

2 SITING - PLACING YOUR NEW HOUSE WITHIN ITS SITE BOUNDARIES

Having chosen the location for a new house, spend some considerable time examining the site in order that its potential is not wasted so that its specific features are used to good advantage.

Pay particular attention to slopes in order to establish if excavation or underbuilding would be an advantage.

It should then be considered where best to place the house within the site; how to orientate the building to obtain an outlook and achieve shelter, direct sunlight and natural warmth within and immediately around the house; and where excavated material from the building phase can be placed to provide a ready means of additional or necessary screening.

Very often, the positioning of older houses in the surrounding countryside gives a clue as to how these aspects have been faced in the past, and the degree to which they have been successful. (Shelter belts of trees, for instance, often indicate problems of exposure).

Note any trees or shrubs etc. within, and on the boundary of the site which can be retained; they help to lessen the "raw" appearance of a new site, and can reduce the extent of new planting and landscaping which may be required.

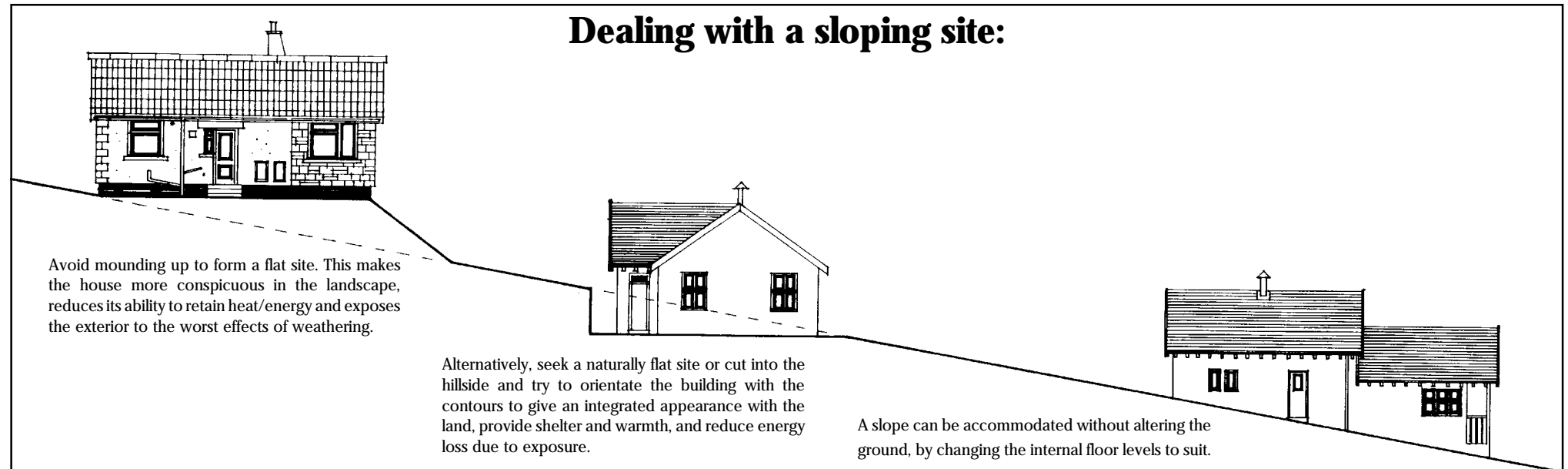
Take account of the exposure of the site to winds and sunlight; try and achieve adequate shelter naturally, and not depend on high walls or artificial-looking windbreaks.

Finally, examine the relationship of the site to the proposed access road. As far as possible, avoid the need for creating a long length of new road (which can create a scarring effect for many years); but also try to achieve a degree of privacy when viewed from the road.

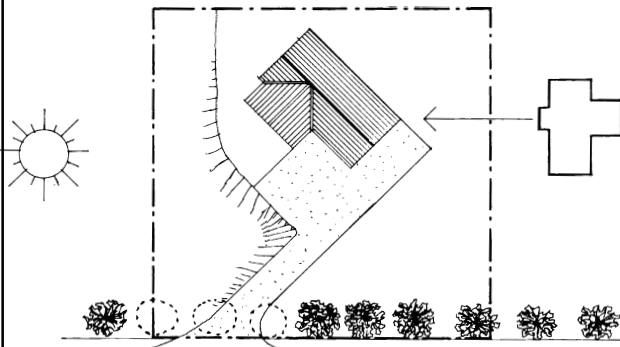
Landscaping

Landscaping and garden areas can of course add significantly to the setting and seclusion of the dwelling house. If partial screening is decided upon, try and use trees and shrubs which are indigenous to the area, otherwise the landscaping may have the effect of making the overall development more intrusive in its setting.

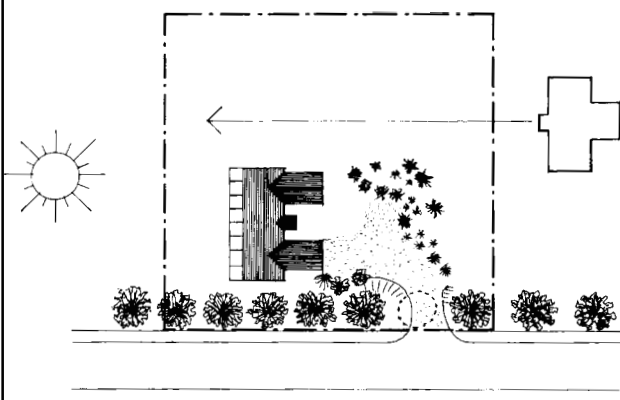
Where total screening is required, the provision of understorey planting, mounding or, possibly low walls, may be necessary to create the desired effect. Avoid 'garden centre features' such as ornamental paving slabs and decorative walling which can alter the natural character of the site.



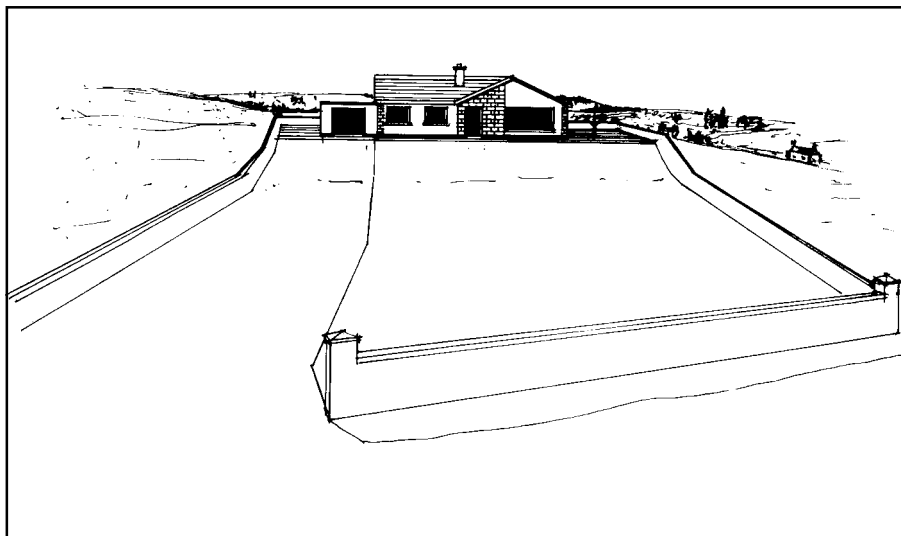
Placing Your House in Your Site



Where you choose to build your house within your site will require careful consideration. If chosen badly, your house will cause adverse impact if it affects your neighbours and causes a scar in the landscape e.g. blocking of light and outlook, long driveway, unnecessary removal of trees, the requirement for creating a site platform etc.



On the other hand, a house which is well sited in its grounds will cause minimum disruption to neighbours and the landscape.



Bulldoze the site, removing all contours, trees and hedgerows. Add a sweeping driveway, a modern bungalow on a platform with an absence of landscaping and you create an insensitive development which irrevocably damages the natural features of the countryside.



A much more successful result, providing the same level of accommodation, can be achieved by a better selection of site, (where the existing contours, trees and hedgerows can be retained), a more sensitive house design, and a more thoughtful use of landscape features. This sketch is based on a modified kit house by Alasdair Alltridge of Wittets.

Basic rules for placing your house within its site boundaries:

- Make full use of the sites natural features
- Don't fight the contours - work with them
- Orientate the building to maximise shelter, direct sunlight and natural warmth
- Be neighbourly - don't position your house to overlook or shade a neighbour's property
- Utilise existing and provide new planting and landscaping to integrate the new building, thereby providing privacy and shelter and an attractive setting for the new dwelling

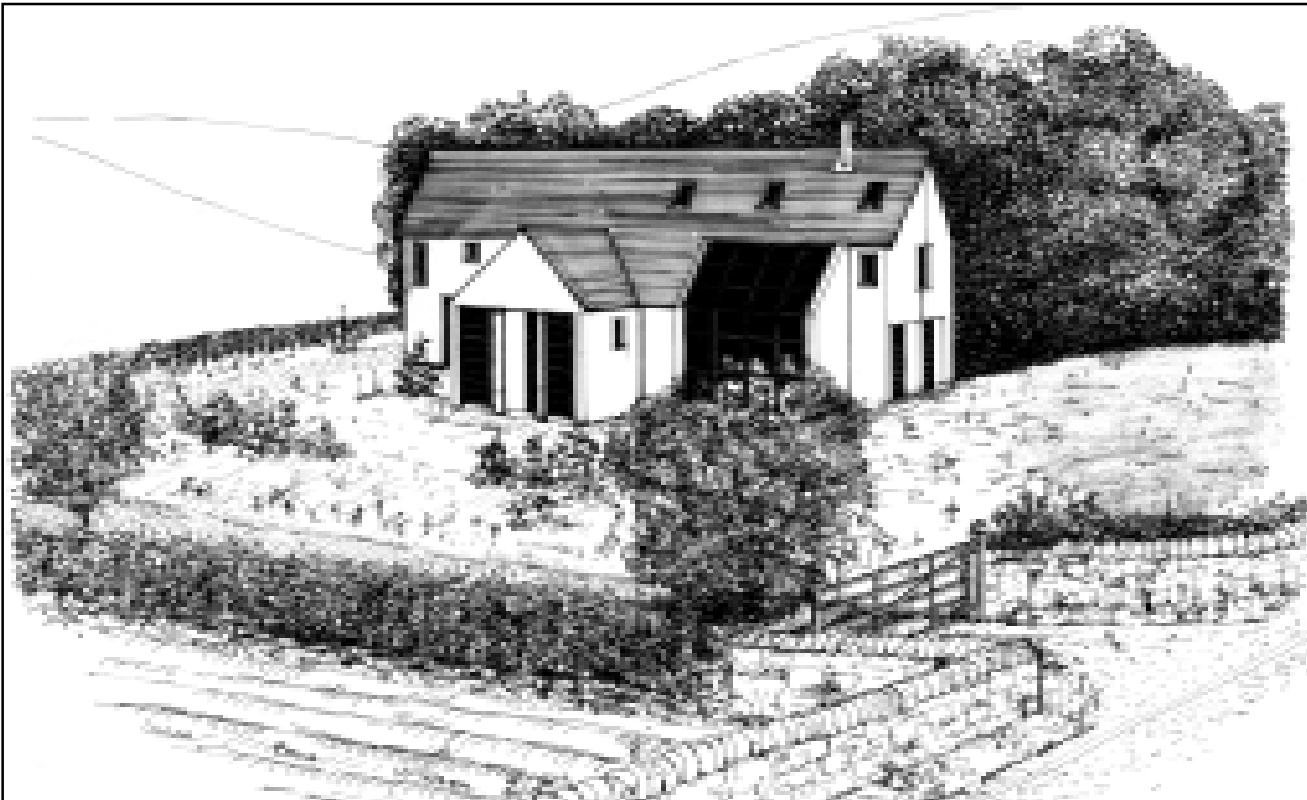
3 DESIGN - THE DESIGN OF YOUR HOUSE AND ITS GROUNDS

In a district which has been acclaimed as representing “a microcosm of the best of Scotland” (Charles McKean, ‘Illustrated Architectural Guide to Moray’ 1987) in terms of the quality of its architecture, it is perhaps a matter of regret that there has been a general acceptance in recent times of extremely unimaginative standards of domestic ‘rural’ house design. Today’s open market of DIY housing has relegated design standards to such a level that ‘style’ in rural

house design, so admirable and clear cut at one time in the past, now appears to have lost all sense of direction amid a prevailing attitude that it is futile to insist on aesthetic standards when market pressure and commercial interests demand otherwise.

Responsibility for standards rests as much with the general public and the agencies which draw and submit plans on their behalf, as with the planning authority. What is important now is that this joint responsibility is recognised and that all parties make efforts to restore some direction to the evolution of modern domestic rural architecture in Moray.

If this exercise can encourage people to move away from the ubiquitous and ‘alien’ suburban bungalow chosen from a builder’s catalogue, towards a form of house design which is more sensitive to local building traditions and more sympathetic to the landscape in which it is set, then we might achieve “a Scottish style” of architecture which is a compliment to the Moray countryside.



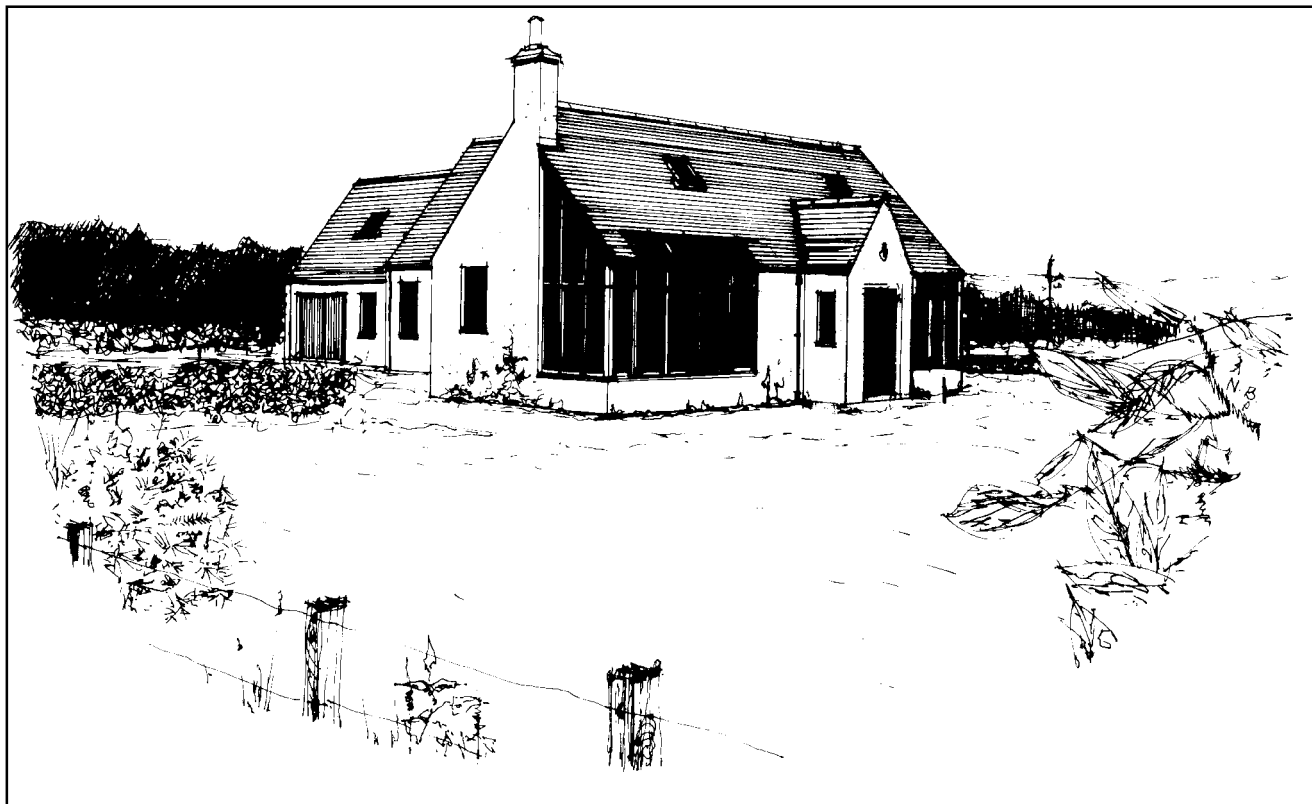
“Convenience, strength, commodiousness and beauty, and this art (to make all buildings so) is called architecture”.

Richard Morrison - ‘Useful and Ornamental Designs in Architecture’ (1793).

Previous local plans have all started a design policy in general terms of form, proportions and materials, but the application of this policy has had limited success because in many cases it was used to persuade applicants to alter design features (such as windows, finishing, materials, colours, etc.), when these tended to be of a superficial and cosmetic nature, and did not answer the real problem, i.e. the design of the catalogue bungalow is fundamentally alien to traditional rural design.

This may explain how planning authorities have come to accept the standard bungalow form with little variation, as providing an easy solution for modern living requirements, a trend which has become more nationally standardised with the introduction and widespread use of kit houses. But as the technology and range of products has improved, the design has moved further away from rural characteristics. In this respect the problem is not one of kit technology itself, rather it is the manner in which the manufacturers catalogues present a range of designs aimed almost exclusively at a suburban UK market, paying no particular respect to rural Scottish characteristics. Matters are not helped when increased competition between builders has simply led to the use of a wider range of 'gimmicks', such as for example, calling a kit bungalow marketed in Scotland, 'The Gleneagles', and the identical house marketed in England, 'The Sandringham', -..... "and of course, you can stick on any bit you fancy from this range".

All this does little justice to the versatility of kit house design which can in fact easily be adapted to provide a product fit for rural situations. Indeed, a number of manufacturers are now showing interest in developing a range of designs more suited to the local rural market and this is wholeheartedly welcomed.



Throughout Moray the dominant traditional form is that of the croft house. Modern interpretations by designers who understand this form can be very successful.

"So why do we get the much derided bungalows and the 'suburban' details in rural situation? Often, because people saw them, wanted them and bought them. Companies, not surprisingly, were happy to provide them. There is little doubt however that there is increasing awareness of the sensitivities surrounding the design and siting of rural housing. The industry itself has welcomed a dialogue and is keen to explore the way forward with statutory authorities and the design professions".

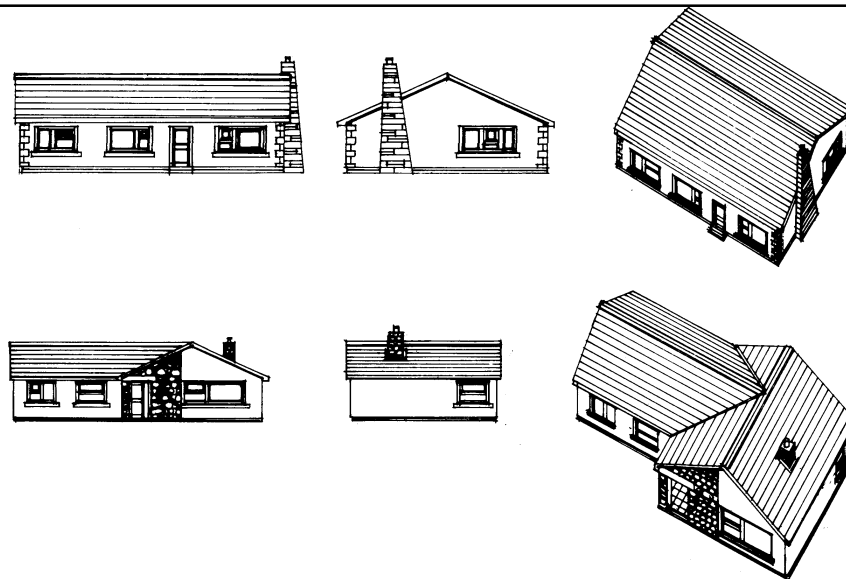
Scottish Consortium of Timber Frame Industries

THE PROBLEM: 'RURAL' AND 'SUBURBAN' ARCHITECTURE ARE FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT



Traditional Domestic Dwellings

Rural dwellings have evolved in response to their setting and function in the countryside. The architecture is simple but functional, yet has a distinctive style. In this area it is the development of this architecture which gives the Moray countryside its individual identity.



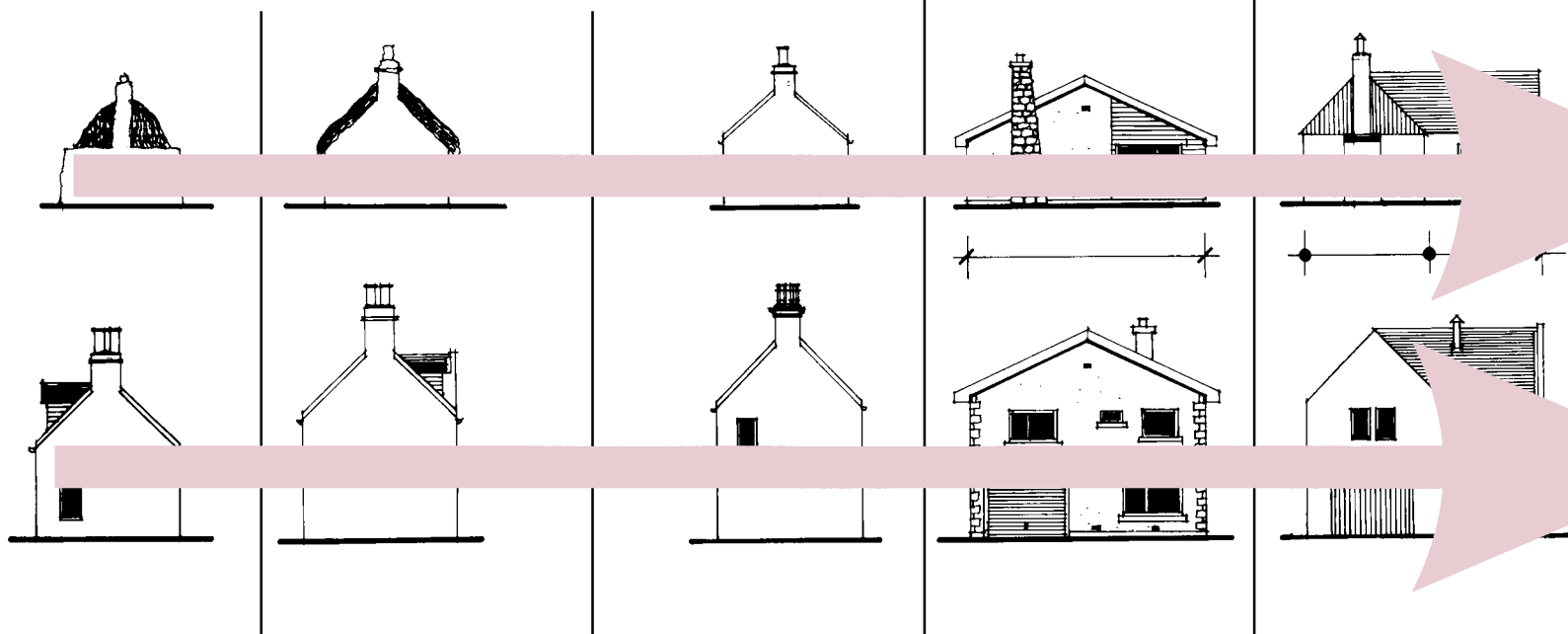
Catalogue Bungalows

20th Century, mass produced, imported housing. Belongs to nowhere yet found everywhere. Anonymous in terms of cultural identity. Easily absorbed into the city suburbs, where it can blend more effectively with the built-up area. In the Scottish countryside, however, it appears 'out of place' and unable to blend with its natural surroundings.

The scale, form and detailed design of current mass produced housing demonstrates little association with the traditional domestic buildings in rural Moray.

THE EVOLUTION PROCESS

Existing and early rural dwellings have evolved by adapting to new building methods and materials, but in so doing they have maintained a clear relationship with each other. The buildings 'speak' in the same language.



Narrow widths, steep roofs, vertically proportioned windows, central chimney at gable, natural local finishes.

'A country without a heritage is like a man without a memory'.
The Civic Trust Society.

However, a crude interruption to this evolving process has come in the late 20th century from the mass produced and commercially marketed bungalow and kit house. It has few links with what has evolved before in the Scottish countryside.

20th century needs and contemporary design can produce dwellings which are immediately at home in their surroundings because they have taken inspiration from existing rural forms.

21st century rural form. Planning must allow for future innovative design, which will meet the challenges and demands of the 21st century.

Wide plan, shallow pitched roof, horizontally proportioned openings, imported man-made synthetic finishes ie alien to previous forms.

The above dwellings can be kits which provide the same space, light, views and needs as those previous yet they relate to and are culturally identifiable with a recognised Scottish design tradition.

There is no simple answer as to how future dwellings will harmonise with the countryside, but if a modern rural Scottish architecture is to evolve it will respect what has gone before.