

Sutherland Local Plan- Examination

Reporters' request for further information concerning Housing Land Supply- Issues 1, 8, 10, 14, 28, 49, 50, 52, 62, 64, 65, 67, 72, 80, 102

“The following additional information is requested by the reporters in relation to the local plan housing land supply:

- *explanation, including any relevant supporting evidence, as to how Tables 1, 2 and 3 of the local plan (which arrive at a total housing land allocation of 1512 units) are reconciled with the structure plan (particularly paragraphs 2.2.4, Policy H1 and Figure 8);*
- *explanation, including any relevant supporting evidence regarding the council's reasons for inclusion of an additional long term land supply.*

Note: This information should explain any variation in the assumptions behind the local plan housing projection as set out in table 2 and the allocation for Sutherland as set out in structure plan policy H1. It should also enable identification of the relevant components of the housing land supply particularly the extent of the allocation (if any) which exceeds that stated in the structure plan.”

The Highland Council's response

Firstly it should be noted that, as indicated in the Local Plan Errata which is referred to and commended as changes under Issue 102, the Total Housing Capacity figure given in Table 3 – “How the allocations meet requirements” should be corrected from 1512 to 1313.

The Highland Structure Plan (Policy H1) requires the allocation of land for up to 1150 houses in Sutherland in the period 1998 to 2017. (For comparative purposes, if expressed in annual terms this is the allocation of land for up to 60 houses per annum.) The figure was derived from 1994 based population and household projections and included an additional allowance for flexibility and choice of locations, fluctuations in the market and to take account of the high level of second and holiday home ownership in Sutherland. The Structure Plan flexibility element applied in Sutherland was 25%.

Table 1 in the Deposit Draft Local Plan sets out population projections using national data and accepted pan-Highland assumptions. These are equivalent to the Structure Plan projection assumptions and again include a 25% flexibility allowance. The Local Plan projections are based on more up-to-date population estimates than are those in the Structure Plan. The resultant projections in Table

1 indicate a requirement for housing land provision of 557 for the period 2008-18 equating to circa 60 per annum (a close match to the Structure Plan requirement level).

However, Table 2 in the Deposit Draft Local Plan provides alternative projections which differ from those in Table 1 and from those in the Structure Plan. Table 2 indicates how much land would need to be identified in order to provide for sufficient new housing to accommodate the population growth required to achieve a stable working age population. Achieving stability in terms of the number of people within Sutherland's 'core workforce' age group will be very important to sustaining and growing Sutherland's economy and strengthening its communities. It will help to achieve the Plan's Objectives set out in Chapter 3 of the Deposit Draft and support the Community Strategy for Sutherland which is referred to in Chapters 3 and 4. Table 2 therefore reflects a policy drive.

As noted in paragraph 4.4 of the Local Plan, Table 2 indicates the housing land requirement but due to inclusion of a flexibility allowance the actual number of homes anticipated to be required is fewer, around 1040 (compared to a land requirement for 1304).

Table 3 in the Deposit Draft Local Plan compares the land requirement (1304) to the total housing capacity of sites allocated in the Plan (1313 as per the Local Plan Errata). This is a close match. As indicated in a footnote to the tables, the projections in Tables 1 and 2 were based on former areas (former Ward boundaries) which did not include Edderton; however the Local Plan follows newer Ward boundaries in this area and includes Edderton. The Plan provides allocated land for 40 houses in the village (not 30 as stated in Deposit Draft- see Errata). If for comparison purposes the figure of 40 is subtracted from 1313 this gives allocated capacity (excluding Edderton) of 1273, which remains a close match with the required 1304.

Given the close matches noted above, the extent to which the housing land supply in the Local Plan exceeds the requirement set out in the Structure Plan is in effect demonstrated by comparing Local Plan Table 2 with Local Plan Table 1. The difference is substantial in numerical terms and represents approximately doubling the level of provision for new housing over the period; the rationale for allocating this amount of land is in order to support the vision and strategy, as discussed above and in the Local Plan. The level of provision of housing land also reflects the fact that site options were explored at individual settlement level and that in many cases the Plan has as a result been able to provide choice of sites to cater for the growth of the individual community. This is particularly valuable given the geography of the plan area, often with considerable distances between one settlement and the next and a desire to be able to meet housing needs locally. Also the Council has chosen to identify in this Local Plan quite extensive allocations of housing land at Dornoch (Dornoch North) and at Golspie (Drummuie) in the belief that this will enable good planning of these major urban

extensions- promoting a masterplanned approach, enabling detailed options for how to develop the sites to be explored in the context of implementing the Local Plan and promoting effective planning and investment in infrastructure. It is however likely that these sites will be developed over a period extending beyond that covered by the emerging Sutherland Local Plan.

As stated in Table 3, the figure for the total housing capacity of allocated sites does not include the Long Term sites identified in the Local Plan. Given the many challenging constraints to future growth of settlements in Sutherland (for example landscape considerations, topography, ground conditions and infrastructure), not all of which can be or are likely to be overcome through investment, the Council has taken the approach through its exploration of site options to examine and consult on potential future directions for growth. Where, after consideration, these have been confirmed as having potential for the longer term (beyond the lifespan of this Local Plan) then they have been identified as such in the Local Plan. The Council could consider bringing them forward as proposed allocations through plan review if necessary, in the event that monitoring of the availability and effectiveness of housing land supply indicated that additional or alternative land allocation was required. Paragraphs 4.5 and 4.39 of the Deposit Draft refer to monitoring and review of allocations and the Glossary defines the term 'Long Term allocations'.

The Scottish Government's Scottish Planning Policy SPP3: Planning for Homes (revised 2008) indicates that the contribution of housing development to the Scottish Government's overarching purpose of promoting sustainable economic growth should be considered. In discussing Housing Need and Demand Assessments, it says that they should cover a range of household projections, including the high migration variant projection. It goes on to say that the Scottish Government's national objectives, reflected in targets for greater economic and population growth, imply higher overall household growth than central projections indicate. Furthermore, SPP3 says that it is for planning authorities to consider the most appropriate planning solutions for their areas through a sustainable settlement strategy, and that this may involve directing development to particular locations to achieve desired policy outcomes; as such the planned level or direction of growth may not necessarily reflect past trends.

The Council's Housing Need and Demand Assessment work will inform the forthcoming Highland wide Local Development Plan and future Caithness & Sutherland Area Local Development Plan rather than the Sutherland Local Plan. However, in broad terms the Sutherland Local Plan responds to SPP3 by identifying a healthy supply of land for new housing to meet a range of needs, to provide choice and to sustain and grow communities in order to achieve desired policy outcomes including strengthening the economy.
