These guidelines set out the relevant criteria and advice how to measure the impacts on existing buildings and adjoining land in order to achieve a high quality in all new developments.

This has been based on Building Research Establishment Report Site Layout for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice by P J Littlefair (1991). Each application will be assessed on its merits.

They should also help individuals and organisations – such as neighbours and community councils – to know what we consider appropriate.

They’re meant as a guide to the policies detailed in Fife’s structure plan and local plans.

Other leaflets in this series can be viewed at www.fifedirect.org.uk/planning
1. Introduction to sunlight/daylight

These guidelines set out the relevant criteria and advice on how to measure the impacts on existing buildings and adjoining land in order to achieve a high quality in all new developments.

Applications that are deemed to have the potential to have an adverse impact upon the current levels of sunlight/daylight enjoyed by adjoining properties and buildings will need to be accompanied by the methods of daylighting and sunlighting assessment set out in the BRE Report Site Layout Planning and where appropriate demonstrate both ‘before’ and ‘after’ circumstances.

2. Sunlight/daylight – what are the main differences?

Daylight is defined as being the volume of natural light that enters a building to provide satisfactory illumination of internal accommodation between sun rise and sunset. This can be known as ambient light. Sunlight refers to direct sunshine. Below are some helpful hints to take into account:

- The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.
- The sun reaches its maximum height around noon and will generally be due south at this time.
- The sun is higher in the sky in summer months as opposed to winter months.
- The sun elevation in mid-winter does not generally rise above 10 degrees in Scotland and therefore can cast long shadows.

3. When do I need to consider daylight/overshadowing issues?

Before submitting your planning application (check first that planning permission is required in the first instance) you should contact Development Services to check whether a daylighting/overshadowing assessment is required. The Council will require as a minimum that:

All new development including extensions will be designed to minimise overshadowing of neighbouring properties.

The greater part of any overshadowing that occurs will be confined to the applicants own land.

There are a number of major factors that have to be taken into account in any assessment. These are as follows:

- Height;
- Distance to boundaries;
- Size of Plot;
- Orientation; and
- Topography
The Council will not support extensions or any new development that would result in the loss of sunlight leading to overshadowing for the majority of the day.

Whilst a building warrant will ensure that there is a minimum level of daylighting, all buildings including changes of use and extensions/new developments will still be required to provide adequate levels of sunlight. A building warrant is no guarantee that planning permission will be granted.

4. The 45 Degree rule of thumb

At all times care should be taken in the design of residential environments to ensure that adequate levels of natural light (based on Building Standards) can be achieved within new dwellings and unacceptable impacts on light to nearby properties are minimised and preferably avoided. Proposed dwellings should be laid out so as to maximise the penetration of sunlight to main rooms and gardens. The overshadowing of amenity spaces, particularly those that are used for outdoor seating should be minimised.

The Building Research Establishment (BRE) guidelines “Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice” (1991) provides guidance on avoiding unacceptable impacts and sets out non-mandatory targets for levels of daylight and sunlight within existing and proposed development. The Council will generally apply the BRE guidance targets where new development affects natural light to existing properties.

A useful guideline to measuring the impact of the new development is the 45 degree rule of thumb method as can be seen in Diagram 1 below.

New flatted housing layouts in the form of ‘T’ shaped plans (i.e. projection to rear elevation), courts or quadrangles, projecting wing arrangements (on side or end elevations), house designs with projections and angled frontages, and house extensions which adjoin the front or rear of a house are required to satisfy the 45 degree assessment method.

Application of the 45° approach to domestic extensions is summarised in Diagram 1 below. A significant amount of light is likely to be blocked if the centre of the window (or for a floor-to-ceiling window, as here, a point two metres from the ground) lies within the 45° lines of both plan...
and elevation. The method applies only where the nearest side of the extension is at a right angles to the window and not for windows which directly face it.

The 45 degree method can also be applied to new house designs in situations where windows are placed at the corners of internal courtyards; ‘L’ or ‘T’ shaped or angled blocks.

In all new residential development proposals where future extension(s) could cause serious loss of light to neighbouring property Fife Council will consider removing permitted development rights.

5. The 25 Degree Rule of Thumb

This approach should be used when the new development directly faces the affected window. Suitable daylight for habitable rooms is achieved when a 25 degree vertical angle taken from the centre of the lowest windows is kept unobstructed. See diagram 2. The recommended distance between the buildings is dependent on the opposing property ridge height. If the building opposite has a high ridge, the loss of daylight will be more notable than if the building has a lower ridge height. If the proposed development fails this test and that of the 45 degree method then further investigation and evidence will be required by the Council in order to assess whether an unacceptable loss of sunlight/daylight will occur.

6. The Vertical Sky Component Method

In cases where it is not possible to meet the criteria set out above and where a more detailed assessment is necessary, for example in areas of historic townscape, this should be made by calculating the vertical sky component. The methodology for calculating the vertical sky component is set out in more detail in the BRE report “Site Layout Planning” which also contains advice and guidance on interior daylighting standards. (This information should be submitted with the application).

A satisfactory level of daylight is assessed by calculating the vertical sky component for neighbouring property whether existing or, when none exists, for possible development equal to the proposed.

New development adjacent to vacant land should as a minimum requirement ensure that this land retains the potential for good diffuse daylighting.

Sunlight

All new development should seek in line with other policies and guidance to maximise the benefits of sunlight to provide a pleasant living environment and promote solar gain.
7. How to contact us

Development Services can be contacted as below:

Development Services
Forth House
Abbotshall Road
Kirkcaldy
KY1 1RU
Tel: 08451 55 11 22
email: development.central@fife.gov.uk
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