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## 2. Development Plans and Development Plan Examinations

### What is a Development Plan?

The Development Plan provides an understanding of the planning issues in your area. It contains information about how places should change and policies on a variety of topics which are used to determine planning applications.

### Why is the Development Plan Important?

The land use allocations and policies contained in development plans affect your everyday life. For example, they may influence how your travel, where you live, shop, work and spend your leisure time. Becoming involved in development plan preparation gives you an opportunity to have a say in shaping the future of your community and environment. Making your opinions known at this stage can be much more effective than trying to influence decisions over planning applications later because planning applications must be decided in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise (see Information Sheet 8: Material Considerations).

### How have Development Plans in Scotland changed?

The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 introduced a new basis for development planning in Scotland into the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, in order to make development plans clearer, visionary, up-to-date and action orientated. This is leading to the replacement of the previous system of structure and local plans with a new system of Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans.

### What is the National Planning Framework?

In Scotland we have a [National Planning Framework](#) which sets out a long-term spatial vision for the development of Scotland until 2030. The National Planning Framework sets out the key policies, strategies, developments and infrastructure that Scotland needs and has designated 14 developments of strategic importance to Scotland. The National Planning Framework provides the context for Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans, and they must take it into account when they are being prepared. The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 requires Scottish Ministers to prepare or review the National Planning Framework every four years.

## **What are Strategic Development Plans?**

Strategic Development Plans will be prepared by “Strategic Development Planning Authorities” (SDPAs) to cover the four largest city regions around Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Strategic Development Plan is a “visionary” document which sets out a long term strategy (up to 20 years) for the development of the city region so that it can be used when preparing Local Development Plans. Strategic Development Plans must take account of a number of important documents such as the National Planning Framework, the National Waste Plan, regional strategies (such as transport and housing strategies), River Basin Management Plans, Flood Risk Management Plans and neighbouring Strategic Development Plans.

To find out more about how to see information sheet How do I get Involved in the Development Plan?.

## **What do Strategic Development Plans Cover?**

To ensure that the Strategic Development Plan is focused, can deliver outcomes and provides a framework for investment, it is required to include the following:

- A monitoring statement – used to identify how the objectives and vision of the previous plan have been met.
- A vision statement – which sets out how future development of the city region should and could happen. For example, how the area could look in 20 years.
- A spatial strategy – which builds on the vision statement to provide a strategy for the type of development that will occur and the general location. A map or diagram must be produced to describe the spatial strategy.

Strategic Development Plans must also cover a variety of topics, such as housing, business, shopping, waste management, green belts and infrastructure (water supply, waste water and transport).

## **What are Local Development Plans?**

All planning authorities (your local Council or National Park Authority) are required to produce a Local Development Plan, which must cover the whole of the authority area. This includes authorities who are covered by a Strategic Development Plan. A planning authority may also produce more than one Local Development Plan if it is required for a different purpose, such as a Minerals Plan.

Local Development Plans, as the name suggests, cover a smaller area than Strategic Development Plans and are more detailed in terms of policies and land uses. For example, they will identify the locations for housing, business and retail development. Local Development Plans must be concise, map-based documents that focus on specific proposals for a time horizon of 10 years (where they are also covered by a Strategic Development Plan) or 20 years (outwith Strategic Development Plan areas).

To ensure that Local Development Plans remain concise and focused, minor proposals and detailed policy guidance can be issued as “Supplementary Guidance”.

### **What is Supplementary Guidance?**

Supplementary guidance can be used by planning authorities to supplement the topics, policies or proposals which are set out in Development Plans. Using supplementary guidance ensures that a Development Plan isn't too lengthy. Supplementary guidance can include detailed policies and proposals on topics such as affordable housing, flood risk, renewable energy, design, biodiversity and development/design briefs.

### **How are Development Plans prepared?**

Both Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans follow the same stages in preparation. It is expected that the whole process from preparation to adoption will take approximately 2-3 years.

1. **The Development Plan Scheme** - produced annually, this is an important document which you should be aware of as it sets out the programme and timetable for the preparation and review of the Development Plan. It also contains the “Participation Statement” which sets out how and when the public, community groups, agencies and other groups will be involved and consulted on the development plan.
2. **The Main Issues Report** – this stage provides the **principal opportunity** for people to be involved in the preparation of the Development Plan. The Main Issues Report sets out the authority's general ideas for the future development of the area, and will include a description of how things have changed since the last plan, a preferred set of options and alternatives. Prior to the production of the Main Issues Report, consultation will be undertaken so that the main issues and options can be identified and assessed by the planning authority. Since the planning authority will be open to ideas at this stage, it is important that you get involved. Once the Main Issues Report is published, a minimum period of 12 weeks is provided for people to make “representations” (comments) to the planning authority. Another important part of the plan preparation at this stage is Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). (See our information sheet on SEA).
3. **The Proposed Plan** – following consideration of the representations made during the Main Issues Report stage, the planning authority will produce the “Proposed Plan”, which forms their settled view as to what the content of the final version of the plan will be. A minimum period of 6 weeks will be provided for people to make representations, although this may be extended for more complex plans. It is important to be aware that there will be no further opportunity for people to expand upon their representations later on in the Development Plan process; this means that if you intend to make representations at this stage, they must take account of everything you wish to comment on. Note that representations should be no more than 2,000 words, and must fully explain the issues you want to be considered at the examination.

4. **Modifications** – following consultation on the Proposed Plan, the planning authority may or may not decide to make modifications to the plan to take account of representations, consultation responses or minor drafting and technical matters. The extent of modifications will determine whether a further period of consultation is necessary. If no outstanding representations remain, or the planning authority decides to make no notifiable modifications, the plan will be published and sent to Scottish Ministers.
5. **Examination** – the proposed plan is then sent to Scottish Ministers. Where there are unresolved representations, Scottish Ministers will appoint a person to examine the plan. Authorities are required to publicise the examination in local papers and notify people who made representations.
6. **Adoption** (of the Plan) - Strategic Development Plans are approved by Scottish Ministers whilst Local Development Plans are “adopted” (approved) by the planning authority.

### **What is a Development Plan Examination?**

Individuals, community groups and other stakeholders have the opportunity to provide representations (comments, objections or support) to Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans when they are being prepared. Where there are unresolved representations, Scottish Ministers will appoint a person to examine the plan (called “the Reporter”). This process is referred to as a Development Plan Examination.

### **How have Development Plan Examinations been revised?**

The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 has resulted in a number of changes to make development plan examinations more focused and efficient:

- Scottish Ministers expect the examinations process to be less time consuming and take approximately six to nine months.
- All information must be provided at the outset – this means that the examination will focus on the representations you made earlier on in the process and there is no provision to submit further information unless required to do so by the person appointed to conduct the examination.

The above changes mean that Development Plan Examinations are less likely to be subject to lengthy inquiry sessions as was more common in the past, and these will only be used in exceptional cases. They will now focus on original representations with requests for written submissions and hearings only being used when the reporter requires more information to determine the examination.

More information on the examination process can be viewed at the [Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals \(DPEA\) website](#):

## **What happens if I receive notification of a Development Plan Examination?**

If you have provided representations which remain outstanding (i.e. have not been withdrawn or taken account of by modifications) you will receive notification of the examination. This will include a “Summary of Unresolved Issues” and information on where documentation can be viewed. The Summary of Unresolved Issues contains a summary of all the issues raised by the representations and will include the authority’s reasons for not agreeing to these and modifying the plan.

## **How do I prepare for a Development Plan Examination?**

The amount of preparation required will be largely dependent upon the reporter’s decision as the reporter will decide the format of the examination, the issues to be assessed, and whether further information/material is required. In some cases the reporter will consider that they have all the necessary information meaning they will rely upon your original representation.

The format of the examination can include written submissions, hearing or inquiry sessions. More information on these can be found in our information sheet Planning Appeals and Local Reviews.

## **What happens after the Development Plan Examination?**

The reporter will produce an examination report which sets out conclusions and recommendations. This report is sent to the planning authority in the case of Local Development Plans, and Scottish Ministers in the case of Strategic Development Plans. The report is largely binding on planning authorities, meaning that they may only depart from the recommendations if there are exceptional circumstances.

## **What happens after Approval/Adoption of a Development Plan?**

Within 3 months of the approval or adoption, the planning authority must publish an Action Programme which sets out a list of actions required to deliver the plan’s policies and proposals. This may include matters such as the delivery of supplementary guidance and key infrastructure such as roads, water supply upgrades and sewage upgrades. The Action Programme must be kept under review and published every 2 years.

Strategic and Local Development Plans must be kept under review. This means they are required to be updated every 5 years.

## **How can I become more involved in Development Plans?**

Refer to our information sheet How do I get involved in Development Plans?

## **How can I obtain further information?**

- Contact your planning authority
- See Scottish Government [Circular 1 2009 Development Planning](#)

Note - This information sheet contains only a brief of the Development Planning process. More detailed information is contained within the above Circular.

## How can Planning Aid for Scotland help?

If you are still unsure or need independent advice, then Planning Aid for Scotland may be able to help. Contact our **Advice Service**, which is **free of charge** to individuals and community groups, on **0845 603 7602**, or refer to our information leaflet which is available on our website at [www.planningaidscotland.org.uk](http://www.planningaidscotland.org.uk).