



Development Management Guidance Interim Spatial Strategy: July 2025

Introduction

This Development Management Guidance (DMG) provides direction on the Council's interpretation of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the Orkney Local Development Plan 2017 (OLDP2017).

The DMG is intended to operate as an interim position until such time as the Proposed Plan is published. The Proposed Plan once published will have material weight in the determination of planning applications. This DMG, once approved, will represent Orkney Islands Council's position on this matter.

Throughout NPF4 it is noted that Local Development Plans (LDPs) should be informed by an understanding of population change over time, locally specific needs, market circumstances and characteristics; and that LDPs can have tailored approaches to development. In this regard, the Spatial Strategy of the OLDP2017 is considered to remain relevant and appropriately reflects Orkney, its development pressures and consequently that it remains appropriate as a Statement of Orkney's Spatial Strategy in the context of the overarching principles of NPF4.

Evidence base: The Housing Needs and Demand Assessment and the Local Housing Strategy

Findings through monitoring and consultation for the review of the OLDP2017, provides evidence that the existing Spatial Strategy of the OLDP2017 appropriately reflects Orkney. The Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (HNDA) 2024 and Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2024 consider that the Spatial Strategy of the OLDP2017 provides for adequate housing supply for at least a five-year period.

The HNDA looks at population and demographic change and the housing needs and demands for Orkney. In doing this Orkney is divided into five Housing Markets Areas. These areas are geographical areas where the demand is relatively self-contained. It should be noted that the non-linked Islands of Orkney form one separate Housing Market Area. In addition, these housing documents acknowledge that the demographics of our non-linked islands are different than that of the Mainland and the Linked Isles, with population decline rather than population growth, lower incomes levels and higher percentage of second or vacant homes.

The LHS looks to assess the housing needs of all persons in the area, across all housing tenures drawing on the HNDA, develops strategies to meet these needs and sets out priorities and actions for new housing supply. This work provides the review of the Local Development Plan (LDP) with local housing outcomes.

The Scottish Government Chief Planner Letter: 8 February 2023

The Scottish Government Chief Planner wrote to all Planning Authorities in February 2023 to provide guidance on the implementation of the new NPF4 policy, in particular the relationship that this should have in relation to Local Development Plans.

“LDPs already adopted will continue to be part of the development plan. For avoidance of doubt, existing LDP land allocations will be maintained. Whether an LDP has been adopted prior to or after the adoption and publication of NPF4, legislation states that in the event of any incompatibility between a provision of NPF and a provision of an LDP, whichever of them is the later in date is to prevail (Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (“the 1997 Act”); section 24(3)). It is important to bear in mind NPF4 must be read and applied as a whole. The intent of each of the 33 policies is set out in NPF4 and can be used to guide decision-making. Conflicts between policies are to be expected. Factors for and against development will be weighed up in the balance of planning judgement.”

The Scottish Government’s Urban Rural Classification 2020: May 2022

Policies within NPF4 refer to using the Urban Rural Classification 2020. It is considered that this national classification system is an unrefined method for assessment in the Orkney context. It considers only population and accessibility in its classification of Scotland in terms of Large Urban Areas, Other Urban Areas, Accessible Small Towns, Accessible Rural Areas and Remote Rural.

There is no consideration of facilities and services and the service provision our settlements provide to our rural areas and islands; and it does not appropriately reflect the local circumstances of Orkney.

Accessibility is based on drive times with some consideration of ferries. We consider having an assessment based on drive times is not reflective of the climate change agenda of NPF4 or the policy provisions on local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods. Driving as the mode of transport does not consider Orkney as a rural archipelago where journeys are made regularly by ferry and plane.

Therefore, it is considered that the six fold Urban Rural Classification 2020 is not appropriate for Orkney.

The Interim Spatial Strategy and the Orkney Local Development Plan 2017

For the review of the OLDP2017 we have completed significant work to look at the locations of facilities and services within Orkney considering what is important to the County in the development of sustainable opportunities for growth. This work backs up the work that was undertaken previously for the drafting of the OLDP2017.

The present Spatial Strategy for the OLDP 2017 has three classifications that acknowledge the facilities and services of the County and their inter-relationship with our rural areas and island communities.

The classifications are:

The Settlements of the Mainland and Linked Isles – settlements throughout this area are identified where there are services, facilities, retail, infrastructure, employment and centres of population are primarily located and act as service centres for our rural communities and non-linked isles. There are opportunities for sustainable development.

The Countryside of the Mainland and Linked Isles – provides opportunities for new sustainable economic development including that of new homes, whilst seeking to protect Orkney's landscape and natural environments for future generations.

The Isles Approach – development which supports permanent resident populations and are served by public transport services and does not place any unacceptable burden on existing infrastructure and services, will be supported.

The Interim Strategy

This Interim Strategy reflects the local housing outcomes of the HNDA and LHS. The Council's Interim Spatial Strategy for the purposes of interpreting NPF4 Policies will be defined as Settlements of the Mainland and Linked Isles, the Countryside of the Mainland and Linked Isles and the Isles as mapped and defined in the adopted OLDP2017.

In addition, the NPF4 definitions will be interpreted as follows:

The Spatial Strategy of the OLDP2017 reflects Orkney, the existing pattern of development, Orkney's distinct communities and looks to the future in terms of development aspirations for sustainable growth. By reading and applying NPF4 as a whole, this Spatial Strategy supports the Spatial Strategy and the Six Spatial Policies of NPF4 – Just Transition, Conserving and Recycling Assets, Local Living, Compact Urban Growth, Balanced Development and Rural Revitalisation.

The following classifications in NPF4 will be interpreted as:

Quality Homes – The Settlements of the Mainland and Linked Isles

Rural Areas – The Countryside of the Mainland and Linked Isles

Remote Rural Areas and Fragile Communities – The Islands Approach
(Orkney Non- Linked Isles)

For more information on this planning document, please contact Development Management by email at planning@orkney.gov.uk or by calling 01856 873535.