sensitivities and features of each individual landscape character area and details what is consistent and appropriate with the landscapes features. The policy is considered to be compliant with national guidance and should be retained as it currently stands subject to small amendments. It is recommended that the final paragraph should refer to planning advice 12/2012 *Landscape character advice for small scale development* as having been published and must be consulted when assessing landscape impacts. In addition, it is proposed that the policy includes greater reference to valued views including their purpose and aims.

## **References**

Aberdeen city and shire Strategic Development Plan Authority (2013) *Proposed Strategic Development Plan*

Aberdeenshire Council (2006) *Aberdeenshire Local Plan*

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

*European Landscape Convention 2000*

Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish Planning Policy*