

SIMPLIFIED PLANNING ZONES: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF PROJECT

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise PPSL of the proposed closure of the Scottish Government Simplified Planning Zones (SPZ) Pilot Project, which was being progressed jointly by Development Policy (Planning and Regulatory Services) and Housing (Community and Culture) in association with a private developer on behalf of the Scottish Government.
- 1.2 The Simplified Planning Zone project was brought to the [PPSL Committee on the 15th March 2017](#), which endorsed the principle of preparing an SPZ Scheme for a site in Lochgilphead and another site on Mull. This was to investigate the use of an SPZ Scheme to enable the delivery of self/custom build homes in differing situations.
- 1.3 A number of issues arose during the course of the project which have impacted adversely on its delivery. These included issues relating to flooding, access, sustainable development, market changes and a changed economic and policy environment. These issues mean that the feasibility of progressing a successful SPZ Scheme is now unlikely. Therefore continuation with this approach is not considered to be a practical solution. However, there still remains good potential to develop both sites more effectively outwith this project through the normal planning process, including for self/custom build homes. The option to close the project was discussed with the Scottish Government. Given the significant issues the Scottish Government would permit the closure of the project. A requirement of closing the project would be the return of any unspent grant money.
- 1.4 Recommendations
- It is recommended that the members of PPSL:
- i) note and consider the information in the Report;
 - ii) recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee, the closure of the project with the return of unspent monies to the Scottish Government; and
 - iii) continue to support the development of the sites through the normal planning process, utilising information gained during the project where possible.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. The Scottish Government sought projects from local authorities to assist with a pilot study into the use of the Simplified Planning Zone (SPZ) process. The aim was to investigate the potential for an SPZ Scheme to assist in the delivery of self/custom build housing. A Simplified Planning Zone is an area where the need to apply for planning permission is removed for certain types of development.
- 2.2. Argyll and Bute proposed a project for the Scottish Government pilot that consisted of a remote rural island location (Mull) with a green field site in private control and a Main Town (Lochgilphead) location on a brown field site in Council ownership. Due to a range of issues it has become unfeasible to progress the project to a successful conclusion. The closure of the project would require the remaining grant monies to be reimbursed to the Scottish Government.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Recommendations

It is recommended that the members of PPSL:

- i) note and consider the information in the Report;
- ii) recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee, the closure of the project with the return of unspent monies to the Scottish Government; and
- iii) continue to support the development of the sites through the normal planning process, utilising information gained during the project where possible.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 An SPZ Scheme may be used to promote self/custom build housing delivery. However, in the case of the 2 sites piloted within Argyll and Bute the issues encountered during the progression of the scheme significantly reduced the viability of the approach.
- 4.2 The issues include:
- Flooding – full modelling of the Lochgilphead site highlighted issues that were difficult to resolve within an SPZ Scheme.
 - Access – constraints at Lochgilphead that may be better overcome using land outwith the Scheme.
 - Sustainable development – constraints resultant from a Scheme are liable to reduce delivery capacity and result in a less effective use of a valuable town centre site.
 - Market changes – the Scheme is not easily amended and may constrain development in changing market conditions.
 - Changed economic and policy environment - the Scheme has experienced significant delays related to the pandemic and SEPA cyber attack. There are new options for the delivery of self build/custom housing with greater policy support mechanisms.
- 4.3 The benefits of having taken part in the pilot have been the raising of awareness of self and custom build options with developers and communities, assisting in developing national policy and technical survey work undertaken on the Council owned Lochgilphead site.
- 4.4 Both sites from the project can progress successfully without the use of an SPZ Scheme. The Mull site is a designated housing allocation and the Lochgilphead site is within a Main Town Centre near infrastructure and key facilities.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The issues with the SPZ Scheme are such that the sites are not liable to achieve their full potential through this approach. In addition, market conditions are subject to change and it is considered that the SPZ Scheme is not as responsive to this as the normal planning process. The recommended approach is to close the project and support the delivery of the sites through the normal planning process.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – None
- 6.2 Financial – Unused grant monies totalling £37,099.09 require to be returned to the Scottish Government.

- 6.3 Legal – There is a requirement to return unused grant monies to the Scottish Government.
- 6.4 HR - None
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: None
 - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – None
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – None
 - 6.5.3 Islands - None
- 6.6 Climate Change – None
- 6.7 Risk – Failure to close the project would utilise additional resource on potentially abortive work and is liable to result in a less effective route to delivery of development on the project sites.
- 6.8 Customer Service – None
- 6.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - None

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