



**Landscaping
Design**
Planning advice
PA2023-08

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Purpose of this Planning Advice

Landscaping is fundamental to the future environmental quality and success of a development. This Planning Advice provides developers with a clear process to achieving a quality long term, sustainable landscaping scheme for a development. The guidance focuses on soft landscaping and supports implementation of Policy P1 Layout, Siting and Design, Policy P2 Open Space and Access in New development, and Appendices 8 and 9 of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2023.

This Planning Advice will help applicants meet the requirements of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), Policy 20 ‘Blue and green infrastructure’, which requires that blue and/or green infrastructure is in integral element of the design, and responds to local circumstances. Moreover, landscaping is important in applying the overarching NPF4 policy principles of Policy 1 ‘Tackling the climate and nature crises’, and Policy 3 ‘Biodiversity’, to help meet climate targets and reverse biodiversity loss.

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1. Introduction

The provision of public open space will be an important contributor to delivering the Scottish Government’s objectives of National Planning Framework 4 to protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure and their networks, including open space, and as an integral component of successful placemaking.

Improving the quality of places is considered fundamental to sustainable development bringing wide ranging benefits including biodiversity, improved health and wellbeing, and enhanced climate resilience. Quality landscape design is an integral part of all new developments. Aberdeenshire Council aims to achieve high standards of landscaping design, planting and maintenance to ensure that networks of green and blue open spaces support placemaking by being well located, designed, and managed, as well as being adaptable, and sustainable.

This Planning Advice establishes the key requirements of a quality landscaping scheme and sets out a step-by-step methodology by which this may be achieved. Information is also provided on tree and plant species to be avoided in landscaping schemes.

2. Designing a Landscaping Scheme

A quality landscaping scheme should:

- Aid development to fit positively into its landscape setting, enhance overall appearance and contribute to public open space networks.
- Provide quality green-blue spaces (networks) in new development to secure positive effects for biodiversity and provide multi-functional, linked spaces.
- Provide a cohesive scheme taking into account adjacent developments and natural habitats and seek to improve overall landscaping quality.
- Be accessible to all, incorporating path design into the landscaping scheme, ensuring these can be easily used by people with a disability¹.
- Ensure that the function of all outdoor spaces in the development are considered, and that even the smallest and most basic of areas are at least planted to improve biodiversity.

3. Methodology for Landscape Design

The following process outlines a good methodology for landscape design for any development. Other planning advice is available with recommendations on more detailed matters that relate to landscape design such as securing positive effects for biodiversity enhancement, riparian buffer strips, trees and development and design for related initiatives such as Energetica.

¹ Refer Planning Advice PA2023-12 Outdoor Access and Development

To achieve quality landscape design for any development, the following steps are recommended:

Step 1 – Seek the advice of a qualified/experienced landscape designer at an early stage, ideally at pre-application.

Such consultants can bring out the best in a development and its setting through detailed survey, analysis and design.

Step 2 – Carry out a survey of the development site and its setting.

Information on the following should be recorded on a survey plan and/or supporting statement:

- Existing trees and vegetation/habitats both in and adjacent to the proposed development site.
- Built and natural landscape features both in and adjacent to the proposed development site such as buildings, ponds, roads, paths, fences, water courses.
- Topography, soil conditions and drainage conditions.
- Climatic conditions including exposure to prevailing wind and frost, aspect to sunlight.
- Views in and out of the proposed development site.
- Archaeological features and designated sites both in and adjacent to the proposed development site.
- Listed buildings or places of recreational / heritage interest both in and adjacent to the proposed development site.

For larger sites a levels survey prepared by a qualified surveyor is essential for the successful site design in terms of planned infrastructure and overall landscape design. For all sites it is important to understand how a proposal sits in the topography of the land, in particular what changes in level would be needed, e.g. through 'cut and fill' to keep a development sitting low in the landscape.

Step 3 – Identify opportunities and constraints

Information gathered and developed at survey stage will show what is practical and what is not, in terms of site design, including:

- Where and which plants/trees will grow well.

- What existing natural and built features are worth retaining and enhancing.
- What existing natural and built features should be removed and why.
- What improvements need to be undertaken, e.g., to soil, drainage, topography, planting etc.
- Where shelter is provided and where it is needed.
- How links can be made to the surrounding areas.
- Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.
- Which views should be retained and enhanced.
- What features planned and existing require to be disguised or screened.

Step 4 – Design the landscaping scheme

Based on the initial survey and the identification of opportunities and constraints, the landscaping and open space structure proposals can now be designed. The design should be submitted in as much detail as possible as part of a planning application.

Low maintenance landscapes (planting etc. that require minimum maintenance) are promoted. Plants/trees should be specified to fill a space, to reduce the need for future pruning. Areas of grass requiring regular cutting can also be minimized by using suitable low maintenance wildflower seed mixes. Plantlife provide some useful advice for verges, which is transferrable to other areas of grassland².

For shrub and woodland planting smaller planting stock (whips) planted relatively densely initially, to be thinned when crown closure occurs, is a good approach to establishing landscape structure.

Appropriate native species of local provenance should (wherever possible) be included in the landscaping scheme. Plants from locally sourced seed are more likely to be suited to our conditions and will flower and bud at the best times for

² See <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/learning-resource/road-verge-green-space-management-best-practice/>

our insects. A list of appropriate trees and shrubs native to north east Scotland has been provided by Aberdeenshire Council^{3,4}.

Mixed native species hedging is encouraged as an appropriate solution to provide screening and contribute towards required positive effects for biodiversity at smaller development sites. Advice on hedgerow planting is provided by the Wildlife Trusts⁵.

Prevention of the spread of Invasive non-native species (INNS) is an important consideration, see details at the end of this advice.

The design information should:

- State what the scheme's aims, and functions are (a design statement) and clearly indicate its spatial layout.
- Provide levels information for both pre-development and post-development stages. Information needs to be in contour format but can include cross-sections where level changes/earthworks are proposed.
- Provide drainage details with the levels information and include landscaping proposals for the SUDS network.
- Demonstrate how a SUDS design has contributed to and/or enhanced the quality of the landscape scheme.
- Adhere to Scottish Water advice on separation distances from sewers for all new tree planting.
- Respect/relate to the character and amenity of the surrounding area, including valued built and natural features.
- Incorporate measures for the protection, enhancement and creation of habitats.
- Aim to provide links between sites of nature conservation value thus contributing to the development of green-blue networks.
- Be provided at a scale which makes clear all aspects of the scheme including all finished surface specifications, a planting schedule listing all plant and tree species, their size, type, number per planting area, initial planting density, protection from vermin etc.
- Contain enough information so that there is no doubt as to the quantity, quality or dimensions of each element of the scheme.

³ See <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/19015/2012-01-09-native-tree-species.pdf>

⁴ Although ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) may be available for planting we would not advise including it in landscaping schemes at this stage due to issues with ash die back.

⁵ <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/HedgesforWildlife.pdf>

- Demonstrate compliance with Policy P1 and P2. Ensure the scheme will be of high-quality design and meet the criteria for quality placemaking as set out in Appendices 8 and 9 of the Aberdeenshire LDP 2023.

Step 5 – Management Plan

The Local Authority has no duty to take over the maintenance of greenspace in any new development. Therefore, it is essential that a management plan is provided to ensure the scheme is properly established and maintained. This should be prepared in two inter-related sections as part of the landscape design package and be produced as part of the information package needed with a planning application. The developer should confirm arrangements/ responsibility for future maintenance. It is expected that developers will ensure that proprietors are afforded sufficient flexibility and democratic control within factoring arrangements to ensure that maintenance of outdoor space is not compromised by contractual obligations e.g., to allow for a change of factor, maintenance regime, or change of use of space.

This landscape establishment and maintenance information should be submitted in as much detail as possible as part of a planning application. It should include details of plant replacement, weed control, grass cutting, pruning, general maintenance activities and watering; and be in two parts:

Part 1 – A short term implementation and establishment plan for 3-5 years to be presented primarily as a programme relating to monthly maintenance tasks for establishing all aspects of a new landscape, including grassed areas, shrub planting and woodland planting. A commitment to watering young stock in drought conditions should be included in this section.

Part 2 – A long term maintenance plan (5 years +). To address all aspects of management and maintenance for the long-term development and retention of the landscape created, including the programme for grass cutting, weed control, pruning, long term maintenance inspections and replacement planting.

Maintenance is the key to the long-term success of a landscape design and should be developed as part of the overall site design process.

For development proposals requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment, the landscape design should relate directly to the environmental impact assessment process in terms of minimising adverse impacts on site, enhancing environmental value and implementing appropriate mitigating measures.

4. Prevention of Spread of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

Invasive non-native species (INNS) are species that have been introduced either deliberately or accidentally outside of their natural range, where they then become established and cause damage to their new environment.

A Code of Practice has been produced by NatureScot to identify and clarify responsibilities for dealing with INNS <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-species/invasive-non-native-species> .

Landowners have a legal responsibility to prevent INNS spreading into the wild or causing a nuisance. This means that due consideration is given to what is included within planting and landscaping schemes, particularly for sites outwith the urban environment or adjacent to semi-natural land i.e. uncultivated areas such as grassland, woodland.

It is illegal to sell certain INNS including the major problem invasive plant species (Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed). Further information on these species and other INNS that should not be planted can be found at <https://www.nonnativespecies.org/non-native-species/> .

Appendix 1 details some non-native species that will spread and should only be planted in areas where there is no potential for them to spread to adjacent land i.e., these species might be appropriate for urban schemes but not for landscaping in areas adjacent to semi-natural habitat. In these circumstances the best policy is one of precaution and therefore if in doubt, do not plant these species.

Plantlife have produced a useful guide 'Landscaping without harmful invasive plants'⁶ which details alternative species suitable for planting at sites adjacent to semi-natural land. If you are proposing to create a pond the current advice is not to plant at all, but to allow plants to colonise naturally.

⁶ See <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/19037/2014-plantlife-landscaping-without-harmful-plants.pdf>

Appendix 1: Species which should not be planted in schemes close to water courses and semi-natural habitat

Common name	Scientific name
Bluebell, Spanish	<i>Hyacinthoides hispanica</i>
Buckthorn, Sea	<i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i>
Butterfly bush	<i>Buddleja davidii</i>
Cornflower, Perennial	<i>Centaurea montana</i>
Cotoneaster – all species	<i>Cotoneaster – all species</i>
Currant, Flowering	<i>Ribes sanguineum</i>
Daisy, Michaelmas	<i>Aster aggregate</i>
Dogwood, Red Osier	<i>Cornus servicea</i>
Grape, Oregon	<i>Mahonia aquifolia</i>
Ladies mantle, Soft	<i>Alchemilla mollis</i>
Mallow, Tree	<i>Lavatera arborea</i>
Montbretia - all species	<i>Crocsmia - all species</i>
Pampas grasses	<i>Cortaderia selloana and C. richardii</i>
Rhubarb, Giant - all species	<i>Gunnera - all species</i>
Rose, Japanese	<i>Rosa rugosa</i>
Snowberry	<i>Symphoricarpus albus</i>