

Employment Policies

1 What are the Employment Policies?

The Employment Policies are a set of requirements that help to:

- a) Achieve the Objectives of this Plan.
- b) Deal with the main employment issues affecting Aberdeenshire.
- c) Make decisions on planning applications.

2 What are the main employment issues affecting Aberdeenshire?

- a) The need to provide sufficient marketable land for employment uses.
- b) Encouraging sustainable, economic diversity to prepare for an eventual downturn in oil and gas related employment.
- c) The need to enhance the vitality and viability of our town centres.
- d) The divergence between where people live and where they work.
- e) The continuing decline in agricultural employment.

3 Employment Proposals

The Employment Issues affecting Aberdeenshire are not only dealt with through the following set of policies, but also through a series of proposals. The proposals fall into two categories.

- a) land use allocations shown in Chapter 8 and on the Plan's Main Proposals Maps; and
- b) a set of actions to be undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council during the period of the Plan. These are, in no order of priority:

- To prepare a set of design guidelines for new employment-related buildings.
- To help implement the Council's Economic Development Strategy and any other relevant employment related publications.
- To monitor the employment policies against the criteria listed in Chapter 1 and to alter these where appropriate.
- To work closely with and support other employment related bodies such as Scottish Enterprise (Grampian), the Chambers of Commerce, Local Business Associations etc.
- To prepare, or have developers prepare, development briefs for appropriate employment proposals.
- To promote the marketability, servicing and landscaping of allocated employment land through public and private funding.
- To identify a site of around 20 hectares to the south of Aberdeen for a business park.

Allocated and Existing Employment Land

New employment uses will be approved, in principle, on allocated employment land.

There shall be a presumption in favour of retaining existing sites (greenfield and brownfield) for industry and business use. Development for non-employment uses on employment land will be refused unless:

- a) the non-employment use does not prejudice the strategic employment land requirement; **OR**
- b) there is a constraint on the site whereby there is no reasonable prospect of it ever becoming marketable for employment development; **OR**
- c) it is poorly located for employment purposes and an alternative land use would benefit the surrounding area and community; **AND IN ANY OF THESE CASES**
- d) it respects the character and amenity of the surrounding area, and is landscaped accordingly; **AND**
- e) it is compatible with neighbouring employment uses.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to ensure allocated employment sites, shown on the *settlement* proposals maps, are developed for suitable employment purposes and also to protect these and existing sites from non-employment development. The amount of *employment land* allocated in the Plan is shown in Appendix 11.

In accordance with the *Structure Plan*, the *Local Plan* maintains a *marketable* supply of land for industrial, business, and other employment uses, normally Classes 4, 5 and 6 of the *Use Classes Order*, and other employment uses where appropriate. This is one of the key factors in sustaining a vibrant, effective and sustainable economy for Aberdeenshire. However, some employment uses will not be suitable on any allocated employment land. Attention must therefore be given to ensure that proposed employment uses are compatible with neighbouring land uses.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policies 1, 2 & 31.

Other main documents:

- *NPPG 2* (Business and Industry) – main paragraphs 55 & 56.

Employment Development in the Green Belt

New employment development in the Green Belt will be refused unless:

- a) **it is for a non-residential building related to a primary industry, or which otherwise conforms with Policy Gen\13 (Green Belt); OR**
- b) **it is for new mineral or landfill workings that conform to Policy Env\13 (Mineral Extraction) or Inf\6 (Waste Management Facilities.)**

The expansion or intensification of an existing business in the Green Belt will be approved, in principle, if the use conforms with Policy Gen\13 (Green Belt).

All new employment development located in the Green Belt should be of the highest quality in terms of siting, scale, design and materials to be used. It should be in accordance with the guidance set out in Appendices 1 and 5.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to protect the Aberdeen *Green Belt* from employment development that would be inconsistent with its functions.

The extent and general purpose of the Green Belt is dealt with under Green Belt Policy Gen\13. It is important that its character is protected mainly to prevent coalescence of *settlements*, promote recreation and safeguard and enhance its landscape. New or expanded employment development should therefore be restricted to that which is compatible with the functions of the Green Belt.

New appropriate employment development in the Green Belt must be appropriately sited and designed and be of an appropriate scale for the Green Belt area, in which regard it should build on the principles laid out in Appendices 1 and 5. It should also wherever possible be located where it reduces the need to travel and does not encourage sporadic or dispersed development.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policies 3 & 5 Policy Emp\3.

Other main documents:

- *NPPG 2* (Business and Industry) – main paragraph 56.

Employment Development in the Countryside

New employment development and the conversion of an existing building for employment use in the Countryside will be approved, in principle, if:

- a) the developer demonstrates there is an economic need and that benefits to the community outweigh any adverse environmental impacts of the development;
- b) the development respects the natural and built environment and protects the character and amenity of the surrounding area ensuring there is no significant adverse impact upon the nature conservation, landscape character or amenity value of the countryside;
- c) the proposal is located as close as possible to the existing population in order to provide employment opportunities for people close to their homes and help promote social inclusion;
- d) the proposal takes account of the availability of, and the need for, access and infrastructure;
- e) the proposal has regard to the proximity of existing and potential public transport corridors, where available;
- f) reasonable account has been taken by the developer of the possibility of using disused/derelict buildings or of locating a new building either on brownfield or on allocated employment land;
- g) new development is designed in accordance with the provisions of Appendix I;

- h) where conversion of a traditional building is concerned the developer, when requested, submits a structural survey undertaken by an appropriate professional demonstrating the building is capable of conversion, and that this would not involve extensive demolition and rebuilding; **AND**
- i) where the conversion includes a proposed extension, in the case of traditional vernacular buildings it complies with Appendix 2.

The expansion or intensification of an existing employment use will be approved, in principle, where the use and scale of development are appropriate to the rural character of the area.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to promote the rural economy whilst protecting the environment in the *countryside*.

In many areas of the countryside there continues to be considerable pressure for employment *development*. A broad aim of the *Local Plan* is to strive towards sustainability where development is focused on *settlements*. However, new development also has an important role to play in sustaining the rural economy. Subject to the terms of sub-section a), suitable employment development which has no significant nuisance value is therefore permitted outwith settlements.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 1, 5, 6, 7 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policies 3, 28 & 31.

Other main documents:

- *NPPG 2* (Business and Industry) – main paragraph 56.

- Terms in *italics* are explained in the Glossary.
- In determining planning applications more than one policy can apply.

Home Based Employment

Home based employment will be approved, in principle, if:

- a) it does not cause significant loss of amenity to neighbouring properties;
- b) it does not change the overall character of the property's use as a single dwelling; AND
- c) any extension proposed for home based employment purposes is compatible and in keeping with the existing residential fabric and conforms with Appendix 1 (or in the case of traditional vernacular buildings with Appendix 2).

Justification

The aim of this policy is to encourage small businesses at home, but to maintain control over their impact on the surrounding area.

A recent trend has been the growth of small businesses being carried out from home. This is likely to continue, particularly with advances in communications. As homeworking reduces the need for travel it is a good example of *sustainable development*. It is therefore encouraged, although some control must be exercised to ensure that the operation of these businesses does not have an adverse affect on the surrounding area.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 4, 5, 7 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policy 3.

Other main documents:

- *NPPG 2* (Business and Industry) – main paragraphs 44 & 45.

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Defined Town Centres

Retail and commercial leisure proposals will be approved, in principle, in defined town centres, subject to the criteria in Appendix 9. Other development in defined town centres will be approved, in principle, where it would maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre. Housing development will only be approved when in conjunction with a town centre use, and where it would not prejudice the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to ensure that the vitality and viability of the *defined town centres* of Aberdeenshire's larger settlements are maintained or better still enhanced. These are defined on the settlement proposals maps.

The centres of the larger settlements in Aberdeenshire are very important economic and social focal points, and it is important that both their vitality and viability are maintained and enhanced in order that they continue to provide their important service to both residents and visitors. Although it is important to retain retailing as the main function of a defined town centre, certain sites require to be safeguarded for uses such as commercial leisure and entertainment (including cinemas and theatres), offices, health care, higher education and tourism, as these need to be accessible to a large number of people and can help bring life into a town centre during both day and night.

While the contribution that residents of defined town centres make to the centre's vitality and the value of a well designed building as an addition to the urban fabric is accepted, the loss of an opportunity for a business/commercial use of land would detract from it. A combined development achieves the best of both options.

The *Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership* (ATP) has a special role in promoting both the centre and other areas of the larger settlements of Aberdeenshire. It will therefore be important that any new development complements ATP's strategy and plans.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policy 1.

Other Main Documents:

- *NPPG 8* (Retailing) – main paragraphs 25–32, 35–38.
- *PAN 59* Improving Town Centres.
- *PAN 35* Town Centre Improvements.
- *PAN 52* Planning in Small Towns (*Scottish Executive*).

Retail Development in the Larger Settlements – The Sequential Approach

In larger settlements (i.e. those with a defined town centre on the Proposals Map), retail development proposals outwith the defined town centre will be approved, in principle, if it is demonstrated that:

- a) (i) there are no suitable sites available within the defined town centre; and
 - (ii) there are no suitable sites available on the edge of the defined town centre; and
 - (iii) there are no suitable sites in or adjacent to an established major retail location outwith the town centre; and
- b) the site is or can be made accessible by a choice of means of transport; and
- c) there would be no detrimental impact on the vitality or viability of town centres; and
- d) the proposal accords with Policy GEN\2 'The Layout, Siting and Design of New Development'.

Convenience shops of less than 500 square metres gross retail floorspace, located and designed to serve only a local residential area, are exempt from these requirements.

Justification

This policy only applies to the larger *settlements* in Aberdeenshire, which are those shown with a *defined town centre* in the Proposals Maps. The aim of this policy is to support the provision of modern shopping facilities for the residents of each settlement, consistent with the protection of their defined town centres and the application of the *sequential approach* to proposed retail developments, which is defined in *National Planning Policy Guideline 8: 'Town Centres and Retailing'*

In applying the sequential approach to selecting sites for new *retail development*, preference is given first to town centre sites, followed by edge of centre sites, and then to established major retail locations outwith town centres which are, or can be made, easily and safely accessible by a choice of means of transport including regular, frequent and convenient public transport services. This ensures that opportunities to enhance the retailing role of town centres are not lost, or their role threatened; and that the existing role of other established major retail locations is also recognised, including those which are identified in the settlement proposals maps.

When considering retail development proposals, the impact on the vitality and viability of town centres will be of primary concern. While developments within or adjacent to a defined town centre are expected to enhance its vitality and viability, all other developments will have to demonstrate that they will not have an adverse impact. It may be necessary to use planning conditions or a legal agreement to restrict the range of goods sold in the new development, or to *mitigate* a potential adverse impact.

- Terms in *italics* are explained in the Glossary.
- In determining planning applications more than one policy can apply.

While a formal *Retail Impact Assessment* is required for larger retail developments (over 2,500 square metres gross retail floorspace), smaller proposals should also be accompanied by reasoned statements of the anticipated impact on the town centre. Guidance on the form and content of Retail Impact Assessments is provided in “Retail Impact Assessment, a Guide for Developers.”

This policy conforms to:

- Development Plan - Objectives 1,2,3,4 & 7 (Chapter 2)
- NEST - Policies 15 & 31

Other main documents:

- NPPG - 8 (Retailing), main paragraphs 3 – 7 & 12 – 16.
- Aberdeenshire Council - Supplementary Planning Guidance: Assessing the Impact of Retail Development in Aberdeenshire (2004).
- PAN 59 Improving Town Centres (Scottish Executive).

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Retail Development in the Rural Service Centres

Retailing and related facilities in those smaller settlements without a defined town centre shown on the proposals map in the smaller settlements will be approved, in principle, if:

- a) the principles of the sequential test outlined in policy Emp\6 (Retail Development in the Main Settlements – the Sequential Approach) are satisfied;
- b) the proposal does not exceed 500m² gross floorspace;
- c) reasonable account has been taken by the developer of the possibilities of locating the proposal on brownfield land or in disused buildings;
- d) the site has good access to the public transport network where available or delivers major improvements to public transport services in scale with the development; **AND**
- e) the proposal accords with Policy Gen\2 (The Layout, Siting and Design of New Development).

Convenience shops located and designed to serve only a local residential area are exempt from the sequential test requirement.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of those smaller settlements without a *defined town centre* shown on the proposals map through a *sequential approach* to new retail development and only allow out of town centre retail development in exceptional circumstances. The town centre will be taken to be that area which can be described as such by the juxtaposition of land uses and its central location.

The smaller settlements play a key role in supporting a healthy rural economy. The aim of this policy is to support local facilities which provide an effective and valuable service to the community. In terms of retailing, existing food stores and supermarkets often play a key role in maintaining the quality and range of shopping in rural town centres as well as providing an essential service to both town and hinterland. These centres are preferred locations for both comparison and *convenience* retail development.

Given the potential impact on the variety of shopping in town centres as well as surrounding settlements and village shops, the scope for superstores and other large retail developments is likely to be more limited in the smaller settlements than elsewhere. Therefore, it is appropriate to indicate a maximum store size, which is consistent with maintaining a variety of shops in the centre.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policies 15 & 31.

Other main documents:

- *NPPG 8* (Retailing) – main paragraphs 3 – 7 & 12 – 16.

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Office Development

New office development will be approved, in principle, if:

- a) it respects the character, amenity and scale of the surrounding area;
- b) it is readily accessible by public transport, cycling and on foot, or would deliver major improvements to public transport services in scale with the development where available, in order to reduce the reliance on the private car;
- c) it is located close to where people live and reduces the need to travel;
- d) wherever possible it makes use of derelict, despoiled, unused or underused land and buildings; AND
- e) in the case of offices that fall within Class 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Use Classes Order 1997, the sequential approach set out in Policy Emp\6 has been satisfied.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to encourage office development to locate on sites appropriate to the scale of the proposal. This helps to maintain a diversity of use as well as maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of each settlement and its town centre. Additionally the policy ensures that development proposals should not have a significant impact on the nature conservation, landscape character or amenity value of the area.

Class 2 of the Town & Country Planning (Scotland) Use Classes Order 1997 includes financial, professional and other services such as accountants, banks, estate agents, doctors and dental surgeries and betting shops. The Council may waive the sequential approach requirement for medical facilities where appropriate.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 & 8 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policies 2, 15 & 31.

Other main documents:

- *NPPG 8* (Town Centres & Retailing) main paragraphs 3 – 7 & 12 – 16.

Tourist Facilities and Accommodation

New or improved tourist facilities and accommodation will be approved, in principle, if:

- a) **they respect the character, amenity and scale of development in the surrounding area;**
- b) **they are reasonably accessible by public transport where available, cycling and on foot, or would deliver major improvements to public transport services in scale with the development;**
- c) **they are well related to existing settlements and avoid dispersed patterns of development, unless the developer has demonstrated a locational requirement based on the need to be near to the specific tourist interest being exploited, and that the facility will not damage those interests; AND**
- d) **in the case of those facilities falling within Class 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Use Classes Order 1997, the sequential approach is followed, as set out in Policy Emp\6.**

Justification

The aim of this policy is to promote tourism in locations where it would not damage one of the main resources on which it is based i.e. the environment. The policy therefore ensures that *development* proposals do not have a significant impact upon the nature conservation, landscape character or *amenity* value of the area.

As long as it is not overdeveloped, tourism is essentially a sustainable industry and is of considerable potential value to Aberdeenshire. As such it should be promoted. For this reason facilities for *participation sports* and other recreational activities requiring unimpeded access to remote open country will normally be accepted on appropriate sites in the *countryside*. However tourism must not destroy those very qualities that bring tourists to the area in the first place. *Tourist* related development must therefore be carefully located, sited and designed to provide high quality facilities which fit successfully into the environment. Retail outlets in particular will only be accepted where they are clearly ancillary to a tourism activity, and any significant retailing operation will be assessed against Policies Emp\6 and Emp\7.

Tourism development and facilities can generate large amounts of traffic, mainly in the form of cars. It is, therefore, important that they are located in areas and locations which are accessible by public transport and other modes such as cycling and walking.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 9 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policy 6.

Other main documents:

- NPPG 8 (Retailing) paragraphs 3 – 7.
- NPPG 15 (Rural Development) – main paragraphs 44 – 46.
- NPPG 2 (Business and Industry) – main paragraphs 24 – 26.

Sport, Leisure and Recreation

New or improved sport and recreation facilities will be approved, in principle, if:

- a) **it can be demonstrated that the sequential approach set out in Policy Emp\6 has been followed in regard to professional spectator sports;**
- b) **they respect the character and amenity of the surrounding area;**
- c) **they are readily accessible by public transport where available, cycling and on foot or would deliver major improvements to public transport services in scale with the development in order to reduce reliance on the private car;**
- d) **they are located close to where people live and reduce the need to travel; AND**
- e) **in the case of a location within the Green Belt, the proposal is shown to be consistent with the purposes and nature of the Green Belt and is of high quality in terms of siting, scale, design and use of materials.**

Participation sports and recreational activities requiring unimpeded access to remote open country are exempt from the requirements of clauses a), c) and d).

Justification

The aim of this policy is to promote sport and recreation wherever appropriate and prevent the loss of any such facilities that are important to the local communities.

Sport and recreational facilities are essential to the quality of life, health and well being of both local communities and visitors to

Aberdeenshire. They also play an important role in the local economy of the area. However, new facilities particularly those related to *countryside* and open-air activities must also complement or be compatible with landscape *character* and have the minimum possible impact on the landscape.

The *sequential approach* set out in NPPG 8 – Town Centres and Retailing, also applies to new sport, leisure and recreation facilities, in particular commercial leisure developments such as multi-screen cinemas or bowling alleys. Therefore, proposals must demonstrate that they meet the requirements of the *approach*. However, not all types of sport, leisure and recreation development can fit the *sequential approach* e.g. golf courses, are more suitably accommodated on the urban fringe.

Accessibility by public transport is a key factor in locating new sport, leisure and recreation development. Proposals should be located, wherever possible, where they can be easily accessed by public and other modes of transport at all times of the day, and close to where people live in order to cut down on travel time and costs. As such they should be supported and retained where possible. To help assess development proposals the views of *Sportscotland* may be sought.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policies 15, 16 & 31.

Other main documents:

- NPPG 8 (Town Centres and Retailing) – main paragraphs 12 –16.
- NPPG 11 (Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space) – main paragraph 30.
- NPPG 15 (Rural Development) – main paragraphs 44 – 46.
- NPPG 2 (Business and Industry) – main paragraphs 24 – 26.

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• In determining planning applications more than one policy can apply.

Major Oil and Gas Sites

Oil and gas related development within St. Fergus Gas Terminal or on land allocated for related development will be approved, in principle.

Non oil and gas related development in or adjacent to these two sites will be approved, in principle, if it is ancillary to their operation.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to safeguard the major oil and gas sites at St Fergus North and North Collielaw for oil and gas related *development*. Their site boundaries are shown in the Buchan section of Chapter 8, although they do not strictly meet the definition of a *rural service centre*.

Both St Fergus North and North Collielaw have been identified in *National Planning Policy Guidance* as requiring to be safeguarded for large petrochemical development. Such safeguarding gives protection of these areas from development that could impact negatively on their current and potential operations. This is in both the local and national interest given the important role of these sites.

This policy conforms to:

- *Development Plan* – Objectives 5, 7 & 10 (Chapter 2).
- *NEST* – Policy 2b(iii).

Other main documents:

- *NPPG 2* (Business and Industry) – main paragraphs 75, 77 & 79.

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