



## *National Planning Policy Guideline*

### **NPPG15**

#### **Rural Development**

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## National Planning Policy Guideline NPPG15

### *planning series:*

- **National Planning Policy Guidelines (NPPGs)** provide statements of Government policy on nationally important land use and other planning matters, supported where appropriate by a locational framework.
- **Circulars** also provide statements of Government policy and 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 Government policy contained in NPPGs and Circulars may, so far as relevant, be material considerations to be taken into account in development plan preparation and development control.

### *introduction*

1. This National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) sets out how the statutory land use planning system can assist the rural areas of Scotland achieve sustainable development. The planning system operates to secure the efficient and effective development and use of land in the public interest, taking into account objectives for social and economic progress and the conservation and enhancement of the natural and built heritage. A key strength of the system is the scope it provides for public involvement in preparing plans, policies and proposals and for securing their implementation through development control. Planners can help communities determine their needs and identify development opportunities designed to meet those needs, in a way that enhances rather than diminishes environmental quality.

2. The future of rural areas will be shaped by broader considerations such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), land ownership and land management and the guidance may be revised in due course to take account of Agenda 2000, Scottish Forestry Strategy and the Government's intention to invite the Scottish Parliament to designate National Parks. These issues are drawn together in "Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland - The Framework" and this NPPG complements that report, as well as the Government's response as set out in the Land Reform Policy Group's "Recommendations for Action". The NPPG addresses particular subject areas where land use planning can contribute to a more integrated and strategic approach to rural policy, for example, by identifying land and promoting action in development plans for employment and tourism facilities; by promoting opportunities for diversification from agriculture and uses for new technology and telecommunications; in meeting both the demand for new housing and the need for affordable housing; and associated transport considerations.

*Land Reform Policy Group - Recommendations For Action, The Scottish Office, Jan 1999*

3. In its Framework Paper, the Government stated that the overall aim of all its policies for rural Scotland is to foster and enable the sustainable development of rural communities. The paper identified four key principles for the formulation and delivery of rural development strategy. They are that rural development strategy must:

*Towards A Development Strategy For Rural Scotland - The Framework, The Scottish Office, Aug 1998*

- not set rural Scotland apart;
- reflect the diversity of Scotland;
- work through an integrated approach; and
- facilitate community involvement.

This NPPG reflects these overarching aims and indicates how they should be interpreted in development planning and development control and adds a fifth key principle:

- to protect and, where appropriate, enhance the countryside.

4. Structure and local plans have a key role to play in achieving sustainable development. They do so by setting out policies and land allocations that reflect economic, social as well as environmental considerations; by co-ordinating the land use issues and development proposals of the agencies and organisations at work in rural Scotland (see Annex); and by involving local communities. These plans will provide the basis for considered, consistent and effective development control decisions. As an input to this process, the NPPG:

- outlines the diverse character of rural Scotland;
- identifies current issues in, and approaches to, rural development;
- suggests a typology of areas for planning purposes within which different approaches can be pursued;
- emphasises the scope for greater community involvement in planning;
- promotes the co-ordination of agency activity in the planning process; and
- indicates general policy guidance and the action to be taken through structure plans, local plans and development control.

### **Rural Diversity**

5. Scotland has a rich diversity of rural landscapes of quality and rarity which contribute to regional identity and the overall quality of life for their inhabitants. Such areas have proved an attraction to new residents, to businesses and to a large number of tourists. They also contain the many small towns and settlements (see PAN 52) which provide economic and community foci. Diversity and quality are major assets that should not be diminished by inappropriate development and planning policies must be tailored to reflect and support these important characteristics. There are a number of ways of defining and categorising rural Scotland and it is broadly up to councils both to delineate their rural area and to define its subdivisions where they consider this will help in shaping policy and its emphasis. Work is currently underway on developing typologies of rural areas by The Scottish Office and Scottish Homes with a view to establishing a common database which can be used by a range of organisations for their particular needs. This NPPG draws broad distinctions between the rural hinterlands of the major urban areas, the less populated intermediate areas and the remote areas where even fewer people live and where issues associated with peripherality arise.

The following typology of areas is suggested based on groupings identified in the Scottish Rural Life Update analysis which looked at factors such as degree of remoteness, settlement pattern, population density, demographic structure and employment trends:

*Scottish Rural Life Update, HMSO, 1996  
In Association with Univ. of Aberdeen*

**commuter** - Residents are within easy access (less than 1 hr travel time) of a principal centre by either road or rail and settlements can vary in size from small villages to small towns of around 10,000 population. Areas are characterised, on the whole, by population growth and increased employment levels over the last 10 years. Typical commuter areas include the north-east around Aberdeen and rural areas within and close to the central belt e.g. most of Fife, Ayrshire, Lothian and parts of rural Stirling, the Borders and Perth and Kinross. They will often include green belt and countryside around towns (CAT) areas.

**intermediate** - Residents will typically be 1 to 2 hours travel from a principal centre. Areas are generally characterised by a resident ageing population, low population density and a high proportion of people living outwith settlements. Typical intermediate areas include large tracts of Highland, Berwickshire and large parts of Dumfries and Galloway.

**remote** - Areas characterised by their remoteness e.g. residents can be more than 2 hours travel from the nearest principal centre by car, rail or ferry thus isolation and peripherality are major issues. Areas are generally characterised by a static or decreasing population (due to ageing and net out-migration of young people), low population density, poor employment opportunities and with a relatively high dependence on the primary sector although there are exceptions where tourism has led to growth (e.g. Skye). Remote areas include parts of the western seaboard areas, the Hebridean islands, Caithness and Sutherland.

6. These three broad areas face different problems and pressures. The **commuter** areas, for example, often face pressures for land for new housing, business and industry and associated infrastructure. Accommodating new development without jeopardising the essential rural identity of existing settlements through suburbanisation can be a major issue. Substantial new development will of course have implications for movement, particularly car commuting. Thus, related policies on public transport provision and traffic management (e.g. park and ride) have to be considered in parallel. In the **intermediate** areas, important issues are how to manage the diversification from agriculture through small-scale economic development and encourage the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings for housing and business uses whilst ensuring quality development. In **remote** areas, the main issues are how to relieve the isolation and distance from services of residents and how to stimulate the local economy e.g. through providing land for affordable housing, opportunities for local enterprise which harness information technology, alternative income generating opportunities for farmers and crofters through diversification and by promoting green tourism initiatives.

7. While it is possible to have distinctive and identifiable types, the area of rural Scotland is of course a continuum with a number of characteristics common to all areas e.g. pleasant, spacious environment, clean air and less choice for residents in terms of public transport, services and jobs, which tend to be seasonal. Planning issues common to most rural areas include the re-use of redundant buildings, providing and retaining affordable housing for the indigenous population, the high costs of providing energy, infrastructure and travel to services. In some areas, issues such as the regeneration of former mining villages and the re-use or treatment of vacant/derelict land need to be addressed.

8. When using an area-based approach, planning authorities should have regard to areas which are already the subject of special initiatives e.g. the Central Scotland Forest is one such area which is contributing to the long term rehabilitation of the rural landscape in the central belt. In these areas, planning authorities will need to liaise closely with the responsible organisations/agencies involved and with neighbouring authorities to ensure co-ordination of strategic and management objectives. They should also consider how they can achieve added value in planning terms e.g. by ensuring that their development control decisions contribute to wider objectives.

### **Current issues and approaches in Development Plans**

9. A review of development plans reveals that most plans and policies do not adequately reflect the distinctiveness between, and within, the rural areas of Scotland. New approaches for dealing with rural diversity should be developed if social, economic and environmental objectives for distinctive areas are to be achieved. There also has to be increased awareness and discussion at local authority and community level of what sustainable development means and how long-term benefit for rural communities can be achieved and reflected in development plans. The recent proposals to introduce Community Planning will aid this process.

10. In some areas, particularly the **remote** areas, population and employment decline remain real issues of concern to residents as do the high cost of housing, infrastructure and service provision. There is scope for local authorities to address these issues, and through their development plans, provide a framework for co-ordinated action to tackle severe problems of rural deprivation where it occurs. Some authorities have already considered an area-based approach to policy delivery in their rural areas and some of the more recent structure plans (e.g. Tayside Structure Plan - A Rural Strategy for Tayside, June 1995) have acknowledged the need for a more co-ordinated approach to rural development, where new development has been considered in parallel with policies for public transport, infrastructure and service provision, with the local authority co-ordinating and working in partnership with the other agencies in the delivery of appropriate development and services.

## ***policy context***

### ***Sustainable Development***

11. The Government's view of sustainable development embraces its concern for the environment, economic growth and social progress. Sustainable communities require new development and employment opportunities which respect local, social and environmental circumstances. Sustainable development in the rural context also demands that the very best agricultural land should enjoy an appropriate level of protection and that the overall environmental quality of rural areas is not put at risk by inappropriate proposals. Rural communities should have opportunities to progress and improve their quality of life, and to sustain their local economies, while maintaining or enhancing the overall environmental quality of their respective areas. A Scottish Action Plan on sustainable development (*Down To Earth: A Scottish Perspective*) has recently been issued for consultation.

### ***European Structural Funds***

12. The European Structural Funds (ESF) and Community Initiatives, through the creation of new development associated with economic diversification and environmental improvement, will support and enhance the development of rural areas until 1999 and beyond. Current programmes cover the 1994-1999 period but expenditure can continue into 2001 (see section on Funding Sources). European support can be given for various types of development. Projects usually comprise small business start-ups and associated infrastructure, tourism-related developments, training facilities, communications, environmental improvement and agricultural diversification projects.

13. Beyond 1999, the pattern of rural development will be influenced by the European Commission's Agenda 2000 package which includes proposals for reform of the ESF, a possible Rural Development Regulation and CAP reform. It will be some time before the impact of these measures will be known but it is already clear that the Commission's drive for concentration, reducing ESF coverage across the EU from 51% to 35-40%, will bring pressure on currently eligible areas. For those who lose out, transitional funding is proposed to allow 'exit strategies' to be developed and implemented.

### ***Economic Development***

14. The Government is committed to the sustainable growth of the rural economy and extending opportunity through partnership with business, local government and local communities to ensure that rural communities are not disadvantaged by their geographical location. Initiatives such as the **Rural Partnership** will be built upon to ensure an integrated approach to policy-making and to provide opportunities for new forms of investment, particularly by the private sector. At the same time emphasis will be given to:

- encouraging investment in small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas including promoting new business start-ups and expansion;
- environmental initiatives e.g. establishing an environmental task force to engage the energies of young people in work for the community; and
- targeting the most vulnerable people in rural communities e.g. young people and women, for support and employment programmes.

15. An important issue for economic development in rural areas is achieving a quality of development on the ground which respects the integrity of the built and natural environment. The role of environmental quality in attracting investment is now well established and is particularly relevant in rural Scotland. High amenity is often cited by the business community and the LECs as being one of the main factors in attracting development. It is essential, therefore, that development in rural areas is designed to a high standard so contributing to environmental quality. Short-term costs paid to enhance the environment should be seen as making a long-term investment in the future prosperity of the area.

### ***Natural Heritage***

16. Many rural areas are important for their natural heritage. There are a number of national designations e.g. National Scenic Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and international designations e.g. Special Protection Areas for Wild Birds and Special Areas of Conservation for endangered species and habitats. It is Government policy to protect these. Guidance on how the Government's policies for the conservation and enhancement of Scotland's natural heritage should be reflected in land use planning is set out in NPPG 14: *Natural Heritage*.

### ***Built Heritage***

17. Today's rural landscape is the product of human activity over thousands of years and Scotland's particularly rich heritage of sites, buildings and landscapes of archaeological and historic interest, dating from the earliest period of human activity to the recent past, is testimony to this process. These features and landscapes are a finite and non-renewable resource. They are a part of Scotland's identity and are valuable both for their own sake and for education, recreation, leisure, tourism and the wider economy. The Government is committed to the protection, conservation and enhancement of the historic environment so that it may be enjoyed today and passed on in good order to future generations. Paragraph 43 outlines the principles of policy which should be considered in the context of rural development and provides information on sources of more detailed guidance.

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### ***policy guidelines***

18. In addition to considering the need for distinguishing between different types of rural areas in order to focus policy, councils should consider the following four factors in their approach to rural development:

- the scope for development within existing settlements;
- the scope for re-use and conversion of existing buildings;
- the extent to which new development should be allowed in the countryside;
- the natural and built heritage.

### ***Scope for development within settlements***

19. The main focus of new development should be on existing towns, villages and small settlement clusters where employment, housing (including affordable housing) and other services can be provided close together. Such an approach strengthens the role of small settlements and at the same time protects the countryside and reduces the need to travel. Development plans should encourage employment opportunities suitable in scale to rural centres and should indicate the circumstances in which new development will be allowed within, and adjacent to, existing villages and small towns.

20. In some settlements, particularly in ***commuter*** and some ***intermediate*** areas, pressures from population and economic growth may create severe problems especially where conservation and infrastructure (roads, water and sewerage) constraints also exist. Consequently, a clear development strategy in structure plans will be necessary to ensure that any planned settlement growth is appropriately and sensitively located. Strategies should be agreed by the agencies, including the water authorities, and emphasise restraint in areas where:

- environmental quality is threatened;
- there is a lack of infrastructure and the cost of new provision is prohibitive;
- there is a risk of flooding.

Brownfield land opportunities should be exploited to the full and new development should give priority to access by a range of means of transport.

21. In ***remote*** areas where the population is more dispersed, priority should be given to locating development and services in settlements which enable the wider catchment population to benefit. Associated access and transportation issues should be addressed at the same time. Working in partnership with the LECs, SH and the housing agencies, SEPA, SNH and the Water Authorities will ensure that councils play their part in co-ordinating and securing plan-led development, thus achieving added value for the communities concerned. Planning authorities also have a lead role to play in the co-ordination of land use issues e.g. site assembly and should, where necessary, use compulsory purchase powers to facilitate development.

### ***Housing within, and close to, settlements***

22. NPPG 3: *Land for Housing* emphasises the role the planning system can play in delivering housing land while protecting and enhancing environmental quality. Current Government policy focuses new housing development on existing centres of population, making the best use of existing buildings and land which has previously been developed i.e. brownfield land. New housing will continue to be required, particularly in **remote** areas, to sustain economic activity (e.g. for hotel employees) and the viability of small village communities. It can also help sustain villages by providing the basis for maintaining and supporting local services. New housing developments should respect the principles of good design, local character and use of traditional materials (PAN 44) and be developed in harmony with the landscape (PANs 36 and 52). The Scottish Office consultation paper on *Investing in Quality: Improving the Design of New Building in the Countryside* reinforces the need for quality in design.

- the pattern of new development opportunities should be set out in development plans and should be well related in scale and location to existing development.

23. In an increasing number of rural communities, there is pressure exerted on the availability of limited housing stock from people outwith the local community who can often afford to pay more for a house than local people. This results in a shortage of affordable housing (see NPPG3: *Land For Housing* for definition) for those on modest incomes who live and work in the area. Scottish Homes and the housing agencies are addressing this difficult issue by working in partnership with councils, the private sector and community councils in many rural areas to provide housing, for both ownership and rent, for local people. Where the local need for affordable housing can be clearly established, the provision of such housing in new development can be assisted by the planning system e.g. by attaching a condition to the planning consent which ensures that a certain quota of new housing development should be for affordable housing and will be provided by the developer.

- councils should participate in joint working arrangements and new housing partnerships with Scottish Homes and Housing Associations to provide and implement affordable housing through local plans where a need has been identified.

### **Scope for re-use and conversion**

24. The re-use and conversion of existing rural buildings has an important role in meeting the needs of rural areas for housing and business development and increasingly for tourism, sport and recreation facilities. Conversions can help reduce demand for new premises in the countryside, contribute to the quality of development in rural areas and stimulate the local economy, thus achieving sustainable development objectives. The conversion and re-use of redundant rural buildings, particularly for business, should be encouraged, provided that conversion does not lead to dispersal on such a scale as to undermine the vitality of existing settlements. Care should also be taken to ensure that the form, scale and general design of conversions are in keeping with their surroundings and complement the wider settlement policies for the area. The Government has recently succeeded in persuading the EC to free up funds for converting redundant farm buildings into homes for rent under the Objective 1 Agricultural Business Improvement Scheme and Objective 5b Rural Diversification Programme.

- local plans should set out the criteria against which applications for re-use and conversion will be assessed, including the nature of any planning conditions likely to be attached to permissions.

### **New development in the countryside**

25. Where it can be demonstrated that there are severe constraints in and adjacent to existing settlements, development plans should identify opportunities for appropriate forms of new development outside settlements, based on the capacity of the landscape to absorb new development. New development should be well designed and in harmony with the character and quality of place. Demand will be varied e.g. for business and industrial premises, housing, tourism-related development, agricultural diversification projects, practical exploitation of IT initiatives and woodland planting schemes. It is imperative that infrastructure providers (e.g. Water Authorities) and regulators (e.g. SEPA) are consulted at an early stage in the development process.

26. The scope for new development opportunities in the countryside should be clearly set out in structure plans and detailed in local plans. They should be justifiable in both environmental and infrastructure terms. There are extensive areas where conservation and protection of environmental quality remain the primary concerns and these areas also have to be clearly defined in development plans. In certain areas, protection of prime quality agricultural land may also be a concern. By contrast, parts of rural Scotland have been degraded by past industrial activity and other forms of built development. Where it does not conflict with other policies (e.g. green belt), then brownfield or degraded land should be re-used as a priority. The forthcoming NPPG on *Transport and Planning* emphasises that, where appropriate, new development should be guided to locations which are able to provide access by a range of means of transport.

### ***Housing in the countryside***

27. Government policy as set out in NPPG3: *Land For Housing* is to generally restrict new house building in the open countryside and to focus new development in areas where it can best be accommodated in terms of:

- access;
- infrastructure;
- landscape; and
- habitat conservation.

28. Where planning authorities identify a need for new development opportunities either for small groups or individual houses in the countryside in their development plans, they should ensure that any new development respects the inherent character of the area, matches local infrastructure capacity and, wherever possible, re-uses derelict and degraded land. Fragile habitats, archaeological/historic sites and landscapes, prime agricultural land and green belts should be avoided. The aim should be to promote initiatives that support the rural economy, embody the principles of sustainable development and enhance the rural environment.

- development plans should show where new housing will be encouraged; and
- set out criteria against which new proposals, not specifically provided for in the development plan, will be judged.

### ***Low density, low impact housing***

29. Low density housing, sometimes referred to as "lowland crofting", is one approach that has been adopted in the **commuter** area of West Lothian and could be emulated in other appropriate rural areas characterised by low grade agricultural land and degraded land. The policy promotes the restructuring of farms, with at least one third of the total area planted as native or amenity woodland, one third (the better farmland) retained in agricultural use (tenanted) and the remainder providing the land for about a dozen holdings of 1-10 hectares each. Occupants are encouraged to run businesses from them but there are restrictions on the type of businesses e.g. no heavy goods vehicles are allowed. The tree planting, public access and other planning objectives are usually secured by Section 75 agreements. The Central Scotland Countryside Trust, the body responsible for promoting the Central Scotland Forest (CSF), in conjunction with other bodies, has completed a review of the lowland crofting initiative.

30. Other smaller scale development with a low impact on the countryside environment, including for example craft homes and workshops, can provide both economic and environmental benefits. The regulation of innovative low impact uses through the planning system is best achieved by a plan-led approach to determine their scale and contribution to wider strategic objectives, followed by implementation by means of conditions and Section 75 agreements.

in areas where the quality of agricultural land is low and the landscape is degraded, councils should actively consider promoting in their development plans, innovative forms of sustainable low density, low impact housing (along the lines of the West Lothian model) and small-scale economic developments.

### **Business in rural areas**

31. There are many existing businesses established within rural areas. These range from village shops and small firms providing professional services, to substantial facilities such as farm equipment service centres or saw-mills. Providing opportunities for new businesses which complement existing businesses is no easy matter. It is, however, a crucial step if rural communities are to improve their quality of life. There are attractions to firms and their staff in locating to a rural environment for the 'quality of life' it offers. Such firms can also bring new life and activity to rural communities and are generally welcomed and quickly assimilated. With changing economic circumstances affecting traditional rural industries, rural employment needs to diversify into new ventures. Development plans should:

- ensure that suitable sites and buildings for both new and existing businesses are identified and are appropriate in terms of their size and location; and
- set criteria against which new development proposals, not specifically provided for in the development plan, will be judged.

32. In **intermediate** and **remote** areas suffering from economic decline, it will be particularly important for councils to identify appropriate land and buildings which have potential for development. They should also work jointly with the key agencies, particularly the LEC, to target specific local firms which have the greatest potential to grow and create development. A number of LECs already undertake specific area-based initiatives where they joint-fund (with councils, charitable trusts and local businesses) a specific initiative, targeted on a closely defined geographical area or social group e.g. in pockets of deprivation. Initiatives will often provide business development and training services at the local level, as in rural Stirling and some communities in the Highland and Islands Enterprise area, where the LEC concentrates on maximising the social benefits and economic potential.

### **Information Technology (IT) and telecommunications**

33. Electronic communications can expand business links in rural areas so that remoteness need not be a major disadvantage. NPPG2: *Business and Industry* recognises the contribution this sector can make to economic regeneration without damaging environmental quality. Specialist premises for multiple users (telecottages) have been provided e.g. in Aberdeenshire and Highland, where local firms are making use of computer and up-to-date telecommunications technology to work and communicate from where it is most convenient for them. IT can make a significant contribution to education by linking rural schools which saves on bussing pupils long distances and by facilitating skills and training in rural learning centres and home working, thus reducing car based commuting.

34. Although doing business electronically saves on physical movement, the activity itself may require space to grow. Policy should take account of the acceptability of expanding in existing rural buildings, and the possible need to develop new workshops or workshops linked to new dwellings. SH can give support to combining affordable housing with home working initiatives through market assessment and joint assistance. Local authorities and the LECs should also consider the scope for such development in their respective areas, taking account of any impact on landscape which may result. Based on the results of this scoping exercise:

- local plans should identify suitable sites and criteria for new businesses based on IT and the likely future expansion of business premises in rural areas.

35. In some areas, telecommunications development in general and masts in particular, have proved controversial. Many such installations, including masts of less than 15m in height, currently enjoy permitted development rights. Following consultation, the Planning Minister has announced that he proposes to introduce, in the near future, a prior approval scheme similar to that which currently applies to certain agricultural and forestry buildings. It will be necessary to amend the GPDO to clarify the position regarding additional masts erected on permitted masts which take their height to more than 15m above ground level.

### **Diversification**

36. It is European and Government policy to promote diversification in agriculture and fishing to create alternative income generating opportunities and rural employment, subject to appropriate environmental safeguards being taken. Diversification projects are varied in their nature and in the impact they make on the environment. They can range from on-farm forestry and woodland schemes to facilities for tourists such as shops, small businesses and leisure facilities. The Government is keen to encourage farm-based retail enterprises (e.g. sale of farm produce, tea rooms etc.) through the Rural Diversification Programme in Objective 5b areas, and to broaden the income generating opportunities in rural areas. Such diversification schemes can also have implications for the re-use of buildings and land and often include new development and infrastructure which requires sensitive treatment.

37. The key is to establish a framework within which planning authorities can take balanced decisions on economic development opportunities while respecting the environment. In some areas, the cumulative impact from development may create significant pressures on the environment which, if left unchecked, could lead to the erosion of the qualities that made them attractive in the first place.

- development plan strategies should provide guidance on acceptable projects resulting from rural diversification and relate it to wider environment, transport and tourism objectives.

### **Mineral Extraction and Waste Management**

38. Mineral extraction and waste management can make a significant contribution to the local economy. Minerals can only be worked where they are found and in some locations strong conflicts of interest and controversy may arise. The Government recognises that the need to work the resource must be reconciled with care for the environment in order to attain sustainable development, particularly in relation to the natural and built heritage and existing communities. NPPG4: *Land For Mineral Working* sets out guidelines for councils dealing with mineral development in rural areas and emphasises the need:

- to provide positively for the working of mineral resources to meet society's needs through the identification of preferred areas for mineral extraction;
- to safeguard deposits of minerals from permanent development that would prevent or hinder their subsequent extraction;
- to protect communities and areas of importance to the natural and built heritage from inappropriate mineral development;
- to achieve improved operating standards and sensitive working practices during the extraction period, in order to reduce the impact of mineral extraction; and
- to achieve a high standard of restoration and aftercare, and provide for beneficial after-uses when mineral working has ceased.

39. Waste management operations frequently occur in rural locations mainly because voids used for landfill are often former mineral workings. Rural areas may also be appropriate locations for other forms of waste processing such as composting or recycling. NPPG10: *Planning And Waste Management* sets out guidelines to deal with waste management in rural areas and emphasises the need for councils to contribute to the achievement of waste management objectives by:

- providing sites for future developments for waste treatment and disposal;
- protecting environmental quality;
- complementing the powers of the pollution control authorities; and
- preparing up-to-date development plans to assist with the wider environmental objectives of sustainable development.

### **Natural and Built Heritage**

40. The Government is committed to ensuring that the natural and built heritage is safeguarded and recognises that local communities and their economic activities have an essential part to play in maintaining and enhancing the environment. It is also an objective of Government to maximise the social and environmental benefits that may be derived from conservation of the environment, as well as to foster the enjoyment and understanding of the natural heritage. In appropriate circumstances, councils should ensure that new development enhances the natural heritage through land restoration, landscaping and the creation of new habitats. NPPG 14: *Natural Heritage* indicates that development which would affect a designated area of national importance, including National Scenic Areas (NSAs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), National Parks (NPs) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), need not necessarily be rejected, provided:

- the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or
- any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance.

41. Proposals for new development likely to affect potential and internationally designated Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EC Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EC Habitats Directive, together contributing to the Natura 2000 network of protected areas across Europe, must comply with the requirements of the Habitats Directive as transposed into domestic legislation by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. Guidance is set out in The Scottish Office Environment Department Circular 6/1995. Sites listed under the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance are given the same protection as SPAs and SACs.

*The EC Council Directives on the Conservation of: Wild Birds (79/409/EC) and Natural Habitats of Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EC)*

*The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (CM 6464)*

42. NPPG 14: *Natural Heritage* also describes the criteria for assessing development which affects other conservation interests, the role of Local Biodiversity Action Plans, and the use of the precautionary principle where development threatens to damage natural heritage.

43. The Government is equally committed to the preservation, conservation and enhancement of Scotland's built heritage. This will often be best secured through appropriate productive use of historic buildings. In assessing proposals, it is important that councils avoid works which will have a harmful effect either upon listed buildings, conservation areas, ancient monuments, archaeological sites, historic landscapes, historic gardens and designed landscapes or upon the setting of these. Government policy on the appropriate treatment of ancient monuments and archaeological sites within the planning context is set out in *NPPG5: Archaeology and Planning*, while Historic Scotland's Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas gives detailed guidance on the expected treatment of listed buildings, conservation areas and historic gardens and designed landscapes. Councils should seek the advice of council archaeologists, Historic Scotland, SNH and The Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland as appropriate. A draft NPPG: *Planning and the Historic Environment* which complements NPPG5, has been issued for consultation and deals with listed buildings, conservation areas, world heritage sites, historic gardens and landscapes.

### **Tourism**

44. Tourism makes a major contribution to the rural economy and to the prosperity of many towns and villages in rural Scotland. Its continuing growth generates a range of economic activity and new job opportunities. It is mainly associated with Scotland's unique natural and scenic quality and cultural heritage and needs to develop in a way which respects local character and landscape and, wherever possible, act as a positive force for environmental protection and enhancement.

45. Sustainable tourism (sometimes referred to as 'green' tourism, where holiday/visits are organised around a green theme e.g. wildlife, nature attractions or scenic quality) promotes both conservation and economic development interests in a sustainable way. It can, for example, include the development of a 'model' hotel or holiday village which could demonstrate renewable power generation, recycling of waste products, low energy technologies and the growing of foodstuffs for local use. It is particularly suited to areas where the conservation interest is paramount, for example, where fragile habitats have to be protected. As many of these opportunities are located in **remote** areas, sustainable tourism initiatives will also help reverse trends of depopulation by creating employment opportunities for young people. The development of cycling as a major tourist activity in rural areas can also bring economic benefit with little or no environmental disbenefit.

46. Development plans can assist tourism development by considering it in relation to other policies for employment, conservation, retailing, transport, sport and recreation. It is important that the strategic aspects of tourism development, including identification of suitable general locations for major development, and any significant land use issues which may arise, are dealt with in structure plans. Local plans should indicate the criteria to be used in assessing the suitability of particular sites and the merits of individual proposals. They should consider opportunities to involve tourism as an element in rural regeneration as there may be scope for major brownfield land reclamation schemes and environmental improvements from tourist-related development. All tourist-related development should demonstrate high standards of design, and be appropriate in scale and location, to avoid adverse environmental impact and to minimise associated visitor management problems.

- where economic activity is significantly influenced by tourism, structure plan policies should reflect the aims of the Government's sustainable tourism policy and those of the Scottish Tourist Board;
- local plans should identify opportunities to involve tourism as an element in rural regeneration and target areas where tourism will be a positive force for environmental protection and enhancement; and
- in considering proposals for tourist-related developments, councils should give priority to improving the quality of small towns (see PAN 52).

### ***Retailing***

47. Government policy seeks to promote a healthy rural economy and this should be taken into account by planning authorities when dealing with applications for new retail development or for the change of use of existing shops into dwellings. Consistent with the revised guidance in NPPG8, within rural areas generally, retail development should be guided to central locations in the small towns and villages thus making shopping facilities accessible to the majority of the population. The provision of retailing should be appropriate in scale to the type of rural area, the size of the settlement and its catchment area. The role of small towns in serving their rural hinterland also needs to be protected from the impact of free-standing, one-off developments that could drain their commercial life blood. Out-of-centre retail developments should, therefore, be strictly controlled with particular attention given to the role of village shops, the need for local shops and provision of petrol filling stations in rural areas. NPPG8 emphasises that:

- planning policies should be supportive of local facilities, in small towns and villages, which provide a valuable service to the local community;
- out-of-centre retail developments in large towns should not be allowed if their provision is likely to lead to a reduction in the range of local facilities in smaller towns and villages or lead to the loss of general food retailing from the centre of small towns;
- rural filling stations should be protected and superstores selling petrol in large towns should be considered in terms of their potential wider impact, with full weight being given to maintaining services in surrounding rural areas;
- councils should adopt a positive approach to applications for conversion to shops and for extensions designed to improve their viability; and
- councils should consider the social and economic functions of village shops in deciding applications for new development or a change of use from existing shops.

The Government recognises the importance of rural shops to sustaining communities and has introduced the Rate Relief Scheme for village shops and post offices, which came into effect in April 1998.

## **Transport**

48. The White Paper on Integrated Transport referred to the need to reduce travel and promote accessibility by public transport, walking and cycling. The forthcoming NPPG: *Transport and Planning* will provide guidance on the integration of land use planning and transport policies in the creation of sustainable patterns of development. It acknowledges that people in rural areas are more heavily dependent on the private car and that car ownership is higher than the Scottish average, reflecting the fact that most rural dwellers have little alternative for many journeys. Nevertheless, new development can be properly planned to meet economic, housing and social needs for access to rural services, such as schools and health care centres, and at the same time reduce the need to travel e.g. by allocating sites that promote and integrate the use of public/community transport, pedestrian and cycle routes, railheads, harbours and airfields.

*The Scottish White Paper - Travel Choices For Scotland. Cm 4010, The Stationery Office, July 1998*

49. In **commuter** areas, there should be a general presumption against developments which would add to car commuting and planning authorities should steer new development to locations which reinforce the viability of public transport links. Mechanisms for countering high levels of car commuting into neighbouring urban areas (e.g. park and ride, traffic management schemes), which may result from new rural development proposals, should be considered in parallel. In **remote** areas, while every effort should be made to take advantage of whatever infrastructure exists in the transport system to locate development, the distribution of population and distances involved will result in cars remaining the main mode for many journeys. The objective of encouraging rural development should be set alongside the desirability of maximising the public transport services that exist, or could be provided, including community run and other innovative services.

50. In applying design standards for access to new housing in rural areas, the Government's multi-faceted approach to Transport and Planning will mean that design standards for access to roads from new development in rural areas should reflect local circumstances. The nature of the settlement should also be taken into account e.g. whether it is a cluster of housing units or a dispersed pattern, whether it is on the mainland or one of the minor islands and whether the road access already serves a number of houses. The design and standard of access roads should, therefore, have regard to the local environment e.g. the type of road involved, the scale of the development, the nature of the area, and the volume and character of traffic likely to use the road, and to fitness for purpose, so that developers are not unreasonably burdened with costly and/or inappropriate access roads, especially in **remote** rural areas. Local roads which have recreation and leisure value should be considered for traffic calming, in line with the current "slower speeds initiative".

- planning policies, road policies and construction standards should be devised appropriate to the specific circumstances of rural areas, and publicised, so that developers and the local community understand them.

## **Sport and Recreation**

51. The countryside provides a wide range of venues for sport and recreation both for the resident and visitor population. The most popular activity is 'informal' recreation, which includes hill walking, rambling, mountaineering, water sports and skiing. Visitors are attracted to the countryside by its natural beauty and landscape diversity, its nature, wildlife and cultural heritage interest. The Government remains committed to maintaining a statutory right of access to the countryside and has recently set out clear responsibilities for users, land managers and public agencies. A new Scottish Countryside Access Code will be drawn up by SNH. Residents in rural areas have similar needs for sport and recreation as those in towns and cities, but the provision of facilities has to be tailored to the smaller and more widely scattered population. Existing schools, village halls and the re-use of farm buildings can help provide facilities for community use. The provision of sport and recreation facilities in rural areas also contributes to the economy of rural areas and enhances the quality of life for residents. NPPG11: *Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space* provides further guidance on providing for the needs of residents and visitors while respecting the rural environment. Footpaths, rights of way, bridle ways, byways, tow paths and cycle routes increase opportunities to enjoy the countryside, whilst other outdoor pursuits e.g. mountain biking require to be carefully managed.

## ***Community Involvement***

52. The Government supports local community involvement and believes that rural development should reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities. In some rural areas, there will be a need to help communities become involved and to participate in partnerships, especially where pockets of multiple deprivation or social exclusion occur. Councils can enlist the help of organisations such as Planning Aid and Rural Forum to undertake exercises like 'planning for real' and community profiling. One approach might be to stimulate local communities to generate their own plans and community profiles along the lines of Islay and Jura, where Rural Forum and the Corrom Trust have been involved with local people and the community councils using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to identify the priorities and needs of the area. Development plans can benefit from the input of locally formed partnerships and local communities, particularly at the issue identification stage of plan preparation. In some areas, e.g. Dumfries and Galloway and Highland, the establishment of area committees has been helpful in promoting community involvement in planning, particularly in considering planning applications relevant to the local area.

- councils should promote community involvement; and
- in areas where the population is dispersed, planning authorities should consider the scope for decentralised schemes and area committees.

## ***Partnership***

53. The Government believes that all Government departments, agencies, local authorities, the private and voluntary sectors, and local communities must work together if the overall aims of rural policy are to be achieved. Partnership has a vital role to play at both national and local level. Under the Community Planning process, partnerships will bring together local government and key agencies in the public, voluntary and private sectors and the community itself to plan for, and promote, the well being of the communities they serve. Community Plans are being prepared for each local authority area, for completion by end September 1999. Within this process, rural development strategies will be developed across Scotland which will set out a shared vision of the priorities facing each area, and the contribution each partner can make to attaining that vision. Below strategic local authority area level, local partnerships may wish to articulate a vision for the local community which reflects local needs and concerns, and provide feedback on Community Plans and rural development strategies.

- councils should facilitate the Community Planning process, and involve organisations and local action groups in drawing up their rural development strategies thereby building upon local community aspirations; and
- planning authorities should work more closely with the LECs, the private sector, SH or their agents, SNH, SEPA, Rural Forum, community councils and other local organisations to identify land use issues and to harness the many initiatives that already exist, and are being prepared, to provide small businesses, affordable housing and tourist-related developments.

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