

Supplementary Guidance: Big Buildings

1. Status of Supplementary Guidance

This Supplementary Guidance (SG) forms part of the Development Plan and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

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

- Policy D3 – Big Buildings
- Policy D1 – Quality Placemaking and Design
- Policy D4 – Historic Environment

2. Introduction to Topic

Guidance is given to ensure big building proposals, when appropriate, will have a positive impact on the streetscene and surrounding area, and Aberdeen's skyline.

3. General Guidance

Big buildings can be tall buildings and/or bulky buildings. Generally a big building is regarded as one that exceeds the general height of the surrounding built context and/or whose footprint is in excess of the established development pattern of the surrounding area.

Big buildings can have a positive impact on their environment. They can:

- define places;
- provide greater densities and concentrations of use;
- bring greater accessibility to a range of amenities;
- offer greater social intensity;
- create the opportunity for different economies and uses at different times of the day and night; and
- be a focus of interest through their design.

4. Site Analysis and Context

It is crucial that sites are identified as a result of a thorough analysis to understand their context. The design process will respond to the site's opportunities and limitations. Big buildings must set exemplary standards in design because of their high profile and local impact.

Development proposals need to respect and consider:

- Form
- Height
- Landscape
- Changing Seasons
- Permeability
- Mass
- Colour
- Climate
- Noise
- Scale
- Texture
- Connectivity
- Urban Grain

Big buildings must be situated in close proximity to good public transport links to allow for access and an increase in pedestrian movement. Access for site servicing must be considered. Clustering big buildings is encouraged as this can provide a strong sense of place, and signify the use/importance of an area.

Pedestrian permeability in large, high density developments is essential to the integration of big buildings with surrounding areas. Prominent access routes should be included, along with associated high quality public realm improvements.

The most suitable location for big buildings is in the city centre and the immediate surrounding area/City Centre Masterplan Areas. If a big building is proposed beyond these locations, it will be assessed against the criteria within the document. Buildings on employment land, industrial areas and established health or educational campuses will not be assessed against this Supplementary Guidance.

5. Visual Analysis

A Landscape and Visual Impact and Assessment of the proposal must be submitted with any application for planning permission.

- Near, middle and distant views are important considerations to assess how well big buildings will sit within their setting. For all significant views affected – near, middle and distant – images that show the proposed big building in context with the surrounding area shall be presented.
- The distant view is important because a big building will be seen within a wider context of buildings with a foreground and background.

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- At a long distance big buildings are interesting and act as place markers defining areas of the city and it is their proportion, mass, silhouette, skyline composition, juxtaposition and lighting which are important factors.
 - From medium to short distances the lower floors and their architectural detail becomes important because people are brought closer to the details – the materials, the textures, colours, uses, interiors, entrances become fundamental to our appreciation of the building as the importance of height, scale, mass and juxtaposition with other buildings generally diminishes.
 - The detailing of how the building meets the street is extremely important as this provides animation to the street scene.

6. Building Design

6.1 Vertical Emphasis

Big buildings will have well designed proportions and an interesting silhouette to complement the existing streetscapes and the skyline. Large scale buildings will have a vertical appearance to the elevations to minimise their bulk.

6.2 Environmental Issues

The design of big buildings needs to consider the following environmental issues:

- Overshadowing;
- The effect of winds;
- Glare reduction;
- Night time appearance;
- The environment and amenity of those in the vicinity of the building;
- Potential impact on radio, communications and television equipment;
- Contribution to urban heat island effect;
- Impact of illumination;
- Potential impact on bird and animal movements due to height; and,
- Rainwater runoff.

A Lighting Management Plan may be required. Energy efficient technologies and building managements systems will be required.

6.3 A Mix of Uses

Big buildings can be stand-alone or part of a larger complex of buildings with smaller buildings wrapped around the base. A mix of uses is encouraged to ensure ground and lower floors will have active frontages encouraging activities. Top floors and accessible roof terraces are likely to provide good views across the city and useable out-door amenity space. The roof can introduce distinct elements to the building making it more interesting to look at from street level. Consideration of all elevations and their impact on the street scene is fundamental.

6.4 Maintenance and Future Proofing

Designing for long term sustainability, flexibility and changing functions is fundamental. The long-term resource and energy efficiency of big buildings will be enhanced if their design can be adapted over time - this includes flexible internal re-arrangement. All big buildings should have a robust Management Plan to address maintenance issues.

6.5 Materials, Colour, Craftmanship and Detailed Design

Big buildings will be of a high quality design and constructed from high quality materials with low maintenance implications. Good quality detailing is expected, as this adds visual and tactile interest, to a building, reinforcing distinctiveness, attractiveness and quality of a place. Detail between different materials, particularly those brought together at the junctions is fundamental.

Building proposals shall include a Design and Access Statement that sets out architectural and townscape ambitions and demonstrates the achievement of excellent design in sufficient detail to allow a suitability assessment to be made.

6.6 Green Credentials

Developments will adhere to, and go beyond low and zero carbon measures and will move towards low carbon communities. Policy R7: Low and Zero Carbon Buildings and Water Efficiency, and the associated Supplementary Guidance, provide more information. Specific technical solutions such as green roofs and green walls, rain water management are encouraged. These can make a significant contribution to enhancing air quality, reducing carbon footprint, and street/townscape.

Big Buildings Should:

- complement or improve the existing site context, consider the natural topography, scale and height of structures, urban grain, streetscape and built form, open spaces, effect on the skyline, and respect, reinforce and, where applicable create opportunities for enhanced views and vistas and make a positive contribution to the skyline when viewed from all angles from near, middle and distant views, both during the day and at night;
- consider the environment and amenity of those in the vicinity of the building, including micro climate, overshadowing, glare reduction, night time appearance, internal and external lighting;
- at street level, present an active frontage and be comfortable for people and, where feasible, include publicly accessible areas within the building;
- be situated in areas where existing topography, urban scale and transport make them sustainable;
- have a well-designed vertical emphasis;
- be constructed of high quality materials, craftsmanship and have detailing with low maintenance implications;
- provide fully integrated servicing arrangements which are, wherever possible, off street;
- comply with Civil Aviation requirements and those of other telecommunication, television and radio transmission networks;
- be adaptable over time and utilise best sustainable practices; and
- contain a mix of uses rather than rely on a single use to achieve a viable development. It may be appropriate for big buildings to form part of a wider development mix with smaller scale buildings that reduce any dominating impact.