
**AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
4 MARCH 2005**

**Scottish Planning Policy 15 - Planning For Rural Development
Planning Advice Note 72 - Housing In The Countryside
Planning Advice Note 73 - Rural Diversification**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To advise the Committee of the recent publication by the Scottish Executive of revised Scottish Planning Policy 15 on planning for rural development, Planning Advice Note 72 on rural housing and Planning Advice Note 73 on planning for rural diversification and to advise on the implications for strategic planning in Ayrshire.

INTRODUCTION

- 2 Members will recall that a draft version of the revised SPP for rural development was published in January 2004 and was considered by the Committee in March 2004. The draft attracted a certain amount of criticism for its lack of clarity and detail in some areas. The finalised version of SPP 15 was published in February this year. This forms part of a suite of new planning policy and guidance documents issued for rural development, which include the new Planning Advice Note 72 on housing in the countryside and Planning Advice Note 73 on rural diversification. A research report on Rural Planning Typologies has also been published. This paper looks in detail at SPP 15 and the implications for Ayrshire. Brief outlines of the two PANs are contained in Appendix A.

SCOTTISH PLANNING POLICY 15 - PLANNING FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

General

- 3 There have been no fundamental alterations to the key messages contained within the draft version of the SPP. The opening paragraphs emphasise the need for a more aspirational planning vision for rural Scotland and encourages a more supportive attitude towards 'appropriate development'. The driving forces behind these changes in approach are the decline of agriculture as a source of employment and lifestyle changes which have seen more people wanting to live and work in rural areas who are unconnected to traditional rural economic activities. Rural diversification should be "embraced" and rural landowners and managers encouraged to expand or start new enterprises. However, the Executive's vision is that the overall amount of new

development will be modest and that existing settlements will not be expanded to such an extent that they lose their existing character nor that the countryside will become suburbanised.

Location of New Development

- 4 The SPP continues to distinguish between the more populated rural areas and the remoter parts of Scotland. However the broad typologies identified in the previous NPPG 15 have been deleted. No formal definition of “accessible” or “remoter” rural areas is provided and it is therefore a matter for judgement on the part of the planning authorities. The associated research paper on rural planning typologies will be relevant in making these assessments.
- 5 The SPP states that in the more accessible and densely populated rural areas most new development will continue to be in or adjacent to existing settlements and that the function of greenbelts should remain. It is noted however that there is potential to accommodate some small-scale housing development and to permit businesses to diversify further into new activities within these areas. This is a departure from the previous NPPG which imposed a more rigid sequential approach that strongly favoured locations within and adjacent to settlements. Within remoter rural areas, innovative planning policies that encourage diversification, home working, renewable energy development, tourism and recreation and aquaculture are demanded.

Economic Development/Diversification

- 6 Paragraph 13 states that the planning system should support a wide range of economic activities in rural areas and seek environmental enhancement through development at every opportunity. The preceding paragraph notes the fundamental changes in the makeup of the rural population with fewer people being connected to agriculture, increased personal mobility and technological change. The importance of tourism and leisure to the rural and the national economy are acknowledged. The implication in these paragraphs is that a wide range of economic activity should be provided for in the countryside and that plans should articulate what types of businesses will be acceptable and in what locations. Diversification of farming is a national objective and planning authorities are required to be supportive of such proposals. They should work with the local enterprise companies to help promote and support targeted business opportunities through development plans.

Enabling Development

- 7 The SPP further encourages planning authorities to identify opportunities where enabling development (houses for sale or rent to raise capital) can be supported to allow the formation of new businesses. Such proposals should result in the formation of innovative business opportunities, re-use of buildings, environmental enhancement and significant employment generation. The SPP notes however that regard should be had to access by public transport, drainage capacity and availability of IT infrastructure.
- 8 The coordination of business opportunities with opportunities for reuse of buildings, environmental enhancement, provision of enabling housing development and

availability of public transport and physical infrastructure will require a strong lead from planning authorities. This underlines the plan led approach emphasised in the SPP and the need for planning authorities and local enterprise companies to be proactive in identifying rural economic development opportunities.

Housing

- 9 Whilst SPP 3 *Planning For Housing* remains the first point of reference on housing policy, SPP 15 advances policy in respect of small scale rural housing developments including clusters and groups in close proximity to settlements, replacement housing, plots for individually designed homes and holiday homes. The overall message is that more housing should be allowed and that this should be plan led.
- 10 The SPP states that the factors that determine the amount and location of housing in rural areas include:
- proximity to services (eg schools, shops (ideally within walking or cycling distance));
 - ease of access (from existing road, rail and bus networks);
 - drainage and sewerage capacity (eg from combine septic tanks or public system); and
 - fit in landscape and design (design should follow published guidance and use sustainable materials where appropriate and be energy efficient).

It is noted that some new housing development, particularly in remoter areas, takes place on land out with settlements and not allocated through the local plan. The SPP requires that development plans to identify criteria against which such proposals should be assessed and suggests that small clusters and groups of dwellings could be feasible in many places. It appears to be a matter for the planning authority to judge whether such isolated greenfield development should be encouraged.

- 11 Planning authorities are instructed not to unreasonably constrain replacement housing on run down housing and farm steadings within the original footprint or height limit. Planning authorities should consider policies to support the development of unique, individually designed houses that may encourage entrepreneurs and investors to live in rural Scotland and examine the demand for second, weekend and holiday homes and make additional land allocations.

Rural Accessibility

- 12 Most new housing, employment, retail, leisure and other services should be focussed in accessible locations. Major facilities should continue to be located in larger settlements. However, the SPP notes that not all locations can be served by public transport and that development should be allowed where private transport is the only realistic option provided that the local road network has capacity. It is clear from this paragraph that lack of access to public transport should not be a reason for refusing development. Settlement strategies should however continue to allocate the majority of new development towards the larger and better connected settlements.

Environmental Quality

- 13 The SPP notes the high quality of Scotland's landscape and bio-diversity both within and out with statutorily recognised areas. In some areas there is limited potential for new development, whereas in many others there is some scope. Development plans must recognise potential but must also address constraints. Landscape capacity studies, in conjunction with rural typologies, are regarded as being useful tools in developing positive policies. Planning authorities are instructed to incorporate rural design policies to encourage high quality design and to encourage innovative modern designs.

Enhancement

- 14 The urgent need for environmental improvement and economic revitalisation of former mining areas and fishing towns is noted. The SPP concludes that the role of the planning system should be to highlight the areas requiring attention and influencing the policy agendas of other organisations. Development plans should provide a strategic long term approach to regeneration that will permit coordination of actions to achieve social, economic and environmental progress.

Development Planning – Key Considerations

- 15 The concluding paragraphs of the SPP re-emphasise the need for planning policies to be tailored to the differing requirements of different parts of the countryside, to adopt a clear vision for the future of development, coordinated with the local community plan and contain evidence based policies. Planning authorities are encouraged to effectively engage with the local communities and to build community capacity.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN 2025

- 16 The revised SPP 15 seeks to produce a step change in rural planning, encouraging greater levels of development than have previously been the case. Whilst development plans should continue to direct the majority of development towards existing settlements, the potential of the open countryside to absorb a greater level of development is to be explored. The keys to successful implementation are quality in siting and design. Planning authorities should carry out comprehensive analysis of their areas to identify settlements and areas of the open countryside that have development potential. Development plans should contain clear and consistent policies to guide development to appropriate locations and set down design standards.
- 17 The draft replacement structure plan anticipated the changes promoted by the revised SPP 15 and is fundamentally in accordance with it. Further articulation is required of the approach that should be adopted towards economic development and new housing in the countryside. The issues of farm diversification, enabling development, unique house plots, rural design policies and second/holiday homes will require further

consideration. The guidance contained within the SPP and Planning Advice Notes 72 and 73 will be helpful in the further development of these aspects of the replacement structure plan.

RECOMMENDATION

18 Members note the contents of this report.

Ian Johnson
Manager
Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee

Person to Contact: Alan Edgar - 01292 673764

APPENDIX A

Planning Advice Note 72 *Housing In The Countryside*

- i) PAN 72 was published in February 2005 and replaces PAN 36 *Siting and Design of New Houses In The Countryside*. The advice sets out the key principles which need to be taken into account when preparing development plans and determining planning applications for houses in the countryside. The publication of this PAN follows the publication in 2001 of the Executive's *Designing Places* and is a further effort to increase the profile of siting and design in planning decisions.
- ii) The PAN sets out the key components of design that will influence the success or otherwise of integrating new houses into the rural landscape. The content is similar to that of its predecessor PAN 36, however, there is a greater emphasis on encouraging contemporary design, the use of timber and energy efficiency. The PAN also now highlights the difficulties raised by imposing urban road standards to the design and layout of accesses for rural developments and calls for greater innovation.

Planning Advice Note 73 *Rural Diversification*

- i) PAN 73 was published in February 2005 and is the first advice note specifically covering rural diversification. Rural diversification is simply defined as the establishment of new enterprises in rural locations. Encouragement is given to all sectors of the economy and is not limited to what may have been previously thought of as traditional rural activities. The PAN explains that changing lifestyle preferences, growing demand for rural leisure activities, information and communications technology developments and changes in the economic structure of agriculture are the driving forces behind rural diversification. The PAN also notes that rural economies are already diverse and include almost all activities that urban areas do as well as some specialist activities such as renewable energy development, quarrying and waste disposal.
- ii) Planning is urged to support rural diversification. Development plans should contain positive policies that encourage diversification and identify suitable sites.
- iii) Rural diversification should be viewed as sustainable where it can attract new population to declining communities and help local economies to grow. By providing more job opportunities locally, it can also reduce commuting. Further potential benefits for sustainability arise where it helps protect existing environmental and heritage assets, brings brownfield land back into use and delivers environmental enhancements.
- iv) The PAN addresses the key issues of accessibility, infrastructure, scale and design. With respect to accessibility it is apparent that whilst the Executive are keen to reduce future reliance on the private car, rural economic development should not be resisted because of the lack of public transport or walking and cycling facilities. All proposals should be judged on their own merits in terms of their traffic impacts (eg safety of access and egress and capacity of the road network in the vicinity of the site). There is no general presumption against proposals on the basis that they will increase traffic. In regard to infrastructure, as for urban areas, new development proposals should not

give rise to unforeseen expenditure on public infrastructure. The PAN notes that it would be helpful if planning authorities can identify a range of development sites that have infrastructure capacity.

- v) Scale of new developments should be appropriate to the character of their rural location. Inappropriately large developments should be directed towards settlements. Expansion of existing businesses should be assessed critically and not accepted where there would be unacceptable landscape or environmental impacts. Siting within the landscape and the design of buildings should follow best practice and should be material considerations in determining planning applications for rural diversification proposals.
- vi) Whilst high standards are called for in site selection and design, the PAN notes that planners need to be realistic about the availability of alternative locations. Land ownership, finance and availability are all factors that can influence a developer's choice of location. No advice is offered on how to assess such issues further and planning authorities must therefore make their own judgements.
- vii) A significant section of the PAN is devoted to consideration of business location. This part of the document seeks to advise on what types of business should be located within certain parts of the countryside. Essentially the advice seeks to identify those types of business which have little choice over locations and those which have more flexibility. Farming, forestry and extractive industries are identified as obvious business types that have little discretion about where they are located. Renewable energy has greater flexibility but is still restricted by the requirement to be located where wind and water resources are available. Still other types of activity such as waste treatment works and landfill sites have alternative locational requirements including distance from settlements.
- viii) The PAN recommends that planning authorities consider the locational needs of different types of business and distinguish between those that have a fundamental requirement or economic imperative to be located in specific parts of the rural area and those which may seek such locations for purely marketing reasons or non-business reasons. Where the latter are likely to have significant negative impacts a location within or adjacent a settlement should be encouraged.
- ix) With respect to retailing, the advice contained within NPPG 8 is reiterated. Farm diversification businesses are normally secondary to the main farming activity and planning authorities are encouraged to permit the siting of these within farms.
- x) In summary, the PAN encourages planning authorities to consider permitting the broadest range of economic activity within rural areas. The sustainability of proposals should be assessed in the wider sense and account taken of a proposal's opportunity to stabilise population, diversify employment, reuse buildings and land and restore/enhance cultural and natural heritage. Scale, siting and design are material considerations and protection of the quality of the rural environment should be afforded a high priority. Development should not generally be resisted because it will result in additional traffic, however, site specific impacts will continue to be taken into account. Where possible, choice of location should favour alternative forms of transport to the private car. Whilst high standards are called for, planning authorities

are urged to be realistic and recognise the financial, ownership and land availability constraints that often face developers. Planners are also urged to recognise the differing locational needs of different kinds of activity and to distinguish between those with flexibility and those that haven't.