
AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
2 SEPTEMBER 2005

Scottish Planning Policy 21: Green Belts: Consultation Draft

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise and provide comment on the Scottish Executive's consultation on a new Scottish Planning Policy for green belts, SPP21.

BACKGROUND

- 2 In issuing the new consultation on greenbelt policy Ministers have recognised the importance of Scotland's towns and cities to the growth in the economy and recognise the need to avoid urban sprawl and unmanaged and unplanned growth. The previous guidance, which was issued in the mid 1980's, Circular 24/1985 "Development in the Countryside and Greenbelts" was no longer considered relevant in an economy which has shifted toward service based employment; where social and lifestyle changes are changing the way we use land; where high quality environments and accessible locations are increasingly being valued and where the need to stimulate regeneration of disadvantaged communities and the re-use of vacant and urban land are key priorities of Scottish Ministers. In the light of these social, economic and environmental changes the new Scottish Planning Policy (SPP 21) is being introduced to strengthen and enhance the role of the greenbelt policy in the management of urban change in Scotland.
- 3 In Ayrshire, the approved Joint Structure Plan promotes the designation of Greenbelt at Ayr, Prestwick & Troon. The details of this policy have recently been reflected within the finalised South Ayrshire Local Plan.

GREEN BELTS

- 4 The draft SPP 21 defines green belts as "an area of land designated for the purposes of managing the shape of a town or city in the long term". It is therefore an outcome of a long-term strategy to achieve the following objectives.
 - To direct planned growth to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration;
 - To protect and enhance the character, landscape setting and identity of towns and cities; and
 - To protect and give access to open within and around towns and cities, as part of the wider structure of green space.
- 5 Despite the name, it is further suggested green belts do not have to fully encircle a settlement but can take a variety of forms, as in Ayrshire this could include wedges and coastal strips. Whatever the form of the Greenbelt the intent is to direct development to

suitable locations, not to prevent development taking place. To enable some flexibility for the expansion of the town it is recommended that the inner boundaries of the green belt should not be drawn too tightly but reflect longer-term expansion areas which take into account longer-term growth and which would avoid the cumulative erosion of its integrity. The draft SSP 21 recommends that green belts should consider future development within the context 20 years, for example consistent with the time frame proposed by SPP3 for housing land requirements.

6 The draft SPP21 clearly emphasises the role which development plans have in defining the need for and in considering the uses of land which might be appropriate within a greenbelt designated area. These would however include:

- Agricultural uses, including the re-use of historic agricultural buildings in keeping with their surroundings;
- Woodland and forestry, including community woodlands;
- Horticulture, including market gardening
- Recreational uses that is compatible with an agricultural or natural setting, for example, golf courses, some equestrian uses, fisheries, non-motorised cycling facilities, walking, parks and playing fields.

New development in the greenbelt must however be suitable in terms of its scale and forms. The re-use of buildings of architectural and historic merit should be viewed positively.

COMMENT

7. The approach advocated by the Executive in the use of Greenbelt Policy is consistent with and complements a strategic approach to management of the demand for land and its use. It can be of particular benefit in the planning of regional economies where there is the demand for development that transcends across local authority boundaries and where this form of policy can manage the growth and stimulate regeneration more effectively. It seeks to move away from the perception of green belt policy as a tool which controls development to one which complements other policy initiatives such as the promotion of woodland frameworks, biodiversity, environmental improvement and countryside access strategies.

8 However whilst the 20-year perspective advocated in the policy is generally supported there is a need to specify more clearly in the final document that developments plans have a key role in the phasing of land for release from a greenbelt designated area. This is clearly the case when it might be inappropriate to accommodate a 20-year land supply on greenfield land whilst prospects may exist toward the delivery of regeneration opportunities. The final document should clearly state that Scottish Ministers would be supportive of local authorities future management of expansion areas within the greenbelt in line with commitments to bring forward regeneration and infrastructure investment. Without a strengthening of this commitment in the final policy document the objectives set out in paragraph 6 could be undermined.

CONCLUSION

- 10 The recognition and strengthening of greenbelt policy as part of the suite of planning tools in the management of urban change is welcomed. The use of the policy to complement other initiatives such as regeneration, countryside access, enhancing biodiversity, conserving the historic environment and safeguarding landscape character, town setting and providing opportunities for open space between communities will all contribute to wider objectives relating to quality of life and the development of a modern economy. The move away from the concept of greenbelt policy purely as a mechanism of controlling development is supported. However the document should give greater clarity on the management of land-use over a twenty-year time horizon with the implications this may have in bringing forward infrastructure and regeneration investment.

RECOMMENDATION

- 11 It is recommended that the Joint Committee:
- note the content of this report;
 - approve its contents as a response to the Scottish Executive on the consultation on the Draft Scottish Planning Policy 21;
 - forward a copy to East, North and South Ayrshire Council for their consideration in their own response.

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