

3. MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This sheet covers a fundamental concept of the Scottish planning system.

Update: Update: The Planning (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent in July 2019 and introduces many changes to the Scottish planning system. A programme for introducing reforms has been prepared by the Scottish Government. National Planning Framework 4 was adopted by Scottish Ministers on 13 February 2023 representing a very significant change to the Scottish planning system.

This information sheet provides impartial information about the Scottish planning system and was written by chartered planners.

THE SCOTTISH PLANNING SYSTEM

- Planning impacts on everyone in terms of the places we live in and how they may change, whether with regard to major development proposals or changes to our homes. The Scottish planning system is overseen by The Scottish Government, who prepare and implement planning legislation, policy and guidance. Overall, planning is seen as a key factor in meeting Scotland’s National Outcomes, with these being based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- The purpose of planning as set out in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 is “to manage the use and development of land in the long term public interest”. Addressing climate change sits the forefront of current planning policy. Alongside this lies a desire for a system of governance with greater public participation in planning and placemaking, with new opportunities under the 2019 Act for local communities to prepare Local Place Plans.

SO, WHAT ARE MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS?

Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 states that a Planning Authority’s decision on a planning application must be made in accordance with the Development Plan – unless **material considerations** indicate otherwise.

Two main tests are used when deciding whether a consideration is **material** and relevant:

- It should serve or be related to the purpose of planning. This means it should relate to the development and use of land.
- It should fairly and reasonably relate to the particular application.

There is no defined list of what is, and what is not a material consideration. Planners, planning lawyers and the courts spend huge amounts of time debating the amount of weight that should be attached to material considerations when considering whether or not they are material and whether they are sufficient to outweigh the Development Plan.

It is, however, possible to give general guidance on the kinds of issues which are generally accepted as being material considerations – and also some types of issues which are definitely not. It is in the middle ground where it becomes difficult to decide whether something is “material”.

THE ROLE OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

As decisions on planning applications must be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, when you are commenting on a planning application you should first look at what the Development Plan has to say. This should tell you whether the “principle” of development is likely to be acceptable to the planning authority (your local Council or National Park Authority).

Having checked the proposal against the Development Plan, you may then wish to consider whether there are any other material considerations which might mean that the planning authority could grant planning permission **not** in accordance with the Development Plan.

(Note - please note that material considerations are also relevant when making representations during a Development Plan consultation.)

Types of issue which **ARE** material considerations include:

- Scottish Government Policy, and UK Government policy on reserved matters
- European policy
- Supplementary Guidance, including proposed Supplementary Guidance
- Planning Advice Notes (PANs) and Circulars
- A draft National Planning Framework (note any adopted National Planning Framework is part of the Development Plan)
- Emerging Development Plans, including proposed plans which are not yet “adopted” (Local Development Plans) or “approved” (Strategic Development Plans)
- National Park Plans
- Community-led Plans
- The National Waste Management Plan & Scotland’s Zero Waste Plan
- Views of statutory and other consultees
- Suitability of the site for the proposed development (e.g. contamination/flooding issues).

- Visual appearance of the proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings. This is a complicated area but can include:
 - Building materials
 - Height, scale, massing, design, density and layout of development, particularly in comparison with other buildings in the locality
 - Landscaping proposals
 - Privacy, over-shadowing, over-development (overcrowding), and lack of natural light
- Environmental Impact – such as pollution and contamination
- Impact on archaeology
- Impact on nature conservation
- Impact on setting of listed buildings or conservation area
- Nuisances caused by the development such as noise, smell, fumes, glare from floodlights or headlights of vehicles
- Adverse safety impact, e.g. the siting of a hazardous installation such as a firework factory next to houses
- Compatibility with existing uses, e.g. the mix of uses found in town centres, such as shops, offices and cafes, can be mutually beneficial
- Economic benefits, e.g. creation of jobs
- The needs of an area (employment, commercial, social or leisure facilities, affordable housing)
- Provision of suitable access and transportation (including road safety, parking issues, effect on pedestrians and cyclists, and amount of traffic generated)
- Adequacy of infrastructure (e.g. sewerage, drainage and water)
- Creation of an undesirable “precedent”, making it difficult to resist similar proposals elsewhere (but this should not be over-emphasised)
- Planning history of the site (including decisions on previous planning applications on the same site, particularly appeal or court decisions)
- Personal circumstances of applicant. **Note:** this has occasionally been held to be regarded as a material consideration but only when the weighting has been held to be very significant in terms of its impact.

Please remember that this list is only meant to provide an indication of what might, or might not, be a material consideration.

Items which are **NOT** material considerations and are therefore not relevant to planning include:

- Private impacts on a 3rd party, e.g. devaluation of property, private property rights including boundary and access disputes, and more.
- Private interests, e.g. loss of a view, competition between businesses, loss of a view
- Moral considerations (e.g. to betting shops), or religious objections (e.g. religious objection to working on Sunday)
- Political considerations or ideological dislikes, e.g. private hospitals
- Cost of the development and the financial means of the applicant (these are not likely to be material considerations unless there is clear evidence of wider impacts if the development fails)
- Title restrictions
- Applicant's lack of ownership of the site
- Issues covered by other legislation, e.g. health and safety regulations, licensing, building control
- Any factor indicating that there is a lack of any reasonable prospect of the development proceeding

HOW CAN I OBTAIN FURTHER INFORMATION ON MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS?

- Contact your planning authority
- See Scottish Government [Circular 3/2022 Development Management Procedures](#) – for useful information on material considerations refer to Annex A: “Defining a Material Consideration”.

Note - this information sheet contains only a brief outline of Material Considerations.

HOW CAN PAS HELP?

If you are still unsure or need impartial and independent advice, then PAS may be able to help. Please submit your enquiry to our planning helpline using [this enquiry form](#) or phone 0300 323 7602* (*calls cost no more than a national call rate).