

Edinburgh Planning Guidance: Building Heights and Roofscape Draft for Consultation

OBJECTIVE

This guideline is supplementary to local plan policies that deal with building height and the design of roofs, including service structures on roofs and roofing materials. It provides policy guidance in areas where local plans do not contain such policies and gives guidance on when planning permission will and will not be required. It should be read in conjunction with the Protection of Key Views guideline.

POLICY CONTEXT

The Council seeks to maintain the character of the city, including its historic skyline and important views. It also seeks to secure high standards of design for all development.

Edinburgh City Local Plan objectives support this:

- To ensure that new development is of the highest design quality and respects, safeguards and enhances the special character of the city
- To ensure that the unique qualities of the city, its built heritage and the character of its urban areas are safeguarded for the future

Policy Des10 of the Edinburgh City Local Plan states:

“Proposals for buildings which rise above the building height prevailing generally in the surrounding area will only be permitted where:

- a) a landmark is to be created that enhances the skyline and surrounding townscape and is justified by the propose use
- b) the scale of the building is appropriate in its context
- c) there would be no adverse impact on important views of landmark buildings, the historic skyline, landscape features in the urban area or the landscape setting of the city, including the Firth of Forth.

Policy Des 3 of the Edinburgh City Local Plan states:

“Development will be permitted where it is demonstrated that;

- a) it will have a positive impact on its setting having regard to the positioning of buildings on the site, their height, scale and form,

materials and detailing, wider townscape and landscape impacts and impacts on views...”

The Edinburgh Standards for Urban Design state that:

“ proposed buildings, visible from higher points should maintain or enhance the prevailing massing, articulation and any interesting existing pattern of roofs” and,

”Where a roof is visible, consider it as the fifth elevation by respecting and reflecting adjacent roofscapes”

SCOPE OF GUIDANCE

This guideline applies city-wide and relates to building height and the design of roofs.

STATUTORY AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Planning permission is required to alter or extend a building, including roof alterations and the installation of plant and machinery, where the height of the building as altered or extended would exceed the height of the original building and where the external appearance of the building would be materially affected.

The Council may require the following additional information to be submitted in support of a planning application for high buildings:

- Site levels;
- Heights and elevations of neighbouring buildings;
- Photomontages (required views to be the subject of consultation) and/or a model.

1. Building Heights

a) All new development should generally be well integrated with its surroundings as regards, scale, form, siting, alignment and materials.

b) Accordingly, development should conform to the general height of buildings prevailing in the surrounding area. In residential areas this will be commonly set by tenemental or villa building forms or, in a mews location, will be determined by existing mews buildings. Well-designed architectural features that rise above this height, and which would contribute to the visual interest of the city’s skyline and not adversely affect key views, may be acceptable.

c) Existing high and intrusive buildings will not be accepted as precedents for the future and their replacement with more sensitively scaled buildings will be

sought when their redevelopment is in prospect. New high buildings must conform with the conditions of local plan policy DES 10 and the guideline on the Protection of Key Views.

2. Roofscapes

a) Where it is possible to view roofs from street level and/or other prominent locations, all plant and machinery, and other services, should be incorporated within a building or located behind a parapet wall, or similar feature, which is part of the overall design of the building.

b) New buildings, which are visible from above, should seek to continue the interesting pattern of roofs created by the variety of traditional roof styles found in the following locations:

- (i) the Old Town and New Town Conservation Areas which are extensively in view from the Castle, the Scott Monument and Calton Hill;
- (ii) other conservation areas seen from prominent locations;
- (iii) other sensitive areas where low rise buildings are seen from adjacent higher buildings. New buildings will be treated on their merits depending on local circumstances but it will be necessary to produce carefully designed and detailed roofs to take account of views from above.

c) On new buildings, in appropriate locations, green roofs and roof gardens may be acceptable, subject to compliance with other policies of the Council, particularly those relating to the preservation or enhancement of a conservation area.

d) Roof gardens should not be seen as an alternative to open space on the ground which may be required as part of an overall development, although they may make a valuable contribution to the overall provision (open space standards are specified within local plans and are addressed by a separate guideline), or as a justification for an unacceptably intense form of development.

REASONED JUSTIFICATION

Development throughout much of the city has the potential to impact adversely on views of the city centre skyline. The Council has recognised the importance of the harmonious makeup of large parts of the city and has established a presumption against new buildings that are conspicuously higher than their neighbours. Strategic views across the city have been defined and protected through the Protection of Key Views guideline.

Likewise, over-simplified building forms and unattractive roof structures can have a similar harmful effect on views of intricate roofscapes. Accordingly, the

Council requires the careful integration of all new development with its surroundings in order to protect city-wide and local views of importance, to reinforce the visual effect of the city's topography, and to preserve the special character of conservation areas.

An integral part of the historic and architectural character of the City is its varied skyline. A principle governing the design of roofs and the upper levels of all new development is that they should be designed to maintain and respect the traditional 'roofscape' of the City. Due to the varied topography of the City, roofs can be seen from many street level locations – for example buildings on Princes Street when viewed from The Mound.

These guidelines seek to ensure that the roof of a building is seen as an integral part of the overall design of a building and considered as such from the beginning of the development process.