



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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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.

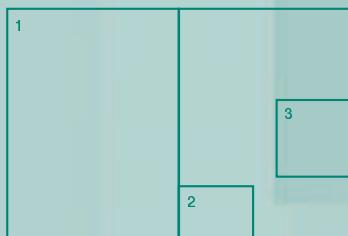
This PAN supersedes and reinforces many of the key themes set out in **PAN 36 Siting and Design of New Housing in the Countryside** (published in 1991) and brings the advice up to date with the new emphasis on design and quality.

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.



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- 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, nevertheless, 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

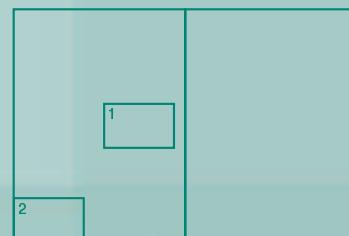
One of the most significant changes in rural areas has been a rise in the number of people wishing to live in the accessible parts of the countryside while continuing to work in towns and cities within commuting distance. Others wish to live and work in the countryside. These trends derive from lifestyle 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.



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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

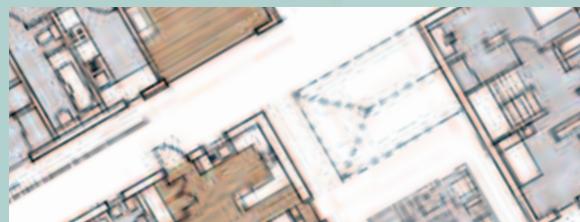
Making development welcoming is important, especially in the layout of new houses on the edge of settlements and at the gateways or entrances to villages.



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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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.



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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.



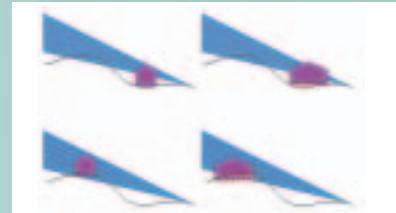
Shelter – Layouts should try to avoid any unnecessary exposure to the elements, i.e. houses should shelter one another and generally be positioned to take account of the prevailing wind direction and to create a good microclimate.



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.

