

# OUTER HEBRIDES DESIGN GUIDE

## Planning and designing your house



“This design guide presents a new beginning for housing in the Outer Hebrides. I’m delighted to have been involved in its development and hope it can be used by everyone to make informed decisions. Every new house, however modest, is a permanent change to the landscape. Our Islands have a rich cultural heritage and are renowned for their beautiful landscape – by designing buildings which sit well in the landscape, we can manage the distinctive character which sets our Islands apart. What’s important is that joint responsibility is recognised and that all parties contribute to well designed houses.”

**Councillor Angus McCormack, Design Champion**



## INTRODUCTION

This guide sets out the key considerations that you should look at when planning and designing your house. This is to enable you to create the right house in the right location. Whether you are a novice or an experienced developer/architect/builder, everyone should read this guide as it signals a change in the Comhairle’s interaction with applicants and aspirations for design. In particular, what has sometimes been built in the past, may no longer set a precedent for what is considered acceptable now.

Affordability is an issue which concerns many people but good design does not necessarily equate to expensive design. It is just as possible to create a well-designed affordable home as it is to create a poorly designed costly dwelling. Following the advice in this guide can help you to achieve planning permission for a well designed home. Innovation is also encouraged - whether in a traditional or contemporary style - providing it is sensitively handled.

To build your new house you will need planning permission, which looks at location, siting and design (all of which are set out in this guide) and a building warrant, which deals with structural and technical issues. For more information on building warrants, please see [www.cne-siar.gov.uk/buildingstandards/warrants.asp](http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/buildingstandards/warrants.asp)

# CONTENTS

The format of the guide has been set out in 4 stages and responds to some of the most frequently asked questions.

## The key stages are:

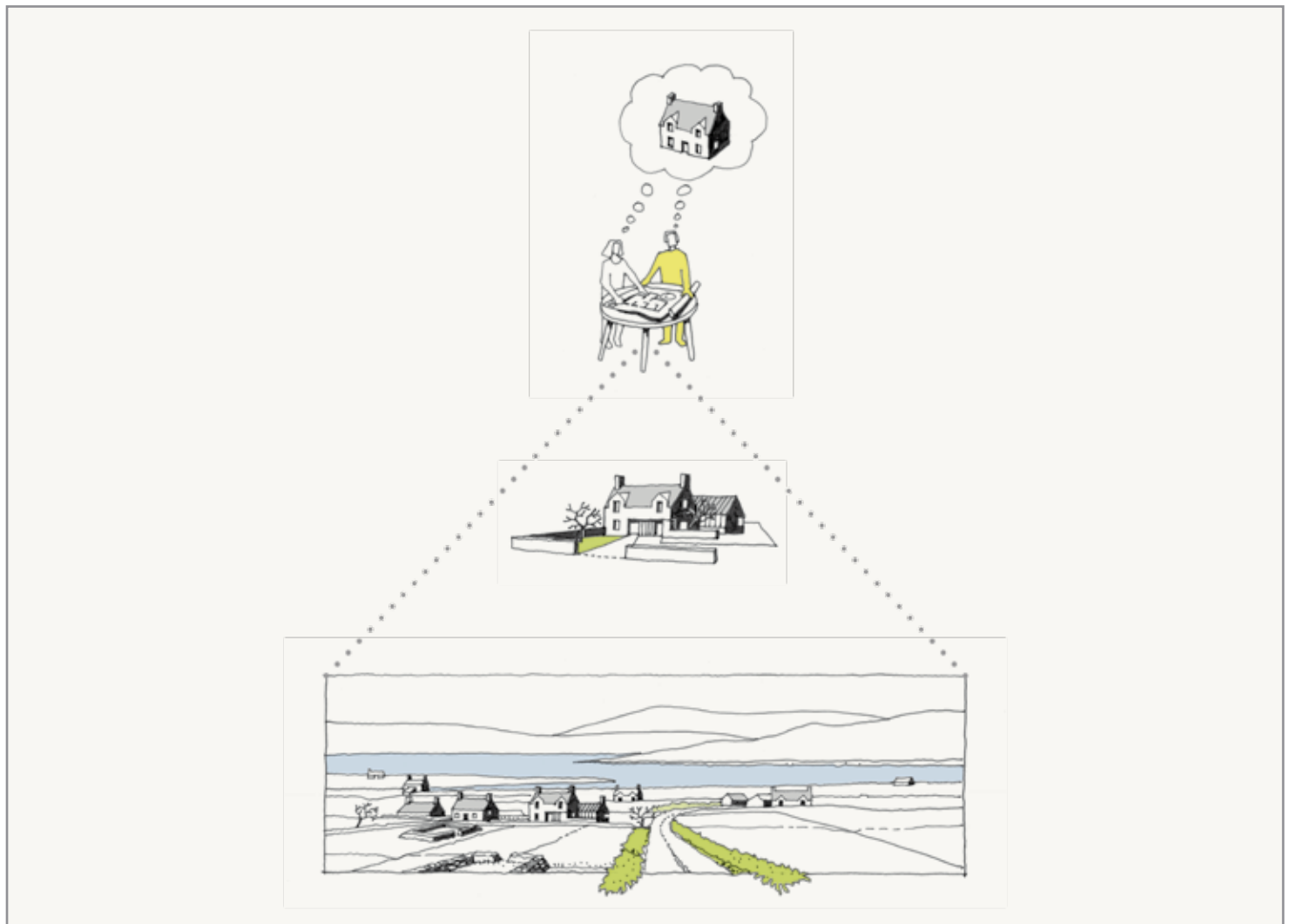
<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Getting Started</b>	<b>Ideas</b>	Why are my ideas important?
<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Developing the Design</b>	<b>People</b>	Who can help with my aspirations?
		<b>Policy</b>	What are the relevant policies?
		<b>Process</b>	Where can I locate and site my house and what should it look like?
<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>Practical Aspects</b>	<b>Submission</b>	When do I submit for planning permission and what do I submit?
		<b>Determination</b>	When and how will my application be determined?
<b>Stage 4</b>	<b>Completion</b>	<b>Place</b>	How can my house become an example of good development?

## STAGE 1 GETTING STARTED

### Ideas: Why are my ideas important?

Whether you are considering a renovation, an extension, a standard house design from a brochure, a one-off 'architect-designed' house or groups of houses, your initial ideas about what you want to create are important. This is because your house design has to fit within the context of the wider landscape. It is therefore important not to just think about your home from the 'inside-out' i.e. focusing on interiors first but to look from the 'outside-in' i.e. how your house will relate to its settings. Please see the illustration below.

You may also want to consider building a house which is suitable for your current needs whilst planning it to allow for well designed extensions to be added in the future. This can be a cost effective way of building in the long term.



## STAGE 2 DEVELOPING THE DESIGN

### People: Who can help with my aspirations?

**The planning service of the Comhairle should be your first port of call.** A planning officer can speak with you about your ideas, called a pre-application discussion, and this advice service is provided free of charge. We encourage you to engage with planners as early as possible as it will help you to gauge how well your ideas fit with policy. This will allow you to incorporate the outcomes of your pre-application discussion in your final design proposal.

To help the planning officer to consider your proposals during pre-application discussions, it would be helpful if you could provide:

- a map of the site and any alternative sites/plots showing the surrounding area and neighbouring buildings.
- photographs of the site including some close to the site and from public roads.
- sketches or photographs of existing houses similar to the one that you have in mind.

**If you are unable to visit Comhairle offices, please email [design@cne-siar.gov.uk](mailto:design@cne-siar.gov.uk) and send in your ideas, plans or pictures for advice.**

If the thought of designing your house seems daunting, you should consider hiring professional help, such as an architect. Their input can often pay dividends and add value to your home. You should, however, ensure that whoever you employ is aware of this guide.

### Policy: What are the relevant policies?

This guide sits alongside Scottish Government Planning Advice Note 72 Housing in the Countryside. It also relates to the Development Plan for the Outer Hebrides. Information from those documents is not repeated in this guide, but you can view them on our planning website [www.cne-siar.gov.uk/planningservice](http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/planningservice). The policies and design advice contained in these documents can be a 'material consideration' to help us determine your application. It is sometimes the case that applications can be considered unacceptable, and therefore refused, solely on design grounds.



### Process: Where can I locate and site my house and what should it look like?

The location and siting of your house is just as important as what it looks like. To help you, the broad meanings of location, siting and design have been set out below. This is followed by a table which provides detailed information on the key design considerations relating to each term. The table also cross-refers to diagrams (A-F) for illustrative purposes.


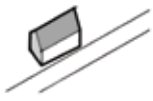












**Location:** Careful positioning within the wider landscape. New developments should try to fit-in or nestle into the landscape and respect traditional settlement patterns. Consideration should also be given to constraints on locations such as local development plan policies, the potential for flooding and proximity to utilities.

**Siting:** Responding to the character of your site to achieve a well designed layout. This is important because a poor layout can detract from good design. Layout considerations relate particularly to topography and site levels, and how best to use these to create an attractive and practical site. Creating a well designed site, with careful consideration of where and how the house is placed on site can also save money - from extensive site preparation works to running costs. For example, orientating the house to enhance shelter and solar gain can help retain heat and reduce energy consumption. Consideration must also be given to access (driveways), drainage and hard surfacing (parking), as well as to landscaping which can be used to integrate your house into its surroundings.

**Design:** What your house looks like. This can be described as the choice of building materials and colours. It also includes details such as the style of windows, doors, dormers, chimneys, porches and conservatories.



# LOCATION, SITING AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

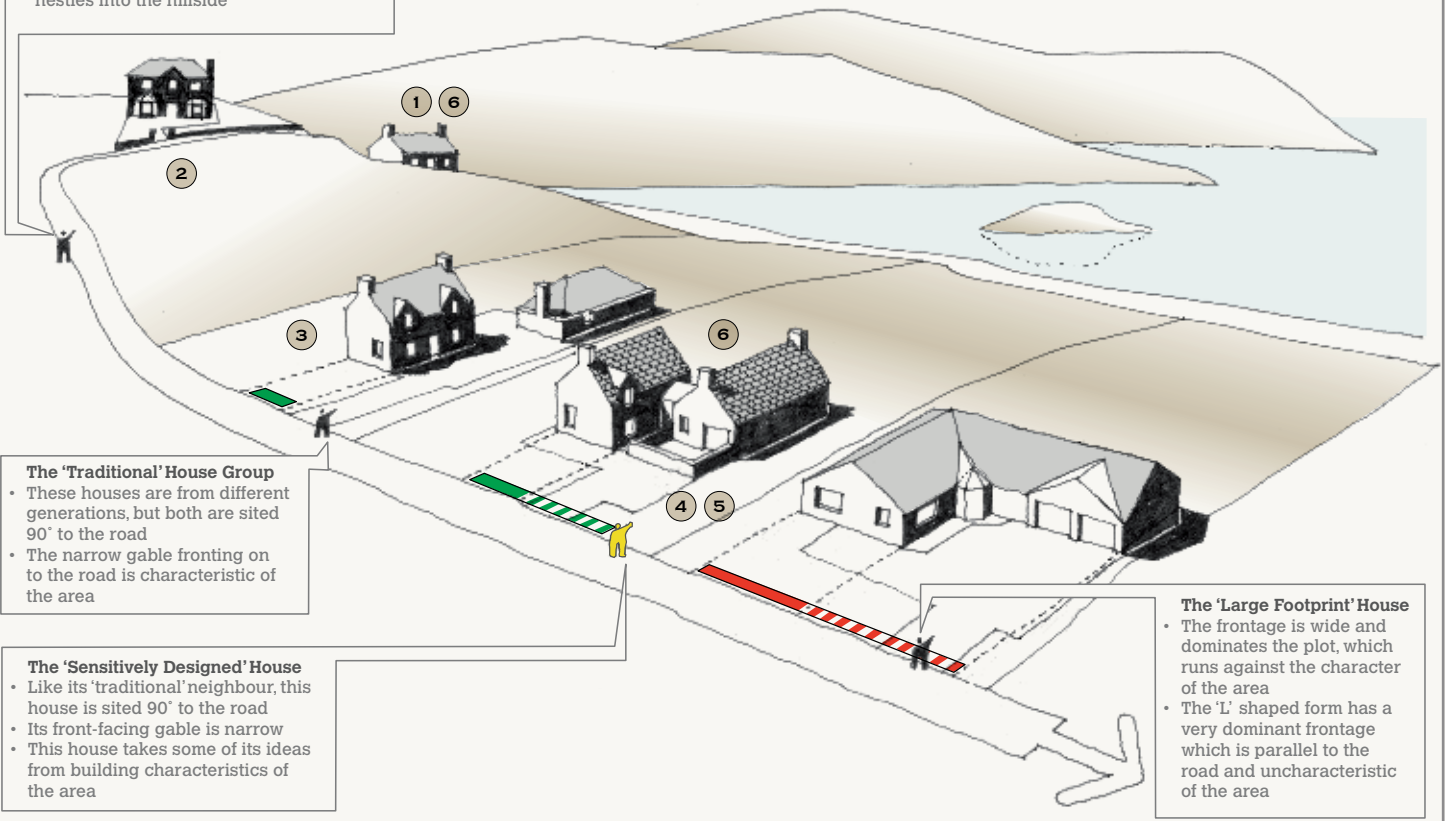
Category	Key consideration	Main aim	Refer to diagram	How to achieve
<b>LOCATION</b> Careful positioning in the wider landscape	<b>Landscape</b> 	Nestle into the landscape	A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site the house in the natural lie of the land.</li> <li>Avoid dominating the skyline or the waterline.</li> </ol>
	<b>Orientation</b> Roads 	Assess proximity and relationship to the road	A, B	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build close to the road if this has been established as the traditional pattern.</li> <li>Build either parallel or perpendicular to the road following the established pattern.</li> </ol>
	Buildings 	Look at the orientation of surrounding buildings	A, B	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow the established building lines – look at the direction the front door and main elevation face on existing houses.</li> </ol>
	Climate 	Maximise sunshine and minimise wind	A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following the traditional lines for the positioning of your house in relationship to roads and buildings will often maximise solar gain and minimise wind-chill. If you wish to build on a more isolated site, you will need to orientate the house in response to the climate.</li> </ol>
<b>SITING</b> Respond to the character of your site	<b>Slope</b> This refers to the ground levels 	Use sloping sites to create a difference in level for the house	C	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid mounding your site i.e. creating an over engineered platform.</li> <li>Balance cutting into and filling the site, if groundworks are essential.</li> <li>Avoid any excessive or uneven block underbuild.</li> </ol>
	<b>Size</b> The size of your house in relation to your site 	Ensure your house fits well within your plot	B D	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure your house does not dominate the plot, leaving no space around it.</li> <li>Sufficient open garden space should be considered as an integral part of your development.</li> <li>Carefully consider the siting and design of garages and outbuildings so as not to be as prominent as the house</li> </ol>
	<b>Shape</b> The form and shape of the house's footprint 	Create the right shape and proportions	B, C	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Break up the mass of your house to create the right footprint.</li> </ol>
	<b>Access</b> 	Create an access from existing entrance points	C	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider using an access that already exists. Ensure safe and sufficient access is provided to the development.</li> </ol>
	<b>Parking</b> 	Ensure safe and low profile parking	D	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower the visual impact of car parking by allowing for it to be positioned at the rear of the house.</li> <li>Avoid hard surfaces dominating the plot.</li> </ol>
<b>DESIGN</b> Create the right style and features for your house	<b>Roof</b> 	Use strong plain roof pitches	D E	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use a pitch of 40-45 degrees, where possible, with a simple layout.</li> <li>Opt for dual pitch roofs with gables.</li> <li>Try to have all the pitches in the roof structures the same pitch.</li> <li>Generally avoid mono pitch, mansard and complex roof structures.</li> <li>Only use a hipped roof if it works with the proportions of the house.</li> </ol>
	<b>Windows</b> 	Keep windows vertical	D E	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that windows generally have a vertical emphasis and a simple design.</li> <li>Consider using dormer windows are of the same style, proportion and roof pitch as the main house design.</li> <li>Ensure that window proportions are consistent throughout the house.</li> <li>Have a definite lintel so that windows are clear of the eaves.</li> </ol>
	<b>Materials</b> 	Use natural materials	F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow for finishes, like natural stone, wet dash render and slate. Timber, artificial slates, profile sheeting or turf roofs are alternatives. Try to use sustainable building materials.</li> </ol>
	<b>Ornamentation</b> 	Avoid excess decoration and embellishments	D	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid complex porch designs; set out or slender chimney stacks; feature panels; quoins and arches.</li> </ol>
	<b>Boundaries</b> 	Ensure sensitive and in-keeping	D, E	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid high fences or concrete block walls where a simpler approach would work better.</li> </ol>



## DIAGRAM A: LANDSCAPE & ORIENTATION

### The 'Poorly Sited' House

- This house visually breaks the skyline and dominates the landscape, unlike its neighbour further down the valley which nestles into the hillside



### The 'Traditional' House Group

- These houses are from different generations, but both are sited 90° to the road
- The narrow gable fronting on to the road is characteristic of the area

### The 'Sensitively Designed' House

- Like its 'traditional' neighbour, this house is sited 90° to the road
- Its front-facing gable is narrow
- This house takes some of its ideas from building characteristics of the area

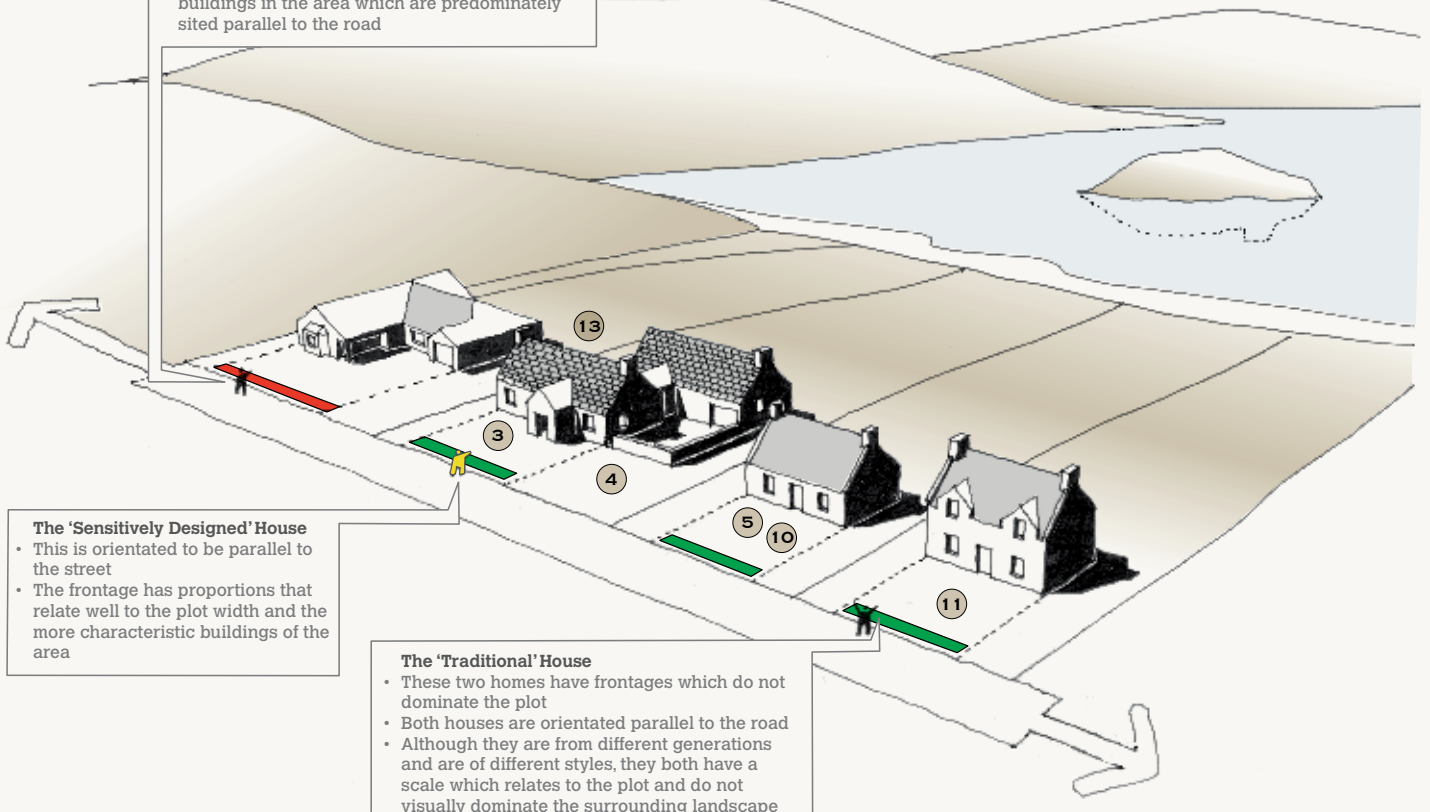
### The 'Large Footprint' House

- The frontage is wide and dominates the plot, which runs against the character of the area
- The 'L' shaped form has a very dominant frontage which is parallel to the road and uncharacteristic of the area

## DIAGRAM B: ORIENTATION, SIZE & SHAPE

### The 'Poorly Sited' House

- This house has a dominating frontage and appears too large for the plot width
- The projecting gable is aligned at 90° to the road which is out of character with the buildings in the area which are predominately sited parallel to the road



### The 'Sensitively Designed' House

- This is orientated to be parallel to the street
- The frontage has proportions that relate well to the plot width and the more characteristic buildings of the area

### The 'Traditional' House

- These two homes have frontages which do not dominate the plot
- Both houses are orientated parallel to the road
- Although they are from different generations and are of different styles, they both have a scale which relates to the plot and do not visually dominate the surrounding landscape

## DIAGRAM C: SLOPE, SHAPE & ACCESS

### The 'Underbuild' House

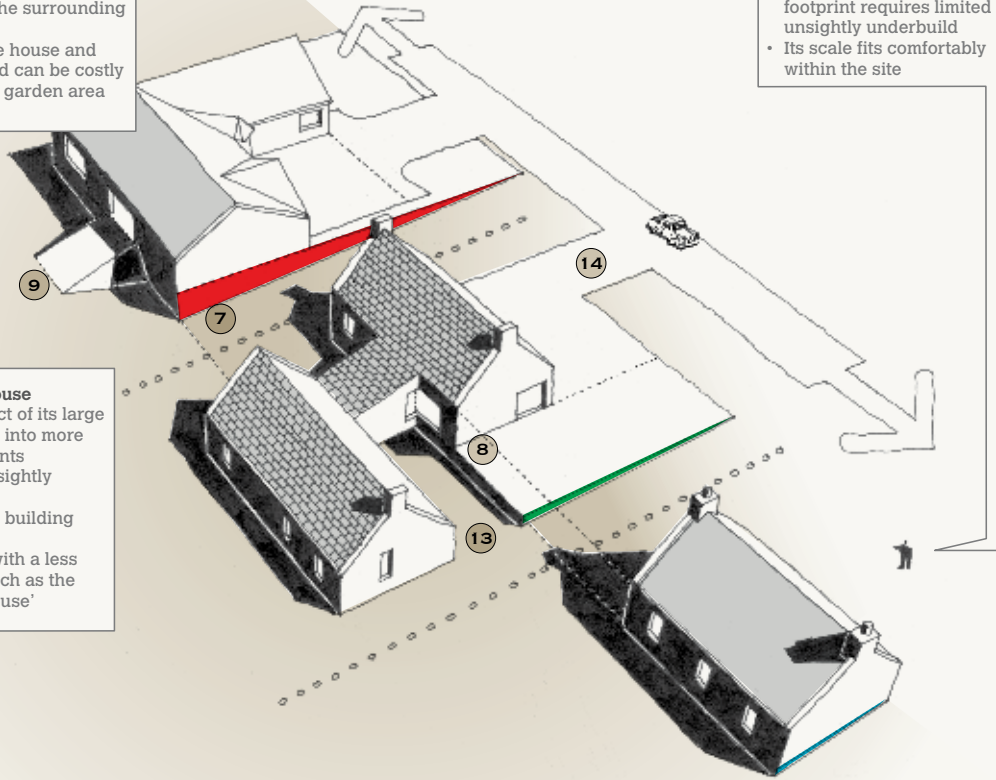
- This house has a large, inflexible footprint which is not integrated into the sloping site
- The underbuild is unsightly and visually dominant when viewed from the surrounding landscape
- The ill-considered siting of the house and the requirement for underbuild can be costly and makes level access to the garden area difficult to achieve

### The 'Traditional' House

- The simple narrow footprint requires limited unsightly underbuild
- Its scale fits comfortably within the site

### The 'Sensitively Designed' House

- This house reduces the impact of its large footprint by breaking it down into more appropriately sized components
- This reduces the need for unsightly underbuild
- A group of connected, simple building forms can provide the same accommodation as a house with a less flexible footprint and form, such as the neighbouring 'Underbuild House'



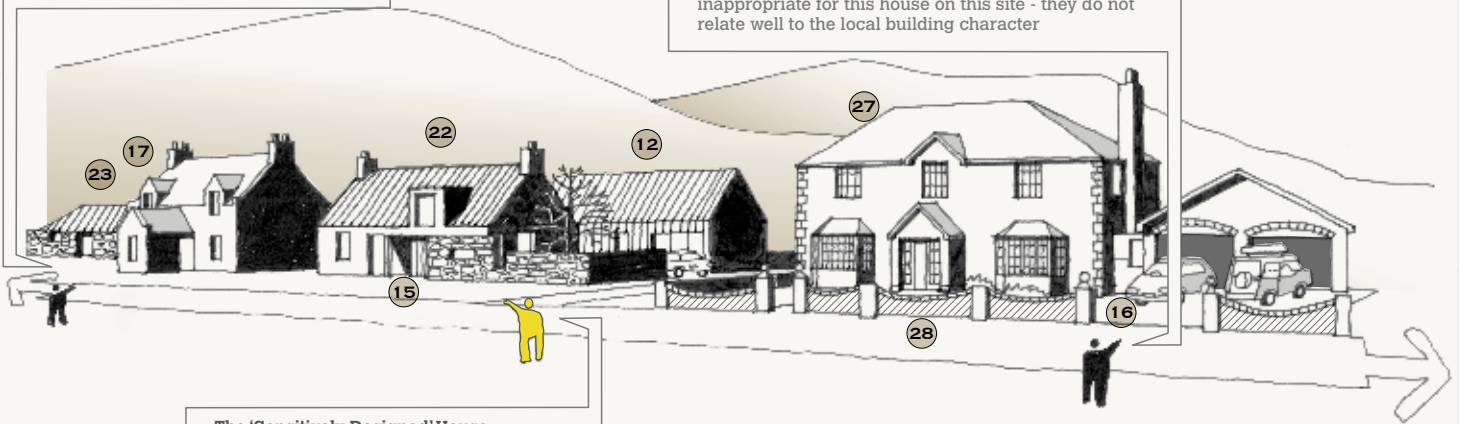
## DIAGRAM D: SIZE, PARKING, ROOF, WINDOWS & ORNAMENTATION

### The 'Traditional' House Group

- Both these homes are simple in shape and detail
- The roof has a pitch of between 40-45°, dormers, porches, chimneys, doors and windows are appropriate in scale and details are distinctive but unobtrusive
- The materials used are appropriate to the local area - local stone; wet dash harling; slate; flat grey tiling; profile metal roofs

### The 'Out-of-Place' House

- Unlike its neighbours, this house has a wide footprint, gables and hipped roofs which dominate the streetscene
- The roof pitch is about 30° and does not relate well to its neighbours
- The garage doors dominate the appearance of the house
- The proportion and over elaborate detail of the windows, porch, corner details, arches and bay windows are inappropriate for this house on this site - they do not relate well to the local building character



### The 'Sensitively Designed' House

- This house is contemporary in design, form and scale
- The roof has a pitch of between 40-45°; the design reflects the built character of the area in scale and detail
- The materials used complement those used on houses which have local characteristics

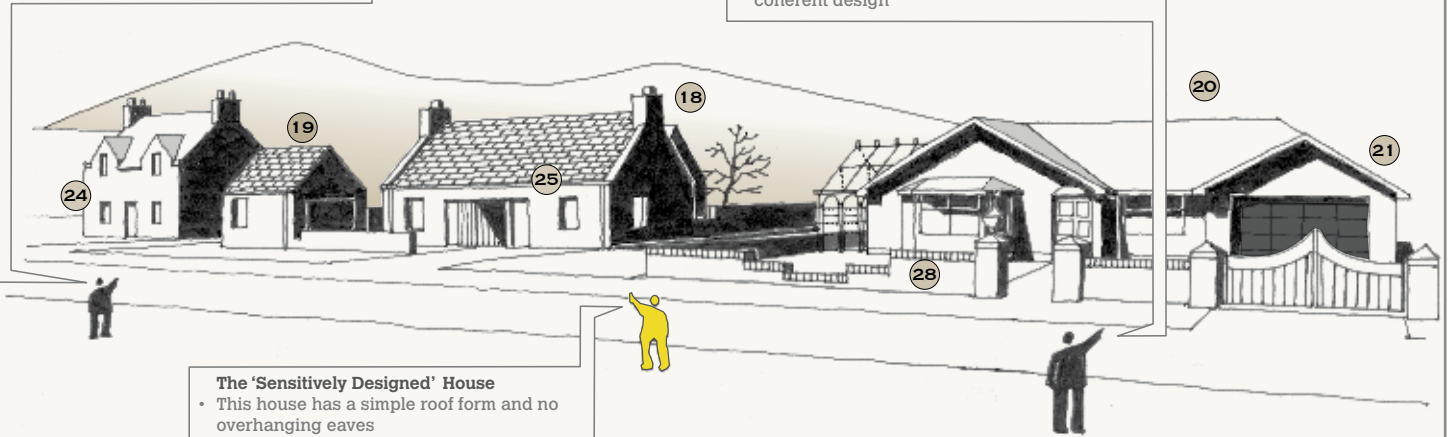
## DIAGRAM E: ROOF, WINDOWS & BOUNDARIES

### The 'Traditional' House Group

- This house shows many local characteristics - simple yet distinctive dormers, vertically proportioned windows and symmetrical front elevation
- The materials and colours are suitable for the area - many are natural, such as stone and slate

### The 'Out-of-Place' House

- The garage door dominates the appearance of the house
- The shallow roof pitch and wide gable do not fit with the character of the area
- A mixture of hipped roof types with gables and overhangs have a negative impact on the overall character of the area
- Windows have horizontal proportions with no coherent design



### The 'Sensitively Designed' House

- This house has a simple roof form and no overhanging eaves
- The windows have vertical proportions with a defined lintel, ensuring the tops of the windows are clear of the eaves
- The garage doors are 90° to the road and does not dominate the frontage of the property
- The materials are chosen to complement the local character - using wet dash render and slate

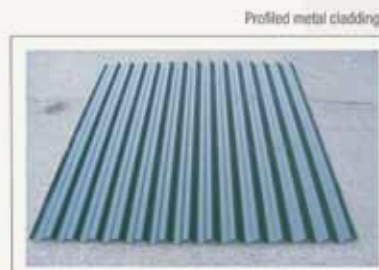
## DIAGRAM F: MATERIALS & COLOURS



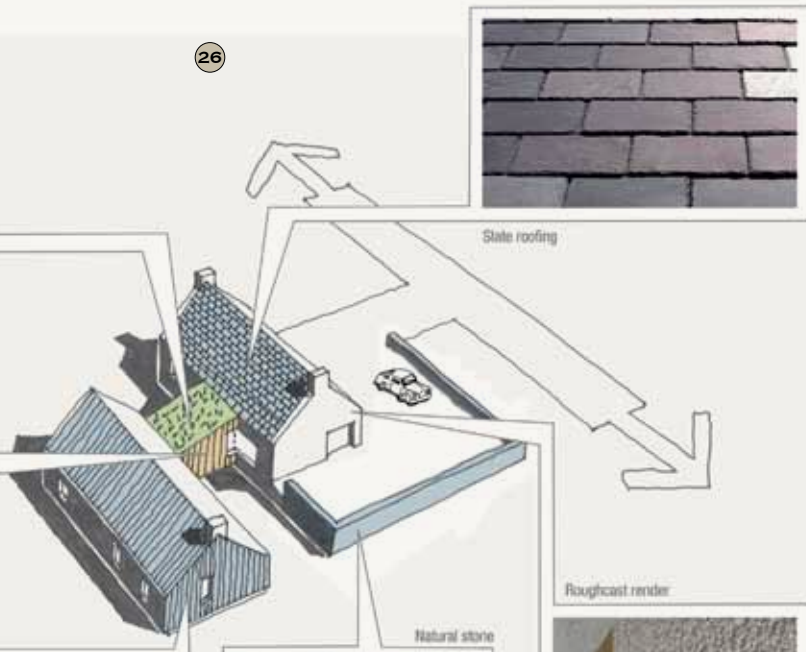
Turf roofing



Natural and painted timber cladding



Profiled metal cladding



Slate roofing

Roughcast render

Natural stone





## STAGE 3 PRACTICAL ASPECTS

The practical aspects stage involves gaining planning permission.

### **Submission: When do I submit for planning permission and what do I submit?**

You should submit your planning application once you have:

1. Completed stages 1 and 2 in this guide.
2. Engaged in pre-application discussions with the Comhairle's Planning Service.
3. Satisfied the requirements of both the Planning Application Form and Guidance, as well as any additional information requested by the Planning Service.

### **Determination: When and how will my application be determined?**

If information that you have provided is incomplete or inaccurate, your application may not be 'validated' (i.e. entered within the planning system). The Planning Service has eight weeks from the date of validation to consider your application but can request an extension of time. By engaging in pre-application discussion with the Comhairle, and following the advice in this guide, you can be more confident that your application will receive a positive decision within a reasonable timescale.

## STAGE 4 COMPLETION

### **Place: How can my house become an example of good development?**

Once you have planning permission you should start work within 3 years. People should feel proud about their new house and it could become part of a portfolio of good built examples. The Planning Service welcomes enquiries from those who feel their house could be included and displayed as an exemplar development.

This guide aims to make a difference to the quality of new housing in the Outer Hebrides. Not considering this guide could result in your time and money being spent on protracted negotiation. A refused planning application is also not what the Comhairle's Planning Service wishes to see.

By creating a well-designed house which takes into account location, siting and design, value can be added to the property as well as enhancing the wider landscape of the Outer Hebrides. Good design has lasting benefits for us all.

## CONTACTS

For general information or to arrange a pre-application discussion contact:

Lewis and Harris: **01851 709545**

Uist and Barra: **01851 602425**

Email: **planning@cne-siar.gov.uk** or **design@cne-siar.gov.uk**

This document is available in hard copy and at: **www.cne-siar.gov.uk/planningservice**

**Please note:** The information in this guide focuses on new-build houses but if you are wishing to extend or alter your property, more detailed information is also available from the Comhairle's webpage.

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