

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**TITLE: ASSESSING APPLICATIONS FOR SINGLE AFFORDABLE HOUSES OUTSIDE SETTLEMENTS.**

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### **PURPOSE OF PAPER**

Members will recall that at the 7 December 2012 meeting of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) an application for a new house was refused on the grounds of failing to comply with planning policies relating to design, siting and affordability.

This was the first case of an application being considered on the basis of being an “affordable” single house in the countryside in relation to Policy 22 on Housing Development outside Settlements. At this time Officers advised that a paper would be brought to the Committee to clarify the process to be followed when assessing affordability under this policy with any other future cases until the new Local Development Plan is approved.

The purpose of this paper is to agree how applications for affordable housing in the countryside will be assessed, in order that any future applicants are clear from the outset on the level and type of information which will be required. This paper relates simply to the affordable housing element of Policy 22 not to siting, design and other planning issues.

### **BACKGROUND**

Both national and local planning policy supports the delivery of affordable housing and a summary of this policy background is attached as **Appendix I**.

In relation to Local Plan policy, the CNPA is essentially supportive of affordable housing on suitable sites outside settlements providing other all other relevant Local Plan policies, including those on siting and design etc are met. However, this support rests upon the housing actually being “affordable,” meeting a demonstrable local need and meeting the other policy

requirement that there are no other sites available within settlements. It is therefore crucial that the affordability case is robustly made and assessed.

This is particularly important given the recent Scottish Government circular (**see Appendix 1**) on Planning Obligations which gives a clear direction that there is only a limited role for obligations to restrict the use of land or buildings. Clarification as to how affordable housing will remain affordable has been sought from Scottish Government colleagues who advise that if a robust case for development is made in the first place, then there should not be a requirement to attach restrictions regarding its future use.

## **MAKING AN AFFORDABILITY CASE**

Sufficient information requires to be submitted with a planning application in order to assess the case. Assessment of the previous case referred to earlier was undertaken by the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) The experience gained has been used to set out the key issues to be considered with any future cases to ensure the affordable development is required by the applicant, actually is affordable, is of an appropriate size, and is in a location which is justifiable. A suggested information note to assist applicants in submitting sufficient information is attached as **Appendix 2**.

## **ASSESSING THE CASE**

Once all necessary information set out in **Appendix 2** is received, this will be passed on to an independent housing assessor (such as Local Authority Housing Officer, Highland Small Communities Housing Trust) in their role as consultee to the Planning Service. The consultee should advise the Planning Authority, based upon the information submitted whether or not:

1. There is a demonstrable local need for the house.
2. There are any other suitable sites available
3. The proposed house is affordable

The Planning Authority will then consider this consultation response and proceed to determine the application in relation to compliance with Policy 22.

Finally, it should be noted that if all of the necessary information is not provided the application may be refused on the grounds that insufficient information has been submitted to determine compliance with policy.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That Members agree the following steps:**

- 1. The information note set out in Appendix 2 shall be used as the basis for submission of information by applicants, subsequent assessment by relevant bodies (HSCHT/ Local Authority Housing Officers) and consideration by the CNPA Planning Committee when dealing with any applications making the case for an affordable house outside a settlement.**
- 2. Advise our component Councils of this approach to ensure consistency across the Park**
- 3. Finalise and publish the information note on our website**