Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines

Chapter 2

Residential Densities

Planning Department
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

CHAPTER 2 RESIDENTIAL DENSITIES

CONTENTS

(December 2025 Edition)

The chapter has been updated mainly to reflect the latest policy directives.

RESIDENTIAL DENSITIES

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives and Functions

1.1.1 Residential density is a quantitative measure of the intensity with which land is occupied by residential development. Control of residential density is a fundamental component of effective land use planning, as the relative distribution of population has major implications for the provision of public facilities, such as transport facilities, infrastructure, utility services, community facilities, recreational facilities and open space.

1.1.2 In order to boost the short- to medium- term land supply for housing use under a multi-pronged approach, there is a need to make efficient use of the scarce land resources, in particular land more immediately available for development within a shorter timeframe, by maximizing the residential density to the extent permitted by planning terms in order to augment the housing supply in Hong Kong and living space of Hong Kong people.

1.1.3 In the 2014 Policy Address, the Government announced that, except for the north of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula which are more densely populated, the maximum domestic plot ratios that can be allowed for housing sites located in the other Density Zones of the Main Urban Areas and New Towns would be raised generally by about 20% as appropriate[1]. In accordance with the established practice, the Government would duly consider factors such as traffic and infrastructural capacity, local characteristics, existing development intensity and various possible impacts of the proposed development in the area concerned.

1.1.4 To further make better use of land resources, it was announced in the 2022 Policy Address that a higher maximum domestic plot ratio of 6.5 would be adopted as a guideline in the next-generation new towns, including the Northern Metropolis and the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands.

1.1.5 The maximum domestic plot ratios in the relevant Density Zones should not be considered as an automatic and across-the-board specification, but a general guidance for the maximum plot ratio

[1] The respective plot ratios in Table 1 (Density Zones R2 and R3 of Main Urban Areas) and Table 2 (Density Zones R1 to R4 of New Towns / New Development Areas) have incorporated the directive of the 2014 Policy Address (i.e. generally increased domestic plot ratios by 20%).

to be considered or tested for individual sites for residential development in the planning process where there is scope to allow such an increase in terms of infrastructure capacity and planning considerations. The specific plot ratio adopted for a site should be determined through comprehensive studies and assessments taking into consideration relevant factors, and endorsed by relevant authorities in accordance with the established procedures.

1.1.6 The main objectives of residential density guidelines are:

(a) to promote an acceptable standard of environment and amenity for the occupants of residential areas;

(b) to ensure an appropriate balance between the residential population of an area and the capacity of the existing or planned facilities and infrastructure required to service it;

(c) to maintain an efficient and optimal use of land resources in the context of competing demands on a limited supply of developable land;

(d) to maintain safe levels of development and population in areas where there may be potential risks due to adverse geotechnical conditions, neighbouring hazardous installations, etc.;

(e) to provide for eclectic urban form which is in line with good urban design principles and to satisfy the demands of different market sectors;

(f) to ensure development is in keeping with its surroundings, particularly that in rural and/or heritage and nature conservation areas; and

(g) to provide sufficient flexibility/resilience to accommodate future needs and unforeseen circumstances.

1.1.7 Residential density guidelines embrace these objectives by providing a coherent framework of density standards for application to different areas. These standards are applied to planning at all levels from strategic to district planning as development guidelines on both public and private housing developments. They should, however, be applied flexibly to take into account site conditions, local circumstances and specific policy objectives.

1.2 General Principles

1.2.1 In applying residential densities, there are a number of general principles which need to be considered coherently with a view to achieving integration of land use, transport, environmental and infrastructure planning. Through such integrated planning, residential developments of different densities can be planned to achieve the most efficient and functional disposition and economies of scale in terms of community, transport and infrastructure provisions while meeting environmental objectives.

1.2.2 The guiding principles for residential densities with the above integrated approach are:

(a) there should be a well-defined hierarchy of residential densities to meet market needs for a diversity of housing types;

(b) to make available an array of residential densities commensurate with the existing and planned infrastructure and environmental capacities;

(c) to encourage the use of public transport and reduce the travel demand; and as such, higher density residential developments should be located near rail stations and major transport interchange hubs wherever possible to capitalise on the development opportunities and reduce reliance on road-based vehicular travel;

(d) there could be a decreasing gradation of residential development densities from the distances to the rail stations and major transport interchange hubs;

(e) higher density residential developments outside major transport corridors or the catchment areas of a rail station could be considered where there will be adequate feeder services from the rail stations and transport interchange hubs;

(f) to devise environmental mitigation measures as appropriate to meet the environmental standards where higher density residential developments near high capacity transport node would be subject to environmental impact;

(g) to avoid monotonous urban form and create a more interesting townscape, residential developments at different levels of density could be considered; and

(h) it would be more compatible to adopt a low density for residential developments in areas close to environmentally

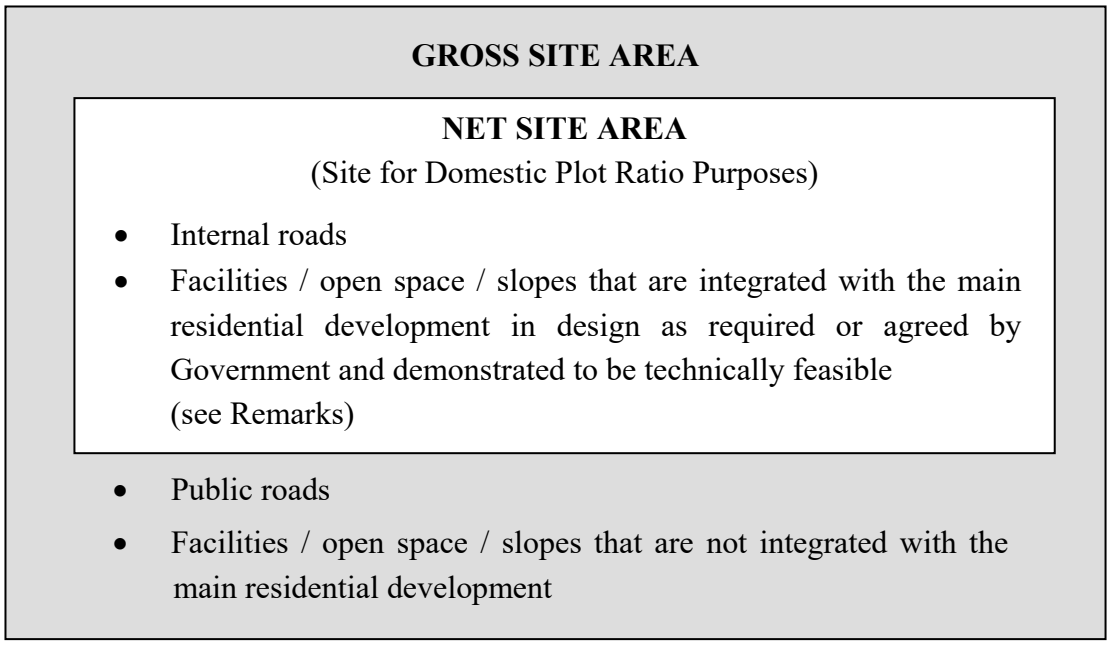
sensitive areas**,** e.g. wetland, conservation areas, country parks, coastal protection areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

2. Residential Density Control

Definitions of Site Areas and Plot Ratio

2.1 The density of development in public and private residential areas in Hong Kong is guided by way of plot ratio. Plot ratio is defined as the ratio between the gross floor area (GFA)[2] of a building and the area of the site on which it is erected (the Net Site Area). The site area definitions are shown in Figure 1. Plot ratio governs the amount of GFA in buildings but affects population density through the interplay of other factors, including flat size and persons per flat ratio.

Figure 1 : Site Area Definitions



Remarks:

(a) Figure 1 generally applies to site specific / project level development where planning context is more certain. It is not applicable to planning of New Town / New Development Area as there are various factors and constraints affecting land for residential use, and their respective site areas will be ascertained in separate comprehensive studies.

(b) In general, public roads should be excluded from the Net Site Area, while internal roads should be included in the Net Site Area subject to the agreement of relevant government department(s) on a case-by-case basis taking into account factors such as building bulk, urban design considerations and infrastructure capacity.

(c) The matter of integration shall be considered on a case-by-case basis, with due regard to relevant site context including the layout and design of the development, the requirements under the statutory plans, planning briefs, the development rights under lease, and other government requirements.

[2] As defined under the Building (Planning) Regulations.

Administrative Context

2.2 The primary objective of stipulating a maximum plot ratio/GFA is to control development intensity. At present, the Buildings Department, Planning Department and Lands Department act in different capacities to exercise powers under the building, planning and land administration regimes respectively to control residential density:

(a) Building Regime – all private development projects are subject to development intensity control by virtue of the Building (Planning) Regulations (B(P)R) under the Buildings Ordinance.

(b) Planning Regime – development intensity control is stipulated in the Notes of statutory plans as needed or implemented through planning permissions granted under section 16 of the Town Planning Ordinance.

(c) Land Administration Regime – development density control, particularly maximum GFA, would be generally imposed in new or modified lease.

2.3 First Schedule to the B(P)R, which is applicable to all private development projects in Hong Kong, stipulates the maximum permitted plot ratios and site coverages for domestic and non-domestic buildings of different building heights in relation to site classification defined according to the number of "specified streets" not less than 4.5m wide that a site abuts. Where a residential building also contains a non-domestic element, the maximum permissible domestic plot ratio may be reduced according to the provisions of the B(P)R composite building formula.

2.4 In general, if the maximum plot ratio/GFA restriction stipulated in the relevant statutory plan is more stringent than the permissible plot ratio restriction stipulated in the B(P)R, the plot ratio/GFA restriction stipulated in the statutory plan will prevail. On the other hand, if the permissible plot ratio restriction stipulated in the First Schedule to the B(P)R is more stringent than the maximum plot ratio/GFA restriction stipulated in the relevant statutory plan, the Building Authority may, on application, favourably consider exercising discretion under section 42 of the Buildings Ordinance to grant modification to permit the plot ratio restriction stipulated in the First Schedule to the B(P)R to be exceeded to a level on par with the maximum plot ratio/GFA restriction under the planning regime[3].

[3] With reference to the streamlined arrangements on plot ratio control under Joint Practice Note No. 4 on "Development Control Parameters – Plot Ratio / Gross Floor Area".

2.5 For ensuring aviation safety, development intensity may also be restricted through the airport height restrictions enacted under the Hong Kong Airport (Control of Obstructions) Ordinance. For Special Control Areas that are designated to preserve areas with a special character or amenity or because of limitations in transport capacity, more stringent development intensities or restrictions may be effected through statutory plans and/or lease conditions.

3. Residential Density Framework

3.1 Determination of appropriate development intensity is one of the planning foundations for achieving optimal developments. The land use and development intensity in different areas of Hong Kong have evolved through a systematic planning process taking into account the changing demographic, social and economic circumstances. For the purpose of providing guidance on residential densities, the territory of Hong Kong is categorised into three broad areas, namely the Main Urban Areas, the New Towns / New Development Areas (NDAs) and the Rural Areas. The following paragraphs outline the recommended residential densities or maximum domestic plot ratios for the Density Zones in each of the broad areas.

3.2 Main Urban Areas

3.2.1 The Main Urban Areas comprise Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the districts of Tsuen Wan**,** Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi, and are established with the following density principles[4]:

(a) within acceptable environmental limits, to maximise the intensity of people and jobs close to high capacity transport systems (particularly rail);

(b) conversely, to limit densities in areas not well served by high capacity transport systems;

(c) wherever possible, to reduce densities in highly congested districts which are experiencing widespread environmental problem; and

(d) to limit densities in areas where the visual impact of development is the prime concern[5].

[4] The density principles are established under the Metroplan.

[5] Reference should be made to the urban design guidelines of Chapter 11 of the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines for areas where visual impact is of prime concern.

3.2.2 The Main Urban Areas are generally divided into three Residential Density Zones: R1, R2 and R3.

(a) Residential Zone 1 covers the highest density of residential development and applies to districts well served by high capacity public transport systems such as rail station or other major transport interchange hub. The buildings often incorporate a significant component of commercial floorspace.

(b) Residential Zone 2 covers development at a medium density and applies in locations less well served by high capacity public transport systems. There is usually no commercial floorspace component.

(c) Residential Zone 3 covers the lowest density of residential development and applies to districts with very limited public transport capacity, subject to special constraints for urban design, traffic or environmental reasons and/or with special local character.

3.2.3 The maximum domestic plot ratios applicable to these zones are set out in Table 1.

Residential Zone 1

3.2.4 Within the existing built-up area, the plot ratios permitted on redevelopment of existing buildings in Residential Zone 1 vary among major geographical areas. The maximum domestic plot ratio of 8/9/10 (depending on site classification) stipulated in the First Schedule to the B(P)R is applicable to Zone 1 on Hong Kong Island. For Kowloon, the maximum domestic plot ratio is further restricted to 7.5 in general[6], which implemented through the relevant statutory plans.

3.2.5 In new development areas in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, including new reclamations and formed areas, such as West Kowloon Reclamation, Kai Tak Development and Anderson Road Quarry Development, the maximum domestic plot ratio is generally 6.5. This plot ratio is lower than the statutory limit

[6] The generally adopted maximum domestic plot ratio of 7.5 in Kowloon is based on the recommendations of the Kowloon Density Study (KDS) Review in 2001, which also concluded that there might be scope for selective relaxation of plot ratios in large-scale urban restructuring schemes in western parts of Kowloon subject to enhancement to infrastructural capacity, in particular on sewerage and transport, and provision of GIC facilities. To adopt a more holistic, district-based approach for urban renewal and to optimize development/redevelopment potential, domestic plot ratios higher than the generally adopted maximum plot ratio of 7.5 may be justified for specific areas or sites, subject to planning study confirming technical feasibility and suitability with regard to local circumstances.

set by the B(P)R to bring about improvements in living conditions in the urban areas by reducing densities.

3.2.6 In comprehensive development areas in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon which generally involve larger site areas for comprehensive developments with appropriate scale, layout and design, the maximum domestic plot ratio is normally 6.5 but higher plot ratios may be justified according to local circumstances and where infrastructure capacity permits.

3.2.7 For Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi districts, the maximum domestic plot ratio is 6[7].

Residential Zones 2 and 3

3.2.8 Within the existing built-up area, the lower plot ratio restrictions for Residential Zones 2 and 3 set out in Table 1 can be enforced through statutory plans and lease conditions. The maximum domestic plot ratios for Zones 2 and 3 are set at 6 and 3.6 respectively.

3.3 New Towns / NDAs

3.3.1 The New Towns / NDAs are also divided into three Residential Density Zones: R1, R2 and R3, on the same basis as those in the Main Urban Areas. In addition, a very low density zone, R4, may be designated where justified by severe geotechnical/ infrastructure constraints or compatibility with the adjacent rural low density developments. The maximum domestic plot ratios permissible in these zones are set out in Table 2.

3.3.2 The New Towns / NDAs are designed to provide more land for future development and encourage thinning out of the congested Main Urban Areas by offering prospective residents a better living environment. While the maximum domestic plot ratio adopted in Residential Zone 1 in most New Towns / NDAs is 6, such a domestic plot ratio could be optimized and increased generally to 6.5 to align with the maximum domestic plot ratio adopted for the next-generation new towns / NDAs (including the Northern Metropolis and the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands),

[7] Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi districts were developed as a First Generation New Town to provide a less congested living environment, and the maximum domestic plot ratios of many residential areas therein are restricted to 5, which is further revised to a maximum domestic plot ratio of 6 based on the directive of the 2014 Policy Address (i.e. an increase of 20% from the domestic plot ratio of 5). Under exceptional circumstances or to adopt a more holistic, district-based approach for urban renewal and to optimize development/redevelopment potential, higher domestic plot ratios up to a maximum of 8 may be justified for specific areas or sites subject to planning study confirming technical feasibility and suitability with regard to local circumstances.

where infrastructural capacity and planning considerations permit[8].

3.3.3 The maximum domestic plot ratios for Residential Zones 2, 3 and 4 in New Towns / NDAs are 5, 3.6 and 0.8 respectively.

3.4 Rural Areas

3.4.1 In the rural areas, densities need to be lower than those in the urban areas, partly because of the limited capacity of transport, utility and social infrastructure but in many cases also because of the need to protect sensitive natural resources from undesirable urban encroachment.

3.4.2 Five Rural Residential Density Zones cover those parts of the Rural Areas which are suitable for low to medium density development: RR1 to RR4 and Village. The guidelines on domestic plot ratios are given in Table 3.

(a) Rural Residential Density Zone 1 (RR1) relates to medium-rise residential development. A maximum domestic plot ratio of 3.6 is generally the highest density appropriate to non-urban areas, applicable in the commercial centres of Rural Townships**,** such as Sai Kung Town and Mui Wo.

(b) Rural Residential Density Zone 2 (RR2) relates to low-rise residential development. A maximum domestic plot ratio of 2.1 is applicable to areas within Rural Townships lying outside the commercial centre, and in other significant rural development areas served by medium capacity public transport, such as light rail systems.

(c) Rural Residential Density Zone 3 (RR3) relates to low-rise terraced housing or flats. These may be in peripheral parts of Rural Townships or other rural development areas, or in locations away from existing settlements but with adequate infrastructure and no major landscape or environmental constraints. A maximum domestic plot ratio of 0.75 is applicable.

(d) Rural Residential Density Zone 4 (RR4) relates to detached or semi-detached houses in similar locations to RR3 but where development intensity is restricted by infrastructure or landscape constraints. It also relates to

[8] Under exceptional circumstances, a higher domestic plot ratio up to 8 should only be adopted in areas which are comprehensively planned to that development scale and with no infrastructure constraints.

house developments permitted as replacements for temporary structures in areas requiring upgrading. A maximum domestic plot ratio of 0.4 is applicable.

(e) Village Density Zone relates to New Territories Exempted Houses, which are permitted within the defined envelope of recognised villages. A maximum domestic plot ratio of 3, i.e. 3 floors on 100% site coverage on a site area of 65.03m^2, is applicable.

3.5 Plot Ratio Ranges

The maximum domestic plot ratios are summarised in Tables 1, 2 and 3 for general guidance. Where there are significant constraints on development capacity (such as transport or infrastructure limitations, environmental, topographical or geotechnical conditions, or heritage and nature conservation), other planning principles and urban design considerations (including local character and setting, building height profile and massing of the neighbourhood, air ventilation and visual impacts on the surroundings, protection of important physical features such as ridgelines), or special design considerations, a maximum domestic plot ratio lower than this target may be applied.

4. Estimation of Development Potential for Residential Use

4.1 Estimation of Potential Residential Land Area in Strategic Planning

At initial stage of strategic planning, it is often required to assess the development potential of a study area in terms of flat production and population capacity when site specific data or detailed development layout is not available. This would first require estimating the amount of land that can be set aside for residential use, which shall take into account the following considerations:

(a) the areas of the land not suitable or available for development, e.g. steep terrain, environmentally sensitive areas, land with special natural or heritage conservation value or scientific interests, permitted burial grounds, overhead transmission lines, recognised villages, etc.;

(b) the development theme or economic positioning of the study area, which would determine the proportion of land required for other economic or non-residential land uses;

(c) the areas of land required for population-related uses and facilities, including roads and transport infrastructure, government,

institutional or community (GIC) facilities, recreational facilities, open space, etc.[9]; and

(d) reference could be made to land use budgets of existing NDAs of similar positioning.

4.2 Estimation of Flat Production and Population Capacity

4.2.1 With more site-specific data and detailed layout plan, the Net Site Areas for residential use within the study area can be determined with greater certainty, subject to confirmation of technical feasibility.

4.2.2 Upon determination of the Net Site Area (see Figure 1) for domestic plot ratio calculation purpose, and prior to availability of development scheme, the number of flats to be produced from and the population capacity of the residential site can broadly be estimated on the basis of the assumed average flat size and average persons per flat using the following formulae:

$$\text{Number of Flats} = \frac{\text{Net Site Area x Domestic Plot Ratio}}{\text{Assumed Average Flat Size}}$$

Population = Number of Flats x Average Persons per Flat

[9] For the purpose of assessment of land requirement under Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030, the assumed land per person ratios for transport infrastructure, GIC facilities and open space are assumed at $6m^2$, $3.5m^2$ and $3.5m^2$ respectively.

Table 1 : Maximum Domestic Plot Ratios – Main Urban Areas

Density Zone	Location	Maximum Domestic Plot Ratio	Notes
R1	Hong Kong Island	8/9/10	(i) (ii)
	Kowloon	7.5	(iii) (iv) (v)
	New Development Area and Comprehensive Development Area in Hong Kong Island & Kowloon	6.5	(vi) (vii)
	Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung & Tsing Yi	6	(ii) (viii)
R2		6	(ix) (x)
R3		3.6	(ix) (x)

Notes:

General:

- The Table only gives an indication of the maximum domestic plot ratio which may be allowed for a particular area. However, where there are significant constraints on development capacity (such as transport or infrastructure limitations, environmental, topographical or geotechnical conditions, or heritage and nature conservation), other planning principles and urban design considerations (including local character and setting, building height profile and massing of the neighbourhood, air ventilation and visual impacts on the surroundings, protection of important physical features such as ridgelines), or special design considerations, a lower domestic plot ratio may be specified when considered appropriate and possible.

- In some areas, maximum domestic plot ratios may not be achievable due to airport height restrictions.

(i) Maximum domestic plot ratio of 8, 9 and 10 depends on site classification of class A site, class B site and class C site defined under the B(P)R respectively.

(ii) If there is non-domestic floorspace, maximum domestic plot ratio will be reduced according to the provisions of the B(P)R composite building formula.

(iii) The maximum domestic plot ratio is in accordance with those stipulated on statutory plans and site classification is not relevant.

(iv) In general, if there is non-domestic floorspace with a plot ratio in excess of 1.5, maximum domestic plot ratio will be reduced by the amount of this excess.

(v) To adopt a more holistic, district-based approach for urban renewal and to optimize development/ redevelopment potential, domestic plot ratios higher than the generally adopted maximum plot ratio of 7.5 may be justified for specific areas or sites in Kowloon subject to planning study confirming technical feasibility and suitability with regard to local circumstances.

(vi) Higher maximum domestic plot ratios may be permitted in comprehensive development areas having regard to local circumstances, such as infrastructure capacities.

(vii) Any non-domestic plot ratio component may be provided in addition to the domestic plot ratio, up to the maximum permitted by the B(P)R composite building formula or those of the statutory plans.

(viii) Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi districts were developed as a First Generation New Town and are generally restricted to a maximum domestic plot ratio of 5, which is further revised to a maximum domestic plot ratio of 6 based on the directive of the 2014 Policy Address (i.e. an increase of 20% from the domestic plot ratio of 5). Under exceptional circumstances or to adopt a more holistic, district-based approach for urban renewal and to optimize development/redevelopment potential, higher domestic plot ratios up to a maximum of 8 may be justified for specific areas or sites subject to planning study confirming technical feasibility and suitability with regard to local circumstances.

(ix) In existing development areas**,** this maximum domestic plot ratio can only be imposed in the case of lease modifications or through planning permissions granted under section 16 of the Town Planning Ordinance, unless it is incorporated in the statutory plans.

(x) In Special Control Areas, the maximum domestic plot ratio may be further limited.

Table 2 : Maximum Domestic Plot Ratios – New Towns (excluding Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi) / New Development Areas (NDAs)

Density Zone	Maximum Domestic Plot Ratio
R1	6.5 (i) (ii)
R2	5
R3	3.6
R4 (iii)	0.8

Notes:

General:

- The Table only gives an indication of the maximum domestic plot ratio which may be allowed for a particular area. However, where there are significant constraints on development capacity (such as transport or infrastructure limitations, environmental, topographical or geotechnical conditions, or heritage and nature conservation), other planning principles and urban design considerations (including local character and setting, building height profile and massing of the neighbourhood, air ventilation and visual impacts on the surroundings, protection of important physical features such as ridgelines), or special design considerations, a lower domestic plot ratio may be specified when considered appropriate and possible.

(i) Under exceptional circumstances, a higher domestic plot ratio up to 8 should only be adopted in areas which are comprehensively planned to that development scale and with no infrastructure constraints.

(ii) If there is non-domestic floor space, maximum domestic plot ratio will be reduced according to the provisions of the B(P)R composite building formula.

(iii) Sites in New Towns/ NDAs should only be designated R4 if there are special justifications, such as severe geotechnical/infrastructural constraints or compatibility with the adjacent rural low density developments.

Table 3 : Maximum Domestic Plot Ratios – Rural Areas

Density Zone	Maximum Domestic Plot Ratio (i)	Locational Criteria
RR1	3.6	Commercial centres of Rural Townships
RR2	2.1	Areas within Rural Townships lying outside the commercial centre, and in other significant rural development areas served by medium capacity public transport, such as light rail systems.
RR3	0.75	Peripheral parts of Rural Townships or other rural development areas, or in locations away from existing settlements but with adequate infrastructure and no major landscape or environmental constraints.
RR4	0.4	Similar locations to RR3 but where development intensity is restricted by infrastructure or landscape constraints. Replacement for temporary structures in areas requiring upgrading.
Village	3.0 (ii)	Within the defined envelope of recognised villages.

Notes:

General:

- The Table only gives an indication of the maximum domestic plot ratio which may be allowed for a particular area. However, where there are significant constraints on development capacity (such as transport or infrastructure limitations, environmental, topographical or geotechnical conditions, or heritage and nature conservation), other planning principles and urban design considerations (including local character and setting, building height profile and massing of the neighbourhood, air ventilation and visual impacts on the surroundings, protection of important physical features such as ridgelines), or special design considerations, a lower domestic plot ratio may be specified when considered appropriate and possible.

(i) Domestic plot ratio is applied to the Net Site Area (see definition in Figure 1).

(ii) Relates to New Territories Exempted House, built on a site area of 65.03m^2, with 3 floors on 100% site coverage.

Residential Densities