

## **Circular 17/1997: Environmentally sensitive areas**

The Chief Executive Local Authorities  
Our ref: PGE/1/25  
June 1997

Dear Sir or Madam

### **Environmentally sensitive areas**

1. The purpose of this Circular is to clarify the status of Environmentally Sensitive Areas in planning policy and, specifically, to differentiate them from statutory national and international heritage designations such as National Scenic Areas, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest and related international designations.

### **Purpose of the ESA scheme**

2. The Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme is based on the provisions of Sections 18 and 19 of the Agriculture Act 1986, which are designed to promote agriculture practices which have helped create distinctive landscapes and have contributed to the maintenance of wildlife habitats or historic features. The Scheme also forms part of the Scottish Agri-Environment Programme which is required to meet the UK Government's obligations under the Common Agriculture Policy. Its sole purpose is to allow farmers and crofters within designated areas to have access to payments to sustain or adopt environmentally-friendly farming practices. Participation by farmers and crofters in the Scheme is voluntary. Consequently the ESA is not a national landscape and/or nature conservation designation.

### **ESAs and natural heritage designations**

3. Environmentally Sensitive Areas are frequently extensive and may include land designated nationally as being of high value in terms of landscape, nature conservation or the built heritage. They may also include land which is identified independently in development plans as being important at regional or local level, for example for the protection of landscape. These other designations require reason and justification in their own right in the normal way. ESA coverage of the land does not, in itself, imply that special planning arrangements are merited over the whole area or indeed any part of it. Relevant references to ESAs in National Planning Policy Guidelines should be interpreted in this way.

### **General**

4. Any enquiries about this Circular should be addressed to Graeme Purves, Planning Services Division, Area 2-H, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ (Telephone 0131-244-7533). Further copies of the Circular can be obtained from the above address (or Telephone 0131-244-7066).

Yours faithfully

M T Affolter