

# The Highland Council Infrastructure and Environment Self-Build Guide



# Introduction

Self build housing has always been an important part of rural house building across Highlands, supporting local contractors, builder merchants and many other businesses. The Council and Scottish Government is keen to encourage greater self-build opportunities and this guide has been prepared to provide an introduction to the planning system and forthcoming changes. **To be kept updated on these future changes, please register at [consult.highland.gov.uk](https://consult.highland.gov.uk)**

Building a bespoke house whilst very rewarding, will be complex and involve many differing requirements and applications. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to seek professional help with the process, and would advise you to contact one of the following professional bodies for assistance:

- [RTPI Directory of Planning Consultants](#)
- [ARB Directory of Architects](#)
- [Directory of Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists](#)

\* All application fees stated relate to the development of a single house as charged in March 2020 and are subject to change. For the latest Planning fees please refer to our website.

10%  
Self-builds  
in Scotland

96%  
Of all  
Planning  
Applications  
approved

# The Site / Plot

Finding a good site takes time and patience, with the first choice being where do you want to live, either Rural or Urban:

A rural (or countryside) plot lies outwith villages, towns and Inverness City. In general, we are supportive of new rural housing providing it supports our existing local communities and results in residents living and working in a high quality sustainable location.

The Council operates a two tier approach towards rural sites, with the areas around Inverness, towns in Easter Ross and Fort William being designated as the '**Hinterland**' and the remaining rural areas known as the '**Wider Countryside**'.

Our planning policies for new housing within the 'Hinterland' are restrictive and limited to a number of exceptions, whilst a more positive approach is taken elsewhere within the 'Wider Countryside'. More information is contained in our [Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance](#).

Within villages, towns and Inverness City (Urban Sites) again we support house sites, providing they offer acceptable amenity and privacy to the proposed house and any adjacent users, are acceptable in design and site layout terms, that infrastructure exists to accommodate the proposal and that they are in accordance with the Local Development Plan.

## Finding a Plot:

<https://www.scotlandselfandcustombuildportal.co.uk/need-plot>

<http://highlandhousingalliance.com/plot-sales>

<https://www.plotfinder.net/>

<https://www.plotbrowser.com/>

<https://plotsearch.buildstore.co.uk/findingland/>

<https://www.primelocation.com/>

<https://www.hspc.co.uk/index.asp>

<https://www.rightmove.co.uk/>

<https://www.purplebricks.co.uk/buyers>

**This list is not exhaustive and other sellers/sites are available**



# Site Layout

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Highland landform is not uniform and extends from seaward coastal areas up to 'wild-land' mountain ranges and to built up urban areas. Therefore, there is not a 'one solution fits all' approach to the identification and acceptance of housing sites.

You should instead identify the main characteristics of the particular location and ensure the following considerations are taken into account:

- The site should respect the traditional settlement pattern of the immediate surroundings and fit / nestle within the landscape using natural features where possible.
- Existing trees on site or close should be safeguarded – The Council has prepared Supplementary Guidance for developments within woodlands.
- Landscaping and bio-diversity impacts are reviewed and protected as part of the scheme.
- The flood risk of the site from sea, river and surface water is considered and respected and built development located outwith areas of flood risk.
- Road access, junction visibility and space within the site for turning and parking conform to the Council standards.
- Infrastructure (Water, Electric and Foul & Surface Water) are sufficient to accommodate the proposal.
- The layout safeguards and protects adjacent users' privacy, amenity and land-use.
- The parcel of ground is of appropriate size to accommodate your proposals and is in proportion to adjacent houses.
- The layout is designed to maximise 'solar gains' and shelter from the prevailing weather.
- In the urban setting, sites should have a 'Road Frontage' and avoid 'Backland Developments'.

# House Design

Building a house creates a permanent feature that will impact on the landscape and character of an area for a very long time.

Therefore, careful consideration should be afforded to the house design and should respect Highland traditional built form, which has evolved over many years. In general the following criteria are considered the main characteristics of this built form:

- The house adopts a simple geometric design;
- It uses a limited palette of natural materials along with plain detailing in a contrasting material or colour;
- Windows have a vertical emphasis and symmetrical appearance.

The use of modern design, materials and techniques are supported, but they are still expected to complement the traditional design, material and setting.

Further guidance on building scale, massing, finishes and detailing can be found in our Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance.



# Pre-Application Advice

**We strongly promote our Pre-application Advice Service for Council advice on your site selection, layout and/or design of your house.**

## **How do I submit a Pre-application advice request?**

They have to be submitted via our dedicated online form, which you need to complete, include a description of your project and as many of the following documents as possible:

- A location plan drawn to a metric scale showing the proposed site in red, with any other land you own/control in blue;
- Details of site road access and any drainage details;
- Sketches or drawings of the proposed site, house and any retained buildings to a metric scale.

## **When will I receive a response?**

Within six weeks of the date of validation, we will issue a formal pre-application advice letter. Due to statutory work pressures this timeframe is a guide only.

## **How do I apply?**

Submission should be made online at [https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning\\_-\\_policies\\_advice\\_and\\_service\\_levels/785/pre-application\\_advice/2](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/2)

**We do not provide informal free advice over the phone, via email or in a letter without going through the above process.**

Allow  
2  
months

£140\*  
Application  
fee

# Planning Application

**The Council has a statutory duty to determine valid planning applications. However, the quality of plans, details and supporting information submitted can greatly improve the speed of decision and even influence the final decision.**

Allow  
2 - 4  
months

## **Type of Application:**

There are two main application types 'Planning Permission in Principle' (PIP) and 'Detailed' / 'Full'. A PIP application typically relates to the acceptability of the location and access issues only. A further application (Matters Specified in Condition) is required to be submitted and approved with the house design and detailed site layout prior to development commencing.

£401\*  
Application fee  
£147\*  
Advert Fee

Whereas a 'Detailed' / 'Full' application includes all aspects of the scheme in a single application and once approved development can be commenced without further delay (subject to satisfying any planning conditions).

## **Developer Contributions:**

Every planning application in Highland is assessed against our [developer contributions guidance](#) and you may be required to make a financial payment towards service and infrastructure provision, known as developer contributions. Before submitting a planning application you can calculate the likely developer contribution costs using the guidance document. Developer contribution costs should be budgeted for when buying land and calculating your project costs.

# Planning Assessment

**The vast majority of planning applications in Highland are approved and the use of this guidance and our other documents will aid your chance of securing approval.**

**96%**  
Planning  
Approvals in  
Highland

## **Planning Assessment:**

Planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan and 'material considerations', with the planning officer making an informed view after undertaking the following:

- visiting the site;
- reviewing your proposal against relevant planning policies and guidance documents;
- checking that you have provided all the required information, we may need to seek further information/details as part of the application process;
- organise consultations with other internal and external services as necessary; and
- taking valid comments/representations into consideration.

Once the officer has completed the full review of your proposal, they will make a recommendation for the decision. In the event of approval, this may be subject to appropriate planning conditions (see page 10 below).

Planning officers determine the majority of applications themselves (delegated decision), but it is sometimes necessary to refer the final decision to the area committee for determination in compliance with our scheme of delegation.

We aim to do all the above within 2 months of receiving your valid application. However sometimes the process can take longer.



# Planning Decision

## **Approval:**

The vast majority of all planning applications in Highland are approved and the use of this guidance and our other planning documents will improve your chance of success.

## **Refusal:**

Ultimately, the Council is required to make a formal decision on the application and in a number of cases the decision will not be in the applicant's favour, resulting in a refusal being issued. If this happens you have a right to appeal against it or ask for a review if:

- you are unhappy with our decision;
- you disagree with the conditions attached to your permission.

Our decision letter will explain how to do this in more detail and you can also view a guide to planning appeals on the Scottish Government website.

You also have the right to appeal if we do not make a decision within the time period set by the Planning Acts.

## **Variations to the Approved Plans:**

We understand that sometimes changes are required to an approved application during the build stage. To cover this we offer a 'Non material variation' system, for which we will charge an administration fee for each variation, currently £121.00.

Further details of the information required to be submitted and the costs can be found on our website ([www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)).



# Post Planning Approval

## **Planning Conditions:**

Most approved planning applications include 'planning conditions'. Conditions typically focus on prior approval of external materials, landscaping and boundary schemes and other aspects of a project too detailed to be included in the planning application. It is important you read and respect them. The Council offers a service to confirm that you have satisfied the conditions, further details (including associated costs) can be found on our website ([www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)).

3  
years to  
commence  
development

## **Living on Site During Construction:**

Self-builders often want to reside on site in temporary accommodation (caravans) during building works. Providing detailed planning approval has been obtained for the house, we consider this to be 'permitted development' during building works and you do not require planning permission for this aspect. We will however require the temporary accommodation to be removed once the house is built.

## **Following Granting of Planning Permission:**

After receiving planning permission we will send you 2 forms to complete at different stages:

- Notice of Initiation of Development (NID) – requires to be completed to inform us when the work on the site will start.
- Notice of Completion of Development (NCD) – requires to be completed once your development is completed to inform us of the completion.

## **Planning Enforcement:**

Should you deviate from the approved plans or breach the planning conditions, the Council has the power to investigate and seek compliance with the planning approval and / or planning acts. Therefore, care should be taken to comply with all approved documents.

# Other Approvals

Planning approval is only one part of the development consent process and before building can commence you may require various other permissions/approvals, including:

- Building Warrant Approval;
- Road Construction Consent;
- Street Naming & Numbering;
- SEPA CAR Licence for private foul water drainage systems.

Further details and advice on these can be found on our website and development should not commence until you have secured all the relevant approvals.

Various pipes, cables and services are buried underground and before you start any excavation, we would recommend that you contact 'Dial Before you Dig' on 08000 231 251 to confirm if any underground services are on site.

**It is your / your agent or developer responsibility to ensure you have all the required permissions in place and you have notified the correct bodies prior to commencing any works.**



# Planning in the Future

The Highland Council and Scottish Government are currently working on an ambitious plan to modernise the planning system, with various changes scheduled to be introduced over the next few years.

Some of these include:

- **Self Build Register** – in the future Scottish planning authorities will have to “prepare and maintain” a list of anyone interested in acquiring land for self building in the authority’s area.
- New **‘Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan’** – we are currently working on a new Local Development Plan covering the Inner Moray Firth area and plan to publish the first stage (Main Issues Report) in Spring 2020 for public consultation.
- Updated version of our **Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance**, which we plan to commence public consultation on in summer 2020.
- Development of a new approach to urban development proposals using a **‘Placemaking Audit’** procedure, which is again planned to be introduced in spring 2020.
- Scottish Government is encouraging local communities to prepare **Local Place Plans**. These plans are envisaged to help empower community involvement at a local level in the planning process.

**To be kept updated on the above and any future Development Planning work, Register at [consult.highland.gov.uk](https://consult.highland.gov.uk)**