

**REPORT TO: PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE,
14 NOVEMBER 2005**

**REPORT ON: SCOTTISH PLANNING POLICY 21: GREEN BELT -
CONSULTATION DRAFT**

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION

REPORT NO: 628-2005

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the comments proposed to be forwarded to the Scottish Executive in relation to the proposed Scottish Planning Policy 21: Green Belts: Consultation Draft.
- 1.2 To obtain approval of provisional representations submitted to the Scottish Executive by the Director of Planning and Transportation on behalf of Dundee City Council.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee
 - a notes that formal representations were invited by the Scottish Executive by 28 October 2005 and that a provisional response has been issued to meet the consultation deadline.
 - b approves the formal representations made by the Director of Planning and Transportation, in consultation with the Convenor of the Planning and Transportation Committee in relation to Scottish Planning Policy 21 - Green Belts: Consultation Draft.
 - c notes that with the advent of City Region Planning, Green Belt policy may be an option to prevent uncontrolled development in Dundee's housing market area.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising for the City Council as a direct result of this report.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Local Agenda 21 implications of this report cover a wide range of key themes. In particular, the transportation implications for new development affect the issues of sustainable development, access to facilities, services, goods and people is not achieved at the expense of the environment and are accessible to all.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equal opportunity implications associated with this report.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 The Scottish Executive published a draft version of SPP21: Green Belts - Consultation Draft on August 2005 for consultation purposes. The consultation period ends on 28 October 2005.
- 6.2 The proposed response of the Director of Planning and Transportation to this document forms Appendix 1 to this report. However, the following points are highlighted.
- 6.3 It is generally welcomed that this Scottish Planning Policy on Green Belts has been updated particularly in respect of the changes in terms of Scotland's population, economy, development patterns and social and lifestyle changes since the last official policy guidance, which was Circular 24/1985 Development in the Countryside and Green Belts. The draft guidance would appear to take a more flexible approach rather than the current restrictive approach to development and appropriate uses in the Green Belt.
- 6.4 Green Belts represent a concept that is perceived as important by the public and often found valuable by planning authorities in their efforts to shape and manage urban growth. This Scottish Planning Policy is trying to get away from Green Belts having an 'untouchable' image. They should be seen as a tool of strategic long term settlement planning. Green Belts are more relevant in some contexts than others and their physical shape and control regimes may also vary. The draft policy recognises that this may be the case and as such accepts that Green Belt policy is not always the most appropriate method of protecting urban fringe land.
- 6.5 Tayside Regional Council/Dundee District Council moved away from the Green Belt principle in 1980 in response to problems of rural depopulation and took a more positive approach of relying on the substitution of general policies for development in the countryside and protection for particular sites instead of the Green Belt. The overall impact of this policy approach has been limited due to the prevailing level of demand in this City region. Consequently, this Scottish Planning Policy will have limited impact on the land use decisions within the City of Dundee.
- 6.6 Scottish Planning Policy 21 is a more flexible document which is in line with the modern way of life and concerns about sustainable development. The guidance also provides greater clarity to avoid any misinterpretation of the status of Green Belts.
- 6.7 Dundee City Council welcomes the recognition that green belts should only be applied on an individual basis due to the differences in pressures and issues between settlements.
- 6.8 Once this guidance has been updated, Green Belt policy may be used in the future City Region Plan to prevent uncontrolled development in Dundee's housing market area to the detriment of Dundee's regeneration and growth process.

7 CONSULTATIONS

- 7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Draft SPP1 - Green Belts (August 2005).

Review of Green Belt Policy in Scotland - Scottish Executive Social Research 2004.

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12 October 2005

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APPENDIX 1**COMMENTS OF DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL ON SPP21: GREEN BELTS - CONSULTATION DRAFT****1 GENERAL**

- 1.1 Dundee City Council generally welcomes the modernising of this SPP to bring it up to date and more in line with current thinking. However, as Dundee City Council's predecessor Dundee District Council abolished the Green Belt around Dundee, this document will have limited impact on the City.
- 1.2 The document would appear to be confused about what it is trying to achieve. It is trying to encourage a more flexible approach in the use of Green Belts but on the other hand paragraph 20 states that "There is a strong presumption against new development in the green belt."

2 MANAGING THE GROWTH OF TOWNS AND CITIES

- 2.1 The document recognises that Scotland's population and household patterns are changing. There are regional and local variations as to the degree of change. Consequently, certain areas will have pressure for further development. The aim of the guidance is to ensure that Green Belt policies manage change effectively and best use is made of the land.
- 2.2 The draft recognises that Green Belt policy may help to manage growth effectively but there are other policies which can achieve the aims of green belts just as successfully. The alternative approach that Dundee has adopted since 1980 has still managed to prevent uncontrolled development in the open countryside.
- 2.3 The document states that regeneration and the re-use of vacant urban land are key priorities. However, urban regeneration is not aided by Green Belt designation unless it is matched by policies to encourage the use of underused urban land. In theory, Green Belts should encourage the development of brownfield sites. However, there is no proven link that this happens. Dundee has a track record of successful regeneration with a consist high level of brownfield development.

3 THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF GREEN BELTS

- 3.1 The draft provides a definition of what a green belt is and clearly emphasises that designation of a green belt is not a means of protecting natural heritage or safeguarding land for major land uses, there are other policies to achieve this. The key objectives of Green Belts are:
- a to direct planned growth to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration;
 - b to protect and enhance the character, landscape setting and identity of towns and cities; and
 - c to protect and give access to open space within and around towns and cities, as part of the wider structure of green space.

- 3.2 The policy states that only land required to achieve these aims should be covered by Green Belt policy.
- 3.3 The document recognises that to take account of local circumstances, green belts can take a variety of forms such as buffer, wedges, corridors or coastal strips.
- 3.4 There is a gradual move away from presenting the Green Belt as a "no-go" area. And instead the draft recognises that the use of land for sport and outdoor recreation is appropriate.
- 3.5 The guidance highlights that consideration needs to be given to sustainable growth. The impact of the private car needs to be taken into account. Growth on the urban fringe or in a development corridor, with associated public transport links may represent the most sustainable solution. However, "leap-frogging" is not encouraged. The guidance does not go far enough in contributing to the objectives of achieving sustainable development. It should be recognised that the presence of a green belt moves pressure to other areas which often increases commuting distances.

4 DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

- 4.1 The main change is that local plans will establish the need for and the boundaries of green belts except in the four city regions, where strategic developments plans will consider the issue of need.
- 4.2 In line with the White Paper: "Modernising the Planning System", the development planning system is being encouraged to take a long term view of development (20 years) in order to achieve long-term certainty.
- 4.3 With the production of this up to date Scottish Planning Policy, Green Belts may be used in the future with the development of the Dundee City Region Plan to prevent uncontrolled development in Dundee's housing market area.

5 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 Paragraph 20 states "There is a strong presumption against new developments in the green belt", apart from certain types of uses. These include: Agriculture uses; Woodland or forestry; Horticulture including market gardening; and Recreational uses for example golf courses, parks, walks and playing fields. To allow for growth and change existing settlements, major educational and research uses, major business operations and airports should be excluded from Green Belt designations.
- 5.2 Existing Green Belts vary widely in character. As such, one designation will tend to produce different effects in different cases. The type of suitable development is a matter of interpretation as to whether it is a "suitable scale and form for the location".

6 MANAGING THE GREEN BELT RESOURCE

- 6.1 In line with current thinking, engagement with the local community at an early stage when designating a green belt is being encouraged so there is agreement on the production of a masterplan. In general, it is difficult to involve a wholly representative proportion of the community in planning matters. There is no best practice guide as to how to achieve understanding of the objectives of the Green Belt policy.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Scottish Planning Policy 21 is a more flexible document which is in line with the modern way of life and concerns about sustainable development. The guidance also provides greater clarity to avoid any misinterpretation of the status of Green Belts.
- 7.2 Dundee City Council welcomes the recognition that green belts should only be applied on an individual basis due to the differences in pressures and issues between settlements.
- 7.3 Once this guidance has been updated, Green Belt policy may be used in the future City Region Plan to prevent uncontrolled development in Dundee's housing market area to the detriment of Dundee's regeneration and growth process.