

Planning Advice 3/2014

The sequential approach to retail site selection

1. The sequential approach requires that locations within settlements 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. other out-of-centre sites in locations that are, or can be made, easily accessible by a choice of modes of transport.

Proposals out with settlement boundaries will be considered through SG Retail2: Retail development in the countryside.
2. Table 1 within The Supplementary guidance BUS 4 provides guidance on the retail centres in towns across Aberdeenshire and on the nature of development that is supported. This is reproduced in Appendix 1. A sequential assessment report is not required for sites within defined town centres or that otherwise meet the principles within that 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.

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 and the planning authority. An alternative site may still be acceptable for the purposes of the sequential approach, if it falls within the same format even if it cannot accommodate development on the same scale or form as originally proposed. For example food retail falls into 5 broad formats, main food shopping, mid range/top-up, discounters, frozen and convenience. Formats that in the developers view do not fit into existing town centres, are 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 format 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.

Appendix 1

Table 1 from SG Bus 4 “Town Centres and town centre uses”

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	Town Centres. 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	Town Centres. Preferred location for convenience shops which serve the town.	Aberchirder Aboyne Alford Kintore Macduff Newmachar Oldmeldrum Portsoy Rosehearty Westhill
Neighbourhood centres	Local retail provision only (less than 500m ² gross floor area)	Out of Centre	Other villages Neighbourhoods within principal towns
Other commercial centres and retail parks		Other commercial centres. 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. Balmacassie, Ellon Spurryhillock, Stonehaven
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