# Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Amenity

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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 D2 – Amenity

## 1.2 Introduction to Topic / Background

Amenity is defined by the Aberdeen Local Development Plan as “the attributes which create and influence the quality of life of individuals or communities”, in short, the pleasantness of a place.

Amenity has in impact on many levels, an individual level, a neighbourhood level, a city level and a regional level. Amenity encompasses more than the home in which a person lives, good amenity is the benchmark for all development and enshrines the principles of placemaking. At all levels good amenity has a positive impact on people’s quality of life and health and wellbeing, and on being climate change ready.

At an individual level good amenity can ensure a person has access to a pleasant living, working and social environment – which enriches their daily life. At a neighbourhood level people feel secure, welcome, with access to open space. At a City level good

amenity will help to reduce inequality in health and wellbeing, while at a regional level, good amenity allows an area to become a benchmark for quality of life, with healthy and productive citizens.

Amenity within this document focusses on layout, orientation, shelter, aspect, daylight, sunlight, privacy, outlook, noise and air quality.

Buildings must be fit for purpose and meet the needs of users and occupiers, with consideration given to neighbouring properties to ensure there are no unreasonable impacts on daylight, sunlight, noise, air quality and outlook. Amenity spaces around buildings must be useable, have a degree of privacy and be designed to include a range of functions appropriate to the building use, such as space for play, seating, food growing, tree planting and shelter, and drying laundry. A range of methods and professions are used to assess impacts on the criteria noted above, these are outlined within the document.

The impact of development upon the amenity of neighbouring developments and buildings is one of the main issues to be assessed in the determination of planning applications, consideration needs to be given to a range of issues relating to design, and the effect upon neighbouring outlook, privacy, sunlight/daylight and any noise and disruption likely to arise directly or indirectly as a result of the development. The relationship of buildings to each other and their individual design can have a significant impact on these factors and on residents and users comfort.

The importance of amenity was paramount during the lockdowns during the Coronavirus pandemic. Amenity played a fundamental part in an individual's experience of the pandemic and had a significant impact on health and wellbeing, both mental and physical. This is not solely dependent on access to outdoor space, but also how the building helped support individuals e.g. access to bright rooms, privacy and the impact of noise.

### 1.3 Climate Change

The documents aligns with many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals such as Goal 3 good health and wellbeing, Goal 11 Sustainable cities and communities, Goal 12 Responsible consumption and production. To ensure Goal 3 good health and wellbeing, access to daylight, sunlight, privacy, good air quality, and impact of noise are all fundamental. Goal 11 Sustainable cities and communities is achieved through considering building orientation and the use of solar gain. While Goal 12 Responsible consumption and production is linked to amenity through future proofing buildings, providing good amenity can help to ensure the

impacts of climate change are lessened by allowing buildings to be more easily and readily adaptable to new uses should their current use fall out of favour.

Ensuring developments and buildings are built to make the most of natural assets, e.g. good orientation, existing natural assets not only helps to reduce the impact of climate change and meet our net zero target, but it can also ensure good amenity to residents and users. Scotland has a net zero target by 2045. Developments and buildings play a large part to ensure this target is met. More than 40% of Scotland's / UK's carbon dioxide emissions, a major cause of climate change, come from the energy we use to heat, light and run our buildings hence solar orientation as a starting point. Net Zero Aberdeen Route Map notes 6 themes to ensure the city can become Net Zero by 2045. The document aligns with theme 2: Buildings and Heat. Aberdeen Adapts notes climate change will have an impact on design, construction, management and use of Aberdeen's buildings and surroundings, challenging building performance.

## 2. Aberdeen Planning Guidance

### 2.1 What is Amenity?

Amenity is defined by the Aberdeen Local Development Plan as "the attributes which create and influence the quality of life of individuals or communities".

It is the quality or character of an area and elements that contribute to its overall enjoyment. Amenity has a significant and crucial impact on the way in which people use buildings and places, and naturally health and well-being of everyone is directly related to the level of amenity we can enjoy. When assessing how a development proposal may impact on amenity, consideration needs to be given to a range of design issues, and the effect upon neighbouring outlook, privacy, sunlight/daylight and any noise and disruption likely to arise directly or indirectly as a result of the development, this is true of both proposals where there is existing amenity and for proposal for completed new development, e.g greenfield sites. Proposals are required to ensure they provide good amenity for building users, or those neighbouring, for example within a large scale development site. Where proposals are adjacent to existing buildings consideration will be given to neighbouring properties to ensure there are no unreasonable impacts on daylight, sunlight, noise, air quality and outlook.

The cumulative impact of not designing in good amenity to future development and buildings is poor quality development, which is difficult to adapt and which will result in long term detrimental health and wellbeing impact of people.

## 2.2 Design - Layout, Orientation, Shelter and Aspect

Natural light is important to amenity as it ensures a pleasant and healthy place. In the initial design stages, consideration should be given to the orientation of the proposal so that it can benefit from the most natural light. Natural light is also beneficial in reducing energy demand by providing passive heating and lighting for the lifetime of the development.

Climate change, energy insecurity and rising fuel poverty are key challenges for Scotland now and for the foreseeable future. Design considerations for a development as a whole and for the individual buildings will help to increase the efficiency of energy use. For example, simply changing the orientation of a proposed building to maximise solar gain can make improvements to energy performance.


*Figure 1: Diagram explain shelter*

Development layout design should maximise the potential for passive solar gain with public rooms facing south, or within 30 degrees of south. Where possible development should also maximise the use of south facing slopes to make use of solar gain.

Assessment of site topography and shelter from prevailing winds is also an important consideration in the siting of development. Site layouts that enable shelter from cold winds should be applied, particularly useful will be tree planting across the north of a site to protect against cold northerly winds. The use of trees combined with planting and fencing provides some degree of wind shelter. Trees should attain a similar height to the building and planted 1 to 3 times height away or 3 to 4 if solar access is required

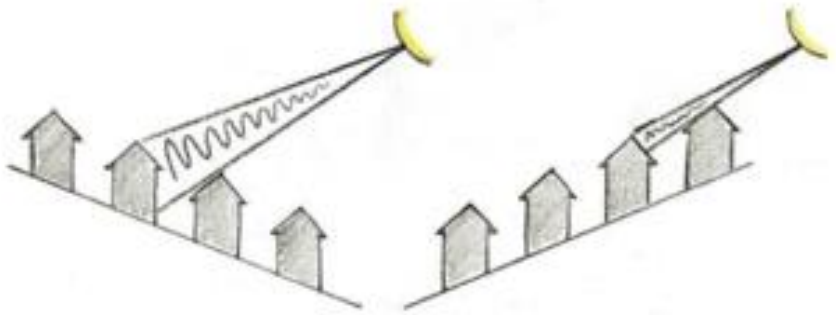


*Figure 2: Diagram explaining aspect*

To utilise solar energy new developments should take maximum advantage of south facing slopes. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment will ensure the context opportunities are known at the start of the process.

## 2.3 Daylight, Sunlight, Privacy and Outlook

General Principles

Providing good levels of daylight and sunlight in buildings and spaces is beneficial to the health and quality of life of residents and users of buildings. All proposals for housing (including student housing, Houses of Multiple Occupation and residential care) must meet the daylight requirements for living spaces (living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms) as outlined in the technical guidance below. Daylight is defined here as the amount of ambient light received from all directions. Sunlight is the sun's direct rays, as opposed to the background level of daylight.

By providing reasonable levels of privacy, outlook, daylight and sunlight the future reuse and reworking of buildings will be more easily supported and achieved.

To achieve reasonable levels of daylight, windows must be big enough and interiors must be designed to a deep enough level that ensures daylight can penetrate within them. Reasonable levels of sunlight to buildings and spaces will be achieved if sufficient account is taken of orientation.

When comparing proposed new development against existing situations, scale drawings, showing layout including external spaces, building height and elevations should be provided along with the relevant calculations and methodology. It is the responsibility of the agent/applicant to ensure that this information is provided and that all affected properties are clearly shown and tested.

This section applies to all new development where these aspects of amenity are particularly valued including housing, schools, nurseries, hospitals and clinics.

## Technical Guidance

### 2.4 Protecting daylight and sunlight amenity to existing buildings

Daylight receipt is a requirement for living rooms, kitchens (where these are not internalised) and bedrooms, and for non-domestic buildings where daylight would be a reasonable expectation such as schools, hospitals, hotels and hostels, small workshops and some offices.

In assessing the potential impact of proposed development upon existing dwellings is the “BRE Guide, Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight – A guide to good practice” will be used.

It is appropriate to expect that new development will not adversely affect the daylighting of existing development. Residents should reasonably be able to expect good levels of daylighting within existing and proposed property. All dwellings should receive some direct sunlight in at least one habitable room in all months of the year. With conversations of existing buildings, this can sometimes be difficult to achieve, where existing floorplates and layouts may be constrained, resulting in no feasible alternative to the creation of some single aspect, north facing dwellings. Only in such instances single aspect dwellings may be acceptable and only where appropriate mitigation is incorporated, such as: increasing the amount of daylight which can enter the rooms, through the use of larger windows, ensuring a high-quality outlook, increasing the internal floor area and/or providing access to private external amenity space.

The amount of daylight inside new buildings at different times of the year will be influenced by a number of factors such as the height and number of windows, the presence of obstructions (trees boundaries), the depth of the building and the reflectance of surfaces nearby.

Sunlight and daylight calculations will be submitted as part of a proposal.

Techniques for assessing the impact of a proposal on an existing building include the 45º method and the 25° method. They are used in different circumstances. The 45º method is used when buildings are adject to each other, the 25° method when existing windows would directly face the proposed building.

<u>The 45° Method</u>

This method involves drawing 45° lines from the corner of a proposed building in both plan and section views. If the shape formed by both of these lines would enclose the centre point of a window on an adjacent property, the daylighting to that window will be

adversely affected. The line drawn at 45° would pass through the mid-point of the window on elevation drawing, but not on the plan. This would therefore satisfy the 45° method for daylighting assessment. Were the proposal to fail on both diagrams, it is likely there would be an adverse affect on daylight to the adjacent window of the neighbouring property.

The 25° Method

Firstly, a section should be drawn, taken from a view at right angles to the direction faced by the windows in question. On this section, a line should be drawn from the mid-point of the lowest window, 25° to the horizontal, towards the obstructing building. If the proposed building is entirely below this line, it is unlikely to have a substantial effect on the diffuse daylighting of the existing building. Where the 25 degree approach is not satisfied, it will be for the planning authority to make a judgement on the degree of impact upon an adjacent building.

The Council may require more detailed information on the likely amount of daylight in affected rooms in existing buildings. This will be assessed using the Average Daylight Factor (ADF) methodology. Further information can be found in “BRE Guide, Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight – A guide to good practice”.

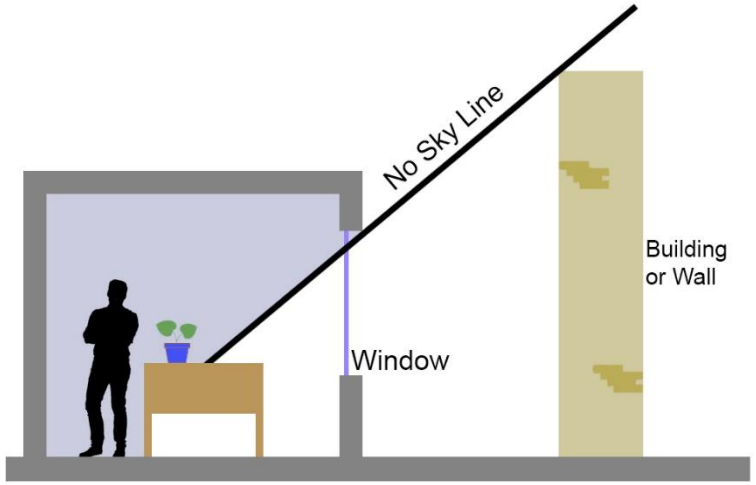
Daylight to bathrooms, stores and hallways will not be protected. Daylight to gables and side windows is generally not protected.

| | |
|---|---|
| Minimum ADF for bedrooms | 1% |
| Minimum ADF for living rooms | 1.5% |
| Minimum ADF for kitchens | 2% |

Further information can be found in “BRE Guide, Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight – A guide to good practice”.

## 2.5 Providing daylight to new buildings

The “no sky line” (the point beyond which the sky cannot be seen on a working plane) methos will be used. The “BRE Guide, Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight – A guide to good practice guide” explains this in detail. If drawings can be provided that show that direct skylight will penetrate at least half way into rooms within new development at the height of the working plane and where windows make up more than 25% of the external wall area, this will ensure that adequate daylight is provided to new development.




## 2.6 Sunlight to new gardens and open spaces

Sunlight is an important feature of gardens and open spaces. Sunlight in the spaces between buildings has an important impact on the overall appearance and useable amenity of a development. It is valuable for a number of reasons, to:

- provide sunlit views
- make outdoor activities like sitting out and playing more pleasant
- encourage and sustain food and plant growing
- dry out the ground, reduce areas of damp
- melt frost snow and ice
- dry clothes without mechanical means
- “BRE Guide, Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight – A guide to good practice guide” recommends that certainly no more than 2 fifths and preferably no more than a quarter of the garden should be prevented from receiving sunshine on 21 March.

Applicants should assess the availability of sunlight for all open spaces which could be created or affected by new development, this includes:

- gardens, usually the main back garden;
- parks and playing fields;
- children's playgrounds;
- outdoor swimming pools and paddling pools;
- sitting out areas such as those between non domestic buildings and public squares;
- focal points for views such as a group of monuments or fountains

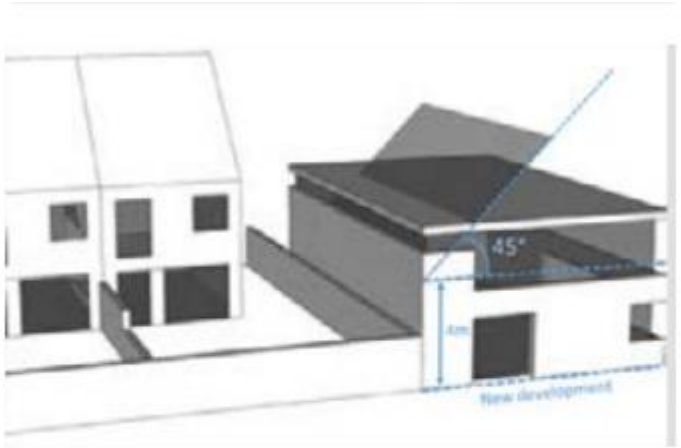
Each of these spaces will have different sunlight requirements however half the area of gardens or amenity spaces should be capable of receiving potential sunlight for more than two hours during the spring equinox. This will be assessed using hour by hour shadow plans for each hour of 21 March.

### 2.7 Sunlight to existing gardens and spaces

New buildings should be laid out so that reasonable levels of sunlight are maintained to existing gardens and spaces.

Whether sunlight to neighbouring gardens will be affected can be tested by checking whether new development rises above a 45° line drawn in section from the site boundary. If a development rises above this line, the amount of sunlight falling in the neighbouring garden might be affected. To take account of orientation, the 45° line should be drawn at the following heights above ground level along the different boundaries around the site:

| Orientation of extension relative to affected space | Height from which 45 degree line should be taken |
|---|---|
| N | 4M |
| NE | 3.5M |
| E | 2.8M |
| SE | 2.3M |
| S | 2M |
| SW | 2M |




**45º method for sunlight**
*This sketch shows a proposed development located on the north side of an existing garden. The sunlight to the neighbouring garden might be adversely affected because it rises above the 45 degree line set from 4m above the boundary.*

| | |
|---|---|
| S | 2.4M |
| NW | 3.3M |

When assessing whether any loss of sunlight is adverse, the use of the affected area of the garden and the size of the garden as a whole will be taken into account. The sunlight of spaces between gables will not be protected unless the affected space is of particular amenity value in comparison with the remainder of the garden. Such a space may include one that has been designed with the house as a patio.

Note that these heights do not indicate whether a development will be acceptable when assessed against other considerations.

Sunlight will be assessed using before and after plans showing shadows for each hour on 21 March. The qualities of the existing space and the effects of sunlight, both before and after will inform whether any loss of sunlight is considered adverse.

**2.8 Privacy and Outlook**

People value privacy but they also value outlook - the ability to look outside, whether to gardens, streets or more long distance views. The best way of ensuring privacy for new and existing development is to ensure that windows do not look onto the ‘private areas’ of neighbouring properties. 'Private areas’ can be regarded as habitable rooms and any garden area immediately to the rear of a house, as this part of the curtilage tends to make the biggest contribution to the enjoyment of the property.To protect privacy and ensure outlook, windows should be positioned to avoid direct views between dwellings.

The pattern of development in an area will help to define appropriate distances between buildings and consequential privacy distances. This means that there may be higher expectations for separation in suburban areas than in more compact, urban areas.

On the rear, as well as spacing windows far enough apart, reasonable levels of privacy can be achieved by positioning windows on opposing buildings so there are no direct views between them, angling windows and erecting screens between ground floor windows. In assessing this, each case will be looked at individually and assess the practicalities of achieving privacy against the need for development.

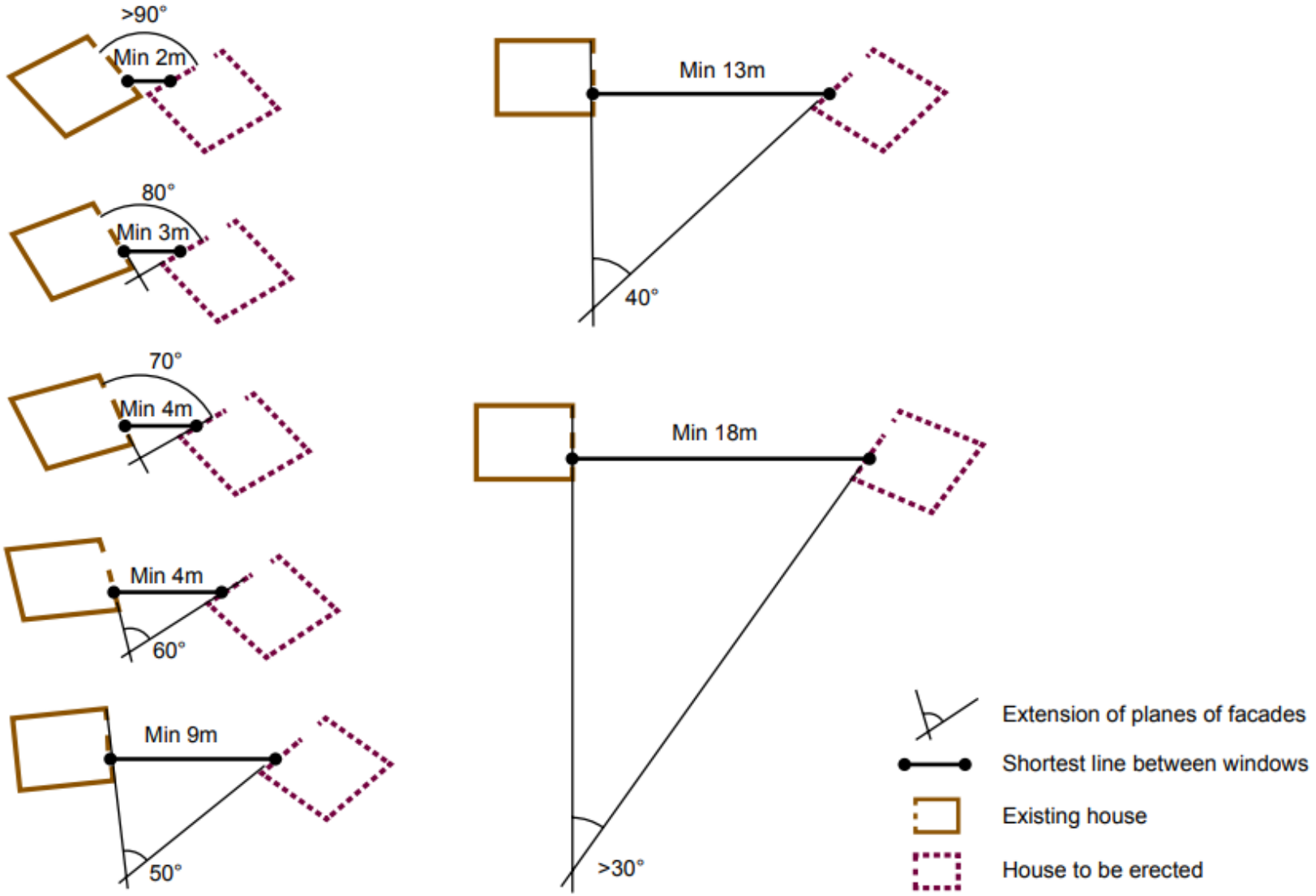
Although private views will not be protected; the immediate outlook, to the foreground of what can be seen from within a building, may be.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances this means new development that blocks out the immediate outlook of an existing dwelling must be avoided.

This guidance does not seek to protect the privacy of gables of existing housing.

There will be circumstances in which distance between buildings has to be a primary consideraton to ensure good levels of privacy and outlook – for instance where there are differences in ground levels or where higher buildings are proposed. The distance can be reduced if the angle between the windows of the existing and proposed properties is offset, if effective screening exists, or if screening is proposed that would not obstruct light, adversely affect amenity or be unacceptable for other planning reasons

**Method for checking privacy distances between window openings**



## 2.9 Improving internal amenity

In order to ensure a good standard of overall amenity for new development, there is a presumption towards dwellings with two (dual) or more aspects. Dwellings with a dual aspect have windows which face out from two separate elevations. The provision of more than one aspect can result in multiple benefits for internal amenity. These benefits include opportunities for better daylight and sunlight receipt, enhanced outlook, natural ventilation and in providing greater flexibility as to the use of spaces, such as positioning bedrooms towards a quieter aspect if the development is on a busy road.

## 2.10 Designing housing for older people and those with disabilities

Housing should be designed on the principle it can be adaptable, thereby accommodating a mix of ages and abilities in people and uses within their floorplan. To do so:

• The approach to all entrances should preferably be level or gently sloping;

• All entrances should be illuminated and have level access over the threshold;

• Enable convenient movement in hallways and through doorways

• Enable convenient movement in rooms for as many people as possible

• Provide an accessible bathroom that has ease of access to its facilities from the outset and potential for simple adaptation to provide for different needs in the future

• Enable people to have a reasonable line of sight from a seated position in the living room and to use at least one window for ventilation in each room

More detailed design information and guidance can be found in:

Building standards technical handbook: domestic

The projected figure of people living with dementia in the UK is expected to reach 1.6 million people by 2040. Improving the design of homes to assist people the with dementia is outlined the Royal Town Planning Institute publication: Dementia and Town Planning. Principles within in the document include safety, visual clues, clearly defined rooms, interior design, noise, natural light or stronger artificial light, and outside space.

### 2.11 Environment

Development should actively help enhance the environment, manage exposure to pollution and reduce overall emissions. Adopt good design principles that reduce emissions (noise, air and light pollution) and contribute to better pollution management.

### 2.12 Air Quality

The location and design of a development has a direct influence on exposure to elevated air pollution levels. This is particularly relevant where developments include uses such as residential uses, hospitals, schools, open spaces and playgrounds, or the development is propsed to take place within an Air Quality Management Area. Developers will ensure building's design, layout and orientation avoids increased exposure to poor air quality. These elements, need to be considered at the initial design stage.

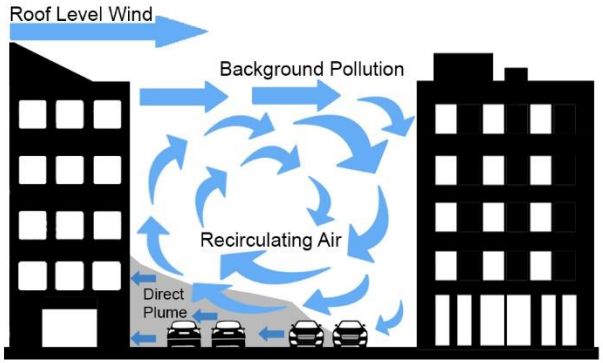
Good practice principles in the design stage should be aligned to Delivering Cleaner Air for Scotland, and should consider the following:

• New developments should not contravene Aberdeen's Air Quality Action Plan, or render any of the measures unworkable;
• Wherever possible, new developments should not create a new "street canyon" or building layouts that inhibit effective dispersion of pollutants;
• Delivering sustainable development should be the key theme for the assessment of any application; and

• New development should be designed to minimise public exposure to pollution sources, e.g. by locating habitable rooms away from busy roads, or directing combustion exhaust through well-sited vents or chimney stacks.

Where possible, new trafficked roads should align to prevailing winds which may help with pollutant dispersal, alternatively, the creation of a buffer zone between busy roads and buildings could be another practical solution to pollution exposure.

Developers should also consider the location of outside space including gardens, balconies and roof terraces proposed in areas of particularly poor air quality. Outside spaces should be screened by planting where practical, and be appropriately designed and positioned to minimise exposure to pollutants.



Air Flow Pattern In A Street Canyon -
Where Vehicular Traffic Is Expected Street Canyons Should Be Avoided.

National guidance and policy which should be adhered to includes Planning Advice Note 51: Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation, and Cleaner Air for Scotland: The Road to a Healthier Future, and Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Air Quality.

### 2.13 Protecting internal air quality

To protect internal air quality, developers should specify environmentally sensitive (non-toxic) building materials. The use of materials or products that produce volatile organic compounds and formaldehyde which can affect human health, should be avoided. It is also important to maintain combustion plant and equipment, such as boilers, and ensure they are operating at their optimum efficiency to minimise harmful emissions. Building Standards set the criteria on ventialtion to ensure the air quality inside of a buidling is not a threat to the building or the health of the occuapants.

### 2.14 Noise

In addition to reducing general quality of life, excessive noise can damage health and harm the environment. The density and mix of uses within Aberdeen contribute to the vibrancy of the place.

Where a proposed development will emit noise, the site layout should be designed to minimise future noise complaints, incorporating the most appropriate mitigation measures into the scheme.

Where a proposed sensitive development is likely to be exposed to noise, developers should design the layout to minimise noise and implement the most appropriate measures to ensure amenity is protected. This could include locating noise sensitive areas/ rooms away from the parts of the site most exposed to noise or designing the building so its shape and orientation reflect noise and protect the most sensitive uses.

Masterplan layouts should be designed to allow enough external space to accommodate landscape buffers (with mounding and planting) from any source of noise (e.g., busy roads, factories, etc). Such solutions are preferable to the use of acoustic barriers which are visually unsightly. Green acoustic barriers may be more attractive but they have a high maintenance burden. Landscape mounding and planting is much better as it also contributes to visual amenity and biodiversity enhancement.

It should be noted noise is context based, with differing baselines due to existing infrastructure and business. It is up to the new development to mitigate against these issues. For example, whilst it is reasonable to expect an adequate level of residential amenity, urban centres are lively and vibrant places and those who live there should not expect that the amenity would be comparable of that of a purely residential area.

Reference should be made to Planning Advice Note 1/2011 Planning and Noise and Aberdeen Planning Guidace: Noise

### 2.15 Lighting

Lighting is a critical component in the design of high quality public realm and it has an important role in supporting placemaking across the city. Further guidance is contained within Planning Advice Note 51: Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation; and Planning Advice Note 77: Designing Safer Places.

### 2.16 Odour

Chimney or flue termination points located at low levels in relation to adjacent buildings, can cause problems for amenity, as well as having visual impacts. Consideration should be given when designing extraction for commercial kitchens, the flue system for a wood burning stove or when dealing with the industrial processes to the location and height of these points. It is more effective to address odour at the design and planning stage of a new plant or process than to seek to abate a statutory nuisance from odours retrospectively. The Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Harmony of Uses provides more information.

## 3. Further Reading

BRE Guide, Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight – A guide to good practice guide

Building Standards Technical Handbook 2022: domestic

Building Standard Technical Handbook 2022: non-domestic

Cleaner Air for Scotland: The Road to a Healthier Future

Net Zero Aberdeen Route Map

Planning Advice Note 51: Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation

Planning Advice Note 77: Designing Safer Places.

Planning Advice Note 1/2011 Planning and Noise

Royal Town Planning Institute: Dementia and Town Planning