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1. Introduction

Aberdeenshire Council is required to produce a *Local Development Plan* to inform the development of land governed by the Land Use Planning Acts. The process of preparing a Local Development Plan has a number of steps within it, and can take a number of years to develop and agree. This document, the Main Issues Report, is expected to be the main focus of engagement and consultation on the Plan.

The Local Development Plan will contain statements of Aberdeenshire Council's policy for assessing planning applications submitted to it, and proposals, in the form of allocations of land, for uses within different parts of Aberdeenshire. The area covered by the Main Issues Report will be the whole of Aberdeenshire, excluding that part within the Cairngorms National Park. The Cairngorms National Park Authority will be preparing their own Local Development Plan in due course. The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan will have an effective date from the date of its adoption (anticipated early 2011) until 2023. It will provide firm guidance for the period up to 2016, when it will be reviewed.

The Local Development Plan is required to be consistent with the aims and objectives of the *Strategic Development Plan*. Because the legislation surrounding the production of strategic and local development plans is still very new, there has not yet been time for the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) to prepare a Strategic Development Plan. However, the finalised Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan is of a form and has content that gives it the equivalent role, and its use in providing a strategic context for the Local Development Plan is confirmed by the new regulations.

In the meantime, consistency with the finalised Structure Plan is being sought, recognising that there may be modifications to the Structure Plan prior to approval. Although this approach carries an element of risk, any issues raised by modifications to the structure plan can be addressed in the proposed local development plan. The debate that we encourage on the Main Issues Report will not be devalued by any changes that Scottish Ministers may make to the finalised Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan and can be addressed in the proposed local development plan, when it is ready for publication, which is not due until February 2010 – after the expected approval of the structure plan. The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority proposes to publish a Strategic Development Plan under the new regulations by the end of 2013. This will build upon the foundation provided by the Structure Plan currently before the Scottish Ministers.

The finalised Structure Plan sets an ambitious framework and a clear vision for the future development of the North East over the next 20 years, with all parts of the City and Shire being recognised as important in delivering the plan's vision. Its strategy builds on the diversity of the region, recognising the characteristics and opportunities of different areas. It identifies strategic growth areas, where the majority of development is expected to take place, and regeneration areas where Aberdeenshire Council and its partners will have to develop a strategy to foster economic growth and combat disadvantage.

The Local Development Plan will have regard to a number of other key documents which relate to Aberdeenshire. These include statutory strategies produced by Aberdeenshire such as the Local Housing Strategy and the Local Transport Strategy, which can be regarded as sister documents to the Local Development Plan. They also include higher level documents, like the Community Plan, and the Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future Action Plan, "Building on Energy". Many of the choices and options available will be constrained by the need to be consistent and help deliver these other strategies

2. What is the role of the Main Issues Report?

The Main Issues Report is informed by a *Monitoring Report* and *Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report*, and sets out a series of choices in relation to the direction that policy and land use allocations can take. It is a document that concerns itself with choices, and seeks views from communities and other interested parties as to which options should be developed for ultimate inclusion in the Plan itself. We will then write the proposed plan in the light of all the responses received to this Main Issues Report. We expect to publish the proposed plan in early 2010, and this in turn will be subject to the opportunity for formal objection.

The options within the report include one set which are described as “preferred”. The judgement of what is “preferred” has been based on a wide range of considerations, including the past performance of planning policy, regional and national planning objectives, and the technical merits of one site over another. In all cases regard has been given to the wider aspirations of Aberdeenshire Council and the needs of local communities. At this stage the “preferred” options have all been identified entirely on a technical basis by the Council’s professional planning staff. Officers have not yet explicitly taken into account “public opinion” on the merits of the different proposals. The function of this document is to gather views on what should be taken forward into the *Proposed Plan*. It is only at the proposed plan stage, in the light of both the technical background and the public response, that the Council’s committees will be required to make absolute decisions on the issues raised.

The Local Development Plan is being prepared to implement the emerging structure plan produced by the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA). That Authority submitted a finalised Structure Plan to Scottish Ministers on 27 February 2009 and it is hoped that it will be approved by the end of 2009. Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council are both preparing Local Development Plans to implement the vision contained within this plan. At the point of adoption, these local development plans will need to be consistent with the approved structure plan.

Following this introduction, **Sections 3 and 4** of this report – “**What should the objectives for the Plan be?**” and “**What settlement strategy should we adopt?**” – relate to issues that affect all development across Aberdeenshire. This includes discussion of the scale and location that development allocations could take, within the context of the spatial strategy provided by the finalised Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan. It also poses questions about what we should be asking all development to deliver.

Section 5 of the report – “**What policy areas require major change, and how should they be changed?**” – looks in detail at some areas where we have identified that significant policy change is required. In this section we also recognise that there are other important issues that affect Aberdeenshire, and on which people may wish to voice an opinion. From analysis of the performance of existing policy and early engagement with stakeholder groups, the “citizens panel”, and community councils we have identified major changes in direction for some policies in the current plan. While many policies are still relevant in meeting our common objectives, others require radical redesign to deliver either a different objective, or fundamentally to improve delivery of an accepted community objective. The *Monitoring Report* provides an in-depth analysis of the existing plan. It also provides the justification for why some issues are identified as “main” issues, while other issues, although extremely important, are not given prominence in this report. Generally, the other important issues are ones where no radical change in policy direction is being proposed.

We would welcome views on any aspect of land use planning policy, but anticipate that the main focus of discussion will be in relation to the main issues detailed in section 5.

In **Section 6 – “What sites should be considered for development?”** – choices are provided for development in each of the main settlements in Aberdeenshire. The choices presented have been derived from a number of sources, including the aspirations of the development industry, landowners and Community Councils. They also include Aberdeenshire Council’s own aspirations for the development of sites to accommodate necessary public services. “Preferred” options are presented, which represent a rational and coherent settlement strategy, and which have been judged on a technical basis to be the most appropriate sites for development in individual communities.

Finally in **Section 7 – “How will we take the Local Development Plan forward?”** – we provide more detail of the process of consultation, and how we propose to evaluate and respond to the submissions made to us on this document. This includes the role of Aberdeenshire Council’s *Development Plan Scheme* in setting out the proposed timetable and arrangements for participation.

The closing date for submissions to us on the Main Issues Report is 10am on Monday 6 July 2009

3. What should the objectives of the Plan be?

i. The messages from the Structure Plan

The finalised Structure Plan's strategy has been developed to make the area an attractive place to live, visit and do business in. The plan recognises the need for fundamental change in order to meet the vision. The finalised Structure Plan aims to lead the way in promoting economic growth and diversification whilst addressing the urgent challenges of sustainable development and climate change. The plan identifies local development plans as one of the key implementation tools, highlighting a number of areas where these plans need to take action.

We have adopted the vision and aims of the finalised Structure Plan for the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan and will develop objectives for the plan based on those aims. These are to:

- provide a strong framework for investment decisions which help to grow and diversify the regional economy, supported by promoting the need to use resources more efficiently and effectively; and
- take on the urgent challenges of sustainable development and climate change.

To support these main aims, the plan also aims to:

- make sure the area has enough people, homes and jobs to support the level of services and facilities needed to maintain and improve the quality of life;
- protect and improve our valued assets and resources, including the built and natural environment and our cultural heritage;
- help create sustainable mixed communities, and the associated infrastructure, which meet the highest standards of urban and rural design and cater for the needs of the whole population; and
- make the most efficient use of the transport network, reducing the need for people to travel and making sure that walking, cycling and public transport are attractive choices.

ii. What should we expect all development to deliver?

Based on these aims the following objectives are proposed for the Local Development Plan (LDP). Alternatives are presented, but as mentioned in the Introduction, whatever objectives are set they must be consistent with the Structure Plan and the other strategies to which Aberdeenshire subscribes. In many cases the alternatives presented represent relatively extreme points on a sliding scale of options, on which more or less radical choices can be made. The prime reason for the “preferred” options in most cases is the need for consistency with the Structure Plan.

a) AIM: Grow and diversify the economy

Preferred options for LDP objectives

- The plan requires to identify land to maintain a supply of employment land on sites which offer a choice of size, location and environmental amenity, and which allow flexibility to provide for market uncertainty. The finalised Structure Plan requires 150ha of additional employment land to be identified in the Strategic Growth Areas during the plan period.
- Outwith these areas the Local Development Plan proposes employment land to be provided in proportion to housing proposals (a rate of approximately 1ha of serviced employment land per 200 new houses has been used to reflect the scale of employment land that the finalised Structure Plan is seeking to achieve – the specific rate in each case will depend on local circumstances). Opportunities require to be provided for employment development in rural areas and regeneration areas, where a need can be identified, or on a flexible basis in response to demand. The purpose of this is to stimulate economic diversification.
- The Local Development Plan aims to stimulate economic development by ensuring that employment land is serviced as part of wider mixed-use developments.

Alternatives considered

- Alternative objectives could seek to increase (or decrease) the scale of the employment land requirement in comparison to that identified in the finalised Structure Plan. However, the Structure Plan has a reasoned justification for this scale of development, which is already considerably higher than current rates of development.
- Employment development opportunities in the countryside could be restricted in some way, for instance, only to what is required to support primary rural industries (e.g. farming, fishing, energy generation). Under such an objective all other employment development would be restricted to settlements. This option would not fully capitalise on the opportunities provided by Aberdeenshire’s rural areas. An extreme form of it would also be contrary to current government policy. However, it may avoid the environmental consequences of promoting dispersed development that requires travel to access goods and services.

b) AIM: Take on the challenges of sustainable development

Preferred options for LDP objectives

- All development should contribute to restricting the “carbon footprint” of the area, and help to conserve and enhance natural, built and cultural

heritage. Reducing the use of non-renewable energy in new buildings and identifying appropriate locations for development has a particular role to play in this. The pursuit of higher sustainable development objectives should allow for and balance the need for community development.

- No development should sterilise, or cause a permanent and unacceptable reduction in the quality or availability of the region's key economic and environmental assets, unless such development is required to promote key needs of communities.
- All development should avoid risks associated with flooding or other major hazards, and should avoid creating such risks. Mitigation in such circumstances is not usually an acceptable alternative unless the development is required to promote key needs of communities and there are no other sites available.

Alternatives considered

- Alternative objectives could seek to have a significantly "harder" line on sustainability. Objectives could be promoted which to some degree or other reject proposals that are not carbon neutral both in construction and use, including travel. Such an objective would likely be more centred on settlements and may have significant adverse effects on rural areas and on the cost of development. It may impact on objectives to achieve economic growth. A "softer" line, accepting greater impacts on global climate, could also be adopted. However, this would be contrary both to the Structure Plan and to current government and council policy.
- Mitigation of risks, such as building flood resistant buildings or capping pipelines with a concrete skin, could be considered as a suitable strategy for development where "acceptable" risks exist. The risks would still exist, but would be mitigated in some way. This would also involve the use of additional resources on the mitigation, which would be altogether unnecessary or available for other community benefits, if the development were sited elsewhere.

c) AIM: Make sure the area has enough people, homes and jobs to support services and facilities

Preferred options for LDP objectives

- Allocations for development must provide sufficient housing, employment and mixed use development opportunities. A rolling 7 year supply should be maintained at all times of both housing and employment land that is likely to become "effective"*. This requirement should act as a trigger to provide sufficient time for additional land releases to be made, to ensure maintenance of the actual 5 year effective land supply.
- Allocations must secure a choice of locations for a viable supply and adequate choice of land for development. This should be related to each settlement's ability to accommodate it without loss of identity, amenity, or unacceptable impact on quality of life in accordance with the spatial strategy of the finalised Structure Plan.

Alternatives considered

- Alternative options include increasing or decreasing the scale of the effective housing land supply. Decreasing the scale to 5 years would remove the buffer to allow time for additional land to be drawn down into

the effective supply. It would also make it more difficult to deliver sites with significant infrastructure constraints, which need a particularly long lead-in time to prepare. Increasing it to 12 years is likely to be unattainable due to the difficulties of determining marketability within that timescale.

- The plan could accept impacts on quality of life associated with development. Development could be welcomed regardless of the impacts that it may have on existing communities. This may not be consistent with Aberdeenshire Council's own vision to help sustain and create the best quality of life.

* **NOTE** The "effective" land supply means that land which is identified in a local plan or local development plan for development and is free from any constraints that would stop it from being developed in the next five years.

d) AIM: Protection and improvement of assets and resources

Preferred option for LDP objectives

- All development must give special protection to internationally, nationally and locally designated sites of built heritage, archaeological and environmental importance, and utilise opportunities to foster and interconnect the natural and built environment as a whole, whether designated or not.

Alternatives considered

- To give protection only to statutory protected sites and to allow development on sites of local importance would promote wider opportunities for development. This would not meet Aberdeenshire Council's own vision to be "the best area" through promoting our special environment and diverse culture. Nor would it provide clarity within the plan to our legal obligations, for example, to protect species and habitats outwith designated areas.

e) AIM: Sustainable mixed communities with the highest standards of design

Preferred options for LDP objectives

- Long-term site planning must be employed for major or important sites that encourage the provision of a mix of uses and services appropriate to the size and needs of the neighbourhood and community.
- All development should pursue excellence in design that embraces the new as well as respecting the old, and which creates diverse and efficient streetscapes. Developments should be of the highest design quality, which can accommodate future needs, and do not preclude future development options. Design needs to be considered at the earliest stages of developing proposals.
- Development must promote an integrated and balanced mix of uses, house type, affordability and tenure, within individual communities and according to the nature of the area, in response to needs, aspirations and demands.

Alternatives considered

- It would be possible to give market forces a greater role in determining the mix of uses and types provided within communities. While undoubtedly popular with developers and removing a degree of regulation from the development process, this free market option would be unlikely to deliver expected public benefits, particularly in terms of the scale of low-cost and affordable housing.

f) AIM: Make efficient use of the transport network

Preferred options for LDP objectives

- Development plan allocations must promote a pattern of development that assists the development of a long-term framework for the communications network. This should make public and freight transport, cycling, walking and development of the telecommunications network easier. While recognising the role that the private motor car has within a rural area, reducing the need to travel through the creation of walkable neighbourhoods remains a key aim.
- Development proposals of all types must relate to their accessibility to services and the transport network; and must adopt appropriate standards for the type of area they are located in.

Alternatives considered

- At the other end of the spectrum it would be possible to encourage personal responsibility in terms of transport, allowing the market to ascertain what the most efficient use of the transport network might be. This option would remove restrictions on the location of development, in terms of proximity to existing public transport etc., and would increase development opportunity. However it is unlikely to be effective in making the overall transport system more efficient.

Question 1. Are the preferred options suitable and appropriate objectives for the Local Development Plan?

Question 2. Are there any further objectives of a similar nature to these that the Local Development Plan should be trying to deliver?

4. What settlement strategy should we adopt?

The finalised Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan directs Local Development Plans to follow a *spatial strategy* consisting of three types of area.

- *Strategic Growth Areas*, that include Aberdeen City and corridors from Huntly, Peterhead and Laurencekirk to the city following the main transport routes. These are identified as the main focus for development in the North East, accommodating at least 75% of all new development.
- *Regeneration Priority Areas*, where challenges and opportunities are wide-ranging and demand an appropriate response, and positive and lasting change is required.
- *Local Growth and Diversification Areas*, where levels of growth are related to local needs.

The finalised Structure Plan divides the Strategic Growth Areas into 6 sub-areas, and the Local Growth and Diversification Areas into two. In the following table the housing allowances (what we have to plan for) are shown for the first two periods of the plan.

	Phase 1 2007- 2016	Phase 2 2017- 2023	Structure Plan Requirement for new employment land	New Employment land allocations to 2023
Huntly – Pitcaple	300	500	105ha	10ha
Inverurie – Blackburn	1,000	1,500		32ha
Portlethen – Stonehaven	2,200	2,400		52ha
South of Drumlithie - Laurencekirk	500	400		11ha
Peterhead – Hatton	800	800	45ha	18ha
Ellon – Blackdog	800	1,500		27ha
Local Growth (AHMA)	1,000	1,350	Undefined	Unlimited
Local Growth (RHMA)	4,200	4,000		Unlimited

* NOTE The Aberdeen Housing Market Area is an area defined by the area of search for housing made by housebuyers wishing to locate in the Aberdeen area.

The “Rural Housing Market Area” is the area outwith the Aberdeen Housing Market Area.

The Local Development Plan will provide certainty for the allocations in the first period of the plan, and an indication of where second phase sites will be

provided. In order to meet the proposed objectives in Section 3, the Proposed Plan will provide a mechanism for the early release or “drawing down” of sites from the second phase, if this becomes necessary to accommodate the 7 year land supply target.

The settlement strategy requires to consider the areas noted above and provide a rationale for the distribution of development within the different areas. Key considerations in a settlement strategy are:

- the efficient use of existing buildings, land and infrastructure;
- accessibility of homes, services, open space and employment opportunities by a range of transport options;
- co-ordination of housing land release with investment in infrastructure including transport and educational investment, and with other major proposals; and
- the protection and enhancement of landscape, natural, built and cultural heritage, biodiversity and the wider environment, including consideration of flood risk.

i. Settlement strategy for the Strategic Growth Areas

a) Huntly to Pitcaple

800 houses and 10 ha of employment land to 2023

Preferred option

The Local Development Plan is required to accommodate 800 houses and an appropriate volume of employment land within this corridor over the plan period.

Huntly has been identified as the focus for the majority of this growth due to its scale, servicing and opportunities for economic development. However, Inch could also accommodate significant growth. Initial growth is proposed to be equally distributed between the two towns in the first phase, with Huntly taking additional development in the later phase of the plan. Modest development is also promoted at Old Rayne. Very small scale development is proposed at other small villages in response to need and demand.

This strategy has implications for the provision of infrastructure by increasing pressure on the Gordon School and generating the requirement for a new primary school within Huntly. This would have to be provided through developer contributions, which could be generated by the additional allocations suggested.

Alternative options

Two alternative options can be proposed: either focusing development on an extensive village expansion at Pitcaple or focusing development on a significant village expansion at Inch.

Pitcaple does not have the connectivity to support a major village expansion. Moreover, expanding the village by a factor of several times would have the effect of creating a new village, rather than building on the strengths of the existing community. At Inch, while there is good connectivity, the scale of the expansion required both to take up existing capacity in the primary school and to provide sufficient development to justify a second primary school would be such that growth in other areas could be prejudiced.

Question 3. Is this an appropriate strategy to follow for the Huntly to Pitcaple part of the Strategic Growth Area?

b) Inverurie to Blackburn

2500 houses and 23ha of employment land to 2023

Preferred option

Strategic choices within this part of the strategic growth area centre around the need for additional secondary schooling. Inverurie Academy can still accommodate the children from approximately 1000 additional households. Beyond this, additional secondary school capacity would be needed. Locating a replacement secondary school at Kintore would allow greater capacity to be created to accommodate the growth anticipated by the Structure Plan. It would also provide much needed community facilities for Kintore, and help to avoid any risk of disruption caused by redevelopment of the existing Kemnay Academy site. Creating a new Academy to accommodate an optimal 1200 pupils would provide for approximately 1000 additional households over those already educated at Kemnay Academy. Development in this location would also assist the business case for the proposed new railway station at Kintore.

The Thainstone area has been identified as having significant benefits as a focus for employment development, particularly with the impending closure of the Paper Mill and the availability of a rail siding at this location.

Consequently the preferred strategy for the Inverurie corridor is to focus significant development firstly in Inverurie, and in Kintore later in the plan only after a new Academy with its attendant community facilities has been constructed. Development in locations outwith these areas would be modest.

Alternative options

Alternative options have been examined for the development of a second Academy in Inverurie to accommodate the necessary growth, or for a “super” academy (an academy accommodating up to twice the number of pupils in the existing Academy) within that town. Neither of these options provides the additional community benefits that would be generated by a second academy in a different town and are not favoured by the Education Authority. Likewise substantial growth at Blackburn has been considered but dismissed due to the flooding of potential sites and the constraints posed by the existing oil and gas pipelines.

Question 4. Is this an appropriate strategy to follow for the Inverurie to Blackburn part of the Strategic Growth Area?

c) Portlethen to Stonehaven

4600 houses and 52ha of employment land to 2023

Preferred option

As elsewhere issues with capacity in secondary schools also influences the preferred option within this part of Aberdeenshire. The scale of development anticipated by the structure plan cannot be accommodated within existing secondary schools. Even with the construction of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and the Stonehaven “fastlink” extension (a new road proposed between the AWPR at Milltimber Brae and the A90 at Stonehaven), significant improvements are likely to be required to increase the capacity of the road network to accommodate development.

The development of a new settlement within this corridor is the preferred solution, with two possible contenders, one at Banchory Leggart, and one at Elsick, adjacent to Newtonhill. Of these the Banchory Leggart proposal is preferred due to its greater deliverability in the short term, and the lesser impact it would be likely to have on the transportation system. It is anticipated that this, and development north of Portlethen feeding into a new Academy on the proposal site, would accommodate the vast majority of development in the area, with modest allocations within the other settlements to meet their specific needs.

Alternative Options

The development of a new settlement at Elsick is a very real alternative to the Banchory Leggart new settlement, releasing capacity for additional development in both Portlethen and Stonehaven, as well as providing much needed community facilities for Newtonhill. Doubt remains as to whether this site can deliver the scale of development required within the first period of the plan, and what the likely impacts on the road network are likely to be.

Further options include two academies, or one “super” academy (one twice the size of a normal academy school) solutions, coupled with major urban expansion of existing towns. Landscape, pipeline and transportation constraints make these undesirable.

Question 5. Is this an appropriate strategy to follow for the Portlethen to Stonehaven part of the Strategic Growth Area?

d) South of Drumlithie to Laurencekirk

900 houses and 11ha of employment land to 2023

Preferred option

Development of the scale anticipated by the finalised Structure Plan for this area cannot be accommodated by either Mearns or Mackie Academy. Mearns Academy is very small, in comparison with other Aberdeenshire schools. A replacement school is proposed in Laurencekirk which could be increased to an optimal size to deliver the full curriculum and to accommodate the children generated by the finalised Structure Plan’s allowance for the area. Other aspirations in Laurencekirk to optimise the use of the new railway station, to provide safer access to the A90, and to reduce the impact of through traffic on the village centre itself could also be addressed by a substantial allocation in this area.

Alternative options

Alternative options for this corridor would still involve the creation of a larger Mearns Academy, but would promote development in a wider range of settlements. Realistically any alternative to the preferred strategy would be likely to result in creating substantial new villages on top of existing small villages through an unacceptably large scale of expansion.

Question 6. Is this an appropriate strategy to follow for the South of Drumlithie to Laurencekirk part of the Strategic Growth Area?

e) Peterhead to Hatton

1600 houses and 18ha of employment land to 2023

Preferred option

Peterhead, as Aberdeenshire's largest town, has the capacity to absorb substantial growth. Infrastructure capacity exists for this to be accommodated, and the economic development opportunities afforded by the port can be capitalised on in forthcoming years. Other settlements within the corridor are of a considerably smaller scale. The "Energetica" proposal promoted by Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Futures (ACSEF) and managed by Scottish Enterprise promotes a "lifestyle corridor" from Aberdeen to Peterhead, and the introduction of substantial new development opportunities into Peterhead, married with more modest proposals in other towns, would assist in delivering this vision.

Concentrating development in and around Peterhead would reduce the need to travel to both leisure facilities and employment and education opportunities, and would promote a sustainable pattern of development well connected to the trunk road network. A large allocation of both employment and housing land is required to create the critical mass that would maximise opportunity. Modest allocations could be considered elsewhere in order to make use of existing infrastructure capacity.

Alternative option

As an alternative strategy, significant growth could be targeted to Cruden Bay, Hatton and Longhaven. However, these places do not have the accessibility advantages of Peterhead and could be completely swamped by the scale of development required to be accommodated.

Question 7. Is this an appropriate strategy to follow for the Peterhead to Hatton part of the Strategic Growth Area?

f) Ellon to Blackdog

2300 houses and 27ha of employment land to 2023

Preferred option

A replacement academy for Ellon is a priority for Aberdeenshire Council, and significant additional capacity could be accommodated within a new building on

a new campus without creating a “super” sized school (one twice the size of a normal academy school). Ellon is a key node on the “Energetica” corridor and has already a considerable base of services and facilities, which could be augmented and improved through additional development. There are constraints associated with the cross-town movement of traffic, but development could alleviate these issues. A substantial rural population is served by Ellon Academy and additional development potential could also be created through the development of a second Academy, serving the area to the south of the town.

The villages of Balmedie and Blackdog are constrained by their location, and by the risk of creating communities severed by the A90. Some development may be required in these areas in the relative short term to allow for the construction of a new school at Ellon. Potterton, however, could be the focus of significant additional development with the construction of a further new secondary school in the area. This could accommodate growth later in the life of the plan, once the Western Peripheral Route is completed.

Alternative option

An alternative option would be to use both a new school site and the existing school site to create a “super” academy and concentrate the majority of development on Ellon, with modest levels of development elsewhere. This would result in a significant and rapid increase in the size of the town in a short period, with an expectation of further growth beyond 2023. Such an option is not favoured due largely to the relative loss of opportunity to other areas that would result, and the potential impact on the character of the town from such rapid expansion.

Question 8. Is this an appropriate strategy to follow for the Ellon to Blackdog part of the Strategic Growth Area?

ii. Settlement strategy for Regeneration Priority Areas, and Aberdeen and Rural Housing Market Areas outwith Strategic Growth Areas

2350 houses in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area to 2023, 8200 houses in the Rural Housing Market Area to 2023 and unlimited employment land.

Preferred option

For areas outwith the Strategic Growth Areas the finalised Structure Plan requires development to be based on the needs of the area. These needs are both economic, related to jobs and employment, particularly within the regeneration areas, and social, relating to the provision and maintenance of services. In this context development allocations and policy can be used to support economic diversification in the towns and rural areas, and also to achieve social objectives of maintaining vibrant rural communities. The capacity of infrastructure in settlements to absorb new development is also a key element that determines how much development can be absorbed.

The larger rural towns and villages are capable of absorbing significant development. Consequently a “key settlement” approach is proposed, where the scale of land allocations made will largely match the size of the village or town in which it is made – more specifically this will relate to the town’s connectivity or accessibility to surrounding areas. This will help to avoid over-development and the loss of the existing character of each place. The largest towns in the Rural Housing Market Area are likely to be able to absorb the scale of development that allows complete new neighbourhoods to be created, whereas small villages may only be able to accommodate something on the scale of one additional street. Within the Aberdeen Housing Market Area these opportunities are more limited, since other constraints, such as the transport network or the capacity of secondary schools, are so significant that very large scales of development may be required to resolve them. In some cases this may extend to more than 30% growth over the plan period.

In regeneration priority areas the preferred strategy concentrates on providing wide opportunities for development, to ensure that when regeneration activities are proposed they can be accommodated by the plan. In essence this means that larger land allocations have been made in these areas relative to other parts of the Rural Growth and Diversification Areas.

Outwith the settlements a more welcoming approach to development is proposed, based on recognition of the social and economic needs of different types of rural area. It is anticipated that in some parts of Aberdeenshire this may account for more than 20% of all development.

A distinction requires to be made between housing land allocations and employment land allocations. Housing needs are predictable and allocations for land for housing can be made with some success. Employment land needs are considerably less predictable, particularly outwith the Strategic Growth Areas, and may be related to particular resources, markets or other opportunities. While some employment land allocations are proposed in the larger settlements, where a pool of labour represents a considerable resource, much more reliance is being placed upon flexible approach to employment land needs through the revised policy on rural development. Mixed use developments, where housing and employment opportunities are forwarded together, are also being promoted. In this way the planning system can actively respond to the needs of business.

Within this overall model for development the most significant land allocations are proposed for the towns of Banff, Macduff and Fraserburgh, reflecting both the need to promote regeneration opportunities in these areas and the spare capacity that they have in infrastructure. Settlements such as Banchory,

Aboyne, Mintlaw, Turriff, Oldmeldrum, Newmachar and Inverbervie are also identified as being able to accept growth. Some settlements, most notably Westhill, are identified as being incapable of further large-scale growth of either houses or business in the meantime, due to current serious infrastructure constraints.

Modest allocations are proposed for other towns within the two housing market areas according to needs and capacity.

Outwith the towns and larger villages a policy approach has been developed. This allows greater flexibility in the provision of sites for single or small groups of houses, and for businesses. It is based on opportunities to reuse previously developed land, to develop on new sites in proximity to villages, and, to provide wide opportunities where need for development is greatest and demand lowest, to develop on appropriate sites in the open countryside. In practice, the policy will need to vary in relation to the type of area, for instance, whether it is close to Aberdeen's commuter pressures, or it is more remote and with a need to support local services. A rural "typology" will therefore be developed to inform this policy approach.

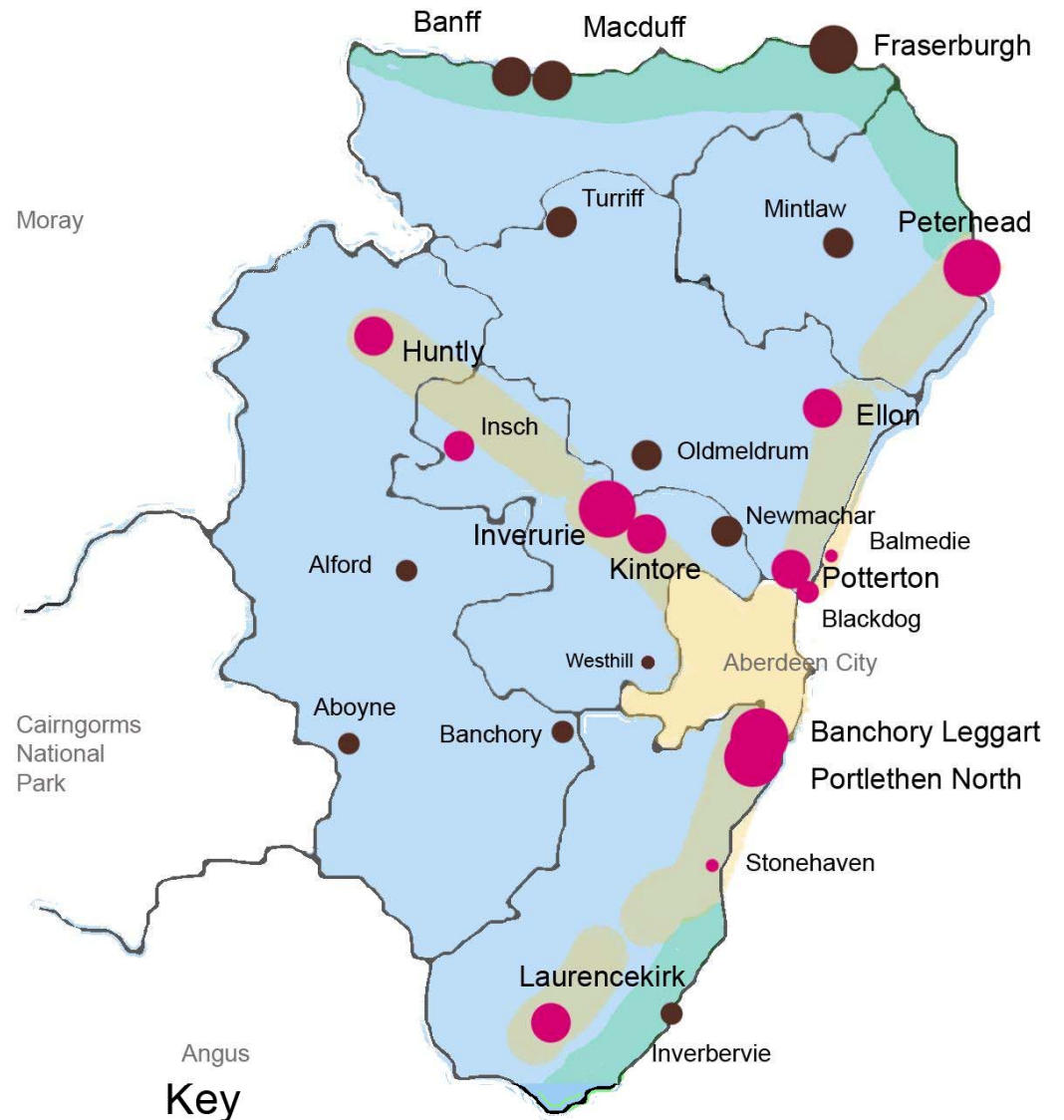
Alternative options

It would be possible to reduce the scale of the allocations proposed for some of the larger settlements through the development of stand-alone new settlements or, as was the case with the village of Elrick (now absorbed within Westhill), using an existing village as the seed for a substantial new town. Outwith the Strategic Growth Areas such an approach would not be consistent with the finalised Structure Plan strategy and would not achieve that plan's objective of meeting local needs.

An alternative may be to promote significantly more development in the countryside, outwith the towns and villages. While this approach is embraced in part by the proposals for a rural development policy, it is unlikely to provide the scale of development required, and would not meet the needs of the majority of the population who wish to live in a town or village. Such an approach would also not be consistent with the sustainability objectives of the planning system.

Question 9. Is this an appropriate strategy to follow for the rural areas?

Figure 1. Proposed settlement strategy



- Key**
- Strategic Growth Areas
 - Rural Growth and Diversification Areas
 - Regeneration Priority Areas
 - Preferred Strategic Growth Area allocations
 - Preferred Regeneration and Rural Growth and Diversification Area allocations
 - Preferred main allocation
 - Preferred minor allocations
- Preferred small allocations not shown

5. What policy areas require major change, and how should they be changed?

During 2008 we asked a range of groups what aspects of the current Aberdeenshire Local Plan were drawn up to deliver the wrong outcome, or were trying to deliver the correct outcome but were not achieving this. In addition a technical exercise took place to look at the operation of the policies in today's context. Full details of this exercise are contained in the Monitoring Report. From the analysis 8 specific policy areas were identified that would be likely to require a significant change in direction. These are the "Main Issues" as they relate to policy.

The "main" issues identified are:

- i. Developer contributions for facilities serving sub-regional areas.
- ii. Planning for minerals.
- iii. Planning for waste.
- iv. Planning within the landscape.
- v. What approach should we take for "enabling" development?
- vi. Destination retailing in rural areas.
- vii. How should rural development, including housing in the countryside, be accommodated?
- viii. How can design quality be improved?

In addition to the main issues, a number of other "important" issues were also identified that require minor change, although the overall objective remains sound. These are addressed under:

- ix. Other important issues.

The *Monitoring Report* provides an in-depth analysis of the existing plan, including those issues where there is not the same need for radical change, and where the objective of policy is likely to stay the same. We would welcome views on any aspect of the policies contained within the existing Aberdeenshire Local Plan to inform the roll forward of this plan into the new Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2009.

i. Developer contributions for facilities serving sub-regional areas

Large-scale housing development over the past number of years has left much of the infrastructure across Aberdeenshire at capacity. For this reason, as we look to the future, new developments must be serviced by their own new infrastructure facilities. Many examples are also evident of current infrastructure facilities that themselves require to be expanded or replaced. However, this can prove difficult as many are constrained by their site and neighbouring uses.

Funding for major new infrastructure is often difficult to obtain and therefore a robust mechanism needs to be put in place to allow new development to financially support **all** new infrastructure that is needed.

Issues

The policy requires to achieve the following goals:

- The policy must be robust enough so that Aberdeenshire Council will have reasonable control of where and when new infrastructure will take place.
- There needs to be a mechanism to allow a fair and equitable partnership to develop between the Council and the developer.
- There needs to be a genuine joined-up approach between developers to avoid '*disjointed incrementalism*' (the piecemeal development of successive sites without consideration of the implications of the bigger picture).
- An appropriate scale of infrastructure needs to be highlighted at the start of the process in order to ensure that this will serve all development in the right location, now and in the future.
- A robust policy approach should help to promote greater transparency for communities, and help to deliver certainty for developers.

The preferred policy approach

The preferred policy approach has three aspects

1. Being clear up-front about the type and scale of infrastructure that will be needed, so that all potential developers are aware of as many of the likely cost implications as possible at the time they acquire the land.
2. Up-front funding for selected strategic new infrastructure would be provided by Aberdeenshire Council and then recouped from developers as development takes place. This would give control to the council in terms of the most appropriate location for new infrastructure and by delivering it when it is needed. It would guide development to the most appropriate places as sites would effectively already be serviced by the necessary infrastructure. There is a risk with the financial contribution, if external factors change. However, this can be offset by Aberdeenshire Council's borrowing ability.
3. A parallel approach would be to highlight on maps specific areas that will need to be masterplanned. This could cover one or more developments on related sites, and will call for co-operation between the different developers involved. Long-term confidence will be achieved through these masterplans being adopted through supplementary guidance.

Alternative policy approaches

Allocation of land within the Local Development Plan could be used to guarantee that land will be available for any community or strategic needs, especially in regard to unknown future development. This would also depend on highlighting

at the earliest possible stage what infrastructure will be needed and therefore provide a degree of certainty for developers and the community. However, formal allocation would mean that no changes would be possible until the five year review of the Local Development Plan took place. This level of inflexibility could lead to potential problems of deliverability. There may also be an issue of blight, if sites are allocated for 'bad-neighbour' uses, and it does not address the fundamental problems of funding the infrastructure.

A second alternative would rely on a developer-led masterplanning and an emphasis on working together. This would put most emphasis on the development industry to supply the infrastructure requirements and would rely almost entirely on an improved, co-ordinated approach between developers. The development industry would determine where and when development took place rather than being guided by the Planning Authority.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 10. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt for developer contributions? If not, how should we change it?

ii. Planning for minerals

The approach to assessing the protection and extraction of mineral resources requires to be reviewed. Government advice on mineral extraction has been updated since the adoption of the last local plan in 2006. It promotes a planned approach to mineral extraction and reconciles the need for minerals with concern for the natural and historic environment and communities. As a result, it will be necessary to review the use of the “tiered approach” currently adopted and to ensure mineral reserves are safeguarded from development that could prevent their extraction.

Issues

The policy requires to achieve the following goals:

- To provide a plan-led approach to mineral extraction, and protection to existing mineral reserves.
- To ensure that land can be granted consent in the plan area, so that it is possible at any one time to deliver at least 10 years supply of construction minerals (sand and gravel) and hard rock; and yet to ensure that mineral reserves with planning permission are not significantly in excess of market requirements. For the purposes of this plan, which will be due for review within 5 years time, it is assumed that the target should be 15 years supply.
- To identify if non-aggregate construction mineral reserves (e.g. limestone) and industrial minerals (e.g. silica sands and barites) are present in the region, and to provide policies for their working.
- To identify market areas for construction aggregates in the LDP area.
- To provide protection to communities from noise, dust and the adverse impacts of transportation of minerals on the road.
- To prevent adverse cumulative impacts on communities and on the natural and historic environment from mineral extraction.
- To prepare areas of search/safeguarding maps, to prevent mineral extraction from being constrained by new development, should there be a future shortfall in reserves for construction aggregates, building stone and/or non-aggregates.
- To provide for the reclamation of surface mineral workings.

The preferred policy approach

To keep the local development plan (LDP) succinct a single policy is promoted, merging the existing policies together. Supplementary guidance (SG) would be an appropriate way of providing the detail that the policy would require, to identify the market areas and where necessary to safeguard mineral deposits. The tiered approach is effectively repetition of other policies and would be replaced with criteria which support the planned approach promoted in Government policy and place greater emphasis on safeguarding mineral reserves from new development. Greater detail for the criteria based approach and maps in SG would also provide greater clarity to communities and the industry.

Alternative policy approaches considered

1. Like the preferred policy approach, a single policy on minerals could be used, but the policy would retain the tiered approach and only be amended to conform to Government policy. However, retaining the tiered approach would not support the planned approach promoted by the Government and it

would duplicate policy elsewhere in the LDP. The lack of maps would also create uncertainty for the community and for those involved in mineral extraction.

2. A second alternative could be a single policy on minerals to replace the tiered approach with a set of criteria, but would preclude the use of site-specific maps. This approach may allow for flexibility when assessing a proposal, but the lack of maps would create uncertainty for the community and for those involved in mineral extraction.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 11. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt for minerals? If not, how should we change it?

iii. Planning for waste

The review of ALP has identified that the approach to assessing waste management facilities needs review. Government advice on waste management has been updated since the adoption of ALP in 2006. It promotes a planned approach to the assessment and identification of sites for waste management facilities. As a result, it will be necessary to review the “tiered approach” currently adopted, to ensure waste management facilities are sited in locations as close to the source of waste as possible, and to ensure they have the least environmental and amenity effects. The finalised Structure Plan contains a commitment by the Strategic Development Planning Authority to produce strategic supplementary planning guidance to provide a context for making decisions on future planning applications for waste management facilities which are regionally significant.

Issues

The policy requires to achieve the following goals:

- To follow the waste hierarchy, favouring in order of precedence: prevention, re-use, recycling, recovery, and only then disposal.
- To accommodate the facilities identified as needed in Area Waste Plans and the National Waste Plan; and to provide policies for their site identification and working.
- To provide policies on where waste can safely be treated, stored and managed before final disposal.
- To provide protection to communities from noise, smell, and any adverse impact from the transportation of waste on the road.
- To protect waste facilities from inappropriate neighbouring development.
- To prevent adverse cumulative impacts on communities, and on the natural or historic environment.
- To provide policies on the use of recycled/reclaimed material in new developments, and on the need for Site Waste Management Plans and design statements, where necessary.
- To promote facilities for waste separation and for appropriate kerbside collection of recyclable materials in new housing developments.

The preferred policy approach

To keep the Local Development Plan succinct, a single policy is promoted. Supplementary guidance (SG) on this topic is to be produced by the Strategic Development Planning Authority, but additional SG will also be required locally. Safeguarded sites (e.g. areas of search) will be identified for specific waste management facilities that are needed in Aberdeenshire or are required to conform to the current and future National Waste Strategy and the North East Area Waste Plan. The tiered approach would be replaced with criteria, which support the planned approach promoted in Government policy. As part of the sustainable approach to waste management planning promoted by the Government, the layout of the preferred policy option follows the waste hierarchy (recycle, recovery and disposal). The preferred approach would reduce the duplication of policy advice (e.g. where it has been repeated under nature conservation), would place greater emphasis on the waste hierarchy, and would protect existing sites from inappropriate surrounding development. Using this criteria-based approach and detailed SG for local safeguarded sites would also provide greater clarity to communities and the industry. Placing the technical

standards in the SG would create a more succinct plan, and the use of SG would also allow policy advice on waste management to be updated more quickly.

Alternative policy approaches considered

1. Like the preferred policy approach, a single policy on waste could be used, but the policy would retain the tiered approach and would only be amended to conform to Government policy. However, retaining the tiered approach would not support the planned approach promoted by the Government and it would duplicate policy elsewhere in the LDP. This option would not protect existing waste facilities from inappropriate surrounding development or prevent waste facilities from change of use applications, resulting in their potential loss. The lack of maps would also create uncertainty for the community and for those involved in waste management.
2. Another alternative would be a single policy on waste and, like the preferred option, would replace the tiered approach with a set of criteria, but would preclude the use of maps in supplementary guidance. This approach may allow for flexibility when assessing a proposal, but the lack of maps in SG would create uncertainty for the community and for those involved in mineral extraction.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 12. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt for planning for waste? If not, how should we change it?

iv. Planning within the landscape

Through the review of ALP it has been identified that the approach to assessing the impact developments have on the landscape will have to be reviewed. The European Landscape Convention (2000) (ELC) encourages sustainable management, protection, and enhancement of all landscapes and not just areas of exceptional quality. Furthermore, the policies on landscape will require to be amended to reflect the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) boundary, as there are no National Scenic Areas outwith the CNP. Finally, the current policy is based on the protection of a limited set of designated landscapes. Although these represent a well-recognised mechanism, many of these Area of Landscape Significance designations are now outdated. They were originally identified several decades ago and subsequent development is starting to undermine their value and quality. Moreover, focus on them effectively devalues all other types of landscape across Aberdeenshire. Accordingly the role and need for Area of Landscape Significance designations needs to be reconsidered.

Issues

The policy requires to address the following types of issue:

- The different types of landscape across Aberdeenshire, and the differences in their vulnerability to change as a result of development.
- Poorly located development in the landscape.
- Insensitively laid out development.
- Development of a dominant or overbearing scale.
- Development with adverse impact on the landscape character.
- Development with little or no design relationship with the local landscape character.
- Development with minimum or no mitigation.
- Development with adverse visual impact.

The preferred policy approach

To keep the local development plan succinct, a single policy is promoted, which covers only those landscapes within the LDP area. As a result references to the protection of the National Scenic Area would be deleted.

A comprehensive approach to landscape character assessment (LCA) is proposed to cover the whole of Aberdeenshire, amending policy to reflect both these and the Areas of Landscape Significance (ALS). The preferred approach retains ALS, but amends their boundaries to act as a subset of the more comprehensive LCAs. While recognising that all landscapes are important through reference to LCAs, retaining ALS would provide an early indication to applicants when a landscape is of particular importance and more sensitive to development. Furthermore, re-aligning ALS with LCAs would amend their boundaries quicker than a full review of all ALS.

Alternative policy approaches considered

1. Like the preferred policy approach, a single policy on landscape could be used, but the policy would only refer to landscapes designated as Areas of Landscape Significance. This approach would require only minor amendments to be made to Policy Env5B. However, this option would require all ALS to be reviewed, which may take longer than the time to prepare the proposed plan. As a result, supplementary guidance would be necessary to define their boundaries. Furthermore, this policy option would

not provide protection to non-designated landscapes. It would result in the duplication of policy advice on landscapes, as non-designated landscapes have to be considered elsewhere in the LDP.

2. Another alternative would be a single policy on landscape, but would replace the ALS designation altogether with a simpler landscape character assessment approach. This approach would allow for all forms of landscape character to be considered. It would also allow for flexibility in the approach to assessing planning applications (e.g. criteria based approach). However, without the addition of value judgements on the quality and vulnerability of each landscape (e.g. its qualities/why is it important), this would weaken it as a policy option, and possibly lead to inconsistency in its interpretation.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 13. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt to protect and enhance landscapes within Aberdeenshire? If not, how should we change it?

v. What approach should we take for “enabling” development?

There is now reason to consider widening the scope of the existing policy on “enabling development”, especially in light of change in the Scottish Government’s advice on when it might be appropriate to use such a tool. There is an opportunity to provide both a clearer policy on enabling development and also to clarify its use as an aid to economic development where this is deemed appropriate.

Enabling development is generally described as *“development that would be unacceptable in planning terms but for the fact that it would bring public benefits sufficient to justify it being carried out, and which could not otherwise be achieved.”*

Issues

Issues with enabling development and its application through policy Env\18 of the Aberdeenshire Local Plan include:

- Continuing problems with identifying how much enabling development is needed to take historic buildings off the ‘At Risk’ register, or to prevent their imminent collapse or further decay.
- Circumvention of stringent rules intended to define the number of houses permitted as enabling development.
- Whether plots (which involve larger total allocations) should be ruled out and only fully developed houses should be accounted towards the “enabling” element permitted for the development.
- The definition of “restoration” and clarity over what this should and should not involve.
- Affordable housing contributions and whether or not they should be part of housing permitted as enabling development.

Issues also arise through changes to Scottish Planning Policy. Government policy (within SPP 15 Planning for Rural Development) is that in order to aid rural diversification, new businesses should be allowed to “depend on having new-build or conversion housing for sale or rent to provide early funding.” SPP 15 also calls for local authorities to “identify opportunities for rural diversification and housing opportunities together in the development plan”. Likewise Government policy has changed from allowing enabling development for the restoration of ‘historic buildings at risk’ (NPPG 18) to ‘allowing enabling development where it is the only means of restoring a listed building’ (SPP 23).

The preferred policy approach

The preferred policy approach will be to continue to allow enabling development to be used as a tool where it can be proved that it is the only means of restoring a listed building. The policy will provide a statement on what is to be regarded as “restoration”: this will then be used as a starting point for negotiation on the restoration of buildings. It will encourage enabling development to take place off-site, and to avoid large allocations in areas not suited to housing or which are inconsistent with the development plan settlement strategy. In order to promote sustainable communities, all enabling housing developments will be subject to affordable housing contributions, if not on-site, then elsewhere. The new policy will also continue with safeguards to ensure the protection of the setting or character of the primary restoration building.

In addition, the preferred approach would now allow enabling development to provide for capital to encourage rural diversification in line with SPP15, and will go beyond this by stating that enabling development can be used in Regeneration

Priority Areas to promote regeneration, without any links to built heritage conservation being involved.

Alternative policy approaches

1. The policy would still only be used for restoration projects. A tightening up of the current rules on enabling development has been considered to include the wording change to update the policy in line with SPP 23. The new policy would strictly enforce the rules of the current ALP policy, Env\18. Enabling development would only be allowed where associated housing development amounts to 6 houses or fewer; and anything else would be deemed a departure from the development plan. However, this would not be consistent with Government policy as expressed in SPP15.
2. The policy could be relaxed to allow enabling development to be used as an economic development tool regardless of location. A relaxed approach would allow enabling development to be used to finance proposals up to a point agreed between the developer and the council, possibly beyond the minimum point to enable the primary use. This approach could significantly impact on the authority's ability to predict and guide development, would provide no certainty for communities as to the likelihood of development in a particular area and would not allow co-ordinated provision of infrastructure. Such an approach would make allocations of employment land in the plan less valuable than a greenfield site, where cross-funding from other development could be used.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 14. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt for enabling development? If not, how should we change it?

vi. Destination retailing in rural areas

Through the review of ALP policies it has been identified that there have been some retail proposals in the countryside approved as departures. An example of this is Drum Garden Centre, which was considered to create useful employment in the countryside and a tourist facility. In the last local plan the retail policies were written to conform to SPP8 and adopt the sequential approach.

There is now an opportunity to be more flexible in relation to proposals for destination retailing including farm shops. Retail tourism is where a retail use is located in the countryside, but is linked to a tourist or recreational facility.

Issues

The policy is required to achieve the following goals:

- To broaden the economy of rural Aberdeenshire and to provide opportunities for rural diversification.
- To recognise that farm shops have potential to boost tourist choice in Aberdeenshire
- To provide support for existing businesses and allow for the organic growth of existing retailing in the countryside
- To provide a policy approach for “destination retailing” developments.
- To provide protection to existing retail centres while accepting the limitations of retail in town centres.
- To retain retail uses in sustainable locations.
- To ensure policies react to the way people live, rather than impose lifestyle choices. Policies must allow flexibility for diversity.

The preferred policy approach

Retail development in the countryside should be accepted, if the retail development is related to an existing tourist or recreation facility or a new tourist or recreation development. The aim of the policy would be to allow retail developments that are secondary to a tourist or recreational destination. This approach would also support farm shops in the countryside. Allowing these developments would support the rural economy and promote tourism in Aberdeenshire.

The preferred approach requires retail tourism developments to be linked to existing tourist or recreation facilities, but to avoid large non-tourism retail developments in accessible locations. These are best located in or on the edge of existing town centres.

Other forms of rural diversification are considered in the revised policy approach promoted for rural development.

Alternative policy approaches considered

1. In order to provide opportunities for rural diversification, in principle a new policy could allow farm shops in the countryside. In order to protect existing retail locations, and to avoid large retail developments in the countryside, the policy would require that a certain percentage of goods sold be grown on-site and that the retail unit must be linked to an existing farm. This option would not support any other retail developments in the countryside, in order to retain towns as the primary retail locations. These primary locations may be town centres or edge-of-town commercial centres.
2. A second alternative would be more relaxed than the preferred option and would support retail developments in the countryside that can be classified as a destination in their own right. This could range from a small farm shop

to retail destinations on a main transport corridor. An example of this type of development is Brodie Countryfare. There is a risk that allowing this type of retail development would have a huge impact on existing retail locations in towns, where it is more sustainable to provide general retail opportunities.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 15. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt for destination retailing in rural areas? If not, how should we change it?

vii. How should rural development, including housing in the countryside, be accommodated?

Changing Government policy promotes sustainable rural development and a more welcoming stance towards development in the countryside. The existing policy stance does not yet reflect this. Through stakeholder consultations and the citizen's panel, "housing in the countryside" emerged as one of the key issues. Views on the merits of different forms of housing in the countryside vary.

Issues

There are many issues this policy has to address, emphasising the controversial and far reaching nature of the policy. Above all else a new policy needs to have increased flexibility. Issues can be split into four main groups, which vary in importance across Aberdeenshire:

- "Sustainable communities"
 - the need to create prosperous self-sufficient communities;
 - the efficient use of previously used land and buildings;
 - the maintenance of a "lived in" countryside;
 - maintenance of rural traditions; and
 - concerns over potential dispersion, or sprawl of homes and businesses due to the desirability of the rural idyll.
- Accommodating needs:
 - the real requirement for people to live and work in rural areas;
 - the opportunity this presents to encourage much needed economic growth across Aberdeenshire; and
 - the need to promote development that is affordable so as to retain people in their communities.
- Commuter pressure
 - the distinction between the needs identified above and the commuter pressure for dormitory space related more to Aberdeen and some of the other larger towns than to the local area.
- Efficiency issues
 - the costs of new infrastructure and services, both in terms of carbon generation and cash expenditure; and
 - the need to make best use of facilities that already exist, and to support their retention for the benefit of local communities.

The preferred policy approach

The preferred approach would be tailored to the different areas within Aberdeenshire, depending on the balance of issues in each case. It would thus promote sustainable communities, increase efficiency, and meet demands to different degrees, depending on the type of area being considered and the specific pressures it is experiencing. The negative impacts on sustainability from rural development need to be balanced with the scale of likely demand, so as to achieve a solution that meets needs, allows aspirations to be met and caters for demand, all in the local context. In essence, this balance would be expressed by the following table.

Type of area	Needs	Scale of demand	Policy approach
“Accessible” hinterlands around Aberdeen City and towns	Low	High	Maximise sustainability and re-use, emphasis on brownfield development.
Intermediate “remote” areas	Medium	Local	Maximise sustainable communities, emphasis on development proximal to existing centres of the community.
“Very” remote areas	High	Low	Maximise meeting needs, development should not be unnecessarily constrained.

These types of different areas, and their boundaries, can be explored and justified through the use of rural “typologies”. Aberdeenshire Council has not come to a settled view on this matter yet, but figures 2 and 3 provide possible rural typologies that provide an indication of the areas that could be used.

Alternative policy approaches considered

An alternative approach is to use one policy option over the area as a whole. History has shown that a “one size fits all” policy approach is neither sufficiently flexible nor, in many cases, appropriate. However, three basic options exist.

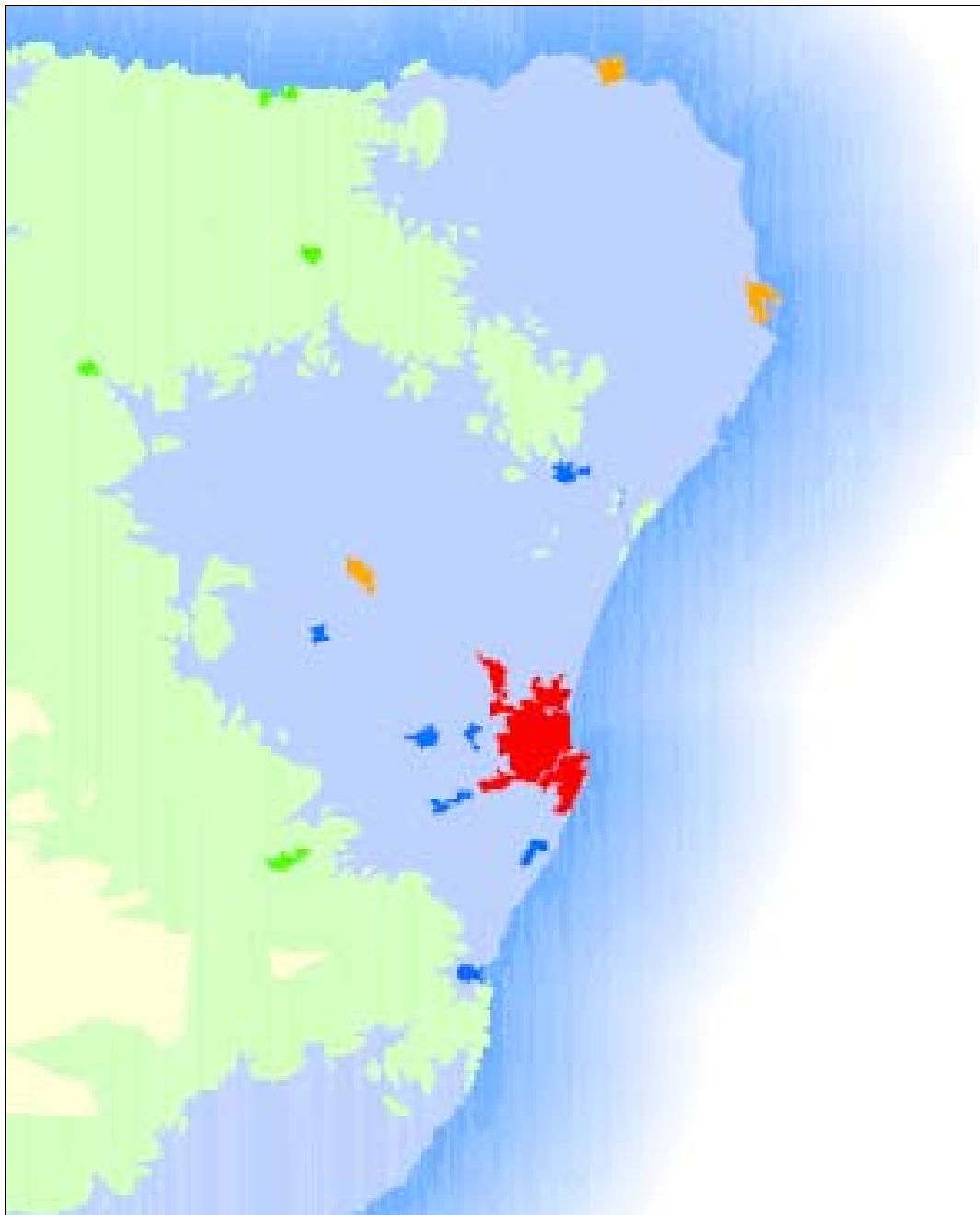
1. A policy to maximise sustainability would prevent appropriate rural development. This option would offer no major change over existing Local Plan Policy, except perhaps relaxation of brownfield development. This approach would not represent a “welcoming” approach to development in the countryside.
2. An approach that promotes sustainable communities would offer slight relaxation to development, but would not promote dispersed housing. The flexibility which is desired by communities would not completely emerge, and the contribution made to sustaining remoter areas would also be questionable.
3. A policy that seeks to meet everyone’s aspiration would result in over-development and sprawl throughout Aberdeenshire’s spectacular countryside. Although there would still be fairly stringent requirements to be met, the relaxation could be particularly detrimental in the areas accessible to Aberdeen, where there is a huge demand for housing.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 16. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt for rural development? If not, how should we change it?

Question 17. Is the use of the 8-fold rural classification appropriate for Aberdeenshire? Would an alternative typology be better suited to Aberdeenshire?

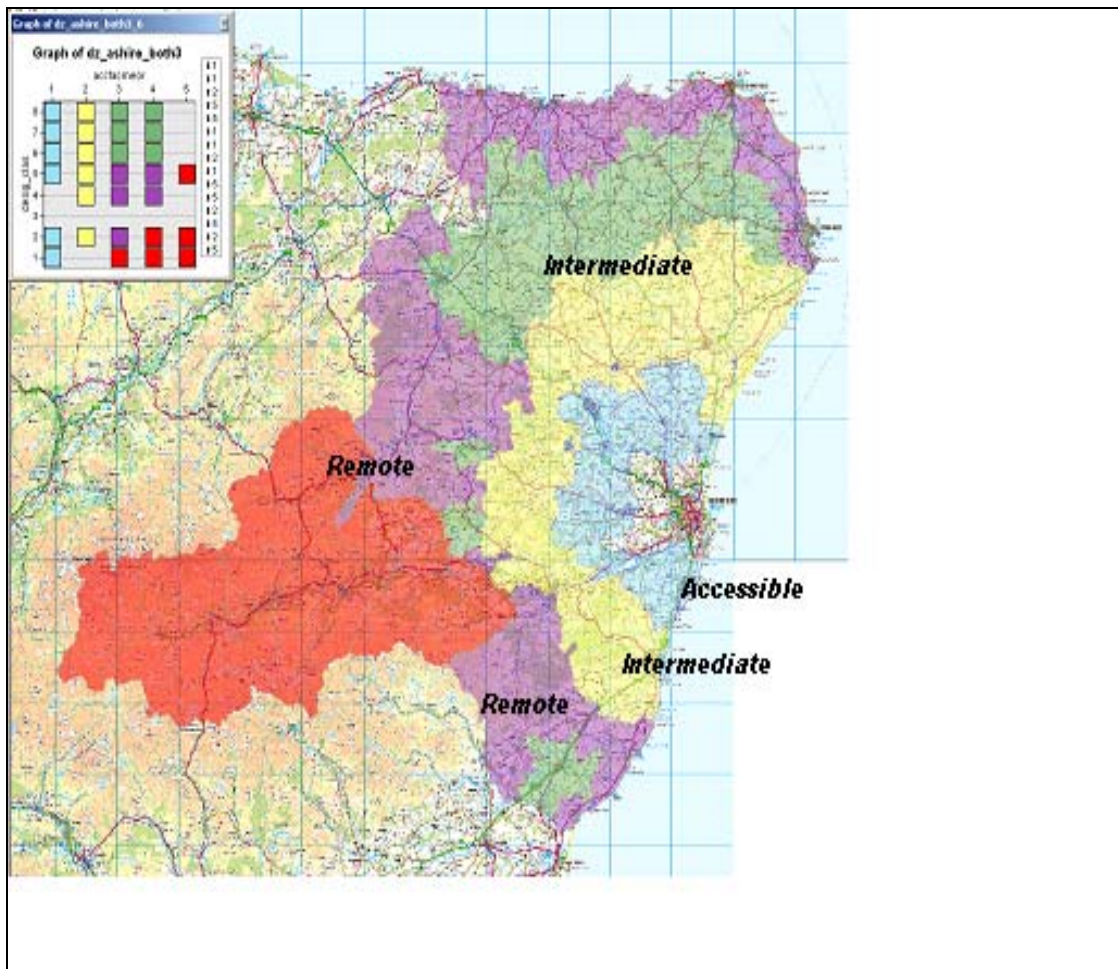
Figure 2 Rural Typologies- the 8 fold classification (Scottish Government)



**Scottish Government
8-Fold Urban Rural Classification**

- Large urban areas (with a population of over 125,000)
- Other urban areas (with a population of 10,000 to 125,000)
- Accessible small towns (with a population of 3,000 to 10,000 and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000)
- Remote small towns (with a population of 3,000 to 10,000 and within a 30 and 60 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000)
- Very remote small towns (with a population of 3,000 to 10,000 and over a 60 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000)
- Accessible rural (with a population less than 3,000 and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000)
- Remote rural (with a population less than 3,000 and within a 30 and 60 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000)
- Very remote rural (with a population less than 3,000 and over a 60 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000)

Figure 3 Alternative Typology (Macaulay Institute)



Key

Red	Remote
Purple	Remote
Green	Intermediate
Yellow	Intermediate
Blue	Accessible

viii. How can design quality be improved?

There has been concern for some time that the standard of design of new developments in Aberdeenshire could be significantly better than is evident in the majority of developments. Visual impact is only one aspect of design, and other issues include the way layouts and buildings deal with their setting, accessibility, privacy, vandalism, crime, and the growing concerns of energy and resource-efficiency. The one overarching issue is the need to recognise that good design cannot just be added on to an otherwise finished product. A comprehensive approach is needed to all the issues involved, since they are interrelated. It is equally important to remember that design is a process that runs all the way through from concepts to land-use distribution, layout and detailed design, with each element affecting all the others. It will only be by addressing design on a comprehensive basis like this that current dissatisfaction with the built environment will begin to be resolved.

The problems of poor layout and design have been with us for decades, and there are solutions to most of them. To date the policies we have formulated, while technically competent, have not produced the desired results, not least because they have tended to be piecemeal and to focus on too minor details.

The finalised Structure Plan commits the Strategic Development Planning Authority to starting a design review process for masterplans and the most significant planning applications submitted in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

Issues

The major issues a policy on layout and design has to address are:

- The lack of clarity on what actually constitutes the “good design” that we all seek, which in turn results in a failure of confidence and consistency in making the decisions on actual applications.
- The consequent need for some sort of agreed definition of what is and is not important to design.
- The need to include in this “template of ingredients” ways of addressing the sustainability agenda, e.g. how to make development resource and energy-efficient.
- The need for recognition that good design relates to all aspects of a development, from the shape of the whole layout down to features on individual buildings.
- The need to consider design as a comprehensive process, rather than some sort of “quick-fix” – a process, which involves continuing dialogue between planner and architect, and runs from concept to detailed design.
- The consequent need to address design on a broad front – not just by addressing the policy wording.

The preferred policy approach

In terms of design there is a limit to what policy can do in terms of encouragement and offering incentives, although these do each have a role. In practice, the poor state of most contemporary design, particularly of mass housing, is such that positive intervention is also justified. Such intervention should deliver:

- Layouts and house designs that respect what is valuable in the surrounding area – the landscape, natural and urban setting;

- Layouts and designs that provide a comfortable, safe, accessible and interesting environment, which is people-centred – not least providing a “sense of place” or “unique identity” that users can relate to; and
- Layouts and designs that put sustainability at the top of the list of issues to be addressed.

To do this policy requires:

- a comprehensive approach;
- clear definitions of what needs to be considered; and
- a structured process that will tie all the stages and elements in design together.

To achieve truly good design also requires good designers. That is beyond the immediate scope of a LDP policy. However, if the policy is clear in setting out the approach, the issues to deal with and the process involved, it should soon become apparent to developers that they will need good designers to address it. Thus the preferred policy approach would involve the whole range of design tools available, including masterplans, design frameworks, pattern books and structured analysis of what design is seeking to achieve in particular circumstances, and which considers setting, layout, form, style and detailing.

The Urban Design Tool Kit (detailed in Planning Advice Note 67) contains a number of solutions to the problem of improving the design process, all of which are useful and will be encouraged. One specific tool, that Aberdeenshire Council has already been developing in collaboration with The Scott Sutherland School of Architecture at the Robert Gordon University, is “Index21”. Effectively this is a comprehensive “template of ingredients” that are important to design. Among other things, it includes sustainability criteria, identifies weaknesses in proposals, and helps to structure dialogue between the Council and developers. It is available in a software form and has already been peer-reviewed by architects and planners at both national and local level.

Alternative policy approaches

Alternative approaches would be to focus on one element of the design process, or on a “one size fits all” policy approach. History has shown that neither of these is sufficiently flexible or effective. However, three basic options exist.

1. One alternative would be to set a menu of good design principles, and generic “best practice” exemplars. However, it has not achieved the desired results in the past. This is probably because it tends to treat the exemplars as a list of spare parts that can be grafted on to any design, rather than thinking of each new design as a whole and in its own context. Even if the exemplar is itself comprehensive, the application of one style is never likely to suit all settings or situations, or be adaptable to new technology or to the new issues generated by the sustainability agenda. This approach is therefore never likely to work well.
2. Having accepted that a process is required, the degree to which the Council should intervene in the development process is also a relevant question. The Council could either attempt to dictate all the key requirements from start to finish, or rely on the development industry to carry out the process entirely on a basis of trust. The former would provide the control required, but would be expensive, time-consuming, unresponsive to commercial realities, and ultimately possibly stultifying. The latter would be too reliant on the public good coinciding with commercial interests, and has seldom worked well in

the past. Neither of these extremes would therefore work as well as a process involving dialogue between them.

3. One further option would be for the policy to focus on a limited scale of design, for instance, at the level of the general principles, or of the layout, or of the detailed design. Each of these would be simpler (and quicker) to deliver than the comprehensive approach, but would be equally ineffective in delivering what almost everyone has said that they want – good design. The problem is that design simply cannot be parcelled up and delivered piecemeal. To a large extent, it is all or nothing.

A draft policy is presented in appendix 1.

Question 18. Is this an appropriate approach and policy to adopt to improve design quality? If not, how should we change it?

ix. Other important issues

Other important issues identified from the engagement exercise have been:

- The need for a policy to address demand for residential care homes.
- The scale and procurement of affordable housing.
- The supply of marketable employment land.
- Protection of unused employment land.
- The over-development of allocated sites.
- The conversion of derelict rural buildings.
- The adequacy of open space standards.
- Protection of hotels from alternative developments.
- Accommodating Gypsies / Travellers.

These 9 additional topics are at least of equal importance with the “main issues”, which the new Local Development Plan will have to address. However, in each case there are clearer ways forward for policy development, and there is not the same pressing need for discussion of the direction in which to take them. For this reason they have not been identified as Main Issues. It is intended that existing policy in these areas is “rolled forward” into the next plan. The technical report provides information on the aspects of these policy areas that may require to be amended.

Residential care homes

Current policy identifies criteria which should be met for the successful siting of a residential care home. It aims to encourage the construction of high quality care homes in locations which are suitably located for both residents and visitors and prefers such facilities within, or exceptionally on the edge of, settlements. A need has been identified for new care homes in a range of settlements within the life of the plan. Difficulties have been found in identifying sites for such facilities in settlements. The principle of the existing policy remains valid and the lack of any significant number of appeals or refusals identify it as a generally robust policy.

The scale and delivery of affordable housing

Current policy requires all housing developments to include a proportion of affordable housing. The policy is supported by an appendix in the current local plan, which details the way in which the policy is designed to operate. Problems in the past have occurred with the justification of the scale of the affordable housing requirement, and whether affordable housing development of the scale required can be provided only through this route. The aim of the policy remains valid and this has not been the principal subject of appeals or refusals in recent years. The policy has not achieved the level of provision that might be expected or is needed (12% of all completions affordable). This in part reflects the investment programmes of social rented landlords, who have found it difficult to deliver the scale of affordable housing required. An alternative model may be required, which sees direct cross subsidisation of low cost homes by the development industry. Currently this kind of detail is contained in an appendix to the Local Plan. Advice from government is that, having established the principle of requiring affordable housing in the Local Development Plan, it may be most appropriate to deal with delivery issues through separate Supplementary Planning Guidance.

The supply of employment land and the protection of unused employment land

Employment land supply issues will partly be resolved by the increased employment land allocations within the finalised Structure Plan. However, supply has frequently been constrained by a “hope” value associated with achieving an alternative use for employment land allocations in a future plan. The use of action programming for mixed use sites will provide a means to achieve the early release of employment land to the market, while a more robust interpretation of the current aims of policy, to make development of existing employment land for other uses more difficult, will remove the “hope” value. Minor change to the policy itself would achieve the looked for improvements in this regard without the need for debate on the principle of the policy itself.

The over-development of allocated sites

This is an issue which causes great concern within communities which often feel aggrieved that land on which they thought a certain number of houses would be built (according to the development plan) is then the subject of many more houses when an application is lodged. This also causes problems for infrastructure provision where capacities are calculated on best estimates, only to be thwarted when applications come in. This is not an acceptable situation in the light of the Scottish Government’s aspiration to encourage early engagement between communities and developers, but could be resolved simply by amending the terms of the existing policy rather than recasting the policy completely.

The conversion of derelict rural buildings

This aspect of rural housing policy has come in for particular criticism, particularly the issue of when a derelict rural building becomes unfit for further development by virtue of its state of repair, size, or construction. The existing policy approach does not enjoy widespread support. The question arises whether it is entirely necessary to promote this as another “main issue” when it can conveniently be considered as an aspect of the “housing in the countryside” main issue already identified. In this context increased energy conservation standards and the impact on traditional building forms will also be addressed.

The adequacy of open space standards

Aberdeenshire Council is currently developing an open space strategy, which will provide localised and up-to-date advice on the standards of open space required from development. Such a strategy will inform the replacement of appendix 6 of the current local plan, probably by supplementary planning guidance. This appendix is referred to in a number of policies, but particularly Local Plan Policy Gen / 5, which seeks “appropriate levels of landscaping to help them fit in with their surroundings”. The aim remains valid and does not require consideration as a “main issue”.

Protection of hotels from alternative developments

This is an issue on which there is no guidance in the current development plan. A clear issue here is the role that the planning system can have in supporting an uneconomic business. A policy approach that seeks to constrain the use of existing hotels may lead to dereliction and real economic hardship if the viability of the business is in question. It might be the case that this is an issue for economic development agencies to address through supportive funding rather than the planning system.

Accommodating Gypsies/Travellers

Planning legislation for Gypsies/Travellers is complicated by the requirement for planning authorities to have regard to the “Advisory Committee’s Guidance Notes on Site Provision for Travelling People”. This requires the exceptional

accommodation needs of this multiply disadvantaged group to be acknowledged, particularly where there is a deficit in the number of sites that they can access. The needs of Gypsies/Travellers is to be set out in the Local Housing Strategy, and planning authorities are required to identify suitable sites to accommodate shortfall and to set out a policy for dealing with applications for small privately owned sites. The existing policy approach is sound, but is significantly weakened by the current lack of alternative sites for Gypsies/Travellers to use. Consequently this is an issue which requires specific site allocations within the plan.

Details of possible changes to these and other policies can be found in the Monitoring Report

Question 19. We propose to take the existing policy approach for “important issues” forward largely unchanged, with modification of the way the objectives are delivered. Do you have any views on the way that we deliver these, or other policy topics?





6. What sites should be considered for development?

The following sections detail the sites that have been proposed or identified as having potential for development. Choices are required as to the sites that are taken forward for development in the Local Development Plan. On the basis of the preferred spatial strategy, and a technical assessment of the planning merits of the different sites, “recommended” options are provided. To provide choice however, a second set of “possible” options has been identified. Finally a third set of options has been identified as “undesirable” due to specific constraints that impinge on the sites. Details of this analysis are available on the Aberdeenshire Council website.

For each of the main settlements in Aberdeenshire a statement of “settlement character” has been provided to aid the delivery of development that complements the existing town.

Following this a map of the settlement has been produced, which identifies four different classes of land according to the following key. The areas shown on the plans are proposals put to the Planning Authority by developers, by communities or, in a very few cases, promoted by planning officers. Aberdeenshire Council has also submitted proposals for consideration, like any other developer.

Key to maps

-  Existing effective allocation
-  Site preferred for development
-  Site technically possible for development
-  Site incapable of being developed

Each site is identified by a reference number that relates to the original submission made. Further details provided by the sponsor of the site are provided on the Aberdeenshire Council website at:

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp.

For the majority of sites this information has been available since November 2008.

Sites that are capable of development are either amber or green. In the view of the Council’s planning officers the green sites represent the best choice for the delivery of housing and employment land requirements of the area. This takes into account the capacity of infrastructure such as schools and waste water treatment facilities (or promoting a scale of development that allows such constraints to be overcome).

Sites that are affected by constraints that, in the view of planning officers, make them incapable or very difficult to develop are identified as red. We believe that development should not occur on such sites where there is any reasonable alternative.

Following the maps a justification for the preferred site option is provided. A reason for dismissing other alternative sites is also provided.

In the rural areas the flexible rural housing policy described in section 5 above will also apply, increasing the range and variety of development opportunities available. As discussed in the context of that policy, identifying specific sites to

meet the needs of rural communities may not always be the best way of delivering their needs.

Question 20. What are your views on the sites preferred for development? Do you agree that these represent the best locations for development in the area? Do you think that other sites should be promoted for development other than those preferred?