



rural

location

design

sustainability

Planning Advice Note

housing

in the countryside



housing in the countryside the intention is to create more widespread good quality rural housing which respects the Scottish landscape



rural solutions are required for rural locations

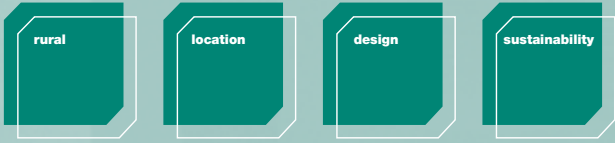
Planning series:

- › **Scottish Planning Policies (SPPs)** provide statements of Scottish Executive policy on nationally important land use and other planning matters, supported where appropriate by a locational framework.
- › **Circulars**, which also provide statements of Scottish Executive policy, contain guidance on policy implementation through legislative or procedural change.
- › **Planning Advice Notes (PANs)** provide advice on good practice and other relevant information.

Statements of Scottish Executive policy contained in SPPs and Circulars may be material considerations to be taken into account in development plan preparation and development control.

Existing National Planning Policy Guidelines (NPPGs) have continued relevance to decision making, until such time as they are replaced by a SPP. The term SPP should be interpreted as including NPPGs.

Statements of Scottish Executive location-specific planning policy, for example the West Edinburgh Planning Framework, have the same status in decision making as SPPs.



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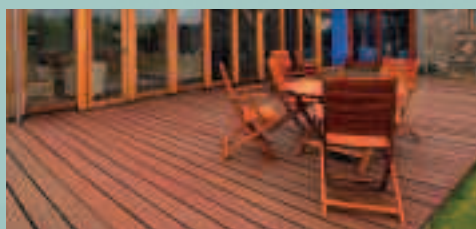
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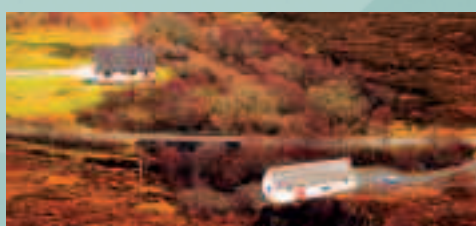
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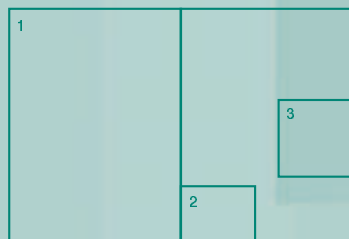
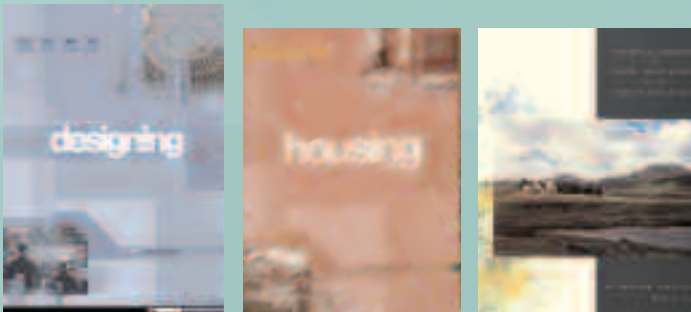
Aim

***Designing Places*, published in November 2001, sets out the Scottish Executive's expectations of the planning system to deliver high standards of design in development for rural and urban areas. The design based Planning Advice Note (PAN) series is an additional means by which we can maintain the profile of design and identify best practice in planning for high quality development.**

This PAN supersedes and reinforces many of the key themes set out in *PAN 36 Siting and Design of New Housing in the Countryside* (published in 1991) and brings the advice up to date with the new emphasis on design and quality.

The advice in this PAN sets out key design principles which need to be taken into account: by applicants when planning a new development and by planning authorities, when preparing development plans and supporting guidance, and determining applications.

The purpose is to create more opportunities for good quality rural housing which respects Scottish landscapes and building traditions. The advice should not, however, be seen as a constraint on architects and designers wishing to pursue innovative and carefully considered contemporary designs.



- 1: Skirling, Scottish Borders
- 2: Housing sitting down low in the landscape
- 3: Gable end of the Wooden House, Skye, Highlands



Rural development

Problems to solve

For over 10 years, PAN 36 has had some positive impact on new housing development but, nethertheless, concerns remain:

- ▶ an inability to understand designs particular to local areas;
- ▶ development plans and supporting guidance not always sufficiently clear about the standards required;
- ▶ a lack of confidence in articulating and holding out for quality design, and following through to appeal, if necessary;
- ▶ an over reliance on houses not designed specifically for the site; and
- ▶ roads and drainage engineers using urban solutions rather than having greater flexibility to reflect local circumstances.

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It is therefore appropriate to restate the importance of quality development in the countryside by expanding on the messages in PAN 36.

Changing circumstances

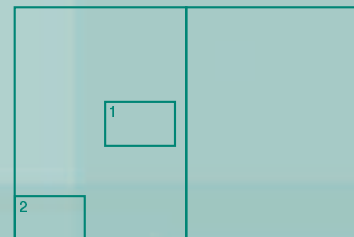
One of the most significant changes in rural areas has been a rise in the number of people wishing to live in the accessible parts of the countryside while continuing to work in towns and cities within commuting distance. Others wish to live and work in the countryside. These trends derive from lifestyle choices and technological changes which allow working from home. More people are now also buying second or holiday homes. In addition, leisure and tourism businesses have been increasingly active, for example through timeshare and chalet developments. It is for planning authorities to assess these demands and decide how, and where, to accommodate them.



a rise in the number of people wishing to

live

in the countryside



1: Self catering units, near Auchterarder, Perth & Kinross
2: Contemporary artist's studio and home, Perth & Kinross

Opportunities

Some landscapes will probably have to accommodate considerable change in the coming years. This change needs to be planned and managed so that the effects are positive. Buildings in rural areas can often be seen over long distances and they are there for a long time. Careful design is essential. Traditional buildings can be an inspiration but new or imaginative re-interpretation of traditional features should not be excluded. Where possible, the aim should be to develop high quality modern designs which maintain a sense of place and support local identity.

Examples of the main opportunities include:

conversion or rehabilitation

The revival of rural buildings to provide comfortable modern homes has become increasingly popular. It not only brings a building back to life but it may provide opportunities to sensitively conserve our built heritage, including buildings of merit which are not listed. The sympathetic restoration of buildings which are structurally sound, largely intact, safely accessible and linked to water and other services maintains the character and distinctiveness of places.



small-scale infill

Small-scale infill in existing small communities can bring economic and social benefits by supporting existing services such as schools and shops. Planning authorities should generally seek to reinforce the building pattern of the existing settlement and ensure that new buildings respect and contribute to the area's architectural and cultural heritage.



new groups of houses

Housing related to existing groupings will usually be preferable to new isolated developments. The groupings should not be suburban. They should be small in size, and sympathetic in terms of orientation, topography, scale, proportion and materials to other buildings in the locality. They should take account of sustainable development criteria in location and infrastructure needs.



single houses

There will continue to be a demand for single houses, often individually designed. But these have to be planned, with location carefully selected and design appropriate to locality.



Policy framework

Guidance and advice

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) 3 *Planning for Housing* and SPP 15 (revised) *Planning for Rural Development* recognise that changes in the rural economy require new development. Diversification of the rural economy is also of importance and PAN 73 on Rural Diversification concentrates on this issue.

Policy in SPP 3 *Planning for Housing* anticipates that most new housing will be located in towns and villages, but given the major changes in farming and the rural economy, it is expected that new housing out with existing settlements may have a greater part to play in economic regeneration in rural areas.

SPP 15 *Planning for Rural Development* advances policy in respect of small-scale rural housing developments, including clusters and groups in close proximity to settlements, replacement housing, plots on which to build individually designed homes and holiday homes.

The requirement for additional housing in an area should reflect not only local needs including affordable housing, but also provide for second and holiday homes where there is demonstrable demand.

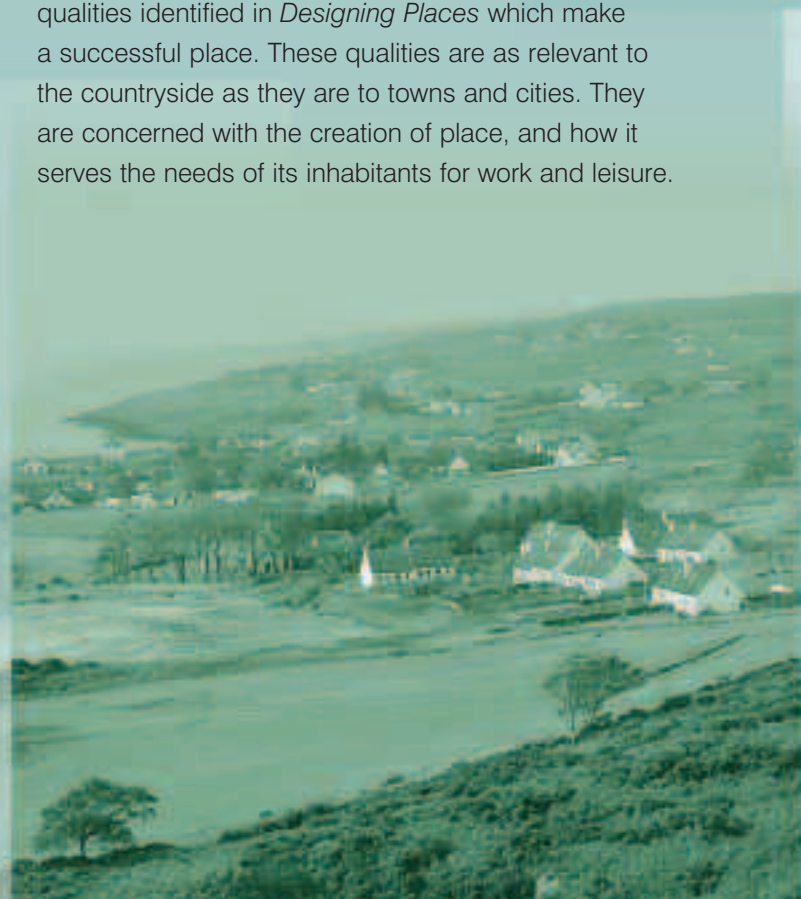
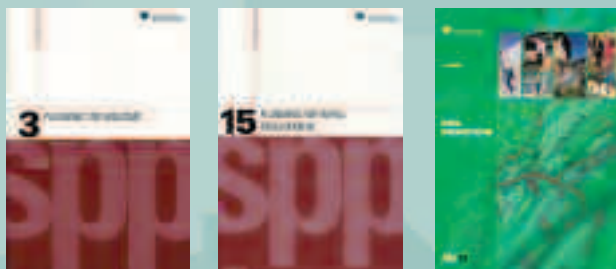
Together, the guidance and advice indicates that the amount and location of housing that can be developed in rural areas is determined by a number of factors. These include:

- › **Context** – Fit in the landscape.
- › **Identity** – Design details which reflect the local character, as well as an increased awareness of energy efficiency linked to design standards.
- › **Connection** – Proximity to services, e.g. schools, shops (ideally within walking or cycling distance), ease of access (from an existing road and foot path and to a rail station or bus route); drainage and sewerage capacity (from combined septic tanks or links to public systems).

Overall, new developments in the countryside, if properly planned, sited and designed, contribute to the quality of a landscape.

Designing Places

Designing Places (2001) sets out clear national planning policy support for higher design standards, and it is important that these are carried forward throughout Scotland. The aim is to improve the quality of the environment for everyone. There are six key qualities identified in *Designing Places* which make a successful place. These qualities are as relevant to the countryside as they are to towns and cities. They are concerned with the creation of place, and how it serves the needs of its inhabitants for work and leisure.



Distinctive

Vaila Shore Base, Shetland

The success of a place often depends on maintaining its distinctiveness. Development which does not undermine the identity of rural areas should be supported.



Safe & pleasant

Barn O'Braco, Aberdeenshire

These qualities are seen by many as essential to countryside living. People often move to the countryside for a healthier and less frenetic lifestyle.



Easy to get around

Manor Valley, Scottish Borders

Countryside dwellers rely on good accessibility to conduct their day-to-day lives. The reality of life in many rural areas requires the use of a private car.



Welcoming

Kincardine O'Neil, Aberdeenshire

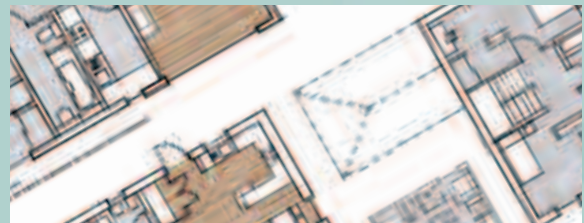
Making development welcoming is important, especially in the layout of new houses on the edge of settlements and at the gateways or entrances to villages.



Adaptable

Layout plans for adaptable space

This is about recognising changing patterns of use where appropriate, as well as allowing people to easily adapt their homes as their needs change with time.



Resource efficient

North Uist, Western Isles

Careful siting will not only enhance the landscape but can also bring benefits by utilising current infrastructure and services, maximising passive solar gain and reducing energy consumption through avoiding extremes of weather. Also, using locally sourced materials may be more sustainable and better suited to the local natural and built environments.



Location

The provision of new development should be sustainable. One way of achieving this is whether it helps to maintain the population in an area – making services viable, retaining people in affordable homes and creating new businesses in rural areas. It is also helpful if development makes use of spare capacity in existing infrastructure and services. But it is important to ensure that any new development does not overload the capacity of current services and infrastructure.

3 factors which influence location

- 1. Landscape**
- 2. Layout**
- 3. Access**

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location

sustainability

1. Landscape

Scotland's geological and climatic conditions have influenced vegetation, land use, settlement patterns, building methods and styles. This has led to a rich diversity of landscapes. These landscapes have different capacities to accommodate development. It is therefore crucial that the proposed location and siting of new housing considers the impact on the landscape, in terms of both immediate and wider surroundings. If a proper fit in the landscape is not achieved, then even a well designed building can fail. Overall, a well designed house must reflect the landscape in which it is set. It must be informed by and respond to it, rather than being a house which is designed without regard to the context and placed within a site.

Scotland's most valued landscapes are recognised by a range of national and local designations. These include National Parks, National Scenic Areas, local landscape designations (such as Areas of Great Landscape Value), Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Conservation Areas and the setting of listed buildings and Ancient Monuments. These identify areas that are mainly important for their scenic or cultural heritage but which may also be important for nature and recreation. In such places, planning authorities should take steps to encourage developments that respect the special combination of features for which an area has been designated.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), in partnership with local authorities across Scotland, has completed a suite of Landscape Character Assessments. These provide a more objective description of landscape, enabling a better assessment of how change will affect it. Related techniques, such as landscape capacity studies, can also help in exploring the ability or limits of different landscapes to successfully accommodate development in keeping with local landscape character.



Some landscape considerations

Location within the landscape – Location concerns site selection within the wider landscape. Some areas are so prominent that it is accepted that any development at these locations would be detrimental to the surrounding landscape. Most new developments should try to fit into or nestle within the landscape. Skyline development should normally be avoided, as should heavily engineered platforms. This is to ensure that the building does not interrupt and conflict with the flow of the landform or appear out of scale. Even where sites are less visible they will still require a significant level of skill to assimilate buildings into the landscape. Sites which are least visible can often be suitable for more adventurous or individual designs. Occasionally, where a landmark development is considered to be appropriate, its design needs to be of the highest quality and considered very carefully. Likewise, where there are groupings of new buildings, their location within the landscape and relationship to each other is important.



Woodlands – Setting a building against a backdrop of trees is one of the most successful means by which new development can blend with the landscape. Where trees exist they should be retained. Care should be taken to ensure an appropriate distance between tree root systems and building foundations, so that neither is compromised. In some parts of Scotland, where there is little existing planting and limited scope for landscaping, particular care should be taken in the selection of sites and design of houses.



New planting – The purpose of new planting is not to screen or hide new development, but to help integration with the surrounding landscape. New trees and shrubs which are locally native will usually be easier to establish than non-native plants, and will be more in keeping with the character of the area. Planting with locally native species has the additional benefits of creating habitats for wildlife and potentially contributing to Local Biodiversity Action Plans.



Boundary treatments – The open space associated with a house or houses should be considered as an integral part of the development, not as an afterthought, and again be treated in relation to the surrounding environment. Suburban ranch-type fences, concrete block walls and the regimented use of non-native fast-growing conifers should be avoided. Although the use of dry-stone walling in some areas can help the integration of new development with the landscape, the costs involved may mean that this can only be justified in exceptional circumstances. Such circumstances are most likely to arise in designated areas, e.g. National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Conservation Areas and local landscape designations.



2. Layout

The importance of layout within a site cannot be over stated. A good layout can enhance an individual house design; conversely, a bad layout can detract from a good design. When determining a site's layout, consideration must be given to a range of natural and technical factors.

Layout considerations

Topography – Sloping sites need careful consideration to allow a practical house design which does not look out of place. They can, however, give an opportunity to use the difference in levels to create an interesting and fitting building. This approach is much more appropriate than the use of platforms. In low-lying areas, flood risk needs to be addressed.



Orientation – Attention should be paid to established building lines and orientation of any buildings in the area. Overlooking should be avoided. The location and proximity to natural and built features, such as landmarks, can also influence layout.



Shelter – Layouts should try to avoid any unnecessary exposure to the elements, i.e. houses should shelter one another and generally be positioned to take account of the prevailing wind direction and to create a good microclimate.



Solar gain – Energy efficient layouts can help to maximise natural light and solar gain.



Views – Views to and from the site should be maximised, but not at the expense of good design.



Movement – Easily accessible links should be made for pedestrian and vehicular movement.



3. Access

Rural areas need design solutions and road standards which are appropriate to their character and setting. The application of urban standards and materials, such as tar macadam and concrete kerbs have resulted in development in the countryside looking too formal and over engineered. In addition, the adoption of suburban street lighting standards is not only inappropriate and increases light pollution, but often the lamp design can look out of place in the rural context. Every effort must be made to adopt an approach which complies with safety standards and yet responds sensitively to the rural scene and local circumstances.

There is scope for innovative road design solutions, particularly in designated areas, which achieve safety without compromising a sense of place. For example, where possible, access should be from existing entrance points on existing roads, modified as appropriate to improve sightlines. It may be appropriate to develop small groups of roadside buildings, particularly where this follows a historical precedent. Provision should also be made for safe parking.

Careful consideration needs to be given to proposals for new housing where access from the trunk road is required. The Executive is committed to improving safety on trunk roads.



scope for rural road design solutions

Cluster



Courtyard



Linear





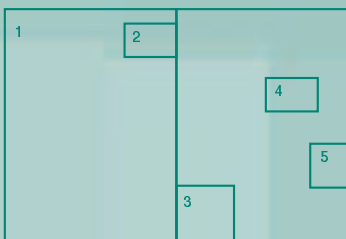
Design

High quality design must be integral to new development and local area differences must be respected.

Traditionally, local climate and available materials have had a profound influence on the design of houses and have helped to create local area characteristics. Likewise, features and finishes can help connect, or disconnect, a house to its surroundings. Increasingly, however, design has been standardised across the countryside. The challenge therefore lies in encouraging designs which are distinctive and responsive to their setting.

In some areas, such as National Parks, National Scenic Areas and Conservation Areas, there may be a case for more prescription and a preference for traditional design, but it is also important to encourage the best of contemporary designs. There is considerable scope for creative and innovative solutions whilst relating a new home to the established character of the area.

The overall aim should be to ensure that new housing is carefully located, worthy of its setting, and is the result of an imaginative, responsive and sensitive design process.



- 1 & 2:** Manor Valley, Scottish Borders
- 3:** The Wooden House with four interior levels and design flexibility so that the walls can be added or taken out, Skye, Highlands
- 4:** Elgol, Skye, Highlands
- 5:** Sustainable steading conversion, Barehilllock, Aberdeenshire

3	factors which influence design	1. Scale
		2. Materials
		3. Details



1. Scale

There is a sturdy quality to much of the scale and shape of Scotland's domestic rural architecture. This is derived largely from the simplicity of the form and proportion, and in the arrangement of doors and windows. Traditional Scottish style has sometimes been diluted by modern designs which do not always reflect the historic scale and proportions. There is a need for sensitive designers to tackle this, especially when buildings are sited next to traditional buildings.

The main objective should be to adapt the best from the local elements and to interpret traditional shapes and sizes into a modern context. Overall, the envelope (the width, height and depth of the walls) together with the roof pitch (angle) determine a building's proportions.



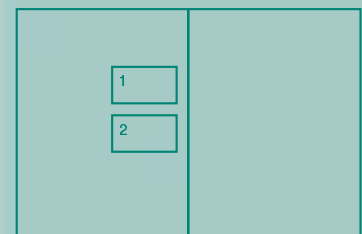
simplicity

of form and proportion

Traditional rural buildings look "right". They have a wide frontage and narrow plan which controls their scale and proportions.



Even if the roof pitch remains the same, if the proportions alter, the building starts to look less appropriate!



1: Easter Davoch steading conversion, Aberdeenshire
2: New extension, Skye, Highlands

2. Materials

The use of inappropriate or too many materials can have a negative impact. The greater the use of local materials, the more the house may reflect aspects of the local character. This will also help to contribute to sustainability.

In some parts of Scotland, stone is the traditional building material, with the diversity in colour and texture adding to local identity. It is expensive, however, and may only be required in some circumstances. One suitable alternative is a tinted harl which reflects local colour, such as red brown in East Lothian.

Slate or pantiles are often the most common traditional roofing materials. Slate is a versatile and highly effective roofing material but, like stone, it is becoming increasingly expensive. In some circumstances, manufactured alternatives may be suitable.

The economic and practical advantages of timber frame construction and timber cladding means that this is likely to remain the prevalent form of construction and design in rural areas. Forestry Commission Scotland and the Wood for Good Campaign has been promoting the idea of living and building with wood. Also innovative house designs have been produced looking at the use of timber in construction.

More use of timber cladding needs to be encouraged. Ways in which it can be made more visually appropriate is through opaque painting, which is also highly desirable in terms of durability. The use of limey white colours can help to assuage concerns about timber not fitting with the tradition of lime-washed harl masonry. Other colours may sometimes be acceptable including ochre, duck egg blue and dark green.

Kit houses in the countryside need to be well designed to reflect local circumstances.



3. Details

The detailed aspects of rural house design show some general characteristics, although local guidance should stress any variations. Many of the typical attributes of the Scottish rural house, such as window size and setbacks, eaves and verges, dormer design, chimney stacks and porches are shaped by an often wet and windy climate. Overall, design details often need to be assessed on individual merits but excessive detailing and ornamentation should generally be avoided.

Some design detail considerations

Windows and doors – Windows and doors are often historically small and set back from the face of the wall for added protection from driving rain. Their emphasis is almost always vertical, with windows consisting of small panes. More recently, some new modern housing has favoured large windows with a horizontal orientation. This has advantages of light, solar gain and outward views from the house. Whatever the size, the use of traditional wooden frame designs, as opposed to plastic, should be encouraged.



Eaves and verges – Overhanging eaves and verges are very much part of the Scottish tradition, but their use does vary from place to place, as they are often a direct response to the micro climate. For example, they have particular benefits in areas of high rainfall.



Gables and chimneys – Chimneys are an important characteristic of traditional Scottish rural housing, normally located on gable ends and breaching the ridgeline of the roof to avoid long slender stacks exposed to the weather. However, in the context of energy efficiency, it is good practice to locate a chimney centrally, rather than on a gable.



Dormers – Dormer windows, used where the roof space is required for accommodation, should normally take the form of traditional dormers or roof lights with vertical proportions.



Porches – Porches are a common feature on most houses and a variety of styles has evolved, performing a number of useful functions such as reducing draughts. Where they are part of the overall design of a house they can make a contribution to the quality of the internal and external environment. Whether traditional or modern, they have to be in proportion to the elevation.



Energy – Considerations should be given to energy efficiency including heating systems, insulation and type of glazing.



Conservatories – These should be sensitive in design and often benefit from more heat and light if placed on a south facing elevation.

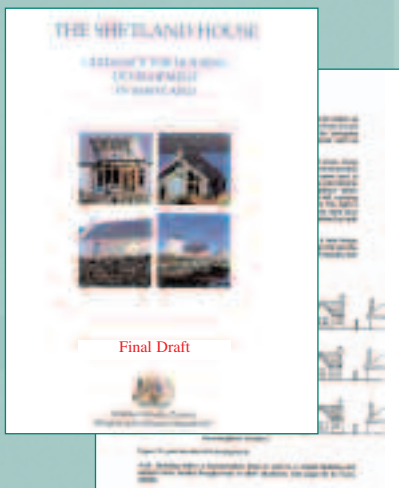


The way forward

Role of applicants

Applicants must play their role in delivering good quality designs. They should seek the assistance of skilled architects and designers. Applicants, and their agents, should familiarise themselves with the relevant policies before preparing a proposal, and likewise planning authorities have a duty to communicate to applicants, and explain to them what is required. Pre-application meetings with the planning authority should be encouraged.

PAN 68 on Design Statements provides advice on how to write design statements. They should often be prepared for developments in sensitive locations. Their purpose is to allow applicants an opportunity to demonstrate their analysis and understanding of the settlement character, their thought process behind their development and the quality to which is being aspired.



Ways for local authorities to help communicate effectively with applicants

- ▶ Hold lists of good local architects and designers with examples to illustrate their work.
- ▶ Publish design guides and advertise them to landowners, developers, local architects, planning consultants and builders in the area.
- ▶ Provide detailed design guidance at the pre-application stage to ensure potential applicants are aware of the policies and less likely to submit proposals likely to be refused.
- ▶ Mount a public display in the planning department to illustrate local examples of successful siting and design. This could be rotated around relevant venues such as libraries, shopping centres and community groups for maximum benefit.
- ▶ Organise seminars to publicise the planning authority's policies on the location, siting and design of new housing in the countryside. Illustrate poor examples, and explain why they are unacceptable.
- ▶ Hold local awards (such as Aberdeenshire Council) and advise applicants to submit to other award schemes.
- ▶ Set up websites which provide easy access to examples of good design in the area.



Role of planning authorities

Local authority planning services should be committed to securing high quality design in new homes and must equip their teams with the necessary design skills. They must also engage effectively with applicants.



Development planning

Development policies must provide a clear vision for high quality developments. They provide an opportunity to set out the type of high standards expected from development proposals. They should be up to date, clear and forward-looking.

It is proposed that rural Scotland will be covered by single-tier plans, and also more concise plans in the future. This will mean that there will be a greater role for supplementary planning guidance.

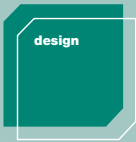
Supplementary planning guidance

Development plan policies should be complemented by more detailed design policy in supplementary planning guidance (SPG). This is an effective way of handling detailed information. When drawing up the guidance, public consultation is essential followed by formal adoption. This strengthens its status as a material consideration in the planning process.

Some examples of SPG include:

- ▶ **Design guides** – Guides or handbooks can help to illustrate the relationships of new houses to the landscape and the range of local traditions, with some principles of character and vernacular. Examples of good and bad practice from the area enable people to form a clearer picture of appropriate development. Illustrations with explanations of what would and would not be likely to be given planning permission can also be helpful. Overall, they appeal to a wide audience and bring to life many of the issues.
- ▶ **Design codes** – Design codes may be appropriate in very special circumstances where a very high degree of prescription is required, for example, in a Conservation Area.
- ▶ **Leaflets** – Simple information leaflets summarising local policy and guidance should describe the key policy elements, refer to additional sources and emphasise the benefits of submitting a well considered and presented application.





Development control

Authorities must ensure that applicants are clear about the expected quality and design requirements. The principles which will be taken into account when determining applications should be expressed clearly and concisely. It is also essential that authorities apply their policies consistently. Where policies are not clear and open to interpretation, this hinders the development control process, through an increased risk of inconsistent decisions. Design is a material consideration in determining planning applications.

Role of councillors

Development in the countryside can be sensitive politically. It is very important that there is a solid core of planning policy and guidance which is accepted, understood and applied consistently. If there is to be more development in the countryside it has to be well planned and then implemented properly. The process has to be seen to be fair and impartial and councillors must demonstrate a commitment to policy. Seminars, study tours and attendance at local awards schemes can be useful.

consistency

of decision making



Concluding remarks

There will continue to be a need for new houses in the countryside and this demand will have to be accommodated. Although we are sensitive about our landscapes, they are evolutionary, not static. Most are able to accommodate some degree of change.

This change can be positive, if it is well planned. The location and appearance of each new house must be determined with care and thought, as short-term thinking can have a long-term impact on the landscape.

Every settlement should have its own distinctive identity. This is determined in part by the local characteristics of the area's architectural style of individual buildings and the relationship of these buildings to each other.

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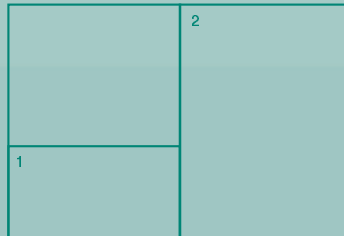
analysis

concept

The key messages are to:

- ▶ set the scale of change that is acceptable;
- ▶ establish a clear policy framework which promotes opportunities to create sustainable and affordable new homes, and apply it consistently;
- ▶ ensure that developments enhance local character; and make a positive contribution.

Creating new homes represents an important challenge for all concerned. Together, we must ensure that today's new developments have the quality and integrity to form the Conservation Areas and listed buildings of the future.



1: New housing, Duisdale, Skye, Highlands

2: Steel and timber conservatory, Perth & Kinross

change can be

positive



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Images

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Renzo Mazzolini
Rural Design
Shetland Islands Council

Enquiries

Enquiries about the content of this Planning Advice Note should be addressed to Susan Stirling, Planning, Scottish Executive Development Department, 2H Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ. Telephone 0131 244 7551. Email susan.stirling@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Further copies of this PAN and a list of SPPs, NPPGs and PANs can be obtained by telephoning 0131 244 7543. A copy of this PAN is also available on the Scottish Executive website: www.scotland.gov.uk/planning

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