# Topic 1: Spatial Strategy

Engagement version March 2025

## Requirements addressed in this section:

Information required by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, regarding the issue addressed in this section

## Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended

| Section | Requirement |
|---|---|
| Section 15(5)(a) | the principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district, |
| Section 15(5)(b) | the principal purposes for which the land is used, |

## National Planning Framework 4

Regional Spatial Priorities

To deliver sustainable places, Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Plans (LDPs) in this area should plan infrastructure and investment to support the transition from oil and gas to net zero, whilst protecting and enhancing blue and green infrastructure and decarbonising connectivity.

To deliver liveable places, Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Plans in this area should focus on continued regeneration and encourage more local living to sustain the skilled workforce and improve local liveability.

To deliver productive places, Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Plans in this area should support continued economic diversification and innovation.

Green Belts

LDPs should consider using green belts, to support their spatial strategy as a settlement management tool to restrict development around towns and cities.

Green belts will not be necessary for most settlements but may be zoned around settlements where there is a significant danger of unsustainable growth in car-based commuting or suburbanisation of the countryside.

Green belts should be identified or reviewed as part of the preparation of LDPs. Boundary changes may be made to accommodate planned growth, or to extend, or

alter the area covered as green belt. Detailed green belt boundaries should be based on evidence and should be clearly identified in plans.

Brownfield Development

LDPs should set out opportunities for the sustainable reuse of brownfield land including vacant and derelict land and empty buildings.

Coastal Development

LDP spatial strategies should consider how to adapt coastlines to the impacts of climate change. This should recognise that rising sea levels and more extreme weather events resulting from climate change will potentially have a significant impact on coastal and islands areas, and take a precautionary approach to flood risk including by inundation.

Spatial strategies should reflect the diversity of coastal areas and opportunities to use nature based solutions to improve the resilience of coastal communities and assets.

LDP spatial strategies should identify areas of developed and undeveloped coast and should align with national, sectoral and regional marine plans.

Business & Industry

LDPs should allocate sufficient land for business and industry, taking into account business and industry land audits, in particular ensuring that there is a suitable range of sites that meet current market demand, location, size and quality in terms of accessibility and services. This allocation should take account of local economic strategies and support broader objectives of delivering a low carbon and net zero economic recovery, and a fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

National Developments

- Urban Mass / Rapid Transit Networks (Aberdeen)
- Aberdeen Harbour (Aberdeen)
- Pumped Hydro Storage (All Scotland)
- Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure (All Scotland)
- Circular Economy Materials Management Facilities (All Scotland)
- National Walking, Cycling and Wheeling Network (All Scotland)
- Digital Fibre Network (All Scotland)

# Links to Evidence

Regional Spatial Priorities

- Aberdeen City and Shire Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (Co-produced by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils – September 2020) PDF

Green Belt

- AECOM Nature Networks Corridor Map
- NatureScot – Scottish Landscape Character Type Maps and Description
- Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy 2021-2026
- Aberdeen Planning Guidance 2023 – Landscape
- Aberdeen Landscape Study – Landscape Character Assessment, February 2021
- Aberdeen Landscape Study – Coastal Character Assessment, February 2021
- Aberdeen Landscape Study – Peri-Urban Study, February 2021
- Aberdeen Landscape Study – Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, February 2021

Brownfield Development

- Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland
- Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey 2023
- Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey Site Register
  Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey GIS Map
- Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land 2024 – excel (PDF)
  Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Housing Land Audit 2024
- Aberdeen Brownfield Urban Capacity Study 2020
  City Centre Masterplan and Delivery Programme 2015
- City Centre and Beach Masterplan Refresh 2022

Coastal Development

- Scotland's National Marine Plan
- Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance - Scottish Government, February 2023
- Dynamic Coast
- SEPA Coastal Flood Maps
- Aberdeen Adapts
- Aberdeen Adapts Evidence Base

Business & Industry

- Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation
- Regional Economic Strategy 2035
- Economic Statistics for Industry Sectors in Scotland
- City Region Deals - Cities and regions - gov.scot

- Energy Transition Fund
- Aberdeen's lost decade: What went wrong? | Centre for Cities
- Ryden 89th Scottish Property Review 2024
- Business & Industry Land Audit 2023
- Aberdeen Economic Policy Panel Report 2023
- Aberdeen City Data Observatory - Economy

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# Summary of Evidence

## Policy context

Purpose and Scope of Evidence Report Chapter

Aberdeen will endeavour to promote and support sustainable, liveable and productive places. The retention and appropriate management of Greenbelts can limit the risk of urban sprawl into the countryside, while providing nature corridors that are integral to the health and vitality of the city. Identification and re-use of Brownfield sites will help support the vitality of the city by bringing disused or vacant sites back into active use that can meaningfully provide housing or business opportunities to local communities. Business and Industry will also be supported as the need to diversify Aberdeen's economy and transition away from a dependency on revenues from the oil industry towards a net-zero future. Supporting this, Coastal Development will also offer opportunities that will seek to establish the city as a leader in hydrogen, and renewable energy technologies, as well as sustaining a busy port and balancing these demands with the protection and preservation of marine species and habitats along the coastline.

These broader topic areas will be addressed in more detail in the following order:

- Indicative Regional Spatial Priorities
- Greenbelts
- Brownfield Development
- Coastal Development
- Business and Industry

It is not the intention of this chapter to repeat the full content of other chapters. It should be read in conjunction with other chapters, including:

- Topic 2: Delivery of Homes
- Topic 3: Infrastructure and communication
- Topic 4: Sustainable Transport
- Topic 5: Climate and
- Topic 6: Nature and Biodiversity
- Topic 7: Energy and Resources
- Topic 8: Centres of Business and Culture
- Topic 9: Place
- Topic 10: Wellbeing of Communities

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# Regional Spatial Priorities

**Aberdeen City and Shire Interim Regional Spatial Strategy**
This functions as a "bridging document" that supports the transposition of the Spatial Strategy from the Strategic Development Plan of 2020 into the National Planning Framework 4. It is intended as the primary bellwether for strategic planning across the City Region. It offers a "spatial reference for the implementation of other City Region and local level plans and strategies such as the Regional Economic Strategy, the City Region Deal and Regional Transport Strategy" (see figure 1).

The document covers the Local Authority areas of both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, with the exception of those parts of Aberdeenshire that are situated within the Cairngorms National Park. Delivery of its' objectives will require collaboration with other key stakeholders and communities.

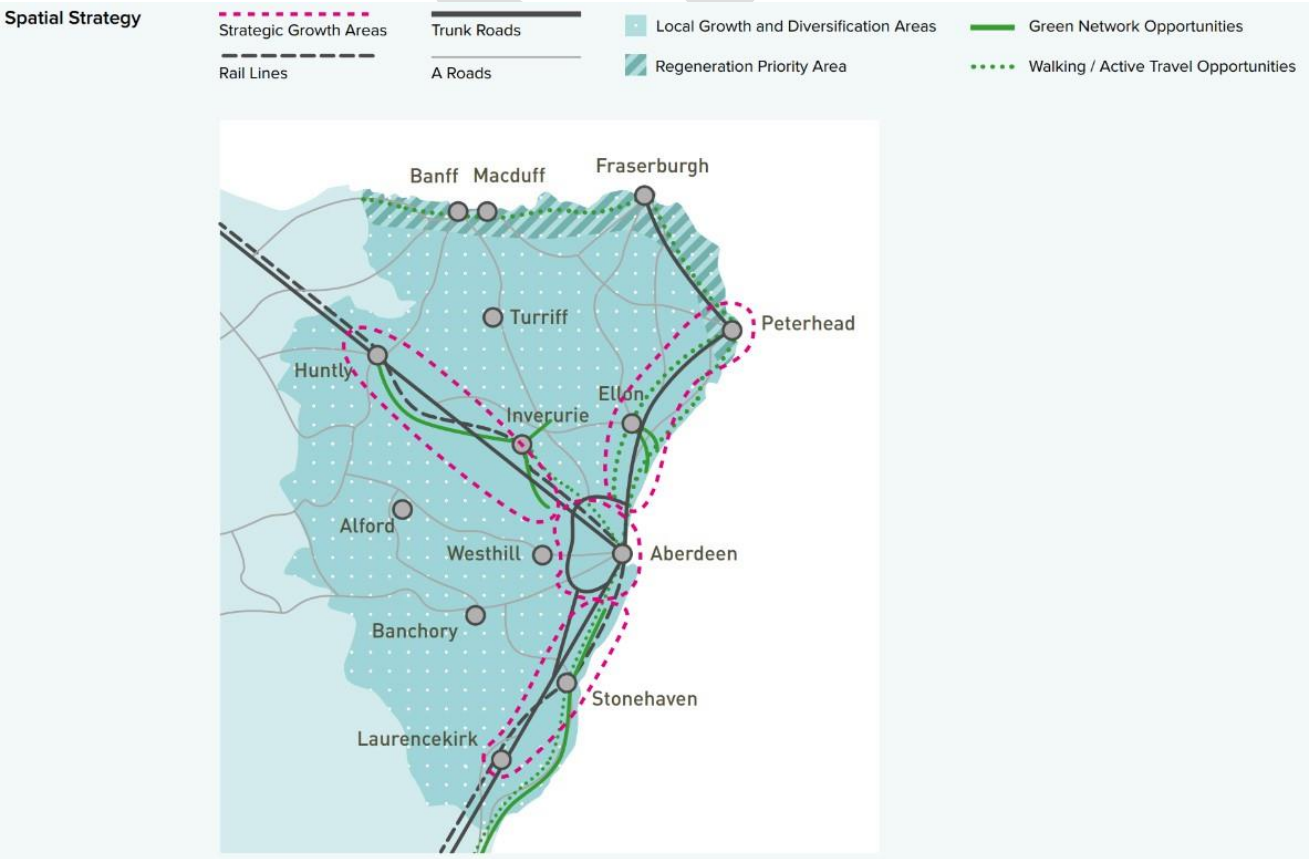



*Figure 1: Excerpt from the Interim Regional Spatial Strategy illustrating the Strategy across the north-east of Scotland*

# Green Belt

Green Belts around Aberdeen

A green belt around Aberdeen was first established in 1958 and has evolved and changed over its lifespan. Successive development plans have used green belts to support their spatial strategies. The current Aberdeen green belt covers all of the countryside within the Council's boundary.

There have been periodic changes to its boundary, generally in order to accommodate new development. A boundary review took place in 1986 and was formalised in the 1991 Aberdeen District Wide Local Plan. Further changes were made to accommodate the allocations in the Aberdeen Local Plan 2008, and to incorporate former 'Countryside Around Towns (GB2)' and 'Lower Don Policy Areas' into the green belt.

The Local Development Plan 2012 was required to make major housing allocations and extensive boundary changes were made to accommodate new settlements all around the City. A Green Belt Review which looked at the detailed boundaries of these areas was produced as a background document to this Plan.

The 2017 and 2023 Local Development Plans had much smaller housing requirements, and although new sites were identified on former green belt areas in both Plans, they were relatively small in nature and no formal review of the green belt took place at these times.

The Aberdeen Green Belt has been successful in several respects;

- It has prevented coalescence between Aberdeen and settlements and suburbs along lower Deeside, the northern and southern corridors and to the west of the city along the A944.
- It has focussed development into Aberdeen and encouraged the redevelopment of brownfield sites there.
- It has helped to prevent inappropriate development in the countryside close to Aberdeen.
- It has protected large areas of countryside such as the coast, woodland, river valleys and Hazlehead for recreational use. In doing so, uncontrolled urban sprawl has largely been avoided and some of the primary landscape elements which protect the setting of the Aberdeen – the coastal strip, two major river valleys and backdrop of surrounding hills – have been protected.

Green Belt Review

A green belt review is being actioned as part of a wider Natural Heritage Strategy. It is anticipated a draft document will be completed by late Summer 2025. The Review will focus on the following issues:

1. Development Pressures – Green belts have been used to control otherwise unrestricted growth around places with high development pressure. We will examine development bids for previous LDPs to indicate the level of development interest around Aberdeen. This in turn will inform the continuing need for a green belt.

2. Landscape Setting and the identity of settlements – how does the green belt contribute to protecting and enhancing the character, landscape, natural setting and identity of Aberdeen and its surrounding settlements?

3. Nature Networks – what contribution does the green belt make to support nature networks to tackle climate change, and to protect nature networks from a recreational and ecological point of view?

4. Other planning constraints – are there any other assets or features that are protected by green belt?

5. Directing development to the right places – how can we use green belts to make sure that development happens in the right places?

In carrying out a review of the green belt, several other factors need to be recognised:

- All of the countryside outwith Aberdeen's urban area is identified as green belt. There are no other 'countryside' designations. This means that any development requirements that cannot be identified on sites within the urban area will have to be in locations that are currently green belt and adjustments to its boundary could be needed. The scale of new allocations have yet to be determined.

- The Aberdeen green belt extends beyond the city boundary and into Aberdeenshire. Here it extends to Blackdog, Potterton, Hatton of Fintray, Blackburn, Westhill, Drum, Kirkton of Maryculter, and Banchory Devenick southwards to as far as Muchalls. Aberdeenshire Council are currently reviewing their part of the green belt as part of their Local Development Plan review. At the time of writing, they are suggesting some adjustments to the outer boundaries but none of these will have a significant impact on the City's green belt area.

**Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy 2021-2026**

Scotland's long-term vision for sustainable land use focuses on emission reduction targets, Net-Zero goals, biodiversity loss, and climate change impacts. It emphasizes careful land use to support the population while protecting natural habitats, promoting peatland restoration, forestry creation, and enhancement of wildlife habitat. Onshore wind generation and food production are also considered. The strategy can help underpin future policy for the ongoing designation of green belt, as well as promote efforts to improve its connectivity to other areas of green space within Aberdeen, to further the vitality and resilience of these natural spaces. It also offers potential opportunities for future woodland expansion and enhancement which can result in improvements to public health, environmental benefits, improved air quality and increased carbon sequestration capabilities.

**NatureScot – Scottish Landscape Character Type Maps and Description**

The Landscape Character Studies that formed the basis of this data was originally mapped between 1994 and 1999, and were expanded and updated in 2019.

There are several differing landscape types within the Aberdeen City Council, see figure 2 which outlines indicative landforms. Very broadly, there are pockets of 'Upland and Hills' located towards the west and north-west of the city near Westhill and Dyce. There are two main areas identified as 'Valley' habitats: the River Valley – Aberdeen extending from Stoneywood to Hatton of Fintray, and a mixture of Valley habitats stretching from Cults in a south-westerly direction past Peterculter and into Aberdeenshire. The remainder of the outskirts of the city are characterised as 'Lowland', with Beaches, Dunes and Links along the northern portion of the coastline with the North Sea, and Cliffs and Rocky Coast, along the southern portion of the Aberdeen coastline. Unsurprisingly for a city authority, much of the core of the city is identified as 'Urban' landscape.

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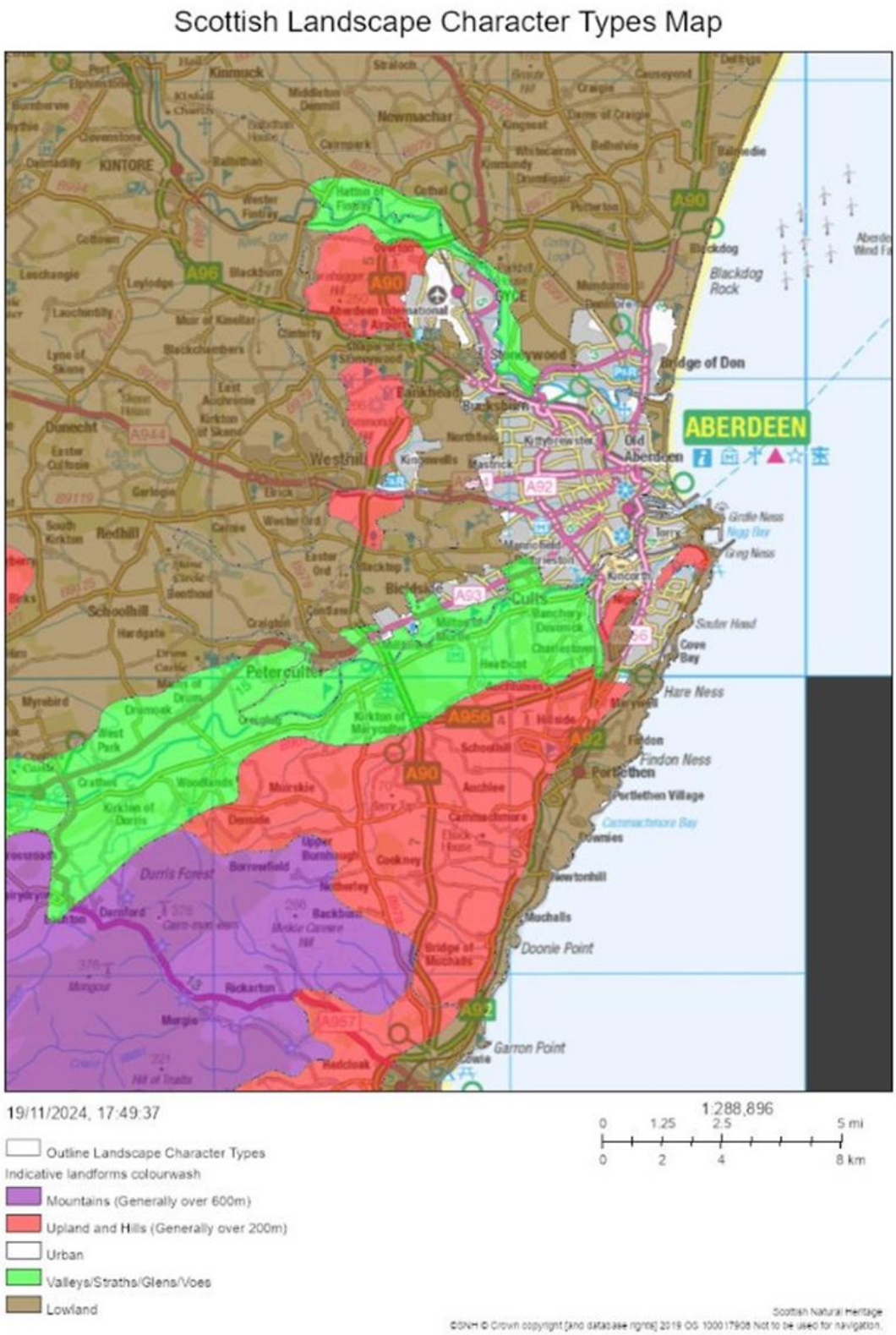



*Figure 2: Screenshot showing the Scottish Landscape Character Types around Aberdeen)*

## Topic 1: Spatial Strategy

**Aberdeen Landscape Study**

The Aberdeen Landscape Study provides a comprehensive assessment of the landscape character, coastal character, peri-urban areas, and landscape sensitivity in Aberdeen City. The Landscape Character Assessment describes, classifies, and maps areas of land to explain their distinctive characteristics and determine their value. Nine Landscape Character Types were identified, which can help inform decisions on green belt extent and site allocations for development. The Coastal Character Assessment categorizes Aberdeen's coastline by examining maritime influences, coastal edge nature, and hinterland identity, identifying six Coastal Character Areas with management guidelines to address distinct pressures and threats, and suggest future enhancements.

The Peri-Urban Study identifies 15 peri-urban areas subject to development pressure, detailing landform, land cover, land use, and designations. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment gauges landscape sensitivity to development, identifying 32 units unsuitable for residential, business, or industrial land uses, and informing spatial strategies and planning applications. These assessments provide valuable insights for future decision-making on land allocation, potential areas for protection or enhancement

**Aberdeen Planning Guidance 2023 - Landscape**

This Aberdeen Planning Guidance (APG) is primarily intended to provide assistance in the interpretation of the Local Development Plan Policies D4 – Landscape, and D5 – Landscape Design. It includes design principles, technical advice, outlines the general expectations of proposed developments with regard to planting schedules and landscaping schemes as well as provides a consolidated summary of the various Aberdeen Landscape Studies.

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**AECOM Nature Networks Corridor Map**

This map viewer identifies Nature Networks Corridors throughout Scotland to connect 30x30 sites with other environmental assets. Corridors are scored from 0-7 based on establishment cost, with Aberdeen's scores ranging from 1 to 4. It helps inform Nature Networks in Aberdeen City and guide habitat enhancement efforts. Nature Networks will inform the spatial strategy and are part of a Natural Heritage Strategy, with a draft expected by late Summer 2025. They are discussed further in Infrastructure and Nature and Biodiversity Topic Papers.

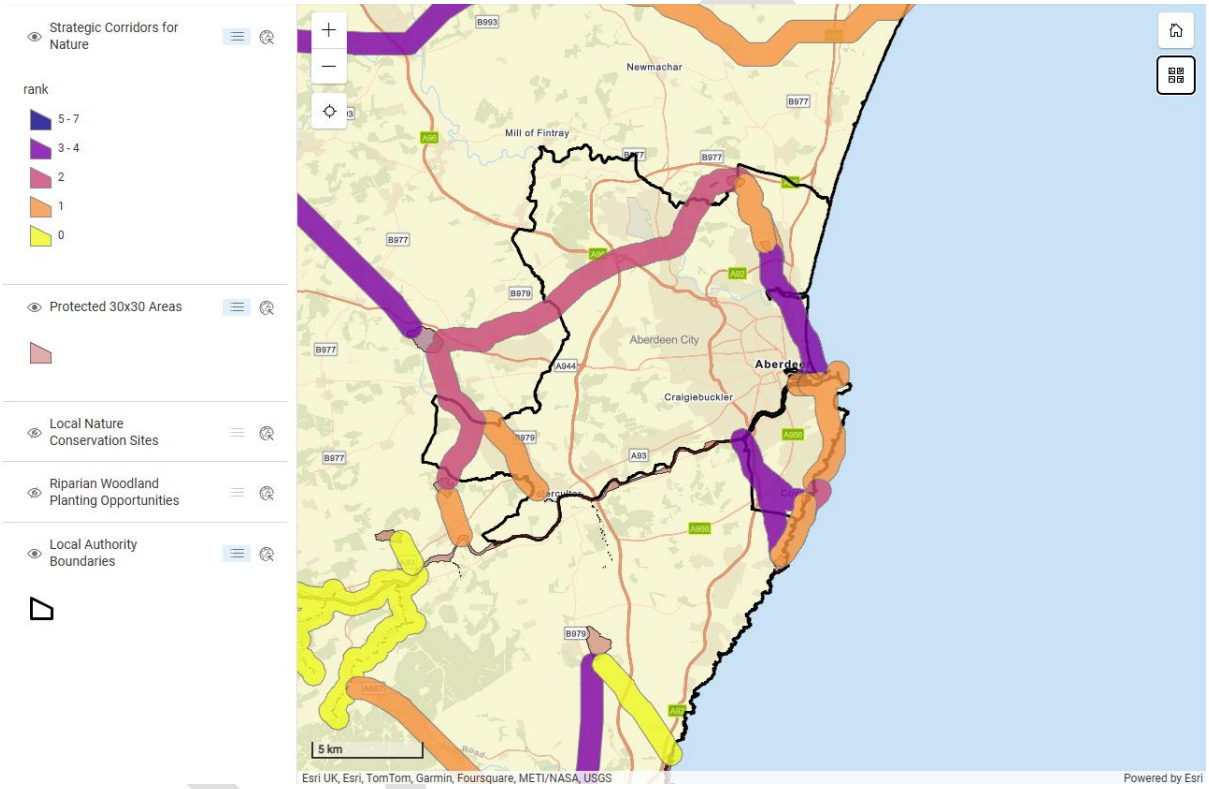



*Figure 3: Screenshot showing the location of Aberdeen's Strategic Corridors for Nature*

# Brownfield Development

Brownfield and Greenfield Development Trends

Housing Land Audits (HLA) can be used to provide evidence of past trends with respect to the split between brownfield and greenfield development levels within the City, as is shown in the Housing Topic Paper

Table 1 shows that 53% of all housing development in the City from 2012 to 2022 has taken place on greenfield sites, and 47% has taken place on brownfield sites. Brownfield development has played in significant role in helping to meet housing needs within the City over the last decade. Looking to the future, the 2024 Housing Land Audit identifies that some 76% of the established housing land supply in the City is on greenfield sites, with 24% on brownfield sites. This is reflective of the large greenfield housing land allocations that are identified within the Local Development Plan, albeit the Local Development Plan also seeks to promote brownfield development.

| Type of Development | Total No. of Units Completed 2012 – 2022 | Percentage of Total Development 2012 – 2022 |
|---|---|---|
| Brownfield | 4,663 | 47% |
| Greenfield | 5,333 | 53% |

*Table 1: Quantity of housing development constructed on Brownfield and Greenfield sites in Aberdeen City between the years of 2012 and 2022.*

**Brownfield Urban Capacity Study Sites**

A Brownfield Urban Capacity Study will be undertaken to inform the spatial strategy of the next Local Development Plan. It identifies potential brownfield housing sites and estimates the number of housing units these sites are likely to produce. A map showing the existing 2019 Brownfield Urban Capacity Study sites, with colour coding to show remaining capacity of each site, can be found below (figure 4).

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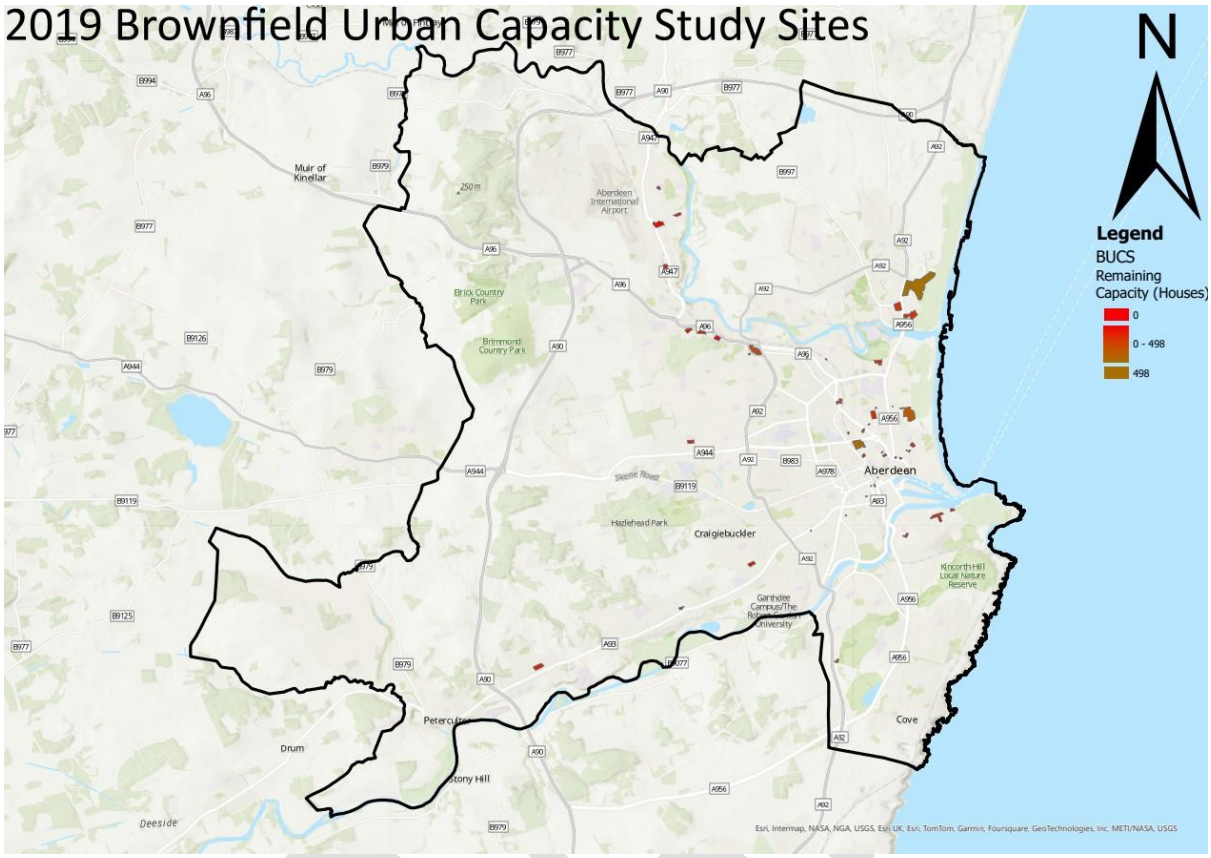



*Figure 4: Map showing the location of Brownfield Urban Capacity Study Sites (2019)*

**The Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey**

The Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey (SVDLS) is updated annually. It involves reporting the annual change in the take-up of brownfield land and recording new sites which have become vacant or derelict. These are mapped and various details are recorded for them, including the former use of the land.

The 2024 SVDLS return was submitted to the Scottish Government in October 2024. It lists 74 sites that cover a cumulative area of nearly 144ha. At the time of writing, the Scottish Government had not published the annual SVDL 2024 datasets.

The 5 largest sites constitute approximately 35.6% of the total area of SVDLs 2024 sites and these are as follows (Table 2):

| Site Name and Address | Site Size | Area of City |
|---|---|---|
| Silverburn Park, Exhibition Avenue | 17.6ha | Bridge of Don |
| Former Stoneywood Papermill | 15.4ha | Stoneywood |
| Former Shell Building, 1 Altens Farm Road | 10.7ha | Altens |
| Former Cordyce Residential School, Riverview Drive | 8.2ha | Dyce |
| Peterseat Drive 1 | 7.3ha | Altens |

*Table 2: Table identifies the five largest sites recorded in the Aberdeen's Vacant and Derelict Land Survey 2023 and their respective sizes and locations.*

Within this 47 sites are vacant, 17 sites are derelict and 10 are vacant with buildings. The sites are fairly well distributed across the city, with concentrations in and around the industrial estates at Altens/Tullos, around the industrial estates near Aberdeen International Airport/Dyce, around Ellon Road, Bridge of Don and some wider more spaced-out scatterings at Auchmill Road. As table 3, below show the top 3 previous uses in Aberdeen for vacant and derelict land are manufacturing (17%), offices (17%) and recreation/leisure (15%).

| Previous Use | Area (hectares | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture | 3.19 | 2 |
| Business Class | 5.24 | 4 |
| Community & Health | 4.81 | 3 |
| Education | 20.51 | 14 |
| Manufacturing | 24.82 | 17 |
| Mineral Activity | 5.37 | 4 |
| Offices | 23.63 | 17 |
| Other | 1.04 | 1 |
| Other General Industrial | 9 | 6 |
| Recreation & Leisure (excluding passive open space) | 21.97 | 15 |
| Residential - Hotels, Hostels etc | 1.96 | 1 |
| Residential - Housing | 3.87 | 3 |
| Retailing | 1.98 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Storage | 1.47 | 1 |
| Unknown | 12.32 | 9 |
| Utility Services | 2.03 | 1 |

*Table 3: Key for the Vacant and Derelict Land Survey 2024*

**The Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland**

The Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland is maintained by Historic Environment Scotland. It includes the location and details of all recorded at risk buildings within Aberdeen City. At the time of writing there are 58 sites in Aberdeen on this register.

Of these 58 sites, 55 are currently at risk and 3 are undergoing restoration (as of January 2025). Only 7 of the sites are unlisted, and 17 are Category 'A'- Listed. 29 sites are classed as being in poor condition, 6 are in very poor condition and 3 are classed as ruinous. All but one of the 'At Risk' sites are urban locations, with the exception being 'B'-Listed Waulkmill Bridge in Peterculter.

The Buildings at Risk Register has been paused while Historic Environment Scotland consider long-term options for its future in light of the main findings, conclusions and options of the Buildings at Risk Register review.

**City Centre Masterplan and Delivery Programme 2015 / City Centre and Beach Masterplan Refresh 2022**

The City Centre Masterplan and Delivery Programme 2015 (CCMP&DP) was approved in 2015, and outlines a 25 year development strategy for Aberdeen City Centre. The CCMP&DP looks to increasing the mix of uses within the city centre. In August 2022 a refresh of the CCMP&DP was approved. The review does not replace or supersede the CCMP&DP 2015. The City Centre and Beach Masterplan incorporate interventions and linkages to and from Aberdeen beach to the city centre, and a new intervention area, George Street. It follows the principles of the CCMP&DP 2015, but has a public realm and project focus.

The CCMP&DP outlines seven intervention areas, that aim to increase the mix of uses in the city centre. This includes increasing residential use, ensuring there are area of employment through office and retail use, and cultural assets.

| Intervention Area | Masterplan Focus |
|---|---|
| Denburn Valley | A revitalised Union Terrace Gardens establishes itself as a key destination and the linking thread to a new residential quarter |
| Heat of the City | Reinstating the central role of Union Street in the life of the city, establishing stronger retail linkages north and south and creating a destination not just for shopping but for many city activities. |
| Queen's Square | A new city centre neighbourhood with a strong urban character. An exemplar of the best of urban living in a sensitive historic context. |
| Union Street West | A focus for the wider business sector, from new businesses with a Made in Aberdeen focus, to spin-outs from the energy sector. Union Street West emerges as a much stronger business address. |
| Station Gateway | The critical remodelling of the key gateway to the city centre, with new business and commercial developments, providing city centre users and visitors with a radically transformed arrival experience, leading seamlessly northwards to Union Street |
| Castegate / Castlehill | A focus for visitors and tourists, taking in the best of Aberdeen's townscape, including Castlegate, Union Street and links to the harbour to the south and the beach to the east |
| North Dee / Torry Waterfront | New riverside quarters connected by a pedestrian bridge and a much improved riverside park and promenade. To the north, an urban business district; to the south, a residential neighbourhood that maximises its relationship to the river. |

Table 4: Intervention Areas from the City Centre Masterplan and Delivery Programme

Please see Place topic paper and Centres of Business topic paper for more information on the city centre masterplans.

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## Coastal Development

**National and Regional Marine Plan**
A comprehensive overarching framework for all marine activity in Scotland's waters. It will enable sustainable development and use of Scotland's marine area in a way which will protect and enhance the marine environment whilst promoting both existing and emerging industries. Aberdeen is noted specifically within the document with regard to oil and gas, recreation and tourism, and shipping, ports, harbours and ferries, with the National Development: Aberdeen Harbour also noted. There is no regional marine plan for the north east of Scotland.

**Coastal Change Adaptation Plan**
The Scottish Government Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance (2023) is designed to help local authorities in planning for our future climate at the coast and to support long term adaptation and resilience of coastal communities. The aims of the guidance are as follows:

1. Promote the resilience of our natural coastline and begin the process of adaptation to climate change;
2. Set out a process for a proactive approach to coastal adaptation planning that will maximise opportunities and minimise risk from climate change impacts;
3. Ensure our collective coastal adaptation journey starts now and;
4. Support local authorities to begin the process.

At the time of writing, a Coastal Change Adaptation Plan is being developed in Aberdeen to understand how coastal development can adapt to anticipated changes resulting from climate change. This will include projections of different climate change scenarios to understand how Aberdeen's coast will change.

**Dynamic Coast**
Dynamic Coast, Scotland's Coastal Change Assessment has identified areas at risk of future erosion. This includes small areas along Aberdeen's soft coastal areas, north of the River Don that may be susceptible to future erosion.

Further discussion on this data source can be found in the Natural Places section of the Nature and Biodiversity Topic Paper.

**SEPA Coastal Flood Mapping**
SEPA's Coastal Flood mapping indicates that the entire Aberdeen coastline presents a 'high' likelihood of flooding, particularly along the beach, the river Don, and the river Dee. It demonstrates areas of coastline that are susceptible to natural erosion. This is

most evident along the northern areas of Aberdeen's coast, along the beach, and north of the river Don. It demonstrates a northerly movement of sediment along the coast.

Further information concerning flood risk and management is outlined in the Climate topic paper.

**Coastal Zoning**

Within the extant Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023 spatial strategy, coastal areas are zoned as either developed or undeveloped. The principle of these zonings is well established. The boundaries may need to be re-examined due to the development of the National Development: Aberdeen South Harbour. A small area of Undeveloped Coast lies within the Aberdeen South Harbour which would appear to be an anomaly now that the harbour has been built. There are no areas of remote coast in Aberdeen.

**Aberdeen Adapts**

Aberdeen Adapts (2022) is a framework for city-wide progress towards climate adaptation. It identifies 'Flooding and Coastal Change' as one of five main focal themes for climate adaptation in Aberdeen.

The Aberdeen Adapts Evidence Base indicates that there will be a rise in sea level under all emission scenarios, with a mean increase of 0.56m under a high emission scenario and a mean increase of 0.36m under a low emission scenario. Additionally, flooding and coastal erosion are increasingly likely as the risk of tidal surges and wave overtopping heightens.

It identifies that although a dynamic coastline is a natural process, coastal inundation has potential consequences for natural habitats and defences, such as the coastal dune ridge north of the River Don. Additionally, changes in sedimentation pattern may lead to erosion at the coast or sedimentation processes in adjacent areas to existing coastal defences.

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# Business & Industry

**Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (SNSET)**
Outlines national goals for business and industry, and identifies five interconnected key policy programmes of action (entrepreneurial people and culture; new market opportunity; productive businesses and regions; skilled workforce; a fair and more equal society) to drive improvements in Scotland's economy by 2032. Success in delivering these would mean a strong economy, where good, secure and well-paid jobs and growing businesses have driven a significant reduction in poverty particularly child poverty. There is a role for all, from government to business, trade unions, third sector and the people of Scotland.

**Regional Economic Strategy – a sustainable economic future for the North East of Scotland**
Outlines the regional strategy for creating suitable conditions for economic growth throughout the North East. The regional economy has faced significant challenges, in response to leaving the European Union, following COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the oil and gas sector.

It identifies 5 overarching objectives:

- To establish the North East as a pioneer of the energy transition, by delivering an 80% reduction in carbon emissions per head;
- Maintain regional GVA as a share of Scotland's overall GVA while increasing the share of regional employment from the region's growth sectors;
- Maintain a healthy, sustainable, working age population through increasing economic participation rates;
- Become a Real living Wage region with 95% of overall employment offering a real living wage or higher; and
- Protect and enhance the natural capital of the region by aligning to national ambitions to manage 30% of the region for people and nature by 2030.

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The objectives are supported by four work programmes detailed below (Table 5).

| Work programme | Overview |
|---|---|
| A thriving, innovative driven economy | Growth across our key sectors will be driven by innovation, entrepreneurship and internationalisation so that high quality jobs are created. Investment in decarbonisation will be maximised through unlocking private capital for investment in the transition. |
| An outstanding natural environment: | Our natural environments and biodiversity will be preserved, protected and restored, to ensure we retain their value and integrity, allowing them to continue providing all the essential services we need to support and strengthen our economy, people and places. The region remains a stunning, healthy and productive place to live, work and visit, and accessible to all. The North East's nature underpins many industries providing sustainable raw materials to businesses, supplying a world renowned food and drink sector, strengthening the health and wellbeing of our people and the natural beauty that is the most cited reason for visiting by tourists – outdoor activity, natural environment, marine and adventure tourism are all unique features that the North East can capitalise on. |
| A healthy and skilled population: | There will be investment in education, skills, technology and employment opportunities that help residents benefit from the transition to net zero. Individuals will be able to access high-quality education and training at all life stages. This, combined with a focus on Fair Work and a reduction in inequality, will ensure that all residents and communities are equipped to fulfil their potential, contributing to an improvement in wellbeing and ultimately life expectancy. |
| A strong community and cultural identity: | There is a vibrant culture and creative sector that is championed to enhance our distinctiveness with a successful arts and cultural sector that capitalises on new investments such as P&J Live or Aberdeen Art Gallery and forthcoming Levelling Up investments to create a new museum in Peterhead and expansion of Macduff Marine Aquarium. |

Table 5: F*our 'programme areas' developed in response to a number of new challenges and opportunities that the North East economy faces.*

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**North East Scotland Investment Zone (NESIZ)**

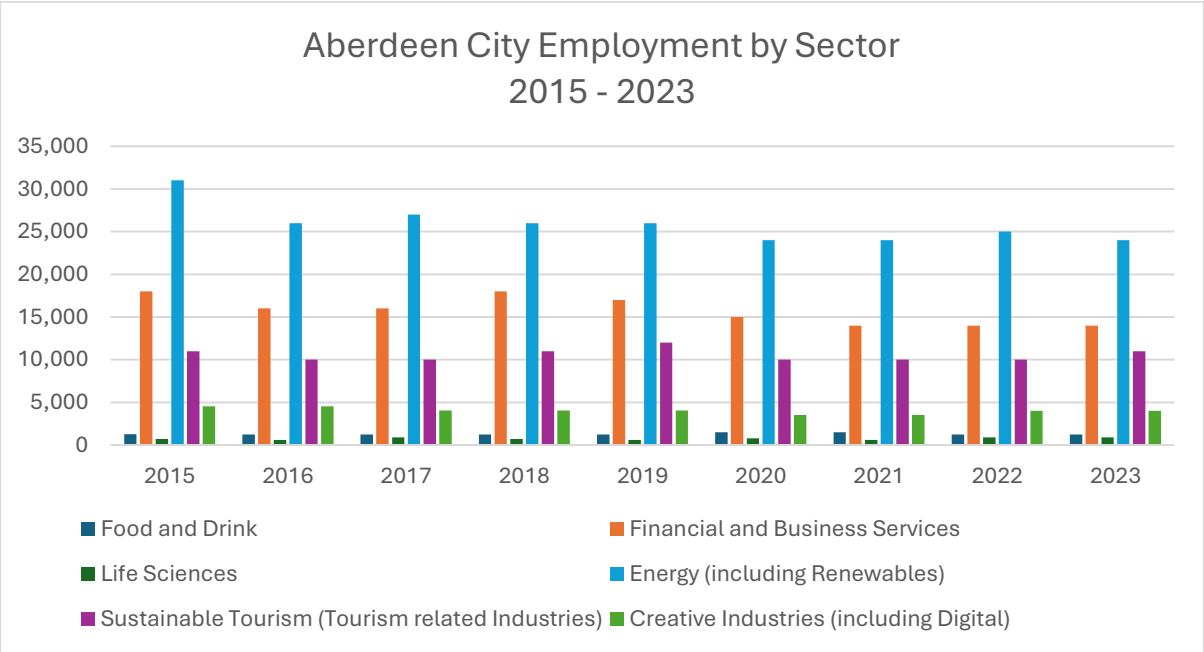
North East Scotland was confirmed as an Investment Zone in June 2023, encompassing Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The NESIZ will receive up to £160 million over ten years, supporting economic growth in green energy and digital technology sectors. The region aims to create high-value jobs and support the transition away from oil and gas. The area has extensive experience in offshore energy and a significant tech cluster, contributing to economic growth and innovation.

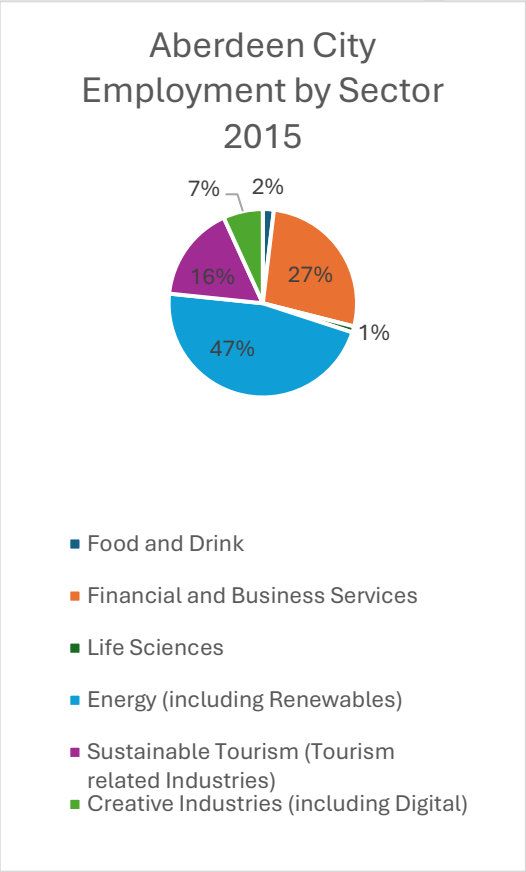
Aberdeen City Data Observatory

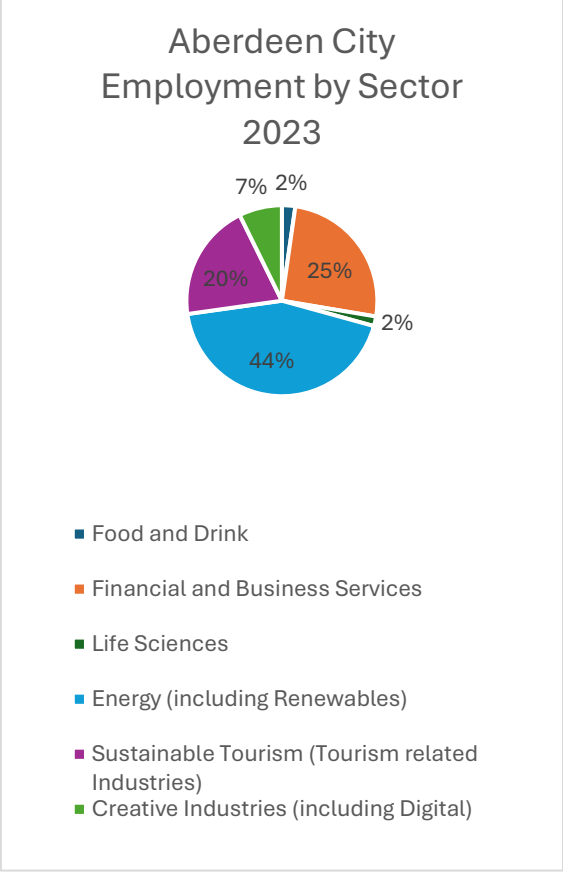
The Aberdeen City Employment by Sector (Figures 5, 6 and 7) show the number of people employed within the six largest sectors in Aberdeen between 2015 and 2023. As of 2023 within Aberdeen, the largest proportion of people (44%) are employed within the Energy (including Renewables) sector. The second largest sector is Financial and Business Services, at 25%.The third largest sector is Sustainable Tourism (20%), which includes tourism related industries. This sector has been among the most stable sectors of employment. No other sector of employment within Aberdeen exceeds 10%.

Comparing Aberdeen to Scotland (figure below 8,9 and 10), it is noticeable that Sustainable Tourism (32%) and Financial and Business Services (29%) are by far the largest employment sectors as of 2023 at a national level. While Aberdeen is broadly comparable with Scotland in the Financial and Business Services (at 25% in Aberdeen vs Scotland's 29% in 2023), Aberdeen's Sustainable Tourism industry only accounts for 20% of employment compared to Scotland's 32%.

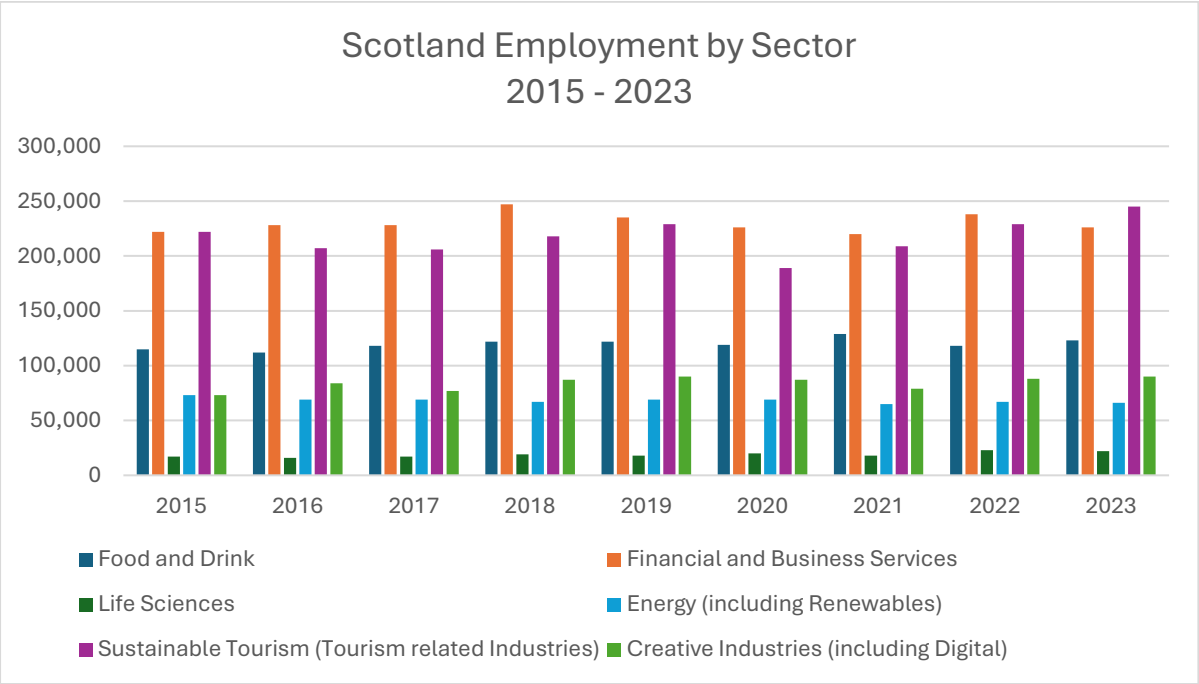
The main differences will likely be reflective of Aberdeen being primarily an urban local authority situated on the coast. In addition to this, as the 'Energy capital of Europe', its role in employing people within the oil and gas industries are an outlier, rather than representative of an opportunity available throughout Scotland. While this employment sector is contracting due to the desire to reduce the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels, investment in renewable energy such as wind turbines and solar farms has partially counter-acted this.

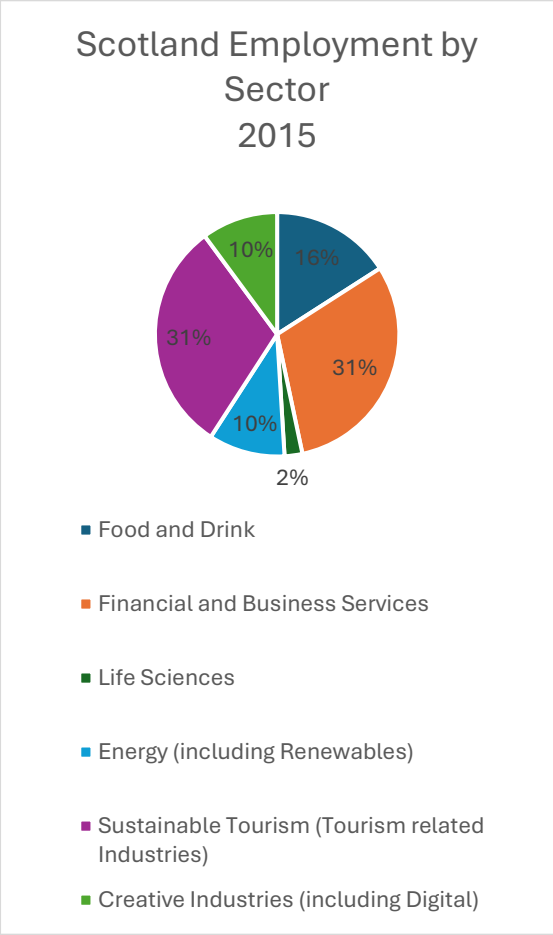


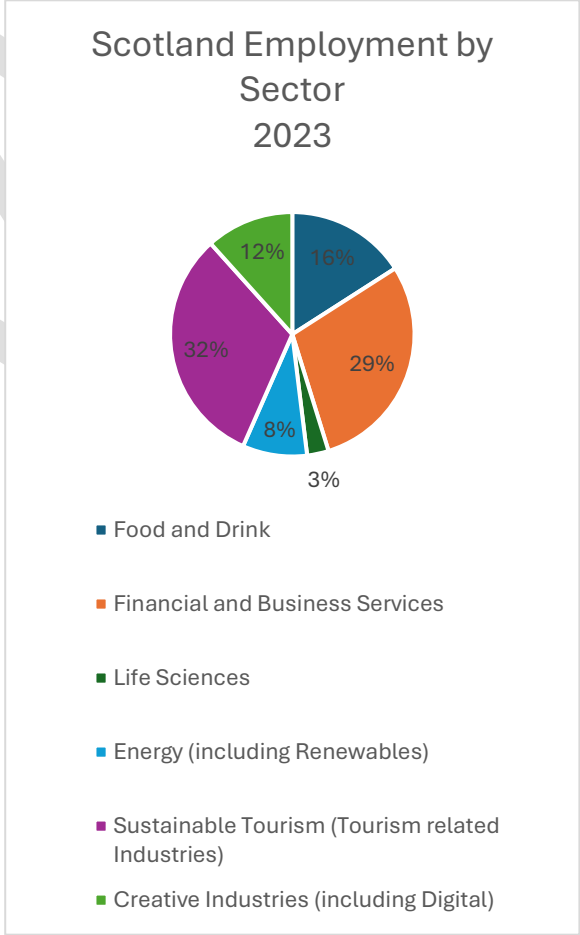




*Figures 5,6 and 7: Aberdeen City – Employment by Sector – 2015-2023*




*Figures 8, 9 and 10: Scotland – Employment by Sector – 2015-2023*

National Planning Framework 4's spatial planning priorities relate to economic growth, economic diversification, innovation, a transition from oil and gas to net zero, regeneration and a retained workforce. This emphasises the importance Aberdeen and the North East has for Scotland's wider net zero objectives. It will have a significant effect on the nature of the Aberdeen employment market for both existing and emerging businesses and industries which may have differing land allocation requirements.

The GVA per head in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire saw a rising trend until 2015 and a falling trend to 2020 (as a result of the oil and gas downturn). In comparison, the Scottish line remained steady until 2019 (COVID-19). Aberdeen City and Shire has followed a similar growth trend to the national figures since 2020.

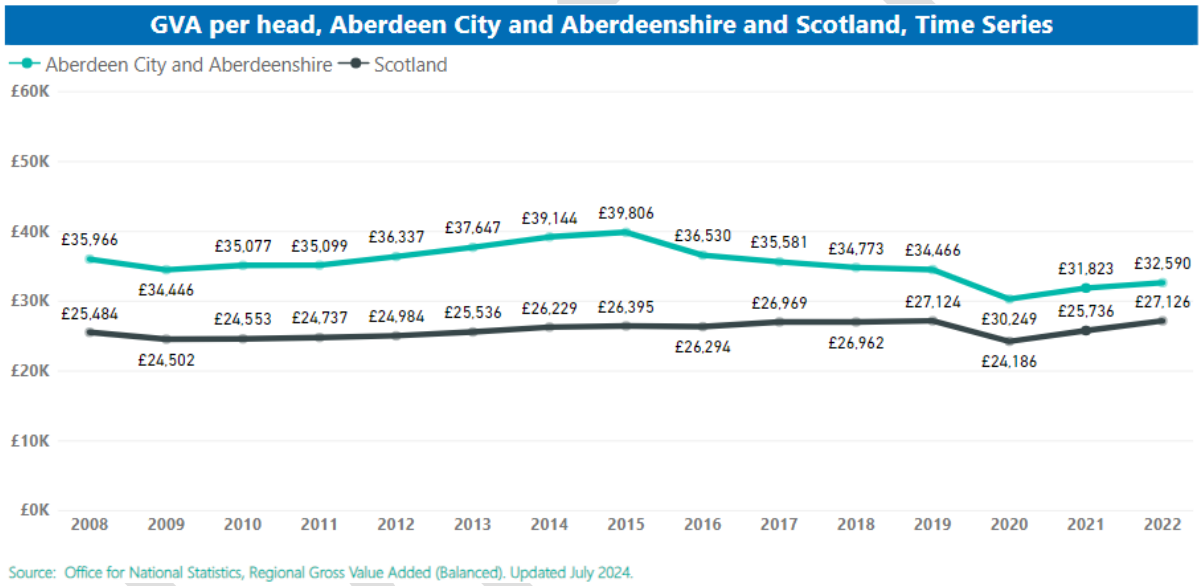



*Figure 11: Gross Value Added (GVA) per head in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire 2008-2022*

A similar trend is seen in business births and deaths shown by Figure 12 below. Between 2010 and 2015 business births exceeded business deaths quite considerably. Only two years since has seen business births higher than deaths (2018 and 2019) before COVID-19 pandemic impacted on businesses yet again. 2023 shows only a small difference between births and deaths and indicates stabilisation is occurring.

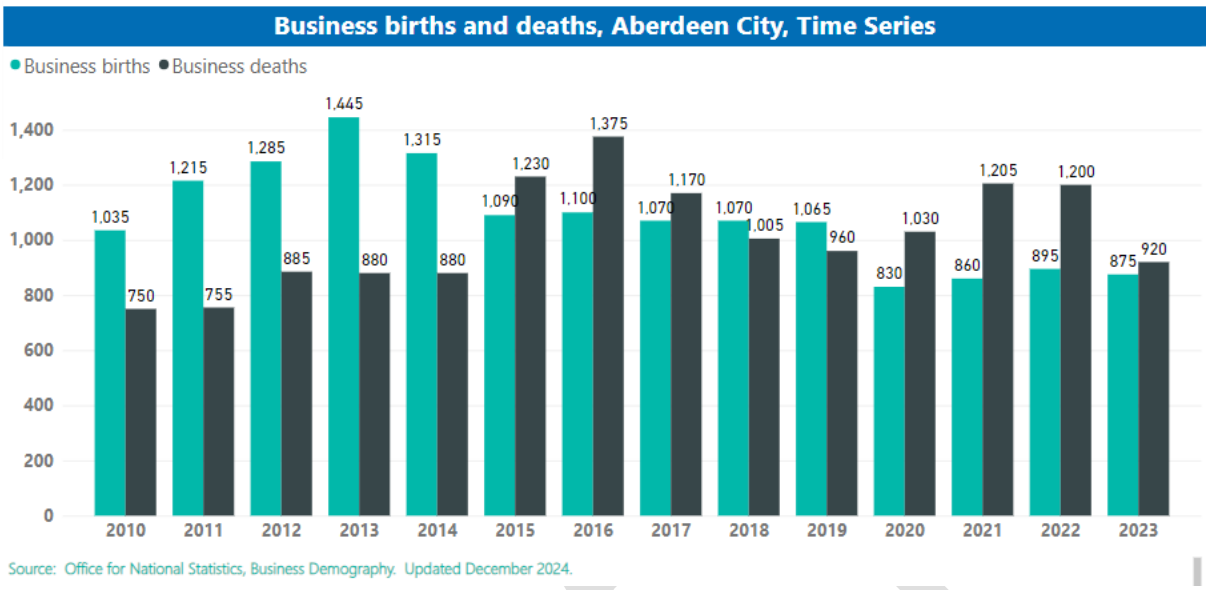



*Figure 12: Business births and deaths in Aberdeen 2010-2023*

Wages in Aberdeen have historically been higher than the Scottish average. However, as Figure 13 below shows, after the oil and gas downturn and COVID-19, wages have evened out across gender and location since 2022.

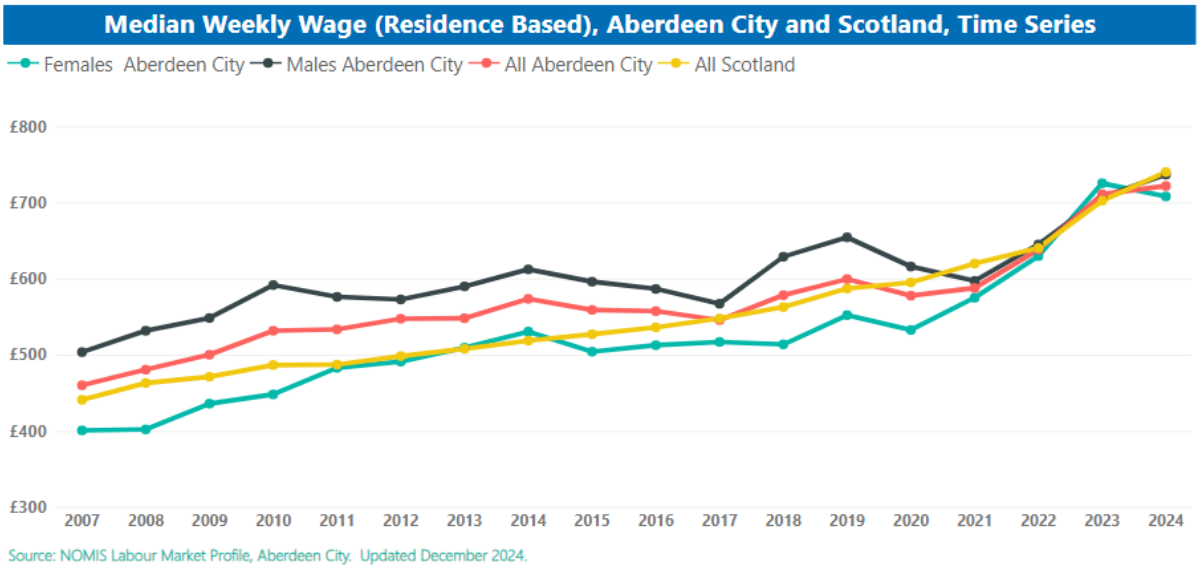



*Figure 13: Median Weekly Wage – Aberdeen City, Scotland and by Gender 2007 - 2024*

The energy sector in Aberdeen is dominated by oil and gas industries, however there is an emerging renewable energy sector. There are current transitions to sustainable sources of energy such as solar, hydrogen, wind, combined heat and power in line with the Scottish Governments net zero targets.

## Topic 1: Spatial Strategy

Energy Transition Fund

The £62m Energy Transition Fund is available to support projects, to protect existing and create new jobs in the North East. Focussing on Global Underwater Hub, Net Zero Solution Centre projects, A Hydrogen Hub, The Acorn Project and; An Energy Transition Zone adjacent to Aberdeen South Harbour. The energy transition fund aligns with the Aberdeen City Region Deal and its support for retraining and skills development. Planning for the future has seen relocation of activity from Aberdeen Harbour to the South Harbour – both of which are key assets in the regions blue economy.

**City Region Deal**

The Aberdeen City Region Deal commits the UK Government and Scottish Government to invest up to £250m. The deal, aims to encourage investment in innovation, internationalisation, digital connectivity, and infrastructure across the region. Investments includes £90 million to support an Oil and Gas Technology Centre, and £15 million towards new innovation hubs focusing on research, development and growth in the life sciences and food and drink sectors. Key projects include the Aberdeen South Harbour (completed in 2023), BioHub (opened in 2023), SeedPod (under construction, due for completion in 2025), Net Zero Technology Centre (formerly the Oil and Gas Technology Centre), 5G digital technology and transport projects.

**Aberdeen Economic Policy Panel Report 2023**

The report highlights the need for a long-term strategic approach to secure a successful transition to renewable energy. This requires diversification, attracting and retaining skills, investing in infrastructure, making Aberdeen an even better place to live and work and implementing a successful regional economic strategy. Employment rates in Aberdeen dropped at a steeper rate post oil price decline in 2015 than in the rest of Scotland. Whilst the rate has started to recover, it remains lower than pre-pandemic levels (figure 14):

Employment rate pre-pandemic (2019): 79.4%
During pandemic (2020): 71.8%
Post pandemic (2024): 77.4%




*Figure 14: Extract from Data Observatory showing Employment Rate in Aberdeen and Scotland over time.*

Demographic changes in the region will impact upon the North East economy with the average age of residents increasing throughout Scotland. In the North East there has been a decline in working age population from 328,000 in 2015 to 315,000 in 2021 equating to a 4% decline. Compared to Glasgow and Edinburgh, where the rate has increased by 5%, the North East has the lowest working-age population since 2008 (figure 15).

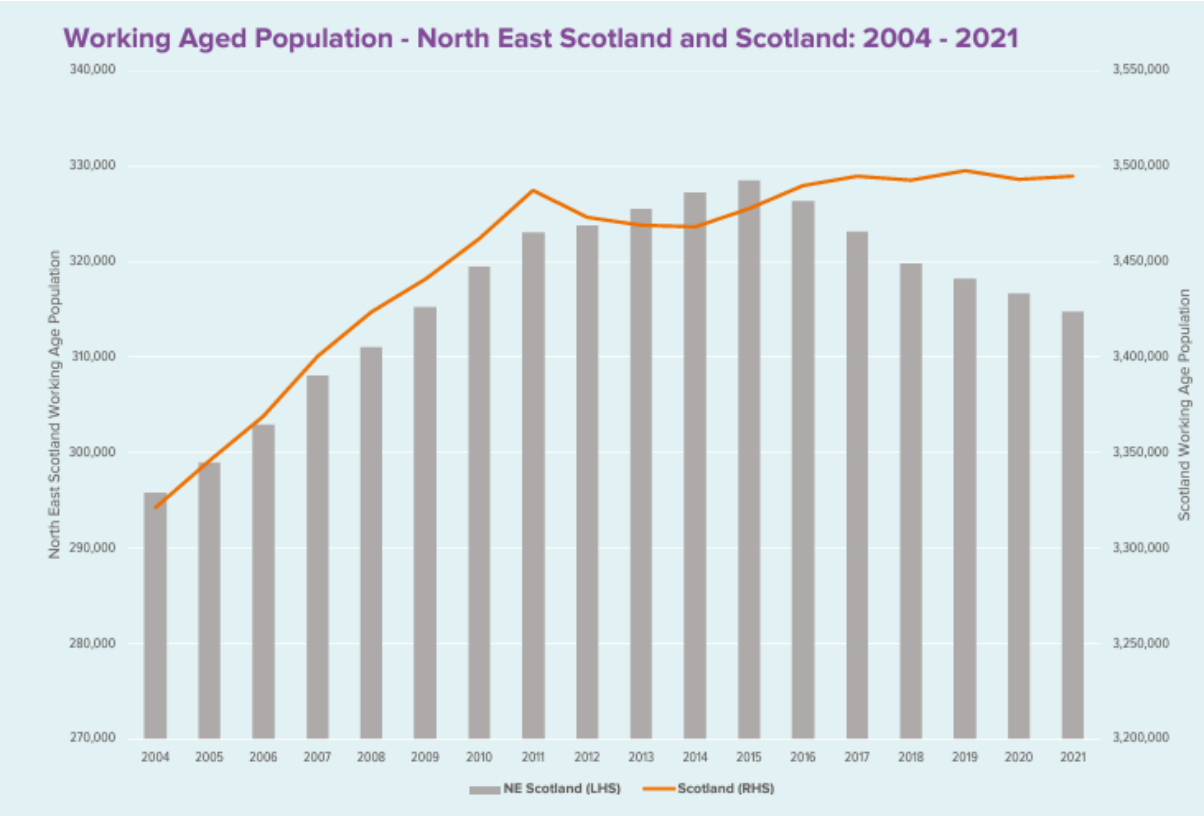



*Figure 15: Extract from Aberdeen Economic Policy Panel Report 2023 showing Working Aged Population Rate in North East and Scotland over time.*

Other notable factors compounding this issue include national cost of living increases and economic effects of COVID-19, but also local housing market house price falls, local rent increases and a higher claimant figure post pandemic (figure 16).

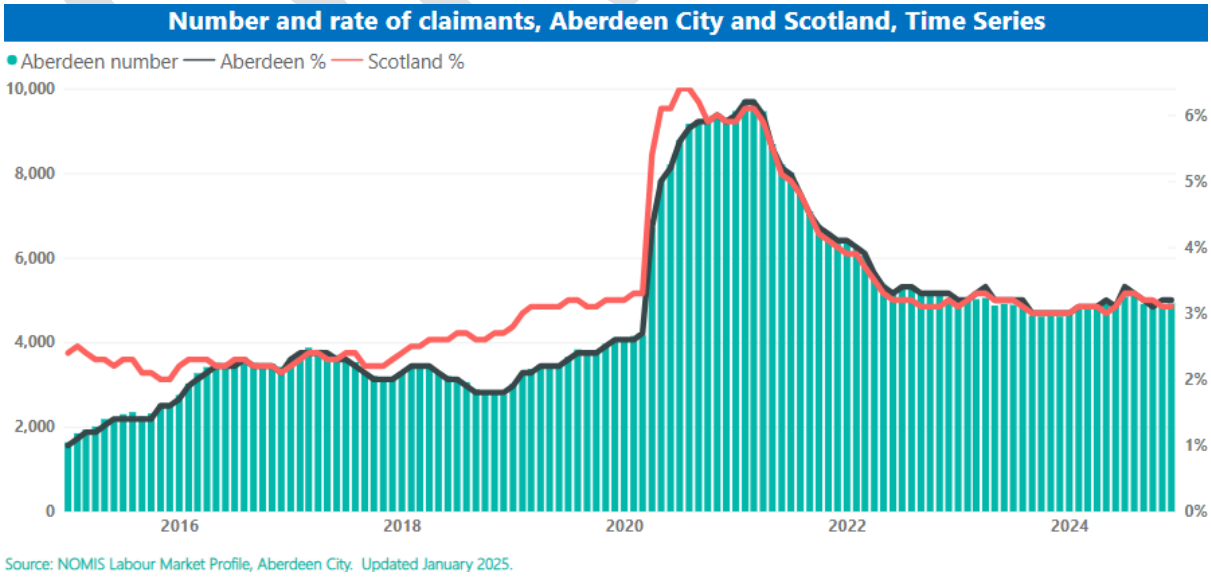



*Figure 16: Number and rate of claimants in Aberdeen and Scotland.*

Demographic changes, pressures and skills shortages can have knock on effects on the ability for businesses to obtain staff. The report notes that 83% of North East companies have reported challenges in recruiting suitable staff. In line with the Regional Economic Strategy ambitions to diversify the North East economy away from oil and gas will require to take place amongst the demographic changes, labour shortages and rising costs and prices. Diversification towards other sectors that have strong growth potential (identified in figure 17 below) will be fundamental in achieving the aspirations of the Regional Economic Strategy.

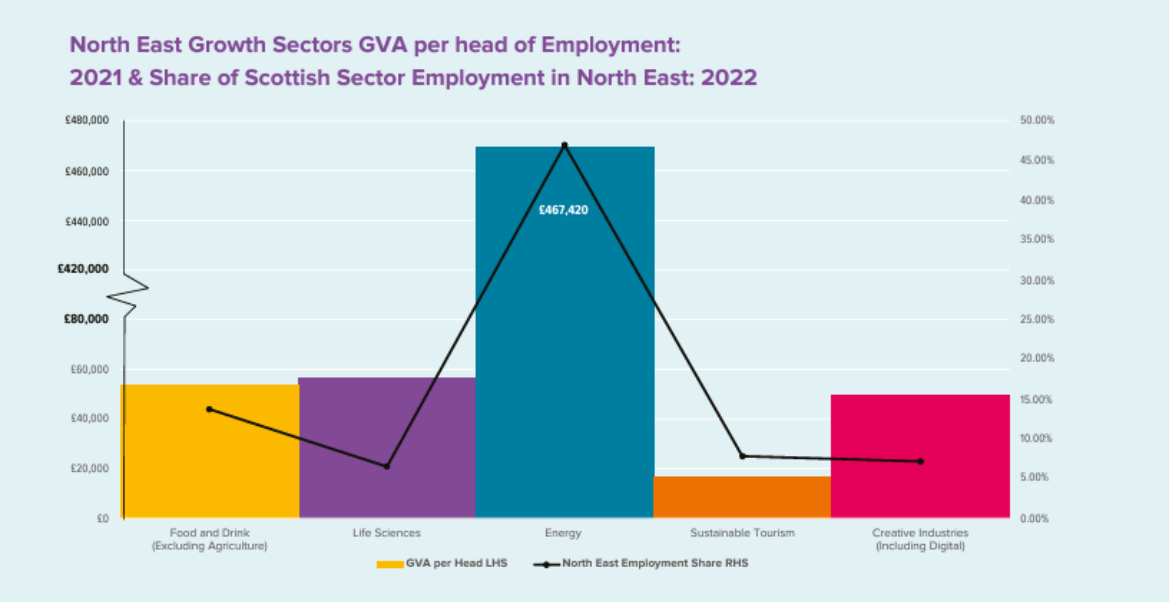



*Figure17: Extract from Aberdeen Economic Policy Panel Report 2023 showing Growth Sectors GVA per head of Employment in North East*

**Employment Land Supply**

Analysis of current and potential demand for employment land through specific policies and allocations will be required to align with National Planning Framework 4 focus on economic prosperity and just transition. The biannual Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Business and Land Audit 2023 monitors the location, size, planning status and any existing constraints (marketability, infrastructure, land use etc) of sites within the existing business and industry land supply. The audit monitors the supply and availability as well as the take up of land. Previous audits can be used to identify any trends. National Planning Framework 4 does not state a specific land requirement target for business and industry land allocations.

There is 254 hectares of undeveloped business and industry land designated in Aberdeen City. Around 25% of that is constrained as it is not expected to be capable of coming forward within 5 years. The reduction in the established land supply was

mostly due to a re-allocation of a single large site at Cloverhill. The Marketable, Immediately Available, and Constrained land supply also fell by 7%, 14%, and 3% respectively as Figure 18 below shows.

**Aberdeen City Business and Industry Land Supply 2021 and 2023 in Hectares**

| | 2021 | 2023 | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Established** | 270 | 254 | -6% |
| **Constrained** | 64 | 62 | -3% |
| **Marketable** | 206 | 192 | -7% |
| **Immediately Available** | 49 | 42 | -14% |
| **Under Construction** | 1 | 5.2 | |

*Figure 18: Aberdeen City Business and Industry Land Supply 2021 and 2023*

As shown in Figure 19 below, in Aberdeen City there has been a decreasing trend in take up of employment land over the past 10 years which can be attributed to the decision to leave the European Union, the downturn in the oil industry and effects of COVID-19 pandemic. A proportion of the take-up has involved non business and industry uses such as retail and “drive-thru” restaurants/take-aways premises. This is further discussed in Topic Paper – Centres of Business and Culture. There is currently no analysis available regarding overall loss of business land (hectares) to other uses.

Without a specific land requirement target, future site allocations will require to look towards the Regional Economic Strategy and North East Scotland Investment Zone to ensure that the potential to meet economic objectives for Aberdeen City and the wider region is maximised.

**Aberdeen City Past 10 Year Completions in Hectares**

| 2013/14 | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | 15.9 | 15.3 | 3.4 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 4.5 | 0 | 1.14 |

*Table 3: Aberdeen City 10 Years Business and Industry Land Completions*

*Figure 19: Extract from Aberdeen City Business and Industry Land Completions 2013-2023*

## Office Space

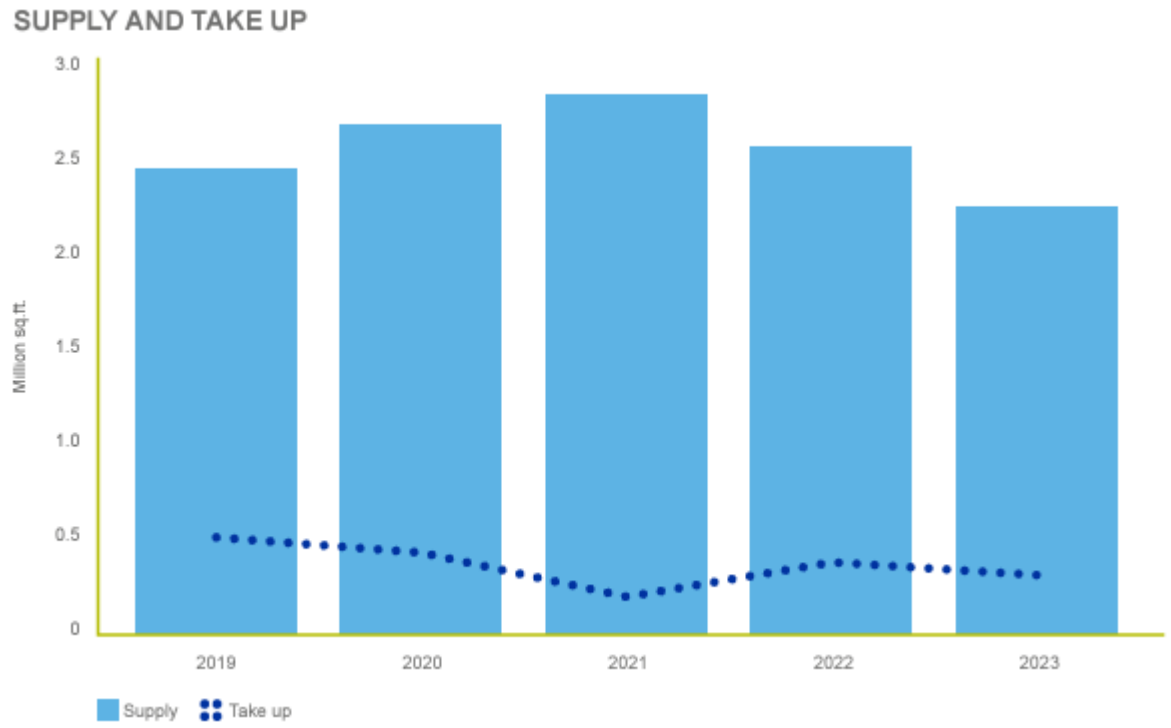



*Figure 20: Supply and* Take Up of Office Space in Aberdeen 2019-2023 (Ryden Scottish Property Review 2024)

Take up of office space is down in Aberdeen, however this is a similar picture in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Office supply at the end of 2023 totalled 2,217,564sq. ft with a notable 12% reduction compared to 2022. This continues the decreasing trend in vacancies which now sits at 20%.

In comparison to 2022, the office take up in Aberdeen has decreased by 14% across 78 transactions. Most deals were less than 5,000sq.ft. The largest deal was Harbour Energy at PrimeFour Business Park at 35,000sq.ft.

Grade A space in the city centre continues to decrease with limited availability of larger suites. Redevelopment of properties in the West End shows continued demand for the right office product where owners are prepared to invest in the building. Outwith the city centre the higher quality office stock continues to be popular with limited availability at PrimeFour and Aberdeen Internation Business Park. Although rents in Glasgow and Edinburgh have risen, Aberdeen has seen a stabilisation. Grade A rents have remained at £32.50 per sq. Ft. However, rents could rise for the higher quality stock due to lack of speculative new developments.

It is important to recognise that post COVID-19 pandemic many organisations continue to work a hybrid or flexible model and this can impact upon space requirements of an organisation.

**Industrial Space**

*Supply*

Due to financial factors including interest rate rises and increased build costs speculative development in Aberdeen has stopped. Supply has fallen from its peak of 3.2million sq.ft to 2.0million sq.ft. However, a large portion of this supply is old stock or of premises less active at the current time. Industrial rents have grown in Aberdeen. Buildings which are of a higher quality and energy efficiency are moving quickly.

*Demand*

2023 marked the largest volume of transactions since the downturn in the oil and gas sector in 2015. 97 transactions took place and represented a 10% increase on the five-year average of space taken up. This could partially be as a result of a consistent price per barrel of oil in 2023.

A lack of quality stock is constraining the market so demand is higher than the take-up figures reflect. In particular the market is strong for good quality industrial units over 10,000 sq.ft which benefit from secure yards and overhead craneage.

**Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) – Work and Local Economy/Facilities and Services**

Between 5 October and 6 November 2023, 470 participants took part in online and six in person Place Standard assessments for Community Planning. The full results and more information on this are found in the Place Topic Paper. The Place Standard assess places and is split into 14 themes. Places are assessed, awarded a score out of 7, and people asks for comment on what is good now and what can be improved about their local area. The results for Aberdeen are split into north, south and central, with “all” noting where these comments were present on all three areas. The results from the Place Standard are paramount for assessing quality of place and understanding the positive and negative perception of local areas. The Place Standard assessments were completed with adults and children.

The facilities and services, and work and local economy themes of the Place Standard are relevant here both scoring 3.9.

| Place Standard Theme | "Good" now | "Improve" for future |
|---|---|---|
| Facilities and Services | •Good provision of shops, within easy access (All)<br>• Support services were good with a range of services available (All), particularly those for the elderly and the vulnerable, and children (Central)<br>• Publicly funded facilities (community centres, libraries, school, play parks) are good. (All)<br>• Good activities for children.<br>Good provision and access to all services and shops (South)<br>• Park facilities were good locally. (South) | • Increases/improvements to health and community health services (All)<br>• Improvements and increases to publicly funded services, such as maintaining and reopening particularly libraries (All)<br>• Improve activities for children and young people (North)<br>• Improve road safety and crossing. (North)<br>• Improvements to, and increased funding for, support services, such as food banks and services to help the vulnerable and elderly. (Central)<br>• Access to affordable food (Central)<br>•Encouraging investment and incentives for businesses to open locally (South,<br>•Improvements to community health services and support services, and the homeless, elders, and young people (south, north)<br>• Improve public transport to the GP (South)<br>•Do not develop existing green space (South)<br>• Increasing access to and the provision of shops, including bigger food shops (Central) |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • More investment needed to improve local facilities and services that the community want (Central) |
| Work and Local Economy | • Good training opportunities, volunteering opportunities and availability of jobs. (All)<br>• Local businesses and independents opening (Central)<br>• Range of retail services (Central) | • Type and range of job opportunities available locally (North and Central)<br>•Improve employment support and training (North and Central)<br>• Volunteering opportunities (North)<br>• Training especially for retraining and skills development (South and Central)<br>• Empty buildings grants and incentives(South and Central) |

*Table 6: Summary of respondent's views on good and improvable aspects of their place for the future.*

The children and young people results on work and local economy noted: 62.3% felt they were okay, 32.1% felt they were not good, and 5.7% felt they were great. For facilities and services: 53.7% felt they were okay, 35.2% felt they were not good, and 11.1% felt they were great.

| Theme | What is good now? | What would make it better? |
|---|---|---|
| Work and Local Economy | • Volunteering (20.8%)<br>• Jobs for my family (17.9%)<br>• Jobs nearby (14.2%) | • Training to learn new things (29.3%)<br>• Jobs nearby (27.4%)<br>• Jobs for my family (17%) |
| Facilities and Services | • Good shops (22.6%)<br>• School (22.6%)<br>• Doctors (12.3%) | • Clubs (22%)<br>• Doctors (20.8%)<br>• School (16%) |

*Table 7: Summary of young person/children's responses to what is good or could be improved about their places. Information is specific to the Work and Local Economy and Facilities and Services criteria.*

# Summary of Implications for Proposed Plan

Regional Spatial Strategy and National Developments

Any regional spatial strategy when approved will be used to inform the spatial strategy of Proposed Plan.

National Developments within National Planning Framework 4 will have to be considered in terms of the spatial strategy.

Green Belts

We will use the information from the Green Belt Review to inform the Proposed Plan. The continuing role of the green belt as part of the spatial strategy will have to be considered, taking into account the policy outcomes in National Planning Framework 4.

A detailed, site-specific review of the boundaries of the green belt will need to be undertaken.

Consideration will need to be given to whether any land previously designated as green belt should be released to meet future development requirements.

Consideration should be given to whether any new areas of green belt should be designated to protect and enhance the character, landscape setting and identity of Aberdeen.

The role of Aberdeen's green belt in supporting nature networks and helping tackle climate change, as highlighted in National Planning Framework 4, will require to be considered.

With a detailed green belt policy now included in National Planning Framework 4. consideration will need to be given on the need for a local green belt policy.

We will consider how the vision of Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy 2021-2026 can help achieve the policy outcome and intent of the green belt as outlined on National Planning Framework 4.

We will consider the role the landscape character assessment, the coastal character assessment, the peri urban study and the sensitivity assessment will play in any green belt review.

We will consider the role the nature network corridor map will play in any green belt review, and development of nature networks.

Brownfield Development

The continuing role of the use of brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings as part of spatial strategy will have to be considered, taking into account the policy outcomes in National Planning Framework 4.

It is proposed to continue and further develop this approach before identifying greenfield sites for development. The biodiversity value and contribution brownfield land can make to nature recovery, and productive greenspace will be considered when assessing the appropriateness of allocating and considering such sites for development.

Information contained in the most recent annual return to the Scottish Government Vacant and Derelict Land Survey, the Brownfield Urban Capacity Study and the City Centre Masterplan's will be used to inform the Proposed Plan.

Consideration will be given on if, and how, the impact of the Historic Environment Scotland review of the current Buildings at Risk Register might be reflected in the policy framework and development strategy for the Proposed Plan.

Coastal Development

The Proposed Plan will seek to incorporate relevant aims of the national marine plan and any regional marine plan when published. National Development: Aberdeen Harbour will be identified within the Proposed Plan.

The impacts of climate change with regard flooding and coastal erosion, and long term adaptation and reliance will be considered when developing the spatial strategy.

The spatial strategy should reflect the diversity of coastal areas and opportunities to use nature-based solutions to improve the resilience of coastal communities and assets.

A review of the current coastal zonings, developed and undeveloped will need to be undertaken for the Proposed Plan.

With a detailed coastal development now included in National Planning Framework 4, consideration will need to be given on the need for a local coastal development policy.

Business and Industry

A review of the current business and industrial land and business zones will need to be undertaken for the Proposed Plan, to understand if existing sites may require to be re-allocated, or if more economic land should be allocated, and for what type of uses.

The location of any new economic allocations in relation to communities, access to services and all forms of travel and transport services will need to be considered. In this context it may be appropriate in some cases to consider a wider mix of uses.

Information contained in the Regional Economic Strategy, North East Investment Zone, and the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Business and Land Audit will be used to inform the land requirements targets for business and industrial land in the Proposed Plan.

The spatial priorities for the North East from National Planning Framework 4 will have a significant effect on the nature of the Aberdeen employment market for both existing and emerging businesses and industries which may have differing land allocation requirements.

With a detailed Business and Industry policy now included in National Planning Framework 4, consideration will need to be given on the need for local Business and Industrial Land, and Business Zones Policies.

Marmot Places

Aberdeen, along with North Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire, has been confirmed as one of three Marmot Places in Scotland. Aberdeen will seek to embed the eight Marmot Principles within the Proposed Plan. The table below identifies where the topic paper aligns with the Marmot Principles.

| **Principle** | **Potential implication for the Plan** |
|---|---|
| Give every child the best start in life. | |
| Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and control over their lives. | |
| Create fair employment and good work for all. | X |
| Ensure a healthy standard of living for all. | X |
| Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities. | X |
| Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention. | X |
| Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes. | |
| Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together. | |