

DRAFT Local Planning Policy: Development Along Lanes

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Part 1 – Introduction and Context

1. Overview

This document provides planning and design parameters for development along established lanes within the **City Centre**, part of the **Albyn Place / Rubislaw conservation area**, and for new development along lanes in **masterplanned areas**. This document provides policy advice for the creation of residential mews buildings in these areas, although the forms of development advocated may also be appropriate for a range of other uses, if demonstrated as being in accordance with the Aberdeen Local Development Plan.

1.1 Definition of a Lane

A lane is a narrow-shared surface road or vehicular passageway with well-defined boundaries on opposing sides, usually formed by high walls, hedges or fences. The lane's built characteristics are its relative narrowness, its shared surface, its ability to accommodate a vehicle's width and its well-defined edges. In order to redevelop along a lane, or to design a new one, reflecting these basic characteristics in design solutions is crucial to creating, or maintaining, a positive sense of place.

1.2 Planning for Diversity in City Living

- 1.2.1 The recent supply of 21st century purpose-built office accommodation within Aberdeen is driving an increase in historic property in the city centre, inner city and West End, originally built for residential use but later converted for office accommodation coming onto the open market. As part of this context of change and adaptation, a policy direction on the sympathetic remodelling of these buildings, their curtilage and feus is necessary in order to propose new high-quality development in these valued locations.
- 1.2.2 Close proximity to shops and local services, coupled with a strong architectural legacy, means that the city centre and its surrounding areas present attractive sustainable opportunities for quality residential redevelopment. Increasing the residential population by providing a greater dwelling choice in a safe well-connected environment should appeal to a wide spectrum of people and support greater diversity and urban intensity of the city centre. This trend comes at a time where Aberdeen City Council is enabling the recommendations of the City Centre Masterplan and investing in the amenities and place quality of the city centre as the premier destination for the City Region.
- 1.2.3 The transition from office to residential use is a growing trend within the conservation areas of Bon Accord Crescent / Crown Street, in the city centre city. The trend is likely to reach into the core of the Albyn Place / Rubislaw conservation area, the “West End Office Area” within the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2017 (Policy B3), where high profile businesses continue to benefit from high quality granite frontages giving prestige kerb appeal coupled with the attractiveness of planned townscapes, accessibility and proximity to the city centre.
- 1.2.4 As demands and uses change and more historic properties become available, the forms of development proposed, and the quality of amenity they provide, should support the objectives of high-quality residential property within the designated area. Sites in areas out-with the area covered by this document are not precluded and will be subject to evaluation based upon their merits.
- 1.2.5 The parameters provided in this advice are also applicable to development along new lanes within masterplanned areas where lane characteristics should form part of a well-designed hierarchy of a place and movement network, and where a greater range of different dwelling types provides choice and improves whole-life options for the creation of sustainable communities.

1.3 Historic Lanes and Mews Buildings

- 1.3.1 Lanes have always been part of the urban development of Aberdeen as a necessary means of servicing a larger planned network and their use can be traced back to medieval times. In the Georgian period the planned urban environment was organised to reflect social hierarchies with people and uses segregated according to social class and use hierarchy. Historically, the grandest of properties would have the lane at the rear of the feu edged with a mews building, being two-storey and accommodating carriages, horses, general storage and sometimes with living accommodation above. Today there are remnants of mews buildings along Bon Accord Crescent Lane, Albyn Lane and Queens Lane North and South, however many have been lost to the demands of in-curtilage car parking and by the time the greater part of the West End was complete mews buildings were no longer required for their original purpose.
- 1.3.2 In the second half of the 20th century some retained mews buildings were adapted as dwellings whilst typically the primary building on the feu was converted to office accommodation or subdivided into smaller dwellings. Mews buildings today, either as a reworked existing, or new building, remain as an appropriate form of small-scale development in the 21st century both within historic and newly planned areas. They offer the opportunity to have an attractive home close to amenities and whose form, of relatively small-scale living, gives an attractive contrast and diversity to the surrounding properties, and when grouped together should foster a strong sense of community.

1.4 Development in Conservation Areas and Historic Properties

- 1.4.1 For some time the accepted approach to maximising floor areas within an historic building, curtilage or conservation area has been to extend a property to the side and/or rear with some demarcation between the old and new building fabric. Unfortunately, this approach has resulted in additions which have often been intrusive to the rear elevation, which not only impact upon the building's fabric but also its architectural worth and its setting. This approach was developed at a time when the front elevation, as usually the most architecturally worked elevation, was regarded as significantly more important than the other elevations, which are often of a lesser architectural design quality and craftsmanship.
- 1.4.2 Within the feu of historic residential properties with a change of use to offices often allowed the on-site accommodation of car parking resulting in the loss of the rear walls of the feu and any buildings to the lane as well as significantly intensifying vehicular traffic movement along the lane.
- 1.4.3 Today there is a greater understanding and appreciation that the complete form of an historic development within its feu, and the social order reflected through architecture and craftsmanship, is just as important as the retention and preservation of the front elevation. Any addition to and beyond the original building envelope must be thoughtfully proposed to enhance the building and the feu as an entity.
- 1.4.4 To check the footprint of historic development the National Library of Scotland provides free on-line images of historic maps in addition to Aberdeen City Council's Local Studies and Archives and Historic Environment Scotland's Historic Environment Policy (HEPS) 1 is valuable in 'understanding and recognising' the important built environment.
- 1.4.5 Retain the existing built fabric and promoting new mews buildings is a way of introducing a sympathetic form of redevelopment. The form should be a responsive contemporary design to the built environment and allow existing properties to appear as originally built by reducing pressure to extend their original building envelope.
- 1.4.6 Development along lanes in a mews form is likely to be more suited to residential use, though other uses such as workspaces and small businesses may be acceptable depending upon the existing context and the demands the use would place upon it.

Part 2 - Policy - Development along a Lane

The following steps should be taken when scoping the likelihood for development along a lane as part of a comprehensive redevelopment within a feu:

2.1 Step 1 – Find out what was there before

2.1.1 A useful exercise when exploring options for redevelopment in any historic built environment is to determine the footprint, form and use of what had previously been there. The results will often give direction to what could be an appropriate form of new development representing a new part of a wider whole. This exercise is not intended to limit redevelopment by a comparison to historic footprints but is a starting point for new forms of development and wider place connectivity. If no indication of previous development can be found, it doesn't preclude development proposals being brought forward in accordance with the following steps.

2.2 Step 2 – Recording and Evaluating the Context

2.2.1 Quality development is as a result of an informed approach to design and site capacity by a thorough understanding of the context.

2.2.3 The current uses of the lane, the proximity to other buildings and uses, surrounding building heights and materials provide a fundamental basis to start to inform design development proposals and the context evaluation provides the fundamentals for a Design and Access Statement (see Scottish Government's Planning Advice Note 68 – Design Statements) which explains to any interested party the design approach to support a planning application.

2.3 Step 3 - Window to Window Distances

- 2.3.1 As part of the evaluation of context, the window to window distance between habitable rooms for new development is important and windows must be placed where they do not impose on neighbouring property.
- 2.3.2 Lanes present a creative challenge to provide internal layouts that do not compromise the amenity and privacy enjoyed by residents in nearby property, as well as designing a viable form of development that enlivens a lane with visual interest, has opportunities for natural surveillance and provides a strong demarcation of public and private space. Only in exceptional circumstances will angled windows, and limited in number, be considered as an acceptable design solution.
- 2.3.3 There is considerable variety in the range of widths between the window to window distance of habitable rooms to the properties along the streets and lanes in the city centre could be between 4-6 metres. A comfortable window to window distance of habitable rooms for privacy within the feu between the main building and its mews should be around 12 metres, however each proposal must be assessed on its specific context and intended room use.
- 2.3.4 Lanes are by definition relatively narrow and the placement of windows to habitable rooms on the boundary of a lane must be made in consideration of the existing context, daylight and sunlight receipt as well as overlooking and overshadowing which will also have a material bearing on window displacement which must inform development proposals.

2.4 Step 4 – Amenity Value

- 2.4.1 A high level of amenity is necessary for the creation of sustainable quality development and the standard of amenity can be measured by a broad range of considerations. The proximity to existing long-term services in the area including public transport, open space and commercial centres as well as internal space provision and the quality and amount of external space associated within any development are typical considerations. The architectural quality of development is also regarded as having a strong amenity value because it will add to the visual placemaking qualities and townscape aspects of the site and wider area.

- 2.4.2 An assessment of the qualities of the lane as a suitable residential environment need to be made, in addition to the provision of appropriate private and/or communal amenity space. The inclusion of floor to ceiling windows with balconies and ground floor private patio space, as part of a larger communal amenity space incorporating a drying green are key external amenities. Properties with good internal floor areas and with potential for internal storage are also considered as benchmarks of amenity, however, amenity such as aspect and daylight must not be borrowed from an adjacent property.
- 2.4.3 Trees have a vital role in quality placemaking. Tree retention and/or planting significantly contributes to the identity and feel of a place, enhancing the sense of scale, framing views of surrounding buildings and adding seasonal colour and interest. In addition to providing habitat connectivity for wildlife, trees make a significant contribution to sustainable integrated infrastructure, promote value and worth and add resilience to climate change adaptation as well as human health and wellbeing. To ensure we protect our green infrastructure, consideration should be given as to how existing trees, hedges and shrubs can be incorporated into development.
- 2.4.4 Proposals along a lane adopted by Aberdeen City Council, meaning that the lane is maintained by the Council to an acceptable standard, which offer direct unhindered access for waste collection etc. are preferred, otherwise the proposal will need to meet the waste management travel distances. In addition, if a lane is unadopted by the Council, its surface condition, lighting levels and uncontrolled parking, as well as the uses along its length, will have a fundamental bearing on the quality of the environment for residential use. Proposals along unadopted lanes are therefore unlikely to be supported.

2.5 Step 5 – How Accessible is the Proposed Site?

- 2.5.1 **City Centre and Albyn Place / Rubislaw Conservation Area (part)** – On sites within the city centre in-curtilage parking is discouraged in order to achieve more sustainable modes of travel. This would not preclude the inclusion of car parking in some circumstances, but any need would be assessed against the quality of the environment of the lane, the proposal as a whole and the need for any car club provision in the locality which could provide a communal transport resource.

2.5.2 Within the city centre, vehicle speed is limited to 20 miles per hour, and as the transition of offices to residential use continues, the vehicular activity along lanes should reduce as a cumulative result. The narrow width, and often winding form, of lanes should also mean that they naturally function as shared use areas where no footway delineation is required, however, some refuge will be required in the form of pends or access locations.

2.5.3 **Masterplan Zones** – Sites within the Aberdeen Local Development Plan’s Masterplan Zones should consider in-curtilage car parking in the form of garaging integral to a mews development and with the garaging serving no more than the residence above in order that residential amenity is not compromised. The provision of garaging that serves nearby property will require robust justification.

2.6 Step 6 – Form of Development

2.6.1 Mews buildings offer a form of development that is small in scale but offers large possibilities for the introduction of high-quality new dwellings, and other uses. Mews can also introduce new materials and contemporary architecture to complement existing historic contexts as should have a strong place the development of new masterplanned areas.

2.6.2 When designing a new lane the defined characteristics must prevail: relative narrowness; the lack of a footway because of a shared surface carriageway; and with well-defined boundaries on opposing sides usually formed by high walls, hedges or fences. Within an existing environment the characteristics of the built context should prevail. For new masterplanned areas the boundaries should only be formed with high walls, which may be a building, and/or with hedges of species that have blossom and berries, being suitable for pollinators, in order that attractive and sustainable places are created.

Part 3 – Design Checklist

The following steps should be taken when developing proposals for a mews development along a lane:

3.1 New mews development along a lane **should**:

- a. Look to historic context in terms of footprint, orientation, walls, entrances and any other features, as well as referencing any previous building footprint.
- b. Form a strong boundary to the edge of the lane being the edge of the mews building to maintain the sense of enclosure and define the curtilage.
- c. Have regard to solar orientation to design in and maximise passive solar gain.
- d. Where trees are within the site, or within 15m of the site boundary, a tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment will be required compliant with BS5837:2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction'. (See *ACC Supplementary Guidance: Trees & Woodlands for further information*).
- e. Trees form a crucial role within new development and in order to plan for longevity the site constraints must be known so that that an appropriate tree species is selected to provide environmental, practical and aesthetic benefit as well as avoiding over-shadowing and significant maintenance implications.
- f. Respect the built environment context by incorporating existing original boundary walls where they exist and reinstating or reinterpreting them through new development where they have been lost.
- g. Not prejudice the amenity or servicing of nearby property.
- h. Be built across the entire feu width, or most of the feu width to maintain the sense of enclosure of the lane.
- i. Be no more than two domestic stories in height and be equal to or less than 5.6 metres to the ridge line of the roof from the ground floor level in order to maintain a traditional domestic height and scale.
- j. Be no deeper than 7 metres in order to maintain a relatively narrow footprint in keeping with a traditional mews.
- k. Have a ground floor public elevation with a robust appearance, with appropriate materials, to reinforce the sense of enclosure of a lane with a defensible edge to the property.
- l. Have a clearly defined and secure pedestrian access to/through the mews to a private courtyard area.

- m. Provide an attractive level of external low maintenance hard and soft landscaped amenity space incorporating a drying green / courtyard, both private and communal, to the property and not prejudice, compromise or borrow amenity from neighbouring property.
- n. Be capable of fulfilling necessary daylight and sunlight needs to habitable rooms in accordance with British Research Establishment (BRE) standards.
- o. Provide for all servicing requirements such as bicycle storage and waste management facilities in accordance with the Aberdeen Local Development Plan being private, secure, enclosed and off-street.
- p. If the site is within a conservation area and is likely to involve the removal of a tree(s) the agent must give notice to the Council to allow consideration of the proposal and for the Council to respond within 6 weeks with either a Tree Preservation Order or with no objection to tree loss.
- q. Be sited off a lane that is adopted by Aberdeen City Council in order that the surface quality and street lighting of the lane is of an acceptable standard for accessibility and that the environment is controlled. If a lane is unadopted there is less likelihood of proposals for development being supported.
- r. Have an upper floor of a stepped or canted form to reduce any potential over-bearing to the lane and to allow for architectural expression, depending upon the construction materials used.
- s. Provide for natural surveillance across the lane without compromising the privacy of habitable rooms in nearby residential property, and for sight-line analysis to be provided in the Design and Access Statement.

4. Pre-Application Enquiry

- 4.1 This policy provides parameters enabling proposals for development along lanes to be worked to a level where pre-application advice can be provided at an early stage in the development process. The pre-application process will use this and other policy and material considerations pertinent to the site to provide an initial assessment and to allow for further reflection and any refinement suggested prior to submitting a planning application. When used well the pre-application procedure front-loads potential issues, based upon the level of information submitted, and when well used, the process should reflect in the speed of determination.
- 4.2 If you wish to submit a pre-application enquiry to Aberdeen City Council please follow the guidance in the link:
<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/planning-and-building/planning-applications/apply-planning-permission/pre-application-advice#1791>

5. Contact Details

- 5.1 For all enquiries please contact us on:

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