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Dear Emma,

Scottish Planning Policy – Proposed Policy Changes Consultation

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the additional policy changes now being proposed to Part III of Scottish Planning Policy which is due to be published by the end of the year.

At its meeting of 18 September 2009 and in recognition of the imminent publication of the current consultation, the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) agreed to delegate this response to officers in consultation with the chair and vice-chair. However, this response will be reported to the SDPA on 4 December and I will forward any additional comments after the meeting.

This response has sought to avoid duplication with any responses from Aberdeen City or Aberdeenshire Councils by concentrating on those matters of particular interest to the SDPA.

As a consequence of the above, I do not propose a response in relation to those sections of the consultation relating to flooding, onshore oil and gas operations or high amenity business locations.

Sustainable Development and Climate Change

The additional level of detail provided by the current proposal (as opposed to the original consultation) is welcome.

It is agreed that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 places significant new obligations on planning authorities which extend beyond those contained in the planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 (s3E in particular). While the planning system is just one tool in the toolkit to address climate change adaptation and mitigation, it is an important one. However, it is important to highlight the scale of change implied by the climate change targets and that 'business as usual' will not be acceptable. Unless stronger language is used its impact will be weakened. Section 8 (paragraph 4) attempts to express this but

does not use language commensurate with the challenge. The sum of the bullet points in section 8 will mean that new development will be unrecognisable from that seen over recent years. The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan highlights both the significance and the urgency of the climate change issue and the SPP should do likewise.

Section 8 (bullet 4) uses the phrase “areas with likely increased vulnerability to the effects of climate change”. This could be interpreted extremely widely rather than relate to the significance of either the effects or the increased vulnerability and should be reworded as a consequence.

Section 9 relates to s72 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 but refers to development plans generically rather than local development plans. However, the Act refers specifically to local development plans and this distinction should be retained in the SPP. Strategic Development Plans will have an important role to play in mitigation but not at the level addressed by s72.

The implications of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 for the planning system need to be explored in more depth than the SPP will provide space for and I understand that further work will be undertaken by the Scottish Government (hopefully with planning authorities) to explore these issues further. The danger that needs to be avoided is the 2009 Act being used against all new development rather than making sure new development is as sustainable as possible. This problem is emphasised in the final two bullets on page 4 with the potential contradiction between “the most sustainable option” and it being “essential that decision-making within the planning system supports reduced greenhouse gas emissions in line with the commitment to reduce emissions by 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050”.

Coastal Planning

The reference in the consultation document to the arrangements proposed for marine spatial planning and its relationship with development plans is important. This is an area which will develop further over the next few years but recognising this important link at this stage is welcome. However, the relationship should be two-way – “Planning authorities and Marine Planning Partnerships should work together to ensure that their respective plans are complementary...”

I trust that these comments are helpful and I look forward to seeing the final publication of the SPP in the next few months.

Yours sincerely,

David Jennings
Strategic Development Plan Manager