

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**11 August 2010**

Agenda Item	11
Report No	PED 62/10

**Housing in the Countryside – Supplementary Guidance  
& Siting and Design Guidance**

**Report by the Director of Planning & Development**

**SUMMARY**

Members will recall the changes to the Housing in the Countryside: Supplementary Guidance which were reported to the August 2009 meeting of this Committee. The Committee agreed revised interim guidance that incorporated changes to the existing Housing in the Countryside guidance and which offered more opportunity for well sited and designed housing in the countryside. Committee agreed that this interim guidance policy be agreed as interim guidance until its integration into the Highland wide Local Development: Proposed Plan. It was also agreed that a siting and design guide for housing in the countryside be prepared. A draft version has now been completed.

Members are asked to approve further changes to the guidance in light of experience gleaned from the operation of the interim supplementary guidance and also the outcomes of consultation on the Highland wide Local Development Plan Main Issues Report. Members are also asked to approve the accompanying Siting and Design Guide and to carry out consultation of these documents alongside the Proposed Highland wide Local Development: Proposed Plan.

Copies of the full text of the Housing in the Countryside – Supplementary Guidance & the draft Housing in the Countryside Siting and Design Guide is available as Appendix 1 in the Members' library and on the Council's web-site.

This report contributes to the Council's commitment to enable an increase in the number of houses built in Highland.

**1. Introduction**

1.1 Members will recall the changes to the Housing in the Countryside: Supplementary Guidance which were reported to the August 2009 meeting of this Committee. The Committee agreed revised interim guidance that incorporated changes to the existing Housing in the Countryside guidance and which offered more opportunity for well sited and designed housing in the countryside. The interim supplementary guidance on housing in the countryside has therefore been in use since August 2009 and the policy approach has also been the subject of consultation through the Highland wide Local Development Plan: Main Issue Report.

1.2 This consultation and the use of the guidance by development management colleagues has indicated the need for minor changes to text of the document

which are outlined in this report.

- 1.3 To support the housing in the countryside policy, the preparation of siting and design guidance was considered important, providing a tool for use by developers, officials and members in considering housing proposals in countryside areas. A draft Siting and Design guide has now been drafted and members are asked to agree this for further public consultation.

## **2. Main issues raised in the consultation and response.**

- 2.1 The consultation on the Highland wide Local Development Plan: Main Issues Report and feedback on the operation of the Interim guidance has raised several issues requiring a redraft of the text:

**Hinterland boundary** – In reference to the policy approach to regenerate the Caithness economy and reverse population loss a less restrictive approach to housing development in the outlying areas of Caithness has been taken. This supports the removal of the hinterland areas around Thurso and Wick allowing the potential for further development to support the outlying areas. In regard to the hinterland boundaries as defined in other existing areas the review of the Area Local Development Plans will allow opportunities to assess their extents.

**Garden ground** – Concern has been raised in regard to the inappropriate development of the garden ground of existing single houses in the countryside. The potential for development in garden ground will now only relate to those houses within existing housing groups, and these will be subject to other elements of the policy guidance relating to housing groups.

**Crofting related housing** – The potential for new housing relating to the development of new crofts is now focused on providing opportunity for wider community benefit. This element of the policy will now be guided by the new Crofting Township policy contained within the Highland wide Local Development: Proposed Plan.

**Particular areas of pressure** – It is clear that some areas or housing groups have or may become under pressure from the cumulative impact of development. In these areas a capacity study will be prepared to determine the potential for development and adopted as further supplementary guidance. This will allow a more responsive approach than has been in place in the past. This additional supplementary guidance will also have enhanced status under the provisions of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act.

**Need for Siting and Design Guidance** – proper interpretation and application of the policy requires further guidance to be produced. Appendix 2 to this report contains the Councils draft Siting and Design Guidance to be made available for consultation.

**Trees** – additional information on the effect of development on and the use of trees in development was requested. The Siting and Design Guide will incorporate basic guidance on trees. However, the Council is producing Supplementary Guidance on Trees and Development that will provide further advice.

**Simplification and clarification of text** – The text of the guidance has been redrafted and reordered to aid the accessibility of it to a wider audience

2.2 **General Issues** - Concern was expressed that the revisions to the Housing in the Countryside guidance were too permissive and that the changes were a step backwards and will result in increased development pressure in the hinterland. Whilst there is always a risk that a less restrictive approach will have negative effects, the guidance along with the siting and design guide, reflects Council policy and guidance from Scottish Government. It is considered that careful monitoring of the policy will reduce the risks, and the Council could if required review the Supplementary Guidance as appropriate. Clarity was also sought as to where the policy applied, and what elements if any were applicable to wider countryside areas. Revisions have been undertaken to the interim guidance to clarify which areas of policy are applicable to the wider countryside.

### 3. **Recommended changes**

3.1 Overall the Interim Supplementary Guidance: Housing in the Countryside and the opportunities it offered were generally welcomed. The trial of the interim guidance and wider comment received in regard to the Housing in the Countryside indicated the need to further clarify some points and further amendments have been made to the guidance to reflect these points of concerns as follows:

1. The text of the guidance has been redrafted and reordered to simplify the document.
2. The potential for sub-division of garden ground has been removed from gardens of single house development.
3. In areas where significant housing pressure is noted, capacity studies will be prepared to identify remaining development opportunities.
4. The potential for new housing development related to the development of new crofts will be guided by the Crofting Township policy contained within the Highland wide Local Development: Proposed Plan.
5. A draft Siting and Design Guidance has been prepared to further inform consideration of development proposals.
6. The hinterland boundaries around Wick and Thurso have been removed in support of economic development and regeneration policy initiatives.
7. Advice in relation to the impact of trees to development has been included within the draft Siting and Design Guidance

3.2 The preparation of the draft siting and design guidance which will accompany the Housing in the Countryside policy guidance is now complete, and members are asked to agree the content of the document, which is available in the Members' Library and on the Council web-site. A short description of the guidance will also be given at Committee.

### 4. **Assessments of the Policy**

4.1 The Guidance documents are currently the subject of SEA screening with the SEA Gateway and the statutory consultation authorities.

## **5. Financial Implications**

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report that have not been considered within the Service budget requirements.

## **6. Next Steps**

6.1 It is the intention that following this Committee the documents will be prepared for public consultation alongside the consultation of the Highland wide Local Development: Proposed Plan.

## **7. Conclusions**

7.1 The revision of the Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance addresses many of the points raised during the trial of the Interim Supplementary Guidance and also accommodates comment received in response to the consultation of the Highland wide Local Development Plan: Main Issues Report. It continues to allow a more flexible approach to well sited and designed development in housing groups whilst maintaining a more controlled approach to the development of single houses in the countryside.

7.2 The preparation of the Siting and Design Guidance will assist individuals, developers, officials and Members in considering the appropriateness of development proposals.

### **Recommendation**

That Committee agrees:

- the changes to the Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance as set out in this report;
- the draft Siting and Design Guidance; and
- that both documents be subject to a public consultation alongside that of the Highland wide Local Development Plan: Proposed Plan.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning & Development

Date: 2 August 2010

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Ref: BM/HIC