

# **Aberdeen Planning Guidance 2023: Conversions of Buildings in the Countryside (DRAFT)**

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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.

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

- Policy D1 – Quality Placemaking
- Policy D2 – Amenity

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

Traditional agricultural buildings and steadings, mainly dating from the 19th Century, are a major feature of the Scottish landscape, and an important part of Scotland's architectural and cultural heritage. The conversion of such buildings to residential and other uses offer opportunities to diversify and regenerate rural environments and, in the case of residential redevelopment, increase the level and variety of housing stock and create dwellings of individualistic character within an attractive rural setting.

## **1.3 Climate Change**

The redevelopment of buildings will play a small part in reducing urban sprawl, thereby protecting space for nature, Goal 5 of Aberdeen Adapts. The document aligns the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 Sustainable cities and communities.

## **2. Aberdeen Planning Guidance**

### **2.1 General Design Principles**

The following general design principles apply to all proposals. Where a proposal involves a Listed Building, the planning authority will also have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any feature of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

### **2.2 External**

Vernacular buildings must not be changed to the extent that they lose their original form. The best conversions reinforce the original architectural qualities of a building. External alterations should be the minimum necessary to allow the building to function adequately in its new use and should not disguise the original purpose of the building.

Contemporary interventions can, if well executed, successfully highlight a building's traditional qualities. The original character and setting of a building must always be protected and enhanced. Consideration should be given to the reinstatement of significant or attractive features that have previously been removed.

Features that should not generally be altered include:

- Ridge heights and roof pitches
- Wallhead heights and gable profiles

Features that should generally be respected include:

- Scale, massing and materials
- Door, window, ventilator and other openings
- Relationship of solid to void in masonry

A limited number of openings in either external walls or the plane of the roof is a defining characteristic of traditional agricultural buildings. In instances when the formation of new openings may be required, these should be kept to an absolute minimum. An accumulation of domestic scale windows can detrimentally affect the appearance and character of a traditionally agricultural building. It will be preferable to employ a simple style of window in conversions, rather than any intricate, urban style of window.

Dormer windows, especially those of an urban style, look out of place on a steading roof and should be avoided. Instead, rooflights (which can provide a higher level of illumination with less visual intrusion) will be promoted.

New rooflights should lie flush with the roof, and there should be no appearance of regularity in their layout. Where a dormer is unavoidable, it should be built off the wallhead in the style of a hayloft door, rather than the more common type of dormer set further up the roof.

The position of external penetrations of the building envelope should be carefully considered so as to minimise their visual impact. Extracts and flues taken through the roof via discreetly designed outlets are preferable. Meter boxes should be installed internally or ground mounted.

Traditional steadings and outbuildings are a valuable resource, whilst the materials and energy used in constructing them represent a significant reserve of embodied energy and of minerals. The potential for the development proposal to incorporate low and zero-carbon energy solutions (such as ground source heat and biomass) should be explored at an early stage.

## **2.3 Internal**

If a structure is not listed, applicants will generally have freedom to consider internal alterations that do not alter the structure or envelope of the building.

If the internal height of the building allows the formation of an attic floor, this will be permitted provided it does not entail any increase in height of a wallhead or ridge, or any change in the roof pitch.

In planning a new internal layout, particular care should be taken to maximise the re-use of existing openings, even those that

have been formed at a later date in the life of the steading.

## **2.4 Extensions and Ancillary Buildings**

Restoration of original courtyards will be encouraged, and the removal of unsympathetic extensions and later buildings is strongly encouraged.

Ancillary buildings in good condition and which are of substantial construction should be repaired and re-used whenever possible. Any new ancillary buildings should be justifiable and must respect the setting of the original building in location, scale, massing, proportions and use of materials.

While accommodation should largely be created within the existing envelope of the building, modest extensions may be permitted to provide additional accommodation and to allow the more efficient use of existing space (e.g. a storm porch).

The following criteria should be observed:

- Extensions should be subservient in scale and massing to the original building;
- Extensions should not be so large as to confuse which parts of the building are original and which are recent;
- The ridge of any extension should be lower than the ridge of original part of the building;
- The roof pitch should generally match the original building;
- Roof finishes should generally match existing finishes

Large extensions which are proposed with the aim of creating additional stand-alone units will not be acceptable.

Where it is necessary to choose between extending into a loft space or building an extension, the option of the extension may be preferable where this helps to avoid the construction of dormers, insertion of an excessive number of rooflights, or formation of additional openings in original masonry walls.

Alterations and extensions which use accurate traditional detailing and materials will be promoted. Pastiche development will not be acceptable. Contemporary design solutions may also be acceptable so long as they are of a high architectural quality and are formed in good quality materials whilst respecting the character, setting, massing, scale and proportions of the original building.

## **2.5 Materials**

Harling will be acceptable on non-public elevations only. Granite matching coursing and masonry finish of the original building is acceptable.

The use of timber linings on a timber frame is a traditional form of construction that, when carefully designed, can sit comfortably against granite rubble masonry found on many common forms of buildings in the countryside.

Base courses, stringcourses and decorative opening surrounds do not normally feature in steadings and should normally be avoided in extensions. Over-elaborate details such as stone quoins on corners, in conjunction with a roughcast finish, should also be avoided.

## **2.6 Site Boundaries, Landscape Design and Infrastructure**

Any traditional boundary treatment should be respected and retained. Any new boundary treatment must be appropriate for the type and scale of the building. Boundary enclosures such as “ranch fencing” are not acceptable.

Allowance must be made for the retention of existing trees, and for landscape design proposals and other amenity space.

Development layouts and detailed landscape design must be informed by the assessment of the site and surroundings.

More information is available within the Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Landscape.

Courtyards often found within farm units should be designated as communal space, and not artificially sub- divided into the separate curtilages of each residential unit. Proposals for the conversion of farm buildings should retain existing accesses wherever possible.

## **2.7 Planning Obligations**

Planning obligations may be required with new developments. Further guidance and information can be found in the Planning Obligations Supplementary Guidance

## **2.8 Protected Species**

Farm buildings, and any associated drystone dykes and surrounding trees may be home to protected species such as bats and birds. Where it is suspected that a proposal may impact upon a protected species, an appropriate survey will be required to

accompany any application for planning permission. Further guidance and information can be found in the Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Natural Heritage.

## **2.9 Submission Requirements**

Applications for planning permission must be supported by a Design Statement to explain the architectural approach taken.

Applications must also be supported by a structural engineer's report to demonstrate that proposals to adapt existing buildings are feasible. This report will clearly identify those parts of the building that are structurally sound and complete, as well as those that will require demolition and rebuilding.

The report will include: survey drawings of the building as existing and sections showing external ground levels and existing foundation levels. All existing openings, and proposed downtakings and new openings must be clearly shown on drawings.

Planning permission will not be granted for the conversion of any building that is dilapidated to the extent that it would have to be substantially demolished and rebuilt.

Applications must also include the main routes and items of external drainage. Proposals must demonstrate that foul and surface water can be adequately disposed of on land within the applicant's control, and in accordance with any regulations pertinent at the time, prior to any planning permission being granted.

### 3. Definitions

**Listed Building:** working on behalf of Scottish Ministers, Historic Environment Scotland inspectors identify buildings which are worthy of statutory protection due to their: Age and Rarity; Architectural Interest; and/or Close Historical Association. You can search for listed buildings in Aberdeen via the Historic Environment Scotland website.

**Vernacular Buildings:** a traditional type of building utilized by ordinary wage earners.



## 4. Further Reading

Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Landscape

Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Natural Heritage

Supplementary Guidance: Planning Obligations

Historic Environment Scotland website: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/search-for-a-listed-building/>