

# Rural Housing Supplementary Guidance Stiùireadh Leasachail airson Taigheadas anns an Dùthaich

Adopted December 2021





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**Register at [consult.highland.gov.uk](https://consult.highland.gov.uk) to view, comment and be kept updated on any future Highland Development Plan documents.**

- 1.1** The Council is supportive of new rural housing throughout Highland to safeguard, support and sustain all our communities and to encourage people to live and work in healthy, high quality environment and this guidance has been prepared to provide detailed advice on the appropriate locations for new housing within the Highland countryside. In addition, high standards of siting and design are key to achieving successful developments and this guidance also explains and illustrates how this should be achieved.
- 1.2** This guidance, adopted on 10 December 2021, replaces the "Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance" adopted in 2013 and the Housing in the Countryside Briefing Note 2016. It forms part of the Council's Development Plan and act as the "Housing in the Countryside and Siting and Design Supplementary Guidance", thus making it a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

## Section 1 - Introduction | Ro-ràdh

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- 1.3** This guidance relates to the area covered by the [Highland-wide Local Development Plan \(HwLDP\)](#)<sup>(1)</sup> and the associated adopted and emerging [Area Local Development Plans \(Area LDPs\)](#)<sup>(2)</sup> covering the Highland area and should be read alongside all relevant policies within the entire Development Plan and adopted [Supplementary Guidance](#)<sup>(3)</sup>. For proposals within the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) area please refer to the [CNPA Local Development Plan](#)<sup>(4)</sup> and their associated Planning Guidance.
- 1.4** In the consideration of new rural housing, the Council operates a two tier policy approach, with the areas along the Inner Moray Firth and Fort William being designated as the "Hinterland" (where proposals are considered against Policy 35 of the HwLDP), outwith the Hinterland area, the countryside is defined as the "Wider Countryside" (with proposals considered against Policy 36 of the HwDLP). This document provides detailed guidance where new housing will be acceptable in each area. It also recognises that crofting is a core component of rural life in the Highlands and provides guidance for developments on crofts within settlements, the hinterland and the wider countryside.
- 1.5** The Council strongly welcomes the opportunity to provide pre-application advice before any formal application is submitted. Information about how to do this can be found on the [Council's website](#)<sup>(5)</sup>. It is also recommended that consultation is undertaken with utility providers to ascertain whether your site can be adequately serviced prior to making a formal planning application.

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1 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local\\_and\\_statutory\\_development\\_plans/199/highland-wide\\_local\\_development\\_plan](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan)

2 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local\\_and\\_statutory\\_development\\_plans](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans)

3 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory/52/a\\_to\\_z](https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory/52/a_to_z)

4 <https://www.cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/planning-building/>

5 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning\\_-\\_policies\\_advice\\_and\\_service\\_levels/785/](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/)

- 1.6** This guidance has been prepared under the terms of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2008. During the preparation of this guidance, the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 received Royal Assent and work at a national level is progressing on regulations, guidance and transitional arrangements for Development Plans.
- 1.7** One provision the new Act has brought in is for planning authorities across Scotland to "prepare and maintain" a list of anyone interested in acquiring land for self build across the authority's area. The Council has now published a [webpage](#) <sup>(6)</sup> where interested parties can add their details to the self build register.



### 1.1 Aims and Objectives

- 1.8** The aims of this guidance is to be supportive of appropriate new rural housing throughout rural Highland, whilst minimising the impact on the environment, agriculture, infrastructure and services. To do this it is important that the following objectives are achieved:
- Raise the quality of housing development in the countryside, by addressing issues of location, siting, design and environmental impact;

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6 <https://www.highland.gov.uk/selfbuild>

## Section 1 - Introduction | Ro-ràdh

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- Encourage rural development that supports prosperous and sustainable communities and businesses whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality;
- Ensure that new rural housing does not place an undue strain on public and private services and infrastructure;
- Maintain and grow communities through encouraging suitable development opportunities;
- Protect the landscape, biodiversity habitats and productive agricultural ground.
- In the Hinterland areas:
  - Guide most new housing development to locations within Settlement Development Areas;
  - Protect against an unsustainable growth in car-based commuting and the suburbanisation of the countryside;
  - Provide opportunities for small scale housing development in appropriate countryside locations;
  - Support the appropriate development of the rural economy.
- In the Wider Countryside:
  - Allow the construction of houses outwith settlements, on the proviso they are well sited, designed to fit with the local landscape character and take account of landscape protection;
  - Promote and support housing opportunities in crofting communities whilst balancing environmental considerations.





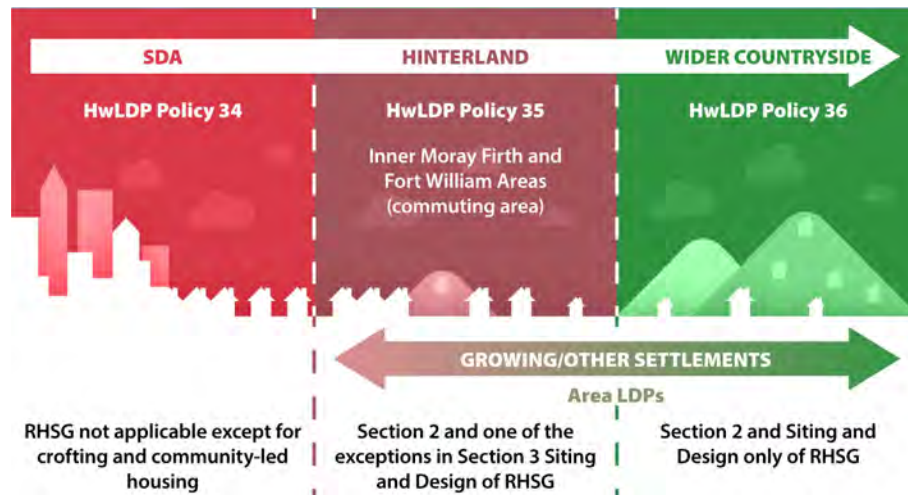
### 1.2 Policy Context

**1.9** As noted previously, the Council operates a two tier rural housing policy approach, with the areas along the Inner Moray Firth and Fort William being designated as the "Hinterland" (where proposals are considered against Policy 35 of the HwLDP), outwith the Hinterland area, the countryside is defined as the "Wider Countryside" (with proposals considered against Policy 36 of the HwDLP). This document provides detailed criteria and guidance where new housing will be acceptable in each area. It also recognises that crofting is a core component of Highland rural life and provides guidance for developments on crofts within settlements, the hinterland and the wider countryside (Policy 47: Safeguarding Inbye/AppORTioned Croft Land and Policy 48: New/Extended Crofting Townships).

**1.10** The Council has published detailed mapping to assist applicants determine within which area their site will fall and therefore which policy criteria is applicable. A copy of the map is available in Appendix 3 - 'Highland Countryside and Settlement Map' and an [Highland Countryside & Settlement Map](#) is available.

## Section 1 - Introduction | Ro-ràdh

**1.11** If a proposal falls within a Settlement Development Area (SDA) or a Growing/Other Settlement as defined in the Area Local Development Plans, the application will be considered against the relevant policies associated with that SDA and not this guidance (with the exception of Crofting and Community-led housing). However, the "Requirements for All Proposals" and "Siting and Design" Section may still be beneficial.



**1.12** Local Place Plans (LPPs) are community led plans providing proposals for the development and use of land. The intention is that LPPs will inform and be informed by the Development Plan. While consideration will be given to the content of an LPP, promotion of housing development within an LPP may not in itself guarantee that any specific individual proposals will be supported.

- 2.1** Choosing the right site is the most important consideration and often makes the difference between a house fitting into the landscape and thus being acceptable or not. New houses are therefore expected to be carefully located to minimise their impact on the environment and where possible result in a net landscaping and biodiversity improvement. The acceptability of the development should be based on the natural constraints of the site, including topography, shelter and solar gain, as well as the proximity to local services and employment opportunities.



**New houses in the Highland countryside are expected to meet the following criteria:**

- Proposals should enhance the setting of any settlement;
- The local character, scenic quality, and wider landscape characteristics of the area are respected;
- Be compatible with the existing pattern of development, adjacent land uses (including working farms, forestry, or other rural industries) and does not undermine the coordinated approach to the strategic future expansion of any settlement;
- Sensitively addresses site constraints including topography; natural, built and cultural heritage features; flood risk;

- Do not impact detrimentally on existing trees and/or woodland which are important to the character, setting, amenity and/or containment of the housing group or surrounding landscape;
- Be compatible with existing servicing and utilities capacities, including demands on private water supplies and the environmental impacts of private drainage systems. Isolated development in very remote/inaccessible areas will be resisted to avoid placing unacceptable pressure on limited infrastructure and services, including school bus provision and refuse collection;
- Protects public views over open water;
- Demonstrates sustainable and/or ultra-low energy & impact design principles, in compliance with Section 6 - 'Siting and Design | Suidheachadh is Dealbhadh'; and
- Provides a safe and secure access to the public road network in accordance with the Council's [Access to Single Houses and Small Housing Developments Supplementary Guidance](#)<sup>(7)</sup>; any required road and junction improvements must be achievable by the applicant.

Where rural areas of the Highlands come under significant pressure from the cumulative impact of housing development, the Council will prepare a capacity assessment to determine any potential for further rural housing growth within that area.

7 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/2346/access\\_to\\_single\\_houses\\_and\\_small\\_housing\\_developments](https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/2346/access_to_single_houses_and_small_housing_developments)

- 3.1** Scottish Planning Policy and the HwLDP recognise the importance of protecting rural areas against the unsustainable growth in car based commuting and preventing the suburbansiation of the countryside. The Moray Firth and wider Fort William areas experience the greatest pressure of this, being within easy commuting distance to Highland's many settlements. To control this, a more managed approach to housing development is required, but one which still acknowledges that there is still potential for small scale housing development, based around existing housing groups, renovation and redevelopment of existing buildings and housing linked to rural business enterprises.
- 3.2** Hinterland boundaries were established under the area local development plans, and any future revisions or amendments to the their boundaries are considered as part of the relevant LDP review and are not considered as part of this supplementary guidance.

### 3.1 Housing Groups | Buidhnean Taigheadais

- 3.3** The Council supports new houses within existing housing groups provided proposals are consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance, and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.
- 3.4** "Housing group" is defined as:
- at least 3 buildings (2 of which must already be houses) that are physically detached from each other but that have a perceptible relationship with each other and share a well-defined, cohesive character.
- 3.5** "Building" means:
- a house;
  - a non-residential building granted permission before April 2012 and defined as being above ground, of a scale similar to a traditional rural house, with the majority of the original walls to wallhead height and with a roof or remains of a roof.

### 3.6 “Building” **does not** include:

- an agricultural or forestry building permitted under prior notification/prior approval;
- a building whose use is restricted to holiday accommodation by planning condition/obligation or by design;
- a self-contained annex or “granny” flat (even if physically separate from the “parent” house);
- a domestic outbuilding or garage;
- a non-residential building granted permission after April 2012.

**3.7** If you are unsure whether your proposal is within a housing group, the Council strongly recommends its pre-application advice. Information about how to submit a pre-application request can be found on the [Council's website](#)<sup>(8)</sup>.

**3.8** If your proposal is within a housing group, the Council will assess the capacity and suitability for new housing development within the group. To do this the Council will consider the existing form, character and cohesiveness of the group and the level of containment provided by natural enclosure or established man-made boundaries.

#### **The Council’s criteria for the acceptable expansion of a housing group are:**

The proposed new house(s) **will**:

- Constitute in-fill or rounding-off of the group into a readily definable development site;  
**and**
- Have a positive relationship with the existing group by enhancing the cohesiveness and perceptible relationship of the buildings in the group;

8 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning\\_-\\_policies\\_advice\\_and\\_service\\_levels/785/pre-application\\_advice](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice)

- Reflects the character, spacing, scale and amenity of the buildings in the group (i.e. the new house will appear as if it was always part of the group);
- For multiple house proposals, schemes should include a mix of type, tenure and designs to provide an inclusive addition to the existing housing group.

The proposed new house(s) **must not:**

- Create uncharacteristic ribbon or linear development;
- Create an inappropriate intrusion into a previously undeveloped field or open land;
- Overwhelm the landscape setting.

No housing group will be permitted to increase in size by more than 100% of the number of houses built, under construction or with an extant planning permission as at 3 August 2011.

### Design Rules for Housing Groups

#### Ribbon and Linear Development





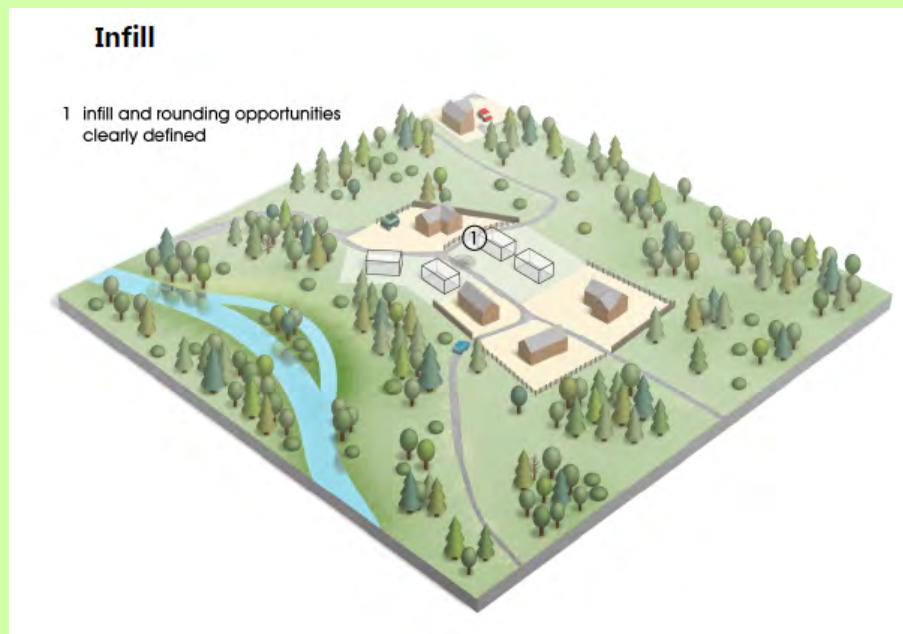
An existing feature of the countryside is small groups of houses built along road frontages. These are generally well established and consist of no more than two or three houses.

Adding to this linear form, becomes a issue when these small groups are extended along a road or landscape feature, with the result being an accumulation of houses dominating otherwise rural views and leading to sub-urbanisation and an erosion of the rural character.

Unplanned development of this type, with no natural finish point and unrelated to land use or to a traditional township pattern will not be supported.

There are areas where this form of development does represent the traditional development pattern. For example crofting townships often exhibit linear forms of settlement pattern that are traditional to the area. Over-development and coalescence of adjacent townships will not generally be supported.

### Infill Housing Sites



Within a housing group the layout of the existing buildings often creates sites which may be appropriate for infill development. This will generally be supported, providing the wider siting and design criteria is adopted in the layout and design.



### 3.2 Garden Ground | Talamh Gàrraidh

**3.9** The Council will support additional houses within existing garden ground, provided proposals are consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile's, the following guidance, and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

**3.10** "Garden ground" is defined as:

- Land maintained as a domestic garden associated with an existing dwelling house. The extent of the land is clearly defined by existing boundary treatments (e.g. hedge, fence, wall etc) and ground management of the land is evident. Domestic structures (e.g. sheds, summer houses, decked seating areas etc), with paths or well-trodden routes to these structures indicating use of the land ancillary to the dwelling house, will also be defined as garden ground.

**3.11** "Garden ground" **does not** include:

- land physically separate from a dwelling house;
- ground accommodating horses/non-domestic livestock/associated animal housing;
- ground accommodating commercial polytunnels;
- fields (whether in use for agricultural purposes or not);
- woodlands/felled woodland;
- land occupied by temporary structures (e.g. moveable play equipment, pegged out gazebos etc) unless it meets the definition above.

### The Council's criteria for development within garden ground are:

- The existing garden ground must be of an adequate size to accommodate the parent property and the proposed new house (N.B. the garden to house ratio in a rural location is generally more generous than in an urban location);
- The proposed new house respects the scale, proportions, building line and amenity of the parent property and relate to the pattern of existing development in the surrounding area;
- Existing trees or mature landscaping that has a positive amenity and/or biodiversity impact are retained;
- All infrastructure/services should be contained within the plot associated with the proposed new house. Where this is not possible the applicant should ensure that appropriate legal agreements are in place before planning permission is granted.

### 3.3 Conversion, Reuse and Replacement of Traditional Buildings

#### | Ath-chleachdadh Thogalaichean Atharraichte agus Cur an Àite Thogalaichean Traidiseanta

**3.12** In May 2019, the Highland Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency, which requires the Council to prioritise the protection of our finite resources. This includes protecting, preserving and reusing the considerable embodied energy contained within the derelict and underused building stock and vacant derelict land across the Highlands. As such, the Council prioritises the conversion and reuse of existing traditional buildings over their replacement.

**3.13** In addition, this section of the guidance should be read alongside the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 (as amended) in relation to the permitted development rights associated with the conversion of agricultural and forestry buildings.

**3.14** The conversion and reuse of traditional buildings will be supported provided proposals are consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance, and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

**The Council's criteria for supporting conversion and reuse are:**

- The building being substantially complete and meeting one of Appendix 1 - 'Stages of Rural Building Dereliction' and adherence with 'Design advice for conversion and reuse'.
- The building is of a scale that is commensurate with a habitable building and the conversion and reuse would maintain or enhance the form, character or architectural features, design and setting of the existing building.
- New extension(s) should be high quality, and reflect the architectural expression of their own time, whilst concurrently being sympathetic to the scale, massing, architectural style and finishes of the existing building.
- For buildings included on the list of Scotland's buildings of special historical or architectural interest register (a listed building), applications will also be considered against Policy 57: Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage.



### Design advice for conversion and reuse

1. Retain, preserve and enhance the maximum fabric of the existing building and its original character.
2. Make use of existing openings whenever possible and only add new opening sensitively to respect the built form.
3. Retain existing roof form.
4. New extensions to be sympathetic to the scale, massing and architectural style and finishes of the existing building.
5. New openings and extensions should be distinguishable from the original building.
6. Special care should be taken with buildings of obvious architectural distinction (churches, mills, steadings, schools and listed buildings).
7. Existing features such as lades, water wheels, louvered windows, ventilator shots, architectural details should be retained where possible.
8. The proposal complies with the detailed guidance in Section 6 - 'Siting and Design | Suidheachadh is Dealbhadh'.

Temporary buildings such as Dutch Barns and modern buildings less than 5 year old are not considered suitable for reuse or replacement.

A site analysis should also be undertaken to establish boundaries, existing landscape shelter belts and areas used to store or dispose of waste/machinery.

### **The Council's criteria for complete demolition and replacement of non-residential buildings**

Where a traditional building has deteriorated to such an extent that it is incapable of conversion or renovation, the Council will support its replacement where:

- The building/s meets one of Appendix 1 - 'Stages of Rural Building Dereliction';
- A Structural Report from a suitably qualified professional is submitted, with the application to demonstrate that conversion or rehabilitation cannot be achieved and the reasons why;
- The replacement respects the form and scale of the original building and/or the character of the locality;
- Existing site contours, landscaping, boundaries and access points are retained and utilised where appropriate;
- The replacement results in a significant improved building design, accommodation provision and energy performance. With the use of modern methods of construction, sustainable design and passive housing standards being strongly supported;
- The new house is within the curtilage of the original building, and only relocated within on the site where benefits to the landscape setting, improved biodiversity or environmental constraints are achieved;
- The duntakings from the original building, especially natural stone and slate, are reused as part of the overall development; and

- Statutory protected buildings and structures will normally have to be retained and additionally meet the requirements of Highland-wide Local Development Plan Policy 57 (Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage).

### **Design advice for demolition and replacement**

Where an existing building has deteriorated to a degree that it is incapable of renovation or conversion in line with the above policy criteria, its replacement may be acceptable. It should not however, be assumed that a dwelling of a size significantly larger than the original building it is replacing would automatically be accepted, nor a replacement house on a site located away from the footprint of the former building will be readily accepted. The following basic siting rules should be followed:

1. The replacement should be of a form and scale relative to the original building.
2. The replacement should not be excessive when compared to the original building.
3. The use of existing site features, boundaries and access points should be adopted.
4. Reuse of derelict building materials on site where possible.
5. The new house should be sited to maximise solar gains and protection from the prevalent weather.
6. The use of contemporary design, construction methods and materials is encouraged.
7. Remaining structures and walls could be incorporated into the new design.
8. The proposal should also comply with the detailed guidance within Section 6 - 'Siting and Design | Suidheachadh is Dealbhadh' of this document.

Given the level of detail and information required for a conversion or a replacement house to be acceptable, applicants are encouraged to submit detailed planning applications.

### 3.4 Replacement of an Existing House | Cur an Àite Taigh Làithreach

**3.15** The replacement of a house which is no longer fit for modern living, will be supported providing proposals are consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance; and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

#### **The Council's criteria for the replacement of an existing house**

- The existing house is substantially complete, is currently, or has previously been used as permanent residence and meets the Appendix 1 - 'Stages of Rural Building Dereliction';
- The building is not included on the list of Scotland's buildings of special historical or architectural interest register (a listed building), of local architectural or historic merit, or within a conservation area;
- Robust evidence is provided as to why the house is no longer fit for modern living and requires wholesale demolition and replacement, rather than reuse and extension. Financial costs alone will not be an acceptable justification.
- The replacement house must result in a significant improved building design, accommodation provision and energy performance. With the use of modern methods of construction, sustainable design and passive housing standards being strongly supported;
- The new house must be within the curtilage of the original house, and only relocated within the site where benefits to the landscape setting, improved biodiversity or environmental constraints are achieved;
- The resultant footprint does not result in an excessive increase to that of the original house which is detrimental to the wider landscape setting; and
- The existing house is demolished as part of the development.

## Section 3 - Housing Opportunities in Hinterland Areas | Cothroman Taigheadais taobh a-staigh na Cùl-tìre

**3.16** Where a habitable house is damaged or destroyed beyond repair by an external factor (i.e. fire or flood), its replacement will generally be supported. The replacement house would be expected to meet the requirements outlined in the above criteria.



### Design advice for replacement of an existing house

The following basic siting rules should be followed:

1. The replacement house should be of a form and scale relative to its original;
2. The use of existing site features, boundaries and access points should be used where appropriate;
3. The new house should be sited to maximise solar gain, protection from the prevalent weather; and avoiding areas of overshadowing.

## 3.5 Previously Developed Land | Talamh a Chaidh a Leasachadh Roimhe

**3.17** The Council supports the redevelopment of vacant and derelict land where a return to a natural state is not readily achievable and where a net environmental benefit can be achieved through redevelopment. Any redevelopment must be consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.



**3.18** A number of vacant and derelict sites have little or no impact on the visual or environmental amenity of the area and can be left to return to a natural state over time; such sites are unlikely to be supported for development.

**3.19** "Previously Developed Land" means;

- vacant or derelict land;
- land occupied by redundant or unused buildings.

### **The Council's criteria for the redevelopment of Previously Developed Land**

- The former use(s) have ceased and the land or building is no longer fit for its original purpose;
- The land has been significantly degraded by a former activity to the point where it cannot be left to naturalise without remediation or the land can no longer be used productively without significant investment;
- Reuse or demolition of any traditional buildings on the site meet the requirements of 3.3 'Conversion, Reuse and Replacement of Traditional Buildings | Ath-chleachdadh Thogalaichean Atharraichte agus Cur an Àite Thogalaichean Traidiseanta' of this guidance.
- Where the site includes redundant or unused non-traditional buildings these must warrant redevelopment by virtue of their construction. Buildings intended to have a limited lifespan (modern agricultural sheds, temporary wooden buildings and bale stores) are unlikely to be considered as brownfield sites suitable for redevelopment;
- The nature, scale and appearance of the proposal is compatible with the site, wider landscape and any adjacent land uses;
- Net environmental improvements to the landscape setting, improved biodiversity and environmental constraints through high quality redevelopment consistent with Section 6 - 'Siting and Design | Suidheachadh is Dealbhadh' of this guidance are achieved;

- The replacement buildings are of an exceptionally high building design, accommodation provision and energy performance. With the use of modern methods of construction, sustainable design and passive housing standards being strongly supported;
- Redevelopment is confined to the immediate curtilage of the site; and
- Where appropriate, provision of a contaminated land investigation and remediation plans are provided and outcomes respected, including the consideration of appropriate infrastructure and building protection.

### 3.6 Affordable Housing | Taigheadas Neo-chosgail

**3.20** The Council supports the provision of rural affordable housing, to encourage the retention and regrowth of rural communities with local inhabitants and workers providing it is consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance; and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

**3.21** "Affordable Housing" is defined as housing provided by;

- A Registered Social Landlord;
- Approved private rented accommodation, managed and maintained to standards and cost equivalent to a Registered Social Landlord;
- Low Cost Owner Occupation delivered by shared ownership, shared equity, subsidised home ownership, discounted serviced plots or house sales, or unsubsidised low cost home ownership or serviced plots.

#### **The Council's criteria for supporting new rural affordable housing**

- It meets a demonstrable local affordable housing need, as identified by the Council or one of our partner agencies; and
- The Site Selection Sequential Approach has been followed and has not identified opportunities for affordable housing development within nearby settlements.

- The new house(s) are of an exceptionally high quality building design and energy performance standard. With the use of modern methods of construction, sustainable design and passive housing standards being strongly supported.

**3.22** Any proposals justified under this part of the guidance must be for entirely affordable housing. Any element of open market housing is unlikely to be supported.

### **3.7 Housing to Support an Existing or New Rural Business | Taigheadas airson Taic a Chur ri Gnothachas Dùthchail Ùr no Làithreach**

**3.23** The Council supports housing required for expanding and new rural businesses providing it is consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance; and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

#### **The Council's criteria for supporting housing related to an existing or new rural business**

##### **The applicant is required to demonstrate that:**

- The house is essential for the direct operational requirement of the existing or new rural business, which is itself appropriate to that rural location;
- The house is for a worker predominantly employed in the enterprise and the presence of that worker on-site is essential to the efficient operation of the enterprise.
- There is no suitable existing house or traditional building capable of residential conversion and no appropriate sites within nearby housing groups;
- The house site has been selected in accordance with the Site Selection Sequential Approach.

**3.24** Where a house is proposed for an existing or new rural business, the onus will be upon the Applicant to demonstrate compliance with the above criteria through the submission of robust supporting information, such as an Operational Needs Assessment and/or Business Plan. These documents will be reviewed by the Council and/or the Council's appointed consultants and further information may be sought as a result of this review. Any commercially sensitive information provided should be contained in a separate annex to allow for ease of redaction.

**3.25** If the Council is not satisfied with the viability of the business set out in the supporting information, a new house may not be supported. In this instance, the Council will indicate whether it would support an application for a non-permanent form of housing for a limited period (up to a maximum of five years).

**3.26** The supporting information shall include:

1. Description of the current business (where applicable) including:
  - a. Operations - a description of the current operations including labour requirement;
  - b. Labour requirement - the number of current workers/where they reside (e.g. on-site, rural off-site, urban off-site);
  - c. Size of landholding - a map identifying the extent of the land holding and tenure/s of the land; to be included in the labour calculation evidence must be provided that the landholding is owned by the applicant or, if let, a formal tenancy agreement is in place for minimum period of five years; and
  - d. Infrastructure - a description of infrastructure that supports the business (e.g. buildings and equipment);
2. Description of the new business/changes to the existing business including:
  - a. Operations - a description of the proposed operations;

- b. Labour requirement a calculation of the labour requirement for the expanded/new business. A significant proportion of the labour requirement must necessitate a full-time on-site presence.
- c. Size of landholding - as above. Identify any additional land required and whether this has been acquired/let as per 1 above.
- d. Infrastructure - a description of any additional infrastructure required; and
- e. A justification in support of the new house being in a rural location.
- f. Information regarding who will reside in the house, where they reside currently (on-site, rural off-site, urban off-site) and why their current accommodation is unsuitable;
- g. A detailed financial report outlining the costs associated with establishing/developing the business and the predicted profit and loss forecasts for operating the business for 5 years;
- h. Confirmation as to how the business shall be funded (including evidence as to how it will be financially viable and sustainable for a period of at least 5 years. If secured lending for the business is proposed, evidence should be provided to demonstrate that this has been approved, will be sufficient to establish the business and can be repaid.

**3.27** For agricultural businesses, the latest edition of the SAC Farm Management Handbook should be referenced to calculate labour requirements for livestock and/or crops that are existing and/or proposed and to demonstrate that the rural activity is commensurate with the size and capability of the land available. A significant proportion of the labour requirement must necessitate a full-time on-site presence. If the labour calculations fall short of one annual labour unit then justification must be provided as to why a full-time on-site presence is essential.

**3.28** "Site Selection Sequential Approach" means:

1. In areas within close proximity to large centres of population (e.g. up to a 5 minute drive) details should be provided to demonstrate why existing housing options have been discounted as unsuitable;
2. Details of any historic and extant planning approvals for housing on the applicant land holding;
3. There are no buildings or brownfield sites on the land holding which lend themselves to conversion or redevelopment;
4. There are no opportunities for infill or rounding off of existing housing groups and/or farm buildings;
5. A suitable site is selected based on limiting landscape and visual impact and taking into account amenity considerations.

**3.29** If the Council considers a sequentially preferable site is available or if there are historic approvals for new housing (including on the grounds of a rural business justification) on the land holding any new application is unlikely to be supported.

### **Tourism Accommodation in the Countryside**

**3.30** The Council recognises the significant contribution that the tourism sector makes to the Highland economy and is supportive of proposals which result in increased length of visitor stay/spend and promotes a wider spread of visitors, provided it is consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riathanasan airson Molaidhean uile' the guidance below; and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan including siting and design considerations.

**3.31** "Tourism Accommodation" is defined as:

- A premises which is generally unsuitable for permanent residential use, by the virtue of its design, site layout, plot separation and the shared use of communal facilities (including, laundry facilities, parking and refuse collection points).

- A building which has its permitted development rights removed or planning conditions attached restricting its permanent habitation or the creation of private garden grounds.

**3.32** Should the proposed accommodation be suitable for permanent residential occupation, it will be treated as a residential house and will need to meet one of the other criteria for housing within the hinterland area to be supported.

### **The Council's criteria to support small scale tourist accommodation developments in the countryside**

- The premises complies with the preceding Tourist Accommodation definition;
- Evidence is provided to demonstrate how the business is to be funded and how it will be financially viable and sustainable for a period of at least 5 years;
- A Site Selection Report (incorporating a plan of the applicant's land holding) demonstrates that the site has been selected in accordance with the Site Selection Sequential Approach.

The Council's criteria to support Manager/staff accommodation related to larger scale tourist accommodation developments are:

- Demonstrate that manager/staff accommodation is essential;
- The house is located on-site or in very close proximity to the tourist accommodation;
- A Site Selection Report demonstrates that the Site Selection Sequential Approach has been followed.

**3.33** Where tourism accommodation is supported, planning conditions will be used to ensure it is not used as a permanent dwelling and/or the associated tourism accommodation is completed prior to the manager/staff accommodation house being occupied.

### 3.8 Housing to Support a Retiring Land Manager | Taigheadas airson taic a chur ri Manaidsear Fearainn a' leigeil dhiubh an dreuchd

**3.34** The Council will support a new house for a retiring farmer, their spouse; or for a person retiring from a rural business ("The Land Manager"), on the proviso that the house is on land managed by them for at least the previous ten years and providing it is consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance, and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

#### **The Council's criteria for supporting a new house for a retiring Land Manager**

- Written evidence is submitted from a recognised professional, confirming that the Land Manager has managed the land for a period of at least ten years and intends to retire;
- Demonstrate that an ongoing full time on site presence is required to continue the operation of the existing business;
- Details of what will happen to the Land Manager's existing residential accommodation; and
- A Site Selection Report demonstrates that the Site Selection Sequential Approach has been followed.

**3.35** The Council will only support one application for a house for a retiring Land Manager on a land holding within the Local Development Plan period. Given the reason for the house, it is expected that a detailed application shall be submitted.





- 4.1** Across much of Highlands, our rural communities have suffered depopulation brought about by the loss of housing affordable available for local workers and residents. In addition, many of these communities have been abandoned by the volume housebuilders and are instead served by a mix of smaller housebuilders and an emerging trend of community housing schemes.
- 4.2** Community housing schemes include a diverse range of solutions including; co-housing schemes, community-led schemes and rural groupings. These types of developments often deliver a welcome mix of house designs and provide accommodation for a range of occupants across a range of income thresholds. Community led schemes also have the ability to introduce burdens on the property titles to retain the homes in local ownership, an option currently unavailable to the planning authority and one which the Council is keen to support. As such, providing proposals are consistent with Section 2 - 'Requirements for all Proposals | Riatanasan airson Molaidhean uile', the following guidance, and the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan community-led housing schemes will generally be supported.
- 4.3** Within Growing Settlements

### **The Council's criteria for supporting Community-Led Housing within Growing Settlements**

- The Community Housing Trust proposing the scheme will be required to demonstrate that they have a robust and sustainable business model in place recognised by an appropriate body, which includes future succession planning/long-term management.
- Community housing schemes should include a mixed tenure of owner occupation, shared ownership, mid-market and social rent;

- The new houses are of an exceptionally high-quality building design and energy performance standard. With the use of 'modern methods of construction', sustainable design and passive housing standards being strongly supported;
- At least 75% of the properties to include burdens on the property titles to retain the homes in local ownership and be recognised as affordable as per the definition for affordable housing in 3.6 'Affordable Housing | Taigheadas Neo-chosgail'.

### Wider Countryside

#### **The Council's criteria for supporting Community-Led Housing within the Wider Countryside**

- Satisfies the requirements for Community-Led Housing in Growing Settlements;
- Proposal assessed with regards to the extent they will help support communities in maintaining their population and services by helping to re-populate communities and strengthen services in compliance with Policy 36 of the HwLDP.

### Hinterland

#### **The Council's criteria for supporting Community-Led Housing within the Hinterland**

- Satisfies the requirements for Community-Led Housing in Growing Settlements and the Wider Countryside;
- It meets a demonstrable local affordable housing need, as identified by the Council or one of our partner agencies (including Communities Housing Trust);
- A Site Selection Sequential Approach has been followed, which has not identified opportunities for community housing development within nearby SDAs or Growing Settlements.

## Section 4 - Community-Led Housing | Taigheadas fo Stiùir Coimhearsnachd

- All the properties must include burdens on the property titles to retain the homes in local ownership and be recognised as affordable as per the definition for affordable housing in 3.6 'Affordable Housing | Taigheadas Neo-chosgail'.

**4.4** Community Crofting (including Woodland Crofts) schemes will also be required to conform to the criteria outlined in the Section 5 - 'Housing to Support Crofting | Taigheadas airson Taic a Chur ri Croitearachd'.



- 5.1** Crofting is an integral part of life and the landscape of Highland. It can deliver a wealth of benefits to crofters and wider communities. For these reasons the Council recognises that there is a genuine need to promote and support crofting communities and activities (including the creation of Woodland Crofts). However, we must also ensure that crofting-related development does not conflict with the Council's other policies and objectives or result in unsustainable development, particularly in our hinterland areas.
- 5.2** The identification of an appropriate location for a new croft house must examine traditional crofting related buildings across the wider landscape setting. Infill development may not be appropriate where this detracts from the traditional dispersed nature of development. Some crofting settlements are characteristically linear in pattern and a linear extension may be appropriate to support the continuance of this form of development. We will support proposals that maintain the the local traditional pattern of croft development and are not prejudicial to the running of the crofts; result in the loss of locally important croft land; or impede the use of remaining croft land by virtue of its location. The potential for new housing related to crofting must also meet the criteria set out in HwLDP Policy 47: Safeguarding Inbye/Apportioned Croftland, where appropriate Policy 48: New/Extended Crofting Townships, and all other relevant policies.

### **Within Settlement Development Areas and Growing Settlements**

- 5.3** We appreciate that many of our more rural settlements may contain crofts and crofting land within their boundaries which form a key part of the settlement pattern and character. While we support proposals in these settlements we will also judge them in terms of how compatible they are with the existing pattern of development and landscape character and how they conform with existing land uses.

The Council's criteria for supporting a new (croft) house within an SDA are set out in Policy 34 of the HwLDP and within a Growing Settlement are set out within Policy 3 of the relevant Area LDP.

### Wider Countryside

- 5.4** Proposals should maintain the local traditional pattern of croft development; and, where possible, avoid siting on the better part of a croft in terms of its agricultural value or impeding the use of the remaining croft land by virtue of its location.

The Council's criteria for supporting a new croft house within the Wider Countryside are set out in HwLDP Policy 36.

### Hinterland Areas

- 5.5** The potential for new housing relate to crofting is restricted to new crofting townships, or significant extensions to existing crofting townships and meet the criteria set out in HwLDP Policy 48: New/Extended Crofting Townships. Proposals for single crofts/croft houses will be considered in line with the criteria for Housing to Support an Existing or New Rural Business in 3.7 'Housing to Support an Existing or New Rural Business | Taigheadas airson Taic a Chur ri Gnothachas Dùthchail Ùr no Làithreach'.
- 5.6** For the avoidance of doubt, proposals for new houses on croft land that are not related to crofting will require to meet with at least one of the other exceptions outlined and are not prejudicial to the running of the crofts; result in the loss of locally important croft land; or impede the use of remaining croft land by virtue of its location.

### 5.7 Supporting Information

**The following information must be submitted with a formal application for a croft house or a house on croft land:**

- Croft registration information including: reference number(s); size of croft; access to common grazing or woodland;

- Information on the croft land quality and how this has influenced the siting of the proposed house;
- A Business Plan and/or a Woodland Management Plan where relevant;
- A Masterplan for the entire development area for new or significantly extended crofting townships.

**5.8** Community Crofting (including Woodland Crofts) schemes will also be required to conform to the criteria outlined in the Section 4 - 'Community-Led Housing | Taigheadas fo Stiùir Coimhearsnachd'.

### 5.1 Woodland Crofts | Croitean Coille

**5.9** The establishment of Woodland Crofts is an emerging land-use across Highlands and one the Council is keen to support.

**The following information must be submitted with a formal planning application for the creation of a new Woodland Croft Township:**

- Business Plan, setting out how the Community will control/manage the woodland crofts (including intended tenancy conditions). There will be no expectation of a full time income from operating the croft.
- Masterplan for the entire development area, outlining the siting, density and layout and associated infrastructure and services.
- Woodland Management Plan to UK Forestry Standard (covering the whole area, not individual crofts).
- Ecological Reports (Birds, Squirrels, Bats and Badgers).

**5.10** If large areas of existing woodlands are to be felled an EIA may be required and further advice from the Council Planning Service should be sought.



### 6.1 Introduction

**6.1** The erection of a new house within the countryside is a permanent feature that will affect the landscape and character well beyond the life of the developer. The Council therefore considers that this offers an opportunity to achieve exceptional innovative and ecologically sustainable design, and good siting and finish for all new residential developments. This guidance has not been developed to provide a list of acceptable designs or locations, nor will the Council expect every criteria to be satisfied; instead it provides a guide of important considerations which should be studied and utilised as necessary to achieve a fitting development and is relevant to all rural housing regardless of location.

**6.2** The guidance is split into four categories:

1. Site Selection - Choosing the right site in the landscape, often dictates the success of the project.
2. Site Layout - The placing of the built development, infrastructure and landscaping within the chosen site.
3. Design Material Selection - The individual design characteristics of the buildings.
4. Building Detailing - The finer design aspect which can improve the overall building design.

### 6.2 Site Selection

**6.3** Finding a good site takes time, patience and a great deal of consideration. The guidance below provides advice to assist applicants in choosing the right site, the advice is relevant to both houses located in the hinterland and wider countryside areas of Highland.

**6.4** Highland landform is not uniform and extends from seaward coastal areas right up to wild-land mountain ranges, corollary there is not a "one solution fits all" approach to the identification of rural housing sites. Applicants should instead identify the main characteristics of the particular location and ensure the following considerations are taken into account:

### **Elevated or Exposed sites:**

**6.5** Modern building techniques allow houses to be built on almost any site, regardless of the surrounding physical landscape. This allows houses to be built on skyline locations or artificially elevated sites, resulting in the natural contours of the landscape being irrelevant to the construction of the building and thus often making them unduly prominent. Significant under-building further increases the visible mass of a building, contributing to its dominating detrimental effect.

**6.6** Access and Servicing:

**6.7** The provision of road access to and within the site and areas for car turning and parking often involves levelling, cutting and/or mounding, which can have as much impact as the house itself and, as such, full details should be included.

### **Biodiversity Impacts:**

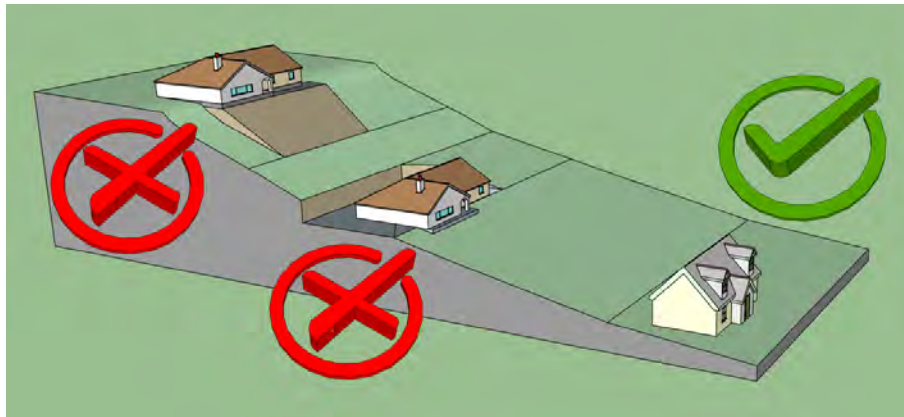
**6.8** Rural sites provide feeding and living habitats for a large number of wildlife species and important habitats for bio-diversity assets, the majority of which are offered a degree of protection under UK and European legislation. A full landscape and habitat impact review should be undertaken at an early stage to ascertain any likely negative impacts on biodiversity interests and mitigation proposed.

### **Site Prominence:**

**6.9** Housing positioned adjacent to main roads and tourist routes will be highly visible and therefore careful consideration need to be given to these types of sites. Sites in open fields devoid of any landscaping either within or bordering the site will lack natural enclosure and often results in obtrusive developments.

### Development on Sloping Ground:

**6.10** Housing on sloping ground should carefully consider the most appropriate location for the new house, to avoid the need for significant earthworks, whether mounding or cutting. The use of split levels designs can avoid the need for engineered solutions.



**Picture 6.1 Building on a Slope**

#### Design Rules for Building on a Slope:

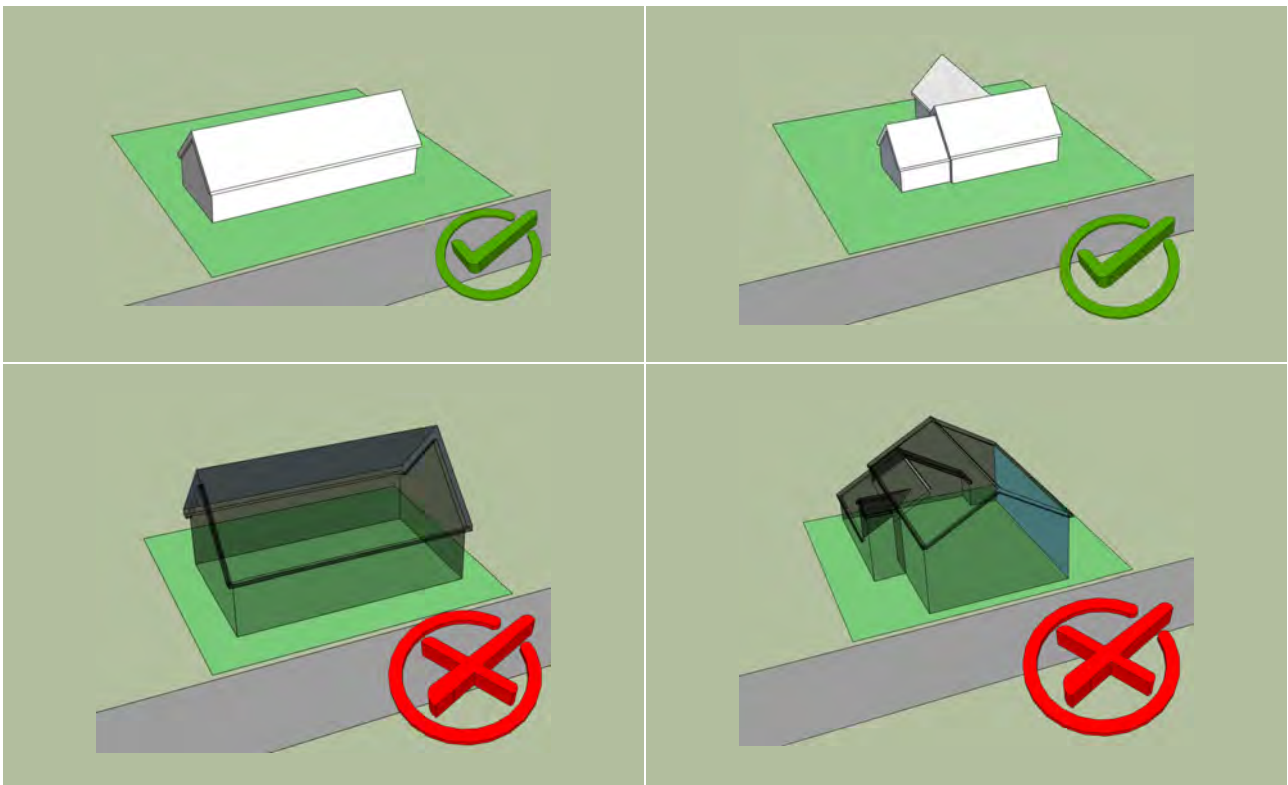
1. Avoid building on a skyline;
2. Avoid engineered platforms or underbuilding to form a level site;
3. Avoid forming excessive cuts into the landscape;
4. Avoid areas at risk of flooding;
5. Seek a naturally flat site;
6. Orientate the buildings with the contours to integrate the building into the setting;
7. Use split level buildings to work with the slope; and
8. Retain existing landscape for enclosure and backdrop.

### 6.3 Site Layout

**6.11** Having selected the right site, it is then important to consider the most appropriate location to position the house on the parcel of ground, its orientation to both neighbouring uses and environmental constraints, the protection of existing landscaping and boundaries and the point of access/egress onto the site.

#### Plot Size

**6.12** Rural buildings have traditionally enjoyed spacious grounds in comparison with urban sites. However, modern accommodation needs, construction techniques and increased wealth, has resulted in rural housing increasing in size over the traditional scale of rural properties. Nevertheless, the spirit of spacious grounds should be upheld to retain the very character of the countryside. The plot size should also respect that of any residential neighbours and complement the local house to plot ratio.



### Using Landform and Environmental Features

**6.13** The prevailing wind is from the south-west across much of Highlands and therefore developments on northern slopes often results in colder and damp sites which lack sunlight in the winter months. Low lying hollows in rural landscapes can be frost hollows and ground at the base of a slope adjacent to watercourses can be marshy, both of which results in cold unattractive sites, which are difficult to develop. Southerly facing sites benefit from solar gains and deciduous tree crops to the south of the house offers shelter from the weather in the winter and shading in the summer.

### Impact on Neighbouring Properties

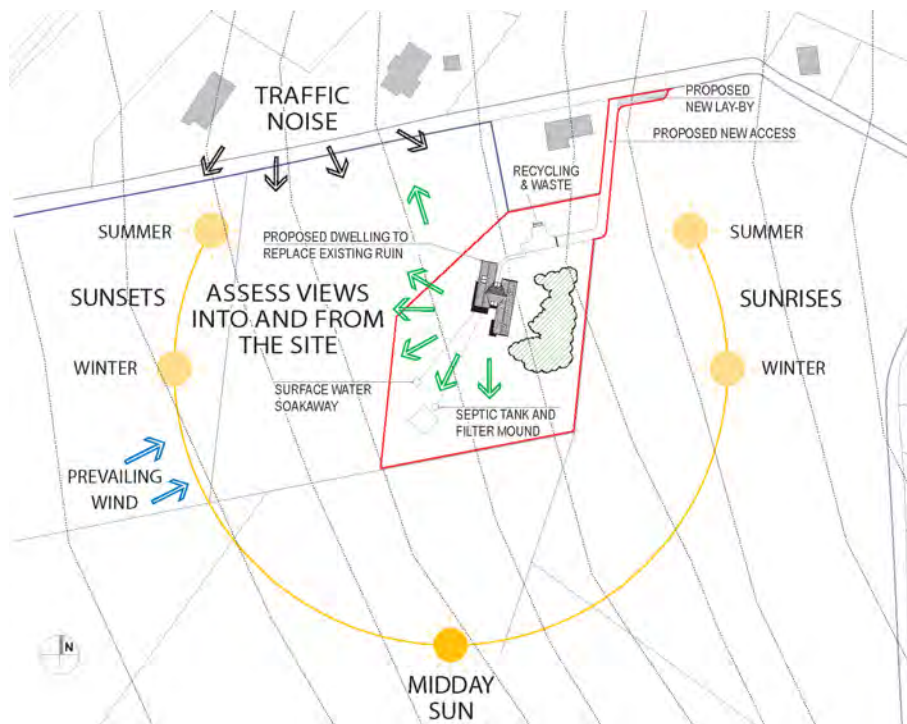
**6.14** Proposals adjacent to or in close proximity to existing housing groups or within garden ground will require the new house siting not to detract from the character and setting of the existing buildings or their surrounding area.

**6.15** New buildings can often integrate with an existing housing group where careful attention is paid to layout, built form, building lines and landscaping taking account and incorporating the characteristics of neighbouring traditional properties.

### Sustainable Design

**6.16** In 2019, the Highland Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency through which it is promoting positive change and resource efficient planning. New housing plays an important part of this work and rural sites should reflect existing building patterns that have developed over time to take account of local climatic considerations, with more isolated sites observing how to best utilise a site in respect of weather patterns.

**6.17** Houses should be designed and sited to maximise solar gains and shelter from the prevailing weather. It is also important to consider protection from overheating from solar gains during the summer months, either with the use of native planting, landscape or man-made features. However, siting for solar gains does not negate the need to ensure compatibility with any the established settlement pattern or result in an overly prominent building in the landscape.



**Site Assessment ©Highland Council**

**6.18** The discharge of surface water back into the natural water cycle is critical in rural areas to avoid onsite and offsite flooding. The use of permeable surface materials to accesses and parking areas will be expected.

**6.19** Rainwater harvesting systems also reduce water demand and will be supported providing they are suitably engineered.

**6.20** The use of renewable technologies such as solar panels, ground and air source heat pumps, and passive heating are now common place. Whilst the use of these technologies are strongly supported, consideration is required as to the most appropriate location of these to be sympathetic to the new building and avoid any conflict within neighbouring uses.

**6.21** Due to the growth of recycling, most households now have to accommodate a number of refuse bins. As part of the site layout consideration should be given to the storage of these within the site and siting for collection purposes. These areas should be clearly annotated on the submitted documentation.

**6.22** Safeguarding and Enhancing Nature

### **Invasive non-native Species (INNS)**

**6.23** Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) are any non-native animal or plant that has the ability to spread causing damage to the environment, the economy, our health or the way we live. It is illegal to release, plant or allow to spread any invasive non-native species into the wild. In Scotland, four invasive plants cause the most damage:

- [Rhododendron](#) <sup>(9)</sup> (*Rhododendron ponticum*)
- [Japanese knotweed](#) <sup>(10)</sup> (*Fallopia japonica*)
- [Giant hogweed](#) <sup>(11)</sup> (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)
- [Himalayan balsam](#) <sup>(12)</sup> (*Impatiens glandulifera*)

**6.24** As such, a precautionary approach is required to be adopted, this requires every applicant and developer to undertake appropriate due diligence and carry out a risk assessment to determine if an INNS is present on site and if the works proposed might lead to the planting

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9 <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/factsheet/factsheet.cfm?speciesId=3004>

10 <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/factsheet/factsheet.cfm?speciesId=1495>

11 <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/factsheet/factsheet.cfm?speciesId=1705>

12 <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/factsheet/factsheet.cfm?speciesId=1810>

or spreading of a INNS. It is therefore recommended that you seek advice from an expert at an early stage. More information about the control and containment of INNS can be found in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and on the Scottish Government's [website](#) <sup>(13)</sup>. This Code contains some good practice guidance and this is designed to help you to take reasonable steps and exercise due diligence.

### **Wetlands Habitat Creation**

**6.25** Well-designed ponds and wetlands areas can provide valuable habitat for a rich diversity of plants and animals, including amphibians, birds, fish, insects and mammals and, as such, the Council will support their inclusion in any rural housing scheme. Moreover, their integration with SUDs schemes can often help in returning rainwater back into the natural watercycle sustainably and efficiently.

### **Food Growing**

**6.26** In recent years the UK has seen the resurgence in self sufficiency which has in turn led to a dramatic growth in private fruit and vegetable growing. There are many benefits to this phenomenon, including; sustainable food supply and consumption, improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, learning new skills, reducing food waste and carbon emissions associated with growing, transporting and selling food and enhancing the quality of the environment, as such the Council is keen to support this growth. Consequently, the inclusion of a fruit and vegetable growing area (including greenhouses and polytunnels) as part of any planting scheme will be strongly supported by the Council.

### **Hedgerow and Wildflower Meadow Protection and Enhancement**

**6.27** Hedgerows form a valuable habitat for biodiversity and strengthen habitat corridors, particularly within more intensive arable and grassland landscapes where the habitat network may be very weak, but since the end of the second world war the UK has lost approximately

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13 [www.scotland.gov.uk/nonnativespecies](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/nonnativespecies)



half of its hedgerows. Moreover, the [use of hedgerows have been shown to improve air quality](#) <sup>(14)</sup>. Therefore the Council strongly supports hedgerow retention and replacement/establishment, where proportionate species are used. The guide [Trees and Shrubs Native to Scotland](#) <sup>(15)</sup> shows the range of native trees and shrubs approved by NatureScot for planting in the wild in Scotland and should be read in conjunction with the booklet [Hedgerow Planting: Answers to 18 Common Questions](#) <sup>(16)</sup>, which provides a useful introduction to hedge planting.

**6.28** Highland historically had an abundance of meadows bursting with a variety of flowering plants, supporting butterflies, insects, farmland birds and other wildlife. But since the 1930s, we have lost over 99% of what are called "unimproved grasslands", and those that are left are fragmented. As most rural housing sites have large plots, the creation of a native wildflower meadow as part of any planting scheme will be strongly supported by the Council.

### Nesting Boxes

**6.29** There is a shortage of natural nesting sites for birds and this has played a part in their decline across the UK. Therefore the additional of nesting boxes and nesting bricks within any developments offer enhanced nesting opportunities for birds, as such their inclusion is strongly supported.

### Carbon Rich Soils

**6.30** HwLDP Policy 55 (Peat and Soils) should be respected, with all built development sited to avoid unacceptable disturbance, degradation or erosion of peat and carbon rich soils.

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14 <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/articles/super-cotoneaster>

15 <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Trees-and-shrubs-native-to-Scotland.pdf>

16 <http://www.hedgelink.org.uk/files/NE%20HEDGEROW%20PLANTING.pdf>

### Trees and Woodland

- 6.31** Retained trees/woodland and new planting can significantly help to integrate a new house into the rural landscape. Carefully sited houses can be located in reasonably close proximity to woodlands or shelter belt of trees to provide weather protection to the house. These locations can offer the house an immediate enclosure, backdrop and screening from wider views. Existing tree cover and new landscape planting should therefore be fully considered at the outset and the planting selection should be appropriate to the locale and size of the development.
- 6.32** Existing trees and woodlands on or adjacent to a site should be retained and protected, and details of such should be included with the proposal from the outset, including protection of the root protection area of retained trees.
- 6.33** More information on landscaping protection is provided within the Council Supplementary Guidance: [Trees, Woodlands and Development](#) <sup>(17)</sup>.



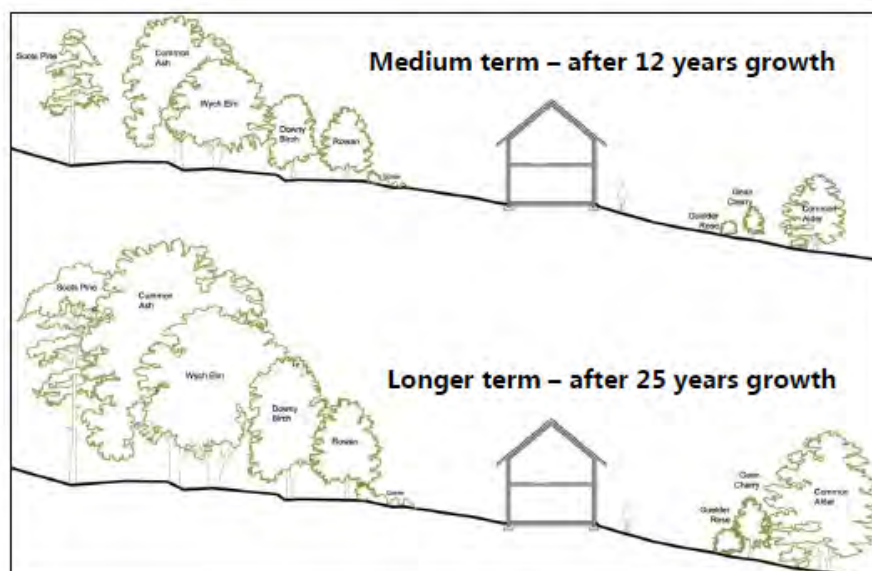
**Protection of Trees ©Highland Council**

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17 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/354/trees\\_woodlands\\_and\\_development\\_supplementary\\_guidance](https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/354/trees_woodlands_and_development_supplementary_guidance)

**6.34** A mix of native species with varying canopy covers and growth rates can ensure that the house remains integrated in the landscape over the year and its lifespan, as faster growing trees with shorter life spans, are replaced over time with slower growing trees with longer life spans.

**6.35** The potential size of any tree should also be fully considered when proposing and undertaking planting and species selected on the basis of their future growth potential and impact in the medium and longer term. The diagram below indicates relative heights of small, medium and large native shrubs and trees after 12 and 25 years and consideration of positioning relative to a house.



**Tress and Development ©Highland Council**

**6.36** The following criteria should be followed when considering site landscaping:

- Ensure all planting/fencing is clear of visibility splays from access points.
- Consideration needs to be given to the falling distance of existing and newly planted trees in relation to habitable buildings.

- Retain, incorporate and sensitively add to any existing landscape features. Setting a building against an existing backdrop is one of the most successful ways of ensuring that it blends into the landscape.
- Avoid very formal gardens with large expanses of manicured lawn which can look out of place in rural areas. The garden area should, however be clearly defined.
- In many locations planting can help development integrate with the surrounding landscape. Preferably use local, native species which will blend with the surroundings and provide wildlife habitats. Planting should be undertaken at an early stage or prior to development commencing, and full details should be submitted with any planning application.
- Planting may appear incongruous in some areas and landscapes, especially open crofting areas, assessment of the appropriateness of boundary treatments should be assessed as part of the wider site considerations. In certain circumstances the planting of non-native species may be acceptable.

**6.37** Existing landscaping on or adjacent to a site should be maintained and protected wherever possible and details of such should be included with the proposal from the outset, including consideration to protect the root area of retained landscaping.

### 6.4 Design and Materials

**6.38** Historically, the local climate and availability of local materials have influenced the traditional design and forms of rural homes. As materials supply has become standardised, coupled with the growth of Kit House Companies, house design has become homogeneous. The Council are however, committed to promoting distinctive and responsive developments which relative to their local setting.



The traditional Highland building form can be characterised as follows:

- Clear, simple geometric form;
- Clear structure to building groups and settlements;
- Limited palette of natural materials;
- Robust detailing;
- Modest use of contrast and colour; and
- General lack of intricate detail.

**6.39** With a tendency against:

- Complex and delicate forms;
- Fussy detailing; and
- Ornamentation.

### Scale

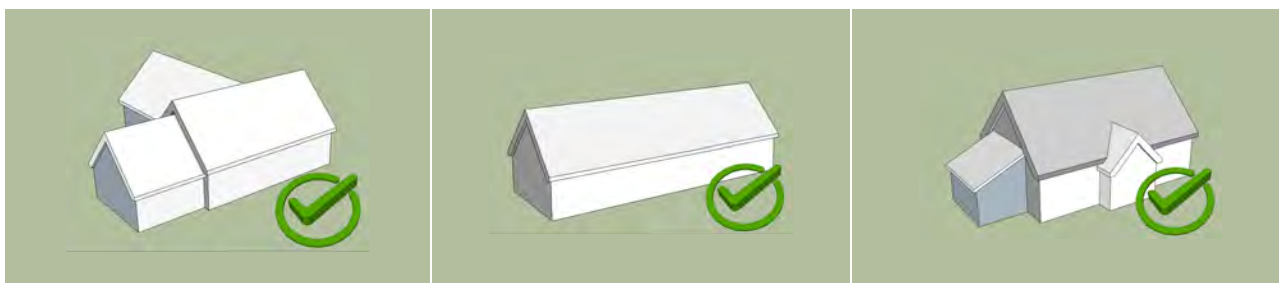
**6.40** Scale is the comparison of the size and proportions of one object to those of another. It is important that buildings are appropriately scaled to both their landscape setting and plot size, but also to any surrounding buildings.

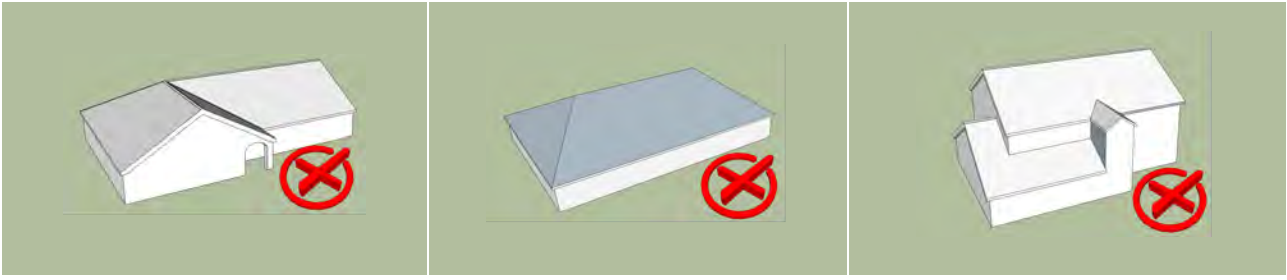
### 6.41 Massing

**6.42** Many of the newer one and a half storey kit houses have been designed to imitate the proportions of a traditional house - e.g. symmetrical, 1 ½ storeys, dormer windows, traditional style porch and vertical windows. However, modern living standards result in much larger footprints than were traditionally built. This results in houses with wide gables, large roofs and dormers which look out of place when viewed alongside their smaller traditional neighbours.

**6.43** To overcome this, and produce a more successful and realistic replica of the traditional house, whilst allowing for the larger floor area, it is often better to break larger buildings into smaller elements. This can be achieved with the use of:

- A central single or one and a half storey core;
- Single storey projecting porches which are considered traditional features of many rural houses and perform a variety of functions including reducing draughts, shoe, boot, coat, bag and pram storage;
- Subservient sunrooms and conservatory extensions to the side and rear elevations – these should be sited to benefit from natural daylighting and solar gains;
- Single storey buildings can be arranged in the same way as typical farm steadings and outbuildings which would result in a smaller mass and a lower building, better able to nestle into the landscape.





### House Design and Plot Layout

#### Walls

**6.44** Within Highland, a fairly limited number of external wall finishes was historically used, including; natural stonework (coursed in different ways, from random/coursed rubble walling to dressed ashlar), wet dash renders, harl and timber cladding. Colouration of the finish should reflect the locality.

**6.45** New houses will generally be expected to conform to and complement these traditional materials. Modern contemporary materials will be supported where justification for their use is provided.

**6.46** Corner quoins, overly decorative basecourses and heavy window detailing are not considered to be a traditional element of rural housing and, as such, will be discouraged.

#### Roofs

**6.47** Highland roofs tend to be steep, with slopes between 40° - 50°, as steeper pitches are less prone to letting wind-driven rain or snow into the roof space and water quickly drains down the slope, making it less likely to ingress. Given this, the use of low pitch, flat, hipped and mansard roofs will strongly be resisted as these are non-traditional rural building features.

**6.48** Where multiple roofs are proposed (dormers and projecting extensions) as far is reasonable practical, all roofs should respect the pitch of the principal section.



**6.49** Natural slate, corrugated iron, thatch, turf, timber shingles, lead and stone slabs are all traditional roof materials. The use of modern alternatives (roofing tiles, zinc, metals) should be justified in its approach.



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### Garages and Outbuildings

**6.50** Detached garages and outbuilding are common features of traditional rural plots and are often sited to offer a degree of protection to the main house. They are normally subservient in nature and are sited behind the front building line of the house, to the side or rear; achieving a natural reduction of the dominance of the car.

**6.51** Their design should respect the main house in terms of proportions and roof pitches – flat roofed garages will generally not be supported. Material finish should generally reflect the main house or use of traditional materials



### Parking

**6.52** Parking should be positioned to screen it from public view either to the side or rear of the main house.

**6.53** Parking provision should be sufficient and meet the Council Standards - Council Supplementary Guidance: [Access to Single Houses and Small Housing Developments](#) <sup>(18)</sup>.

**6.54** A turning area should be provided to allow entry and exit of the site in a forward gear.

**6.55** Surface finish should avoid hard surfaces and instead use permeable, locally sourced materials.



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### Access

**6.56** New rural developments offer the opportunity to develop creative solutions to securing a safe and suitable access.

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18 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory\\_record/712043/access\\_to\\_housing\\_developments](https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712043/access_to_housing_developments)

1. The use of existing access points is preferred, but may require additional improvements to improve visibility splays.
2. Where a service bay is required avoid using concrete kerbing. Overly defined bays look out of place in a rural landscape.
3. Entrances should avoid being overly elaborate or engineered and should use suitable materials that link to wider boundary treatments.

**6.57** Further guidance on rural accesses is contained within the Council Supplementary Guidance: [Access to Single Houses and Small Housing Developments](#) <sup>(19)</sup>.

### Boundaries

**6.58** The types of boundary treatment which may be appropriate in urban areas e.g. ornamental walling or fencing are rarely successful in rural areas, appearing suburban and out of keeping. Generally boundary treatments should assist in the integration of development into the landscape and soften the edges of a development. Options are listed below for potentially appropriate boundary treatments, not all options, however, are suitable for all locations and will required to be assessed against the local context.

**6.59** Considerations for boundary treatments include:

- Appropriate boundary treatments for rural areas include stone dykes, hedging, post and wire fencing, walls with wet dash harl and stone copings;
- Retain and repair existing landscape features such as stone walls and hedges;
- Avoid concrete, rendered walls, timber ranch style/panel fencing or hedges of a non-native species. Wooden fences should be left in a naturally coloured state;
- Down takings from derelict buildings within the site can often be incorporated in boundary treatments, e.g. creation of stone boundary walls;
- Use a consistent boundary treatment alongside roads.

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19 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory\\_record/712043/access\\_to\\_housing\\_developments](https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712043/access_to_housing_developments)



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### 6.5 Building Detailing

**6.60** The finer detail of any building can significantly aid its integration into its setting and, as such, getting these details right is fundamentally important in ensuring the success of new developments. Important considerations which should be taken into consideration with new schemes are detailed as follows.

#### Windows and Doors

- Windows to have a vertical emphasis
- Windows and Doors to be recessed back from the face of the building to offer protection from the elements.
- Large glazed gables on exposed or elevated sites will generally not be supported due to light pollution and their reflective nature across the landscape.
- Ground floor bay window arrangements are not traditional in the countryside and will therefore be resisted.

## Section 6 - Siting and Design | Suidheachadh is Dealbhadh

- Dormer windows should respect the symmetry of the property and be as far as practical located directly above ground floor openings.
- The use of timber windows and doors is preferred.

### Lighting

**6.61** Light Pollution significantly affects the rural countryside, from disturbing the way animals and plants perceive daytime and nighttime to making developments visible across wide areas. The following points can significantly reduce the effects of light pollution:

- Use of LED lighting to provide a focused area of illumination
- External lighting should be controlled by PIR sensors and angled in a downward direction.



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### Eaves and Verges

**6.62** Overhanging eaves and projecting verges are part of the traditional rural architecture and will be encouraged where they follow the surrounding traditional design characteristics.



### Gables and chimneys

- Chimneys stacks should normally be located on gable ends and breach the roof slope close to the ridgeline to avoid long slender stacks exposed to the weather. This is not applicable to Multi Flue Stoves Flues.

Skew tabling is widely used to offer edge protection to roofs within the rural setting and their inclusion is generally supported.



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## Appendix 1 - Stages of Rural Building Dereliction

Description of Decay	HwLDP Hinterland Policy Consideration
<b>Stage 1: Building in Active Use</b>	
<p>Building in regular use and is actively maintained, with no major structural defects, or evidence of any decay.</p> <p>All windows and doors secure and rainwater goods working effectively. Internal rooms are habitable and services are connected.</p> <p>Garden ground well maintained and boundaries secure.</p>	<p>The Council supports the retention of existing buildings in active use and would only support their replacement where net environmental, locational or character improvements can be achieved.</p> <p>The extension and alteration of existing buildings will generally be supported, where the proposal is sympathetic to the design and character of the original building and does not impact on the amenity and privacy of any adjacent users.</p>



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## Appendix 1 - Stages of Rural Building Dereliction

### Stage 2: Unused Wind and Water tight Building

Disused building which is still secure, wind and water tight.

Doors and windows in place; although could be boarded up for security purposes.

Garden ground unkempt and boundary treatment beginning to fail.

Policy 35 (Housing in the Countryside (Hinterland Areas)) supports the reuse of traditional buildings which make a positive contribution to the landscape setting.

Substantially complete traditional vernacular buildings should be sensitively renovated, converted and/or extended rather than wholesale demolition and replacement.

If it is demonstrated that the building is unfit for rehabilitation, the Council will consider demolition and replacement of the existing building with a new house in line with the criteria outlined in Conversion/Reuse section of this guidance.



## Appendix 1 - Stages of Rural Building Dereliction

### Stage 3: Complete Building in early state of failure

Where a building's main structure is substantially complete, albeit in a dilapidated or derelict state.

Easy access for vandalism, theft, water ingress, or animal infestation.

Garden ground and boundaries indistinguishable from surrounding landscape.

Policy 35 (Housing in the Countryside (Hinterland Areas)) supports the reuse of traditional buildings which make a positive contribution to the landscape setting.

Substantially complete traditional vernacular buildings should be sensitively renovated, converted and/or extended rather than wholesale demolition and replacement.

If it is demonstrated that the building is unfit for rehabilitation, the Council will consider demolition and replacement of the existing building with a new house in line with the criteria outlined in Conversion/Reuse section of this guidance.





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### Stage 4: Building Shell

Building walls remains standing to at least ground floor wall head height. The former use is still clearly evident.

Loss of roof structure or partial collapse of one gable without affecting integrity of built form.

Decay and failure occurring rapidly. Planting beginning to take hold, including at wallheads and within the structure.

Policy 35 (Housing in the Countryside (Hinterland Areas)) supports the reuse of traditional buildings which make a positive contribution to the landscape setting.

Substantially complete traditional vernacular buildings should be sensitively renovated, converted and/or extended rather than wholesale demolition and replacement.

If it is demonstrated that the building is unfit for rehabilitation, the Council will consider demolition and replacement of the existing

## Appendix 1 - Stages of Rural Building Dereliction

building with a new house in line with the criteria outlined in Conversion/Reuse section of this guidance.



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**Table 1 Stages of Rural Building Dereliction**

## Appendix 2 - Supporting Information to Accompany a Planning Application

Hinterland Housing Exception	Supporting Information Required to Accompany a Planning Application
<b>Housing Groups:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Plans and illustrations clearly identifying the existing housing group, including its characteristics and boundary extent.</li> <li>✓ Details demonstrating how the new development respects the character, layout and building pattern of the housing group.</li> </ul>
<b>Garden Ground:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Details of the existing site boundaries and extent of formal garden ground.</li> <li>✓ Details of the scale and proportions of the parent property.</li> <li>✓ Applications for detailed planning permission are preferred.</li> </ul>
<b>Conversion and Reuse of Traditional Buildings:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evidence that the building is substantially complete and meets one of the Stages of Rural Building Dereliction.</li> <li>✓ Drawings and details of the unaltered structure.</li> <li>✓ Site Analysis demonstrating established boundaries, existing landscape and historic land-uses.</li> <li>✓ Appropriate Contaminated Land Investigation and Remediation Plan (where required).</li> <li>✓ Applications for detailed planning permission are preferred.</li> </ul>
<b>Demolition and Replacement of Traditional Buildings:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evidence that the building is substantially complete and meets one of the Stages of Rural Building Dereliction.</li> <li>✓ Structural Report from a suitably qualified professional demonstrating that conversion or rehabilitation cannot be achieved and the justification why.</li> <li>✓ Drawings and details of the structure(s) to be demolished.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2 - Supporting Information to Accompany a Planning Application

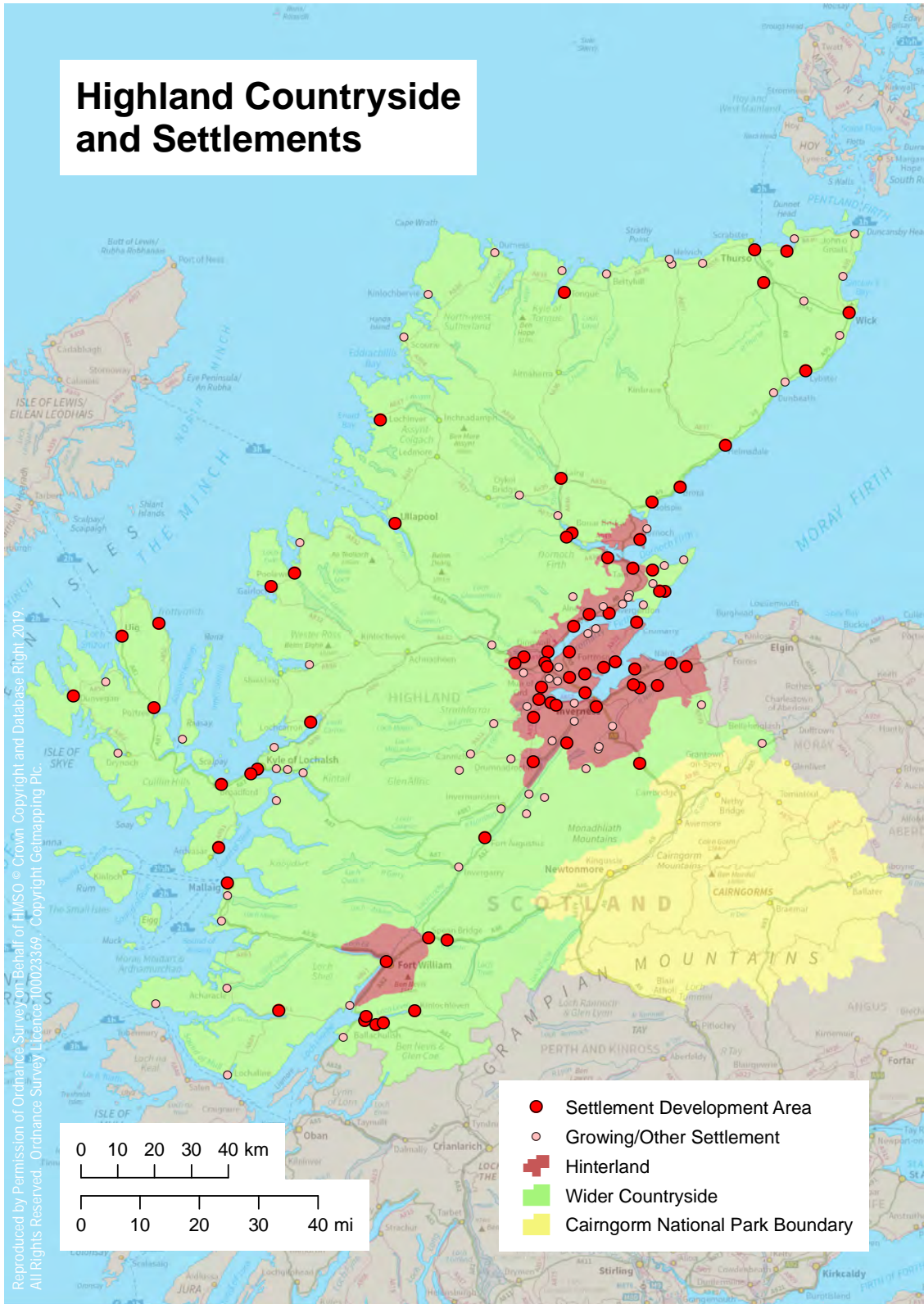
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Site Analysis demonstrating established boundaries, existing landscape and historic land-uses.</li> <li>✓ Details of any down takings reused as part of the redevelopment.</li> <li>✓ Appropriate Contaminated Land Investigation and Remediation Plan (where required).</li> <li>✓ Applications for detailed planning permission are preferred.</li> </ul>
<b>Replacement of an Existing House:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evidence that the building is substantially complete and meets one of the Stages of Rural Building Dereliction.</li> <li>✓ Details of the building previous use and confirmation as to when it was last used as a dwelling.</li> <li>✓ Site Analysis demonstrating established boundaries, existing landscape and the site original layout/house position.</li> <li>✓ If the property has become uninhabitable because of a natural occurrence or accident, details of the event and any Structural Report related to the event.</li> <li>✓ Applications for detailed planning permission are preferred.</li> </ul>
<b>Previously Developed Sites:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A Statement detailing the history of the site, how long it has been disused, why it is no longer fit for purpose, why it cannot be used for another non residential use and why it can not be left to naturalise.</li> <li>✓ Historic mapping and historic and current photographs of the existing land/buildings.</li> <li>✓ Appropriate Contaminated Land Investigation and Remediation Plan (where required).</li> </ul>
<b>Affordable Housing:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Demonstration of a local affordable housing need.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2 - Supporting Information to Accompany a Planning Application

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evidence of the involvement of a Registered Social Landlord or the Council.</li> <li>✓ A statement of evidence that details how the sequential approach to site selection has been satisfied.</li> </ul>
<b>Housing to Support an Existing or New Rural Business:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A statement of evidence that details how the sequential approach to site selection has been satisfied.</li> <li>✓ A statement of evidence demonstrating compliance with the criteria outlined.</li> <li>✓ A planning application (if required) to expand or establish a rural business is in place before or submitted concurrently with any worker accommodation proposal.</li> <li>✓ A plan identifying the extent of the applicants land holding and details of any previous planning approvals for new housing on the holding.</li> <li>✓ Applications for detailed planning permission are preferred.</li> </ul>
<b>Retiring Land Manager:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evidence from a chartered accountant or solicitor that the land manager has managed the land for at least ten years and intends to retire, including information on the future management of the landholding.</li> <li>✓ Evidence to demonstrate that an ongoing full time on-site presence is required to support the business.</li> </ul>
<b>Crofting:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Croft registration information including reference number(s); size of croft; access to common grazing.</li> <li>✓ Information on the croft land quality and how this has influenced the siting of the proposed house.</li> </ul>



# Appendix 3 - Highland Countryside and Settlement Map







**The Highland  
Council  
Comhairle na  
Gàidhealtachd**

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