

Aberdeen Planning Guidance 2023: Open Space and Green Infrastructure

Please note that, pending a comprehensive review of the Open Space Audit (2010) and the associated Open Space Strategy, this Aberdeen Planning Guidance APG largely carries forward the advice from the former 'Supplementary Guidance: Green Space Network & Open Space (2017)'. The review of the Open Space Audit and Open Space Strategy is expected to be complete in 2023/24. An update of this APG will be undertaken as soon as practicable thereafter. Any significant updates to this APG will be subject to full public consultation. Please also note that planning advice on food growing and outdoor access is now outlined in separate APG documents.

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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 relates to and expands on the following policy in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan:

- Policy NE2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure)

The following APGs also provide further guidance on this / related topics and should therefore be read in conjunction with this APG: Food Growing, Outdoor Access, Trees and Woodlands, Natural Heritage. The Supplementary Guidance on Planning Obligations also provides information on the circumstances where developer obligations may be sought towards open space and green infrastructure. Again, this should be read in conjunction with the content of this APG.

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 Plan, 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. References to the former Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) and Strategic Development Plan (SDP) have been largely removed from this APG to minimize confusion, and wherever possible updated references to NPF4 have been included. Occasional references to SPP and the SDP have been retained where necessary to explain the source of data and/or essential context for the APG, 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

Access to good quality green and blue infrastructure, including areas of open space and green networks, will contribute to a greener, healthier, smarter, safer, stronger, wealthier and fairer city. This guidance will assist developments in assessing and demonstrating their compliance in enhancing and improving green infrastructure to create useful, sustainable and well used places. This will benefit the wider community, the natural environment and support a healthy economy.

- Blue Infrastructure refers to water environment features within the natural and built environment that provide a range of ecosystem services. Blue infrastructure features include rivers, lochs, wetlands, canals, other water courses, ponds, coastal and marine areas, including beaches, porous paving, sustainable drainage systems and raingardens.
- Green Infrastructure refers to features or spaces within the natural and built environment that provide a range of ecosystem services.
- Green Space refers to the vegetated areas of open space within urban areas such as playing fields, parks, allotments and cemeteries.
- Open Space is open land or areas that are vegetated, paved or hard landscaped within and on the edge of settlements. It includes greenspace (such as parks, private gardens, burial grounds and cemeteries, and allotments) and open land and public/civic space (such as streets, town squares, market places, amenity land, sports areas, and children's play areas).
- Green Networks are the networks of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas which sustain clean air, water and natural resources and enrich citizens' quality of life.

1.3 Climate Change

The protection and enhancement of high-quality green space networks is aligned with the following [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#): 3 (Good Health & Well-Being); 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities); 13 (Climate Action); and 15 (Life on Land). The provision and availability of high quality green space will allowing opportunity for exercise, which will improve physical and mental health. It will also ensure Aberdeen is resilient, sustainable, and combating climate change by ensuring there are area of open space to help mitigate the impacts of wetter winters and drier summers , to act as a carbon store and reduce carbon emissions. The provision and availability of high quality green space will also ensure support for terrestrial ecosystem, thereby providing habitat and supporting biodiversity.

High-quality green space networks will also play a key role in helping to achieve the [Net Zero Vision for Aberdeen](#) by helping to store carbon and reduce carbon emissions.

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 environmental are vital to the health of the people and communities within

them. The health of the city and economy will be improved through access to a variety of good quality spaces, for example green and blue space. These have been shown to increase physical activity levels and, as such, improve physical and mental wellbeing.

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;
- Priority 2: A Scotland where we flourish in our early years;
- Priority 3: A Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing;
- Priority 5: A Scotland where we have a sustainable, inclusive economy with equality of outcomes for all; and,
- Priority 6: A Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active.

This guidance is deemed to have a strong impact on population health and wellbeing. This means that it is likely a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) screening report will be requested to support any planning application, however 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 Open Space

The City Council completed its first full Open Space Audit in 2010, in accordance with former Scottish Planning Policy guidance and Planning Advice Note 65 - Planning and Open Space. The results of this have been used to prepare an Open Space Strategy, which provides a strategic framework for protecting, creating, connecting, and improving open spaces. In parallel with the development of the Open Space Strategy and using the Open Space Audit and other information, a Green Space Network has been identified for Aberdeen and is protected through planning policy (Figure 1).

On and Off-Site Provision

Planning conditions will normally be used to secure on-site provision of open space. Off-site provision may be necessary to mitigate the development's direct or cumulative impacts on existing infrastructure or facilities. A planning agreement will be normally used in these circumstances, outlining the financial contribution necessary to deliver the off-site provision, which may include the creation of new open space or enhancing the accessibility or quality of existing spaces.

2.2 Green Space Network

Connecting our urban and rural green spaces to each other and to the communities around them, offers a wide range of social, health, economic and environmental benefits. Green networks can provide an enhanced setting for development and other land uses and opportunities for outdoor recreation, nature conservation, landscape enhancement and providing a sense of place and local distinctiveness. Aberdeen's Green Space Network (GSN) is identified in the Local Development Plan (Policy NE2) to protect, promote and enhance designated natural heritage sites, connectivity between habitats, open spaces and opportunities for physical activity and access to the outdoors. It also takes into account opportunities for climate change adaptation and flood risk management, the distribution of existing open spaces and their relationship with communities, development opportunities, health and deprivation information and transport issues.

Areas of GSN can serve the following functions:

- **Cores** - large or key areas of existing green space.
- **Links** - existing or desirable corridors of green space linking other green spaces together (following paths, waterbodies or other elements from the datasets listed above where possible).
- **Stepping Stones** - isolated green spaces which may be difficult or inappropriate to link to the rest of the network using a continuous green corridor, but which may still offer opportunities to deliver the benefits of Green Space Network (see Figure 1).

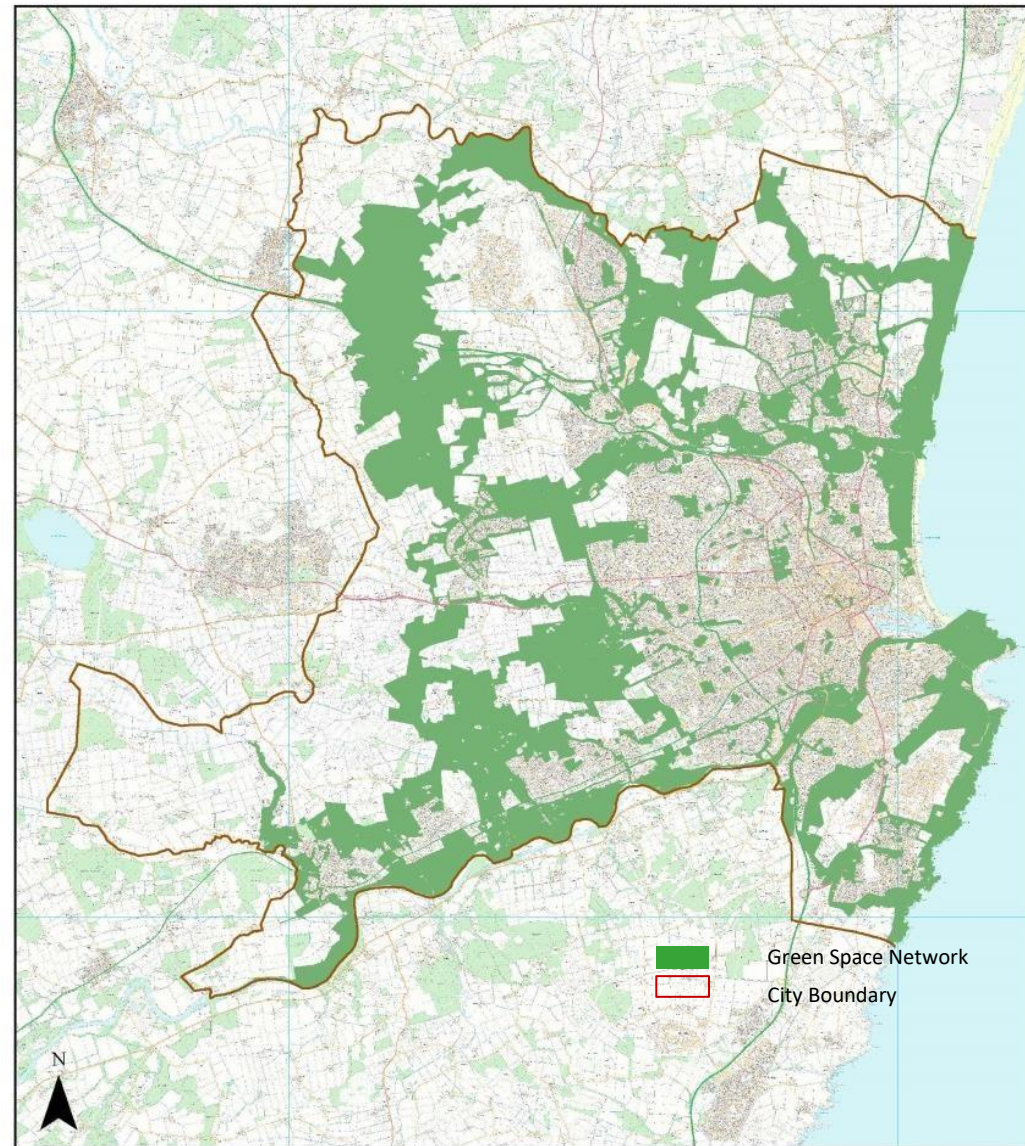


Figure 1: Green Space Network

2.3 Delivery of Green Space Network Enhancements

Key stakeholders, including SEPA, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, and various Aberdeen City Council services have contributed towards the development of a GIS resource. The Green Space Network can be viewed through this interactive mapping system on the Council's website. It highlights the rationale for the selection of each area of Green Space Network, as well as opportunities for its enhancement. This rationale and opportunities for enhancement should be taken into account in the planning of greenspace projects or other developments.

The delivery mechanisms for taking forward enhancements to Green Space Network include the following:

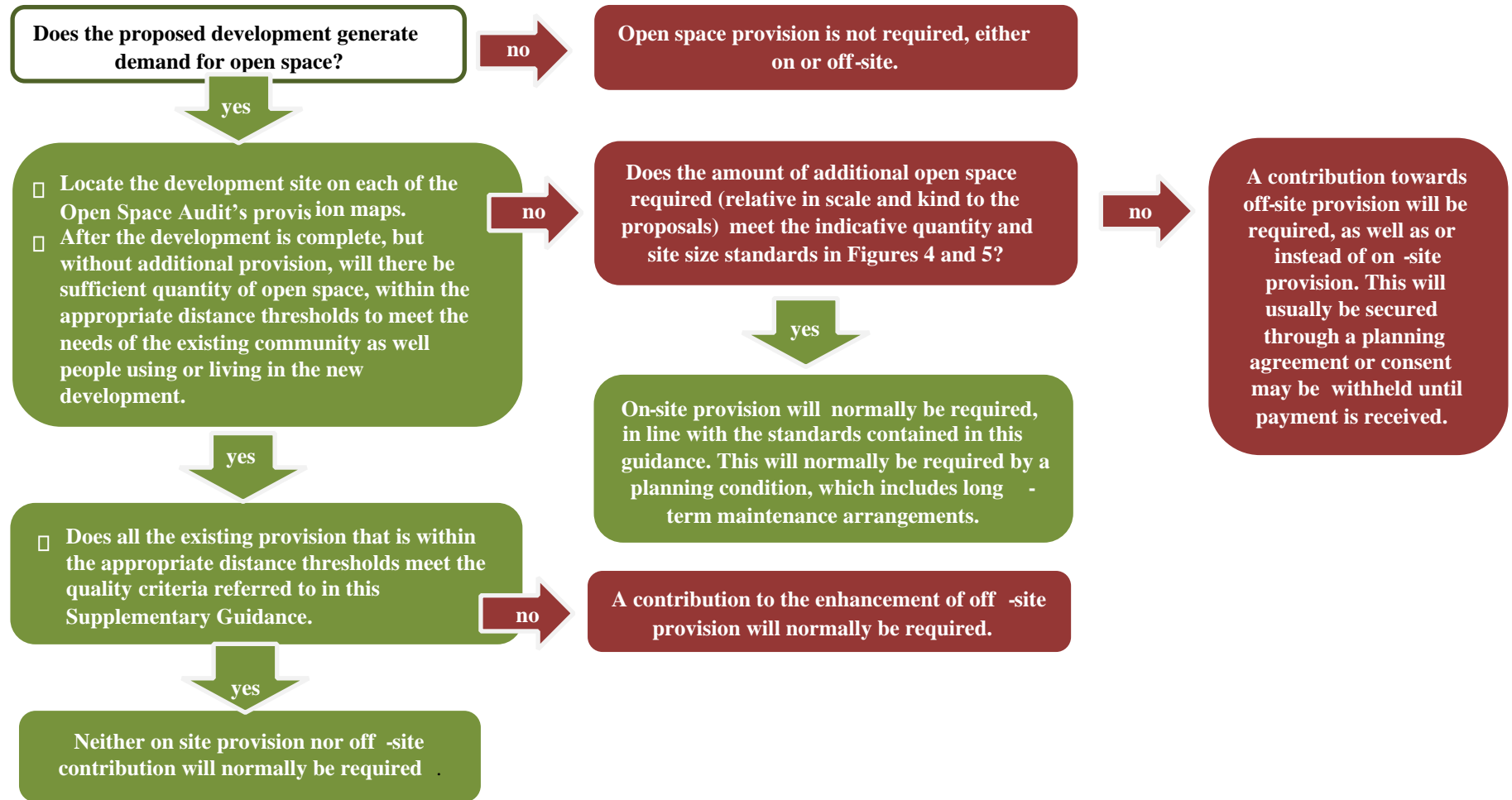
- **Through new development:** Green networks are recognised as valued and desirable forms of open space. Developers should work with Council officers to make sure that key linkages within Green Space Network are maintained. Developers may also be required to undertake necessary enhancements to areas of green space network as part of planning permission.
- **Community-led projects:** Supported by Aberdeen's Open Space Strategy, various potential funding sources may be available.
- **Projects led by Aberdeen City Council,** in consultation with communities, normally involving external grant funding e.g. tree planting, wetland creation and natural water management projects.
- **Forestry Design Plans:** the coherence of the Green Space Network is also a key consideration for those involved in the management and maintenance of commercial forests.

2.4 Open Space Provision in New Development

This section relates to Policy NE2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure) and its sub-heading 'Open Space in New Development'. Aberdeen's Open Space Audit 2010 has identified a need for higher quality and more accessible open space, rather than simply extra quantitative provision. It is for this reason that quality and accessibility, as well as quantity, is included in Aberdeen's minimum open space standards for new developments.

Therefore, the approach to identifying the exact level and mix of open space requirements should be flexible and responsive to the level of existing provision, and its quality and accessibility. It is vital that development proposals refer to the findings of the Open Space Audit to help determine how much, what type and what size of new open spaces need to be provided. Use the flow chart below (Figure 2) to help identify the necessary provision for your development.

Figure 2: Calculating Required Open Space Provision



2.5 Standards for Open Space in Residential Development

The Council requires the provision of at least 2.8 hectares per 1,000 people of meaningful and useful public open space to be provided on-site in new residential development. Figure 3 shows cases where this standard applies. The level of necessary provision will be applied pro-rata.

Figure 3: Developments where Open Space Standards Apply

Type of development	Natural Greenspace and Green Corridors	Allotments	Play Space	Outdoor Sports Areas
Open market housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Affordable housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sheltered housing	✓	✓	x	x
Hostels and special needs housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
One for one replacement dwellings	x	x	x	x
Extensions to dwellings	x	x	x	x

The size of individual open spaces should be designed with the open space hierarchy in mind (see Figure 4 overleaf), and the standard also incorporates requirements for different types of open space (see Figure 5 overleaf). An open space may also sit under one or more 'zonings' within the Local Development Plan, and may therefore be subject to more than one planning policy.

Figures 4 and 5 show the indicative size, quality and accessibility standards for open spaces for new residential development. A degree of flexibility in identifying the exact requirements will be needed, according to the size, location and nature of the development.

Where the open space audit demonstrates that the minimum quantity of accessibility standards is met by existing provision, then raising the quality of that provision may be required instead of, or as well as, new provision.

Open space that is identified as low quality does not mean it will be obsolete and given priority for development but instead provides the opportunity for the quality of open space to be improved.

2.6 Note on Quality Standards

The Open Space Audit and Strategy contains a method for scoring the quality of open spaces out of 25, based on a number of criteria. For more information please see the Open Space Audit and Strategy:

Figure 4: Open Space Hierarchy (for further information see the Open Space Audit)

Open Space Hierarchy	Description	Indicative Site Size (<i>ha</i> = hectares)	Accessibility Standard	Quality Standard
Major Open Spaces	Large areas of open space attracting visitors from Aberdeen City and Shire, often offering a wide range of uses, including informal recreational, sport, large scale equipped play zone, walking routes, seating, lighting, toilets, car parks etc. There may be a diversity of habitat / landscapes. Receives regular maintenance. Will usually form Green Space Network Cores.	>5 ha	All residents within 1500 metres (around 20 min walk) of a Major Open Space	<u>Green Flag ‘Good’ Standard</u> ; and <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Score of 20 or greater. Standards for large scale Play Zone in Figure 5
Neighbourhood Open Spaces	Open spaces that provide a range of recreational uses, attracting users from more than one neighbourhood. These spaces could include equipped Play Zones, natural areas, green corridors, seating,	2-5 ha	All residents within 600 metres (around 10 mins walk) of a Neighbourhood Open Space	<u>Green Flag ‘good’ standard</u> ; and <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Score of 20 or greater.

Open Space Hierarchy	Description	Indicative Site Size (<i>ha</i> = <i>hectares</i>)	Accessibility Standard	Quality Standard
	paths/access, community event space, some formal landscape features, car park, dog waste/litter bins etc. Receives regular maintenance. May include Green Space Network cores, stepping stones or links.			
Local Open Space	Smaller spaces that provide a more limited range of local recreation uses, and are spread throughout a local area. As most users will reach them on foot, they are well connected by paths to community facilities and areas. Receives regular maintenance.	0.4- 2ha	All residents within 400 metres (around 5 minutes walk) of a Local Open Space.	<u>Green Flag 'good' standard</u> ; and <u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Score of 20 or greater.

Figure 5: Open Space Types

Open Space Type	Description	Indicative Quantity (ha = hectares, m ² = square metres)	Accessibility	Quality
<p>Play Zone/ Other Play Areas</p> <p>Large Scale Play Zone</p>	<p>Unsupervised areas dedicated to use by, and equipped for, children and young people. Other Play Areas may include ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateboard areas, teenage shelters.</p> <p>Larger play zones likely to attract children from a larger area. These sites should include a larger range of play functions.</p>	<p>0.3ha per 1,000 population. Minimum size 1,500m²</p> <p>Minimum size 2,500m²</p>	<p>All residents should be within 400m of a Play Zone Suitable for ages 3-13</p> <p>Suitable for ages 3-18</p>	<p><u>Open Space Audit Quality Criteria.</u></p>
<p>Outdoor Sports Areas</p>	<p>Natural or artificial surfaces used for sport and recreation. E.g. playing fields, pitches, tennis courts, bowling greens, athletics tracks, water sports facilities.</p>	<p>1.6ha per 1,000 population</p>	<p>All residents within 1,200m of Outdoor Sports Facilities</p>	<p><u>NPFA/Fields in Trust standards;</u> and</p> <p><u>Open Space Audit Quality Criteria.</u></p>

Open Space Type	Description	Indicative Quantity (ha = hectares, m ² = square metres)	Accessibility	Quality
Natural Greenspace and Green Corridor	Includes woodland, heathland, scrub, grassland, wetland, coastal areas, riverbanks, and streambanks, disused railway lines, green access routes and open water. Also includes designated areas such as Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Sites of Special Scientific Interests (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The primary purposes include nature conservation, walking, cycling, horse riding, watersports, leisure, non-motorised travel, environmental education.	1ha minimum Natural Greenspace per 1,,000 population	All residents within 400m of a natural greenspace >2ha and 2000 metres of a natural greenspace >5ha	<u>Open Space Audit</u> Quality Criteria

Open Space Type	Description	Indicative Quantity (ha = hectares, m ² = square metres)	Accessibility	Quality
Community Food Growing Spaces	Please refer to separate Food Growing APG for more guidance on food growing spaces in new developments			

Aberdeen's open space standards are based on the likely number of residents within a new development. This can be calculated using the average number of people who live in each dwelling. This information is available from the Scottish Household Survey and is outlined in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Average Household Occupancy in Aberdeen

Dwelling Size (bedrooms)	Average Household Size (persons)
1 bedroom	1.3
2 bedroom	1.9
3 bedroom	2.6
4 bedroom	2.9
5 bedroom	3.6
6 bedroom	5.0
7 bedroom	6.0

2.7 Open Space Requirements in Brownfield Development

Brownfield land is generally defined as land which has previously been developed (see the Local Development Plan Glossary for a more comprehensive definition). As outlined in Policy NE2 of the Local Development Plan, we will seek open space provision in all developments, including on brownfield sites. However, it may not be possible to increase the amount of open space on some brownfield sites. For example where existing buildings on the site are being retained. In these cases, appropriate design solutions to deliver on-site amenity will be sought in the first instance and commuted sums towards off-site provision or enhancement of existing open spaces will be sought where appropriate. Brownfield development can also involve additional costs, such as site preparation, contaminated land remediation and demolition. If developers can satisfy the Council that there are exceptional costs associated with a site, it may not always be appropriate to apply the minimum standards for open space to such developments. The Council may instead seek a contribution towards off-site open space enhancements. The necessary contribution will reflect the scale and type of development. (See the Planning Obligations Supplementary Guidance for more information on developer contributions towards open space and green infrastructure).

2.8 Open Space Requirements in Non-Residential Development

The Local Development Plan does not stipulate minimum standards for open space in non-residential developments. Appropriate provision for non-residential development is to be considered on a site-by-site basis. Open space, over and above site landscaping, can make an important positive contribution to non-residential development, creating places for staff to get fresh air and unwind, or to go for a walk or run at lunch time. Connecting non-residential developments, such as employment uses, to existing path networks and nearby open spaces can also support healthy lifestyles and sustainable travel opportunities.

Aberdeen City Council may seek contributions from non-residential developments towards enhancing the accessibility or quality of off-site existing open space or paths in the vicinity of the development, in order to meet the extra for open space demand created by the development.

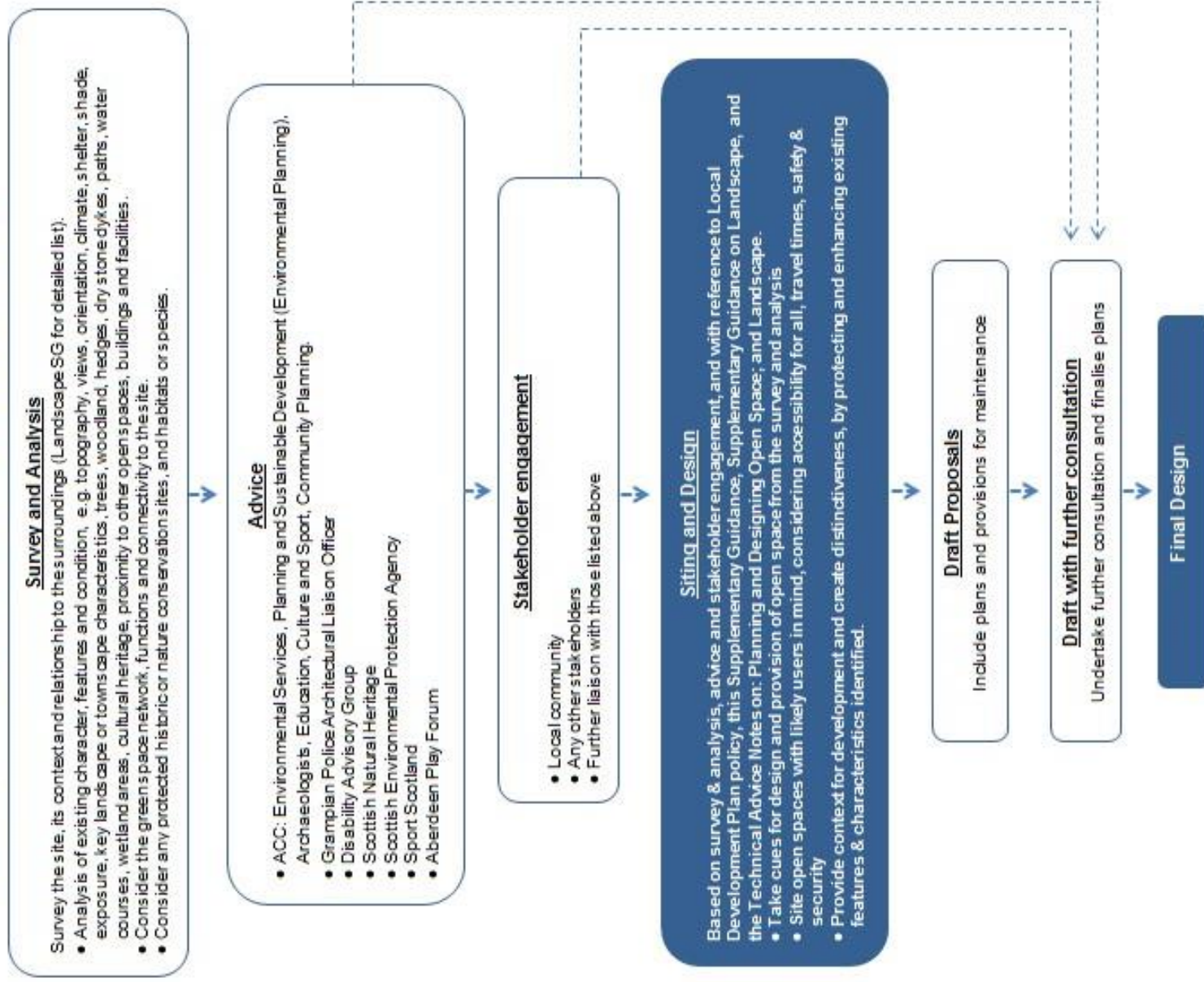
2.9 Applying the Policies

Pre-Application Discussions

Throughout the process of pre-application discussions, developers are encouraged to seek advice from the Council on the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing open space local to their proposed development. Advice from other parties

could also be sought at this stage in order to identify key considerations at the earliest opportunity (see Figure 7 overleaf). Advice may be given on opportunities to link the development with other parts of the green space and path networks, including existing or planned open space, core paths and cycle routes, play or sports facilities, helping to set the context for development and add to a sense of place. Planning Circular 7/2007 states that Sport Scotland must be consulted on any development which is likely to lead to the loss of certain outdoor sports facilities, or in any way prejudice their use.

Figure 7: Flowchart guiding process for planning and designing open space



2.10 Masterplans and Planning Briefs

Open Space and the Green Space Network need to be considered from the outset of the design process within Strategic Frameworks, Development Frameworks, Masterplans and Planning Briefs, playing a fundamental role in offering context, identity and connections. Council Officers will work with developers during the masterplanning process to ensure that key linkages of Green Space Network are maintained, and that sufficient provision is made for open space. Masterplans and Planning Briefs should make use of the open space typologies set out in Scottish Government Planning Advice Note 65 wherever possible.

2.11 Maintenance and Management of New Open Spaces

Open space maintenance relates to a set of defined tasks that aim to preserve the condition of spaces. Management of open spaces requires a long-term perspective, with flexibility to respond and adapt to issues or changes such as community needs and priorities, biodiversity, climate change, improvements to access, quality, safety and competing uses. It is therefore important that developers consider the safety, maintenance and management during the planning and design of spaces, and not as an afterthought.

In accordance with Policy 20 e) of NPF4, development proposals that include new or enhanced open spaces and/or green infrastructure will need to make provision for their effective management and maintenance. The planning system can make provision for management and maintenance arrangements through planning conditions or agreements.

Possible arrangements for the management of open spaces include:

- Residents' Association with factoring arrangements, where residents of a new development are responsible for management of the open spaces within the development and appoint a factor to carry out the maintenance;
- Third Party Arrangements with a suitable third party for long term maintenance. Examples of such third parties can include commercial grounds maintenance companies, local amenity organisations and environmental trusts.