



**Development in the  
Countryside  
Policies R1 and R2  
including Organic  
Growth of Settlements**

**Planning advice  
PA2023-11**

**September 2023**

## **Purpose of this Planning Advice**

This Planning Advice has been designed to give best practice guidance in support of the delivery of homes and employment uses that are appropriate to Aberdeenshire's countryside. It sets out what applicants may be expected to provide in order to support an application and demonstrate compatibility with the frequently used aspects of Policies R1 'Special Rural Areas' and R2 'Development Proposals Elsewhere in the Countryside' of the Aberdeenshire Local Development (LDP) 2023. It also provides the list of identified settlements for organic growth as required by policy R2.14. It focuses on:

- Accommodation for Primary Industry Workers (described as for 'essential workers');
- Redevelopment of Rural Brownfield Sites;
- Organic Growth of Settlements including the list of 'identified settlements';
- Single Homes Associated with Retirement Succession of an Agricultural Holding;
- Extensions to Clusters/Housing Groups; and
- Employment Proposals.

The Planning Advice also takes account of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). Where appropriate, applicants should read this advice in conjunction with relevant policies outlined in NPF4 such as:

- Policy 8 Green belts;
- Policy 9 Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings;
- Policy 10 Coastal development;
- Policy 17 Rural homes; and
- Policy 29 Rural development.

For clarification, specific opportunities for delivering rural housing through Organic Growth and Extensions to Clusters/Housing Groups are considered to represent Aberdeenshire Council’s ‘tailored approach’ to delivering the specific requirement of NPF4 in relation to rural development and local living as outlined in NPF4 Policy 15 Local Living and 20 minute neighbourhoods and Policy 29 Rural development.

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**1. Introduction**

The Development in the Countryside policies are a key part of determining the principle of a development proposal. Applicants are encouraged to engage early with the Planning Service about their site and proposal. This [pre-application advice service](#) informs prospective applicants as to how policies from the LDP will be applied to their proposal, identifies supporting information that is likely required to accompany their application and will flag up whether a proposal may be unacceptable.

In all cases, other policy considerations will apply. Specific focus on an appropriate scale and design is paramount in all instances, and any new dwelling or employment proposal, regardless of its justification, should fit the site and wider setting.

## 2. The Accessible/Remote Rural Areas and Designations

Aberdeenshire comprises two key designations that affect which planning policies and criteria will apply to an application. These are the 'accessible' and 'remote' rural areas that are based on the Scottish Government's 6-fold Urban/Rural Classification.

Additionally, Policy R1 refers to restricted development across the green belt around Aberdeen and coastal zone outside settlements. The accessible and remote rural area boundaries, as well as the green belt and coastal zone can be viewed in close detail on the [interactive Plan](#). For the avoidance of doubt, the interactive Plan shows the 2020 version of the 6-fold Urban/Rural Classification in line with NPF4.

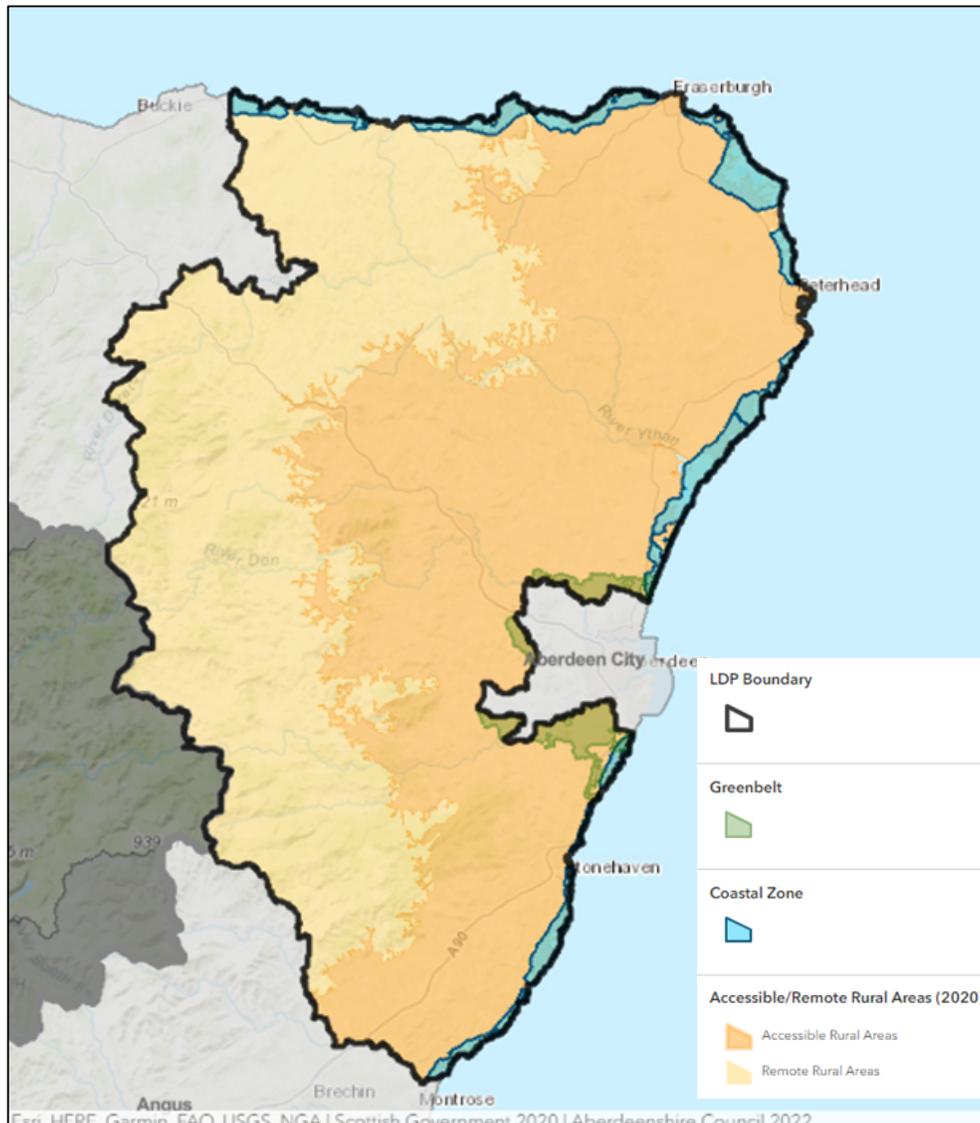


Figure 1: Map of Aberdeenshire's accessible/remote rural area, coastal zone and greenbelt designations.

### **3. Accommodation for Primary Industry Workers (Essential Workers)**

#### **Policy R1.1**

*In order to safeguard the special nature of the green belt and coastal zone, development opportunities will be restricted and subject to the considerations set out in paragraphs R1.2 to R1.5. The boundaries of the green belt are shown on the proposals maps where applicable and in detail in Appendix 4, Boundaries of the Green Belt. The extent of the coastal zone is shown in detail in Appendix 5, Coastal Zone.*

#### **Policy R1.2**

*In the green belt the following developments are permitted:*

- *development associated with agriculture, woodland and forestry, fishing and horticulture;*
- *development for a recreational use that is compatible with its agricultural or natural setting. The development of single huts not associated with a tourist proposal under Policy B3 Tourist Facilities will be prohibited;*
- *development meeting a national requirement or established need, if no other suitable site is available;*
- *intensification of an established use subject to the new development being of a suitable scale and form<sup>1</sup>;*
- *accommodation within the immediate vicinity of the place of employment required for a worker in a primary industry, where the presence of a worker is essential<sup>2</sup> to the efficient operation of the enterprise, and there is no suitable alternative residential accommodation available.*
- *essential infrastructure such as digital communications infrastructure and electricity grid connections.*

*Footnotes:*

*1) This will generally be the extension of an existing non-domestic building or ancillary use rather than its replacement. Householder developments are considered under Policy P3 Infill Developments within Settlements and Householder Developments (including home and work proposals).*

*2) For example, in order to maintain an active presence for the purposes of animal husbandry.*

Policy R1.2, allows for accommodation for workers in a primary industry or 'essential workers'. This policy applies in the green belt and the wider countryside out with the green belt. Applications made under this policy provision must be supported by an independent statement prepared by a suitably qualified industry professional in support of the need for a house in relation to the proper function of the business. In the majority of cases, it is expected that the requirement will arise in respect of the need for a worker for the purposes of agriculture on a farm holding and the advice is therefore aimed at such proposals. However, similar information would be expected of any proposed essential workers accommodation related to any primary industry. The supporting information required for such proposals must include:

- Details of enterprise including extent of ownership, operations, infrastructure and existing labour.
- Labour requirement report and business case including why it is essential for the accommodation to be located at the place of business.
- Potential for the use of any other existing accommodation in the area including open market housing.
- Details and explanation of any disposal of any accommodation or permissions for dwellings.
- The potential for erecting a dwelling under other policies of the Development Plan including the discounting of any brownfield land and or existing buildings which could be converted under other policies.

In the case of proposals for retiring workers, the criteria outlined in this planning advice in relation to Policy R2.15 should be applied. In addition to the criteria stated in R1.2, NPF4 makes it clear that proposals for rural homes also includes retired workers where there is no suitable alternative accommodation available.

**“Primary industry”** is defined within the [Standard Industrial Classifications of Economic Activities](#) and will typically relate to the farming or forestry sectors. It includes activities incidental to agricultural production and activities similar to agriculture not undertaken for production purposes (in the sense of harvesting agricultural products), done on a fee or contract basis. Also included are post-harvest crop activities, aimed at preparing agricultural products for the primary market (see para A01.1 to A01.64 from the [Main Volume of the UKSIC2007](#)).

This policy is not applicable to secondary industries such as construction and “trades” such as joinery, plumbing, electrician, etc. or those involved in tourism. These industries fall out-with the definition of primary industry and therefore the policy will not be applied to applications seeking permission for accommodation associated with these industries.

If the activity can be considered a primary industry, justification is required to demonstrate the need for a permanent presence on site to operate the enterprise associated with that business, and that all alternative options under other policy provisions have been considered. This must be essential to the business' operation and it is expected that applicants provide full details of why accommodation is required, including why the business activity could not reasonably function without the accommodation. “Security” is unlikely to be sufficient justification for an essential worker, as this service can be provided without the need for permanent residence.

All proposals are expected to include a Labour Requirement Report and Business Case, which should be provided to demonstrate that business exists and that there is a prospect of economic viability to sustain a full-time worker on site.

A Labour Requirement Report and associated business case will be required to demonstrate that the business is viable and can support the worker for which the accommodation is proposed. Where a labour requirement of two or more workers is demonstrated, this does not necessarily justify the number of dwellinghouses, instead it must be justified that the business could not operate without that number of workers onsite.

Where accommodation is genuinely required for the management of a business that is not yet operational, but has been fully supported by a Business Plan and Labour Requirement Report, the Planning Service may consider that a temporary form of accommodation is more appropriate. This allows for a new or expanding business to become established prior to considering permanent residential accommodation. The Planning Authority are unlikely to support permanent housing for speculative business proposals in the countryside.

In all cases “no suitable alternative residential accommodation” must be available that could otherwise provide this accommodation, including those available on the open market in the immediate vicinity to the enterprise. In addition, it is expected that other opportunities under other policies of the Local Development Plan which could be used to provide accommodation are fully explored. This may include the conversion or replacement of existing buildings or use of brownfield land.

In all cases the proposed accommodation must be located in the “**immediate vicinity**” of the place of employment. For agricultural operations this is expected to be at or adjacent to the farm hub.

### **Considerations specific to Agricultural Proposals**

The Planning Authority will not generally consider approving a permanent dwelling under this policy if the land to which the agricultural enterprise relates, is not owned by the applicant unless the applicant holds a 1991 Act Tenancy or a Limited Duration Tenancy. In the case of Limited Duration Tenancies, it must be demonstrated as to how long the tenancy period extends. Where the farm business relies on land subject to short limited duration tenancies or other forms of short-term leases that land is unlikely to be considered in terms of any needs case submitted to the Planning Authority.

For avoidance of doubt, due to the prevalence of contracting within the industry, accommodation for agricultural contractors will not generally be considered as requiring an onsite location at a base of operations. Equally, workers employed purely in arable activities are unlikely to be deemed essential unless the business has very specific needs or where mixed farming activities means animal husbandry is a significant part of the overall farm business.

**Policy R1.3**

*In the coastal zone development must require a coastal location or there must be clear social, economic, environmental or community benefits arising. In either case there must be no coalescence of coastal developments or adverse impacts on natural coastal processes or habitats.*

**Policy R1.4**

*We will approve development associated with coastal protection works where it is evidenced that the works respect natural processes and there will be no significant adverse impact on coastal processes or habitats, and that the development will not result in increased coastal erosion or flooding on the coastline. The full range of protection works and management options should be considered over the lifetime of the development to futureproof against relevant climate change projections.*

**Policy R1.5**

*In both the green belt and coastal zone we will also allow:*

- the sensitive restoration, conversion or extension of a traditional vernacular building or other building of architectural merit;*
- replacement of a single non vernacular building within the curtilage of the building to be replaced, and for the same use. The replacement building must be consistent in scale, and no more intrusive than the existing building. In addition, it is generally expected that the new building will demonstrate a significant improvement in design to that of the existing building.*

For the avoidance of doubt, under R1.3, the types of development permitted in the green belt under R1.2 may be acceptable in the coastal zone if they require a coastal location. All coastal zone development will still require to meet the tests of not contributing to coalescence or adverse impacts on natural coastal processes or habitats which will be key to any assessment of development subject to this policy. The R1.3 criteria, “social, economic, environmental or community benefits arising”, is superseded

by NPF4 Policy 10b which requires proposals to have a dependency on a coastal location with the exception of essential infrastructure.

Whilst Policy R1 does not differentiate between developed coast and undeveloped coast as per the considerations set out in NPF4 Policy 10, it is clarified that in the Aberdeenshire context, all settlements with a defined boundary are considered to be 'developed coastal areas' with the remainder of the identified coastal zone being considered as 'undeveloped coastal areas'.

Where a design statement is submitted with any planning application that may impact on the coast it will take into account, as appropriate, long-term coastal vulnerability and resilience.

## 4. Redevelopment of Rural Brownfield Sites

### Policy R2.4

*Appropriate development will be welcomed on brownfield sites that bring an environmental and visual improvement. Any vacant land that has become naturalised<sup>3</sup> will not be available for redevelopment as brownfield land.*

*Footnote:*

*3) Naturalised land is that which has been previously developed but is no longer regarded as 'vacant' due to its nature conservation interests, as demonstrated in an ecology survey.*

“**Appropriate development**” will be informed through applying other policies in the Plan, such as P1 and E2, to ensure the scale, massing and design of the development is appropriate to the site and setting.

Where possible, full or partial refurbishment will be preferred to replacement of existing houses or disused vernacular buildings. The objectives of the policy are to remove dereliction from the countryside, reuse existing buildings where possible and retain the traditional character of the area. The policy also allows for the replacement of individual buildings that have reached the end of their useful life.

“**Brownfield development/land/sites**” are defined in the LDP Glossary as “land/buildings found outwith settlements that have previously been developed or used for some purpose that has now ceased and on which a new use has not been established. Land/buildings will be vacant, redundant or derelict. “

There are a number of exemptions associated with the redevelopment of rural brownfield policies which are defined by the LDP Glossary. These exemptions are as follows:

- Private and public gardens, domestic garages, sports and recreational grounds, woodlands and amenity open space;

This extends to the replacement of buildings situated within an existing residential curtilage. Garages are unlikely to ever be disused and redundant for their original purpose.

- Agricultural buildings or land used for storage purposes e.g. silage clamps or other specialised agricultural structure;

Even if a building was not designed for storage purpose, it would still be considered to be in use and would therefore not comply.

- Temporary buildings e.g. garden sheds and huts;

Redundant or disused buildings of a temporary nature will not generally comply with this policy. This includes sites accommodated by chalets or caravans.

Where there is uncertainty regarding the permanence of a structure, judgement must be made on the type of structure, foundations etc.

- Reinstated sites e.g. former quarries or sites with unimplemented conditions for reinstatement;
- Wells and pump-houses;
- Hardstandings;
- Agricultural buildings constructed using modern materials, including where such buildings are subject to storm damage and sites disused or redundant for so long that they have not become naturalised.

It is considered that such buildings could be reasonably reinstated through a claim on an individual's insurance policy.

Given the need to conserve embodied energy, demolition will be regarded as the least preferred option in all circumstances (NPF4 Policy 9d).

**“Naturalised”** is defined in the LDP Glossary as “vacant or derelict land where there is no clear indication of what the previous use of the land was. The land has reverted to a natural state or the site appears to have blended back through a degree of vegetation into the surrounding landscape. Naturalisation is a dynamic process that is best judged based on a review of the site visit. Land that has been vacant or derelict for at least 15 years is likely to demonstrate signs of returning to a naturalised state, usually through the presence of trees and shrubs.”

A site will be considered to be naturalised where the remains on site contains vegetation that provides habitat and biodiversity value (including areas of established woodland). Clear signs of this are heavy moss or growth on stonework, trees growing within the footprint of the building, or overgrown and unkempt ground in and around the remains.

NPF4 Policy 9 strengthens the position that biodiversity value should be taken into account in all circumstances, but a site can be of low ecological value and continue to be considered naturalised. Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement (biodiversity net gain) should be demonstrated as part of any proposal.

**Naturalised** – overgrown and not suitable for redevelopment



**Brownfield Site** - Sufficient Remains and can be considered, in principle, for redevelopment



**Policy R2.5**

*We will permit the refurbishment or replacement of an existing home. Where necessary, conditions will be applied to ensure that the original home will be demolished on occupation of the replacement home.*

Demolition of a house and its replacement with a new building would be permitted under the policy. It is expected that a house will be replaced with only one house regardless of the curtilage surrounding that dwelling.

If the house is to be replaced by a larger dwelling, issues of siting, design and impact on landscape character will be of particular relevance, assessed against Policies P1 and E2. While it is not the intention to stifle modern design, there is greater potential for adverse impacts on setting and landscape where a dwelling is replaced with a larger one.

Where the original home on site is of value as an ancillary structure, in whole as an outbuilding or in part of a 'sit-oot-erie'/amenity space and it can be retained as an integral and well related element of the new layout proposed, its retention can be supported. Conditions would be attached to ensure the remaining structure is ancillary to the resultant dwelling on site, ensuring the planning unit remains that of a single dwelling.

As set out in R2.10, if the existing dwelling is of architectural or vernacular merit, supporting information to justify its demolition shall be required.

## **Policy R2.6**

*We will permit the small-scale development of brownfield sites that involve the conversion or replacement of a redundant or derelict non-domestic building or the redevelopment of vacant land.*

**“Small-scale development”** is defined in the LDP Glossary as “Development on a site of less than 0.5 hectare. In the countryside, development of housing is limited to up to 3 homes (unless otherwise specified in policy).”

Over time agricultural buildings may not necessarily be used for the purpose for which they were originally designed. Agricultural buildings may be adapted to service the developing needs of the farming enterprise or provide a secondary function. It should be demonstrated that agricultural buildings are redundant from any reasonably practical use on that farm unit, such as fodder or implement storage. Modern agricultural buildings capable of a variety of uses will not be considered as the basis for a brownfield redevelopment or replacement of a disused building.

To be truly redundant the building/site should have no clear evidence of any recent use. Where there is any doubt over the buildings use it should be demonstrated that the building has been disused for its designed use and no viable suitable alternative use can be found for the building. In the case of buildings used for industrial uses, the Planning Service may require demonstration of disuse for a longer period. This may vary on a case-to-case basis depending on the circumstances of each case. Applicants proposing replacement of industrial buildings should engage with their local planning office.

In all cases, there is an expectation that the existing building will be completely removed from the site or converted to a functional use. It should not be left to deteriorate to a derelict state.

It is useful to clarify that development should be small scale, and opportunities presented will depend on the size and location of the particular building to be replaced. Sites should not be enlarged to include agricultural land and/or woodland to artificially increase the site boundary (similar to brownfield), thus avoiding encroachment into the

countryside which may then impact on Prime Agricultural Land, valued grassland habitat, woodland or pose a wider impact on the natural environment and landscape setting of the site. Where a building is associated with other disused buildings, or has a defined curtilage, or connecting redundant land, this will generally be considered to be part of a brownfield site. Brownfield sites or disused buildings should not be subdivided and sites consisting of multiple buildings should be considered holistically in respect of limits placed on small scale development. For larger brownfield sites, see criteria below.

For avoidance of doubt, buildings contained within residential curtilages shall not be considered as disused buildings under the terms of this policy.

**Examples of redundant/derelict buildings** – clearly previously a dwelling/bothy but use now abandoned



## Example of successful conversion



### Policy R2.7

*To promote a planned approach to rural brownfield development, larger brownfield sites, including redundant buildings that are grouped together in a very distinctive and commonly recognised way, such as farm buildings that share a large curtilage, will be considered in their entirety, and should not be divided into their component parts with sequential permissions being sought for small-scale development on each part.*

**“Larger brownfield sites”** is defined as brownfield land/sites located outwith settlements of a size greater than 0.5 hectares or that are considered capable of accommodating more than 3 homes.

### Examples of potentially “larger brownfield sites”



### Policy R2.8

*Proposals for more than three new homes on larger rural brownfield sites will only be permitted where a larger development can be accommodated on the site and the scale of development proposed will not cause adverse social or environmental impacts<sup>4</sup>. The quality of the design will be paramount in such occasions. Mixed use proposals may also be permitted subject to the location being appropriate for the uses proposed and subject to consideration of other relevant policies<sup>5</sup>.*

*Footnotes:*

*4) For example, through cumulative large scale brownfield sites in the countryside.*

*5) Such as Policy B2 Employment and Business Land (B2.3) and Policy B3 Tourist Facilities.*

More than three dwellings will not be accepted without justification and a supporting statement. Considerations such as viability due to need to clear contamination or to provide services to the site may be considered reasonable.

Other policy implications may arise from proposals for more than three dwellings, such as affordable housing provision and the need for adoptable roads and footpath connections, to be assessed against Policies H2 and RD1. The holistic impacts of the development, both the scale and design of housing and the associated infrastructure, will be assessed against other policies of the LDP. The road and path infrastructure may itself have a sub-urbanising impact on the rural setting and could in turn be contrary to Policies P1 and E2. For any proposal under these criterion, the applicant should seek pre-application advice.

### **Policy R2.9**

*Large brownfield sites capable of accommodating eight or more homes should be promoted through an allocation in the Local Development Plan. However, we recognise that in some cases development opportunities may come forward on large brownfield sites unexpectedly and between reviews of the Local Development Plan. In these circumstances, development proposals will be considered on their individual merits. Development approved under this policy in the remote rural area will be exempt from further development through the housing clusters and groups policy during the Plan period.*

The scope for seven houses is the extreme scenario for large sites. In most instances fewer units will be acceptable due to wider considerations relating to layout, siting, design and landscape impact. As in R2.4, other policy considerations come into play and will play a key role in assessing the acceptable level of development on any given site. The scale, massing, quality and character of the development is as important as the number of dwellings. Large dwellings or suburban scale and design is not going to be acceptable, whereas a greater number of modest sized traditional rural vernacular properties would be more likely to receive support.

### **Policy R2.10**

*In all cases, at a very minimum, some parts (such as low walls) of the existing home or non-domestic building(s) must be evident upon physical inspection. Development does not necessarily need to replicate the existing footprint, however development must be contained within a defined curtilage<sup>6</sup>. Where development involves redevelopment of a traditional vernacular home or non-domestic building(s) or is otherwise of architectural merit, full or partial restoration will be favoured in the first instance unless evidence is provided to indicate the building cannot reasonably be reused (i.e. it is not structurally sound and is not reasonably capable of retention). Such evidence should be prepared by an appropriate qualified professional. It is expected that any materials that can be salvaged from the existing home or non-domestic building(s) will be incorporated into the new development either through use in the design, or construction of new home(s) or building(s), landscaping or as a development feature.*

*Footnote:*

*6) This is the land which is associated by either boundary or setting with the house.*

Clarification provided under R2.4 above is applicable to this criteria. The evidence of the site's remains and scale must be clearly evidenced.

**Brownfield Site** - Sufficient Remains and can be considered, in principle, for redevelopment



The retention or re-use of any building materials should be incorporated into the final design solution.

The refurbishment of a traditional vernacular house/ building is actively encouraged. These types of buildings form an important part of Aberdeenshire's character. It is important that traditional houses and buildings are not lost unnecessarily or altered to such an extent that their character is significantly altered in circumstances where they could be sympathetically converted, refurbished or extended and remodeled. Where possible every effort should be made to refurbish houses/ buildings as opposed to replacing them with a new build. The replacement of traditional vernacular houses/ buildings will generally only be considered where it is demonstrated that it is not structurally sound and not capable of retention, typically in the form of a structural survey that identifies the building is not suitable for retention. Simply not having sufficient foundations, being too narrow or having limited headroom is not adequate justification.

In the case of vernacular houses and buildings of architectural merit, a financial report/ cost appraisal that clearly demonstrates why it is economically not viable to refurbish buildings of architectural merit will generally be required to be provided. Such an appraisal should include the cost of site clearance and disposal of materials. Where demolition is justified any salvageable materials such as granite and slates should be reused within the new development.

Replacement houses or buildings do not necessarily require to be situated on the same footprint as was previously occupied, but they will generally be in the same curtilage as the existing house or building. For the avoidance of doubt, sites should not be expanded into surrounding agricultural land. A different footprint may be considered, for example, in order to achieve better siting, layout and design, improve energy efficiency, or avoid a specific existing constraint.

Where a building does not have a defined curtilage, any green field land take associated with the new use should be the minimum required for the new use and should be in keeping with the character and pattern of development in the surrounding area. Replacement of a building with a building on a different site will only be

considered in exceptional circumstances (such as for improved amenity from statutory nuisance), and the siting must be no more prominent in the landscape. Any replacement dwelling will have a defined curtilage.

It is noted that agricultural buildings do not necessarily have a defined curtilage. However, there is often a yard space or clear field boundary that defines an area around the building to where redevelopment should be contained.



**Proposed replacement dwelling – Kept within the existing curtilage**



## 5. Organic Growth of Settlements

### Policy R2.11

*We will support small-scale organic growth in identified settlements, subject to criteria listed in paragraph R2.13 below. In all cases, careful consideration of layout, siting and design will be primary in determining whether the growth promoted is acceptable.*

*Organic growth will not be permitted where development proposed would cause an adverse impact that cannot be suitably mitigated<sup>7</sup>.*

*Footnotes:*

*7) Including considerations set out in other relevant policies in Section 8 (Natural Heritage and Landscape) and Section 10 (Protecting Resources).*

Small-scale growth has been promoted as a way of expanding villages in the way they would have historically grown. This “organic growth” can be defined as being gradual or natural development. Speculative development achieved through submission of multiple planning applications without justification of local need is not considered gradual or natural development. Cumulative developments around identified settlements would be better achieved through a formal allocation in the LDP.

There is an expectation that any organic growth to an “identified settlement”, be it single dwelling or three dwellings, is of appropriate layout, siting, and design. The proposal’s relationship with the existing character and pattern of the development will be fundamental to the acceptability of its overall siting and layout. Other policy considerations, particularly Policy P1 and E2, will inform the decision on the appropriateness of the proposal in terms of design and scale of the individual dwelling. Applicants should use the following considerations to help consider appropriate siting of development:

- Is the site consistent with the historic growth and pattern of the settlement?
- Is the site appropriate in terms of landscape character?

Sites should not extend beyond any natural containment of the settlement in the landscape.

- Does the site relate well to other nearby dwellings (layout and design)?  
Sites should avoid the impression of sprawl or sporadic development in the countryside.
- Does the site have a natural boundary consistent with the other properties?  
Sites should be appropriately located with a relationship to a natural boundary consistent with its surroundings. This could be trees, roads, dykes, adjacent properties or natural landforms that all improve the integration of a house into its setting. Sites cannot be defined by the erection of a new post and wire fence to create an enclave.
- Is the site accessible to an identified settlement via a safe and suitable footway connection?

Common policy considerations in relation to the siting of organic growth proposals include constraints relating to the flooding, impact on prime agricultural land, trees and woodlands, and natural heritage falling under the ‘Climate Change’, ‘Protecting Resources’ and ‘Natural Heritage and Landscape’ policy chapters. For the avoidance of doubt, proposals must comply with all parts of the LDP and where identified settlements for organic growth are bounded by constraints such as those above, Policy R2 will not override these issues.

**Example of organic growth – Sites consistent with pattern of development.**



**Policy R2.12**

*In the accessible rural area only settlements without an opportunity site for housing will be considered under this policy.*

This forms part of the criteria applied to develop the “identified settlements” list as set out below. Appendix 1 provides further detail on how this is used.

**Policy R2.13**

*No more than an additional 20% growth of the settlement, up to a maximum of 10 new homes, will be permitted during the Plan period. The development site must lie within 200m of the settlement boundary. It should represent a logical extension and not prejudice the character of the settlement. It is expected that paths and/or active travel routes will be provided to the built-up edge of the settlement to link to the existing network and safe routes to schools.*

Developments approved as part of organic growth will be permitted up to 20% of the size of the existing settlement, up to 10 new homes. This applies to the plan period commencing on the date of adoption of the current plan and finishing on the adoption of the next plan. The size of the existing settlement refers to the number of dwellings within the settlement or built-up area on the day the LDP is adopted. The total capacity for growth of the identified settlements is set out below.

There is the possibility for planning consent granted for organic growth to expire during the plan period e.g. planning permission granted in 2023 could lapse in 2026. In such instances, the number of homes subject to that consent will be returned to the capacity for growth and made available for other prospective applicants to deliver.

Should development during the plan period be built and reach the cap, it demonstrates that there is demand for development in that settlement, but that further growth may be

appropriate to come through a planned approach via the identification of allocated opportunity sites in the next Plan.

Development(s) of up to 3 homes will be permitted within 200m of settlements. Most, but not all “identified settlements” are also “settlements” recognised in Appendix 7 of the LDP and have a defined settlement boundary from which the 200m growth area can be applied. For settlements that are not contained within Appendix 7 of the LDP the rule will apply from the edge of the built-up area. With siting as a primary consideration, and given that sites should represent a logical extension to the settlement, the 200m distance will not be appropriate for every proposal. Where a site is situated at the edge of this distance, it is expected that the majority of the development site i.e. the dwelling(s) to be erected, be within the 200m buffer. However, flexibility may be provided to permit means of access and drainage to be marginally out with this area. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

**Policy R2.14**

*A list of identified settlements and the number of homes that could be permitted through this policy is contained in Planning Advice, Organic Growth of Settlements<sup>8</sup>, and is subject to change during the Plan period.*

*Footnotes:*

8) See Planning Advice Organic Growth of Settlements – see Glossary.

The following table sets out the list of identified settlements for organic growth and their total capacity for growth as at the date of adoption of the Plan. As the Plan and its Policy R2 does not list the “identified settlements” for organic growth, this planning advice allows for future revisions to be made to this list should there be a need to do so. The criteria applied to develop the “identified settlements” list is set out in Appendix 1.

**Table 1 List of Identified Settlements**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Settlement</b>	<b>Capacity for Growth</b>
Banff and Buchan	Cornhill	10
	Fordyce	10
Buchan	New Leeds	8
Formartine	Berefold	5
	Hattoncrook	3
	Fintry	3
	Woodhead	10
Garioch	Leslie	3
	Whiterashes	2
Kincardine and Mearns	None.	-
Marr	Bridge of Alford	7
	Cairnie	7
	Clatt	6
	Forgue	4
	Finzean	10
	Glenkindie	3
	Kirkton of Tough	4
	Largue	4
	Logie Coldstone	8
	Strachan	10
	Towie	2
	Whitehouse	2

## 6. Single Homes Associated with Retirement Succession of an Agricultural Holding

### **Policy R2.15**

*Single homes will be permitted for the retirement succession of a viable farm holding within, or in immediate vicinity to, the main farm hub<sup>9</sup>.*

*Footnotes:*

*9) One house per farm enterprise will be permitted under this policy.*

Given the significant barriers to entry into farming in Scotland and its importance to a successful and sustainable rural Scotland, the policy under R2.15 intends to allow for the provision of single dwellinghouses in order to facilitate farm succession of viable holdings, which are actively farmed by the retiring farmer. As set out in this advice, it is expected that the provision of a new dwelling on greenfield land will only be proposed following the comprehensive consideration of housing opportunities available on the farm and in the immediate area, including those allowed under other policy mechanisms. In all cases, applicants must provide an independent statement prepared by a suitably qualified professional to support the application.

The supporting information must include:

- Details of farm including farm extent, ownership, operations, infrastructure and existing labour.
- Succession plan detailing how the farm is to be succeeded.
- Confirmation of viability of agricultural holding (note in some cases we may request a Business Plan and accounts for the farm enterprise (usually over a five-year period)).
- Potential for the use of any other existing accommodation in the area.
- Details and explanation of any disposal of any accommodation or permissions for dwellings.

- The potential for erecting a dwelling under other policies of the Development Plan including the discounting of any brownfield land and or existing buildings which could be converted under other policies or under Permitted Development Rights.

The policy will only apply if the beneficiary of the succession meets the definitions of a successor a 'near relative' as defined by the agricultural holdings Acts applicable to Scotland (currently Agricultural Holdings Act 1991) and that successor is taking over the running of the farm enterprise. Applicants should provide information on the current farm ownership or tenancy arrangement under the Agricultural Holdings Act. applied.

The succession must take place on a viable farm holding. A farm holding should be identified through provision of mapping showing the holding and viability confirmed through the supporting statement.

The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate viability of the agricultural business. Where a Farm Holdings is less than 50ha we may seek detailed information through the provision of a business plan and business accounts for the farm business. Where a change to the structure of a business is proposed, which have not taken place, it is expected that such structural changes are included in a business plan and confirmed as reasonable and viable by a suitably qualified agricultural consultant.

Where a new house is required in order for the succession policy to apply it requires the dwelling to be located "Within, or in immediate vicinity to, the main farm hub".

Succession is anticipated to be gradual, with support for the farming enterprise from the retiring farmer. In all cases supporting information should be provided as to the location and siting of such dwellings. Justification will be required in the event that the dwelling cannot, for any reason, be provided on land adjacent to or within the farm hub.

The applicant should confirm that there are no other opportunities for dwelling on the farm holding that meets the requirements to house the retiring farmer this should include details of:

- Residential accommodation owned or available to the farm business, farmer or successor including any dwellings disposed of in the last 5 years.

- Other available accommodation in the immediate vicinity of the farm holding.
- Brownfield land opportunities including the redevelopment of existing buildings.

An explanation should be provided as to why any such accommodation or opportunities cannot be utilised as a retirement dwelling. Brownfield land and the conversion of existing buildings will always be preferred where it can provide opportunities for the additional housing need and opportunities for dwellings under other policy opportunities should be explored and discounted in the first instance.

The Planning Authority, in considering any such applications, may seek input in terms of the application with colleagues from Business Services (farm viability) and Environmental Health. All supporting information is to be made publicly available unless it contains sensitive, financial details (which can be redacted).

## 7. Extensions to Clusters/Housing Groups

### **Policy R2.16**

*In remote rural areas only we will also allow development associated with existing clusters or housing groups consisting of between 5-14 separate habitable or occupied homes on the date of the Plan's adoption. The existing properties within the clusters or housing group should relate well to each other through their design and layout, for example, by sharing curtilage boundaries. There should be a clear relationship between the cluster/group, or development should contribute towards establishing a cohesiveness among the group, for example, through infill development.*

A cluster for the purpose of this policy provision is not a settlement listed in Appendix 7 of the LDP or an identified settlement in terms of organic growth, or within the 200m buffer of an identified settlement. This criteria only applies in Remote Rural Areas, see map in the [interactive LDP](#). A cluster or group consists of at least 5 dwellings, and a maximum of 14 dwellings.

Identifying a cluster, and the number of dwellings within it, is essential to understanding the development capacity. Typically, a consistent and cohesive pattern of development, featuring similarly spaced properties or dwellings with common boundaries, will make up a cluster. Any grouping of rural housing that is disconnected or separated by a physical barrier such as a road, watercourse, tree belt or open space/field is not likely to be considered as a single group. However, capacity for development may still exist if there is a minimum of 5 dwellings identifiable as a cluster.

Proposals for additions to clusters and groups must demonstrate a reasonable degree of “connectedness”. This may be achieved through aspects such as design or layout i.e. through the sharing of curtilage boundaries, and there should be a clear sense of place felt within the cluster or group.

Sites for development must be directly related to the existing houses within the group and upon completion will further strengthen the perception of the cluster or group being

connected to in some way. “Infill”, would likely be appropriate. As such scattered dwellings with little cohesion will be unlikely to be considered as being connected.

**Cluster of housing** – Clear grouping of dwellings.



**Scattered housing** – Widely separated dwellings with no connection/cohesion.



**Policy R2.17**

*Development of a maximum of three homes will be permitted during the plan period. The size of a cluster must not exceed 15 homes<sup>10</sup>. Clusters or housing groups greater than 15 homes must not be sub-divided. This includes clusters/housing groups that may comprise two or three individual clusters/groups situated in close proximity, that is, by sharing the same access road. All proposals must respect the character, layout and building pattern of the cluster or group.*

*Footnote:*

*10) Clusters or housing groups of 13 will be permitted a maximum of 2 homes during the Plan period, and clusters or housing groups of 14 will be permitted a maximum of 1 home during the Plan period.*

As explained through the footnote to this policy:

- Three dwellings can be added to a cluster of 5-12 dwellings in the plan period;
- Two dwellings can be added to a cluster of 13 dwellings in the plan period; or
- One dwelling can be added to a cluster of 14 dwellings in the plan period.

Large groups of 15+ dwellings cannot be sub-divided to create opportunities for growth, but as outlined above, where there are clear distinctive landscape features (watercourse, tree belt or open space/fields) that splits housing, then separate clusters may be identified. A large group of dwellings, formed by the convergence of separate clusters will be considered as one group.

Development proposals that relate to clusters, particularly those that are not easily identifiable and may be considered larger than expected, should be subject to pre-application discussion, with a supporting statement provided to identify the potential cluster, to ensure early engagement and consideration is had on whether a development opportunity exists or not.

There is an expectation that any addition to a group, be it single dwelling or three dwellings, is of appropriate siting, design and scale. Other policy considerations, particularly Policies P1 and E2, will inform the decision on the appropriateness of the addition to a cluster – both in terms of design and scale of the individual dwelling, and

the capacity in the local landscape. For clarity, any proposed additions to a cluster must respect the character, scale, pattern of development and palette of materials within the cluster. Further design advice can be found in Appendix 9 Building Design Guidance.

Key considerations:

- Is the site consistent with the pattern of the existing cluster or group?
- Is the site appropriate in terms of landscape character?
- Does the site have a natural boundary consistent with the other properties?
- Could the addition lead to suburbanisation of the area?
- Are there any services within the vicinity of the cluster?

During the plan period, there is the possibility for planning consent granted as an extension to a cluster or group expires and is not implemented during the plan period e.g. planning permission granted in 2022 could lapse in 2025. In such instances, the number of units subject to that consent will be returned to the capacity for growth and made available for other prospective applicants to deliver.

**Example of cluster opportunities** – Sites consistent with existing cluster pattern.



Any prospective applicant should also check the [planning portal](#) to see if any pending or approved applications exist for the respective cluster, to help identify whether capacity remains. Applicants are encouraged to seek pre-application advice.

## 8. Employment Proposals

### **Policy R2.18**

*In order to promote employment opportunities in settlements, in accessible rural areas outwith settlements employment proposals are limited to brownfield sites.*

For the avoidance of doubt, this criterion does not apply in the coastal zone, nor green belt where special restrictions apply. Applicants may be asked to submit information on alternative sites within nearby settlements, or further afield, that have been considered before deciding on the application site.

This criterion applies to conversions or the replacement of redundant or derelict non-domestic building(s), or the redevelopment of vacant land. It must therefore be read in conjunction with 'redevelopment of rural brownfield sites' (R2.6 – R2.7) that states that only small-scale development will be permitted on such sites and larger brownfield sites shall not be divided to create multiple small opportunities. There may be limited circumstances where a mixed-use development (up to 3 dwellinghouses and a small-scale employment use) can be supported on a larger site. In all cases, any redevelopment should not extend into adjacent agricultural land and should be confined to the previously developed area of the footprint of buildings and associated yard space.

Acceptance of the principle of redeveloping a brownfield site must then be subject to detailed consideration of landscape impact, siting and design (including ancillary development such as enclosures, lighting, etc.) and having appropriate vehicular access arrangements, as well as all relevant technical considerations. A landscaping scheme may be required.

### **Policy R2.19**

*In remote rural areas outwith settlements, small-scale employment proposals will be supported in principle.*

### **Policy R2.20**

*Employment proposals outwith settlements in both accessible and remote rural areas should be in keeping with the surroundings and demonstrate that no other suitable site is available. The development must be located on a site that is safe to access via*

*different modes of transport and demonstrate how it could be accessed via footway/cycle infrastructure and/or public transport.*

For the avoidance of doubt, this criterion does not apply in the coastal zone where special restrictions apply. In addition to development permitted under R2.18, small-scale employment proposals on greenfield sites may also be supported. Applicants may be asked to submit information on alternative sites that have been considered before deciding on the application site and why these are not viable. If necessary, applicants should be made aware that securing planning permission for an employment use will not justify a dwellinghouse, even to house an essential worker, until the business is established and a proven need can be established (e.g. to provide security).

Assessment of the suitability of the proposal and how 'in-keeping' it is with its surroundings should include normal layout, siting and design considerations, such as avoiding isolated sites in prominent locations, the scale and materials of any buildings and impact of ancillary development, such as enclosures, lighting etc. Proposals that primarily involve the change of use of land and / or erection of an agricultural type building are likely to be most acceptable. A landscaping scheme may be required.

Applicants should submit information to clarify the nearest public transport route and how accessible sites are by foot and cycle. An acceptable proposal should be accessible by public transport with safe and convenient access for non-motorised means of travel.

## Appendix 1 Organic Growth Methodology (Identified Settlements)

The methodology for recognising the identified settlements for organic growth follows the LDP 2023's Glossary definition and Policy R2.

A **settlement** has:

- a recognised boundary/built up area;  
This would likely be demonstrated through a clear linear or nucleated pattern, rather than be dispersed in shape which is unlikely to exhibit a notable beginning and end to the built area.
- serves a residential function;
- features urban characteristics including street lighting and a reduced speed limit;  
These urban features would be expected to be evidenced throughout the settlement.
- has at least 15 residential address points; and
- has a facility as listed in the Rural Facilities Monitoring published by the Council's Planning Information and Delivery Team.

Rural Facilities only include the following:

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| - Primary/Secondary school | - Post Office                                       |
| - Medical                  | - Bank  |
| - Centre/Chemist/Pharmacy  | - Retail/Professional services                      |
| - Police/Fire station      | - Church  |
| - Library                  | - Garage  |
| - Village hall             | - Hotel/Public house/Hospitality including Takeaway |

“Settlement” status may change with any future Rural Facilities Monitoring information that becomes available during the lifetime of the LDP with the loss or addition of any facility.

**Identified settlements** are settlements which:

- meet the definition of a settlement above;
- are limited to 99 or fewer residential address points;
- when located within the accessible rural area does not have an opportunity site for housing as identified within the Local Development Plan settlement statements (policy R2.12).

This extends to housing within mixed use opportunity sites. Settlements that are partly within the accessible rural area must have no opportunity site identified for housing at the date of the adoption of the Plan. Where opportunity sites have been built to completion during the plan period, it is expected that continued growth is sought through allocations in the next LDP process.

For clarity, organic growth is not applicable to settlements within the green belt or coastal zone under Policy R1. Settlements where the Appendix 7 Settlement Statement indicates there should not be additional growth at this time, are also incompatible with organic growth and future development will be considered through the LDP process.

A cap has been set at settlements with 99 residential address points in order to identify those settlements that are considered to be of such a scale that organic growth may not indeed be appropriate, and development will be generally supported through formal allocations via the LDP.

### **Difference between “settlements”, “places” and Appendix 7 Settlement Statements**

In the context of local development planning, it is important to distinguish between “places” and “settlements” as part of directing development to the right places and to consider spatial strategies that promote a sustainable pattern of development appropriate to the area, using land within or adjacent to settlements. At present, not all settlements in Aberdeenshire have protected, reserved or allocated sites and as a consequence are not recognised as such in the Plan’s Appendix 7 Settlement Statements. However, this does not mean that they are not settlements that need to be considered under various policy provisions within the LDP. There are also locations

within the Appendix 7 Settlement Statements which do not meet the settlement definition such as the St Fergus Gas Terminal (Buchan) and Craigwell (Marr).

### **Capacities for growth calculations**

The capacity for organic growth is based on the number of dwellings recorded within the settlement or built-up area when the LDP is adopted. Dwellings will have appeared as an address point in the Council's records and shown on the GIS system but need not necessarily be occupied to be counted towards the baseline from which the capacity for growth has been determined.

- Those settlements with fewer than 150 address points or less were reviewed closely to determine the exact number of dwellings within the settlement boundary/ built up area.
- Numbers have been rounded down where 20% does not equal a whole number.