

Supplementary Guidance: Landscape

1. Status of Supplementary Guidance

This Supplementary Guidance (SG) forms part of the Development Plan and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The SG expands upon the following [Aberdeen Local Development Plan](#) policies:

- Policy D2 – Landscape

Due to the cross-cutting nature of landscape, a number of other Local Development Plan policies are however relevant to consider, for example: Policies D1 - Quality Placemaking by Design, D3 - Big Buildings, D4 - Historic Environment, NC9 - Beach and Leisure, NE1 - Green Space Network, NE2 - Green Belt, NE3 - Urban Green Space, NE4 - Open Space Provision in New Development, NE5 - Trees and Woodland, NE7 - Coastal Planning, and NE8 - Natural Heritage.

2. Introduction to Topic

Scotland is a signatory to the [European Landscape Convention](#) (ELC) which highlights the importance of all landscapes, not just special places. The Convention establishes the need to recognise landscape in law, and to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes. [Scottish Planning Policy 2014](#) translates ELC objectives into land-use policy principles.

This section sets out the design principles for considering *landscape*, *seascape* and *townscape* in the siting, layout and design of development proposals. The related [Supplementary Guidance on Natural Heritage](#) should also be referred to where relevant.

Information on landscape techniques (e.g. Landscape Character Assessment, Landscape Capacity Assessment, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) will be provided in the accompanying [Technical Advice Note \(TAN\): Landscape](#). Further guidance on supporting landscape information, planting requirements, native species, amenity species, information for landscape plans and landscape guidelines will also be available in the TAN.

2.1 What is Landscape?

Landscape is about more than just ‘the view’. It is about how people, places and natural environments relate to each other. Landscape results from the way that different natural and cultural (human-made) components of our environment interact over time, and how they are perceived by us.

Landscape can be ordinary, everyday places as well as special, valued ‘scenery’. It can be a patch of urban wasteland, a mountain, a farmed valley, or an urban park.

Landscapes at the coast, which include the marine environment, are referred to as seascapes, and those which are primarily urban are often referred to as townscapes. Landscapes, seascapes and townscapes are usually assessed and described in terms of character or value.

3. **General Guidance**

A competent landscape professional should be an integral part of the assessment, design and development team for any proposal that is likely to affect Aberdeen’s landscapes, seascapes or townscapes. Any required plans, surveys, assessments and designs must be completed by a competent and suitably experienced professional.

3.1 Site Assessment

The creation of a high quality landscape will follow a design process that systematically considers the existing landscape/seascape and townscape character of the site and surroundings, influences the site layout and built form of the proposed development, and considers the requirements of the intended users and for biodiversity, so creating a scheme that is both visually pleasing and functional.

Retaining and protecting appropriate landscape elements, complemented by new features and planting, are important factors in creating a sense of place. Where there are no existing landscape features of note, new landscapes will complement the surroundings of the site and provide positive enhancements.

A fundamental part of any design process must include an assessment of the landscape/seascape and townscape characteristics of the site and its surroundings.

Standard techniques for undertaking these assessments should be used, as will be discussed in [Technical Advice Note: Landscape](#).

The [Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment](#) provides information on the Landscape Character Types of Aberdeen, and guidance on key characteristics and sensitivities which should be taken into account when planning, siting and designing development.

Developers are expected to consider the following characteristics and sensitivities of the site and surroundings, and should seek opportunities to enhance and retain any key characteristics.

- Key characteristics of the site and surroundings (identified in the Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment, or detailed assessments of the site) and landscape features which impart a sense of place, can include landform, soil type, trees, woodlands, hedges, walls, field and road patterns, water bodies, views and approaches, and recreational networks, paths and cycle routes;

- Key views and gateways to the city as identified in the [Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment](#), and a local visual analysis of wildlife habitats and species, including protected habitats and species, designated natural heritage sites, trees, woodlands, waterbodies, wetlands and other wildlife habitats and corridors (refer to [Supplementary Guidance: Natural Heritage](#));
- Open Spaces and the *Green Space Network* including opportunities to avoid fragmentation and enhance connectivity (refer to [Supplementary Guidance: Open Space](#)); and,
- Green buffers around and between settlements.

[Technical Advice Note: Landscape](#) will include a detailed checklist of landscape considerations.

3.2 Layout and Design

Development layouts and detailed landscape design must be informed by the assessment of the site and surroundings. Poorly sited and designed developments cannot usually be redeemed through good landscape design. The layout and design of a development should be integrated with landscape design, and shall demonstrate that the proposals:

- respect and enhance landscape, seascape and townscape character of the site and its surrounds. Conservation Area Character Appraisals should be referenced where relevant;
 - integrate adjoining areas, buildings and features in a way which maintains and creates a sense of place or identity;
 - maximise adaptation and resilience of the built and natural environment to the effects of climate change, and mitigate impacts on climate change;
 - use building and landscape materials from sustainable sources;
 - enhance the external environment of buildings for the benefit of people's wellbeing in a changing climate, including the provision of open spaces and path/cycle networks;
- arrange the layout and orientation of buildings to optimise the energy efficiency of buildings, maximise potential for renewable energy, and minimise shading of external private and public spaces;
 - provide safe, direct linkages within the site and to adjoining areas for encouraging pedestrian/cycling movement and placing less reliance on car travel;
 - provide for high quality, accessible, safe play and open spaces as appropriate to the development;
 - avoid fragmentation and loss of the Green Space Network, and ensure that the *green/blue space* within the development site is connected to green/blue space on adjacent areas (whether they are developed or not) so that the integrity of the city wide Green Space Network is both maintained and enhanced;
 - retain trees, habitats including wetlands and water courses, habitat networks and mosaics, and open spaces, as a means of reducing environmental effects, helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change, improving air quality, and as a valuable landscape, recreation and wildlife resource;

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- create appropriate habitats for wildlife such as wetlands, trees/woodlands and nesting sites;
 - wherever possible and appropriate, use locally native tree/shrub/plant species both to help maintain biodiversity and achieve low maintenance requirements;
 - place buffers strips alongside waterbodies;
 - minimise earthworks and maximise the conservation of natural soil profiles;
 - incorporate water sensitive urban design principles (refer to Water Sensitive Urban Design in the UK and Sustainable Drainage Systems – Maximising the Potential for People and Wildlife)
 - introduce appropriate and multifunctional Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) solutions including minimise the use of hard ground surfacing and maximise the extent of unbound, porous and permeable materials; and,
 - provide a safe environment by ‘designing out crime’ and provide lighting and signage where appropriate (refer to Secured by Design guidance).

Technical Advice Note: Landscape will include a detailed checklist of survey and supporting information.

3.3 Landscape Design

Landscape design forms a central part of the design and layout of any development, drawing together the retention of existing site features and new landscape proposals into a coherent design.

Through the correct choice, use, placement and combination of hard and soft materials and plants, landscape designs should provide robust, sustainable design solutions which also aim for minimal energy use in their maintenance.

3.3.1 *Soft Landscaping*

Soft landscaping, which can consist of existing features and new planting or earthworks, can act as a buffer between developments, increase the amenity of an area, provide visual interest and detail along with increased biodiversity. Soft landscape treatments will be expected to cover a substantial proportion of any site and form part of the fundamental layout, design and siting for the development.

Planting beds need to be a suitable size and appropriate shape to enable plants to establish and fulfil their design function.

The choice of plants must be appropriate to the site, climate and soil conditions and required function of planting. More information on soft landscape design will be included in [Technical Advice Note: Landscape](#)

3.3.2 *Hard Landscaping*

Hard landscaping, especially for the areas around vehicular entrances, car parking and the immediate surrounds of buildings, must be considered as a fundamental part of the design which, integrated with soft landscaping, shall be attractive and functional.

Hard landscape proposals are expected to consider the sustainable sourcing and use of materials, and designing for climate resilience. Permeability, run off from surfaces and the methods of disposing of surface water from slopes, car parks, hard standings and pathways, shall comply with the Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems in agreement with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Further guidance can be found in [Supplementary Guidance: Flooding and Drainage](#).

4. **Specific Proposals**

4.1 Residential Layouts

Layouts for flatted residential schemes shall have clearly defined public and private spaces. There will be a requirement for the provision of formal or informal open spaces (refer to [Supplementary Guidance: Open Space](#)). In private courts at least 50% of the external space shall be used as amenity ground, open space and to provide a landscape setting.

Individual flats or houses shall be designed to make the most of any opportunities offered by the site to optimise views and sunlight. Buildings should be orientated and designed to ensure that public areas and open spaces are sunlit wherever possible. Residents of flatted developments shall have access to sitting-out areas. This can be provided by balconies, private gardens, terraces or communal gardens. Opportunities for individual and communal food growing should be provided wherever possible, in appropriate locations.

Rear gardens of houses up to 2 storey in height should be an average length of at least 9 metres and houses of more than 2 storey should have garden lengths of at least 11 metres.

There must be additional space provided for:

- minimum stand-off distances from existing trees within or adjacent to the site, and new and replacement tree planting (refer to [Supplementary Guidance: Trees and Woodlands](#));
- drawing cars completely off the road;
- clothes drying out of public view;
- sheds and greenhouses;
- refuse bin storage;
- lawns; and
- future extension of buildings, for example for conservatories.

4.2 [Commercial Layouts](#)

A soft landscaping scheme is expected to form at least 15% of site coverage for commercial and industrial proposals. Soft landscaping should be at a scale appropriate to the scale and design of the building and car parks, to provide an attractive and functional landscape setting.

Sheltered, sunlit, accessible and attractive external spaces should be provided to enhance benefits for employees.

4.3 [Car Parking](#)

Approaches to front entrances of buildings will be provided with an appropriate landscaped setting, rather than through a large expanse of car parking. Pedestrian movement shall be designed to accommodate the safest and most direct routes between places. Landscape designs for car parks will include:

- peripheral planting which balances the need for screening with safety and natural policing, often in the form of clear-stemmed trees and low shrub planting;
- trees within parking areas to break up expanses of hard surfacing;
- internal divisions within large parking areas.
- hard surfacing that will relate to and link with the buildings; and,
- methods for demarcating parking bays.

Sufficient space for landscaping, including trees, must be provided in the layout to allow planting to survive without a constant threat of damage, especially at the edges of planting beds. Planting beds need to be a minimum size and appropriate shape to enable plants to establish and fulfil their design function.

As a general rule, a minimum space of 4 square metres is required per planting bed. Narrow beds of less than 1.5 metres should be avoided.

The overhang of cars must be taken into account in the design to prevent damage to plants from physical impact and exhaust fumes. Planting beds shall have a hard landscaped edge at least 300 millimetres wide.

Smaller areas of planting, for example at ends of car parking bays, are usually ineffective on their own and prone to damage. Planting in the central strip between car parking lines should be included. This planting should emphasise and enhance pedestrian routes to and from buildings, provide visual amenity and will have a more successful survival rate. Wherever possible suitable tree species should be included to enhance shade and reduce the impact of severe rain events on surface water run-off.

Where space is at a premium, thought shall be given to using chevron parking arrangements, traffic barriers and vertical screen elements like hedging, to make internal landscaping a feasible proposition. Further guidance on car parking standards can be found within [Supplementary Guidance: Transport and Accessibility](#).

4.4 [Earthworks and Ground Modelling](#)

The use of low mounding or earth modelling should be used with care, and should be assessed in terms of the effects on landscape character. In some locations mounding and bunds with a gently rounded form, graded gently into surrounding levels, up to one metre in height, can serve to enhance the

screening potential of planting and can be effective for screening car parking, open storage or ground clutter around buildings. However earth bunds can draw attention to the development by being out of keeping with the character of the landscape. They can also result in the loss of natural soil profiles and flora, and affect adjoining habitats by changing drainage patterns.

Where earthworks are proposed, slopes steeper than 1 in 3 gradient will be avoided, especially where over one metre high. In exceptional circumstances and appropriate locations steeper slopes up to 1 in 3 may be used to accommodate landscape planting, provided adequate slope stabilisation treatments are included.

Ground level changes shall show a degree of natural undulation. Variation in gradient shall be included to minimise the height of slopes and control surface water run-off. Slopes should avoid sharp angles and flat faces. Adequate sub-surface and surface water drainage will be provided to manage surface water run-off and prevent flooding and de-stabilisation of slopes.

Garden ground on a slope will need to be functional and usable amenity space. Steep embankments within gardens will not be considered usable garden space and should be avoided. Where there is no alternative, embankments within gardens should be adequately retained, drained and landscaped.

4.5 Boundary Treatments

Existing boundary elements such as landscape strips, hedges, trees, walls, dykes, fences, gates and gate piers that contribute to local landscape character shall be retained or reinstated, and incorporated into the design.

Boundary enclosures, for screening, privacy or security shall be designed to provide a good visual external and internal presentation for development sites.

5. **Landscape Plans, Implementation and Management**

Developers must submit supporting landscape information in accordance with this guidance and the Technical Advice Note: Landscape once available. Supporting information may include landscape and habitat surveys, landscape assessments, concept plans, strategic landscape plans and, and landscape proposals. The requirements for wind energy proposals are outlined in Supplementary Guidance: Wind Turbine Development.

Depending on the nature and scale of developments, *Design and Access Statements* or *Design Statements* may also be required. These should include reference to landscape, seascape and townscape (as appropriate) issues and how they are addressed through siting and design.

Details of hard or soft landscaping will be required to be submitted as part of a planning application for development. Landscape plans shall include a site layout plan showing the hard and soft landscape proposals in detail, and whether it is proposed to retain, remove, or replace existing elements. Landscape plans must include details of how hard and soft landscaping will be maintained and managed.

The implementation of landscape schemes shall be properly time-tabled into the construction process. Advance structural planting may be required for major greenfield or urban edge developments.

Planning conditions relating to landscape plans will normally be applied to planning approvals.

For further guidance on supporting landscape information, planting requirements, plant species, information for landscape plans and maintenance plans see Technical Advice Note: Landscape once available.