

1 Introduction

The proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2010 (the Local Development Plan) sets out the ground rules for the development of land under the land use planning acts. Its main purpose is to set out statements of the policies we will use for assessing planning applications. In its proposals it also confirms the principle of development on sites across Aberdeenshire.

The area covered by the main issues report will be the whole of Aberdeenshire, but not the part within the Cairngorms National Park. The Cairngorms National Park Authority will be preparing their own local development plan. The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan will apply from the date the council accept it (probably autumn 2011) until 2023. It will provide firm guidance for the period up to 2016, by which time we will have reviewed it.

This Local Development Plan is consistent with the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan. The structure plan provides a strategic context for the Local Development Plan.

The structure plan sets an ambitious framework and a clear vision for the future development of the North East over the next 20 years. We recognise that all parts of the City and Shire are important in delivering the plan's vision. We build on the different areas of the region, recognising the characteristics and opportunities of each. We also identify areas for growth, where we expect most of the development to take place. We can also identify 'regeneration areas' where we and our partners will develop a strategy to encourage economic growth and tackle disadvantage.

This development plan has also taken account of a number of other important documents which relate to Aberdeenshire. Many of the choices and options we have decided to take forward have been guided by the need to be consistent with, and help deliver, these other strategies. We have written the plan against the background of strategic documents and statements, like the Council's vision statement, the Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2006-2010, and the Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future Action Plan, 'Building on Energy'. It also helps us to put into practice other strategies, such as the Regional Transport Strategy and North East Scotland River Basin Management Plan, and those we have produced such as the Local Housing Strategy and the Local Transport Strategy, which we can treat as sister documents to the Local Development Plan. Finally it has been informed by topic-based studies such as the Aberdeen City and Shire Housing Need and Demand Assessment.

We have carried out a great deal of research and consultation with communities, agencies (such as Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland) and the development industry over a period of two years. The Main Issues Report (published in May 2009) presented the conclusions we came to from this work. It also set out options for the Local Development Plan itself for public debate. While site-specific issues took the main priority in that document, based on the ambitions of the development industry, it also identified and discussed eight policy areas where people thought we should make large-scale changes.

We then carried out a great deal of consultation on the Main Issues Report. The response to this, alongside assessments of the possible effects on the environment and how we can deliver on the proposals, has resulted in this plan.

2 The format of the plan

The Local Development Plan follows the principle that development plans should be concise, map-based documents. We have given details of our policy and site proposals in a shorter, more concise way as encouraged by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. We have also taken advantage of the greater weight that can be placed on supplementary guidance.

We present 14 policies supported (at the time of publishing) by 51 pieces of supplementary guidance. The need for further supplementary guidance is also noted in the policies, particularly in relation to masterplans for specific sites and design guidance for specific areas. In this way we have put a lot of the detailed material in the supplementary guidance. This allows the plan to focus on the distribution of development between settlements, the spatial strategy, and the main policies and proposals.

The Local Development Plan also contains six proposals maps that show the plan's policies and proposals locations in a way that lets you see where the policies apply and the proposals are going to take place. The proposals maps also show the extent of area-wide designations, such as greenbelt. However, the size of Aberdeenshire and the number of proposals being considered mean that it would be very difficult to create a concise document while showing specific site boundaries. Because of this, we cross-reference the policies and proposals in the plan to settlements published as supplementary guidance which show the effect of specific policies and proposals at a local scale.

We have also included five schedules in the Local Development Plan.

- 1 A schedule of land we have allocated for housing, showing the size of the allocations made, and how we have achieved consistency with the housing land allowances contained in the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan.
- 2 A schedule of land allocated for employment use showing the size of the allocations made and how it is consistent with the structure plan economic growth targets.
- 3 A schedule of items, including their location, for which the developers will need to make significant investment. The "settlement statements", published separately as supplementary guidance, also refer to items which may relate only to one site.
- 4 A schedule identifying those areas where we will aim to provide an amount of affordable housing greater or less than the benchmark figure of 25%.
- 5 A schedule of land in the ownership of Aberdeenshire Council which is affected by policies and proposals for development in the local development plan.

3 The vision and aims for the plan

We have developed the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan's strategy to make the area an attractive place to live, visit and do business in. It recognises the need for fundamental change in order to meet the plan's vision. The structure plan aims to promote economic growth while leading the way in tackling the urgent challenges of sustainable development and climate change. It identifies local development plans as one of the major ways of achieving these aims, and highlights a number of areas where we need to take action.

Aberdeenshire is mainly a rural area with an enviable landscape, covering the north-east of Scotland, from mountain to sea. How we manage development will be in line with the principles of sustainable development, looking at the social, economic and environmental effects. Sustainable development is an essential part of the policies that we will take forward. We must balance the need to protect and improve the quality of life for the local community, protect natural resources and promote economic activity with the need to reduce greenhouse gases.

Sustainability is in every policy and proposal in the plan. As a result, the plan aims to take precautions to reduce carbon emissions and promotes measures needed to adapt to a world where climate change is taking place.

We have adopted the vision and aims of the structure plan for the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan in the following way.

a Grow and diversify the economy

We identify a range of sites within the strategic growth areas which offer a choice of size, location, and environmental and other facilities. The range also allows flexibility to cope with uncertainty in the market. Outwith these areas, we promote the idea of providing employment land in proportion to the scale of housing proposals. We have introduced policies to encourage employment development in rural areas and regeneration areas, and to stimulate wider economic growth, if we can identify a need, or in response to demand.

b To take on the challenges of sustainable development and climate change

We have introduced policies to:

- reduce greenhouse gases from development in the area;
- protect and improve natural, built and cultural heritage; and
- avoid risks associated with flooding and other major risks.

These policies recognise the need to balance protection of the environment with the development of communities.

c To make sure the area has enough development land to provide for people, homes and jobs to support services and facilities

We have made proposals in a choice of areas for a viable supply of land which we can develop. These proposals relate to each area's ability to provide that land, without losing identity or amenity, or creating an unacceptable effect on people's quality of life. The policies mean that supplies of both housing and employment land will be maintained at all times.

d To protect and improve assets and resources

Our policies say that all development must give an appropriate level of protection to internationally, nationally and locally designated sites of built heritage, archaeological and environmental importance. They must also use any opportunities to improve the natural and built environment as a whole.

e To promote sustainable mixed communities with the highest standards of design

We need to achieve excellence in design across all developments in Aberdeenshire with a design process that makes sure planning takes place early and over the long term. We must consider the balance of mix of uses, type of house, affordability and the types of tenancy.

f To make efficient use of the transport network

Proposals promote development that helps us develop a long-term framework for the transport and communications network while recognising the role that cars have in rural areas.

4 The spatial strategy

The structure plan identifies three clear types of area for planning purposes.

- Strategic growth areas are the areas where development will be mainly focused. They include Aberdeen City and the major transport routes between the city and Huntly, Laurencekirk and Peterhead. The structure plan expects over 75% of all growth to take place in these areas.
- Outwith the strategic growth areas the “local growth and diversification areas” are mainly rural areas with growth in communities to meet local needs.
- As well as both strategic and local growth, we promote regeneration areas where improving the economy, environmental quality, accessibility, employment opportunities and competitiveness in business have a particular role.

Within the strategic growth areas, our policies and proposals concentrate development on certain locations and on a scale that will allow us to provide major improvements to roads, schools, sewers and other infrastructure. Land identified for allocations in other places reflects the need to maintain or provide for community needs. Our policies limit development opportunities in rural areas, particularly within the Aberdeen City greenbelt.

Within the strategic growth areas, the main development opportunities include:

- developing a major extension to Ellon at Cromleybank and other business land;
- a major extension to Peterhead;
- a major extension to the community of Blackdog (after 2016);
- the development of a major extension to Inverurie at Crichie and by creating an employment hub at Thainstone;
- a major expansion of Huntly;
- the first phase of a major mixed-use extension to Kintore (after 2016);
- the first phases of a new settlement at Elsick;
- significant development in Stonehaven; and
- a major extension of Laurencekirk.

In the local growth and diversification areas, policy and proposals concentrate development on certain settlements, on a scale that will allow us to provide important infrastructure, and that is appropriate to the size of the community. We have made land allocations in areas where there is a specific need identified, mainly to provide opportunities to increase the numbers going to primary schools where these are dropping. We encourage rural development through a very wide range of measures, particularly in the rural housing market area, as defined on the proposals maps. In comparison, we limit rural development opportunities in the Aberdeen housing market area, particularly within the greenbelt (both defined on the proposals map).

The main development opportunities which respond to local needs and regeneration include:

- a major mixed use extension of Banff;
- a major expansion of Fraserburgh;
- the expansion of Inverbervie;
- the expansion of Mintlaw;

- the expansion of Newmachar; and
- the expansion of Turriff.

We are also proposing significant development for Aberchirder, Aboyne, Banchory, Crimond, Cruden Bay, Cuminestown, Edzell Woods, Foveran, Kemnay (after 2016), Longside, Luthermuir, Maud, Newburgh, New Byth, Portsoy, St Cyrus, St Katherines, Stuartfield, Tarves, Torphins and Westhill. All land allocations in the rural housing market area cover both plan periods.

Within the economic regeneration area, defined on the proposals map, we have used a less strict approach to business development, including using “enabling” development, for example the building of houses in order to finance business proposals.

Within the coastal zone, as defined on the proposals map, we have used a more restrictive approach to development, if it does not need to be based on the coast.

5 The policies

The policies help us deal with the main land-use problems and issues affecting Aberdeenshire. They form the basis for making decisions on planning applications in a way that will deliver our aims. Unless we say otherwise, all criteria used in each policy will apply. More than one policy is likely to apply in any particular case.

The policies refer to supplementary guidance, which we have published separately. You should read this alongside the local development plan. It contains detailed guidance on dealing with the specifics of any application made to us.

We may produce other supplementary guidance to support the local development plan. We will only do this if we have identified within the policy that there is the opportunity to do this. If we do create other guidance which has not been allowed for in the local development plan, it will not have a statutory basis.

Policy 1 Business development

Developing business is very important to the economic health of the region. This policy promotes an approach that means that Aberdeenshire is 'open for business'. Without business growth it is unlikely that the population targets set by the structure plan would be met.

For this reason we have to be careful when looking at planning applications to be positive about proposals for economic development. We also need to provide specific support for particular parts of Aberdeenshire, principally the regeneration areas identified by the structure plan, where promoting economic development is even more important; and for the 'Energetica' corridor, where the aim is to promote development of a world-class standard.

Aberdeenshire Council will support the development of business and sustainable economic growth in all areas by taking account of the economic benefits of proposed development when we make decisions in development management. We will also make sure we meet the many different needs and locational requirements of the different sectors and sizes of business by applying the following supplementary planning guidance.

SGbus1: Development of employment land

SGbus2: Office development

SGbus3: Working from home

SGbus4: Tourist facilities and accommodation

We will give particular priority to business development within the regeneration areas and the area covered by the 'Energetica' framework. We may also bring forward further supplementary guidance in partnership with the development industry to promote 'simplified planning zone' status or design guidance for specific sites.

Policy 2 Town centres and retailing

Controlling the location of shops can contribute to the objectives of the structure plan to create sustainable mixed communities and to reduce the need to travel. It reinforces the settlement strategy of the plan.

We also recognise the important role that existing centres have in providing accessible services to both residents and visitors. We want to make best use of this by producing supplementary guidance that promotes a sequential process when choosing sites for development. If a developer proposes a use that is appropriate for a town centre but on a site outwith such an area, we will

need to consider an assessment of the likely effect on the town centre. The assessment will focus on the impact on the town centre and the loss of opportunity to it.

Aberdeenshire is largely a rural area, and there is opportunity to broaden the economy of rural Aberdeenshire by promoting retail developments in the countryside that will not have a significant effect on existing retail centres. Our support for proposals for “destination shops” that are themselves visitor attractions, including farm shops, has an important role to play in sustaining the rural economy of Aberdeenshire.

Aberdeenshire Council will support retail and commercial proposals appropriate to the scale and function of urban areas. This support will apply particularly to retail and commercial proposals in town centres and shops designed to serve a local neighbourhood. Where proposals are made outwith town centres, it will be necessary to demonstrate that a sequential approach to site selection has been followed and that the vitality and viability of town centres will be maintained.

Aberdeenshire Council will also support shops which will act as a new or support an existing tourist destination, and which will make a contribution to the development of the area without affecting the vitality or viability of any town centre in a negative way.

The way we will do this is published separately in the following supplementary guidance.

SGRetail 1: Town centres and retailing

SGRetail 2: Retail development in the countryside

Policy 3 Development in the countryside

We want to create a welcoming approach to development in the countryside. We want to meet needs, while at the same time recognising the effect that rural living can have on the need to travel and on issues of climate change and sustainable development. We will limit development, if the effects will be too negative and there will be too few community benefits. At the same time, we will support development in areas where it will reduce the need to travel and promote sustainable communities.

One policy covering the whole area is not appropriate. In more remote rural areas (including areas identified as regeneration priority areas) the greatest need is to promote economic rural development. In accessible areas, close to Aberdeen and around Aberdeenshire’s major towns, there is a greater need to protect the environment from one-off developments and from the effects of commuting which we cannot maintain on a long-term basis.

We will also use this policy to meet the needs of business proposals that, by their very nature, will need a rural location, such as minerals development, landfill development, wind energy and other renewable energy facilities.

Aberdeenshire Council will support development in the countryside where it meets the needs of a rural community by contributing to its overall social and economic wellbeing, and by promoting vigorous and prosperous rural settlements.

We will balance this with the need to promote a sustainable settlement pattern and to protect our rural environment from the impact of longer distance travel to use services, especially commuting.

As a result, we will manage development in a way that recognises the special character of different types of rural area. We will exercise greater control of development in those areas

that are easily accessible to Aberdeen and our major towns. We will promote small-scale development, especially business development, in the less accessible areas. In doing so, we will support a wide range of economic development that helps to improve the rural economy.

We will publish the way we do this separately in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Rural Development 1: Housing and business development in the countryside

SG Rural Development 2: Wind farms and large wind turbines

SG Rural Development 3: Other renewable energy developments

SG Rural Development 4: Minerals

Policy 4 Special types of rural land

It is not always appropriate to have a policy that applies evenly across the whole area. Many policies within the plan are based on the intrinsic value of an area. We value conservation areas for their built heritage, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest for their nature conservation value. However, we cannot define some areas in such a precise way and their boundaries are more a matter of judgement.

Examples of these boundaries include the definition of the boundary between the Aberdeen and rural housing market areas, the definition of regeneration areas, the boundary of the greenbelt, and the coastal zone. In some cases we use the boundaries to allow for policies that can respond to local circumstances. However, for the greenbelt and coastal zone we also need specific policy guidance as to what is, or is not, to be encouraged.

Aberdeenshire Council will protect the special character of the greenbelt and the coastal zone. In these areas we will have special controls on development. These include a presumption against development that would erode the special nature of these different areas.

The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG STRLtype1: Development in the coastal zone

SG STRLtype2: Greenbelt

The special types of rural land are shown on the proposals maps.

Policy 5 Housing land supply

Schedule 1 of the Structure Plan identifies the scale of land we need to meet the housing requirement. This requirement is the target set by the structure plan to accommodate population growth. The “allowances” in Schedule 1 include a certain headroom for sites that ultimately fail to be delivered, and also allow for better economic performance than the forecasts predict.

This plan tries to maintain a seven-year supply of housing land. This will give us enough freedom to identify and release extra land before we become unable to meet the requirement for a five-year supply of housing land, which is contained in Scottish Planning Policy.

Aberdeenshire Council will support the development of housing in line with the spatial strategy of the structure plan and as set out in part 4” The spatial strategy” of this

document. At all times we will maintain a five-year supply of land for housing that is effective, or can be shown through the action programme to be capable of becoming effective.

If a seven-year supply cannot be maintained, we will draw down extra land from future allocations (2017 to 2023), to ensure we can maintain a five-year effective housing land supply and to deliver the spatial strategy.

We publish the way we will do this separately in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Housing 1: Housing land allocations 2007 to 2016

SG Housing 2: Housing land allocations 2017 to 2023 and early draw down

In order to assist the long-term masterplanning of areas for development beyond 2023, we may bring forward site-specific supplementary guidance for periods beyond 2023.

We have allocated land to cope with the housing allowance for the periods 2007 to 2016 and 2017 to 2023. These recognise that by 2017 we will have developed a replacement local development plan. However, the allocations already identified for 2017 to 2023 will allow us to release land both to compensate for any sites we cannot deliver in the first period and to maintain the effective supply of land, if this becomes necessary. We will use supplementary guidance and planning advice to show how we will achieve this, by using a mechanism to trigger land release that compares the effective supply with the outstanding housing land requirement. We expect that we will release these sites after a local review, and we will protect them from other forms of development in the meantime.

Not all of the housing allowances are contained within settlements. Due to the unpredictable nature of housing development in rural areas, we have not included 25% of the sites required by the Structure Plan for housing in the local growth and diversification areas. We expect to deliver these through the development in the countryside policy.

Some development areas may need the long-term comfort of allocated land beyond 2023. This is especially true if there is a need to carry out costly infrastructure work, such as creating roads and so on, to allow any development at all to happen. The scale of investment needed may require that the developer knows that investments made now in infrastructure will allow development on the site beyond 2023. In this small number of cases, we may use supplementary guidance to promote sites for development beyond 2023.

Policy 6 Affordable housing

Providing affordable housing is an important consideration in the planning system. Government policy and advice confirm that the development plan is an appropriate way in which we may provide affordable housing in areas where there is a demonstrable need. A Housing Need and Demands Assessment has clearly established that there is a need for affordable housing in Aberdeenshire. While we will not meet all of this need using the planning system, it is appropriate that the development industry should make a contribution to providing affordable housing.

Aberdeenshire Council will support development that helps to meet the needs of the whole community. We will do this by providing levels and types of affordable housing that are appropriate to the area, as justified and addressed in the current Housing Need and Demand Assessment, the Local Housing Strategy and our Affordable Housing Strategic Outcome Statement. To help us meet the need for affordable housing in Aberdeenshire, new housing development must contain at least 25% affordable houses, unless we say otherwise in schedule 4 or the settlement statements. The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Affordable Housing1: Affordable housing

We will take a flexible approach to deliver the numbers and types of housing to those in the greatest housing need over the course of the plan. Affordable housing can be provided by developers in a variety of ways, including providing housing without public subsidy. To keep to the other aims of the plan, including delivering sustainable mixed communities, it is important that we provide a range of house types to suit the differing needs of each community, wherever possible, on each housing site.

Policy 7 Other special housing needs

There are cases where general housing policy does not tackle the need for specific types of housing. We must have specific policies which deal with development for particular needs, residential caravans, and Gypsy / Traveller sites. This will help make sure that we provide for special-needs housing adequately.

We will make sure a range of housing types is provided to meet the housing needs of the entire community. We will continue to support this provision within existing communities or as integral parts of new communities. In this way we will promote successful mixed communities and make sure existing and future services are used efficiently and effectively. However, if this is not suitable or it will have a significant effect on existing communities, we will take a flexible approach. If housing for special needs is not necessary or is inappropriate, we will not support it.

Aberdeenshire Council will support special-needs housing in settlements, which takes account of the different needs for this kind of housing, respects the character and amenity of the surrounding area, and, where appropriate, is accessible to community facilities and services. The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG SHN1: Development for particular needs

SG SHN2: Residential caravans

SG SHN3: Gypsy and traveller sites

We have considered the need for houses in multiple occupation (houses where different households share basic facilities such as kitchens or bathrooms, e.g. student residences, often referred to as HMOs) as part of the housing requirement for the area. There is a relatively low level of need for this kind of housing, as we have seen in the Housing Need and Demand Assessment. There have been limited instances when we have received this kind of planning application for HMO development over the course of the previous development plan. As a result, we feel that the housing policy and other relevant policies in the plan will be able to deal effectively with these applications.

Policy 8 Layout, siting and design of new development

For some time there has been widespread concern at national and local level that the general quality of design in new development is mostly poor. In view of that concern, we set up the Aberdeenshire Design Forum, made up of both the public and private sectors who give advice on how to improve the situation. A major part of the advice we received involves recognising that good design needs an overall approach, from the choice of site to its layout and detailed design, and covering the whole range of factors that contribute. For example, in the case of a house, design is not just about what the building looks like, but also about the way the building works, how long it will last and how it relates to its surroundings. It is not about copying the past, but promoting appropriate design, whether that be new or traditional.

There are no simple answers to these questions. In fact, the search for a simple answer in the past has led to specific design guidance that has arguably been more restrictive than helpful. What we now need is a complete and effective process, from which high-quality design can begin to emerge. This is part of a broad approach, which includes:

- recognising all the factors that influence design;
- creating a process by which we can take account of all the relevant issues in the emerging design at the appropriate stage;
- developing a method through which we can include the interests of those who have a major stake in the process (including the developers themselves and the local community); and
- a standardised process of assessment.

This in turn will involve using development frameworks, masterplans, design statements, design codes and so on, methods of design assessment, and public involvement when developing the designs.

Aberdeenshire Council will support new development on sites we have allocated within this plan, where they conform with a previously agreed development framework, masterplan and/or development brief (whichever is appropriate) for the site. We will assess all development, whether on sites we have allocated or elsewhere, using a process that includes appropriate public consultation and appropriate standards for design, open space, accessibility, safety, sustainability, and the provision of associated services.

The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG LSD1: Masterplanning

SG LSD2: Layout, siting and design of new development

SG LSD3: House extensions

SG LSD4: Infill development

SG LSD5: Public open space

SG LSD6: Public access

SG LSD7: Community facilities

SG LSD8: Flooding and erosion

SG LSD9: Hazardous development

SG LSD10: Contaminated land

SG LSD11: Carbon neutrality in new development

All new developments are required to produce ever-lower proportions of greenhouse gases as a result of their use. We will assess this on the basis of the installation and operation of zero-carbon generating and other low carbon technologies in the approved design for the specific development.

In furtherance of SG LSD1, we may produce additional supplementary guidance for specific sites, to provide a statutory basis for putting the masterplans into practice. We may also use section 75 agreements and bonds to secure the results of applying this policy on a continuing basis.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act (2009) introduces a requirement for the plan to include policies which say that all developments in the local development plan area must contribute to reducing greenhouse gases. While we can largely deal with this issue using SG LSD 11, the statement in the policy ensures compliance with the legislation.

For parks, allotments, playing fields and other types of open space, we expect we will need at least 40% of each site area for the variety of roles that open space is used for.

Policy 9 Developer contributions

Developer contributions can help to overcome obstacles in granting planning permission. They do this by helping to reduce, get rid of or compensate for any negative effects. This may apply to any type of development. We will ask for developer contributions for:

- the timely provision of on-site facilities to serve the reasonable expectations of the people who will be living in or using the buildings; and
- providing or improving off-site facilities, if the existing facilities will be placed under extra pressure that results in additional requirements or has a negative impact on what is there.

Aberdeenshire Council will support development, if the developer makes a fair and reasonable contribution towards public services, facilities and infrastructure and the mitigation of negative effects on the environment, that would not have been necessary but for the development.

The Council will ask for contributions for both local and regional items from developers. We will also give details of the circumstances in which we will ask for these contributions, including the locations and the types of development from which we will seek them, in Schedule 3 and the settlement statements.

The way we will do this is published separately in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Developer Contributions 1: Developer contributions

SG Developer Contributions 2: Access to new development

SG Developer Contributions 3: Water and waste water drainage infrastructure

SG Developer Contributions 4: Waste management requirements for new development

The developer contributions identified may be delivered under the terms of an Act other than that relating directly to planning or governed by the terms of Circular 1/2010. In Schedule 3 of the plan we show the main elements of infrastructure for which we will require a contribution.

Policy 10: Enabling development

"Enabling" development allows us to use the value generated by the grant of planning permission for the good of the community. In all areas, keeping a listed building that would otherwise remain at risk sometimes justifies allowing other development to take place, if profits from this are used to fund restoration. In other areas the need to create jobs, leisure facilities and increase tourism can also justify granting permission for development that would not otherwise be allowed.

Aberdeenshire Council will support enabling development proposals, subject to other policies, on sites which have not specifically been identified for development in the plan's settlement maps in the following circumstances:

1. where it is the only way of retaining a listed building; or
2. where it is the only means of enabling the start-up of an employment, leisure or tourism activity within a regeneration priority area or, in exceptional cases, within a rural area (as defined in the proposals maps).

In all cases, we will only approve this kind of enabling mechanism if the public benefit from its use decisively outweighs the disadvantages of breaking the normal policy presumptions of the plan.

The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Enabling Development 1: Enabling development

We have to be very careful to make sure that this kind of development is at a scale which is appropriate to the community benefits anticipated. Within these limits the maximum possible financial benefit must be gained for the built heritage or economic development proposal, which is the main basis for planning permission being granted. For this purpose we will place emphasis on the increase in site value generated by granting planning permission which would not otherwise be available, and will also look at any development profit that might arise from building and selling these and any related buildings.

Policy 11 Natural heritage

The aim of this policy is to provide for, improve and protect Aberdeenshire's natural environment. The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan identifies the natural environment as a valuable resource, and recognises that it can be vulnerable to the effects of new development. Development should improve the natural environment. It should not lead to the loss of, or damage to, nature conservation sites or the natural environment.

The UK has signed up to a commitment to stop the reduction of biodiversity by 2012. As a result, stopping this loss is a central aim of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. We continue to be concerned about the loss of, or damage to, habitats due to construction, quarrying and environmental engineering for flood control. Research continues into the effects of land use planning on rates of decline of species and habitats, and planning decisions have to take this uncertainty into account.

Aberdeenshire Council will improve and protect designated nature conservation sites and the wider biodiversity and geodiversity of the area. Where there is uncertainty over the impacts of a proposed development, we will adopt an approach based on the precautionary principle. We will also consider cumulative impacts of development on the natural environment and will only accept harm to the environment where there is an overriding public interest.

The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Natural Environment 1: Protection of nature conservation sites

SG Natural Environment 2: Protection of the wider biodiversity and geodiversity

Policy 12 Landscape conservation

The aim of the policy is to promote protection, management and planning of the landscape, so we can maintain and improve the overall quality of the landscape. This will include improving local and regional identity.

The Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessments provide a structured approach to identifying landscapes that we can use to help us in our approach.

Aberdeenshire Council will plan for and promote the improvement and protection of all landscapes in Aberdeenshire by recognising and using landscape character areas. All the landscapes of Aberdeenshire are valuable assets and vulnerable resources, which are facing various pressures of change. We will use the Landscape Character Area framework as a basis for our future planning and management policy. We will also take into consideration particular opportunities, sensitivities and vulnerabilities of different landscapes, and make sure that the implications of development on these are managed in an appropriate and sensitive way.

The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Landscape 1: Landscape character

SG Landscape 2: Valued views

We will publish planning advice separately, to identify the relative landscape value, sensitivity and capacity for change of each of these landscape character areas. It will also set out aims for each landscape character area in terms of the quality we want to achieve.

Policy 13 Protecting, improving and conserving the historic environment

Protecting and improving the historic environment contributes to many of the Scottish Government's 15 national outcomes. Local history helps create a clear identity for the area and strengthens connections between people and places. It promotes a positive image of Scotland across the world. It can also help to improve communities and provide educational, training and employment opportunities. Because of this, Scottish ministers place great weight on protecting our history through the planning system.

We support this view and recognise the importance of the historic environment to the character of the area and to the quality of life of the people who live here. We want to maintain and strengthen our commitment to protecting the historic environment, both by putting into practice a historic environment strategy and in the way we manage development.

Aberdeenshire Council supports the protection, improvement and conservation of the historic environment. There will be a presumption against development that would have a negative effect on the quality of these historic assets. Different parts of the historic environment require to be subject to specific guidance and controls to make sure that we maintain and improve their value.

The way we will do this is published separately in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Historic Environment 1: Listed buildings

SG Historic Environment 2: Conservation areas

SG Historic Environment 3: Historic gardens and designed landscapes

SG Historic Environment 4: Archaeological sites and monuments

Policy 14 Safeguarding of resources and areas of search

Conserving natural resources is a major factor in sustainable development. This policy makes sure that we do not lose opportunities for future generations. At the same time we are promoting sustainable economic development by making sure that we keep hold of major sites which are needed for specific uses, and that we do not lose them to other types of development. Finally, the policy will help the development industry to identify the most appropriate areas for what are large and intrusive developments. This will also give local communities elsewhere a certain amount of reassurance that they will not be living next to these developments.

Aberdeenshire Council will not support developments that sterilise, degrade or otherwise make unavailable key strategic resources, including the water environment, important mineral deposits, prime agricultural land, trees and woodlands. Other key strategic resources include sites that may reasonably be required in the future for the delivery of transportation improvements, waste facilities or energy generation.

We have identified areas of search to help the development industry to locate major waste, minerals and energy-generating facilities in appropriate places, taking account of opportunities, constraints and the settlement strategy of the plan.

The way we will do this is set out in the following supplementary guidance.

SG Safeguarding 1: Protection and conservation of the water environment

SG Safeguarding 2: Protection and conservation of agricultural land

SG Safeguarding 3: Protection and conservation of trees and woodland

SG Safeguarding 4: Safeguarding transportation facilities

SG Safeguarding 5: Safeguarding employment land

SG Safeguarding 6: Safeguarding oil and gas sites

SG Safeguarding 7: Areas of search for minerals

SG Safeguarding 8: Areas of search for waste facilities

6 The proposals maps

We have provided six large-scale maps that show the areas which are affected by our policies. These maps show the location of land that may come forward for new development. It indicates the general location of:

- land set aside for housing and business use for the immediate period;
- land set aside for housing for the second period but which can be used earlier for housing if circumstances require;
- future housing land that has not been confirmed at this time (where we are waiting for the results of feasibility studies);
- strategic reserves of business land.

In addition it shows the extent and boundaries of:

- the economic regeneration area;
- the Aberdeen housing market area (for the purposes of the rural development policy);
- the rural housing market area (for the purposes of the rural development policy);
- greenbelt land;
- the coastal zone;
- historic gardens and designed landscapes; and
- areas of search and safeguarded areas for minerals.

The proposals map does not show the boundaries of these areas in great detail. "Settlement statements" have been produced as supplementary guidance which indicate the exact boundaries of proposals in and around villages. Likewise, detailed maps are included in the supplementary guidance that supports policies 4 "Special types of rural land", 13 "Protection, enhancement and conservation of the built environment" and 14 "safeguarding of resources and areas of search", and the boundaries of the greenbelt, historic gardens, the coastal zone, and areas safeguarded for potential mineral extraction.

In addition to new allocations the settlement statements also provide information on the detailed boundaries of:

- conservation areas;
- town centres and other shopping centres;
- land protected for development for amenity, cultural or landscape reasons; and
- land protected for its current business use.