

# Option Three

Building a new house in the  
Open Countryside



# Option Three ..... New build in the Open Countryside

In Option 3 the environmental and visual impact of new development on the open countryside is the prime consideration. Option 3 policies set out additional criteria for a planning permission for the simple reason that the issue of the location of new development is such a sensitive one. In Option 1 and Option 2 the issue of "location" is not so significant. A site within a rural community for example, will be identified within a specific boundary and will be associated with existing development, whereas renovation or conversion (Option 2) involves the re-use of an existing site thereby avoiding the necessity to create a new one.

To site a new build property in the open countryside however, is a skilful task requiring sensitive analysis of landform and careful study of the traditional patterns of settlement in the area. One house in the wrong place, badly designed or built out of inappropriate materials can spoil the landscape. On the other hand, thought and care about what may be appropriate can result in a house which can actually contribute to the character and amenity and are sensitive to the landscape.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives for option 3 policies are as follows :

1. To protect the appearance and character of the open countryside from random housing development.
2. To maintain and improve standards of location, siting and design which respect local traditions and are sensitive to the landscape.



*"Architecture is a cultural act. If a building is not created with cultural intent, it is not architecture".*

*Charles McKean.*

# The Advice .....for New build in the Open Countryside

The construction of a new house is an act of some permanence which will “outlive” the builder and will forever demonstrate the degree of forethought and planning given prior to the building being erected. In rural locations, any basic “mistakes” will be much more obvious than in a village or town setting where the densities of development are much higher and, as a consequence, the details of individual buildings are often less noticeable.

The advice offered in this section is split into three categories:

- 1 - **Location - (Positioning your site in the landscape);**
- 2 - **Siting - ( Placing your new house within its site boundaries), and;**
- 3 - **Design - (The design of your house and its grounds.)**

**The purpose of the advice in this section is not to provide a catalogue of “acceptable” designs or locations for individual houses in the countryside, but rather to list important considerations which should be carefully studied by those contemplating an application for a house in the countryside.**

*The principles of good location, siting and design are not only applicable to the new houses in the open countryside but also relate to new development within existing rural communities and within existing small clusters in the countryside.*

*Right: A new house by Meldrum and Mantell at Orton.*



*Below: A sensitively developed cluster at Newton of Dalvey, near Forres.*



## 1 LOCATION - POSITIONING YOUR SITE IN THE LANDSCAPE

Moray is not uniform in terms of landscape character. The profile on pages 36&37 indicates just how diverse this landscape is. Hummocky land with well-defined field systems and hedgerow lines etc., presents greater opportunities for accepting new buildings than is possible in broad, open sweeps of countryside.

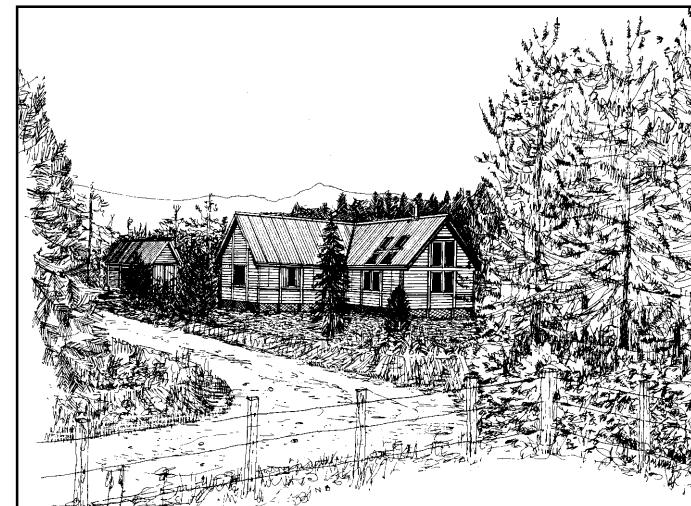
Choose a sheltered site, avoiding locations which use a ridge or hill-top and involve less exposure to weathering thereby reducing future maintenance costs and heating bills.

Choose an unobtrusive site, which has development potential but is not conspicuous. By considering slightly different positioning within the same general area (e.g.: by locating below the ridge line; using trees or hills as a backdrop; or taking advantage of other natural features), it is possible to create a sympathetic site for a new house. In open countryside, seek a naturally flat site which avoids the need to build a platform or, if locating beside an existing building, choose a site which will integrate the new house as part of the cluster of buildings.

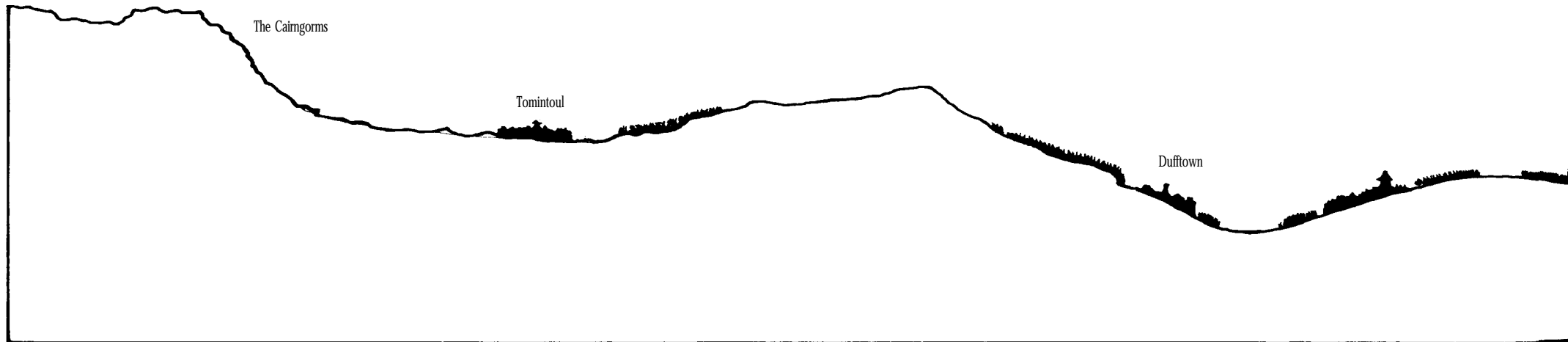
**Scottish Natural Heritage have prepared a Moray Landscape Character Assessment which provides further guidance on location impact.**

*Finding a good site takes time, patience and a great deal of consideration. With due care sites can be found which are suitable for new development of varying styles. Illustrated (right) is an energy efficient timber building constructed almost entirely of renewable materials which can be particularly suited to secluded locations. Locally the Findhorn Foundation have pioneered a number of technological advances in this field.*

*Below, Glen Rinnes, south of Dufftown - an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), within which policy L/ENV 7 requires new housing applications to be submitted in detail only.*



# The Moray Countryside.....



## Mountain and Moorland

(eg. The Cairngorms, Glenlivet, Cabrach, Knockando and Dallas Moor)

Few buildings due to lack of access, servicing, harsh climate and isolation. A robust landscape offering a major design challenge. Use 'tucks' in the landscape and make careful use of slopes and orientation - avoid siting on exposed northern slopes due to shade and prevailing winds. Complete enclosure is essential, particularly in exposed moorland locations where traditional techniques include coniferous shelter belts and dry stone dykes. The need to have the house well anchored in its site ( ie. built into the slope or hollow ) is paramount in these locations where exposure to the elements is a major concern.

To minimise energy loss, concentrate on orientation and the creation of a micro-climate around the new house. Steep roof pitches to handle the weight of heavy snow falls are a traditional feature.

This zone is characterised by quality scenery (Areas of Great Landscape Value), and nature conservation designations (see Chapter 2 of the Structure Plan and Local Plan - ' The Environmental Strategy' ).

## Woodland and Glen

(eg. Upper Speyside, Glenlivet, Findhorn Valley, Pluscarden and Ballindalloch)

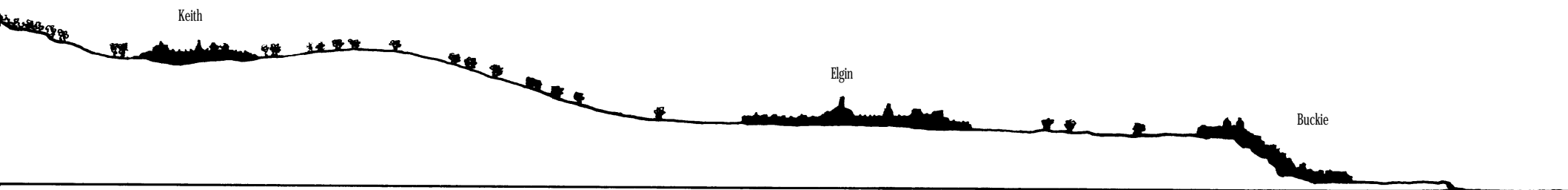
The pattern of settlement in the area will dictate that you follow the contours of the glen. The characteristics of older buildings in the vicinity will indicate the need for shelter, the direction of the prevailing winds and what techniques have been used locally to deal with these. Locating within a glen can give the opportunity to take advantage of spectacular views, but take care not to allow your own house to spoil the view for others. Avoid building your house on an artificial platform and use the slope to anchor the new house into the valley by stepping the house on different levels and design a landscaping plan which gives shelter on exposed elevations, (protection from snow drifts etc), provides privacy to the new house and maximizes the opportunities for passive solar gain, particularly on the southern elevation. Woodland can be used to good advantage where it can provide shelter, screening and an effective backdrop to new development. New proposals should not however require the felling of commercial plantations or the removal of a considerable number of trees in order to create a new site.

This zone is characterised by scenic designations (AGLV's) and commercial forestry plantations (see Chapter 2 of the Structure plan and Local Plan - ' The Environmental Strategy' ).

# ..... A Landscape Of Diversity.....

## Basic rules for locating your site in the landscape.

- 1 - Study the nature of the landscape and the existing buildings before carefully selecting a site.
- 2 - Avoid conspicuous locations.
- 3 - Avoid sculpting the land to suit - let the landform dominate.
- 4 - Make use of natural shelter and sunlight.



## Lowland Hills

(eg. Grange, Drummuir, Aultmore, Deskford, Mulben, Mosstowie and Califer)

Rolling countryside with a mix of arable land, hill grazing and forestry. The lie of the land is critical to good siting and location as the contoured landscape produces better situations for exploiting the natural folds in the landscape. Have regard to the clustering of buildings around farm steadings or the subtle dispersal of individual croft houses on discreet and sheltered sites. Those which do not follow this pattern will appear out of place and conspicuous.

These areas are characterised by small farm holdings with few housing clusters, setting a very distinctive settlement pattern.

## Agricultural and Open

(eg. The Laich, Lower Findhorn Valley, Pitgaveny, Innes and Lennox)

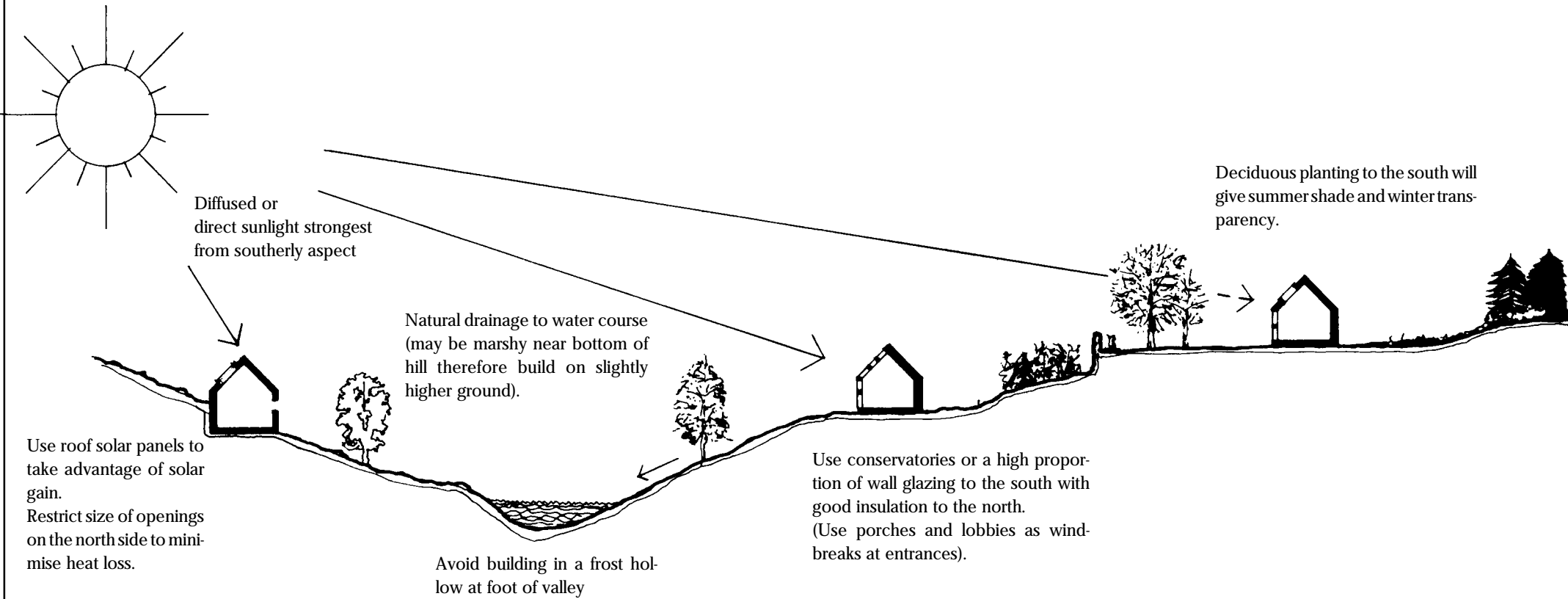
A landscape which has been safeguarded by generations for its productive value. Houses are kept off the best land and the settlement pattern is dominated by clusters of farm buildings, evenly spaced, often distinguished by mature deciduous shelter belts. Choose pockets of land which do not support agriculture and avoid locations which are susceptible to windblown sand. Minimise impact of building by using existing trees and hedgerows and siting preferably on the south side. Otherwise a location within an existing group of buildings may be the only option. Newer houses which do not observe the traditional wisdom of siting in such an open agricultural landscape, are strikingly conspicuous. Within this zone the best quality farmland (classes 1, 2 and 3.1) is protected from development.

## Coastal Zone

(eg. The Bauds at Findochty and Cullen, Spey Bay, Covesea Links, Lossiemouth to Burghead Coast, Findhorn Estuary)

Great skill is required to locate within the coastal zone. The historic settlement pattern indicates that this is a hostile environment directly exposed to the chill of the north sea where housing has tended to group into close clusters and seatowns. Where individual houses are found, they tend to be low, single storey, gable and back to the sea, built into their site and sheltered where possible by stone walls and 'gorse' hedging. Avoid siting between main road and the beach or cliff tops. Small windows to the sea, larger windows to the sheltered south. Within this area there is a protected 'coastal zone' and specific nature conservation designations (see Chapter 3 of the Local Plan - 'The Environmental Strategy').

# USE THE NATURAL ELEMENTS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE



General principles:-

- 1. Maximise southerly solar gain, minimise northerly heat loss.
- 2. Maximise the use of trees for shelter, privacy, air cleaning etc.
- 3. Find a suitable natural site rather than artificially create one.
- 4. Avoid choosing a site in a wet frost hollow or on an exposed mound.

