

Supplementary Guidance: Green Space Network & Open Space

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 NE1 – Green Space Network
- Policy NE3 – Urban Greenspace
- Policy NE4 – Open Space Provision in New Development
- Policy NE9 – Access and Informal Recreation

The following Supplementary Guidance provide further guidance on this topic: Trees and Woodlands, Landscape, Natural Heritage and Planning Obligations.

2. Introduction to Topic

Access to good quality green and blue infrastructure, including areas of open space and green networks, will contribute to a greener, healthier, smarter, safer, stronger, wealthier and fairer city. This guidance will assist developments in assessing and demonstrating their compliance in enhancing and improving green infrastructure to create useful, sustainable and well used places. This will benefit the wider community, the natural environment and support a healthy economy.

- Green Space refers to the vegetated areas of open space within urban areas such as playing fields, parks, allotments and cemeteries.
- Open Space is open land or areas that are vegetated, paved or hard landscaped within and on the edge of settlements. It includes greenspace (such as parks, private gardens, burial grounds and cemeteries, and allotments) and open land and public/civic space (such as streets, town squares, market places, amenity land, sports areas, and children's play area).
- Green Networks are the networks of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas which sustain clean air, water and natural resources and enrich citizens' quality of life. Sometimes the components of a green network are referred to as green infrastructure and can include paths, woods and open areas.

3. Open Space

The City Council completed its first full Open Space Audit in 2010, in accordance with Scottish Planning Policy and Planning Advice Note 65 - Planning and Open Space. The results of this have been used to prepare an Open Space Strategy, which provides a strategic framework for protecting, creating, connecting, and improving open spaces. In parallel with the development of the Open Space Strategy and using the Open Space Audit and other information, a Green Space Network has been identified for Aberdeen and is protected through planning policy (Figure 1).

3.1 On and Off-Site Provision

Planning conditions will normally be used to secure on-site provision of open space. Off-site provision may be necessary to mitigate the development's direct or cumulative impacts on existing infrastructure or facilities. A planning agreement will be normally used in these circumstances, outlining the financial contribution necessary to deliver the off-site provision, which may include the creation of new open space or enhancing the accessibility or quality of existing spaces.

4. Green Space Network

Connecting our urban and rural green spaces to each other and to the communities around them, offers a wide range of social, health, economic and environmental benefits. Green networks can provide an enhanced setting for development and other land uses and opportunities for outdoor recreation, nature conservation, landscape enhancement and providing a sense of place and local distinctiveness.

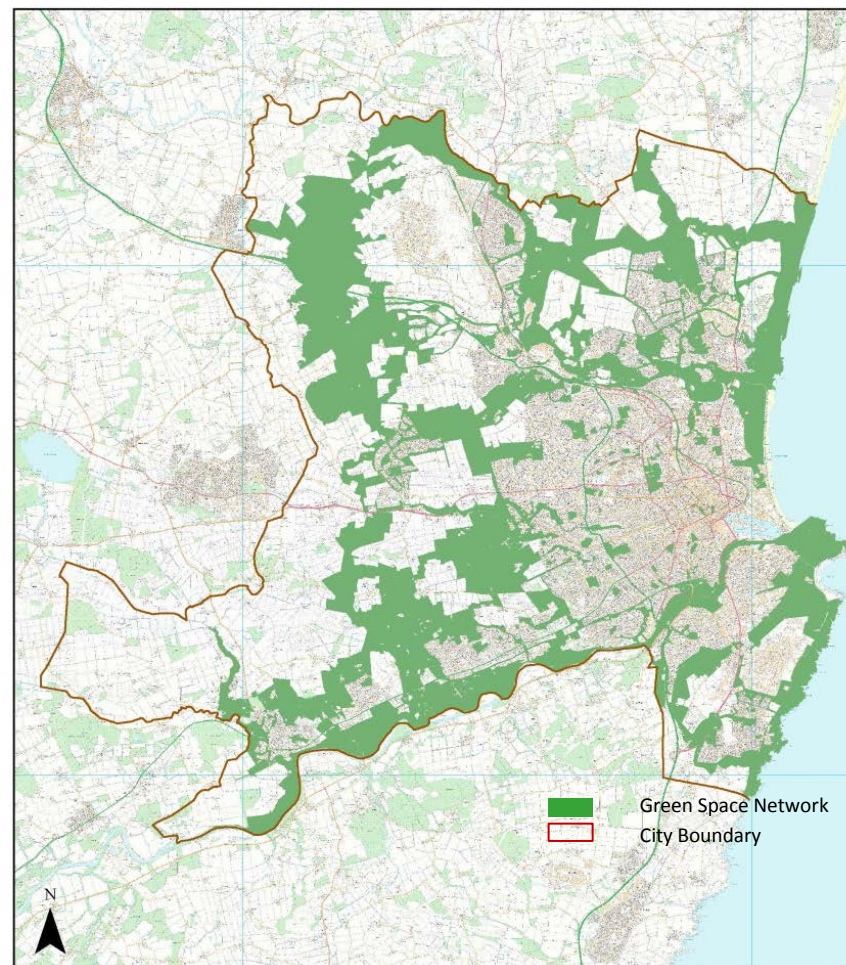
Aberdeen's Green Space Network (GSN) is identified in the Local Development Plan (Policy NE1) to protect, promote and enhance designated natural heritage sites, connectivity between habitats, open spaces and opportunities for physical activity and access to the outdoors. It also takes into account opportunities for climate change adaptation and flood risk management, the distribution of existing open spaces and their relationship with communities, development opportunities, health and deprivation information and transport issues.

Areas of GSN can serve the following functions:

- **Cores** - large or key areas of existing green space.
- **Links** - existing or desirable corridors of green space linking other green spaces together (following paths, waterbodies or other elements from the datasets listed above where possible).
- **Stepping Stones** - isolated green spaces which may be difficult or inappropriate to link to the rest of the network using a continuous green corridor, but which may still offer opportunities to deliver the benefits of Green Space Network (see Figure 1).

5. Delivery of Green Space Network Enhancements

Key stakeholders, including SEPA, SNH, Forestry Commission Scotland, and various Aberdeen City Council services have contributed towards the development of a GIS resource. The Green Space Network can be viewed through this interactive mapping system on the [Council's website](#). It highlights the rationale for the selection of each area of Green Space Network, as well as opportunities for its enhancement. This rationale and opportunities for enhancement should be taken into account in the planning of greenspace projects or other developments.



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The delivery mechanisms for taking forward enhancements to Green Space Network include the following:

- **Through new development:** Green networks are recognised as valued and desirable forms of open space. Developers should work with Council officers to make sure that key linkages within Green Space Network are maintained. Developers may also be required to undertake necessary enhancements to areas of green space network as part of planning permission.
- **Community-led projects:** Supported by Aberdeen's Open Space Strategy, various potential funding sources are available, see www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/openspace.
- **Projects led by Aberdeen City Council,** in consultation with communities, normally involving external grant funding e.g. tree planting, wetland creation and natural water management projects.
- **Forestry Design Plans:** the coherence of the Green Space Network is also a key consideration for those involved in the management and maintenance of commercial forests.

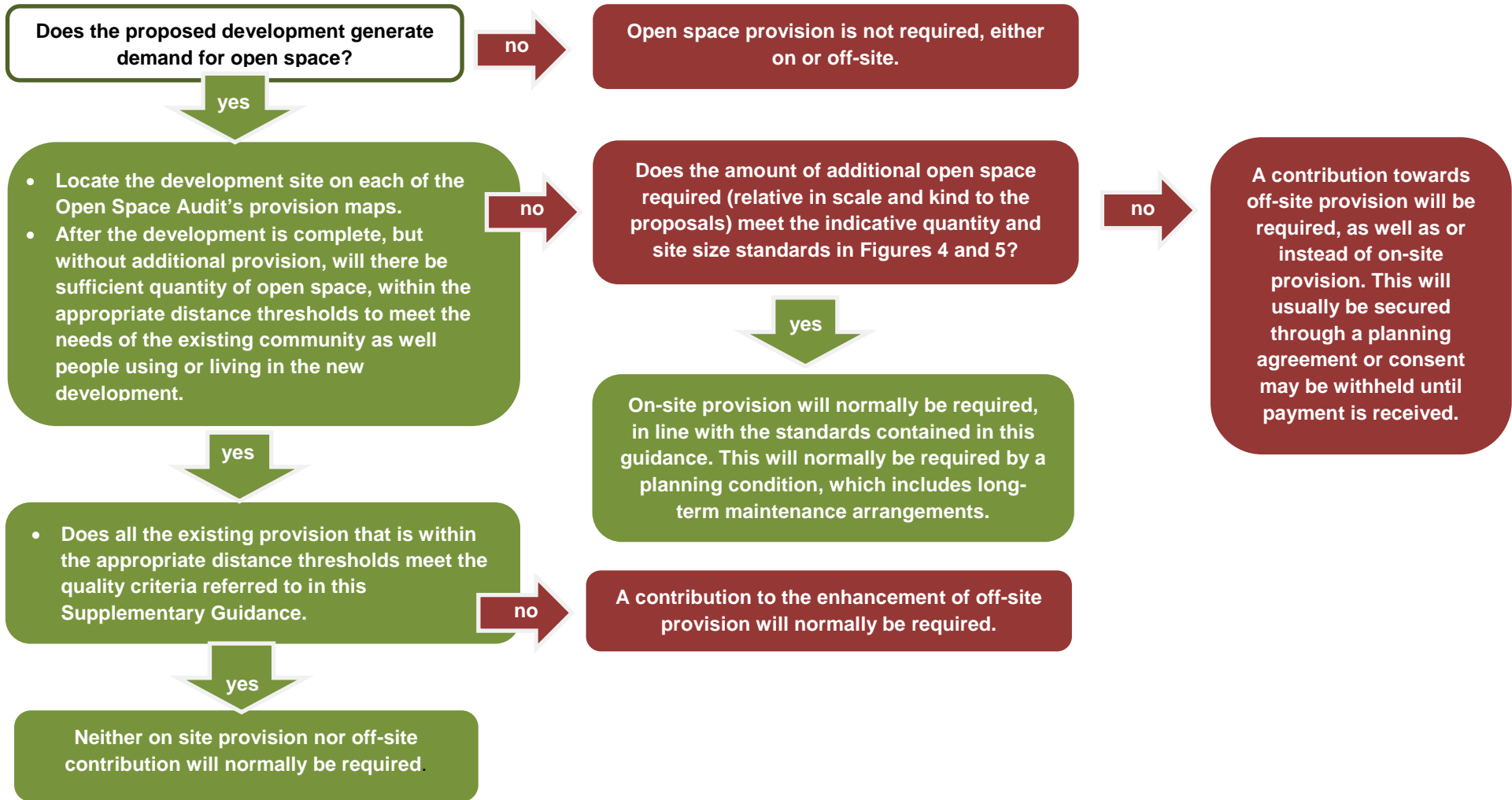
6. Open Space Provision in New Development

This section relates to Policy NE4 Open Space Provision in New Development. Aberdeen's Open Space Audit 2010 has identified a need for higher quality and more accessible open space, rather than simply extra quantitative provision. It is for this reason that quality and accessibility, as well as quantity, is included in Aberdeen's minimum open space standards for new developments.

Therefore, the approach to identifying the exact level and mix of open space requirements should be flexible and responsive to the level of existing provision, and its quality and accessibility. It is vital that development proposals refer to the findings of the Open Space Audit to help determine how much, what type and what size of new open spaces need to be provided

Use the flow chart below (Figure 2) to help identify the necessary provision for your development.

Figure 2: Calculating Required Open Space Provision



7. Standards for Open Space in Residential Development

The Council requires the provision of at least 2.8 hectares per 1000 people of meaningful and useful public open space to be provided on-site in new residential development. Figure 3 shows cases where this standard applies. The level of necessary provision will be applied pro rata.

The size of individual open spaces should be designed with the open space hierarchy in mind (Figure 4), and the standard also incorporates requirements for different types of open space (Figure 5). An open space will also sit under one or more 'zonings' within the Local Development Plan, and may therefore be subject to more than one planning policy.

Figures 4 and 5 show the indicative size, quality and accessibility standards for open spaces for new residential development. A degree of flexibility in identifying the exact requirements will be needed, according to the size, location and nature of the development.

Figure 3: Developments where Open Space Standards Apply

Type of development	Natural Greenspace and Green Corridors	Allotments	Play Space	Outdoor Sports Areas
Open market housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Affordable housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sheltered housing	✓	✓	x	x
Hostels and special needs housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
One for one replacement dwellings	x	x	x	x
Extensions to dwellings	x	x	x	x

Where the open space audit demonstrates that the minimum quantity of accessibility standards are met by existing provision, then raising the quality of that provision may be required instead of, or as well as, new provision.

Open space that is identified as low quality does not mean it will be obsolete and given priority for development but instead provides the opportunity for the quality of open space to be improved.

8. Note on Quality Standards

The Open Space Audit and Strategy contains a method for scoring the quality of open spaces out of 25, based on a number of criteria. For more information please see the [Open Space Audit and Strategy](#):

Detailed advice on quality standards for different types of open space is contained in the Council's Technical Advice Note on Planning and Designing Open Spaces.

Figure 4: Open Space Hierarchy (for further information see the [Open Space Audit](#))

Open Space Hierarchy	Description	Indicative Site Size (ha = hectares)	Accessibility Standard	Quality Standard
Major Open Spaces	Large areas of open space attracting visitors from Aberdeen City and Shire, often offering a wide range of uses, including informal recreational, sport, large scale equipped play zone, walking routes, seating, lighting, toilets, car parks etc. There may be a diversity of habitat / landscapes. Receives regular maintenance. Will usually form Green Space Network Cores.	>5 ha	All residents within 1500 metres (around 20 min walk) of a Major Open Space	<u>Green Flag ‘Good’ Standard</u> ; and <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Score of 20 or greater. Standards for large scale Play Zone in Figure 5
Neighbour-hood Open Spaces	Open spaces that provide a range of recreational uses, attracting users from more than one neighbourhood. These spaces could include equipped Play Zones, natural areas, green corridors, seating,	2-5 ha	All residents within 600 metres (around 10 mins walk) of a Neighbourhood Open Space	<u>Green Flag ‘good’ standard</u> ; and <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Score of 20 or greater.

Open Space Hierarchy	Description	Indicative Site Size (ha = hectares)	Accessibility Standard	Quality Standard
	paths/access, community event space, some formal landscape features, car park, dog waste/litter bins etc. Receives regular maintenance. May include Green Space Network cores, stepping stones or links.			
Local Open Space	Smaller spaces that provide a more limited range of local recreation uses, and are spread throughout a local area. As most users will reach them on foot, they are well connected by paths to community facilities and areas. Receives regular maintenance.	0.4- 2ha	All residents within 400 metres (around 5 minutes walk) of a Local Open Space.	<u>Green Flag ‘good’ standard</u> ; and <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Score of 20 or greater.

Figure 5: Open Space Types

Open Space Type	Description	Indicative Quantity <i>(ha = hectares, m² = square metres)</i>	Accessibility	Quality
<p>Play Zone/ Other Play Areas</p> <p>Large Scale Play Zone</p>	<p>Unsupervised areas dedicated to use by, and equipped for children and young people. Other Play Areas may include ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateboard areas, teenage shelters.</p> <p>Larger play zones likely to attract children from a larger area. These sites should include a larger range of play functions.</p>	<p>0.3ha per 1000 population. Minimum size 1500m²</p> <p>Minimum size 2500m²</p>	<p>All residents should be within 400m of a Play Zone Suitable for ages 3-13</p> <p>Suitable for ages 3-18</p>	<p>See Technical Advice Note on Planning and Designing Open Space and; <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Criteria.</p>
<p>Outdoor Sports Areas</p>	<p>Natural or artificial surfaces used for sport and recreation. E.g. playing fields, pitches, tennis courts, bowling greens, athletics tracks, water sports facilities.</p>	<p>1.6ha per 1000 population</p>	<p>All residents within 1200 metres of Outdoor Sports Facilities</p>	<p><u>NPFA/Fields in Trust standards</u>; and <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Criteria.</p>

Open Space Type	Description	Indicative Quantity <i>(ha = hectares, m² = square metres)</i>	Accessibility	Quality
Natural Greenspace and Green Corridor	Includes woodland, heathland, scrub, grassland, wetland, coastal areas, riverbanks, and streambanks, disused railway lines, green access routes and open water. Also includes designated areas such as Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Sites of Special Scientific Interests (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The primary purposes include nature conservation, walking, cycling, horse riding, watersports, leisure, non-motorised travel, environmental education.	1ha minimum Natural Greenspace per 1000 population	All residents within 400m of a natural greenspace >2ha and 2000 metres of a natural greenspace >5ha	See Technical Advice Note on Planning and Designing Open Space and; <u>Open Space Audit Quality Criteria</u>

Open Space Type	Description	Indicative Quantity <i>(ha = hectares, m² = square metres)</i>	Accessibility	Quality
Allotments or Community Gardens	Areas or plots which are mainly cultivated by the occupier or community group for the purpose of producing fruit or vegetables for personal consumption.	0.3ha per 1000 properties with less than 60m ² private green spaces	Allotments should be no more than 800m from people's homes, and that the (minimum) size/number of plots at a site will be determined according to the advice set out in the Technical Advice Note on Planning and Designing Open Space.	See Technical Advice Note on Planning and Designing Open Space and; <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Criteria

Aberdeen’s open space standards are based on the likely number of residents within a new development. This can be calculated using the average number of people who live in each dwelling. This information is available from the Scottish Household Survey and is outlined in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Average Household Occupancy in Aberdeen

Dwelling Size (bedrooms)	Average Household Size (persons)
1 bedroom	1.3
2 bedroom	1.9
3 bedroom	2.6
4 bedroom	2.9
5 bedroom	3.6
6 bedroom	5.0
7 bedroom	6.0

9. Open Space Requirements in Brownfield Development

Redevelopment in the existing urban area is usually more sustainable than greenfield development, often contributing to regeneration, removing local eyesores and bringing existing buildings back into use. However it can involve additional costs, such as site preparation, contaminated land remediation and demolition. Therefore if developers can satisfy the Council that there are exceptional development costs associated with a site it may not always be appropriate to apply the minimum standards for open space to such developments. The Council may instead seek a contribution towards off-site open space enhancements. The necessary contribution will reflect the scale and type of development.

10. Open Space Requirements in Non-Residential Development

The Local Development Plan does not stipulate minimum standards for open space in non-residential developments. Appropriate provision for non-residential development is to be considered on a site by site basis. Open space, over and above site landscaping, can make an important positive contribution to non-residential development, creating places for staff to get fresh air and unwind, or to go for a walk or run at lunch time.

Connecting non-residential developments, such as employment uses, to existing path networks and nearby open spaces can also support healthy lifestyles and sustainable travel opportunities.

Aberdeen City Council may seek contributions from non-residential developments towards enhancing the accessibility or quality of off-site existing open space or paths in the vicinity of the development, in order to meet the extra for open space demand created by the development.

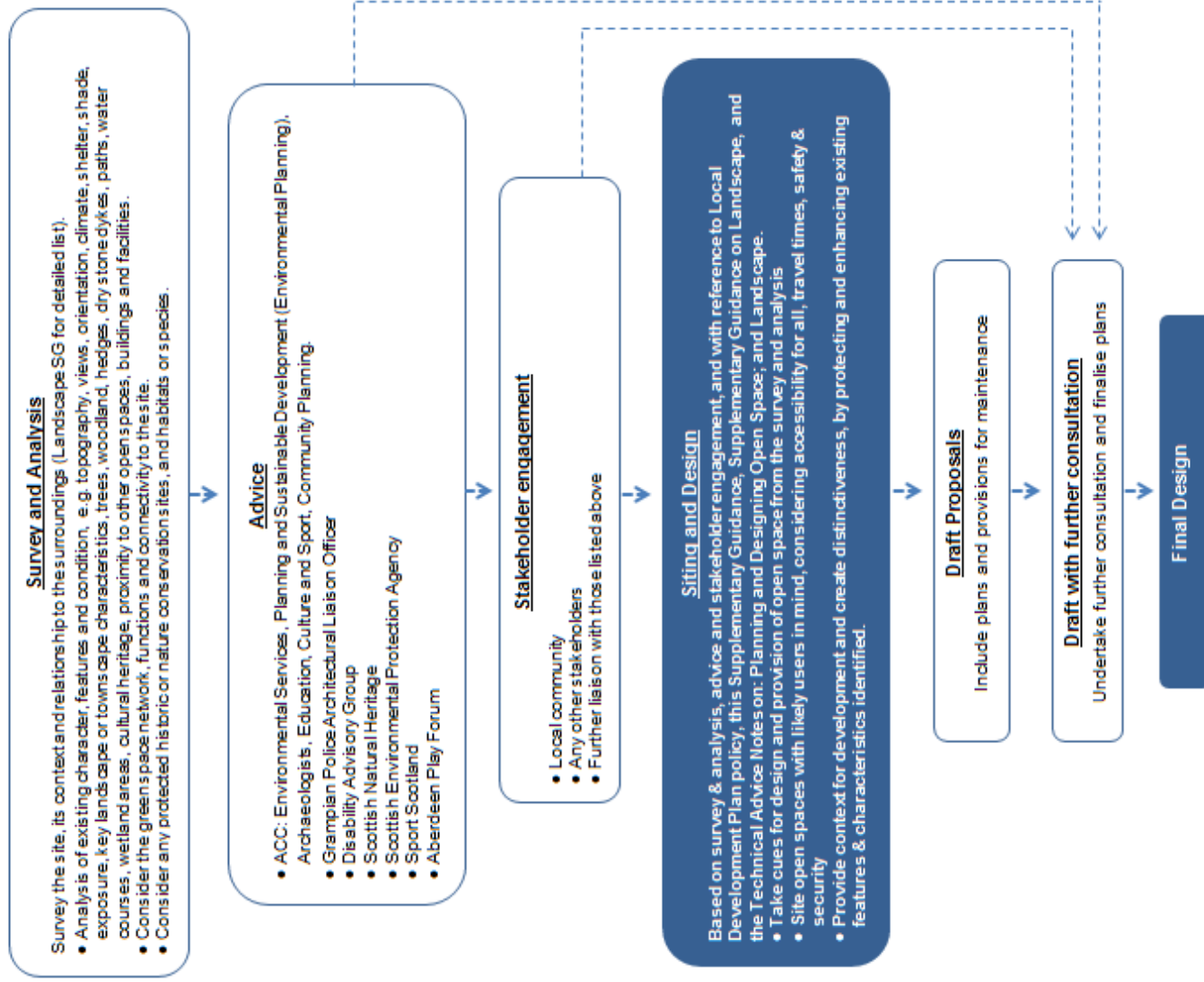
11. Applying the Policies

Pre-Application Discussions

Throughout the process of pre-application discussions, developers are encouraged to seek advice from the Council on the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing open space local to their proposed development. Advice from other parties could also be sought at this stage in order to identify key considerations at the earliest opportunity (see Figure 7).

Advice may be given on opportunities to link the development with other parts of the green space and path networks, including existing or planned open space, core paths and cycle routes, , play or sports facilities, helping to set the context for development and add to a sense of place. Planning Circular 7/2007 states that Sport Scotland must be consulted on any development which is likely to lead to the loss of certain outdoor sports facilities, or in any way prejudice their use.

Figure 7: Flowchart guiding process for planning and designing open space



12. Masterplans and Planning Briefs

Open Space and the Green Space Network need to be considered within Strategic Frameworks, Development Frameworks, Masterplans and Planning Briefs, playing a fundamental role in offering context, identity and connections. Council Officers will work with developers during the masterplanning process to ensure that key linkages of Green Space Network are maintained, and that sufficient provision is made for open space. Masterplans and Planning Briefs should make use of the open space typologies set out in Scottish Government Planning Advice Note 65 wherever possible.

13. Maintenance and Management of New Open Spaces

Open space maintenance relates to a set of defined tasks that aim to preserve the condition of spaces. Management of open spaces requires a long-term perspective, with flexibility to respond and adapt to issues or changes such as community needs and priorities, biodiversity, climate change, improvements to access, quality, safety and competing uses. It is therefore important that developers consider the safety, maintenance and management considered during the planning and design of spaces, and not as an afterthought.

The planning system has limited control over open space maintenance. It can however, make provision for maintenance through planning conditions or agreements.

The preferred approach to management and maintenance is for the Council to adopt public open space, as long as:

- the provision meets the appropriate quality standards at the time of adoption; and
- the developer provides a commuted sum on or before the date of adoption, sufficient to fund the management and maintenance for a period of 18 years. The developer will pay all of the legal costs relating to the transfer of the land or facilities to the Council.

Other arrangements for the management of open spaces are available, although they tend to have more disadvantages. These include:

- Residents' Association with factoring arrangements, where residents of a new development are responsible for management of the open spaces within the development and appoint a factor to carry out the maintenance;
- Third Party Arrangements which involve the Council or developers making arrangements with a suitable third party for long term maintenance. Examples of such third parties can include commercial grounds maintenance companies, local amenity organisations and environmental trusts.

14. Outdoor Access

14.1 Access Rights

The Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2003 established a statutory right of responsible access to most land and inland water in Scotland, irrespective of the existence of established paths or evidence of access use on them. Because most new development occurs on land to which access rights apply, the local authority has a duty to consider statutory access rights, along with public rights of way and other established public access, as material considerations in the determination of planning applications. This includes Path Agreements over land where access rights do not apply. Conditions relating to access rights may also be attached to planning permission where appropriate.

To take account of access rights, the following information may require to be submitted along with the planning application.

- A detailed plan of public access across the site will be provided for the approval of the Council as Planning Authority. This will show:
 - All existing paths, tracks and rights of way, and any areas currently outwith or excluded from statutory access rights (under Part One of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003;

- Any areas proposed for exclusion from statutory access rights, for reasons of privacy, disturbance or curtilage, in relation to proposed buildings or structures;
 - All paths and tracks proposed for construction, for use by walkers, riders, cyclists, all-abilities users, etc.
 - Any diversions of paths - temporary or permanent - proposed for the purposes of the development.
- Water access points (such as those noted in the Core Paths Plan) for canoeing, rafting, rowing and sailing will also be taken into account.

Although the use of vehicles and trailers used to transport them close to the water are not covered under access rights, places where they are parked for launching and landing vessels and suitable routes to the water should be considered and protected with the consultation of the local authority and relevant recreational groups.

Consultation is particularly important where there may be safety, operational or environmental impacts of users attempting to continue water access during development works or following its completion.

Best practice for planning and managing recreation and access on and around construction sites was developed for “[Good practice during windfarm construction](#)”. However, these principles are relevant to all types of developments with a potential for impacts. Scottish Natural Heritage also has published “[A Brief Guide to Preparing and Outdoor Access Plan](#)” to help developers to identify impacts on outdoor access provision and how to manage and mitigate them.

14.2 Procedures for Stopping up and Diverting Paths

Local authorities are assisted in their duty to uphold public access rights through procedures for stopping up and diverting paths, tracks and rights of way (both permanently and temporarily) and it is important that these are followed. If planning permission has been granted and your proposed development will require a path, track or right of way to be stopped up or diverted to allow the development to take place, you should apply to the relevant local authority asking it to use its powers under part 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 to do so.

A planning authority may by Order stop up or divert any path, track or right of way under these sections of the 1997 Act, if

satisfied that it is necessary to enable a development to be carried out by a government department or where a planning permission has been granted.

The Order may provide for:

- The creation of an alternative path, or path improvement
- Authorising or requiring works to be carried out
- The preservation of any statutory undertakers rights
- Requirements over payments or contributions

The Order must be confirmed by the Scottish Ministers if it is opposed, or can be confirmed by the planning authority if no objections are received. These Orders apply to public rights of way, other paths and tracks.

Planning permission will not automatically be granted following the Order. However, to avoid conflict and delays applicants and local authorities should work together to consider the legal requirements of Orders at an early stage of the planning process, to minimise the overall impact of the proposal on those routes

There may also be important issues regarding public safety on access land and paths when development and construction work is taking place. A Construction Management Plan be required detailing how public safety around the site will be maintained during construction.