

# Aberdeen Planning Guidance 2023: Development Along Lanes

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Status of Aberdeen Planning Guidance**

This Aberdeen Planning Guidance (APG) supports the Development Plan and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

This APG expands upon the following Aberdeen Local Development Plan policies:

- Policy D1 – Placemaking

Given the timing of the Local Development Plan, a pragmatic approach has been taken to changes in the planning system. National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was adopted following the examination and subsequent modification of the Local Development, and the publication of a draft version of this APG for consultation. As a result, some terminology referred to in this APG may vary from the new NPF4 policy framework but it should be noted that the LDP together with NPF4 now forms the basis of the statutory development plan.

### **1.2 Introduction to Topic / Background**

This document provides 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 new masterplanned areas (refer to map at Appendix 1). The advice encourages the creation of residential mews buildings in specific areas, although the forms of development advocated may also be appropriate for a range of other uses, if in accordance with the Aberdeen Local Development Plan.

*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.*

A 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.

### **1.3 Climate Change**

The reuse of buildings or redevelopment of brownfield sites is a positive step towards Scotland's long term goal of becoming net zero by 2045. Reusing and redeveloping existing sites ensure embodied carbon is retained, while also reducing the need to develop greenfield sites. The reuse of buildings, where upgrade and regeneration is taking place, allows opportunities to retrofit adaptations, which over time can help to protect the building and increase resilience to the risks of climate change, such as heavy downpours, flooding, high winds and heatwaves. This APG therefore helps to deliver [Aberdeen Adapts](#) Goal 1 - Protecting Buildings and Historic Assets.

### **1.4 Health and Wellbeing**

Where we live, where we work, and where we spend our time has an important influence on our health and wellbeing. How places are designed within their urban or natural environment are vital to the health of the people and communities within them.

This guidance can help to achieve the following Public Health Priorities for Scotland - Priority 1: A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities.

This guidance is deemed to have minimal impact on population health and wellbeing. This means that, whilst it is unlikely a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) screening report will be requested to support any planning application, this will depend on the detail and scope of the application. There may be elements of the proposals that relate to the health and wellbeing of the population that warrant consideration. If that is the case, then a screening HIA will be required, and further advice on this will be provided.

## **2. Aberdeen Planning Guidance**

### **2.1 Planning for Diversity in City Living**

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, guidance 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.

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.

The transition from office to residential use is a growing trend within the Bon Accord Crescent / Crown Street Conservation Area in the city centre. The trend is likely to reach into the core of the Albyn Place / Rubislaw Conservation Area, the “West End Area” within the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023 (Policy VC6). In this area 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.

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 outwith the area covered by this document are not precluded and will be subject to evaluation based upon on their merits.

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.

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. By the time the greater part of the West End was complete mews buildings were no longer required for their original purpose.

In the second half of the 20th century some retained mews buildings were adapted as dwellings, and others demolished to make way for car parking which intensified vehicular movement along the lane. In addition, the primary building on the feu was typically 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 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. When grouped together should foster a strong sense of community.

## **2.2 Development in Conservation Areas and Historic Properties**

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.

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.

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. The Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) 1 provides non-statutory policy in understanding, recognising, and working within the historic built environment.

Retaining 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.

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.

### **3. Advice For Developing Along Lanes**

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

#### **Step 1: Find out what was there before**

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. This exercise is not intended to limit redevelopment by a comparison to historic footprints but should be considered 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.

#### **Step 2 – Recording and Evaluating the Context**

Quality development is a result of an informed approach to design and site capacity by a thorough understanding of the context by everyone involved in the development process.

The current uses of the lane, the building heights and materials provide a fundamental basis to start to inform design development proposals and the context evaluation provides the content 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.

#### **Step 3 - Window to Window Distances**

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.

Lanes present a creative challenge to provide internal layouts that do not compromise the amenity and privacy enjoyed by residents in nearby property. Mews should be 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, being a window set at an angle to the façade in order not to compromise privacy and amenity of an adjoining or nearby property, and limited in number, be considered as an acceptable design solution.

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, ranging from 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.

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.

#### **Step 4 – Amenity Value**

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.

An assessment of the qualities of the lane as a suitable residential environment needs 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 too. Properties with good internal floor areas and with potential for internal



storage are also considered as benchmarks of amenity. Amenity such as aspect and daylight must not be borrowed from an adjacent property.

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.

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.

### **Step 5 – How Accessible is the Proposed Site?**

#### **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.

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 necessary however, some refuge will be required in the form of pends or access locations.

### **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.

### **Step 6 – Form of Development**

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.

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 lane the proposal should reinforce the characteristics of a lane even if they have been previously eroded. 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.

## 4. Design Checklist

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

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 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. Ensure, where trees are within the site, or within 15 metres of the site boundary, a tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment will take out text compliant to construction be required. (See Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Trees & Woodlands for further information).
- e. Recognise that trees form a crucial role within new development and, in order to plan for longevity, the site constraints must be known so 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 adjacent 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. Consider the practical supply and servicing of any site including water and sewerage provision as well as bicycle storage.
- p. Consult with the Council's Waste Management Team as it is important to determine the anticipated capacity and form waste management should take for any development proposal as appropriate storage, management and collection are a necessary part of development quality.
- q. Be sited off a lane that is adopted by Aberdeen City Council in order that the quality of the urban realm, including street lighting and refuse collection, is of an acceptable standard for accessibility and that the environment is controlled. Proposals along unadopted lanes are therefore unlikely to be 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 any Design and Access Statement.

### **Pre-Application Enquiry**

This advice 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.

Scottish Water offer pre-development enquiries at [www.scottishwater.co.uk](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk) to allow an accurate assessment of their ability to serve proposed sites. It is likely that old sewers will be combined foul & surface water and that the portion of surface water should be removed from the sewerage system as part of the development process. The developer's works must conform to Scottish Water's standards in 'Water for Scotland' and 'Sewers for Scotland'.

## 5. Further Reading

Historic Environment Policy for Scotland

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/historic-environment-policy-for-scotland-heps/>

Scottish Government: Planning Advice Note 68 – Design Statements

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/planning-advice-note-68-design-statements/>

Scottish Water: Water for Scotland

<https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/-/media/ScottishWater/Document-Hub/Business-and-Developers/Connecting-to-our-network/All-connections-information/150219WaterForScotlandV4.pdf>

Scottish Water: Sewers for Scotland

<https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/-/media/ScottishWater/Document-Hub/Business-and-Developers/Connecting-to-our-network/All-connections-information/SewersForScotlandv4.pdf>

## Appendix 1: Identified Area: City Centre and Part of the Albyn Place / Rubislaw Conservation Area

