



**Town Centre  
Impacts**  
Planning advice  
PA2023-19

September 2023

## Purpose of this planning advice

The purpose of this planning advice is to provide guidance on the means to assess the qualitative and quantitative impacts retail proposals may have Aberdeenshire’s Town Centres.

This planning advice supports Policy B1 Town Centre Developments in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023. It focuses on key four topics that are equally important and are essential to follow for any town centre developments.

These are:

1. Town Centre First Principle (TCFP)
2. Town Centre Health Checks (TCHCs)
3. The Sequential Assessment
4. Retail Impact Assessments (RIA).

All four topics play important roles in delivering any town centre development in a sustainable manner.

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## 1. Introduction

Aberdeenshire is an extremely attractive area with a variety of coastal, rural, and commuter towns that offer a high levels of employment opportunities. While considerable new housing and employment land is planned for the near future within Aberdeenshire, maintaining town centres’ attractiveness, activeness, and accessibility is vital for the region to be able to continue to thrive.

This planning advice provides a one stop shop for guidance on the Town Centre First Principle, Town Centre Health Checks, Sequential Assessment and Retail Impact Assessments, with the aim to maintain the viability and vitality of Aberdeenshire’s town centres. The following provides a brief overview provided for each topic:

a) The Town Centre First Principle (TCFP) is an important policy position both nationally and for Aberdeenshire Council and plays a major role for Policy B1: Town Centre Developments which is contained within Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023.

b) Town Centre Health Checks (TCHC) are recommended by the Scottish Government as a way of analysing the factors that contribute to successful town centres and indicate good standard of vitality and viability. Since 2003, Aberdeenshire Council undertaken TCHCs generally every two years<sup>1</sup> covering 12 town centres to provide a comparable dataset from previous findings. However, from 2021, TCHCs will be undertaken every year covering principal towns and regeneration town centres to enable the council to monitor the vitality and viability of its town centres more closely. TCHCs shall be carried out bi-annually on “other town centres”.

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<sup>1</sup> The TCHCs were not carried out in 2019 which was the only exception.

c) Sequential Assessment is an approach that is used as part of the site selection process to justify the proposed location of retail developments. This advice explores how developers should consider the location of a retail proposal, with preference being given towards town centres, followed by edge of town centre sites, before considering other out of town sites. If necessary, the test can also be applied for leisure developments or other major footfall generating uses.

d) Retail Impact Assessment (RIA) is an analysis document that provides information and helps to guide and determine a planning application for major retail development. Submission should be made of an RIA for all major retail planning applications. Where a proposed retail use, in the judgement of the Planning and Economy service, is likely to have a negative impact on existing town centres and other retail or neighbourhood centres, RIA may be asked to be provided as part of the planning application.

The assessment aims to evaluate both the qualitative and quantitative impact of the proposed development on the vitality and viability of existing designated town centres and other retail or neighbourhood centres within the proposed retail development's catchment area and assess this to observe if there will be any detrimental impact on existing centres in the short and long term. Developments in town centres should always strive to improve the quality of experience within the town centre.

## **2. National Planning Framework 4**

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) sets out strategies and policies on how successful and sustainable places can be developed in Scotland. It is vital for Aberdeenshire that town centres are successful and viable in order to provide for the residents and attract visitors.

National policy on City, town, local and commercial centres and Retail are provided in policies 27 and 28 of NPF4 within the Productive Places theme. NPF4 has reinforced the use of a town centres first approach for development proposals which generate significant footfall. This is consistent with policies in the Aberdeenshire

Local Development Plan 2023. NPF4 also gives emphasis to the need to recognise 20-minute neighbourhood principles and explicit support for residential development in town centres (this is not explicitly encouraged by LDP 2023).

NPF4 has scoped the content of Town Centre First Assessments to:

- identify the potential relationship of the proposed development with the network of centres identified in the LDP;
- demonstrate the potential economic impact of the development and any possible displacement effects, including the net impact on jobs; and
- consider supply chains and whether local suppliers and workers will be a viable option; and
- the environmental impact of transporting goods and of staff and visitors travelling to the location.

TCHC reports can be used to inform the Town Centre First Assessment

### **3. Town Centre First Principle**

Town centres are a key element of the economic, social, and environmental fabric of Scotland's towns; often at the core of community and economic life, offering spaces to live and work, meet and interact, do business, and access facilities and services. Collective responsibility must be taken to help town centres to thrive sustainably, reinvent their function, and to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

The Town Centre First Principle was launched jointly by the Scottish Government and COSLA in January 2015. Aberdeenshire Council adopted the TCFP in December 2016 and formulated a policy (see below) to implement this principle. The TCFP mandates that the Scottish Government, local authorities, wider public sector, businesses, and communities put the emphasis on the health of their town centres in making their best value decisions, seeking to deliver the best local outcomes regarding investment and de-investment decisions, prioritising to utilise the resources available at the town centre sites, and encouraging vibrancy, equality, and diversity.

## **Town Centre First Principle Policy**

The [Town Centre First Principle Policy](#) is embedded within the decision making processes of Aberdeenshire Council. The Council will put the health of town centres at the heart of proportionate and best value decision making, seeking to deliver the best local outcomes regarding investment and re-investment decisions, alignment of policies, targeting of available resources to priority town centre sites, and encouraging vibrancy, equality and diversity. The Council wishes to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community. This is the central objective of town centre policy within the LDP 2022.

The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 Policy B1: Town Centres Development supports the Town Centre First Principle Policy. Any proposals submitted for town centres must adhere the Town Centre First Principle as material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

### **4. Town Centre Health Checks**

Town Centre Health Checks (TCHCs) are recommended by the Scottish Government within the Guidance on Local Development Planning, as a means to analyse the factors that contribute to building successful town centres and measure good standard of vitality and viability. The vitality of a centre is a measure of how lively and busy it is, whereas viability is a measure of a town centre's capacity to attract ongoing investment (both in terms of new uses and investment in existing activities). Best practice advocates the use of TCHCs as a means of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the town centres and their ability to withstand competition from out of centre developments.

The main purpose of a TCHC is to assess a town centre's strengths, vitality, viability, weaknesses and resilience. In addition to playing a role for the delivery of an Evidence Report, TCHC Reports will be used to inform and guide the application of

relevant policies in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. TCHCs contribute to the planning system's efforts to support successful town centres through giving an overview of their current performance. They provide an analysis of the infrastructure and viability of the town centre which can be used to inform the LDP and act as a material consideration in determining planning applications and also in the preparation of a Retail Impact Assessment (RIA).

Aberdeenshire Council seeks to undertake a version of TCHCs for the 'principal towns' and 'regeneration towns' on a yearly basis. These towns are:

- Banchory
- Fraserburgh
- Macduff (Regeneration)
- Turriff
- Banff
- Huntly
- Peterhead
- Ellon
- Inverurie
- Stonehaven

TCHCs will also be conducted other towns where the Town Centre First Policy applies: Aboyne; Alford;,, Inch;,, Kintore; Kemnay;,, Laurencekirk; Mintlaw;,, Newmachar;,, Portlethen;,, Portsoy; and Westhill on a bi-annual basis All of these towns and villages are identified in the Appendix 2 of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2022.

### **Town Centre Health Checks Methodology**

TCHCs carries out a detailed analysis of a town centre using Place Standard themes, and takes account of the views from communities and businesses, footfall surveys and other related research. Aberdeenshire Council adopted the methodology in 2021.

Aberdeenshire Council collects data on crime rate, public transport information, safety infrastructure<sup>2</sup>, built heritage, vacant and derelict sites, household income, unemployment, major employment sectors and cultural, leisure and public services within town centres to get an insight of the towns economy and the environment. These data sets provide an opportunity to analyse the spending trend<sup>3</sup>, behaviour of the consumers, sense of security and aesthetic value of the town centres. Furthermore, data/information collected on various events and venues to analyse the vibrancy of the town centre and enables the Council to build an understanding on the social interaction that is happening within the town centre. The information collected and the analysis undertaken gives the council a clear understanding of the direction a town centre is taking.

Both community and business surveys are carried out using the Council's Engagement Platform, Engage HQ. The responses to the surveys are used to gather data on shopping experiences and public perception of the users in town centres. The information received from the panels assists the council in delivering the TCHCs final report. At the end of the TCHCs report for each town centre, Key Considerations are formulated which outlines how to maintain or enhance a town centre's vitality and viability.

Local groups such as community councils, community partnerships, community and learning development and any bodies that are interested in the town centre are given the opportunity to express how they want their town centres to be improved, including infrastructure requirements for people with special needs and any other concern they may have. The detailed TCHC methodology is included in Appendix 3 of this planning advice.

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<sup>2</sup> Infrastructure that ensures the safety of the public. For example, CCTV, adequate lighting, barriers in relevant places, etc.

<sup>3</sup> A question was included in the survey which asked the respondents to note their expenditure within the town centre on a number of different topics including events, food shopping, other shopping etc.



## **How TCHCs are used to assess a planning application**

TCHCs report provides information including strengths and opportunities for a town centre that can be used as reference material when assessing relevant planning applications. The findings from TCHCs along with the Sequential Assessment methodology can be used in assessing new retail and leisure proposals, along with making use of it as evidence within a Retail Impact Assessment. More information on Sequential Assessment can be found in section 7 of this report.

These reports give an indication to a town centre's weaknesses and provides a pathway to what needs to be done to improve the town centre. For instance, information on vacancy rates and where the vacant units are located can influence the decision-making process by encouraging developers to re-use a vacant premise instead of building a new one.

Information in the Retailer Representation section of a TCHC reports provides detailed information on the types of shops and services that are available within the town centre. This gives an indication of the types of shops and services that are absent from the town centre and granting planning permission to such missing businesses will have a positive effect on the centre.

If a new development is proposed outwith a town centre, consideration can be given to the impact on this proposal on the existing footfall in all relevant town centres.

Before submitting a proposal to build a new town centre, developers need to consider potential negative impacts the proposed development might cause on the footfall in all the existing relevant town centres. Furthermore, consideration should be given to the aesthetic of existing town centres and how this may be impacted, how the turnover would be impacted, and how the overall economy of the town centre would be affected by the new development.

## 5. Sequential Assessment

Sequential Assessment is an approach taken to assess a development in order of sequential location, suitability and amenity to assist in making decisions regarding the location of new retail developments. The sequential approach should be applied when planning a new development which generate significant footfall deriving from retails, commercial leisure uses, offices, community facilities, cultural facilities and various public buildings such as library, education and healthcare facilities, located within the principle town centres and other town centres, as found in appendix 2 Retail Centres within the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2022.

This sequential approach method should be applied to determine whether there are appropriate sites within, and on the edge of, a town centre<sup>4</sup>. The selected site should also be assessed in terms of the type of goods to be sold, size, scale, and format of development that is proposed.

NFP4 suggests that a flexible approach should be taken when applying the '20-Minute Neighbourhood Principle' during any site selection process. The need for neighbourhood shopping should be demonstrated. The findings from the Town Centre Health Checks should be used as the baseline when carrying out the Sequential Assessment. For example, the turnover over the years, types of businesses present in the town centre and vacant units should be assessed when carrying out the Sequential Assessment. Appendix 3 provides the methodology on Town Centre Health Checks undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council and which will play an important role in building a Sequential Assessment.

This approach should not be restricted to only for retail developments, it should also be applied for other uses that will generate significant footfall, such as commercial leisure uses, offices, community and cultural facilities and, where appropriate, other public buildings such as libraries, education and healthcare facilities and public

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<sup>4</sup> Edge of town centre is the area commences from the boundary of the town centre and cover up to 400m from the boundary in all directions. It can be less than 400m, depending upon the level of activity taking place and the site must not be recognised as a suburban area.

spaces where people can gather, etc. Such developments should only be considered acceptable in out-of-centre locations if it can be demonstrated that:

- Town centre, edge of town centre and other commercial centre options have been sequentially assessed and discounted as unsuitable or unavailable;
- the scale of development proposed is appropriate, and that the proposal cannot reasonably be altered or reduced in scale to allow it to be accommodated on a town centre site;
- the impacts on existing town centres have been thoroughly assessed and there will be no significant adverse effect on the vitality and viability of existing town centres;

It is important to ensure that any proposal will not adversely impact any actions taken to tackle climate change by for example, generating significant levels of additional journeys without reliance on the private car. Therefore, different modes of transport should be able to access the site safely and the routes should be assessed during planning stage.

The expectation is that the applicant will demonstrate rigour in their search for alternative sites, utilising the Sequential Assessment, and carry out a systematic assessment of sites in terms of the LDP. In practice this will involve:

- definition of the primary catchment area of the proposal;
- confirmation that the type of retailing proposed is or is not of an appropriate scale and type for the centre and if not, why not (justification given);
- identification and assessment of sites in or on the edge of the town centre, including other adjacent centres capable of serving broadly the same catchment;
- appraisal of the sites in terms of their suitability, viability and availability for the form of development proposed; and
- assessment of the sites on their ability to accommodate broadly the same form and amount of floorspace proposed by the developer with a degree of

flexibility appropriate to the nature of the retailing characteristics of the centre.

The Sequential Assessment requires that locations are evaluated in the following order:

- town centres (including city centres and local centres);
- edge of town centre (easily accessible locations no more than 400m from the existing Town Centre Boundary;
- other commercial centres identified in the development plan; and
- out-of-centre locations that are, or can be, made easily accessible by a choice of transport modes.

#### Town centres (including principle town centres and local town centres)

It should be demonstrated that the locations within town centres where suitable sites or buildings for conversions are available or likely to become available have been exhausted and have been taken account of. This may require consideration of sites smaller than may be originally desired to ensure an appropriate scale of development in relation to the role and function of the town centre.

#### Edge of town centre

Edge of town centres are usually located just outside the town centre boundary. It should be demonstrated that the site is, or will be, well connected to town centre, particularly by active travel routes used by pedestrians, wheelers and cyclists.

#### Other commercial centres

Other commercial centres located within towns and must be listed in the Appendix 2: Retail Centres under 'other commercial centres and retail parks'. These centres should be accessible on foot and by public transport as well as other means of transportation. These centres should undergo an assessment of the available '20-Minute Neighbourhood' to ensure that the services proposed are accessible particularly by (pedestrian, wheeling and cycle) routes for the majority of residents in the neighbourhood. If the proposed use is one that could be considered to be a key

everyday use; and this criteria cannot be achieved then the proposal may not be appropriately located.

### Out-of-town centres

Out-of-town centres are considered to be the last resort given no suitable sites are found. The site should be well served by different methods of transport and have a high likelihood of forming a link with the existing town centre. Generally, proposals on out of town centre sites will have to undertake a rigorous Retail Impact Assessment to demonstrate acceptable impact on existing centres ensure that all potential town centre options are thoroughly assessed before a less central site is considered for development

For any relevant proposals<sup>5</sup>, prospective applicants should demonstrate that they have complied with the Sequential Assessment for site selection through a section within a Retail Impact Assessment or a Supporting Statement.

The development proposals should not have any significant adverse impact on the vitality and viability of existing retail centres. Generally, a predicted trade diversion of less than 15% would indicate an acceptable impact on viability of the centre. Furthermore, development proposals should also demonstrate that all potential town centre options have been thoroughly assessed. The onus of proof that central sites have been exhaustibly assessed rests with the applicants and will be required to be demonstrated to The Planning and Economy Service.

## **6. Retail Impact Assessment**

### **What is a Retail Impact Assessment?**

A Retail Impact Assessment (RIA) is a means of estimating the potential commercial impact of a proposed new retail development on existing and committed (i.e. not yet built but having planning permission) retail developments. While some proposals may be modest in strategic terms, the local impact on other facilities can be

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<sup>5</sup> Retail, commercial leisure uses, offices, community facilities and various public buildings

substantial, particularly in the more rural parts of Aberdeenshire. An RIA should be used to assess the significance of the impacts from major developments on the current and future vitality and viability of the surrounding centres within the local area.

An RIA will not be the sole basis upon which an application will be determined, elements of qualitative impact, as identified through the assessment against TCHCs and Town Centre First Policy will play an equal part in any decision. All other relevant policies in the Local Development Plan will also apply

### **When is a Retail Impact Assessment necessary?**

Generally, a Retail Impact Assessment is necessary when a proposed development is of a scale sufficient to be likely to have an appreciable impact on the trade of existing or committed retail outlets or centres and the surrounding area. It will normally be required for superstores, retail warehouses, retail parks, shopping complexes and shopping centres, which are individually or collectively have a gross floor space of 2500m<sup>2</sup> or greater or the site area is 2ha or greater<sup>6</sup>. In addition to this, an RIA may be required for leisure developments and major service centres where the gross floor area is over 2500m<sup>2</sup> individually or cumulatively. Proposals that do meet this threshold but may have a significant impact on local centres may be asked to undertake the same assessment. For smaller individual shops or for large extensions to existing shops where it is unnecessary to undertake a full RIA, a statement of retail impact may be required when, in the view of the planning service, there may be an impact from the development.

For proposals under 2500m<sup>2</sup> gross floor space the need for RIA will be evaluated considering the size of the proposal and the scale of the town centre. Principle or large town centres can accommodate significantly more impact in comparison with small centres and a common-sense approach will be adopted by the Authority in deciding whether an RIA is required.

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<sup>6</sup> The Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009

Prospective applicants, particularly those required to undertake an RIA, are required to consider the TCHCs undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council and evaluate the qualitative impacts that their proposals may have on the centre. Should prospective applicants wish to challenge any issue that may have been raised by the Council in preparing the relevant health check, prospective applicants should themselves seek to apply the methodology established by Aberdeenshire Council. If the prospective applicants reach to a different conclusion while undertaking their own health check, this should be indicated as part of the RIA and justification provided as to why the health check undertaken by the prospective applicant should be a greater level of material weight in the determination of any subsequent planning application.

For smaller settlements which do not have a defined town centre applicants may be required to undertake a subjective assessment of the Town Centre (if any). Planning Officers from Aberdeenshire Council will need to be consulted before this assessment is undertaken.

### **Retail Impact Assessment Methodology**

Applicants are required to show that they have complied with the Sequential Assessment (section 7 of this report) for site selection by following the town centre health check survey and town centre first principle, in addition to the policy B1 Town Centre Developments contained within the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2022. The stages involved in preparing an RIA are outlined in Appendix 2 of this planning advice.

Retail Impact Assessment should assess, in summary, the following:

1. The impact on existing investment within all likely affected centres;
2. The impact on the built environment and footfall within centres;
3. The impact of trade diversion (including monetary) on the vitality and viability of town centres;
4. The impact of trade diversion on allocated sites outside town centres;
5. The impact of the proposal in-centre trade/turnover and trade in the wider area;

6. Current and future consumer expenditure capacity in the catchment area and how changes in demography would affect this in the long-run;
7. Whether the proposal is of an appropriate scale and what impacts it may have on the local importance and the closest town centre.
8. Whether the proposal will reduce the need to travel to the site and/or implement different modes of transport.
9. Whether the proposal will bring any new social benefits to the residents, for example, inclusion amongst different social groups.
10. The positive impacts the proposed site and businesses can bring benefit to vulnerable groups.
11. The proposal should consider how it will contribute to any on-going or future regeneration schemes.
12. The aesthetic design of the proposed development and how it will blend in with the landscape and surrounding area.
13. If the site is located adjacent to a listed building or within or adjacent to a conservation area, justify how the setting of the building impacts on the built heritage.

While preparing a Retail Impact Assessment using the above guidelines, it is necessary to identify the catchment area<sup>7</sup> of the proposed new development site, and all the town/neighbourhood centres that are located within that catchment area. Furthermore, information on changes in the number of households over the past years and household expenditure patterns should be used to correlate the current turnover being generated by the existing centres. If the catchment area household expenditure data is unavailable, then estimation should be created using the national or regional data<sup>8</sup>. Information on household income and unemployment rate can be obtained from the Town Centre Health Checks (TCHCs) report for a town centre. Importance should be given to competing centres or shops/services within the catchment area as the turnover from these shops and services are crucial to assess the likelihood impact from the proposed development. The RIA should be accompanied with a business proposal, demonstrating the estimated turnover for the

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<sup>7</sup> Catchment area is the area where the regular shoppers who are likely to use the new centre reside in.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/>



proposed business and describe the methods used to carry out the estimated turnover. Finally, express the amount of diverted trade from each shopping and town centre as a percentage of the estimated pre-impact turnover of that centre. These steps are summarised in figure 1. Furthermore, consideration should be given in the RIA to the findings emerged from the TCHCs report, in particular the 14 themes of the Place Standard.

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. Thus, if the class of goods which are proposed can be reasonably traded in the town centre, greater flexibility will be expected from the developer in terms of the scale of the proposed development. Justification and argumentative analysis given to why the correct size of a site or premise cannot be identified, will not be deemed as a material consideration. The test for reasonableness will need to be a comparison of retail activities on comparable sized sites and locations within other centres. Retail development should be located in existing centres and be of an appropriate size for the town centre and its catchment area; proposals which are “out of scale” in this regard will be resisted.

Demographic changes, SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) and transport impacts should be considered in the RIA. The proposed site should be accessible via different modes of transportation. Developers should consider delivering different modes of transportation that are missing in the area. Any neighbourhood centres within SIMD areas should be accessible via foot or cycle and the 20-minute neighbourhood strategy should be applied to fulfil the need of the shoppers. Retail development within these areas should meet the requirements of the residents, therefore, strict consideration should be given on the type of retail units proposed.

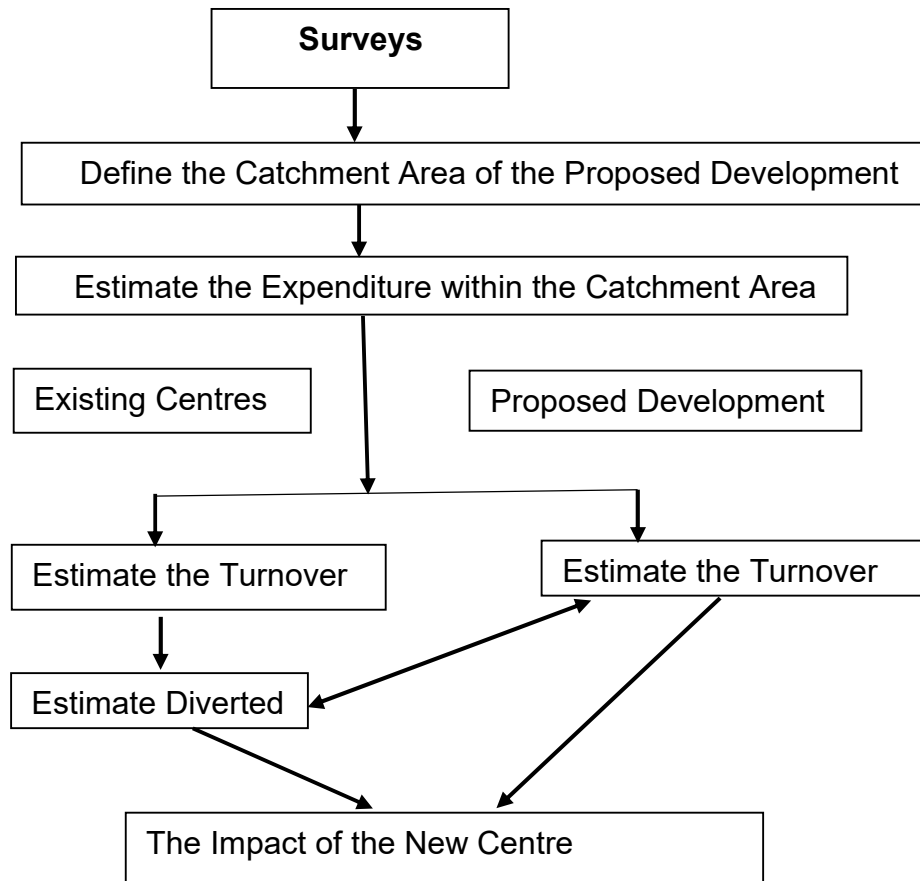


Figure 1: Step-by-step approach to assess turnover of a new retail proposal

If the location of a proposed retail development is outwith a town centre, in particular at the edge of a town, it should be demonstrated that the development would not negatively impact the TCHCs of the existing centres. The new proposed development should not move the footfall away from the existing centres and should aim to generate more footfall into the existing centres without negatively impacting any other town centres within Aberdeenshire. Cognisance must also be taken of the impact that retail proposals have on small village shops and isolated stores in remoter rural areas, which also perform a significant community role.

To avoid unnecessary work and potential delay, applicants are encouraged to begin discussions with Planning Officers from Aberdeenshire Council at an early stage, particularly where the development is large and is likely to generate significant traffic or is remote from public transport networks. These discussions will form the basis of

an agreement on what information will be required in support of the application, for example a transport scoping study on its own or a full transport impact assessment.

### **The role of cumulative Retail Impact Assessments**

Cumulative RIAs (i.e. assessing the combined effects of more than one retail development proposal on a centre or centres) will be appropriate in certain situations including:

- When more than one proposal is applying for planning permission (and there is the possibility that more than one could gain consent).
- Where recent consents have been granted and schemes have not yet reached their test year.
- Where there have been significant changes over a recent time period and the town centre(s) are still adjusting to impacts.

## Appendix 1: Definitions

**Commercial Centre** – A grouping of three or more retail warehouses with associated car parking.

**Comparison Goods** – Non-food items including clothing, footwear, household goods, furniture and electrical goods which purchasers compare on the basis of price and quality before buying.

**Convenience Goods** – Goods bought for consumption on a regular basis (e.g. food, drink, newspapers etc.)

**Edge of centre locations** – Those locations within easy walking distance of the town centre, with no physical constraints to pedestrian movements and good visible and physical linkages with the main shopping area. Edge of centre locations will be within the existing urban fabric, usually adjacent to the town centre. Where possible edge of centre stores should be designed with the store on the part of the site nearest to the centre, preferably with a direct street frontage so that the shop is welcoming to those arriving on foot.

**Neighbourhood Centres** – Provide local retail provision, primarily of a convenience and local retail nature. These serve a local catchment area.

**Out of centre locations** – Are clearly separate from a town centre, but not necessarily outside the urban area.

**Out of town locations** – comprise of development on a green-field site, or on land not clearly within the current urban boundary.

**Place Standard** – The Place Standard is a tool that is used to assess the quality of a place. It focuses on the physical and social elements of a place and assess places that are well established, undergoing change, or still being planned. The tool can also help people to identify their priorities for a particular place.

**Retail Parks** – Off centre group of 3 or more stores selling primarily non-food goods, with a shared car park. One or more of the stores will have a minimum of 1,000m<sup>2</sup> net. Flexibility in format, even to splitting the whole into individual units, will be required to be demonstrated as part of the Sequential Assessment or Sequential Approach.

**Retail Warehouses** – Single storey “warehouse” stores with or without limited mezzanine floor space selling bulky, non-food goods, with a minimum of 1,000m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace, occupying a warehouse type building and having on-site car-parking facilities. Such formats may not be suited to a town centre location.

**Shopping Complex** – A group of retail outlets designed and built as a unified whole under one roof. There will be at least one store, usually a superstore, together with a mixture of food and non-food shops, and supported by car-parking facilities. There will be limited flexibility in format associated with this type of development - subdivision and co-location is unlikely to be a viable option.

**SIMD** – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

**Superstores** – Generally single level, self-service stores, offering a wide range of food and non-food merchandise, with at least 2,500m<sup>2</sup> net sales area and supported by car parking. Such formats may not be suitable for the centres of the smaller towns in Aberdeenshire.

**Supermarket** – Single level, self-service stores selling mainly food with a trading floorspace of less than 2,500m<sup>2</sup> but more than 500m<sup>2</sup>. Such “basket stores” are eminently suited to a town centre location.

**Town centre** – A town or district centre which provides a range of facilities and services and which fulfils a function as a focus for both the community and public transport. Town centres are listed in Appendix 2 Retail Centres of the LDP with town centre boundaries outlined in the relevant Settlement Statement contained within Appendix 7 of the LDP.

## **Appendix 2: Preparing a Retail Impact Assessment**

### **Stage 1 – Scoping and determining deficiency and capacity for new development**

Applicants for retail planning applications are encouraged to scope the development proposal and potential retail impact in advance of the preparation of a RIA. This will include agreement with Aberdeenshire Council as to whether the proposed development warrants a full RIA or whether a shorter, more indicative assessment, in the form of a retail statement, is appropriate. It is also an opportunity to agree a range of issues in advance of preparing the RIA.

In assessing need it is necessary to examine the nature and quality of existing shopping provision; are there qualitative deficiencies in types of provision, by sector or geographically? Is there evidence that existing shops are not meeting available demand? Is there a leakage of trade from the catchment area? Evidence of need does not automatically justify approval of an application for retail development (nor result in refusal should there be no “need”) but may be a material consideration in determining the significance of any impacts.

### **Stage 2 – Surveys**

Encouragement is given to the use of household surveys, in particular where:

- Development proposals are for major and/or complex retail developments.
- Where there is no up-to-date existing household expenditure information.
- Where there is significant uncertainty about the catchment area or trading characteristics of the proposed development.
- Where information is unavailable on demography, including household or annual income, age, ethnicity, car ownership, tenure, etc. Household income should be divided into groups to get a clear sense on the expenditure.

The use of up-to-date survey information on a range of issues will increase the accuracy and reliability of RIA results.

### **Stage 3 – Identification of the Catchment Area**

The identification of the catchment area, and the proportion of trade drawn from this area, is an important stage in the RIA and it will directly affect the assessment of trade diversion from competing centres and retail impact.

If the proposal is to be situated out-with a centre or at an edge-of-centre site, the applicant must consider the likely catchment of the proposal with reference to travel distances determined from a survey of comparable facilities elsewhere in the North-East, in addition to determining the catchments of the adjacent centres. The catchment area needs to be sufficiently wide enough to ensure that the influence of the proposal can be assessed. For example, depending on the scale and nature, as well as location of the proposed development, the catchment may extend beyond the administrative boundary of Aberdeenshire Council and as such it may be appropriate to include areas within Aberdeen City, Angus and Moray as part of the catchment area. Town Centre Health Checks can be referenced to the distance travelled to the closest town centre, however, should not be solely relied upon as this is a sample survey of the overall population.

### **Stage 4 – Identification of Existing Estimates of Population and Available Expenditure**

Information on estimated population and expenditure are required to understand existing trading conditions. Where it is not possible to gather relevant information, then it can be estimated by number of households and per capita expenditure. This is done by estimating the number of households and multiplying it by the expenditure by households and then multiplied by the growth ratio between the base and design year.

## **Stage 5 – Identification of Future Estimates of Population and Available Expenditure**

In stages 4 and 5, estimates of existing and future population in catchment areas should be based, in the first instance, on information provided through planning authorities. If the information is absent, then it can be gathered from other sources, notably through the General Register Office (Scotland). The most practical sources for estimates of available expenditure per capita are commercial data providers.

## **Stage 6 – Existing Floorspace and Turnover**

The identification of existing floorspace and its turnover is central to the assessment of retail impact. Household surveys, if well designed, can be used to provide estimates of the turnover of existing floorspace. For small developments, or where centres are large compared to proposed developments and/or existing centres are not considered to be unduly sensitive to impact, the use of estimates based on averages may be appropriate.

## **Stage 7 – Turnover of Proposed Development**

Turnover of proposed development will be an important factor in determining the calculation of retail impact. The estimate of the turnover of the proposed development should utilise a range of techniques including reference to market share within the catchment, average turnover levels and comparable developments elsewhere (the latter particularly for new forms of development). For small scale developments the use of national average figures combined with sensitivity tests may be appropriate.

## **Stage 8 – Trade Draw**

Trade draw identifies the origin (for example where consumers live) of those who spend money in the proposed development. It is a useful concept for assisting with other stages of the RIA including the estimate of proposed development turnover



and estimation of trade diversion. For small or straightforward development proposals trade draw does not require to be undertaken explicitly as part of the RIA.

### **Stage 9 – Trade Diversion**

Trade diversion is different from trade draw and identifies the source of turnover of the proposed development from existing shops and centres. This stage RIA can become highly subjective. As this stage is fundamental to the calculation of retail impact, trade diversion assumptions will need to be fully and carefully justified. Factors that should be considered for assessing trade diversion include:

- Characteristics of the competing shopping locations based on those which are most likely to be in competition with the development including similarity of retail offer.
- Scale of centres (in particular turnover in relevant goods categories).
- If two proposals are being determined at the same time within the same catchment area.
- Intervening distance.
- Existing shopping patterns.
- Shoppers' travel habits and patterns.
- The relative attractiveness of centres.

Small and large town centres/shopping and leisure centres should be counted separately and must not be combined, unless they are very close to each other or if the same footfall is found to be using both centres.

### **Stage 10 – Calculation of Impact**

The actual calculation of retail impact is based on the deduction of the trade diversion identified (from Stage 9) from the turnover of centres in the test year (from Stage 6). As well as identifying the absolute loss of trade from a centre there are number of additional ways in which this impact figure can be measured to provide support for the conclusions reached, including:

- Percentage loss of trade.
- Residual turnover.
- Impact on market share of centres.

### **Stage 11 – Qualitative Assessment**

It should be stated in the RIA the area of floorspace that will be dedicated to both convenience and comparison goods. If the retailer is known, the RIA should describe the type of goods that the retail development will sell in terms of convenience and comparison goods. Qualitative improvements such as, customer, operational and external facilities should also be stated.

### **Stage 12 – Qualitative Assessment**

Behavioural pattern, demographic changes, SIMD and distance travelled to the closest shopping or neighbourhood centres should be assessed. The proposed centre should be accessible to all types of social groups and vulnerable people. Demographic and behavioural change and the implications for shopper profiles for existing and new centres and the role of inclusion/exclusion of residents should be assessed. Accessibility to the site should not bring any constraint in other parts of the town or village and different modes of transportation should be made available.

The location of the proposed site should be assessed in terms of landscape pattern, settlement pattern, built heritage and environmental constraints. It should be demonstrated how the new development is of high quality design and how it blends in with the surrounding area. In the event that the site is located adjacent or very close to a listed building, conservation area or archaeological monuments, how greater consideration is given to the design and finishes of the building. It should be ensured that the setting does not impact negatively on the built heritage and it should be demonstrated how the development enhances the built heritage/listed building.

## **Stage 13 – The Condition of Centres: Health Check Information**

Information on vitality and viability indicators of existing centres should be provided to support the analysis of the significance of retail impact. Indicators that Aberdeenshire Council encourages applicants to use are:

- Pedestrian count,
- Prime rental values,
- Retailer representation and intentions,
- Space in use for different town centre functions and how it has changed,
- Retailer representation and intentions (national multiples and independents),
- Commercial yield,
- Vacancy rates,
- Physical structure of the centre, including opportunities and constraints, and its accessibility,
- Environmental quality and amenity,
- Periodic surveys of consumers, and
- Crime and safety levels.

Applicants may wish to utilise the finding contained within the TCHC Reports published by Aberdeenshire Council.

### **Stage 13 - Significance of Impact**

The research recommends that RIAs should include an interpretation of the significance of the impact arising from a proposed development. This should include reference to vitality and viability indicators of centres (from Stage 12) and address a range of issues that could result from the impact of the proposed development on the centre.

## **Appendix 3: Methodology Used by Aberdeenshire Council for TCHCs**

### **Background Research**

#### **Desktop Research**

Desktop research<sup>9</sup> was completed to provide the critical first step to information for the town centre. It provided background information on the current situation of the town centre which was then analysed further when out on site. Data was gathered from within the Council and from external partners. More information on what was gathered can be found in the individual themes below.

#### **Place Standard Themes**

The Place Standard tool is used in order to assess the town centre. It has 14 different themes which allowed for different themes to be looked at on an individual basis but also as a collective.

The Place Standard tool also provided a means to identify key considerations and opportunities for each of the different themes.

### **Surveys/ Audits**

#### **Community Survey**

The community survey was designed to gain an understanding of the views of both the residents and visitors of a town centre. The survey was an online survey using the Council's Engage HQ system, shared via a press release, advertised on the Council's Social Media and emailed to relevant groups to advertise further.

The survey contained several questions on several topics including the respondent's feelings towards the town centre, how they generally got to the town centre, thoughts on online shopping and the opportunity to identify any improvements that could be

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<sup>9</sup> This is also known as "collection of secondary data". A researcher finds, collects, and reviews available data about the research topic.

made. There was also a question that asked respondents to rate several different aspects of the town centre on a scale of good to poor including variety of shops, availability of parking, events and feeling of safety.

The survey was live for a 3-week period.

### **Business Survey**

The business survey was designed in conjunction with Inverurie BID. It was available on the Engage HQ consultation portal and shared via the BID and other relevant groups for completion. Several topics were questioned, including the impact COVID-19 has had on businesses along with questions relating to the individual business such as turnover, employment and investment in premises. It also gave an opportunity to comment on improvements they would like to see to the town centre. The survey was open for three weeks for responses.

### **Accessibility Audit**

Work undertaken in conjunction with Community Learning and Development (CLD) officers. Officers worked with a small number of members of the local community to undertake a walkabout of the town centre, assessing footway surfaces and obstructions, facilities and signage, maintenance and enforcement, personal security, crossing points and access to buildings.

## **Site Survey – Place Standard Themes**

### **Identity & Belonging**

Community Spirit: The perception of community spirit was questioned through the community survey.

Overall views of Town Centre: The initial views about the town centre were captured by respondents to both the business and community surveys.

## **Feeling Safe**

Reported Crime: Information gained from colleagues in Police Scotland and relates to the town centre only.

Crime and Safety Perception: The information was gained by using the community and business surveys to gain an insight into how safe people feel within the town centre during the day and in the evening.

Safety Infrastructure: A mix of desk based, and onsite survey analysis used to identify what safety infrastructure is included in the town centre. Looking at the presence of CCTV, lighting etc and noting the condition of them.

## **Care & Maintenance**

Care & Maintenance of Buildings: A survey of the buildings was completed within the town centre making note of any buildings that are in a poor state or a positive example of what could be replicated town centre wide. Views of the businesses and community were also sought through the surveys.

## **Influence & Sense of Control**

Community Activity: Information gathered about the different groups set up either solely to work within the town centre or that have an aspect of work within the town centre. A question was also included in the community survey to gain an understanding of the view of the community when it comes to groups located for/ within the town centre.

## **Moving Around**

Infrastructure: Survey work was done to note signage and town maps within the town centre to help people move around the town centre. A question relating to signage was included within the community survey and a question about getting around the town centre was included within the business and community survey.

Cycling: This was carried out as an onsite survey work; noting the presence of road cycle lanes and boxes at junctions, presence of places to secure bikes, presence of lockable shelters and looking out for the presence of cyclists.

Within the business and community survey views on cycle parking within the town centre were also sought.

Footfall Survey: The footfall count was completed at several locations throughout the town centre to gain information on the vitality at different times of the day. For Inverurie, for example, four different locations were counted. Four timeslots were selected to gain information of the vibrancy in the mornings, afternoon and evening. The counts were completed for 15-minute periods on a weekday and weekend to try and gain an insight into the number of people moving around the town centre. These footfall counts were completed by officers and in partnership with other organisations.

Accessibility Audit: Detailed above.

## **Public Transport**

Public Transport Infrastructure: To note the quality of provision of public transport within the town centre. Looking at the location and state of repair of bus stops, stations and taxi ranks. Also noting down where there was real time information available. A question was included in the community and business surveys to gain the perception about how good the public transport is within the town centre.

Public Transport Routes: A desktop analysis of all routes that are accessible from the town centre along with information on the costs, frequency, last travel time and route were included.

## **Traffic & Parking**

**Traffic Impact:** Looking at the traffic flow within the town centre whilst out on site. Desktop research was also completed to identify if there were any Air Quality issues that needed to be identified. Questions were also included in the community survey relating to the distance travelled to the town centre and by what mode of transport this is usually completed by. Additionally, within the business and community survey a question was asked about traffic flow within the town centre.

**Car Parking Affordability:** A desktop-based survey was completed to look at the different car parks located within the town centre and also the average hourly rate of parking for the town centre. Additionally, the views of the community and businesses were sought with regards to the affordability of parking through the surveys.

**Car Parking Availability:** A desktop study was completed to look at the number of car parking spaces available within the town centre. A survey question was also included within the community and business surveys to gain an understanding on people's views of parking availability.

**EV Charging Points:** Desktop research completed to identify the number of EV charging spaces and the different variety of charging kW available. Usage for the last 12 months was also reviewed.

## **Streets & Spaces**

**Attractiveness of the Town Centre:** Looking at the environment of the town centre and seeing what helps with the overall feeling of the town centre. Noting down areas that have a positive or negative impact. A question regarding the attractiveness of the town was included in both the business and community surveys.

**Historic Environment:** Desktop survey was carried out to identify the listed buildings in the area and to what category the listed buildings were. Whilst on site the condition of the buildings was noted down to identify any relevant actions.



**Seating:** The location of the seats within the town centre was noted down whilst on site, along with their condition. A question regarding the seating areas was included in both the business and community surveys.

**Public Art:** Observation of the town centre during the site visit for forms of public art that brighten up the town centre and recording the location and the condition of each piece.

**Pavements:** The condition and cleanliness of pavements within the town centre was monitored and reviewed when out on site noting down locations where there were cracks, uneven slabs etc. Questions regarding both features were included in both the business and community surveys to gain feedback.

**Vacant & Derelict Sites:** An initial desk-based review of the town centre to identify sites identified within the Vacant and Derelict Land Audit. Whilst on site, photographs were taken whilst noting down the impact that the site had on the overall town centre.

**Vacant Retail Units:** During the site survey, identify any vacant retail units within the town centre, noting down the location and condition of the buildings and highlight the impact these have on the surrounding area.

**Town Centre Boundary:** Whilst on site, the town centre boundary was reviewed to ensure that the area reflects was the most appropriate area and identifying any areas that would contribute to the town centre should be included or areas that aren't adding to the overall vibrancy of the town centre and should be removed.

## **Natural Space**

**Natural Space:** Observed the green infrastructure within the town centre. Identified areas of green space including parks etc and noting down any areas where there could potentially be green linkages made. To gain the views of businesses and community, a question was included into the surveys.

## **Play & Recreation**

Play & Recreation: Identify and record any areas for play and recreation either within the town or that can be accessed from the town centre that contribute to the sense of place for the town centre.

## **Facilities & Amenities**

Retailer Representation: A survey was completed for all of the retail units within the town centre boundary which were then classified into different use class orders. The use of the shops and whether it was an independent shop or a multiple retailer. Information was also gathered via the community and business surveys on the feelings of the variety and quality of shops within the town centre.

Café and Restaurants: Whilst completing the retail survey cafes and restaurants were also noted to show the distribution within the town centre. The views of both the businesses and community were also sought on the choice and quality of the cafes and restaurants in the town centre.

Cultural, Leisure Outlets and Public Services: A desk-based survey to identify the cultural, leisure and public services within the town centre. Whilst on site the condition of the buildings was reviewed, and concerns noted.

Evening Economy: Units which open in the evening were captured when out on site and plotted to show the distribution. The views of both the businesses and community were also sought on the vibrancy of the town centre in the evening.

Community and Visitor Satisfaction: Several questions were included in both surveys to gain an insight into people's feelings about the town centre including variety of goods available in shops, value for money, standard of shops and whether the town centre offers the services expected. Desktop-based research was also carried out to see how many people were interested in visiting Inverurie.

Market: Desktop research was completed to gain information on the farmers market and a question was included in the community and business survey to gain feedback on what people think about the market.

Online Shopping: Survey questions were included to find out the views of communities regarding shopping online compared to shopping within the town centre. The views of businesses and their approach to online presence was also questioned.

Connectivity: A desk-based approach was completed to look at the connectivity to WIFI etc. within the town centre for both the community visiting and for businesses within the town centre.

### **Social Interaction/ Contact**

Social Contact: A desktop-based exercise was completed to identify a range of different events/ venues that allow for people to meet up within the town centre.

### **Key Considerations and Opportunities**

This is a summary of a town's strength and weaknesses under each place standard themes. This provides a pathway to identify any opportunities and threats, however, any opportunities that have been identified are added in the statement.

Other Services: When on site, any additional services that would add to the experience of the shopper were noted including anything that was useful, for safety or adds to the overall functionality of the town e.g. defibrillators etc.

### **Work & Local Economy**

Work & Local Economy: Desktop research was completed to gain information on the average household income, the major employment sectors, unemployment rates and the SIMD information for the area of the town centre.

Business Survey Highlights: Through the business survey an insight was captured of the overall strength of the businesses of the town centre with questions ranging on

whether their business has changed over the last 5 years, confidence in their business and whether the businesses are looking to expand.

Property: A desktop survey was completed to look at the permitted developments through applications that had been submitted within the town centre. Also, information was sought from the businesses to find out whether they owned the premises they are serving and whether they would be investing in the current premises in the next 5 years.

### **Housing & Community**

Housing & Community: A desktop survey was completed to gain information on the housing profile of the town centre including the number, type, tenure, size, council tax band and average price of the properties in the town centre.