

**Highland wide Local Development Plan - Main Issues Report
Consultation Summary and Actions Sheet**

Reference Number:	HWLDP-MIR-223
Organisation/Individual:	John Martin

Action:

Immediate Response Required	
Meeting required with Respondent	
Issue for Area Local Development Plan	
Further Information Required	
Other (Please Specify)	

If no box ticked - issues raised will be dealt with in preparation of the Proposed Plan.

Issues Raised in Response:

Purpose of Main Issues Report	
NPF2 for Scotland	
Vision for the Highlands	
Inverness and A96	
The A96 Corridor	
Phasing of Development	
Developer Contributions	
East Inverness	
Nairn	
Tornagrain	
Smaller Settlements in A96	
Caithness and North Sutherland	
Easter Ross and Nigg	
Development of Local Centres	
Wider Countryside and Fragile Areas	
Population and Housing	
Housing in the Countryside	x
Affordable Housing	x
Planning for an Ageing Population	
Gypsies/Travellers	x
Retailing	
Developer Contributions	
Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage	

Previously used Land	
Wild Land	
Water Environment	
Renewable Energy	
Flooding	
Waste Management	
Air Quality	
Sustainable Design	
Business and Industrial Land	
Accessibility and Transport	
Agricultural Land	
Subdivision of Existing Crofts	
Allocation of Inbye Land	
New Crofting Township	
Small Scale New Crofts	x
Coastal Development	
Forestry and Woodland	
Minerals	
Open Space and Physical Activity	
Access to the Outdoors	
Comments on Consultation Process (+ve)	
Comments on Consultation Process (-ve)	

Key:

Background	Spatial Strategy	Policy Options	Consultation
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Notes:

Sustainability of proposals of Countryside development should be taken into account
 25% for 4 hours or more should be changed to address affordable housing issues
 Small scale sites preferred approach to Gypsy traveller sites preferred
 Approach to small scale new crofts would not address demand for new crofts

Action Sheet Completed by:	SH
Date:	10/12/09

Dawn Sutherland

From: John Martin - Torbreck [REDACTED]
Sent: 09 November 2009 16:08
To: devplans
Subject: Development Plan Response

Dear Sirs,

May I make the following responses to the above.

Although you have a heading entitled "Sustainable Development and Climate Change" my initial submission could easily cover many of the proposals covering development outside of the urban and village areas and does not fit easily into only one or two, although it probably has most to do with Housing in the Countryside and especially in the Pressured Areas around the Inner Moray, Beaully and Cromarty Firths.

After this initial section I have made much shorter comments under your report headings

What Is Sustainability?

There have been many definitions of sustainability, but there is one definitive statement which has been internationally endorsed by the British and most other national governments throughout the world. This is the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, of June 1992, which is backed up by an extensive programme for social change known as Agenda 21.

The Rio Declaration contains 27 principles. Principle 3 states that the right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations. Other principles in the declaration assert the need for conserving and restoring the Earth's ecosystem, eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement of sustainable development, and encouraging citizen participation.

Chapter 7 of Agenda 21 specifically addresses Sustainable Human Settlement Development, and provides a detailed policy context for matters relating to planning and construction. Section C of this chapter, on Sustainable Land-Use Planning and Management, begins: "Access to land resources is an essential component of sustainable low-impact lifestyles."

It continues: "The objective is to provide for the land requirements of human settlement development, through environmentally sound physical planning and land use so as to ensure access to land to all households."

Over the last half century, while considerable attention has been paid to the matter of "environmentally sound planning" in the countryside, "ensuring access to land" has not been a primary objective. On the contrary, farms have become progressively amalgamated, and the agricultural workforce is a quarter of the size it was in 1947. The subsidies allocated under the Common Agricultural Policy and the development of increasingly sophisticated farming technologies have clearly played key roles in this process. But the planning system has also been a major factor.

The primary objective of Scottish rural planning policy over the last fifty years has been to restrain all forms of development in the countryside other than those associated with farming and forestry. There are very laudable reasons for this restraint, and there is no doubt that if it were not for the planning system, the encroachment upon the "pressured areas" of suburban sprawl and "footloose

urban development" would be a good deal worse than it is.

However the free hand given to agriculture and forestry has allowed industrialization of the countryside to proceed under an altogether different guise. As is now belatedly recognized, much of our landscape has been drastically altered in recent years. At the taxpayers' expense, hedgerows have been grubbed up, ancient woodland felled, meadows ploughed under and wetlands drained, to be replaced by prairie-like monoculture and intensive stock-rearing units whose ecological sustainability is highly questionable.

Moreover this process of agricultural "rationalization" has had a debilitating effect upon rural social life. As jobs have disappeared in agriculture and associated industries, so rural residences and farm buildings have been bought up by commuters, weekender's and retired people whose superior buying power usually derives from their urban incomes. This process has brought with it an increased dependence upon the motor car and a decline of rural facilities such as shops, schools, markets and public transport.

In particular, the haemorrhage of farming buildings into the counter-urban" economy, coupled with draconian planning restrictions upon any form of development in the countryside not associated with competitive agriculture, has made it doubly difficult for prospective farmers who wish to run a holding on less industrial lines, or at a scale which does not attract massive subsidies. The acquisition of land with buildings attached is often prohibitively expensive, because of the development potential; but any development upon a bare land holding, and especially residential development, will invite protracted opposition from the local planning authority on the grounds that the applicant is not a bona fide farmer.

The effects can be seen throughout the inner Moray Firth area, wherever there is marginal land. Farmhouses and labourers' cottages have been sold off at a handsome profit. The problem here is that access - and by this we mean access to planning permission rather than access to land tenure - is being made difficult for precisely the people who are interested in managing land in the manner and at the scale most likely to recreate a thriving sustainable rural economy. If we want hedgerows and small fields, coppices and wetlands, wildflowers and hay meadows - and the increase in biodiversity that this sort of landscape entails - then it is to the smaller scale, more adaptable, more labour intensive type of farming that they would do best to turn. If rural people are to benefit from accessible facilities and better public transport, then a larger core of workers wedded to the local land-based economy is necessary to counterbalance the influx of commuters.

The main obstacle to this happening is not lack of people or lack of affordable agricultural land every year people buy or rent a smallholding of land with a view to making a full-time or part-time living from it. Nor is it lack of commercial potential: while the price of globally marketed agricultural commodities is stagnant or falling, the demand for healthy organic food and for local and speciality products is rising.

The main obstacles are agricultural and food distribution policies which favour large industrial farmers; and the planning policies which penalize those who don't conform to this model.

At the planning level, the resolution of this problem is unexpectedly straightforward and far-reaching. If agricultural and forestry applications were assessed primarily according to their contribution towards sustainable land management (rather than, as at present, according to their ability to generate income) then planners could, in the words of Agenda 21, "provide access to land through environmentally sound planning".

Planners and applicants would enter into a social contract whereby the right to occupy and develop land was given in return for a secure commitment to protecting and enhancing the environment. Planners would be saying to farmers and other land managers: "we will allow you to build/work/live on your land providing you can assure us that you will manage it sustainably."

Such an approach would have three main benefits: firstly it would provide an incentive for the sustainable management of land; secondly it would help planners to ensure that land was sustainably managed; and thirdly it would allow affordable access to land for those who could show that their activities upon a holding were sustainable.

Such a shift in planning policy (particularly if coupled with complementary measures and financial incentives that are emerging in other policy fields) would dissolve many of the problems that have plagued our countryside for the last fifty years or more. There would be more opportunities for people to work and live sustainably in the countryside.

The increase in the number of people committed to local land-based activities would support other local industries and help to make local services viable; public transport systems would benefit and rural car dependency would diminish; and fresh, safely produced local produce would become more available.

At the same time, countryside protection would improve since farming practices on sustainable holdings could progressively be brought under the control of the planning system. The protection or reinstatement of woodland, hedgerows, meadows or wetlands would be viewed as an integral part of the development process. The caravans, makeshift shacks and recycled freight containers which presently are typical of low income farming ventures would be replaced by more confident and low-impact forms of rural architecture. A new landscape would begin to emerge, more human in scale, richer in biodiversity and more in harmony with the processes of nature.

Housing in the Countryside.

Since it is already obvious that the existing and previous policies were too restrictive, and given the appalling statistics on family incomes and median house prices in my Aird & Loch Ness Ward, they are no longer tenable.

Option 2 would be the best idea.

Coupled with a strong Housing in the Countryside Design Guide, any fears of development of housing in locations which are not suitable could readily be dealt with.

Affordable Housing

The existing ratio of 25 % is wholly inadequate to address the current housing shortage for those on or below average household incomes. Especially in rural areas, where the existing statistics show real and growing disparities between incomes and market prices, a less timid approach is required. Some suggestions are:

- Extending the current right of a retiral home not just to retiring farmers but also to retiring farm workers, this is a scandalous injustice.
- Lowering the threshold in the countryside to 1 and 50%. ie if you want permission for one house, then you must provide a site for a second under a burdened scheme - eg sold at non-development value to a housing charity or local housing association.
- Only allowing new housing in the countryside to those who have lived locally for at least 5 years.
- Time barring development land in villages and urban areas - ie if developers do not develop within a given time scale, they should forfeit the development zoning.

Gypsies / Travellers

Large sites not only enjoy local suspicion and hostility, they are not favoured by this community themselves since it forces different family groups with different outlooks and expectations to be housed together in unforgiving and poorly located sites (ie the Longman)

Small scale sites owned by families themselves offer a way to allow for some justice towards these communities. As long as issues such as screening, environmental health, and site limitations are controlled, there are no reasons for not letting owner occupying families enjoy similar rights to the larger communities. This would also enable better access to schooling for children and better access to health care for invalid and elderly members.

Having visited one such site near Kiltarlity, I was deeply impressed by the orderliness, cleanliness and well thought out low impact design for one extended family and remain bemused as to why the planning authority would wish to deny the applicants a right to inhabit a best practice example of how to decentralise and de-escalate this so-called problem, and allow Gypsy and Traveller families to closer integrate with the wider community.

Small Scale new Crofts:

Almost entirely conspicuous by their absence, new crofts themselves are not providing any solution to the demand for this lifestyle choice. By limiting woodland crofts to registered Crofts only, this demand will never be met with any significance.

Best practice here could allow for an expansion of low impact development where planning permission could not only be tied to a woodland management plan but also to a set of criteria which defines such development as further conditions.

An example of a local authority who already has a set of policies to cover this can be found in the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Low Impact Development - Making a Positive Contribution adopted by Pembrokeshire County Council in 2006

Hoping that my comments are taken in the spirit of open mindedness.

Many regards

John Martin

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