

## SERVICE UPDATE

<b><u>Name of Function:</u></b>	Development Management Strategic Place Planning
<b><u>Date:</u></b>	25 September 2025
<b><u>Title of Update:</u></b>	Drive Throughs – Consideration of Policy
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## Drive Throughs – Consideration of Policy

### Introduction

The Planning and Development Management Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 instructed that the 'Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning, investigate the possibility of putting in place guidance to clarify the issue of drive thru restaurants in the context of Policy 27(d) of National Planning Framework 4 and report back to this Committee in due course.'

This note discusses the guidance on drive throughs which is mentioned nationally in NPF4, the Local Development Plan Guidelines and a Chief Planner letter, as well as the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council Retail Study which was produced in May 2024.

NPF4 Policy 27 deals with city, town, local and commercial centres. It generally looks to support these through a 'town centre first' approach by directing retail, leisure and other appropriate uses to them. Point d) of Policy 27 states that 'Drive-through developments will only be supported where they are specifically supported in the Local Development Plan.' The current Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023 however, does not consider drive throughs due to the timing of when it was prepared. There is no other discussion on the subject in NPF4.

The Chief Planners letter of 8th Feb 2023 intended to provide some further insight. It stated that Policy 27 d) was intended to ensure that drive throughs are considered as an integral part of the wider development plan, and was not a moratorium on such developments. The letter states that suitable locations could include those identified for Class 1(A) (Shops and financial, professional and other services) and Class 3 (Restaurants and Cafes) uses.

The Scottish Government's Local Development Plan (LDP) Guidance of May 2023 states that Local Development Plans should consider and, if appropriate, identify any areas where drive-through facilities may be acceptable, for example where they would not negatively impact on the principles of local living or sustainable travel.

Through the LDP process, planning authorities should consider whether there is a need for provision of drive-throughs within the area, accounting for any existing provision, impacts and effects upon the existing network of roads, the existing retail offering and distribution in an LDP area, and compatibility of drive-throughs with wider uses.

The Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Retail Study 2024 comments that, at the time of its preparation, there were, in general, two principal types of drive-throughs;

- larger units primarily for fastfood restaurant use (typically 350 sq m ground floor area and upwards) e.g. for McDonalds etc; and,
- smaller units serving coffee shops (typically ca. 200 sq m GFA) e.g. Costa, Greggs etc.

The Retail Study however goes on to say that the market is rapidly evolving, and space/design requirements are likely to change. Some further commentary is also provided on issues that may need to be considered in framing Local Development Plan policy. These include the relationship of drive-throughs with existing centres, transport considerations and impacts on amenity and neighbouring uses.

## **Discussion**

As can be seen from the above, national guidance on drive-throughs is limited. However, NPF4, the Chief Planner letter and LDP Guidelines are all clear that this issue should be dealt with in the Local Development Plan.

In terms of the next Local Development Plan, the Proposed Local Development Plan is currently programmed to be considered by Full Council in Autumn 2026. To inform the preparation of the Proposed LDP, the Council has issued a 'Call for Ideas', which may lead to the submission of commentary on drive-throughs, and a 'Call for Sites', which could prompt the submission of specific locations. Submissions need to be made by 20<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and could provide useful insight in terms of writing policies and/or identifying sites. Taking into consideration the public and the development industry view should lead to better informed and more robust policies in the Proposed LDP.

The Proposed LDP will become a material consideration in determining planning applications when it is approved, alongside the current 2023 LDP.

## **Conclusion**

Officers are currently unaware of any new proposals for drive throughs and there are no ongoing pre-application engagements. Given the timing of the Calls for Sites and Call for Ideas, and the more robust policy position that should be provided in the Proposed LDP, it is officers' view that awaiting the approval of the Proposed LDP is the best way forward and that no additional non-statutory guidance should be progressed at this stage.