

**HOUSING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE
SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE**

**SEA
SCREENING REPORT**

STEP 1 – DETAILS OF THE PLAN

Responsible Authority:

The Highland Council

Title of the plan:

Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance

What prompted the plan:

(e.g. a legislative, regulatory or administrative provision)

Policies 35 and 36 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), Adopted 2012, commit the Council to preparing Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance. The current guidance was adopted in 2013. The guidance is now being reviewed for a number of reasons, including to reflect changes to national policy and adoption of the Council's area local development plans; to respond to the outcomes of planning application monitoring and to make the guidance more streamlined and presented in a more user friendly format.

Plan subject:

(e.g. transport)

Town and Country Planning

Screening is required by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

Based on Boxes 3 and 4, our view is that:

An SEA is required, as the environmental effects are likely to be significant: Please indicate below what Section of the 2005 Act this plan falls within

Section 5(3)

Section 5(4)

An SEA is not required, as the environmental effects are unlikely to be significant: Please indicate below what Section of the 2005 Act this plan falls within

Section 5(3)

Section 5(4)

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Date:

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STEP 2 – CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN

Context of the Plan:

The replacement HiCSG will ultimately be adopted as Supplementary Guidance which forms part of the statutory Development Plan. It will provide detail on the principles of the guidance set out in HwLDP Policy 35: Housing in the Countryside (Hinterland Areas) and Policy 36: Development in the Wider Countryside of the HwLDP. It will also provide further advice in relation to Policy 47 Safeguarding Inbye/AppORTioned Croftland and Policy 48 New/Extended Crofting Townships.

Given that there are no changes to the parent policy in the HwLDP the scope of the HiCSG review is limited to the detail of the supplementary guidance.

Description of the Plan:

The purpose of the HiCSG is to set out detailed advice in relation to proposals for new housing in the Highland countryside. The aim of the guidance is to be supportive of appropriate new rural housing throughout Highland, whilst minimising the impacts on the environment, infrastructure and services. To do this it is important that the following objectives are achieved:

- Raise the quality of housing development in the countryside by addressing issues of location, siting, design and environmental impact;
- Encourage rural development that supports prosperous and sustainable communities and businesses whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality;
- Ensure that new rural housing does not place an undue strain on public services and infrastructure;
- Maintain and grow communities through encouraging suitable development opportunities;
- Allow the construction of single houses outwith settlements provided they are well sited and designed to sit with local landscape character, taking account of landscape protection;
- Promote and support housing opportunities in crofting communities whilst balancing environmental considerations;
- In Hinterland areas:
 - Guide most new development to locations within or adjacent to settlements;
 - Protect against an unsustainable growth in car-based commuting and the sub-urbanisation of the countryside;
 - Provide opportunities for small scale housing development in appropriate countryside locations;
- In the wider countryside:
 - Allow the construction of single houses outwith settlements provided they are well sited and designed to sit with local landscape character, taking account of landscape protection.

It explains the Council's two tier approach towards housing development proposals in the countryside covering hinterland areas around the Moray Firth and Fort William area and elsewhere known as the wider countryside. It provides guidance on circumstances where new housing may be appropriate in the hinterland, alongside advice on housing development in the wider

	<p>countryside. It also recognises the role of crofting in Highland and provides advice guidance for new croft houses within the hinterland and wider countryside. The siting and design section explains and illustrates how high standards of design can achieve successful development in the countryside.</p> <p>The SG is applicable to all areas of Highland with the exception of the parts of Highland that lie within the Cairngorms National Park.</p> <p>The Draft HiCSG will be published for public consultation following approval by the Council’s Economy and Infrastructure Committee. Following consultation, the finalised guidance is anticipated to be statutorily adopted as supplementary guidance to the development plan in summer 2020. Once adopted it will provide guidance for housing development proposals in the Highland countryside. It will be reviewed within five years or possibly earlier to reflect progress with preparing a revised HwLDP.</p>
<p>What are the key components of the plan?</p>	<p>Section 1: Introduction outlines the Council’s approach to housing development in the countryside, setting out the policy framework and aims of the guidance.</p> <p>Section 2: Requirements for all Proposals provides a list of criteria that new houses across the Highland countryside are expected to comply with.</p> <p>Section 3: Housing Opportunities in Hinterland Areas provides detailed guidance on each of the circumstances where housing may be permitted in the hinterland, including housing groups, garden ground, conversion, reuse and replacement of traditional buildings, replacement of an existing house, brownfield sites, affordable housing, housing to support an existing or new rural business and for retiring land managers.</p> <p>Section 4: Crofting recognises that crofting is an integral part of life and the landscape of Highland. It provides guidance for new house proposals within settlement development areas, hinterland areas and the wider countryside, focusing on avoiding the loss of locally important croft land and appropriate siting and design.</p> <p>Section 6: Siting and Design provides advice in relation to site selection, site layout, design and materials and detailing.</p>
<p>Have any of the components of the plan been considered in previous SEA work?</p>	<p>The parent plan for the HiCSG, the HwLDP, was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (finalised SEA published 2012). The assessment of Policy 35 <i>Housing in the Countryside Hinterland Areas</i> found that the policy was unlikely to have an effect on many of the SEA objectives. It did find however that there may be some negative impacts on several SEA objectives due to a loss of green field land, due to the nature of the location of new houses they are more difficult to service, and also may result in an increased reliance on private transport. However it is important to note that this policy helps to control the level of new housing development in hinterland areas, therefore without it there would be potential for more significant environmental effects.</p> <p>Similarly the assessment of Policy 36 <i>Development in the Wider Countryside</i> found that the policy was unlikely to have an effect on many of the SEA</p>

objectives. It found that there could be negative effects due to implications for green field land, servicing and reliance on private transport. However this policy, alongside others in the HwLDP, help to limit environmental impacts by ensuring the selection of suitable sites for housing development.

The assessment of Policy 47 Safeguarding Inbye/AppORTioned Croftland found that the policy may have limited negative impacts due to potential loss of soil function and reliance on private transport. However it was found that the overall environmental impacts of being able to consider inbye land outweighs these negatives.

The assessment of Policy 48 New/Extended Crofting Townships anticipated that there would be a number of positive effects on specified SEA Objectives, particularly the objective relating to protecting the diversity and distinctiveness of landscapes. It also found that the lesser positive effects may become significant in the longer term if applied in conjunction with other appropriate HwLDP policies.

Hinterland boundaries are reviewed as part of area local development plan reviews. The Environmental Reports for the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan and West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan assessed potential environmental impacts of hinterland areas themselves. It was found that it was unlikely that it would have an effect on the any of the SEA objectives other than those related to landscape character and distinctiveness. However, other HwLPD policies, for example policies relating to landscape and design, would be applied to developments and ensure that negative impacts are minimised.

The existing HiCSG was also subject to SEA Screening (June 2011). Following the production of revised Interim SG, Consultation Authorities were in agreement that the supplementary guidance in itself was unlikely to have significant environmental effects. The Council's Screening Determination confirmed this.

In terms of your response to Boxes 7 and 8 above, set out those components of the plan that are likely to require screening:

Given the above the extent of previous SEA work, and that the updated HiCSG does not propose any fundamental changes in approach to housing in the countryside that are likely to have significant environment effects, the Council is of the view that no components of the updated guidance require screening.

The following section 'Step 3' of this report is therefore intentionally left blank.

STEP 3 – IDENTIFYING INTERACTIONS OF THE PLAN WITH THE ENVIRONMENT AND CONSIDERING THE LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE OF ANY INTERACTIONS

Plan Components	Environmental Topic Areas										Explanation of Potential Environmental Effects	Explanation of Significance
	Biodiversity, flora and fauna	Population and human health	Soil	Water	Air	Climatic factors	Material assets	Cultural heritage	Landscape	Inter-relationship issues		
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STEP 4 – STATEMENT OF THE FINDINGS OF THE SCREENING

Summary of interactions with the environment and statement of the findings of the Screening:
 (Including an outline of the likely significance of any interactions, positive or negative, and explanation of conclusion of the screening exercise.)

Previous SEA work on the parent HwLDP policies and on the existing adopted HiCSG found that while there were some negative impacts arising from the policies, through the application of the policies and the guidance the environmental impacts are limited in comparison to having no policy at all. It was found that there was no likelihood of significant environmental effects resulting from the policy or the SG itself. It is therefore the view of the responsible authority that SEA is not required for the following reasons:

- The refreshed HiCSG will not create a new policy framework but provide updated detail and clarification to inform the application of HwLDP Policies 35, 36, 47 and 48;
- The refreshed HiCSG is considered to have limited influence on the content of the emerging Local Development Plans which primarily focus on positive development allocations in larger settlements and a more general policy to be applied to housing development within some named smaller settlements but not the open countryside. The SG will primarily inform the assessment of individual planning applications for single houses or small scale developments which would likely be outwith any development allocations or smaller settlements identified within the Area LDPs; and
- The environmental issues which may be associated with the development of new houses in rural locations while not likely to be significant can be mitigated though the application of the development in the countryside policies, the guidance, and any other relevant HwLDP policies and guidance.

When completed send to: SEA.gateway@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or to the SEA Gateway, Scottish Government, Area 2H (South), Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ.

