



THE SCOTTISH OFFICE  
Environment Department

*Planning Advice Note*

PAN 39

**FARM AND FORESTRY  
BUILDINGS**

*Planning  
Series*



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**National Planning Policy Guidelines (NPPGs)** provide statements of Government policy on nationally important land use issues and other planning matters, supported where appropriate by a locational framework.

**Circulars**, which also provide statements of Government policy, contain guidance on policy implementation through legislative or procedural change.

**Planning Advice Notes (PANs)** provide advice on good practice and other relevant information.

Statements of Government policy contained in NPPGs and Circulars may, so far as relevant, be material considerations to be taken into account in development control.

## *preface*

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This Planning Advice Note sets out general advice on the siting and design of farm and forestry buildings to stimulate planning authorities to prepare both clear development plan policies and, where appropriate, local siting and design guidance. In turn this should:

- encourage new development which is located and designed with respect for the character of rural areas;
- assist the effective implementation of the new notification system as well as the existing system of planning control where appropriate; and
- minimise the number of notifications for which authorities require the submission of details.

The advice note should also help those involved in designing and constructing new farm and forestry buildings.

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## *introduction*

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1. Agriculture is the most extensive rural land use in Scotland, with over 75% of the land used for agricultural production. Farm buildings are therefore a frequent, and in some cases a conspicuous, element in the landscape. In addition, forests and woodlands cover another 14% of the land area. The White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (published in September 1990) sets out the Government's broad objectives for protecting the environment,

including the need to integrate environmental and economic activity in rural areas. One measure designed to help bring this about was the introduction of changes in the system of planning control over agricultural and forestry buildings.

2. These changes have now been incorporated in Parts 6 and 7 of Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 (known as the 'Permitted Development Order') which came into operation in March 1992. They reduce permitted development rights and also bring into operation a system of prior notification of farm and forestry buildings not subject to planning control. SOEnD Circular 5/1992 details the procedures which give local authorities power to exercise control over the siting, design and external appearance of these buildings.

3. This Planning Advice Note provides supplementary advice on the siting and design of new farm and forestry buildings. The main objective is to indicate how development, through the application of appropriate siting and design criteria, can be reconciled with environmental and landscape considerations to achieve a high standard of design throughout the countryside and not just in designated areas of high environmental quality. More specifically, the advice note deals with the matters which local authorities should take into account when considering building proposals which are submitted to them under the notification system. The advice will also be relevant to those undertaking such developments.

4. Although this advice note covers both farm and forestry developments, buildings associated with forestry have not given rise to the same public concern. This is because forestry buildings are relatively few in number, and generally located within woodland areas. The advice is therefore primarily directed at the siting and design of farm buildings, but the general principles also apply to forestry related buildings.

## *trends in agricultural development*

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5. Since 1945 there have been major changes in the agricultural industry. Over much of this time, until the mid 1980s, Government policy sought to encourage increased production and promoted through grant aid the construction of new farm buildings. Greater mechanisation, the introduction of different systems of production and the need to achieve greater output with less labour led to the development of much larger farm units. Larger buildings were required for the efficient housing of livestock, and storage of fodder, produce and general equipment.



6. Recently, because of food surpluses and increasing concern about conservation of the rural landscape, the Government has encouraged farmers to limit output by, for example, taking land out of agricultural production and undertaking farm diversification schemes. Despite the changes in Government policy and the withdrawal of some grant aid, there is a continuing trend towards larger



buildings with wider roof spans, even if fewer are being built. These buildings are industrial in appearance and scale and can have a significant impact on the rural landscape and the visual quality of existing farmsteads.

## *the problems to be addressed*

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7. Over the last decade there has been increasing interest and concern expressed about the impact of new farm buildings. The problems most often referred to are:

- poorly sited buildings, located for example in prominent skyline locations, or without regard to existing development;
- inappropriate design and use of materials; and
- visually disturbing use of colour.

In addition there have been concerns about the future use of redundant farm buildings.

8. Within Scotland there is a diversity of landforms, types of agriculture and vernacular building design. These distinctive local qualities should be respected. It will be important therefore in considering the design and siting of new agricultural buildings to take account of local and regional characteristics in terms of landscape and building styles. These issues become more critical in areas of environmental sensitivity.

## *planning control and notification*

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9. The use of land for agriculture or forestry does not constitute development, as defined by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972. However building, excavation and engineering works, in connection with such uses is classified as development, although in most cases planning permission is deemed to be granted under the provisions of the 1992 Permitted Development Order.

10. Agricultural and forestry developments not covered by the Permitted Development Order and which require specific planning approval in the normal way, include:

- development on agricultural land less than 0.4 hectares in area;
- buildings over 465sq m in extent;
- buildings over 12 metres in height and those over 3 metres high within 3km of the perimeter of an aerodrome;
- buildings within 25 metres of a trunk or classified road; and
- intensive livestock units and slurry stores within 400 metres of any 'protected building' (a building normally occupied by people, but excluding farm houses).

Non-agricultural developments on agricultural land require planning permission, as do most farm diversification schemes. (See "Farm Diversification and Planning Permission" issued by The Scottish Office in 1990).

11. Certain agricultural developments which have significant environmental effects may require the preparation of an Environmental Assessment under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1988. SDD Circular 13/1988 gives a general explanation and provides indicative criteria and thresholds for the identification of relevant projects. Generally these will be restricted to large livestock installations, such as pig and poultry rearing units.

12. The system of prior notification does not affect any of these existing arrangements, but requires the farmer or developer to notify the planning authority of a proposal before deemed planning permission can be exercised. The authority has 28 days to decide whether to call for full details to be submitted

for approval. In operating the controls, planning authorities should always have full regard to the operational needs of the farming and forestry industries; to the need to avoid imposing any unnecessary or excessively costly requirements; and to the normal considerations of reasonableness. Therefore, formal submissions should only be required in cases where the authority considers that a proposal is likely to have a significant impact on its surroundings. Many notified proposals will not have such an impact. Procedural guidance about the system is contained in SOEnD Circular 5/1992.

13. A planning authority should restrict its evaluation of a submitted proposal to the visual and other effects on amenity of the building's siting, design and colour including its setting in the landscape. It will also need to consider the desirability of preserving ancient monuments and their surroundings, known archaeological sites, the settings of listed buildings, and sites of recognised nature conservation value such as SSSIs. The principle of whether the proposal should be allowed is not a relevant consideration.

## *the role of planning authorities*

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14. Planning authorities already deal with planning applications for certain types of development associated with agriculture and forestry and some authorities have already prepared guidance on siting and design. The reduction in permitted development rights and the introduction of the notification system means that there will be more planning involvement in the siting and design of farm and forestry buildings. This strengthens the case for guidance both as a means of establishing a consistent approach in assessing applications and as a way of encouraging developers to consider carefully the impact of their proposals. Dissemination of appropriate advice and policy guidance should help to limit both the number of notification cases where the planning authority has to call for an application and the amount of detailed involvement with individual proposals. Any guidance should be applicable to both notified proposals and those which are subject to full planning control.

15. The notification system will work best where planning authorities:

- include general policies for the siting and design of farm and forestry development in local plans and clearly indicate on the proposals map any special areas where more detailed consideration will be given to such development. Local Plans should clearly and concisely set out the criteria which the planning authority will take into account in determining planning applications and notified proposals. Detailed siting and design advice should however not be included in local plans.



- prepare building design advice leaflets where there is a demand for new agricultural or forestry buildings. These advice leaflets should set out general principles for siting, design and use of materials, indicate any local characteristics and design traditions and specify other sources of advice and guidance. It would also be useful to give examples of modern buildings that successfully address these issues. Leaflets should be distributed to farmers and forestry owners in the area as well as to local architects, building consultants, manufacturers, builders and suppliers;
- organise exhibitions and meetings, where appropriate, to explain the notification system and the principles of siting and design;
- ensure that development control officers are aware of the needs and problems of farming and forestry and the availability and cost of buildings and materials; and
- encourage applicants to discuss proposals with them at an early stage in building design and to obtain professional advice where appropriate (see paragraph 20).

## *siting and design issues*

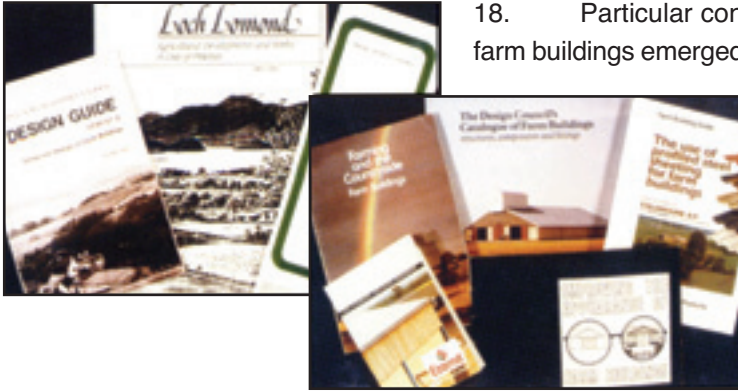
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### **General Considerations**



16. Over hundreds of years the siting and design of farm buildings evolved in response to local climatic conditions, landscape, the farming system, and locally available building materials, skills and traditions. Buildings were usually carefully sited and orientated, resulting in a close relationship between them and the landscape. The building forms, materials and colours tended to harmonise with the landscape and often enhanced it.

17. Whilst it is important that new buildings are located and designed in a way that respects their natural and man-made surroundings, they should not blindly perpetuate past traditions in building styles and materials, when in many cases these are no longer appropriate to contemporary farming practice or building technology. Nevertheless, new buildings should respect traditional influences and be developed in sympathy with their surroundings and in a form appropriate to their function.



18. Particular concern about the siting and design of new farm buildings emerged in the 1970s and since then guidance for farmers has been produced by a number of organisations. Relevant publications are listed in Annex 1. Not all of these are still available. Some planning authorities in Scotland have also produced advice leaflets which have been distributed to applicants and their professional advisers.

19. Planning authorities should consult with staff of The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department where notified proposals require an appreciation of the agricultural requirements and needs of the individual farmer. Similar advice on forestry buildings can be obtained from the Forestry Commission.

20. Authorities should note that the Scottish Agricultural College provides farmers with specialist advice on agricultural buildings through building advice centres at Aberdeen, Auchincruive and Edinburgh. In addition, the Forestry Commission's landscape architects provide landowners with specialist advice on forestry buildings. Annex 2 lists these and other organisations who can provide information and advice.

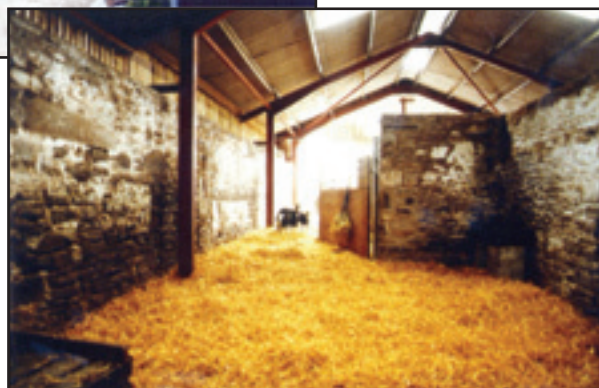
21. The following paragraphs set out the main points to be considered when planning authorities are preparing guidance leaflets and when dealing with notified proposals. The key issues to be taken into account if a farm or forestry building is to harmonise with its surroundings are:

- reuse of existing buildings;
- operational requirements;
- detailed siting and visual impact;
- scale and form of building;
- colour and cladding materials;
- the surroundings.

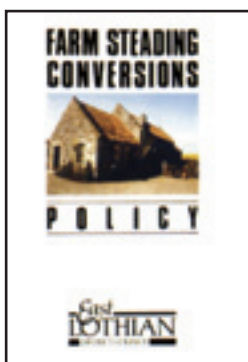
The application of these siting and design issues should not add significantly to the cost of development. In many cases it will be no more expensive to take such matters into account and the use of better quality materials could be more cost effective in the longer term.

22. The advice is based on a review of the existing published material and takes account of the experience of practitioners who have been involved in farm building design. It should be seen as indicative rather than prescriptive. Naturally the level of detail which planning authorities provide in guidance to farmers and others will vary from area to area in response to perceived local needs.

## Existing Buildings



23. The need for new accommodation will generally have arisen in response to specific functional requirements and consideration should be given to the site as a whole, including the opportunities provided by any existing buildings. In certain circumstances it may be possible to rehabilitate or convert existing buildings to accommodate modern processes and new activities. This may be less expensive than erecting a new building and can offer the additional advantages of retaining a mature setting and conserving traditional materials and finishes. However, care is required to ensure that additions or alterations are in sympathy with existing buildings.



24. In many cases, however, a purpose built new building will be the only way of meeting need and consideration may then have to be given to the future of redundant buildings. Some of these may have considerable historic and visual interest and it would be preferable if they remained used and intact. Planning authorities should be able to advise on possible alternative uses and give examples of successful conversions.

25. Grants for the repair or reinstatement of traditional farm buildings may be available from The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department under the Farm Conservation Grant Scheme.

## Operational Requirements

26. The operational requirements of farming and forestry are a major consideration and will often predetermine the general location, and in some cases the particular site and form, of a new building. In general, a building cannot be considered well designed if the operational requirements of the farmer or forester are not satisfied. Good design is not just a question of appearance or form but also relates to the suitability of the building to its function.

27. Sometimes, for operational reasons, new buildings have to be located near existing ones (for example, a self feed unit next to a stock building) and in other cases have to be some distance away (for example, hill farm stock shelters). There may also be health and safety reasons for a separation distance. Location may also be influenced by other operational factors such as the need for security and supervision, road access, the source of water supplies and shelter from prevailing winds.

28. Pollution control is an important determining factor in the location of farm activities. Slurry tanks should be placed down-wind and away from housing but other functional considerations such as the need to be close to livestock buildings and the need to avoid pollution of water courses will influence the siting. Detailed advice is contained in the SOAFD publication 'Prevention of Pollution from Agricultural Activity - A Code of Good Practice'.

### ***Siting and Visual Impact***

29. The visual impact of a new building is more difficult to assess since it involves aesthetic judgements which can vary. It also depends on the location; for example, large scale buildings can usually be more easily accommodated in flat open countryside than in hilly terrain, where, because of their size, they have a greater impact on the landscape. There are, however, some general principles of good practice governing siting that can help to ensure that a new building is integrated with its immediate surroundings and the general landscape setting:

- consideration should be given to the impact of a new building from a number of viewpoints both in the immediate surroundings and in the wider countryside;



- subject to operational requirements, the impact of a new building can be reduced by locating it near existing development. Making use of existing roads and yards and building against an existing wall may also reduce costs;



- buildings located on the crest of the hill are not only more exposed to the elements but are often visually disturbing. Where such a location is unavoidable the impact of the building can be reduced by siting it close to woodland and by careful choice of colour for the walls and roof (see paragraph 35); and

- on sloping sites it is generally best to align a building parallel with the contours and to use cut and fill in preference to large scale underbuilding. Where it is possible to accept different floor levels a building can be stepped down the slope. This will minimise disturbance to the existing land form, reduce visual impact and may even reduce costs;



- large new buildings can look out of scale with older buildings and consideration should be given to the possibility of providing the new accommodation in 2 or more smaller units;
- existing trees and hedges should be retained where possible and new buildings should respect the field boundary pattern.

30. When assessing possible sites for a new building it is important to establish if any natural or man made features of particular interest are present, for example, a scheduled monument or archaeological site, a category A listed building, a historic garden or designed landscape, or an SSSI. Historic Scotland or Scottish Natural Heritage should be consulted about such features where they are likely to be affected. This follows established practice for handling normal planning applications.

### ***Scale and Form of Building***

31. The forms of traditional buildings were conditioned by functional requirements, the local climate and the availability of building materials. This resulted in distinctive regional types. With modern buildings many of these differences have disappeared due to the use of standardised building techniques to produce cheaper and quicker buildings. Large modern buildings can look out of scale both with smaller old farm buildings and, in some cases, with their landscape settings. The apparent size of a building can be increased or reduced depending on the siting, the colour and the detailing of the exterior walls and roof.

32. The following points relating to scale and form should be borne in mind when considering proposals for a new building:

- avoid locating a very large building close to a small one unless there are trees to help mask the difference in scale;
- to reduce the apparent size of a new building consider the adoption of a “L” shaped plan or the provision of the floor space in more than one unit;



- use a multi-span building rather than single span to reduce overall height and create a more varied roof line. Wide overhanging eaves can also help reduce the apparent height of a building;



- where possible match roof pitches with those on existing buildings. Although low pitched roofs can make a building less obtrusive, they are often out of harmony with the steeper pitches of older buildings. Steep pitches are also usually more appropriate within forest areas; and



- break up large expanses of roof and walls with well designed and carefully positioned functional elements such as roof ventilators, gutters, downpipes, doors and windows.

### ***Colour and Cladding Materials***



33. There is now a wide range of cladding materials and colours available for agricultural and forestry buildings and the choices must be very carefully made since colour and finish can be the most important design factors in increasing or reducing the impact of the building. Very light colours (especially light blues and greens) and large areas of intense strong colours do not blend well with the landscape of Scotland, which in general is characterised by subtler, darker colours such as muted browns, greens, blues, purples and greys.

34. Manufacturers of paints and cladding materials are generally aware of the need to provide suitable colours for use on rural buildings and in many cases these are based on the advice provided in the Design Councils Publication “Colour Finishes for Farm Buildings” and the British Standard Code of Practice for “Buildings and Structures for Agriculture”.

35. When considering the exterior colour to be used on a new building the following guiding principles may be helpful:



- darker colours are generally more acceptable as they complement the natural environment throughout the seasons and the different characteristics of daylight during the year.
- dark roofs reflect less light and generally make buildings look smaller and less conspicuous; and as a general rule the roof of a rural building should be darker than the walls. The main exception may be when lighter colours are required for high humidity livestock housing because of the operational need to reduce solar heat gain;

- where more than one colour is used, they should be in harmony. Technical information on preferred colours which can be used together without resulting in severe colour clashes and considerable visual intrusion is contained in 'British Standard BS5502 part 20';



- use of the same or similar colours on new and existing buildings can help to unify a group of buildings; and



- contrasting or brighter colours can be used to emphasise elements or to sub-divide large wall areas to reduce apparent bulk. However, these areas of colour should be limited in extent.

36. In the past the range of building materials available in rural areas was fairly limited, with the result that buildings tended to harmonise and be in scale with each other. New construction methods have resulted in a wide range of cladding materials being available for use on rural buildings. The following principles can be used to guide the selection of external finishes:

- limit the range of materials on one building since too many contrasting finishes can create visual disunity. However, large expanses of cladding of one colour may also be undesirable since this increases the apparent size of the building;



- choose materials which are appropriate for the climate and which will weather well over time.

- Take account of the maintenance implications of the materials used. Low initial building costs may have been achieved as a result of poor detailing and hasty construction and could lead to increased maintenance costs and a reduced life span;



- Consider the use of traditional materials to provide an important link with existing buildings. Treated timber is now an extremely versatile material with an extended life and, in particular, can be effectively used as space boarding where natural ventilation is required; and

- within a forest setting, use vertical rather than horizontal cladding to complement the vertical forms of the trees.



## Surroundings

37. Consideration should be given to the best way of integrating a new building with its immediate surroundings. New areas of hardstanding, fences, boundary walls and additional planting should all be regarded as part of the overall design:

- consider the layout and design of hardstanding, fences, walls and hedges as a whole since they can make an important contribution to the appearance of the holding, create a unifying visual link between buildings and integrate the site with the surrounding landscape;



- retain and, if possible, augment existing groups of trees and shelter belts. Trees can improve the appearance of large new buildings by softening their outline and horizontal emphasis;
- use native tree species or those which are characteristic of the area, since this will have additional benefits for the conservation of flora and fauna. Grants to assist in planting trees may be available from the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage; and
- before undertaking new planting, take account of possible future building expansion, and operational and building maintenance requirements.

38. Where the new building is sited next to an existing development, there may also be an opportunity to review the whole site and carry out improvements to existing buildings. Although such action would be outwith the scope of the Direction and would therefore be voluntary, it may help to achieve a more satisfactory blend of old and new. For example, it may be possible to repaint existing structures to match the new building or to consider linking old and new hard-surfaced areas, perhaps resurfacing with appropriate materials. There may also be the opportunity to remove waste material and redundant machinery from the site and to demolish derelict buildings that have neither future use nor intrinsic interest.

# ANNEX 1

## Existing Guidance and Advice Publications

1. The Design Council's Catalogue of Farm Buildings - The Design Council, 1977.

*An illustrated catalogue of farm buildings, components and accessories then on the market Also includes a very useful introductory chapter providing advice on planning, siting, design, construction and maintenance of buildings.*

2. Improving the Appearance of Farm Buildings - Scottish Farm Buildings Investigation Unit 1978

*A booklet encouraging farmers to improve the appearance of farm buildings and their surroundings. Contains illustrations of the general principles of siting and design.*

3. Farming and the Countryside: Farm Buildings - MAFF, 1984. Illustrated booklet setting out general guidance on siting and design.

4. Farm Building Guide: The Use of Profiled Steel Sheetting for Farm Buildings - British Steel Strip Products, 1988.

*Advice on the use of British Steel Strip products for cladding farm buildings. Highlights the importance of design, colour and appearance and indicates ways of achieving good ventilation for livestock buildings.*

5. Countryside Conservation: A Guide for Farmers- Countryside Commission for Scotland, 1988.

*A step by step guide to landscape and wildlife conservation on farms.*

6. The Siting and Design of Farm Building in the Countryside - Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland, 1989

*Illustrated booklet for farmers setting out siting and design considerations.*

7. Conservation on Farms - Countryside Commission for Scotland/Nature Conservancy Council, 1990.

*A follow up to No.5 above; includes case studies of good practice, dealing mainly with landscape and wildlife, but with relevance for the future planning and development of farms.*

8. Farm Diversification and Planning Permission -The Scottish Office, 1990.

*A booklet providing farmers with information about farm diversification developments which may require planning approval and explaining the procedures involved.*

9. The Farmers' Building Handbook - Eternit, 3rd Edition, February 1991.

*A booklet prepared by the manufacturers of cladding and roofing materials for farm buildings. Includes information on good building practice in respect of choosing the most appropriate type of building, the range of colours available and the effect of siting and design on the landscape.*

10. Tomorrow's Architectural Heritage: Landscape and Buildings in the Countryside - Fladmark, Mulvagh and Evans: Mainstream Publishing, 1991.

*An illustrated book including an analysis of building design in the Scottish countryside; based on a study carried out for the CCS by Gillespies. Sets down some of the basic principles of good design practice.*

11. Forestry Practice: Handbook 6 - Forestry Commission 1992

*Advice on design of small buildings for forest recreation and car parks is given in chapter 16.*

12. Prevention of Pollution from Agricultural Activity: A Code of Good Practice - SOAFD, 1992

*In addition to the above, the British Standards Institution produces standards for agricultural buildings. The relevant part is BS 5502, 'Buildings and Structures for Agriculture'. This is currently being prepared under the direction of the Farm and Horticultural Building Standards Policy Committee and will replace earlier standards. Particular parts of the Standards which are important in the design and appearance of farm buildings are:*

BS 5502 Part 11: Guide to Regulations and Sources of Information.

BS 5502 Part 20: Code of Practice for General Design Considerations.

*Some example of existing Scottish design guides include:*

Advice Note 1: Farm Buildings - Angus District Council, c1980.

Design Guide, leaflet B: Siting and Design of Farm Buildings - Argyll and Bute District Council, May 1985.

Agricultural Developments and Works: A Code of Practice - Loch Lomond Planning Group, 1986. (This code of practice is attached to the Loch Lomond Subject Local Plan, adopted in 1986 and includes a brief design guide).

## ANNEX 2

### Organisations Providing Information and Advice

Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department  
Pentland House  
47 Robb's Loan  
EDINBURGH  
EH14 1TW  
Telephone: 031-556-8400

The Scottish Agricultural College – Edinburgh  
Building Design Unit  
Bush Estate  
PENICUIK  
EH26 0PH  
Telephone: 031-445-2147

The Scottish Agricultural College – Aberdeen  
Centre for Rural Building  
Craibstone  
Bucksburn  
ABERDEEN  
AB2 9TR  
Telephone: 0224-713741

The Scottish Agricultural College – Auchincruive  
Building Design Department  
Auchincruive  
AYR  
KA6 5HW  
Telephone: 0292-520331

Forestry Commission  
231 Corstorphine Road  
EDINBURGH  
EH12 7AT  
Telephone: 031-334-0303

Scottish Natural Heritage  
12 Hope Terrace  
EDINBURGH  
EH9 2A5  
Telephone: 031-447-0055

