



Environmental Report

Non Technical Summary

Housing in the Countryside Policy Review 2008





COVER NOTE

PART 1	
To: SEA.gateway@scotland.gsi.gov.uk	
SEA Gateway Scottish Government Area 2 H (South) Victoria Quay Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ	
PART 2	
An SEA Environmental Report is attached for the Policy entitled:	
Housing in the Countryside Policy Review 2008	
The Responsible Authority is:	
Perth & Kinross Council	
PART 3	
This Environmental Report is being prepared because the PPS to which it relates falls under the scope of Section 5[3] of the Act and requires an SEA under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005	
PART 4	
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PART 5	
Signature	
Date	14 January 2009 (revised 1/8/09)

Non-technical Summary

Requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment

Perth & Kinross Council has prepared a draft Housing in the Countryside Policy. The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the Council prepares an Environmental Report alongside the draft policy. The purpose of this Environmental Report is to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Housing in the Countryside Policy.

Scoping report

Prior to the preparation of this environmental report a scoping report was prepared which set out the coverage, level of detail and assessment methodology that would be used in the environmental report. The Scoping Report was submitted to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Consultation Authorities (Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and Historic Scotland) for comment in September 2008. The scoping report was also available on the Council's website. In addition to the comments received from the Consultation Authorities a number of submissions were made by other interested parties and the scoping report was revised to take these into account.

Background to the Housing in the Countryside Policy Review

The Housing in the Countryside policy which appears in the current Local Plans was approved in September 1999 although minor amendments have since been made to it following discussion of the policy at the Kinross Area Local Plan Public Inquiry in June 2003. Whilst it is an area wide policy there are exceptions to its application. Alternative policy approaches have been adopted in "Western Highland Perthshire" and Glenshee to tackle issues of rural depopulation, in the Lunan Valley and the Loch Leven Basin in response to environmental concerns. This policy can be viewed on the Council's website at <http://www.pkc.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/4283F818-9ECD-4D0E-B4C1-036B1B27561C/0/KinrossPlan.pdf>

A review of the 1999 policy was undertaken in 2005 in response to a growing awareness of the concerns about the policy and a desire of the then Administration to move to a more relaxed policy. Following Council approval of the policy in December 2005 it has operated as supplementary planning guidance and been treated as a material consideration when determining planning applications. There is now concern that the revised policy is too relaxed allowing for inappropriate development particularly in relation to the scale of steading redevelopments and hence the undertaking of this current review.

Relationship to other Plans, Programmes and Strategies

The Housing in the Countryside Policy may be influenced by other existing plans, programmes or strategies. The details of the plans, programmes and strategies which have been reviewed can be found in Appendix 3 of the full Environmental Report however the main documents of relevance to the Housing in the Countryside policy are the Local Plans, Structure Plan and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP). The main points to note are that the key focus for Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)15 is on the provision of sustainable rural development. The overarching aim of SPP15 is to have a prosperous rural economy, with a stable or increasing population that is more balanced in terms of age structure and where rural communities have reasonable access to good quality services. SPP15 advises that the planning system can assist this by adopting a more welcoming stance to development in rural Scotland. The Housing in the Countryside Policy must address the aims of SPP15 and translate this into a Perth and Kinross context.

Existing Environmental Problems and Issues

As part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process a baseline of environmental data has been established (see Appendix 1 of the full Environmental Report). This baseline data has been used to identify the environmental problems and issues currently found in Perth and Kinross. The implications of the potential problems and issues will require to be addressed by the Housing in the Countryside Policy review when setting the criteria for allowing new housing in the countryside.

Evolution of the Environment without the Housing in the Countryside Policy Review

It is considered that the current adopted policy (included in the various Local Plans) does not provide for the full extent of opportunities promoted by SPP15 and that the revised policy of 2005 whilst trying to achieve this will lead to inappropriate development in the countryside as has been evidenced by the planning consents granted since approval of the policy in December 2005.

Such applications include consents for:

- Larger numbers of units on steading and brownfield sites with consents being granted for developments of over 20 units. Concern about this centres around:
 - the potential of these proposals to create significant sized housing estates often in unsuitable locations, presenting difficulties in providing affordable housing, raising issues of sustainability and increasing pressure on rural services e.g. schools.
 - Developers being too keen to demolish steadings and replace with new build houses rather than seeking to convert. This raises issues of loss of traditional buildings and replacement with uncharacteristic new build. This again may be unsustainable.
 - Developers are expecting to be able to use brownfield land at the rear of steadings for new build rather than considering its value to provide larger garden ground or amenity landscaping
 - Policy should only apply to 'redundant' farm buildings, not to existing modern ones; if they are to be replaced, and
 - What happens to existing farm operations?
 - Loss of economic development land as start up enterprises cannot compete with housing land value.
 - Impact on biodiversity e.g. removal of derelict farm buildings which provide a habitat for bats.
- Infill sites – Concern has been raised over the appropriateness of using a figure to determine what is a suitable gap site.
- Replacement houses – there is a need to ensure that piles of stones should not be a justification for a new house overriding issues of appropriate siting and design.

It is therefore considered essential that the Housing in the Countryside Policy is reviewed to produce a policy which not only recognises the opportunities for new housing in the countryside but also addresses the constraints.

Selection of Preferred Alternative

Four alternative Housing in the Countryside policy emphases were compared through a series of policy scenarios:

1. Status Quo Carrying forward the existing Housing in the Countryside Policy revised in 2005
2. Protecting natural and cultural heritage
3. Fostering community and local economic development
4. Sustainability

The full environmental assessment of each of the above can be found in Appendix 2 of the full Environmental Report.

Of the four alternatives assessed it was clear that the existing Housing in the Countryside Policy revised in 2005 had the most negative impacts on the SEA objectives, with the other 3 alternatives having a mix of both positive and negative effects. The assessment of the alternatives has highlighted the areas in which the 2005 policy has failed to achieve satisfactory environmental outcomes and identified potential measures for the prevention, reduction and offsetting of these significant adverse effects (mitigation). From the assessment it is proposed that the amendments to the policy focus on reducing the adverse effects of the policy on biodiversity, cultural heritage and landscape.

With regard to biodiversity there is a strong protective framework through legislation and national and local planning and other policies, however it is considered appropriate for the revised policy to bring to the attention of potential applicants the biodiversity issues specific to the redevelopment of rural buildings. The assessment whilst highlighting the merits in terms of the re-use of existing buildings in preference to new build in respect of maintaining the appearance and pattern of traditional buildings in the countryside, has also highlighted the adverse effects of large scale steading redevelopments on cultural heritage, landscape character and sustainable development issues. In order to address this the policy and review of the 'Guidance on the siting and design of houses in rural areas' requires to give consideration to 'what is an appropriate scale of development in a given location', irrespective of the amount of land actually available at a 'site' with reference to landscape capacity, accessibility issues, infrastructure availability, biodiversity, etc. The assessment has also highlighted the need for the 'Guidance on siting and design of houses in rural areas' to be amended to provide more advice in relation to the siting of housing in the countryside and the treatment of curtilage.

Assessment of Alternatives

An assessment matrix has been used to assess the environmental effects of each Alternative and the results are summarised below. The full results of the assessment can be found in Appendix 2.

Effect				
Major Positive ++	Minor Positive +	Unknown 0	Minor Negative -	Major Negative --

	Alternative							
SEA Objectives	1. Carry forward the existing Housing in the Countryside Policy revised in 2005		2. Protecting natural and cultural heritage		3. Fostering community and local economic development		4. Sustainability	
Maintain, protect and where necessary enhance habitats and species of international, national and regional conservation value, including the populations of European Protected Species and protection of their resting places	--		+		--		--	
Accommodate the desire for people to live in the countryside and direct development to appropriate areas	--		--	+	--		--	
Maintain, protect and where necessary enhance the fundamental qualities and productive capacities of soils	--	+	-		--	+	+	-
Safeguard water resources & water quality, ensure no deterioration of the ecological status of waterbodies and where possible enhance the ecological value of watercourses & bodies	--		-		--		-	
Direct development to locations which reduces the need to travel and reduces journey length and ensure compliance with Air Quality objectives	--		-		0		+	-
Reduce the area's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, especially flooding, through the direction of new development to appropriate areas	+		+	-	+		+	
Maintain, protect, and where appropriate enhance and restore historic buildings, archaeological sites and other culturally important features	--		++		+	-	0	
Maintain & where necessary enhance, landscape character, especially those locations designated as having particular worth	--		++		-		-	
Protect and enhance countryside and rural character and respect existing pattern, form and setting of small settlements and building groups	--		++		-		-	
Minimise the use of resources including fuel and chemicals, and minimise the creation of waste by following the waste hierarchy: Reduce – Reuse – Recycle - Recover	-		-		0		+	
Maximise the sustainable use / re-use of material assets (land and buildings)	--		+	-	+	-	+	-

Of the four alternatives assessed it was clear that the existing Housing in the Countryside Policy revised in 2005 had the most negative impacts on the SEA objectives, with the other 3 alternatives having a mix of both positive and negative effects. The assessment of the alternatives has highlighted the areas in which the 2005 policy has failed to achieve satisfactory environmental outcomes and identified potential measures for the prevention, reduction and offsetting of these significant adverse effects. Details of the mitigation measures are provided in Appendix 2.

From the assessment it is proposed that the amendments to the policy focus on reducing the adverse effects of the policy on biodiversity, cultural heritage and landscape.

With regard to biodiversity there is a strong protective framework through legislation and national and local planning and other policies, however it is considered appropriate for the revised policy to bring to the attention of potential applicants the biodiversity issues specific to the redevelopment of rural buildings. The assessment whilst highlighting the merits in terms of the re-use of existing buildings in preference to new build in respect of maintaining the appearance and pattern of traditional buildings in the countryside, has also highlighted the adverse effects of large scale steading redevelopments on cultural heritage, landscape character and sustainable development issues. In order to address this the policy and review of the 'Guidance on the siting and design of houses in rural areas' requires to give consideration to 'what is an appropriate scale of development in a given location', irrespective of the amount of land actually available at a 'site' with reference to landscape capacity, accessibility issues, infrastructure availability, biodiversity, etc. The assessment has also highlighted the need for the 'Guidance on siting and design of houses in rural areas' to be amended to provide more advice in relation to the siting of housing in the countryside and the treatment of curtilage.

Secondary, Cumulative and Synergistic Effects

The assessment of secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects is an important element of the SEA process because the combined impact of many different plans and policies can have significant environmental effects. There is potential for cumulative effects on the water environment from the proliferation of housing developments in rural non-sewered areas. Piecemeal development in areas at risk of flooding could also have a cumulative and synergistic effect on catchment flood risk in the Policy area. However as the Housing in the Countryside Policy takes account of the other PPS's in its formulation the cumulative impacts are kept to a minimum and in the main serve to mitigate the adverse impacts of the policy.

Mitigation

Appropriate measures to prevent, reduce and as much as possible offset any significant adverse impacts on the environment of implementing the Plan must be identified. Mitigation measures were identified as part of the environmental assessment exercise and the results can be found in Appendix 2 of the full Environmental Report.



Monitoring

It is a requirement that planning authorities monitor the significant effects on the environment arising from the implementation of the plan. A set of indicators have therefore been developed which will allow the Council to monitor and identify any unforeseen adverse effects of the Housing in the Countryside Policy at an early stage and undertake any remediation that is necessary.

Appropriate Assessment

Before giving consent for a plan which is likely to have a significant effect on a European designated site an 'Appropriate Assessment' must be carried out. This has been prepared as a separate document and can be viewed on the Council's website.

Timescale and consultation

The timetable for the completion of the Housing in the Countryside Policy review and associated SEA are set out in the table below.

Key Stage	Dates
Draft Housing in the Countryside Policy & Environmental Report to Enterprise & Infrastructure Committee	28 January 2009
Publication for consultation of draft Housing in the Countryside Policy & Environmental Report and submission to Consultation Authorities and Scottish Government	30 January 2009
Consultation on draft Alteration & Environmental Report <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Published on Council website and in press• Targeted meetings with interest groups	30 January 2009 – 27 March 2009 (8 weeks as requested by Consultation Authorities)
Proposed Housing in the Countryside Policy & Environmental Report to Enterprise & Infrastructure Committee for approval	August 2009

Responses to the draft Housing in the Countryside Policy and Environmental Report were to be submitted by **Friday 27 March 2009** to:

Head of Planning
Perth & Kinross Council
The Environment Service
Pullar House
35 Kinnoull Street
Perth
PH1 5GD

Alternatively comments can be emailed to: developmentplan@pkc.gov.uk