



## Case information

<b>Case IDs</b>	300030647, 300030683, 300030684, 300030688, 300030690
<b>File References</b>	HGH/B/GA/63, HGH/B/GA/123, HGH/B/GA/64, HGH/B/GA/124, HGH/B/GA/125
<b>Name of Site</b>	Inner-city multi-storey flats, Aberdeen
<b>Postcode (if any)</b>	See table below

<b>Local Authority</b>	Aberdeen City Council
<b>National Grid Reference (NGR)</b>	See table below
<b>Designation Type</b>	Listed Building
<b>Designation No. and category of listing (if any)</b>	See table below
<b>Case Type</b>	Designation

<b>Received/Start Date</b>	08/08/2018
<b>Decision Date</b>	18/01/2021

## 1. Decision

An assessment using the selection guidance shows that the buildings itemised in the table below meet the criteria of special architectural or historic interest. The decision is to list the buildings at category A.

<b>Postcode &amp; NGR</b>	<b>Statutory Listing Address</b>	<b>Category of listing</b>	<b>Case Reference/ Listed building Reference</b>
AB10 1TA (1-30 Gilcomstoun); AB10 1TB (31-75 Gilcomstoun)  NJ 93455, 06214	1-75 Gilcomstoun Land, Aberdeen	A	300030647/ LB52522
AB25 1DU (1-48 Porthill); AB25 1BH 49-72 Porthill)	1-72 Porthill Court, 1-126 Seamount Court, shop units at 152-158 (even numbers) Gallowgate, including multi-	A	300030683/ LB52524

<p>AB25 1DQ (1-42 Seamount); AB25 1DR (43-84 Seamount); AB25 1DS (85-126 Seamount)</p> <p>AB25 1DT (152, 154, 156, 158 Gallowgate)</p> <p>NJ 94124, 06846</p>	<p>storey car park to West North Street, Gallowgate, Aberdeen</p>		
<p>AB11 5EP (Virginia)</p> <p>AB11 5DG (1-48 Marischal); AB11 5DW (49-108 Marischal)</p> <p>NJ 94630, 06460</p>	<p>1-48 Virginia Court, 1-108 Marischal Court, Aberdeen</p>	A	300030684/ LB52523
<p>AB10 1ST (1-54 Thistle); AB10 1SE (55-126 Thistle)</p> <p>NJ 93337, 06082</p>	<p>1-126 Thistle Court, Aberdeen</p>	A	300030688/ LB52531
<p>AB25 1EG (1-60 Hutcheon); AB25 1EW (61-120 Hutcheon); AB25 1EZ (121-140 Hutcheon)</p> <p>AB25 1FA (1-64 Greig); AB25 1FB (65-112 Greig); AB25 1FD (113-144 Greig)</p> <p>NJ 93867, 06082</p>	<p>1-140 Hutcheon Court, 1-144 Greig Court, Aberdeen</p>	A	300030690/ LB52525

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

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## 2.1 Designation Background

Gilcomstoun Land, Virginia Court and Marischal Court were previously proposed for listing 2014. A decision was taken to not proceed with an assessment for listing these buildings while the listing review of Cables Wynd House and Linksvie House in Edinburgh – two substantial multi-storey blocks of flats of contemporary date – was taking place. This was to provide context for the possible listing of similar buildings elsewhere in Scotland. The listing review for the Edinburgh cases resulted in a substantial amount of research on the building type and the subsequent listing of both Cables Wynd House and Linksvie House at category A in January 2017.

None of the multi-storey buildings is in a conservation area, but most are directly adjacent to city centre conservation areas.

## 2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals for the buildings except for ongoing maintenance and repair which are not considered to have an impact on the significance of the buildings.

In 2019-20, appraisals of the environmental efficiency, and financial and non-financial appraisals of the inner-city multi-storeys are being considered. A Stage 1 RIBA assessment of Gilcomstoun Land was commissioned by the council's corporate landlord at the end of 2019 to provide options for further investigation from minimal upgrading to demolition and rebuild and the potential costs for these works.

These proposals are at an early stage and have been considered as part of the assessment for designation. (See 3.3 Policy considerations and 4.2 Consultation summary for more information.)

## 3. Assessment

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### 3.1 Assessment information

A proposal to designate eight inner-city multi-storey blocks of flats was received on 08/08/2018. The blocks are located across five discreet sites in central Aberdeen and they were built as part of the city's post-Second World War housing programme. Because of the number of buildings proposed for designation the application for listing the flats has been treated as a project and has concurrently included a project to record the buildings for the National Record of the Historic Environment.

Gilcomstoun Land, Porthill Court, Seamount Court, Marishcal Court, Virginia Court, Thistle Court, Hutcheon Court and Greig Court were visited on 22/11/2018 and 02/07/2019.

The exterior and interior of the common areas were seen. Recent photographs of some flat interiors were seen. The interior of an unoccupied flat at Hutcheon Court was seen on 22/11/2018.

### **3.2 Assessment of special architectural or historic interest**

The buildings were found to meet the criteria for listing.

An assessment using the selection guidance to decide whether a site or place is of special architectural or historic interest was carried out. See **Annex A**.

The common hardstanding areas surrounding the multi-storey buildings form part of the design and conception of the public realm which enhance their setting. Two- and three-storey low rise apartment blocks also form part of some of the original housing developments. Across the sites, these buildings and the setting have not substantially changed since they were built and form an integral part of the redevelopment of the streetscape in the 1960s.

We do not currently propose to designate the related hard landscaping and public realm and adjacent low-rise contemporary housing but consider that these buildings and structures are linked in design terms and contribute to the wider setting especially through the relationship of the buildings and their open spaces.

The exception is at the Gallowgate redevelopment (Porthill Court and Seamount Court) which comprises an integrated parade of shops and a multi-storey car parking facility. These elements of the scheme were carefully incorporated into the original design resulting in a modernist mixed-used megastructure and these are proposed to be included in the listing.

The listing criteria and selection guidance for listed buildings are published in Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019), Annex 2, pp. 11-13, <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy>.

### **3.3 Policy considerations**

We consider the individual circumstances of each case. In deciding whether to designate a site or place or amend an existing designation while there are ongoing development proposals, we will consider:

- the implications of designation on development proposals;
- the effect of the proposed development on the significance of the site or place; and
- the extent to which plans have been developed for the site or place – where these are particularly advanced, we will not normally list or schedule.

Further information about development proposals and designation is found in Designation Policy and Selection Guidance, pp. 7-8.

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy>

In this case none of the above were considered to impact on our decision to list the buildings.

## 4. Consultation

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### 4.1 Consultation information

Consultation period: 14/10/2019 to 24/01/2020.

We consulted with the owners, occupiers, tenants, tenants' groups, local community councils, councillors, the planning authority and the housing authority of Aberdeen City Council. We also held public drop-in events in Aberdeen (Monday 28 October 2 to 4 pm and 7.30 to 9 pm and Monday 11 November from 2 to 4 pm and 7.30 to 9 pm). We attended meetings with the planning authority (12/11/2019), the City-wide Multi-storey Network (27/11/2019), the Corporate Landlord (17/01/2020) and elected members of Aberdeen City Council (17/01/2020).

The consultation report of handling was also published on our portal and our website for comment from any interested parties.

### 4.2 Consultation summary

Further to the public meetings and meetings with Aberdeen City Council officials, there were 65 responses and interactions to the consultation. Out of these 65 responses, 36 of them were from residents.

The aim of the consultation was to engage with people with an interest in the Multis about why we think they meet the criteria of special architectural or historic interest and to answer questions about what listing means. We did not receive any comments which raised issues that put into question the special architectural or historic interest of the buildings for listing.

There were concerns raised about the designation preventing maintenance, repair and the future development of the sites. We answered many questions about what listing means and were able to provide information on a variety of topics, including the implications of listing and the listed building consent process.

Beyond the listing process, we are working in partnership with the local authority on a pilot study to explore how the Multis can be more energy efficient. We are also supporting Aberdeen City Council's planning service to produce a guide to listed building consent for residents. Our programme of making a photographic record of the Multis and other post-war social housing in Aberdeen will continue and the results will become part of the national archive held in the National Record of the

Historic Environment ([www.canmore.org.uk](http://www.canmore.org.uk)). We will also be supporting the Aberdeen City Heritage Trust to develop a community engagement project about the Multis.

A full summary of the consultation is published on our website. [Closed Consultations | Historic Environment Scotland | History](#)

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## ANNEX A

### Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

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#### 1. Building Name and description

##### 1.1 Description of individual sites

###### **1-75 Gilcomstoun Land, Aberdeen**

Eleven-storey modern Brutalist multi-storey 'slab' block of flats designed by Aberdeen City Architects Department, under the supervision of George McIntosh Keith (Chief Architect) in 1959-1963 for the Aberdeen Housing Committee. The project architect was John Pressley. The building contractor was the Aberdeen firm, W J Anderson. Oriented on a north-south axis and located in a built up inner urban area with two-storey low-rise modern buildings in the immediate setting. The block contains 75 maisonette flats laid out on a crossover section: flats are entered on the ground floor at either the bedroom or living area and cross up and over to the bedroom or living area providing a dual aspect on two levels. There is a contemporary painted timber sign 'Gilcomstoun Land' above the entrance.

###### **1-72 Porthill Court, 1-126 Seamount Court, shop units at 152-158 (even numbers) Gallowgate, including multi-storey car park to West North Street, Gallowgate, Aberdeen**

19 and nine-storey modern Brutalist multi-storey 'slab' blocks of flats designed by Aberdeen City Architects Department, under the supervision of George McIntosh Keith (Chief Architect) dating from 1959 to 1966 for the Aberdeen Housing Committee. The building contractor was the Aberdeen firm, W J Anderson. Oriented on a north-south and east-west axes and connected by a pair of enclosed glazed linking footbridges. The blocks are also connected on the ground to a single-storey parade of shops and a modern Brutalist multi-storey car park. The buildings are in a built up inner urban area next to a ring road and near contemporary low-rise housing to the south and north and a modern college building to the east. Seamount Court contains 126 maisonette flats laid out on a crossover section: flats are entered on the ground floor at either the bedroom or living area and cross up and over to the bedroom or living area providing a dual aspect on two levels. Porthill Court has 72 flats with a combination of crossover maisonettes, single storey flats and eight rooftop single storey flats set behind a geometric shaped linking concrete parapet. Seamount Court partially retains its original building name lettering.

The parade of shops consists of a single storey flat-roofed block linked to the undercroft of Seamount Court. There are three units facing a terraced hard-landscaped precinct to the east.

The modern Brutalist multi-storey car park is constructed of in situ and reinforced concrete and is laid out on 3 levels. There is a spiral access ramp and open

cantilevered concrete stair to the north. The long elevation facing North West Street is characterised by a long series of square reinforced concrete open buttresses linked to a recessed first floor. The structure is faced with tall narrow moulded concrete panels at the ground level and has square aggregate panels to the upper level.

### **1-48 Virginia Court, 1-108 Marischal Court, Castlehill, Aberdeen**

19- and nine-storey modern Brutalist multi-storey 'slab' blocks of flats designed by Aberdeen City Architects Department, under the supervision of George McIntosh Keith (Chief Architect) 1959 (completed 1966) for the Aberdeen Housing Committee. The building contractor was the Aberdeen firm, W J Anderson. The buildings are oriented on a north-south and east-west axes and connected by a pair of enclosed glazed linking footbridges. They are in a built up inner urban area next to a ring road. Virginia Court contains 48 maisonette flats laid out on a crossover section: flats are entered on the ground floor at either the bedroom or living area and cross up an over to the bedroom or living area providing a dual aspect on two levels. Marischal Court has 108 maisonette flats.

### **1-126 Thistle Court, Aberdeen**

15-storey modern Brutalist multi-storey 'slab' block of flats designed by Aberdeen City Architects Department, under the supervision of Tom Watson (Chief Architect) in 1971-1975 for the Aberdeen Housing Committee. The building contractor was the Aberdeen firm, Alexander Hall & Sons. Oriented on a north-south axis and located in a built up inner urban area with a low-rise multi-storey car park in the immediate setting. The block has 126 flats with a combination of maisonettes laid out on a crossover section in the middle part and single storey flats at each end. The windows which are set in the granite aggregate facing slabs are framed with canted concrete surrounds.

### **1-140 Hutcheon Court, 1-144 Greig Court, Aberdeen**

15- and 19-storey modern Brutalist 'slab' blocks of flats designed by Aberdeen City Architects Department, under the supervision of Tom Watson (Chief Architect) in 1973-1978 for the Aberdeen Housing Committee. The building contractor was the Aberdeen firm, Alexander Hall & Sons. The buildings are oriented on an east-west and north-south axes. They are in a built up inner urban area next to a ring road. Hutcheon Court contains 140 flats with a combination of maisonettes laid out on a crossover section and single storey flats at both ends. Greig Court has 144 flats with maisonettes and single storey flats at one end only. The maisonette flats are entered on the ground floor at either the bedroom or living area and cross up an over to the bedroom or living area providing a dual aspect on two levels. The facing slabs at the end of the blocks are set with large jagged granite aggregate.

## **1.2 Description of common features**



The buildings are constructed with a reinforced concrete frame and have smooth-finished precast concrete cladding panels and poured concrete tapered columns. The long slab elevations have shallow continuous fire-escape balconies. Some of the blocks are terminated by single storey flats that also have escape balconies. The facing panels have large aggregate granite faced finishes at the end elevations, some of which have been painted over. The facing panels to Thistle Court, Hutcheon Court and Greig Court are more prominent than at Gilcomstoun, Gallowgate and Castlehill with larger rough boulder aggregate and these have not been painted. There is a partially open undercroft with building facilities including laundry rooms, community rooms and substations which are set back from the building line at the ground floor of all the blocks.

The interiors of the common areas largely retain their 1960s and 1970s layout with some original finishes, fixtures, fittings and signage retained to the public areas such as teak boarded ceilings to the entrance lobby. Most of the windows, doors and fixtures and fittings to the exterior and interior have been replaced.

### **1.3 Historical background**

These blocks of flats were designed and built in selected redevelopment areas and were part of a comprehensive building programme that was initiated by the City of Aberdeen Housing Committee to re-house residents into modern, healthy homes. The Chapel Street/Skene Street development (at Gilcomstoun) is the first of a total of five inner city housing developments ranging in date from 1959 to 1978.

The post-Second World War improvement of Aberdeen City Centre city was inspired by the seminal planning tome 'Granite City A Plan for Aberdeen' of 1952 by W Dobson Chapman and Charles F Riley, two of the UK's most highly regarded architects and town planners. Their proposals, which broadly followed the prevalent thinking in the 1950s, was to recommend selective redevelopment (slum-clearance) in order to provide for public health, amenity and convenience which had been lacking in interwar housing schemes. In building terms their recommendations were for high density multi-storey blocks in the immediate periphery of the city centre and for neighbourhood units in outlying sub-urban areas (such as Kincorth and Kaimhill) with a mix of low- and high-rise housing and small scale commercial and public amenities such as shops and schools. Echoing contemporary planning theory of comprehensive redevelopment, their bias was towards flats as the most appropriate housing type, in contrast to 'monotonous' inadvertent urban sprawl.

Town planning was a relatively new discipline and after the upheaval of the Second World War, was of primary importance in driving housing and health reform forward. Soon after the establishment of the Town and County Planning Act of 1947, large cities and county councils across the UK embarked on the major reorganisation of their urban areas. They were committed to improving infrastructure and in providing housing which was integrated to well-planned commercial and industrial activity.

Comprehensive housing reform was first introduced after the First World War with the Housing and Town Planning (Addison) Act 1919 to provide decent housing for the working class and address inner city slums. This act marked a turn towards state-sponsored housing that was characterised by the development of planned council schemes and would dominate the housing supply in Scotland and the rest of the UK until the late 1970s. By the end of the Second World War, Scotland and other UK cities were embarking on unprecedented restructuring. In Scotland, the debate was centred on Glasgow and its overcrowding and sub-standard housing problem. Building within the city boundary or decanting the population to new settlements outside of the city into 'new towns' was the principle point of discussion. The type of housing to build, from cottages to 'four-in-a-block' flats, tenements to high rises, was also intensely deliberated.

While national housing policies and funding strategies were drawn up by central government, local authorities were responsible for deciding on the direction they would take to improve their housing stock. An important factor was the availability of land and how this affected housing density. With the rising cost of land as well as building materials, building high rises was an attractive alternative to low density housing schemes planned along earlier garden-city principles.

The establishment of new high-rise developments was largely aimed at re-housing people who had previously lived in sub-standard accommodation into modern healthy homes. Aberdeen's main housing problem after 1945, however, was not primarily its slums or its shortage of land, but rather a long waiting list for houses. Its ambitious plans for reconstruction was also not principally related to war-damage. Rather than an extensive slum clearance programme, the city of Aberdeen, which was identified by government officials as an area of potential economic growth, embarked on a highly ambitious plan of civic enhancement and regeneration. In this context, the inner-city multi-storey slab blocks planned from in the late 1950s to the late 1970s were unusual for their high-quality individual design by the city's own architects' department. They were exceptional for the period because they were not like the increasingly ubiquitous factory-made system-built schemes that were erected in all of Scotland's major urban centres, also including Aberdeen.

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## 2. Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

To be listed a building must be of 'special architectural or historic interest' as set out in the [Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#). To decide if a building is of special interest for listing, we assess its cultural significance using selection guidance which has two main headings – architectural interest and historic interest (see Designation Policy and Selection Guidance, 2019, Annex 2, pp. 11-13).

The selection guidance provides a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions. The special architectural or historic interest of a building can be demonstrated in one or more of the following ways.

## 2.1 Architectural interest

The architectural interest of a building may include its design, designer, interior, plan form, materials, regional traditions, and setting and the extent to which these characteristics survive. These factors are grouped under two headings:

### 2.1.1 Design

The vision and skill of George McIntosh Keith (1907-1971), city architect from 1954 to 1970, combined with the financial expertise of the city's housing convener and treasurer, Councillor Robert Lennox (later Lord Provost), led to a well-conceived and well-supported programme of public housing across the city of Aberdeen in the post-war period. Keith and Lennox were fully committed to a major multi-storey drive which was directly inspired by their visits in 1959 to innovative multi-storey housing sites at Roehampton Alton Estate near London and at Hutchesontown in the Gorbals, Glasgow. It was highly unusual for a building programme of this scale to be produced almost exclusively by the local authority architects' department which continued in the same ambitious manner under the direction of Thomas Campbell Watson (1914-c.1994) from 1970 to 1975.

In this context, the inner-city multi-storey slab blocks planned from in the late 1950s to the late 1970s were unusual for their high-quality individual design by the city's own architects' department. They were exceptional for the period because they were not like the increasingly ubiquitous factory-made system-built schemes that were erected in all of Scotland's major urban centres, also including Aberdeen.

The result of this leadership in planning and architecture was a consistently high design quality across all the Aberdeen inner-city schemes which are very similar in plan, elevation and material. In their consistency and quality, these multi-storey buildings are among the most coherent and architecturally distinguished group of Brutalist flats in Scotland. The quality construction associated with the inner-city multi-storey blocks in Aberdeen are also due in part to the high standards used by the local contracting industry to the almost complete exclusion of national house building contractors.

The design of the Aberdeen inner-city blocks is an outstanding example of the modernist architecture of the period represented externally by the monumental side wall frames, the massive concrete piers at ground level and overall sculptural concrete detailing. This is further expressed by the cross-slab in situ concrete frame construction which is seen in the arrangement of shallow balconies to the long elevations and the concrete framing which is noticeable throughout the exterior of the building.

In addition to their structural expression of cross-slab in situ concrete frame construction, they are notable for their contextual design elements directly referencing the North-East vernacular by incorporating large granite aggregate into

concrete panels, a device normally associated with smaller scale housing and uniquely applied in Aberdeen. In practical terms, the large aggregate, although a more expensive finish, would attempt to mitigate the effects of fierce weather and north-easterly winds which were a known challenge for buildings of this height in the city.

The Aberdeen multi-storey group of flats were clearly inspired by Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation slab blocks (from 1947) and his socialist ideal of 'cities in the sky' that set the standard for avant-garde architects who were designing multi-storeys building schemes in the following two decades in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Internally, these multi-storey blocks also have an innovative plan. More unusually applied in Scotland was the use of the crossover section plan of a maisonette arrangement. Stemming directly from the Unité d'Habitation's 'internal street', it cleverly eliminated the need for the more common space-consuming external deck access plan, it allowed for more light penetration as well as ventilation and it provided a consistent design to the slab's long elevations. The crossover plan layout was a more expensive design but was promoted by the city architect to ensure that the flats felt like houses when experienced from the inside but also crucially, this higher specification plan form would allow for better ventilation, an important consideration for multi-storey living.

The inventiveness of the arrangement of the blocks themselves is also found in their wider site plan. A combination of hard and soft landscaping, building orientation and the relationship with low rise buildings that were carefully designed as part of the scheme, all considered the wider townscape. This attention to town planning and integration into the city is directly illustrative of the concepts of the Townscape movement which was prevalent during this period.

As well as the usual and essential amenities of rubbish chutes and storage areas, the Aberdeen slab blocks have well-appointed laundry rooms, drying areas, and in some blocks community rooms which also illustrate the attention given to providing a high level of amenities for the residents.

These inner-city multi-storey blocks are remarkable not only for their avant-garde modernist architecture, but also for their relative lack of later alteration. There has been little change overall to the original design, plan form and materials except for the uniform change to windows and doors leading to external balconies and some reglazing to the ground floor service areas. The exposed granite aggregate panels at Gilcomstoun Land, Porthill Court, Seamount Court, Marischal Court and Virginia Court have been overpainted in grey which has affected the original character of the panelling. However, the overall relative lack of later alteration contributes to the authenticity of the block which retains its historic character on its own and within the wider townscape.

### **2.1.2 Setting**

These multi-storey flats are in an inner urban area and because of the buildings' height at up to 19 storeys, the blocks are prominent both in their immediate and wider surroundings. The overall character is of a multi-period urban streetscape ranging from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and because of the predominant use of granite across all building types and dates, the impression is of a unified palette which is compatible with the modern concrete construction of the blocks.

At Gilcomstoun Land and Gallowgate the blocks' relationship with its townscape is enhanced by the contemporary low-rise housing planned as part of the original early 1960s development. The urban realm is a visibly designed hard landscaping with patterned footpaths and structured planting at all the blocks.

The multi-storey blocks have a distinct architectural identity as part of carefully planned series of building groups within the city centre. When siting the blocks, the architect-planners were conscious of their landmark status and the potential for dramatic effect within and outwith the townscape. The inner-ring road, also planned as part of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century reorganisation of the city centre plays an integral part in the setting and plan form of the buildings, especially in the arrangement of the blocks at Gallowgate, Castlehill and Hutcheon Street which are directly adjacent to the road system. At Castlehill, Virginia Court is aligned with Union Street as a terminating vista at the end of Castlegate. All these building groups were designed as set pieces which are integrated into the inner-city plan and are now familiar landmarks in Aberdeen, contributing to the city's wider urban character.

The multi-storey blocks are located next to the boundaries of the central conservation areas with earlier and later buildings, both residential and commercial, characterising these areas.

## **2.2 Historic interest**

Historic interest is in such things as a building's age, rarity, social historical interest and associations with people or events that have had a significant impact on Scotland's cultural heritage. Historic interest is assessed under three headings:

### **2.2.1 Age and rarity**

Erected in their hundreds (863 in total) in the years mainly between 1960 and 1980, multi-storey blocks of flats are a common building type in Scotland. Architecturally innovative schemes were more expensive to build and fewer of these were erected with system-built, prefabricated structures predominating. Few multi-storey blocks of all types and quality now survive in close to their original form, with many having been demolished completely. There are now only a very small number of architecturally exceptional multi-storey buildings which survive and which are not extensively altered.



The multi-storeys at Gilcomstoun, Gallowgate and Castlehill were erected as part of the earliest phase of the inner-city redevelopment of Aberdeen and are among the earliest Brutalist blocks of flats in Scotland planned as early as 1959. Erected in the 1970s, Thistle Court, Hutcheon Court and Greig Court are slightly later but were built in a similar style and to the same plan and design as the earlier blocks.

The first multi-storey public housing development erected in Aberdeen was at Ashgrove in 1959-61, a point block of ten storeys (40 flats). The block at Ashgrove is of standard design and forms part of a mixed-density (high and low rise) peripheral urban development. Earlier, innovation in modern public housing in the inner city was realised at Rosemount Square (1936-46 – listed category A) a courtyard development of Viennese-style modernist flats which anticipated the ambitious housing programme led by the City Architects' Department in the post-war period in Aberdeen.

Many of the first high rise buildings in Scotland were provided by contractors in collaboration with local authority architects' departments, and some early experiments in Scotland include Crathie Court, Glasgow (1946, listed category B – LB51966) and Westfield Court, Edinburgh (1949). By the late 1950s, some of the more architecturally innovative schemes were by architects in private practice.

Around this time, the functionalist concepts of the early modernist period of imposed and comprehensive architectural order on society prevalent in the 1930s and '40s and typified by 'all-flats' schemes, was shifting towards socially inclusive architectural solutions and community planning, and by contrast was exemplified by the new mixed-development scheme. The garden city model was not favoured nor practical in urban areas but neither was the model of high-flats only.

Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (1947-52) at Marseille, France, is widely recognised as the initial inspiration for this change in philosophy and his large slab block of flats located in a parkland setting, which included shops, leisure and other social amenities as part of the development, was the architectural embodiment of a utopian concept of city living known as the 'ville radieuse' or the vertical city. It proved enormously influential and is often cited as the initial inspiration of the Brutalist architectural style and philosophy, which at Marseille (and at the other Unité schemes found in France and elsewhere) applied a raw concrete aesthetic (béton brut) to maximise the possibilities of new materials and building technologies to achieve its theoretical aims.

Early adopters of the new thinking in Britain were found in London and other large cities such as the housing complexes at the Golden Lane Estate, 1953-63 (listed Grade II\*), the Alton West Estate in Roehampton, London, (1955-8 – listed Grade II\*) 5 long 10-storey slab blocks of maisonettes in a parkland setting, and Park Hill in Sheffield (1957-60 – listed Grade II\*). Other expressions of the Unité concept include the Barbican Estate (completed 1963-1982 – listed Grade II), Balfron Tower (1965-7 – listed Grade II), and Trellick Tower (1968-73 – listed Grade II), all in London.

Scotland's cities also responded with ambitious schemes in Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen, mostly with a focus on the ever-pressing need for slum-clearance with the help of forward-thinking city planners, engineers and housing chiefs, such as Robert Bruce and David Gibson in Glasgow. The Gorbals area of Glasgow, a notorious slum in the south of the city plagued by overcrowding, saw the erection of multi-storey housing by architects in private practice, including Basil Spence's renowned Hutchesontown C scheme (1961-6 – now demolished) and Hutchesontown B in 1958 (altered) by Robert Matthew who was leading Scotland in social housing reform, establishing the Housing Research Unit at the University of Edinburgh in 1959. One of the most distinguished of the tower block schemes in Glasgow was Anniesland Court, Glasgow (1966 – listed category A, LB43034), itself a megastructure with integrated shops. Similarly, in Leith, Edinburgh, the ambitious Kirkgate redevelopment included the largest and among the most architecturally accomplished multi-storey blocks of flats at Cables Wind House (1963-5 – listed category A, LB52403) and Linksvie House (1964-7 – listed category A, LB52403). As of 2020, there are four multi-storey public housing buildings listed outside of Aberdeen.

Alongside the listed Brutalist blocks at Anniesland and Leith, the contemporary group of inner-city multi-storey blocks in Aberdeen is among a small number of Scotland's high-rise schemes which exemplify the advanced national and international interest in modern community planning combined with the latest architectural expression of the 'New Brutalism' style. Of these few surviving innovative schemes, there are even fewer remaining which are not largely altered.

Unique to the Aberdeen inner-city multi-storey blocks is the prominent use of local granite facing, an unusual application of regional modernism, not seen in modernist schemes of this type and scale elsewhere in the UK or probably internationally.

Also particular to Aberdeen and unique in Scotland is that these blocks were part of a comprehensive development plan which envisioned eight buildings from the beginning. It was not possible to build all eight multi-storeys at the same time and building work was staggered to meet capacity. This resulted in building taking place over a period from 1959 to 1977, however, the buildings are part of the same scheme and are clearly associated with each other in their design and materials. Their importance as a group tells us much about social and city planning changes in post-war Scotland.

## **2.2.2 Social historical interest**

The interest and widespread acceptance of modern multi-storey housing can be traced to Scotland's long tradition of tenement living. With the advent of 'right to buy' policies and the transfer of public housing stock to private ownership in the early 1980s, Aberdeen's inner-city multi-storeys form part of a historic movement in social housing in which Scotland's local authorities took a leading role.

These blocks of flats represent a period of great social and economic regeneration in Scotland's cities in the post-war era and tell us about changes taking place in town planning and housing. This state-sponsored town planning that was conceived in the immediate post-war years and peaked in the late 1960s, was the climax of a concerted and unprecedented campaign to transform housing tenure in Scotland. Incredibly, by 1964, 79% of new housing built in Scotland was built by local authorities and was by a long way the highest proportionally in Europe with the average local authority owned housing ranging from 2-6% in this period (M Glendinning, 2003: p.122).

### 2.2.3 Association with people or events of national importance

There is no association with a person or event of national importance.

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## 3. Summary of assessment

In our current state of knowledge, the eight inner-city multi-storey blocks meet the criteria of special architectural or historic interest for the following reasons:

### Design

- The buildings are of significant architectural interest as outstanding examples in Scotland of the modernist New Brutalism style in multi-storey housing. The design of the Aberdeen inner-city blocks is an outstanding example of the modernist architecture of the period represented externally by the monumental side wall frames and sculptural concrete detailing. They are of special interest for the expression of the cross-slab in situ concrete frame construction as seen in the arrangement of shallow balconies to their long elevations and the concrete panelled framing which is noticeable throughout the exterior of the buildings.
- Their design is of special interest for its innovative use of the crossover plan arrangement of maisonettes not often applied to housing of this type in Scotland or the rest of the UK. This plan form was chosen to create a greater sense of space and usefully provided cross ventilation.
- The contextual and regional design element of large granite aggregate incorporated into concrete panels directly references the North-East vernacular and is unusual for modernist blocks of this type. The motif is uniquely applied in Aberdeen across the eight multi-storey blocks.
- The overall relative lack of alteration has contributed to a high level of authenticity which adds to the buildings' design interest.

### Setting

- The immediate settings of each block, which are also largely unaltered, are an important aspect of the buildings' special interest as they were designed as complete modernist set pieces applying contemporary townscape principles such as paired offset slab blocks, contemporary hard landscaping and adjacent low-rise housing.



- At up to 19 storeys in height, the buildings are local landmarks and form part of a now historic group of inner-city multi-storey housing developments which were planned as part of the post-war regeneration of Aberdeen.

#### Social historical interest

- The buildings inform our understanding of the most architecturally ambitious and successful public housing programmes of the post-war period in Scotland.

#### Age & rarity

- The buildings are among a very small number of surviving multi-storey public housing schemes in Scotland that are of exceptional architectural interest and have survived largely unaltered.

## 4. Category of listing

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Once a building is found to be of special architectural or historic interest, it is then classified under one of three categories (A, B or C) according to its relative importance. While the listing itself has legal weight and gives statutory protection, the categories have no legal status and are advisory. They affect how a building is managed in the planning system.

Category definitions are found at Annex 2 of Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019) <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy>.

### 4.1 Level of importance

The eight inner-city blocks of flats in Aberdeen's level of importance is category A.

Buildings listed at category A are defined as 'buildings of special architectural or historic interest which are outstanding examples of a particular period, style or building type'.

Considering their outstanding architectural interest and rare survival, category A is the most appropriate level of listing.

## 5. Other Information

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The Gallowgate redevelopment (which includes Porthill Court and Seamount Court) were listed in DoCoMoMo Scottish National Group's 'Sixty Key Monuments' of the Modern Movement in Scotland (1997).

Granite used in the facing panels at Gilcomstoun Land is understood to have been recycled from the Castlehill Barracks site.

## 6. References

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Canmore: <http://canmore.org.uk/> CANMORE ID 173664 (Gilcomstoun Land), CANMORE ID 173845 (Porthill Court); CANMORE ID 173847 (Seamount Court), CANMORE ID 300062 (Virginia Court), CANMORE ID 300062 (Marischal Court), CANMORE ID 300083 (Greig Court), CANMORE ID 173287 (Hutcheon Court); CANMORE ID 173277 (Thistle Court).

### Archives

Aberdeen City Archives. Housing Committee records for Chapel Street/Skene Street Redevelopment (Gilcomstoun Land); Gallowgate (Seamount Court and Porthill Court); Castlehill Housing (Marischal Court and Virginia Court); Rose Street/Huntley Street (Thistle Court) – architects drawings [H/CSK/15-16; C55; C61; C72 ACC 2804 F2/F3/F7; AR16; G27-28].

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### **Additional information**

Additional information courtesy of George McIntosh Keith, son of the city architect and who assisted his father during the design process in the early 1960s (interview held 11/02/2020).

## 7. Images

Images to be included in the online listed building records.



**Type:** Standard  
**Title:** Gilcomstoun Land, east elevation, looking west.  
**Alternative Text:** Gilcomstoun Land, east elevation, looking west, during daytime, with cloudy sky, tree and low-rise housing to foreground.  
**Date taken:** 02/07/2019  
**Photographer:** HES  
**Copyright:** © Historic Environment Scotland



**Type:** Standard  
**Title:** Porthill Court (right) and Seamount Court (left), southwest elevation, looking north.  
**Alternative Text:** Porthill Court (right) and Seamount Court (left), southwest elevation, looking north, during daytime, with overcast sky, trees and road to foreground.  
**Date taken:** 22/11/2018  
**Photographer:** HES  
**Copyright:** © Historic Environment Scotland



**Type:** Standard  
**Title:** Seamount Court, north elevation, above multi-storey car park, looking south.  
**Alternative Text:** Seamount Court, north elevation, above multi-storey car park, looking south, during daytime, with overcast sky, road to foreground.  
**Date taken:** 22/11/2018  
**Photographer:** HES  
**Copyright:** © Historic Environment Scotland



**Type:** Standard  
**Title:** Virginia Court (left) and Marischal Court (right), west elevations, looking southeast.  
**Alternative Text:** Virginia Court (left) and Marischal Court (right), west elevations, looking southeast, during daytime, with cloudy sky, trees and parked red car to foreground.  
**Date taken:** 02/07/2019  
**Photographer:** HES  
**Copyright:** © Historic Environment Scotland



**Type:** Standard

**Title:** Thistle Court, east elevation, looking west.

**Alternative Text:** Thistle Court, east elevation, looking west, during daytime, with cloudy sky, trees and parked cars to foreground

**Date taken:** 02/07/2019

**Photographer:** HES

**Copyright:** © Historic Environment Scotland



**Type:** Standard

**Title:** Hutcheon Court (left) and Greig Court (right), west elevations, looking east.

**Alternative Text:** Hutcheon Court (left) and Greig Court (right) west elevations, looking east, during daytime, with cloudy sky, tree and parked cars to foreground.

**Date taken:** 22/11/2018

**Photographer:** HES

**Copyright:** © Historic Environment Scotland