5. Looking After the North East

5.1 Introduction

The structure plan recognises the need to ensure a high quality of life for everyone, and that this can only be achieved within a secure and well-managed environment. The environment of the North East is extremely diverse. It encompasses both the natural heritage, for example the Cairngorm Mountains and valued wildlife sites such as those at Glen Tanar and Muir of Dinnet and the historic built heritage. It also includes archaeological sites such as recumbent stone circles found throughout the area, and listed buildings and conservation areas located in Aberdeen City and the Aberdeenshire burghs.

One of the main elements of the structure plan strategy is to promote, protect and enhance the natural environment. *Promotion* of the natural environment will involve encouraging access so that people can learn and experience for themselves the benefits it has to offer. Yet many areas of the natural environment are by their very nature easily damaged if not respected. Such areas need to be *protected* and one way of doing this is by designating areas of particular importance or value. Where damage has already been done steps can be taken to *enhance* the natural environment, for example by creative landscaping as part of reclamation and restoration of redundant quarries.

Recognising its intrinsic value the structure plan seeks to maintain the natural and built environment of the North East and to ensure that everyone has access to a good environment which supports the local economy and social well-being. One of the central themes of the structure plan is equity. It is important to ensure that people *all* have access to a good environment, whether they live in an urban area or in the countryside, whether they have use of a car or not, and whether they are young or old. Access to open spaces and the countryside is being promoted by the Countryside Recreation and Access strategies being developed by both Councils. The need to protect and enhance the environment is important, not just for its own sake, but because a damaged environment will sooner or later hold back economic development and lower the quality of life.

5.2 Ensuring Access to A Good Environment

Nature Conservation

Various bodies have responsibility for designating nature conservation sites, according to legislation. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is charged by Parliament with the responsibility of caring for Scotland's rich heritage of wildlife and natural beauty, and promoting its enjoyment by the public. SNH has advised Government on the designation of internationally and nationally important sites; the former regional council assigned regional designations and local authorities have designated sites of local importance. Table One summarises the various types of nature conservation designations that can be found in the North East of Scotland.

Table 26: Nature Conservation Designations

International	Ramsar Sites
	Designated Special Protection Areas
	Proposed Special Protection Areas
	Natura 2000 Areas
	Special Areas of Conservation
National	Sites of Special Scientific Interest
	National Nature Reserves

Regional	Sites of Interest to Natural Science
Local	Local Nature Reserves
	Wildlife Sites
	Ancient Woodlands
	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Reserves
	Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserves

International Designations

The North East of Scotland is internationally important for its wetlands and birds. For example Loch of Skene and Loch of Strathbeg are Ramsar sites, important for their wintering wildfowl. *Ramsar sites* are areas of wetland of value to migratory birds, protected by the Ramsar Convention (1976). *Special Protection Areas* such as Glen Tanar and Fowlsheugh are designated under the European Commission Birds Directive for the purpose of protecting the habitats of rare, threatened or migratory bird species. The new European Habitats and Species Directive requires member states to identify sites for designation as *Special Areas of Conservation* and establish the measures necessary for their conservation. These are intended to play a key role in ensuring that rare, endangered or vulnerable habitats and species of Community interest are either maintained at or restored to a favourable conservation status. Together Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation constitute a European network of designated sites called *Natura 2000* Areas. They are identified for the purposes of protecting those habitats and species within the European Union which are endangered, vulnerable, rare or otherwise require special attention.

Table 27: International Designations

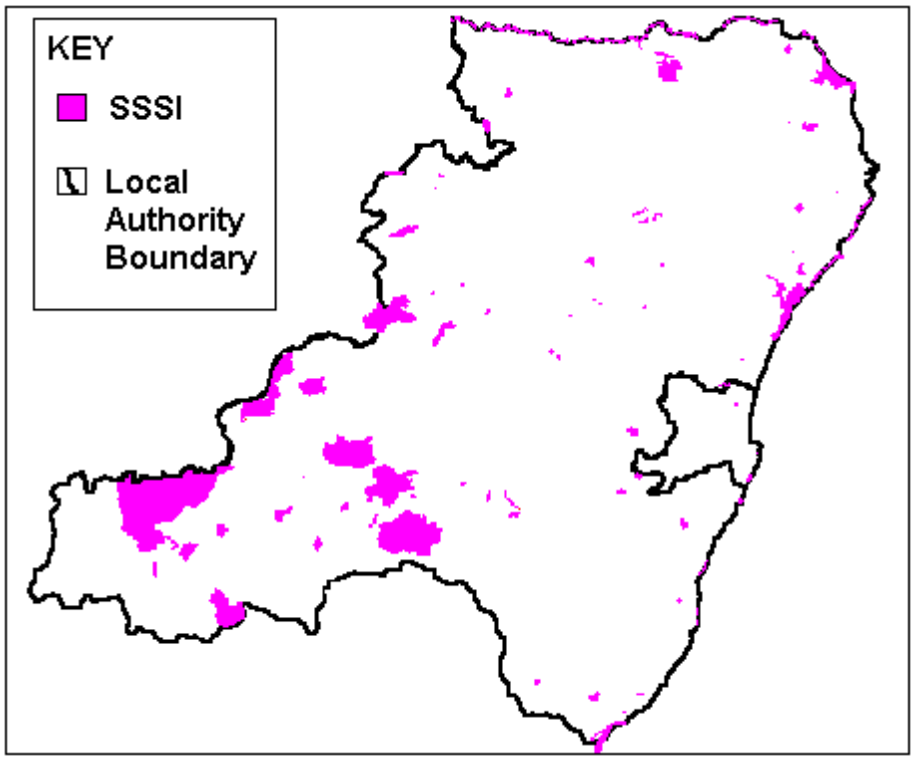
	North East of Scotland
No. of Ramsar Sites	4
No. of Special Protection Areas	14
No. of Special Areas of Conservation	12

Source: SNH, May 2000

National Designations

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are the main nature conservation designation in Great Britain. These sites are special for their plants or animals or habitats, their rocks or landforms or a combination of these. There are currently 1,448 SSSI's in Scotland, covering a total area of 919,597 hectares, 11.7% of the land. There are 81 SSSI's within North East Scotland *(see Figure 6)*. Designation is a legal process, the sites are notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The 1981 Act made much greater provision for the protection of sites from the effects of changes in land management. Owners and occupiers must receive formal notification specifying why the land is of special scientific interest and listing any operations likely to damage the special interest.

Figure 6: Sites of Special Scientific Interest



National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are areas of land managed primarily for the purposes of preserving the flora, fauna, geological or physiographic features and to provide opportunities for their study and quiet enjoyment. There are currently 71 NNRs in Scotland, covering a total area of 114,295 hectares, and 8 lie within the North East.

Regional Designations

Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS) have been identified as important and representative and they augment the Natura 2000 sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Table 27: Sites of Interest to Natural Science

Former District Area	**Number of SINS**
Aberdeen City	17
Aberdeenshire	
Banff & Buchan	29
Gordon	58
Kincardine & Deeside	52
Total	156

Source: SINS – Sites of Interest to Natural Science, Grampian Regional Council: Department of Physical Planning, 1990

Local Designations

Local authorities may designate *Local Nature Reserves* (LNR) under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, as amended by the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982. Examples of LNR's can be found at Arnhall Moss in Aberdeenshire and at Donmouth in Aberdeen. A LNR is usually

declared because of the high natural heritage interest of the site and its particular value for education and informal enjoyment of nature by the public. Local authorities and voluntary nature conservation organisations (for example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Scottish Wildlife Trust) have also identified sites of local importance for wildlife and secure appropriate conservation management. These include *District Wildlife Sites* (for example Walker Dam, Aberdeen), *Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Reserves* (for example Fowlsheugh, Aberdeenshire) and the *Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserves* (for example Coulnacraig Meadows), see Table 28. *Ancient Woodlands* are defined as land, which has been woodland since at least AD 1600.

Table 28: RSPB & SWT Reserves

	Number of RSPB Reserves	**Number of SWT Reserves**
North East of Scotland	2	4

Sources: RSPB, SWT, March 2000

NPPG 14 'Natural Heritage' states that the effect of a development proposal on the natural heritage can be a material consideration whether or not a designated area is likely to be affected. However, the level of protection afforded to natural heritage interests outwith designated areas will not normally be as high as that afforded to sites of national or international importance. Therefore a tiered approach to protection has been adopted, according to whether sites are of international, national, regional or local importance.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is short for 'biological diversity' and, put simply, means the total variety of life on Earth. It is not restricted to specially designated sites, threatened species or habitats but involves the entire natural heritage, including the most commonplace features. The need for international commitment to protect biodiversity was recognised by world leaders at the 1992 Rio 'Earth Summit', where the UK and 150 other countries signed the 'Convention on Biological Diversity' and pledged to develop and implement plans of action to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Biodiversity is important because it provides the support systems that sustain human existence. It provides many of the essentials of life – oxygen, water and food. Locally biodiversity is important because it gives a distinctive character to an area, whether it be a river valley, woodland or an area of coastline. In towns and cities areas of wildlife habitat can make an important contribution to people's quality of life. However, the world is losing biodiversity at an ever-increasing rate as a result of human activity. Outwith specially designated areas semi-natural habitats have been lost, for example due to housing development, agriculture or forestry. This devalues the environment in general and increases pressure on designated sites.

Sustainability is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. Unless efforts are made now to conserve and enhance biodiversity future generations shall inherit a poorer environment. NPPG 14 states that structure plans should provide for the conservation of biodiversity and the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage outwith designated areas. Within North East Scotland action to protect and enhance biodiversity is being co-ordinated through the development and implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). This covers Moray as well as Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council areas. This was an outcome of the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan, 1994, which sets out the steps needed for biodiversity conservation in the UK.

More than 100 priority listed species occur in North East Scotland, representing 25% of UK priority species. A further 290 species of conservation concern have also been recorded in the North East. Priority habitats are also found in the area – for example native pine wood, broadleaved woodland, acid grassland, upland heathland, montane habitats, lowland raised bogs, fens, rivers and streams, coastal vegetated shingle, and

dunes and open sea. Protected species and habitats may be found in areas not themselves protected by special designations. Lists of North East Priority Species and North East priority Habitats can be found in the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan (Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils, January 2000).

Landscape

There is a great diversity of landscape areas in the North East, for example: the coastal strip, agricultural heartlands including arable land areas around Aberdeen, Cairngorm foothills, Cairngorm high hills, straths, rivers and valleys. Certain areas have been designated as being of particularly high scenic quality. At national level there are *National Scenic Areas* (NSAs). There are two NSAs which lie partly within the North East: Deeside and Lochnagar and the Cairngorm Mountains (see figure 6). These are areas of land considered of national significance on the basis of their superb mountain landscapes and native pinewoods, which must be conserved as part of the country's natural heritage.

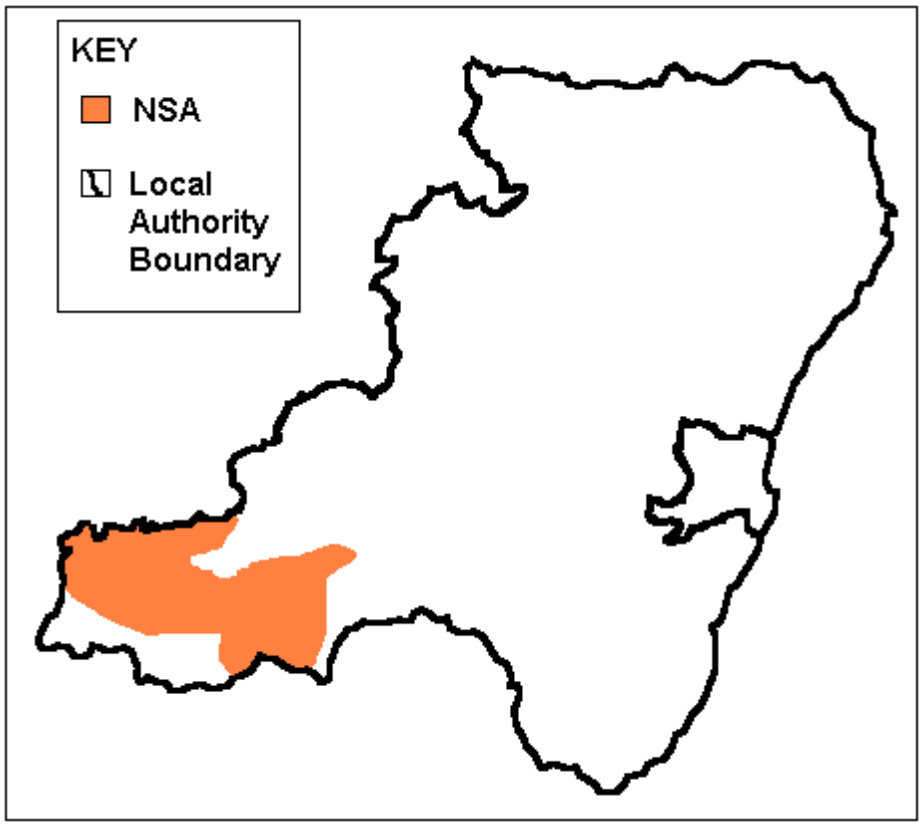
There are currently 40 NSA's in Scotland, covering a total area of 1,001,800 ha. They have been selected for their characteristic features of scenery comprising a mixture of richly diverse landscapes including prominent landforms, coastline, sea and freshwater lochs, rivers, woodlands and moorlands. At present Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is conducting a review of such designations and a consultation paper was produced by SNH in 1998. The outcome proposed is for a more representative series of National Scenic Areas, with a wider coverage and a new purpose, plus one level of landscape designation to cover both locally and regionally significant landscapes.

In the past insensitive development has led to landscape being permanently scarred. The preferred strategy for landscape conservation is to safeguard and enhance the landscape character of the North East by applying the findings of Landscape Character Assessments. Four reports were produced in partnership between the formal local authorities and SNH. These are:

- Banff & Buchan (Cobham Resource Consultants, 1997);
- City of Aberdeen (ACC & SNH, 1996);
- South & Central Aberdeenshire (Environmental Resources Management, 1997); and
- The Cairngorms (Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership, 1996).

These assessments provide an understanding of the area's landscape character; of the constraints and opportunities it presents to development; and of how and where development may be accommodated without depleting the landscape resource. Accordingly the structure plan policy states that development will be sited and designed to respect the landscape character of the area as set out in detail in local plans. National Scenic Areas are also protected in the structure plan through various tiered policies.

Figure 7: National Scenic Areas (NSAs)



Cairngorms

The Cairngorms are recognised for their rich natural heritage nationally and internationally and the area has been proposed as a World Heritage Site. At present the Cairngorms Partnership plays a key role in managing the area. The Partnership was set up by the Government in 1994 to prepare and implement a Management Strategy for the Cairngorms that would guarantee a sustainable future for this most special area of Scotland. This strategy, 'Managing the Cairngorms' was published in December 1997 accompanied by 'The Vision for the Future' describing how the area could look in 25 years time if properly managed. A Work Plan was distributed in April 1999 indicating progress in implementing the strategy so far.

A new National Park Authority (NPA) may be established for the Cairngorms to succeed the Cairngorms Partnership. It is proposed that the Cairngorms may be designated as a National Park by April 2002, subject to parliamentary approval. The Scottish Executive published a draft National Park Bill in January 2000, with a deadline for consultation comments by March 2000. Responses were analysed and an amended version of the Bill was introduced to Parliament at the end of March. Section 1 of the draft Bill sets out the criteria for considering an area for National Park status, and the aims of National Parks. Those aims are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area;
- To promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public; and

- To promote economic and social development of the area.

The Bill provides at Section 9 for the role of NPA's in respect of Planning Functions. This allows for the NPA to take on the role of the planning authority; to take on part of this role; or for the planning function to remain with local authorities and the NPA be given an enhanced role as statutory consultee. This will be considered and consulted upon at the secondary legislation stage. The Parliamentary process is expected to last for several months, with the Bill receiving Royal Assent in July or Autumn 2000. Once the Act is passed a formal Designation Order for a Cairngorms National Park will be prepared setting out the detailed arrangements.

Built Heritage and Archaeology

The built heritage of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire contributes towards the identity of the area. Features such as the castles and archaeological sites of Aberdeenshire and the granite townscape of Aberdeen help to give the North East a distinctive character and a tangible link to its history. The built heritage attracts visitors and tourists thereby contributing to the economic well-being of the area. It is also an educational asset – on both counts it is important to remember that the built heritage is a non-renewable and finite resource and its preservation will benefit future generations and contribute to the aims of sustainable development.

Listed Buildings

Listed buildings are one means of preserving part of the built heritage. These buildings are assigned to one of three categories according to their relative importance. The categories are:

Category A Buildings of national or international importance, either architectural or historic, or fine little-altered examples of some particular period, style or building type.

Category B Buildings of regional or more than local importance, or major examples of some particular period, style or building type which may have been altered.

Category C(S) Buildings of local importance, lesser examples of any period, style, or building type, as originally constructed or altered; and simple, traditional buildings which group well with others in categories A and B or are part of a planned group such as an estate or an industrial complex.

It is an offence to demolish or materially alter or extend a listed building without listed building consent: the penalty can be an unlimited fine or up to 2 years imprisonment, or both. Table 29 gives an indication of the spread of Listed Buildings in the North East.

Table 29: Listed Buildings in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire

	Category A	Category B	Category C(S)	Total
Aberdeen City	56	755	332	1143
Aberdeenshire				
North	69	829	818	1716
Central	76	606	239	921
South	51	463	455	969
Total	252	2653	1844	4749

Source: Historic Scotland (March 2000)

Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Once Conservation Areas have been designated unlisted buildings within their boundaries cannot be demolished unless conservation area consent is first obtained. Four outstanding conservation areas can be found within Aberdeen City: Old Aberdeen, Union Street, Albyn Place/Rublislaw and Marine Terrace and there are 13 within Aberdeenshire, for example Huntly, Portsoy, Ballater and Old Deer. Aberdeen City Council have produced a booklet entitled 'Listed buildings and conservation areas' (February 1999) which includes maps of all the conservation areas within the City Council boundary as well as a list of all listed buildings and their locations.

Table 30: Conservation Areas in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire

	Total No. of Conservation Areas	**No. of Outstanding Conservation Areas**
Aberdeen City	10	4
Aberdeenshire	34	13

(Source: Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils: March 2000)

Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes

Historic gardens and designed landscapes are an important resource for recreation and tourism in Scotland. They can be defined as 'grounds in which, either singly or in combination, flowers, fruits, vegetables, trees and shrubs are consciously laid out for artistic effect, to create a beautiful prospect or for public resort'. They can be valued for various reasons: as settings to historic buildings, as works of art, for their historic value, for horticultural, arboricultural or silvicultural value, for their scenic value or for nature conservation value. The effect of proposed development on an historic garden or designed landscape is a material consideration in determining a planning application. Planning authorities must consult SNH on any proposed development that may affect sites contained in the Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland, which is compiled and maintained by SNH and Historic Scotland. There are currently 28 sites in the North East on the Inventory.

Archaeology

The historic environment of the North East has been radically affected by people over the last nine thousand years. They have left traces in the form of ritual monuments, settlements or forts, as well as in the pattern of fields or in pollen preserved in wet areas. Such features should be protected wherever possible.

A Scheduled Ancient Monument is an ancient monument of national importance which has been given legal protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Within the North East there are also sites of regional significance as well as local importance (see Table 31). Information on all known sites is recorded on the Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) maintained by the Archaeology Services of the Councils.

NPPG 5 'Archaeology and planning' states that the preservation *in situ* of important archaeological finds is preferred, particularly in relation to nationally important sites. Where this is not possible preservation by recording should be carried out at the developers expense. This involves an archaeological excavation with the recording and analysis of the remains and publication of findings. A leaflet entitled *'Archaeological Sites Matter: good practice in the development process'* is available from both councils.

Table 31: Archaeological sites in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire

	No. of Archaeological Sites		No. of Scheduled Ancient Monuments	No. of Sites of Regional Significance
Aberdeen City	1780	28	0	
Aberdeenshire	11382	446	1219	

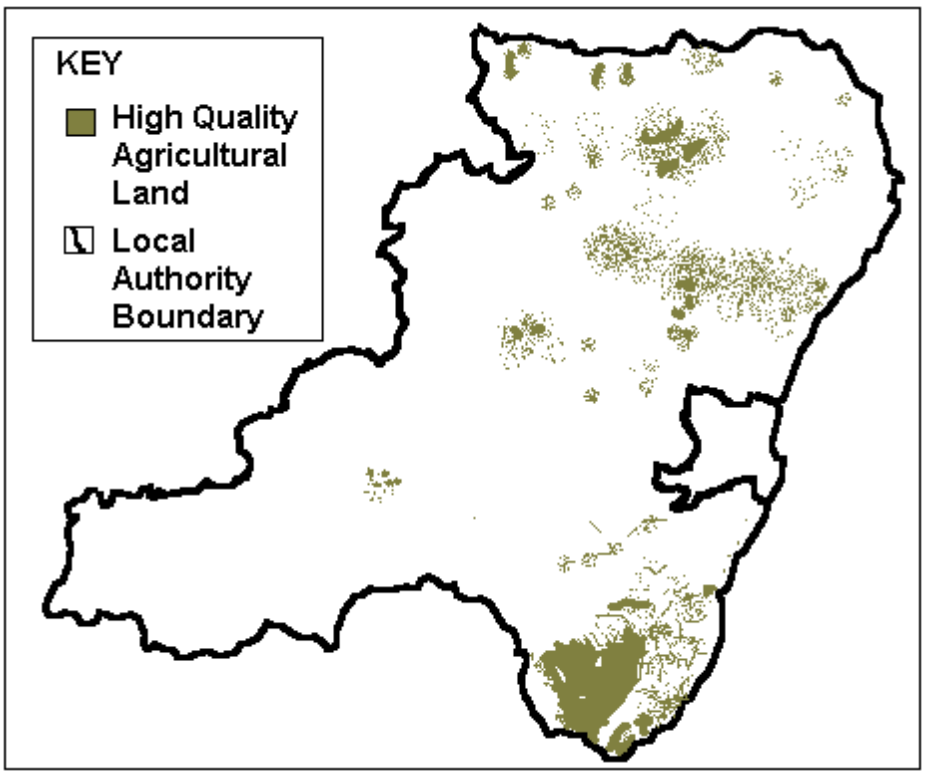
Source: Archaeological Sections of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council (March 2000)

Agricultural Land

'Prime quality' agricultural land is a rare commodity. It constitutes less than 6% of the total agricultural land in Scotland, and less than 7% of total agricultural land in the North East. It is a limited resource of national importance because it can be used to grow a wide range of agricultural and non-agricultural crops, and because it can be worked flexibly with relatively few constraints on agricultural operations. Government Circular 18/1987 (as amended by 29/1988 and 25/1994) states that there should be a presumption against the development of prime quality agricultural land in the interests of sustainable development. Once prime quality agricultural land is lost it is lost forever. Therefore it should be safeguarded in order that it can benefit future generations.

The Macaulay Land Use Classification defines 'prime quality' agricultural land as class 1, 2 or 3.1. Whilst there are no areas of class 1 land in Aberdeen or Aberdeenshire, there are areas of class 2 and 3.1. These can be identified on Macaulay Institute maps held by the Councils. Figure 8 indicates the location of prime quality agricultural land within the North East of Scotland.

Figure 8: Prime Quality Agricultural Land



Countryside and Open-space Access

With growing leisure time there is an increasing demand for recreation opportunities, focussed in and around settlements. Nationwide surveys indicate that demand is not currently being met and that 72% of people think the countryside should be opened up to provide more access. The Countryside (Scotland) Act gives powers and places duties on Local Authorities in the respect of countryside access. The 1994 SNH document *'Enjoying the Outdoors'* reviewed the position on access to the countryside and identified a role for a proactive partnership approach to the provision and management of access. The Paths For All initiative was subsequently established in 1996 to progress the partnership approach at a local level and provide local access to the countryside for users through the creation of local paths networks around settlements.

In 1998 SNH produced another document entitled *'Access to the Countryside for open-air Recreation'* which contained the findings of consultation carried out by the Access Forum. Its principal conclusion is:

> *"There should be a right of access to land and water for informal recreation and passage, subject to responsible exercise of that right to protection of the privacy of individuals, to safeguards for the operational needs of land managers, and subject to any necessary restraints for conservation needs."*

The White Paper on Land Reform published in July 1999 takes on board this recommendation. The proposed legislation to go before the Scottish Parliament will create new opportunities for access by :

- Creating a right of responsible access to land, on enclosed as well as open and hill ground, with appropriate safeguards for privacy, land management and conservation;
- Providing for a new Scottish Countryside Access Code which will set out respective responsibilities;
- Setting new duties on public agencies to help people enjoy the countryside; and
- Setting up local access fora in each local authority area to review implementation in their areas, and deal with any disputes.

Both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council have been preparing Countryside Access Strategies. These offer a vision of a network of welcoming and well managed public access in the countryside for all sections of the population. They also seek to promote the contribution which well managed access networks can make to the local economy. The Strategies provide an opportunity to review current arrangements for access throughout the North East and to create broad agreement with interested parties on the future development of countryside access.

Key aims of the Aberdeenshire Access Strategy are:

- To provide and manage welcoming access to the countryside in a co-ordinated manner giving consideration to public demand and the needs of all groups with an interest in the countryside;
- To acknowledge the concerns of landowners and managers in the development of improvement of access and ensure that, as far as possible, all developments achieve consensus of the landowners, community and users;
- To enable and encourage more people to use and enjoy the countryside through improved arrangements for countryside access near to settlements in lowland areas, for the purposes of sustaining the environment, contributing to the rural economy and benefiting the health and well-being of the population;

- To facilitate and encourage proper provision of visitor and tourism facilities related to countryside access;

- To promote better understanding of countryside access issues by creating opportunities for education in the countryside, and increasing the awareness and knowledge of the country code; and

- To take proper account of wildlife habitats when planning countryside access.

The economic benefits of increasing access to the countryside were evident in a report produced by Grampian Enterprise in July 1999 on 'sustainable tourism'. This showed that opportunities for access to the countryside is a deciding factor in attracting tourists to the area.

Flooding

Development on areas at risk of flooding is unwise for various reasons. The property and its contents may be physically damaged and there will be financial costs associated with this. Secondly the development may cause or exacerbate flooding further downstream in the water course. Thirdly flooding is a natural phenomenon and valuable habitats created by periodic flood events could be destroyed by flood prevention measures necessitated by the development.

NPPG 7 'Planning and Flooding' states that "Development of an area which is exposed to frequent or extensive flooding is likely to be unsustainable and should be avoided." It states that flood prevention may be achieved by avoiding development in areas at risk and that floodplains and other low lying land should be safeguarded from development. The guidance also refers to the application of the precautionary principal with regard to flooding. This can be defined as taking action now to avoid possible environmental damage when the scientific evidence for action is inconclusive but the potential damage could be great. This applies, for example, to the threat of global warming and associated change in rainfall patterns. Although scientific evidence may not be proven it is better to take avoidance action anyway.

Under the Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Act 1997, biennial reports are produced by the Councils, which specify all measures proposed by the Local Authority to prevent or mitigate flooding of non-agricultural land. These reports provide a record of flooding events. Also under Section 25 of the Environment Act 1995 SEPA have a duty to assess the risk of flooding in any area of Scotland, and advise planning authorities, if requested to do so, based on the information they hold. Consideration is being given to the setting up of a Flood Appraisal Group with members from both Councils, relevant local authority departments, private sector representatives etc. to provide a forum for the various parties to reach a consensus view on flood risk and its consequences, as outlined in NPPG7.

Coastal Zone Management

Detailed advice on coastal zoning is given in Planning Advice Note 53 'Classifying the Coast for Planning Purposes'. The Aberdeenshire coastline is used as an example to demonstrate how the classification has been applied in this area at the strategic and local level. Aberdeen City Council has followed this guidance in zoning its own coastline. This is set out in the Aberdeen City Local Plan (Finalised Version), September 1999.

Aberdeen City Council, Scottish Natural Heritage and Grampian Enterprise commissioned Halcrow Crouch to undertake a coastal protection study of Aberdeen Bay to study coastal management and erosion. This covers the coast from Greg Ness at Nigg to Hackley Head at the Sands of Forvie. The study undertook an historical overview of past problems and analysed natural coastal processes and conditions together with their effects on the current coastline and existing defences. The area was inspected to assess the structural

condition of existing defences and the state of the coastline and its natural response. For some areas the Study recommends intervention whilst for others a 'do-nothing' scenario was preferred. The findings of this Study will be used to prepare a Coastal Protection Management Plan.

The Aberdeen Green Belt

The Aberdeen Green Belt has been in existence in various forms since 1958 and in its present form since 1986. Green belt traditionally has three purposes:

- To maintain the identity of Aberdeen and surrounding towns by clearly defining their physical boundaries and preventing coalescence;
- To provide countryside for recreational or institutional purposes of various kinds, and
- To maintain the landscape setting of towns.

Although the structure plan indicates that adjustments may be necessary to allow for development required in the Development Plan, the general extent of the Aberdeen green belt remains the same. This is because it has been successful in avoiding unnecessary sprawl and has assisted the progressive development of brownfield sites in Aberdeen. In addition, large areas of land such as Hazlehead and Loirston are given over to recreation in accordance with green belt purposes.

Much of the value of green belt derives from its rural character, quality and features and its proximity to built up areas. The need to protect this character from inappropriate development is of paramount importance. This, together with ongoing development pressures around Aberdeen, means that the continuation of green belt is considered necessary. This will continue to direct development into settlements in accordance with the structure plan strategy.

Long term development land (also known in the Aberdeen City District Wide Local Plan and Finalised Plan as GB2 and Strategic Reserve Land respectively) is countryside close to Aberdeen that may be required in the longer term for development. It will only be identified for development if the need arises and within the framework of a Development Plan review. Numerous dismissed appeals have proved the robustness of policies applying to these areas. The presence of such land also means that unplanned speculative proposals generally tend to avoid green belt areas. At the same time, land for long term development purposes is maintained which in turn provides confidence and certainty in respect of Green Belt boundaries.

5.3 Supporting the Local Economy and Social Well-being

Forestry

Forestry plays an important role alongside agriculture in the rural economy. Woodlands can provide many benefits, including:

- Providing timber and other woodland resources;

- Enhancing the beauty and character of the countryside, and contributing to the diversity and distinctiveness of rural and urban landscapes;

- Enhancing and conserving wildlife habitats;

- Helping to revitalise derelict and degraded land;

- Creating jobs, directly and indirectly (e.g. through tourism and recreation) and providing opportunities for economic diversification in rural areas;

- Improving the quality of life, especially in and around towns and cities by creating opportunities for recreation, education and local community involvement; and

- Contributing to the reduction of the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

After the commitments made at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, and at the 1993 Ministerial Conference on the Protection of European Forests in Helsinki, the UK Government formally adopted a forestry policy to promote sustainability. This was expressed in the following terms:

- Sustainable management of our existing woods and forest; and

- A steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many diverse benefits that forest provide.

The UK Forestry Standard (1998) sets out the criteria and standards for the sustainable management of all forest and woodlands in the UK. The Forestry Commission in March 2000 produced a draft Scottish Forestry Strategy. This is the Scottish Executive's framework for taking forestry forward. Its vision is that Scotland will be renowned as a land of fine trees, whose valuable forest resource both strengthens the economy and enriches the natural environment, and where people are proud of their trees, woods and forests. The intention of the strategy is to promote confidence in the future of forestry, encouraging investment that will benefit current and future generations. The draft Strategy proposes five strategic Directions for Scottish Forestry. These are:

- To **maximise the value** to the Scottish economy **of the wood resources** becoming available for harvesting over the next 20 years;

- To **create a diverse forest resource** of high quality that will contribute to the economic needs of Scotland throughout the 21st century and beyond;

- To ensure that forestry in Scotland make a **positive contribution to the environment**;

- To create opportunities for more people to **enjoy trees, woods and forests** in Scotland; and

- To **help communities use woods and forests** to promote development.

The Grampian Structure Plan (1997) included a proposal to examine the feasibility of establishing a Grampian Forest. The forest was set up in 1997 to encourage the establishment of well designed productive woodlands as a means of farm diversification in lowland Grampian *(see figure 9 showing the target area)*. The woodlands have to meet multiple objectives – such as providing access for recreation, ensuring water quality is not harmed and that the landscape is not adversely affected. Over 2100 hectares of woodland have been planted to date and more will be developed as Challenge funding for further woodlands is available in 2000/2001.

Figure 9: Target area of Grampian Forest

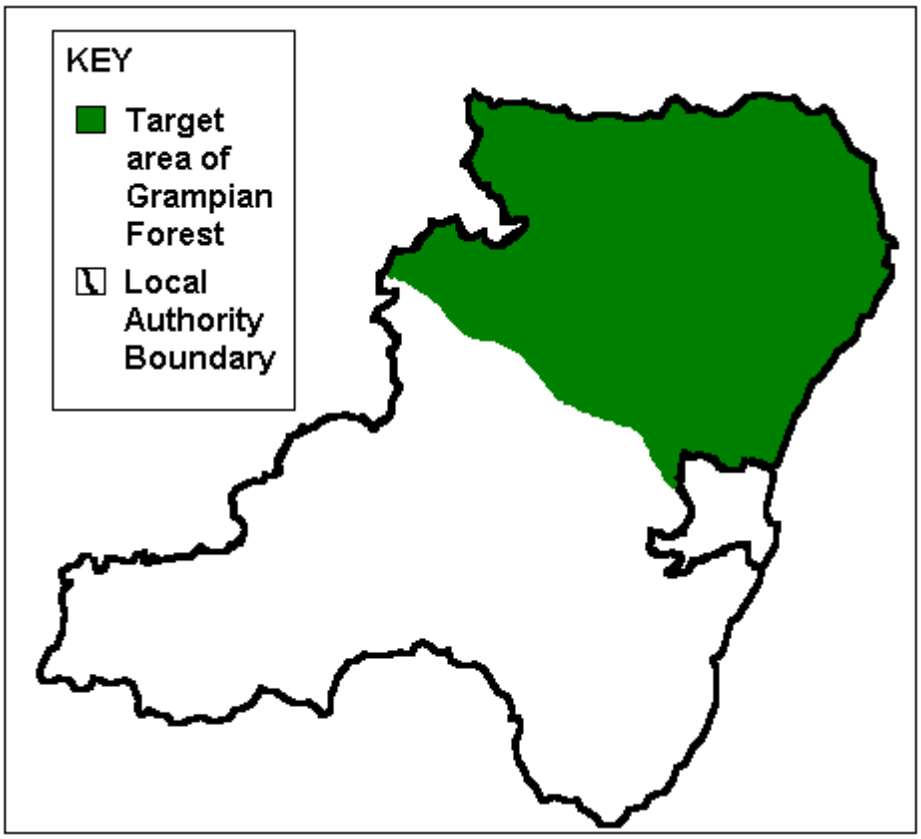


Table 32 shows the total area of woodland cover within Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

Table 32: Woodland Cover in the North East of Scotland

	Woodland Cover (hectares)	**Total Land Area (hectares)**	**% Cover**
Aberdeen City	1,700	18,581	9
Aberdeenshire	92,100	631,787	15
Scotland	1,252,000	7,813,254	16

Source: Forestry Commission, National Inventory of Woodland and Trees (1995)

Forestry is not subject to statutory planning control, however local authorities can influence forestry planting by means of the Indicative Forestry Strategy (IFS). The Forestry Commission consults local Authorities on significant forestry proposals. The current Grampian Forestry Strategy will need to be updated in line with Scottish Office Development Department Circular 9/99. This circular redefines what is meant by 'Preferred', 'Potential' and 'Sensitive' areas:

- **Preferred**: land which offers the greatest scope to pursue a very side range of forestry objectives where it should be possible to accommodate sensitivities in well-designed proposal which fully meet the Forestry Commission's guidelines. The nature of forestry in any particular area should reflect the type of benefits that are sought there.

- **Potential**: land where there is considerable potential to pursue a range of forestry objectives but where there is at least one significant sensitivity. The extent to which certain objectives can be pursued will

depend on how well these can be accommodated within the proposals. The design of schemes in such areas requires particularly careful consideration.

- **Sensitive**: these will tend to be areas where there is a combination of factors, including areas of exceptional natural and cultural heritage interest and areas with high structural value to the local agricultural economy. This will mean that there may be limited scope for forestry expansion unless it is of a scale and character, which can be accommodated and would enhance the features of interest.

Minerals

Minerals are needed for all forms of development, for example housing, industry, roads, and engineering projects. One of the main aims of planning for minerals is to ensure an adequate and steady supply for the construction industry, in a way that takes environmental, social and economic concerns into account.

Reconciling the goals of sustainable development with the exploitation of minerals cannot be easily achieved. Minerals are finite resources, and their consumption, no matter how slowly, will not be at renewable levels – more minerals will be consumed than produced through long-term geological processes. However there are a number of ways of applying the principles of sustainable development to minerals *(see DETR, May 1998, 'Review of the Overall Approach to Planning for the supply of Aggregates')*. These include the increased use of secondary and recycled aggregates; husbanding of resources for future generations and avoidance of minerals sterilisation, as well as the minimisation of environmental impacts during working and high quality site restoration to a beneficial after-use. Also keeping haulage distances to a minimum ties in with a main element of the structure plan strategy: reducing the need to travel.

'Recycled aggregates' includes construction and demolition wastes; asphalt road planing and used railway ballast. 'Secondary aggregates' are by-products of other processes, and will not have been used previously as aggregates. In order to increase the use of these products the government is considering introducing an aggregates tax which is designed to make recycled material more attractive economically compared with primary aggregates. Using recycled materials will reduce the amount going into landfill and will save the amount of finite minerals resources for future generations. A policy encouraging the reuse of recycled sources can be found in the waste section of the structure plan written statement.

Government guidance states that plans should safeguard deposits of minerals from permanent development that would prevent or hinder their subsequent extraction. This is also in the interests of future generations even if the market demand does not exist at the current time.

The minerals policy for the North East of Scotland has operated since 1979, with revisions in 1982 and 1990. Based on an assessment of demand and supply, which took place in 1988, through a survey of minerals operators conducted by the former Regional Council, the minerals policy remains largely unchanged. The main aim of the policy is to ensure ten years supply of sand and gravel and twenty years supply of hard rock. The minerals policy defines two main market areas: within 15 miles of Peterhead and within 20 miles of Aberdeen. The policy also sets out different tiers of constraint in order to protect the environment.

The environmental impacts of quarries include changes to the landscape, and the dust, noise and vibration effects from blasting. Also agricultural land can be permanently destroyed. The tiered policy sets out to protect areas of importance to natural and built heritage from inappropriate mineral development by guiding prospective minerals operators away from sensitive areas such as designated nature conservation sites and prime quality agricultural land. Care also needs to be taken during minerals working to minimise environmental disturbance and to ensure high quality restoration after extraction is complete.

This policy framework continues, as it has been found to be broadly acceptable both to minerals operators as well as to conservation interests. However, the need to update the survey was recognised and a survey of all quarries in the north east was conducted at the end of 1999. The aim was to monitor the activity at quarries and calculate the rate of supply and level of demand as well as the amount of reserves with and without planning permission. Unfortunately some of the larger quarry operators refused to co-operate with the survey. No results have been produced as there are no means of compulsion to reply. Also results from the Scottish Executive Minerals survey were not produced due to a poor response rate from operators. Whilst the policy of maintaining a landbank is supported there is a need to improve the collection of data necessary and this needs to be addressed at a national level. Nonetheless in order to achieve the adequate and steady supply of minerals maintaining a landbank of ten years for sand and gravel and a twenty year supply of hard rock has been carried forward from past surveys. If the landbank in a particular market area is less than ten years this will be a material consideration in determining mineral applications within that catchment. In order to maintain and enhance the efficient use of aggregates it is vital that on-going monitoring and review is carried out.

5.4 Waste Management

Introduction

Every year, around one and a half million tonnes of controlled waste is generated in North East Scotland *(see Table 33).* Much of this waste is produced by the industrial and construction sectors with significant amounts generated by commerce, agriculture and the general public. In addition, agencies such as North Of Scotland Water Authority and Grampian Health Board require the treatment and management of controlled and special wastes.

Table 33: Waste Arising in North East Scotland (Tonnes), 1994

Council	Households	Commercial	Construction & Demolition		Industrial	Total
Aberdeen City	98,625	228,381	256,628	496,765	1,080,039	
Aberdeenshire	107,570	69,892	419,765	37,304	634,634	
Total	206,195	298,273	676,393	534,069	1,714,673	

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin (1996)

Most of this area's waste is disposed of in landfill sites and the majority of these sites are nearing capacity. Table 34 below is the result of a survey of landfill operators carried out by the North East Scotland Waste Strategy Group in 1997. Although the response rate was not 100% it was nevertheless very good and represents the most up-to-date information on capacity in the area. It showed that the landfill capacity for controlled waste (industrial, commercial and household) would virtually run out in late 1999. Since that time a number of developments have extended this capacity such as licence extensions for Aberdeenshire Council's landfill sites, Aberdeen City Council's site at Ness Tip and planning approvals for new landfill sites at Wester Hatton near Balmedie and Stoneyhill, near Cruden Bay.

Table 34: Landfill Capacity in North East Scotland (Tonnes)

Type of Waste	Quantity Disposed of P/A	Remaining Licensed Capacity (November 1997)
Controlled Waste	764,000	1,544,500
Building and Soil	61,000	2,019,000
Inert Waste	125,000	1,340,000

Source: NESWS Group Survey of Landfill Operators (Nov 1997)

Landfill however, is an increasingly contentious issue and a new approach to waste management is demanded at the local, national and European levels. The new approach will require a greater commitment to waste reduction, reuse and recovery (including recycling) carried out in line with the National Waste Strategy. In addition, by balancing social, economic and environmental impacts, waste management will be sustainable in the long term.
Presently only a relatively small proportion of waste in the North East is recycled *(see Table 35)* although this is no worse than recycling rates nationally. This is mainly due to a combination of very poor market conditions in respect of recycled goods and until recently, cheap landfill costs. There are currently no major Energy From Waste plants in North East Scotland. However, increasing landfill costs and the setting of rigorous targets for waste recovery is likely to make this an increasingly attractive option in the near future (see also the section on recycling of aggregates under the 'Minerals' heading).

Table 35: Amount Collected for Recycling in 1994 (tonnes)

Type of Waste	**Aberdeen City**	**Aberdeenshire**	**Total**
Household	13,960	569	14,529
Commercial	30,882	8,542	39,424
Industrial	29,746	1,512	31,258
Civic Amenity	394	2,268	2,662
Voluntary	12	1,056	1,068
TOTAL	74,994	13,947	88,941

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin (1996)

Against this background fundamental changes have occurred in respect to legislative requirements and the waste industry itself. Most derive from European Union Directives and the Government's commitment to sustainable development in the 1990 White Paper 'This Common Inheritance'. These requirements are summarised in NPPG 10 'Planning and Waste Management' and the National Waste Strategy for Scotland. Legislation establishes several guiding principles for the management of waste. These must be taken into account by local authorities when drawing up development plans or waste strategies.

Data on waste in the North East is outdated and SEPA intend to establish an integrated waste management data system to enable changes in waste management to be monitored and assessed. SEPA also intend to publish a yearly report on waste data and periodic reports on the outcome of its research and development.

Guiding Principles

(a) The Waste Hierarchy

In order to reduce environmental impact and increase the efficiency of resource use, waste must be managed in accordance with the following hierarchy of options.

1. Reduction of waste at source (producing and using less to begin with)

2. Reuse (using things more than once)

3. Recovery (using waste to make something else such as compost, energy or recycled products)

4. Environmentally sensitive disposal (when all else fails)

To be more sustainable, waste should increasingly be managed towards the first of these options and in accordance with the following Key Principles.

(b) Key Principles for Sustainable Waste Management

Any attempt to manage waste as high up the waste hierarchy as possible should be governed by the following four principles and any waste strategy or policies should be founded on these:

- The **Proximity Principle** and **Regional Self-sufficiency** concerns establishing a network of treatment and disposal facilities to handle waste as close as practicable to the point of production. This encourages communities to take responsibility for locally produced waste and reduces transport costs and emissions. Generally, **Regional Self-sufficiency** means that structure plan areas should provide for sufficient waste management facilities to deal with their own waste.

- Planning authorities should apply the **Precautionary Principle** when considering waste management proposals or alternatives. This is defined as taking action now to avoid possible environmental damage when scientific evidence for acting is inconclusive but the potential environmental damage could be great.

- The **Polluter Pays Principle** states that economic measures should ensure that waste management options bear their full environmental costs and in turn that the polluter pays. The landfill tax is on such measure.

- The Waste Strategy should be determined in accordance with the **Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO).** This provides the most benefit or least damage to the environment, at acceptable cost, in both the long and short term. The BPEO may vary for each waste stream and for each waste authority.

These are set out in detail in the National Waste Strategy for Scotland (SEPA, 1999).

5.5 The Area Waste Plan

Cross Border Movement of Waste

Of the Key Principles outlined above, both the Proximity Principle and Regional Self-sufficiency are particularly relevant for planning for waste in north-east Scotland. Neither principle necessarily requires waste to be managed within each council administrative boundary. It should nevertheless be managed as close as possible to its source of production, taking into account the BPEO. This can vary for each type of waste. Some hazardous and radioactive wastes can only be dealt with at a national level whereas individual householders can compost garden and kitchen waste. Indeed there are many cases where the management of waste bears no relation to what are essentially artificial local authority administrative boundaries.

The concept of the cross border movement of waste between authorities may not be popular. However, where it is found to accord with the above principles, it may be both economically and environmentally beneficial. Under these circumstances, it should not be used as a reason to prevent waste management facilities, which are appropriate in principle.

Waste Strategy Areas

Through its National Waste Strategy (NWS) SEPA has identified several Waste Strategy Areas (WSA's) throughout Scotland. WSA's provide suitably large economies of scale to plan for waste but do not seek to restrict the import and export of waste in appropriate cases. Many WSA's cover more than one structure plan

area and the North East Scotland WSA is no exception, comprising the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire and the Moray structure plan areas.

Regional Waste Development Groups

Within each WSA, SEPA envisage the establishment of a WSA Group that will be required to prepare an area waste plan. Within this area, SEPA aim to establish the North East Waste Strategy Area Group (NEWSAG) in conjunction with Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils, subject to the approval of each Council.

Presently each of the three local authorities in North East Scotland are pursuing individual strategies for dealing with waste produced in their areas. Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire are preparing separate waste strategies, both of which are scheduled to be finalised in 2001. Aberdeen City Council is also in the process of contracting out its waste management functions to a private sector operator. Although Moray is yet to start work on a waste strategy, this is a requirement of its own structure plan.

The shortage of landfill options have necessitated much of this work and although it is of use to the individual authorities, greater joint working has a number of advantages:

- Research and work will not be duplicated - joint working will save staff time and financial resources;
- The regional context may only be covered superficially in individual strategies - joint working will reduce cross border conflicts in a coherent manner; and
- A larger economy of scale is created. This may enable projects that were not previously viable, to go ahead.

It will be the remit of NEWSAG to prepare an area waste plan for North East Scotland. The plan will establish the optimal combination of waste management hierarchy options for all types of waste and reflect the requirements of the NWS. It will aim to reduce the demand for landfill through waste reduction, reuse and recovery.

The production of the area waste plan will certainly take place in the context of a shortage of waste disposal facilities in the region. As a consequence, clear objectives and responsibilities must be established from the outset and an achievable timetable needs to be set.

5.6 Renewable Energy

Guiding Principles

Government policy is set out in NPPG 6 ‘Renewable Energy’. This seeks to encourage the development of new renewable energy sources wherever they are economically feasible and environmentally acceptable. Accordingly, the development plan should:

- Provide positively for renewable energy developments;
- Safeguard potential areas against sterilisation;
- Protect the natural and built heritage; and
- Achieve acceptable operating standards and early site restoration where necessary.

More detailed information on catering for individual developments can be found in Planning Advice Note 45 'Renewable Energy Technologies'.

Renewable Energy in North East Scotland

It appears likely that renewable energy will play an increasingly prominent role in the energy sector driven by, amongst other things, the Scottish Renewables Order, improved technology and increasing fossil fuel levies. Given that the North East has several potentially feasible renewable energy sources, it is important that local plans take account of the possible requirement for such facilities and identify the types of area suitable for their location.

The potential for renewable energy developments are detailed in the findings of *'Renewable Energy Business Opportunities in Grampian'*, a project supported by the European Union and known as the ALTENER report. It concluded that commercially viable opportunities exist in the north east for the exploitation of wind energy, small hydro, and the combustion or digestion of wood, farm waste, sewage sludge and waste. The following paragraphs contain figures from the project report, which is available from Aberdeen City Council and Grampian Enterprise.

Offshore Wind

Offshore wind exploitation offers huge potential for the region, particularly given the offshore engineering expertise available in Aberdeen. This facet of renewable energy is however, outwith the scope of the Structure Plan as planning controls do not extend beyond the low water tidal mark. As the energy from waste is dealt with elsewhere and the potential for small hydro is limited, this section will principally concentrate on wind, wood and biomass, animal waste and sewage sources.

Animal Waste

The daily slurry production from dairy and beef cattle, pigs and laying hens in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire is approximately 3.49m litres in winter and 1.28m litres in summer. The principal means of generating heat or electricity from animal waste is anaerobic digestion. Because fuel has to be transported to plant, there is some flexibility to location in respect of the electric grid and amenity designations. Most animal waste is produced in the north of the region in the Garioch, Formartine and Buchan areas. Much of this area lies outside designated areas and is close to the grid.

Wind Power

A structure plan policy deals with specific location aspects of wind farms (as well as other renewable energy facilities). The ALTENER Report estimates that the potential capacity for the practicable wind energy resource to be 8703MW for areas with >7.5 miles per second annual mean wind speed at 45m above ground level. If the threshold is increased to 8.5 m/s the practical resource is reduced to 2518MW. The practical resource is mainly determined by amenity designations such as National Scenic Areas and is mapped in the Report.

Sewage Sludge

Approximately 25,000 dry tonnes of sewage sludge are produced in the North East every year. Since the implementation of the 1998 Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive which prohibits sea disposal, most sewage will be treated and disposed of on land. North of Scotland Water Authority (NOSWA) currently plan to dry most sewage sludge into a form that can be spread onto land. However, it is also feasible for dried sewage to be combined with municipal waste in a single energy from waste plant.

Forest Residue

It is estimated that almost 100,000 green tonnes per year of forest residue could become available in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Principle constraints to energy use include the cost of production, transport, processing and storage. In general, the forestry resource is scattered all over the region, although large parts of the western and southern Marr area are unlikely to be suitable for larger plant due to a combination of amenity designations and distance from the electricity grid.

Short Rotation Forestry

A report for Grampian Enterprise Limited entitled *'The use of set aside land for Industrial Crop Production in north east Scotland'* identifies this as a crop with good potential in the area, particularly on better quality land in the north and east of the region. Predicted prices for Short Rotation Forestry however, effectively limit its cultivation to 5-10% of set aside land and uptake is likely to yield up to 8200 oven dry tonnes per year.

Energy facilities that involve the incineration or digestion of wood or animal wastes will be best located close to their source. The nature of such plant means that an industrial setting in the rural area would be the most appropriate for an incineration plant. Small anaerobic digestion plant may be accommodated on individual farms whereas larger developments are likely to be most acceptable beside existing industrial or waste water treatment works.

Saving Energy

There are ways in which building standards could be improved to increase peoples' quality of life. This is particularly true where concerns exist over the sustainability of housing and rising fuel costs in one of the most Northerly areas in Britain.

The use of more sustainable building materials helps to protect the environment and should not lead to a deterioration of standards. Often for very little additional construction cost, the quality and durability of buildings can be greatly improved. Resources are precious and every attempt should be made to use them in the best way possible. Given the important role house building in particular plays in the North East, improvements in construction techniques could have a significant impact on the environment.

Similarly, opportunities exist for homes to be designed for greater flexibility (through lifetime standards) to suit individuals throughout their lives. People may wish to change their house to suit their changing need but many may wish to stay in their home where they have an attachment and a support network of friends, neighbours and services. With an ageing population the construction of homes with the ability for adaptation is even more important. Lifetime Standards are not just about adaptations for elderly residents but also allow families to grow and to take account of illness or disability. These houses would not be amenity or barrier free housing but would allow for a significant degree of adaptation, if necessary.

Fuel costs and the environmental implications of heating means that everyone should seek to minimise the amount of energy spent. The introduction of the Home Energy Conservation Act will compel developers in both the private and social housing sectors to improve the energy efficiency of their developments in order to reduce the environmental impact of energy use. The introduction of statutory rating systems will allow councils as planning authorities to specify the minimum requirements for energy efficiency.

Aberdeen City Council has recently adopted an Energy Strategy. This concentrates on those areas, which the Council can influence or change in relation to energy consumption, both in its own buildings and services and with private householders and industry. It also addresses the promotion of energy production in the north east. Further details on this initiative can be obtained by contacting the City Council's Environment Strategy Co-ordinator in the Planning and Strategic Development Department.

Another means of reducing energy consumption is through the careful siting and design of housing layouts. Guidance on this is set out in a publication called *'Development within Nature'* available from Aberdeenshire Council.