

Smallholdings may be permitted in Carsphairn Area

Experimental move to try to stem depopulation.

By Chris McIntyre.

AN EXPERIMENTAL housing policy that could lead to more people moving back into one of the remotest areas of the region was approved by the regional planning committee on Tuesday.

In response to a request from Carsphairn Community Council, the committee decided to consider new housing in the countryside in that area through the creation of a smallholdings policy.

However, councillors have not said what size the smallholding would have to be before approval was given although it was felt that two hectares would be too small.

Planning Director Mr Gordon Mann said in a report that the size of a smallholding may have to be determined on an individual basis.

Councillors agreed to include a statement in the Stewartry Local Plan to the effect that, in Carsphairn area, the regional council "will consider favourably proposals for new residential development attached to smallholdings." It adds that applicants would be required to enter into a Section 50 agreement linking the smallholding to the house to prevent sub-division of the site.

Carsphairn has suffered considerably over the years as trees replaced sheep on the hills and people drifted away from the countryside into the towns to find work. In recent times, though, the community has been trying to breathe new life into the area and a heritage centre is just one of the projects on the cards.

The smallholdings policy was welcomed by local councillor Mr Mungo Bryson who said there was interest being shown in other parts of Scotland to what was happening at Carsphairn.

The committee also agreed to recommend the policy committee to alter the regional Structure Plan to increase the number of areas where a relaxation of the housing in the countryside policy was allowed. The new areas are Eskdalemuir, Upper Nithsdale, Carsphairn and a large part of Wigtown District.

The Carsphairn area includes parts of Glencairn, Penpont and Dunscore parishes and stretches as far south as Dalry and Balmaclellan. Following a request from the local community council, the committee also agreed to take in the parishes of Parton and Kirkpatrick Durham with the exception of the national scenic area around Loch Ken.

As the relaxation is likely to create greater demand for housing in the countryside, the committee were asked to approve additional criteria to those that already exist. Among applicants will have to demonstrate that the site was formerly the location of a dwelling house and that it did not affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest or one of archaeological interest.

Mr Mann said the areas identified were remote from towns and villages and had been the subject of continued rural depopulation over a period of years. Within those areas it had been possible to identify hamlets or groups of buildings in the countryside.

He went on: "The areas do, however, have a legacy of derelict properties and abandoned sites of houses. In order to increase opportunities for siting a new house in the countryside in those areas advantage should be taken of these sites as the location for a new house.

"By using the sites of former houses it is effectively applying the same logic that is applied throughout the region – that is, new housing should follow the existing settlement pattern.

"It will also safeguard against groups of houses being created in open countryside which can have a detrimental effect on the countryside. In these areas there will be no requirement on the applicant to demonstrate that the house was in sound condition as at 1st July 1948."

Outside the areas of relaxation, new housing in the countryside will be encouraged in existing hamlets and regional councillors have been asked for their suggestions on places to be regarded as a hamlet.

Planning committee chairman Mr Allan Baldwick said after the meeting that they had still not resolved the difficult problem of retiring farmers wanting to build a house on their farm and he felt each case would have to be considered on its merits.