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**Response to Scottish Executive consultation on  
Statutory Guidance on Planning and Sustainable Development**

**22 June 2007**

Homes for Scotland represents the home building and residential development industry in Scotland. Our 90 member companies build some 95% of all new homes built for sale in Scotland. Against that background Homes for Scotland is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the draft guidance.

As stated in our response to the draft SPP6, the important issues being addressed by sustainable policies cannot be questioned from either the national or international perspectives. The advantages to the economy and to tackling the consequences of climate change are clear and UK industry continues to stress the need for a partnership between government and business to deliver real progress.

Our member companies accept that the draft guidance is intended to support the delivery of a National Planning Framework and development plans that contribute to sustainable development. Homes for Scotland fully supports the Scottish Executive's underlying objectives in that regard.

Concern in the industry focuses on the premature introduction of local sustainable building standards by Planning Authorities using Supplementary Planning Guidance. This increases the risk of inconsistency in approach across the country.

We would urge the Executive to reconsider the relationship between sustainable building standards and planning. This stance is based on the following:

The need for further research:

In our response to the draft SPP6 we questioned whether the development industry is yet adequately experienced in the design, operational and cost issues associated with sustainable power generation. We also questioned whether the technology is sufficiently robust and cost-effective for use in large scale housing developments, and whether there is yet sufficient customer buy-in for these technologies to be used on a significant scale in the private housebuilding sector. Despite the industry's commitment to the climate change and the sustainability agenda by reducing energy consumption through the design of its buildings, we continue to raise these questions in relation to power generation.

Further research is required into the most effective way of reducing carbon emissions through micro-renewable technologies. Indeed at this early stage we are still unsure whether some of the suggested micro-renewable equipment would qualify for building warranties thus having serious implications for the viability of projects and the "mortgageability" of new homes.

Scotland experiences different climatic conditions and uses different methods of construction than elsewhere in the UK and Homes for Scotland would be happy to work with the Scottish Executive to support specific trials in micro-generation in Scotland.

#### The lack of technical skills within Planning Authorities:

The draft guidance states that “authorities must satisfy themselves that they have the necessary skills to make these assessments and introduce arrangements”. Our member companies are concerned that Planning Authorities will not have the necessary resources to employ the technical expertise necessary to manage such measures.

We note that the draft guidance calls for close collaborative working between planning authorities and those responsible for the building standards system. This is not enough. Our member companies are firmly of the view that changes in sustainable standards are best dealt with through building regulations. Based on a well publicised research agenda, the Scottish Building Standards Agency has the necessary expertise to implement and police new standards across the country.

#### The need for consistency across Scotland:

It would be a matter of grave concern if the development industry was required to work to 34 different sets of standards in Scotland. The encouragement of sustainable standards as part of Local Authority supplementary planning guidance has the potential to do just that.

Our member companies urge the Executive to promote consistency in approach across Scotland.

Homes for Scotland's preference will always be to have changes in building standards contained within building regulations, promoted and policed by the SBSA. Our member companies however do note that further guidance has been given to Local Authorities in developing their own standards and if this guidance is to become statutory we would welcome further advice for Authorities to encourage consistency. We agree that standards should be subject to extensive consultation and that there should be adequate publicity and lead in time for the introduction of such standards. Our member companies also appreciate the new requirement that authorities should signal their intention to prepare such guidance in their development plans. This will facilitate stronger involvement of the industry and give our member companies more time to prepare for any such changes. Authorities must, however, move beyond the current approach to planning consultations, which all too often, can be characterised as “publish and defend” rather than a genuine initiative to make policy more robust through dialogue.

#### The need to change the focus of policy towards energy providers

As the technology and benefits of on-site renewables is untested and could ironically prove to be unsustainable, Homes for Scotland would urge the Scottish Executive to change the focus of policy and engage with the providers of energy. Rather than rely on on-site generation it would be preferable to obtain “green energy” from those who are specialists in providing energy. This could apply to national, district or local energy provision.