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Our Ref: HWLDP-EX1:7
Your Ref: LDP-270-3
Date: 6 September 2011

Dear Ms Smith,

HIGHLAND WIDE LOCAL PLAN - REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – ISSUE 36 HOUSING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE (HINTERLAND AREAS)

In reference to the reporters request for further information regarding the above issue the Council offer the following response; The Council has retained the wording of the original request questions to provide context with the Councils response following below.

Question 1. How the extent of the proposed hinterland boundary was derived?

Question 2. If from the Highland Structure Plan, how that boundary was derived? The hinterlands have been criticised by some as being too large, and therefore too restrictive on development. Questions 1 and 2

Council response;

Questions 1. & 2.

The principle of the hinterland boundary was established through the development of the Highland Structure Plan 2001 following policy context set out in national guidance; *National Planning Policy Guidance 3: Land for Housing (NPPG)* and *NPPG15: Rural Development*. The development of the Housing in the Countryside policy and consequent definition of a hinterland boundary was a policy response formed in the context of this national guidance to the increasing pressure from commuting housing on rural areas around towns and the need to develop a more managed approach to housing in the countryside within these pressured areas. An indicative boundary was illustrated within the Structure Plan that reflected broadly;

- the level of development pressure;
 - the number and distribution of planning applications over the last ten years;
 - the growth in housing stock(number of house completions) over the last ten years;
 - the level of population change 1991 to 2001;
- travel to work patterns from the census; and
- the degree of social and economic fragility of settlement zones

This initial boundary provided guidance on where a more defined boundary should be drawn in relevant Local Plans. The subsequent development of area based local plans provided the opportunity to define the detailed line and extent of the hinterland. This took into account the above listed indicators as well as having regard to physical features, landscape and the distribution of settlements.

In relation to the hinterland area boundary around Tain this was subject to consultation of the various stages of the Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan (RACE LP).

Question 3. How does the council respond to that charge?

Council response;

Question 3.

As indicated in the response above the development of the hinterland boundary was the subject of consultation during the preparation of the RACE LP and the Inverness Local Plan (IN LP) and the boundary was refined and reduced in extent as a response to the consultation process.

Question 4. In particular, how does it defend the inclusion of the area around Tain within the hinterland area, taking into account the arguments of the local community council?

Council response;

Question 4.

There continues to be demand for housing within the hinterland areas around Tain. Of comments received during the consultation on the Plan and the Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance there was a balance of comment received between those seeking further restrictions and those supporting the removal of controls across all countryside areas (see also Issue 37)

The existing boundary as established through the development of the area local plans represents a balance between these 2 disparate views and reflects the relative positions of both parties, allowing a more permissive approach in areas less related to the larger settlements and under less pressure for commuter housing development.

The delivery of the RACE LP also took the opportunity to identify housing groups with potential for further development. This approach alongside the various exceptions to the policy, at that date, has seen 36 houses built within the immediate hinterland around Tain since the approval of the 2001 Structure Plan. This figure equates to 18% of all development in the Tain settlement zone area over that period. This represents a significant proportion of all housing development and illustrates that not only that the policy does offer opportunity in the hinterland areas surrounding Tain but also demonstrates the relative pressures for housing development within the immediate countryside area. It should also be noted that this figure does not include refusals on applications that do not accord with policy.

The recently adopted Interim Supplementary Guidance: Housing in the Countryside and Siting and Design advances the guidance on where potential for development within the pressured hinterland area lies. The approach taken is aligned with national policy as

contained within Scottish Planning Policy. The Housing in the Countryside policy and the Supplementary Guidance seek to allow for a generous supply of housing land to meet requirements in rural areas through opportunities for small scale development in existing groups. The retention of a hinterland boundary will continue to allow the identification of opportunities in the hinterland around Tain without the suburbanisation of the countryside areas immediately around Tain. Policy 37 Wider Countryside additionally offers a wider range of development opportunities in rural areas more remote from main population centres. This approach is consistent with the aims of Scottish Planning Policy in relation to rural development.

The forthcoming consultation on the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan: Main Issues Report will include the examination of the existing hinterland boundary as contained within the current Local Plans for the area, with comment being invited as to the appropriateness of the extent of the existing boundary.

I trust this response meets the requirement set out in the original request.

Yours sincerely

Brian MacKenzie
Principal Planner
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