



From mountain to sea

# Self-build Guide

*Please note that all links provided are as a convenience and for informational purposes only; they do not necessarily constitute an endorsement or an approval by the council of any of the products, services or opinions of the organisations or individuals.*



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## Introduction

This guide has been developed to provide basic information about the self-build register and considerations for those who are interested in self-building in Aberdeenshire.

Information in this guide can be found in more detail on the [Aberdeenshire council website](#), [Scottish Government website](#) and the Aberdeenshire [Local Development Plan](#).





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## Background

Aberdeenshire Council and the Scottish Government are keen to see more self-build housing. Self-build housing can offer benefits over traditionally built homes in that they can be custom built to individual specifications, can be more cost effective and create unique homes. Design and construction of these homes are also more likely to provide work for local people.

While this guide provides basic information, the process can be complex, so it is advisable to get professional help. The noted bodies may be of use:



[The Directory of Planning Consultants](#)  
[Architects Registration Board](#)  
[The Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists](#)  
[The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland](#)



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## Background

### Types of self-build:

- Self-build housing - where a person builds their own house or appoints their own builder.
- Custom-build housing - where a person tasks a house builder to tailor a home to their preferences before it is built.
- Collective self-build - where a group get together to build their homes. This provides the opportunity for friends and people, to work together - sharing costs and building relationships as they build their houses.
- Community led housing – homes built by local communities for affordable rent or sale to local people.
- Co-Housing - an intentional, mutually-supportive community with shared communal space. It involves people coming together to build a neighbourhood that embodies particular values.
- Self-provided housing - includes self-build housing, custom-build housing and collective build housing.



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## Self-build Register

The Self-Build Register is a record of individuals / group of individuals wishing to acquire land to self-build their residential dwelling in Aberdeenshire. Relevant parts of this register will be published on the council's website following the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The data collected through the Self-Build Register will be used in accordance with the [Aberdeenshire Data Protection Statement](#).

The Self-Build Register can be found [here](#)



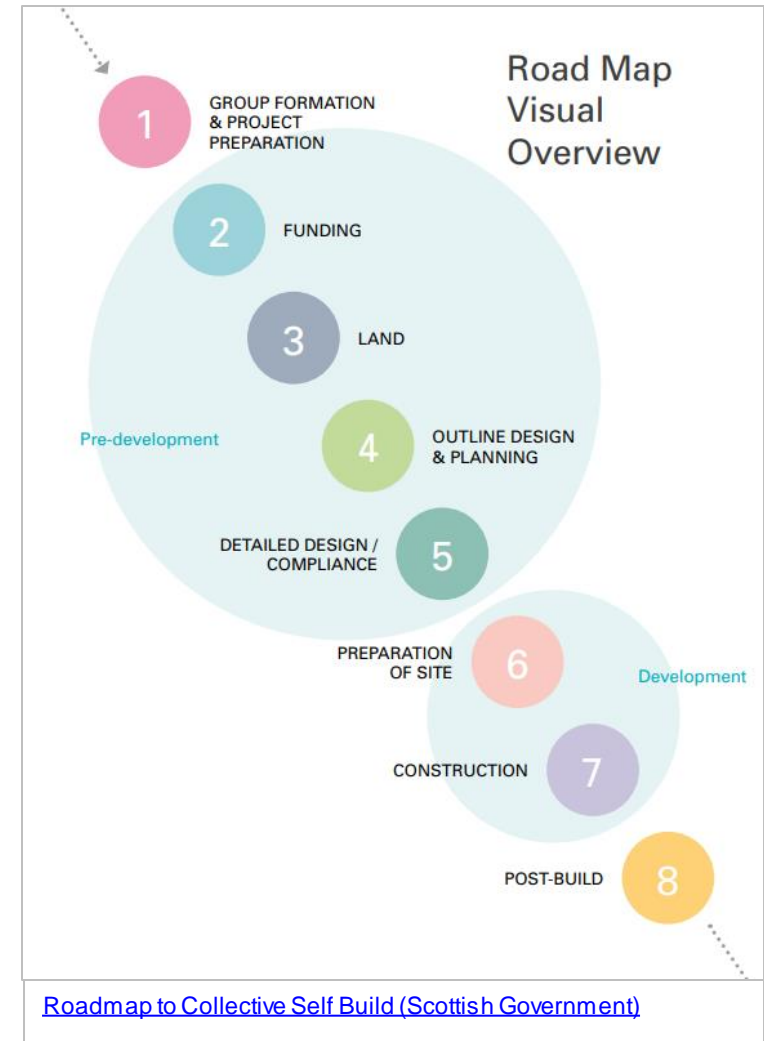


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## Collective Self-build

Collective self-build is where a group of people get together to build homes alongside each other on a larger site. By building together the group can share costs associated with such infrastructure as sewerage, drainage and roads. The group can often share builders again reducing costs by having a larger overall contract.

[Guide to Collective Self Build Guide \(Scottish Government Communities Housing Trust - Communities Housing Trust\)](#)





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## Local Place Plans

Local place plans are another way for groups of people to influence development and advocate for land for self-build development.

These are created by local communities. The [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) states: “A local place plan is a proposal as to the development or use of land. It may also identify land and buildings that the community body considers to be of particular significance to the local area.” They are registered with the council and help inform future development.

Local Place Plans (LPPs) are another way for groups of people to influence development and advocate for land for self-build development



[Local Place Plans - Aberdeenshire Council](#)  
[Community Led Plans - Planning Aid for Scotland](#)





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## Finding a Site

These types of sites have been identified as preferred options with Aberdeenshire Council:

- 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

There are lots of informal and formal ways to find sites, below are some places to get you started:

<https://www.plotbrowser.com/>

<https://plotsearch.buildstore.co.uk/findingland/>

<https://www.primelocation.com/>

<https://www.aspc.co.uk>

<https://www.rightmove.co.uk/>

<https://www.purplebricks.co.uk/buyers>

You can also approach the landowner directly

Be aware, there are risks buying land without consent. You may wish to put in a conditional offer or seek advice from a solicitor before purchasing land.





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## The Site

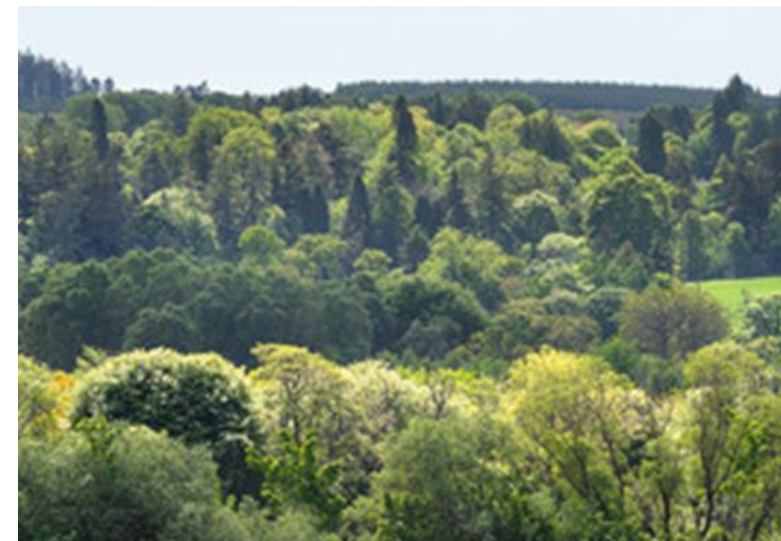
There may be problems with a site that aren't obvious right away. To make sure you know about any problems, you should get a site appraisal done. This will make sure:

- the land isn't contaminated
- there are no mineral-related problems caused by old mineral mines
- the soil is in good enough condition to support a house
- there's no major risk of flooding
- the site isn't on an old waste tip or filled quarry
- essential services (electricity, water and possibly drainage and gas) are available or can be made available

Before you buy a site, check if it already has planning permission. If it does, you might have to stick to the design of the approved planning permission. If you want a different design, you will need to submit a new planning application.

Serviced site - defined as being one that has access to a public highway and connections for electricity, water and wastewater.

Non-serviced site – essential services are not already connected on the site and will need to be installed.





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## Site Layout



*Aberdeenshire Council wants successful places for people to live and as such are looking for these six qualities:*

**Distinctive** - developments with a sense of local identity through creation of a sense of place and the aesthetics of the design features and elements.

**Safe and pleasant** - new development encourages both activity and privacy, providing security and protecting amenity.

**Welcoming** - through ease of movement around the site, visual appeal, style, and the creation of a welcoming environment.

**Adaptable** - to future needs through the balance of land uses, building types, density, sizes and tenures (including housing for people on modest incomes), and the flexibility to adapt to the changing circumstances of occupants.

**Resource efficient** - in terms of waste management, water use, heating and electricity, the use of recycled materials and materials with low embodied energy, and responding to local climatic factors associated with cold winds, rain, snow and solar gain.

**Well connected** - to create well connected places that promote intermodal shifts and active travel and are easy to move around.



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## House Design

It is advised that you engage an architect to help you design your home, they will help you determine what is important to you in your home and what is possible.

When you first speak to them, they will want to know things like; whether you want a kit house or a unique home, how many bedrooms you want and whether you want spaces to be adaptable for the future, how much storage space you need and for what and if there are any design features which appeal to you.

Building Design Guidance (appendix 9) of our Local Development Plan 2023 (linked below) gives more detailed information about what we look for by giving the six qualities of a successful place. They fall into these categories: Distinctive, Safe and Pleasant, Welcoming, Adaptable, Resource Efficient and Well Connected.





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## Pre-Planning Advice

Fees can vary, you can find a calculator and more information on our website



Planning pre-application advice is intended to guide and inform your development proposals before you submit a formal planning application. It allows you to discuss your proposals with a Planning Officer before going to the expense of having detailed drawings and specifications prepared by an architect or other design professional.

By seeking pre-application advice, you will get a formal response in writing that:

- will give you the opportunity to understand how policies from the current Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan will be applied to your proposal.
- can identify at an early stage where there is a need for specialist input for example contamination, transport, or ecology.
- can identify information that is likely to be required to accompany a planning application for example a Flood Risk Assessment or tree survey.
- can help to establish the fee and a likely timescale for processing any subsequent application.
- may lead to a reduction in time dealing with a formal application.
- will flag up whether a proposal is unacceptable which could save you the cost of submitting a formal application.

A formal letter will always be issued providing comprehensive pre-application advice. We aim to provide a response within 25 working days.

[Planning pre-application advice - Aberdeenshire Council](#)  
[Planning application fees - Aberdeenshire Council](#)



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## Planning Application



There are two main types of application

1. Planning Permission in Principle (PPP) – this assesses the principle of development, e.g., whether the principle of a house on a certain site is acceptable and no design details of the house are required. Technical matters such as access, drainage, natural environment considerations etc are still required to be fully assessed. This application will determine the acceptability of a house on a site in terms of relevant planning policies and whether it can be suitably serviced. Following approval of PPP, a further application(s) for ‘Matters Specified in Conditions’ (MSC) will be required and must include the full detailed design of the proposal to be submitted and approved prior to development commencing. Any other pre-commencement conditions will also require to be satisfied prior to works starting. PPP expires after 5 years (unless otherwise specified) and subsequent MSC application(s) approved prior to this expiration date.
2. Full Planning Permission – this assesses the development as a whole and an application will be required to be supported by full details of the layout, siting and design and any technical assessments. If approved, development can commence without further delay (subject to satisfying any pre-commencement planning conditions). Planning permission will lapse within 3 years of the date permission was granted unless lawfully implemented.

**Developer Obligations:** When a residential development takes place there is a need for infrastructure and services to accompany it. This can include roads, schools or a wide range of facilities depending on the scale and location of development. Therefore, developer contributions may be required for your development.



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## Processing Planning Applications

Your application will be assessed on compliance with the Local Development Plan and any 'material considerations' by a qualified planner e.g., noise, traffic and parking, application planning policies.

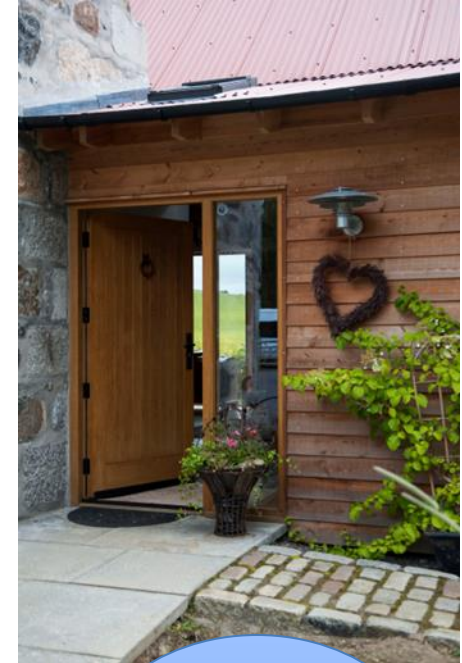
Applications may take various routes, depending on whether they are recommended for approval or refusal, or if there are valid representations made against it. Whilst most applications are Officer delegated decisions, some applications may require to be referred to the relevant Committee for consideration.

During assessment of your application, Planning Officers will:

- Visit the site (physically or virtually)
- Assess your proposal against relevant planning policies and guidance documents
- Check that you have provided all required information. You may be asked for further details during the application process.
- Consult with relevant internal and external services as necessary
- Take valid comments/representations into consideration.

Once the officer has considered all the information, they will make a recommendation for a decision. In the event of approval, this may be subject to planning conditions.

Further information on how decisions are made, and routes of determination can be found in the Council's Scheme of Governance [Planning Delegations \(aberdeenshire.gov.uk\)](http://aberdeenshire.gov.uk).



We aim to respond  
within 2 months of  
receiving a valid  
application



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## Planning Decision

**Approval:** After receiving planning permission, you will be sent 2 forms to complete

- Notice of Initiation of Development (NID), you need to complete this to let us know when work will start. You will need to complete it before starting work and once all pre-commencement conditions have been met.
- Notice of Completion of Development (NCD), you need to complete this to let us know when work is finished.

**Refusal:** If your application is refused, you have a right to appeal against it or ask for a review if:

- you are unhappy with our decision.
- you disagree with the conditions attached to your permission.
- we didn't decide within the time set by the law.
- Depending on how your application was decided (delegated or Committee) will determine where you would appeal the decision, Local Review Body or Scottish Ministers.

Most applications received, are approved

To make minor changes to your development, you can submit a request for a non-material variation (NMV). You can only do that after planning permission is granted and before starting any work. The level of amendments of which can be accepted as an NMV varies and is assessed on a case-by-case basis.





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## Post Planning Approval

After receiving planning permission, you will be sent 2 forms to complete

- Notice of Initiation of Development (NID), you need to complete this to let us know when work will start.
- Notice of Completion of Development (NCD), you need to complete this to let us know when work is finished.



Planning enforcement: it is important that you follow your plans and conditions as stated. Any deviation from the approved plans will require to be approved by the Council (either through an NMV or a new planning application). Unauthorised development or a breach of planning conditions will be investigated and under the Planning Acts we also have powers to remedy breaches.



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## Building Warrants

A building warrant is the legal permission to start building work, or to convert or demolish a building. This permission is to make sure that the development meets building regulations.

Building warrant and planning permission are two entirely different permissions. In most cases, you need both to carry out work legally.

When submitting an application for a building warrant please provide the following information:

- Proposed and existing [drawings](#) of the design and construction.
- Location plan and site plan showing ownership boundaries.
- [Certification](#) – if you are using certifiers of design or construction.
- Remember that the work detailed in your building warrant application must be shown to comply with the Scottish Building [Regulations](#).



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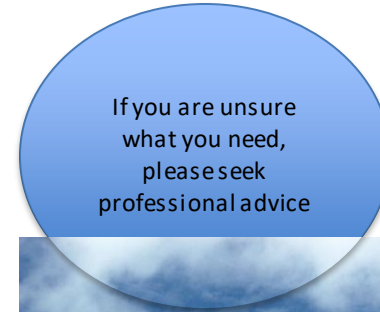
## Other Approvals

Planning approval and building warrants are only part of the development consent process and before building can commence you may require various other permissions/approvals, including:

- Road Construction Consent;
- Street Naming & Numbering;
- SEPA CAR Licence for private foul water drainage systems.

Development should not commence until you have secured all the relevant approvals.

Various pipes, cables and services are buried underground and before you start any excavation, we would recommend that you contact 'Dial Before you Dig' on 08000 231 251 to confirm if any underground services are on site.



It is your / your agents or developers responsibility to ensure you have all the required permissions in place and you have notified the correct bodies prior to commencing any works



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# Queries

Is there anything we haven't covered? Send us a query at:  
[statistics@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

Please provide

- Name
- Contact details
- Have you added your details to the self-build register?
- Description of query: e.g., Housing, planning process, finding a site