

SGRetail 1: Town centres and retailing

We will approve retail and commercial proposals, subject to other policies, if:

- 1) they are appropriate to the scale and function of the settlement; AND**
- 2) they are within a town centre defined in the proposals map, OR they are elsewhere within a settlement where it can be demonstrated that a sequential approach to site selection has been followed (this approach is detailed in Appendix 1 to this statement); AND**
- 3) they are in a location that either is, or at the developers' expense can be made, conveniently accessible by means other than the private car to the projected catchment of the facility; AND**
- 4) in the case of any non-retail or non-commercial developments within town centres, OR of any retail or commercial developments outwith town centres, the developer can demonstrate that they will not affect maintenance of the vitality or viability of town centres, as detailed in Planning Advice published separately.**

Shops designed primarily to serve the convenience of a local neighbourhood, and shops which will act as a new, or support an existing, tourist destination and make a contribution to the development of the Aberdeen Rural Housing Market area, are not subject to the sequential approach to site selection.

Reasoned justification

This supplementary guidance promotes a *sequential approach* to site selection. This is detailed in Appendix 1, but in general requires developers to demonstrate that there are no suitable town centre sites, before considering sites on the periphery of the town centre, and subsequently before considering sites, in other retail centres within the town. This recognises the commercial and transportation benefits to be achieved through the grouping of shops together.

The supplementary guidance also requires developers to demonstrate that their proposals have an acceptable impact on the *vitality and viability* of existing centres through consideration of a wide range of quantitative and qualitative indicators, including expenditure flows. A combined retail, economic and transport assessment is recommended. Details of how this should be undertaken are presented in Planning Advice appended to this policy statement.

A mix of uses is anticipated within town centres, including housing and business developments, but retailing and commercial services should always remain the principal land uses. Public open spaces in town centres are important to allow features such as farmers' markets to operate, making a significant contribution to the vitality of the centre. Town centre strategies are promoted as a means of analysing and identifying the capacity for change within town centres, and setting out a programme for delivery of environmental and amenity improvements. Objectives for such strategies should be to promote sustainable and competitive places with a distinct character and sense of place provided through well designed and appointed public spaces and buildings. Aberdeenshire Council will assist local traders in developing town centre strategies, and will use its planning powers to assist in their delivery.

Retail and commercial developments are often large and conspicuous elements of the townscape. In all cases the highest design standards are to be expected for retail,

commercial and office developments. Large or otherwise significant proposals should be submitted for design review with Architecture&Design Scotland. Where supermarkets are proposed as part of a neighbourhood centre within masterplanned developments, we will require their construction early within the phasing of development.

Appendix 1

The sequential approach to site selection

1. . The sequential approach requires that locations are considered in the following order:
 - i. principal and other town centre sites;
 - ii. edge of town centre sites;
 - iii. other commercial centres identified within the development plan;
 - iv. derelict or vacant land in out-of-centre sites in locations that are, or can be made, easily accessible by a choice of modes of transport;
 - v. other out-of-centre sites in locations that are, or can be made, easily accessible by a choice of modes of transport.

2. Table 1 provides guidance on the retail centres in towns across Aberdeenshire and on the nature of development that is supported. A sequential assessment report is not required for sites within defined town centres or that otherwise meet the principles within this table. Applicants for major retailing proposals are required to show that they have complied with the sequential approach for site selection for any site outwith centres or retail parks (where appropriate) identified in the development plan.

Table 1 “Retail Centres and roles”

Centre type (role)	Policy approach		Centre
	New development	Principle for sequential approach	
Principal Town Centre	Support all retail developments where the market area is not regional	Preferred location for large comparison shop types, and for local convenience shops which serve the town centre.	Banchory Banff Ellon Fraserburgh Huntly Inverurie Peterhead Stonehaven Turriff
Other town centres	Local retail provision only	Preferred location for convenience shops which serve the town	Aberchirder Aboyne

		centre.	Alford Kintore Macduff Newmachar Oldmeldrum Portsoy Rosehearty Westhill
Neighbourhood centres	Local retail provision only (less than 500m ² gross floor area)		Other villages Neighbourhoods within principal towns
Other commercial centres and retail parks		Preferred location for bulky comparison outlets if town centre sites are not available	Balmacassie, Ellon Buchan Gateway, Peterhead Highclere Business Park, Inverurie Portlethen Retail Park South Harbour Road, Fraserburgh, Steven Road, Huntly Windmill Road Peterhead.

3. Applicants should be able to demonstrate that all potential town centre options have been thoroughly assessed before less central sites are considered for development. The onus of proof that more central sites have been assessed rests with the applicant.
4. Flexibility and realism are required from developers. An alternative site may still be acceptable for the purposes of the sequential approach, even if it cannot accommodate development on the same scale or form as originally proposed. A 'format-driven' approach, in which developers have a preferred format, and which in their view does not fit into existing town centres, is not exempt from the sequential approach. Applicants should have regard to the format, design and scale of the proposed development in relation to the circumstances of the particular town centre.
5. Aberdeenshire Council generally takes the stance that any assessment should be made on the basis of the class of goods to be sold, rather than solely on the "built form" of the development. Greater flexibility will be expected from the developer, if the class of goods which are proposed can be reasonably traded in the town centre. The test for reasonableness will be a comparison of retail activities on comparable sized sites and locations within other centres.

- 6 The expectation is that the applicants will have demonstrated rigour in their search of alternative sites for a retail proposal, by an early and systematic assessment of sites. In practice this will involve:
- Identification of sites that are available or may become available in a reasonable time period (5 years) in or on the edge of the town centre, including other adjacent centres capable of serving broadly the same catchments.
 - Appraisal of all the alternative sites in terms of:-
 - their suitability of the site for the type of goods being sold;
 - the impacts of development on the site, particularly in terms of the design sensitivity of uses adjacent to the site and traffic generation;
 - the accessibility of the catchment to the proposal, particularly by non-motorised and public transport;
 - its suitability for the form of development proposed; and
 - the deliverability of the site.
 - Assessment of the alternative sites on their ability to accommodate broadly the same form and amount of floorspace proposed by the developer with a degree of flexibility appropriate to the nature of the retailing characteristics of the centre.

This assessment requires to be submitted along with the planning application.

7. The sequential approach applies equally to proposals for extending existing edge of centre and out of centre development that creates additional floorspace. These will be treated as if they were new development and on the basis of the trade of the store extension.
8. Retail warehouse proposals, where goods are stored and sold from the same location, are not exempt from the sequential approach. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1997 states that:
- “Retail warehouses, where the main purpose is the sale of goods directly to visiting members of the public, will generally fall within the shops class irrespective of the proportion of floor space used for storage.”*
- Aberdeenshire Council will, however, demonstrate realism in the interpretation of the sequential approach to this kind of development, recognising that the format for such proposals and the need for vehicular access may not make them appropriate within the defined town centres of the Aberdeenshire towns. In order to meet objectives to reduce the need to travel, encouragement will be given to proposals which add to an existing group of such developments within a “retail park” site identified within the Development Plan.
9. Factory retail outlets and farm shops are restricted by their location to the factory or farm on which they are sited, and from which the majority of their produce is generated. These types of shop are exempt from the sequential approach.
10. Retail uses are not principally employment uses, and allocation of land for business use does not imply it will necessarily be acceptable as a retail development site.
11. Where possible, edge of centre stores should be designed with the store on the part of the site nearest to the centre. Preferably they will have a direct street frontage, so

that the shop will be welcoming to those arriving on foot and will extend the town centre.