

Service Lanes

Service lanes, formally known as scavenging lanes, are an essential component of the urban fabric. Historically, they provided the means of removing waste from dwellings but in effect also acted as essential fire-breaks. Today, these lanes are commonly incorporated into building designs to provide sources of lighting and ventilation and routes for access and escape. Additionally, established lanes often provide a convenient neighbourhood pattern of footpaths.

2. This practice note advises on general issues concerning private service lanes.

Rights-of-way

3. Before a private or partly private service lane can be used for a particular scheme to meet Buildings Ordinance requirements (such as lighting and ventilation, means of escape and means of access), the authorized person must demonstrate that either permanent or pertinent rights-of-way over the lane exist. The integrity of the lane must be ensured for all users of the proposed building.

Means of Escape and Access

4. Where exit routes are required, they would not be acceptable if they discharge into a private or partly private service lane unless it can be demonstrated that the users of the proposed building would have unfettered rights-of-way over the lane.

5. A service lane, public or private, would not be acceptable as a means of escape and access if it is obstructed, incapable of improvement or obviously in a decaying state.

Site Coverage and Plot Ratio

6. Where an abutting private lane is in the ownership of the developer but is not specifically required for any purpose under the Buildings Ordinance for the proposed scheme, the Building Authority will give favourable consideration to including the relevant area of such lane in site coverage and plot ratio calculations. Where the legal status of a lane has been clearly established by the existence of rights-of-way, it would be necessary to apply formally for a modification of Building (Planning) Regulation 23(2)(a).

7. When an area designated as a private lane has been included in site coverage and plot ratio calculations, it must on completion of the building works be free of any structures. The only exception is where such structures have been approved and taken into account in the calculations.

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8. It is often in the interest of a developer as well as good urban planning to amalgamate sites. This can result in the extinguishment and diversion of existing lanes. Generally speaking, if a diverted lane is required only for a useful neighbourhood pattern and not specifically for a proposed development, then the Building Authority will give favourable consideration to including the relevant area of such lane in site coverage and plot ratio calculations.

Open Space

9. Save as provided for in Building (Planning) Regulation 28(3), the area of service lanes should be excluded from the open space requirements under Building (Planning) Regulation 25. This applies whether or not the area of lane is included in the site coverage and plot ratio calculations.

Improvement and Surrender

10. Every opportunity should be taken to improve a substandard service lane. The long-term objective is that upon full development of abutting sites, a lane would be direct and have an unobstructed width of not less than 3 m.

11. Except in the circumstances prescribed, Building (Planning) Regulation 28 requires that every domestic building shall be provided with a suitable service lane at the rear or to its side.

12. Where improvement to a lane is considered essential in the public interest but the lane is not specifically required under the Buildings Ordinance for a proposed scheme, the Building Authority will consider granting appropriate plot ratio and site coverage concessions in return for the free surrender of such lane acceptable to the Government provided that the area to be surrendered does not form part of an existing lane.

13. When land is surrendered for lane widening, the owner must submit a plan and a written undertaking to surrender to the Government free of all cost the area shown coloured on the plan and to pay for paving, channelling, sewerage, drainage and (where appropriate) lighting. The area for surrender must be free of structures.

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