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## Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

# Report on the Revised Draft National Planning Framework 4



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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The National Planning Framework</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Committee scrutiny</b>	<b>3</b>
Committee views on the revised draft	3
Clarity on policy priorities	4
Clarity and consistency of language	6
20-minute neighbourhoods	7
Community wealth building	8
Drive-through developments	9
Development proposals for retail	10
Local Place Plans	11
Renewable energy developments	12
MATHLR and HNDA	13
Town centre regeneration	13
Impact on self-catering sector	14
Delivering NPF4	14
Delivery programme	15
Capital investment	15
Resourcing of planning departments	16
Upskilling	17
Cross-Government adoption of NPF4	17
Guidance and Regulations	18
Transitional arrangements	18
Monitoring	19
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>21</b>

# Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

To consider and report on matters relating to local government, housing and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, and matters relating to the Local Government Boundary Commission and local governance review and democratic renewal within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.



[localgov.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:localgov.committee@parliament.scot)

# Committee Membership



**Convener**  
**Ariane Burgess**  
Scottish Green Party



**Deputy Convener**  
**Willie Coffey**  
Scottish National Party



**Miles Briggs**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party



**Mark Griffin**  
Scottish Labour



**Paul McLennan**  
Scottish National Party



**Marie McNair**  
Scottish National Party



**Annie Wells**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party

# Introduction

1. The revised draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was laid in the Scottish Parliament for scrutiny on 8 November 2022<sup>i</sup>, almost exactly a year after the original draft had been laid before the Parliament.
2. This revised draft was accompanied by an explanatory report, which provides a summary of the representations made to the consultation on the draft NPF4 and sets out the changes made in response to those representations.<sup>ii</sup> The Scottish Government also wrote to the Committee on 8 November<sup>iii</sup> explaining how the revised draft has responded specifically to the Committee's report.
3. In addition, the Scottish Government laid a document setting out a delivery programme for NPF4.<sup>iv</sup>
4. In this report, the Committee offers its reflections on the revised draft NPF4, how it has responded to comments on the original draft, both those raised by the Committee and those raised by stakeholders more generally. This report also gives careful consideration to the deliverability of NPF4 and how the Committee intends to monitor its effectiveness NPF4. The Committee hopes that this report is useful to members in informing their decision on whether or not to approve NPF4.
5. The timescale for the consideration of the revised draft NPF4 has been considerably tighter than that afforded to scrutiny of the original draft and stakeholders have expressed concern about the limited time they have had to review it. There is no set process in legislation for the consideration of a revised draft and some stakeholders have suggested that this final part of the process has been rushed. At the same time, it is clear that there is a need to have certainty about the direction of NPF4 to enable planning authorities to progress Local Development Plans through the drafting and adoption process as a matter of some urgency.
6. The Committee welcomed the six weeks the Scottish Government committed to providing to Parliament for scrutiny of the revised draft of NPF4. Nevertheless, the Committee considers that it would be helpful to agree a process for the scrutiny of revised drafts of NPF with a view to ensuring there is certainty around that process for future iterations.
7. The Committee is immensely grateful to those stakeholders who informed its scrutiny of the revised draft of NPF4, particularly given the very short timescales in which they were asked to consider it and inform the Committee's work.

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i <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4-revised-draft/>

ii <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4-explanatory-report/>

iii <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/local-gov/correspondence/2022/layingofnpf4.pdf>

iv <https://www.transformingplanning.scot/media/3136/national-planning-framework-4-delivery-programme-for-publication-2-november-2022.pdf>

# The National Planning Framework

8. The National Planning Framework is the spatial expression of Scottish Government policy. "Spatial expression" concerns strategic priorities for the development and use of land. The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, provides the legislative framework for the National Planning Framework (NPF).
9. The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 is the basis for the planning system and sets out the roles of the Scottish Ministers and local authorities with regard to development plans, development management and enforcement.
10. The procedure for submitting revisions of the NPF for scrutiny is provided for in the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997<sup>v</sup> as amended by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019<sup>vi</sup>.
11. The Scottish Parliament must approve a draft of the revised NPF before it can take effect. A draft cannot be laid for approval unless the Scottish Government has:
  - Consulted in accordance with their participation statement;
  - Laid a copy of a draft of the revised framework in the Scottish Parliament for consultation;
  - Had regard to representations made to them on the copy of the draft within 120 days of laying this in the Scottish Parliament; and
  - Laid an explanatory document in the Scottish Parliament which explains how the consultation on the copy of the draft was undertaken, a summary of the representations received as a result of consultation and how they have been considered in producing the draft laid for approval.
12. The Scottish Government has complied with all of the steps above and has now laid the final draft for approval. The Minister has made clear to the Committee that the Scottish Government does not intend to make any further revisions to NPF4 before inviting the Parliament to approve it.

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v [Town and Country Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#), section 3CA

vi [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#), section 2(13)

## Committee scrutiny

13. The Committee's scrutiny of the original draft involved a call for views, stakeholder engagement, visits and cross-committee work to ensure that as far as possible all aspects of NPF4 and all views on it were taken into account. Such an extensive process was not possible in the timescales afforded to consider the revised draft.
14. In the short timeframe for scrutiny the Committee sought to obtain the views of key stakeholders to understand how the revised draft had responded to the concerns expressed to the Committee on the original draft. The Committee held two evidence sessions. At the first session on 22 November the Committee heard from the following organisations:  
  
Panel 1: Royal Town Planning Institute, Heads of Planning Scotland  
  
Panel 2: Scottish Renewables, Scottish Environment Link, Homes for Scotland, Community Land Scotland, Planning Democracy  
  
Panel 3: Dr Caroline Brown, Professor Cliff Hague
15. At the second session on 29 November, the Committee heard from the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth and his officials.
16. The timescales did not allow for other committees to scrutinise NPF4 in the way they did on the original draft, but the Committee wrote to other committees inviting them to participate in the evidence sessions and Liam Kerr MSP attended the meeting on 29 November in his capacity as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.
17. This report is divided into two sections. The first focusses on the revised draft of NPF4 and considers how it has responded to the concerns the Committee raised in its report on the original draft and highlights outstanding issues identified by stakeholders. The second part of the report considers the deliverability of NPF4 including the delivery programme itself as well as the ongoing monitoring of NPF4.
18. It should be noted too that this is far from the end of the Committee's scrutiny of NPF4. The Committee will be closely monitoring NPF4 and holding the Scottish Government to account for delivering on its laudable ambitions. To that end, the Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to producing an annual report to inform this process.

## Committee views on the revised draft

19. Before turning to look at specific issues, it is useful to reflect on the overall positivity expressed to the Committee about the revised draft of NPF4. All of those who gave evidence to the Committee welcomed the significant improvements made to the revised draft. For example, Jim Miller of Heads of Planning Scotland welcomed the revised draft:

- ” We welcome the publication of the revised draft of NPF4. We are pleased with the improvements in context, content, clarity, consistency and detail. We welcome the firm focus on the climate and nature crises...and the way that that links across all the policies. It is much clearer that that is a key focus.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Jim Miller (Heads of Planning Scotland), contrib. 5<sup>1</sup>

20. Morag Watson of Scottish Renewables was even more effusive in her comments:

- ” Last time I sat before you and gave evidence on the NPF4, we were unequivocal that the draft that had been presented at that time would not help Scotland to reach net zero and that it would undermine our ability to deploy the amount of renewable energy that we need in order to hit our climate change targets. I am now delighted to be able to sit in front of you and say that there has been a remarkable turnaround in the document.

I commend the planning minister and his officials in the chief planner’s office. They have done a huge amount of work. They have obviously listened carefully to the feedback that they were given and to the expert input to the process. Our view is now that the document as presented to Parliament probably represents one of the most supportive planning regimes for renewables in the whole of Europe. However, I want to be clear that it does not give a free pass to any development in any place.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Morag Watson (Scottish Renewables), contrib. 87<sup>2</sup>

21. The Committee welcomes the significant improvements that have been made by the Scottish Government in the revised draft NPF4. It is clear to the Committee that the Scottish Government has listened to the comments of the Committee and stakeholders and the Minister and his officials should be commended for their efforts.

## Clarity on policy priorities

22. When considering the original draft of NPF4 one of the key concerns was the extent to which decision makers have sufficient clarity on how they should balance sometimes competing policy priorities. For example, the Committee questioned how the planning system will deliver emissions reduction, particularly where this conflicts with other priorities such as economic development.
23. It is therefore pleasing to the Committee to see in the revised draft that more clarity has been provided. The Scottish Government continues to affirm that any decision on the weight given to individual policies remains a matter for decision makers. However, Policy 1 has been revised to ensure that decision makers give “significant weight” to climate and biodiversity issues in planning decisions.
24. This emphasis on climate and biodiversity was welcomed by stakeholders. Amongst others, Bruce Wilson giving evidence on behalf of Scottish Environment LINK, expressed support for this approach, but there was support from groups representing all sectors.

25. Clare Symonds of Planning Democracy also expressed support for this emphasis on climate and biodiversity, but emphasised that planners will need to be assured of ongoing Scottish Government support for this approach, which could be undermined if decisions taken on the basis of the climate and biodiversity impacts of proposed developments are routinely overturned at appeal. Professor Hague echoed these sentiments:

” I broadly endorse what Planning Democracy said this morning about the need for clarity. Planners need to feel that, when these sorts of things go to appeal, reporters and Government decision makers will have their backs. After all, they will be contested; there is no doubt about that. In general, everybody is in favour of saving the planet but when it comes to them, they will say, “Don’t do it to me, okay?”

There are times when things will come to the crunch at appeal, and I think that practising planners are concerned about getting into such situations, because they are very resource demanding. We must see real support for these priority issues; indeed, as others have said, this also needs to be embedded in training as well as reflected in the monitoring, which I can say more about later, if you want.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Professor Hague, contrib. 163<sup>3</sup>

26. Homes for Scotland welcomed the focus on climate and biodiversity, but at the same time felt that there was not sufficient recognition of the housing crisis.
27. The Minister in his evidence to the Committee recognised the centrality of housing in NPF4 and indicated the focus should be on the quality of housing and not just numbers. He asked his official Carrie Thomson to expand on measures in NPF4 to respond to issues of underdelivery in housing:

” We set out in NPF4 that, where there is underdelivery of housing, the longer-term sites that are allocated can be brought forward. The pipeline is split into three stages: years 1 to 3 are short term, years 4 to 6 are medium term and years 7 to 10 are long term. We have also asked for plans to allocate sites beyond 10 years so that, if delivery is not happening early on, those longer-term sites can be brought forward.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Carrie Thomson (Scottish Government), contrib. 19<sup>4</sup>

28. The Committee welcomes this new emphasis on climate and biodiversity and the increased clarity and focus this would appear to offer to decision makers. The Committee notes the concerns expressed by Planning Democracy and Professor Hague. As the Committee monitors the effectiveness of NPF4 we will be keen to hear from planners on their experience of applying these principles and the extent to which they have sufficient clarity and confidence to make decisions based on these principles.
29. Mindful of the Climate Change Committee's concerns about the progress being made in meeting Scotland's emissions targets, the Committee will be keen to monitor how NPF4's focus on climate and biodiversity can accelerate progress

towards those targets.

30. The Committee also notes the concerns expressed by Homes for Scotland about the lack of emphasis on the housing crisis. While the Committee welcomes the Minister's commitment to delivering quality housing and the measures highlighted to respond to underdelivery, the Committee will reflect on this issue as it monitors NPF4.

## Clarity and consistency of language

31. Another issue of concern to the Committee on the original draft was the lack of consistency and clarity in the language used across the document. In his letter to the Committee the Minister explained how the Scottish Government has responded to those concerns:

” In preparing the revised draft NPF4 the terminology used throughout the strategy and policies has been given detailed consideration. The policy intention and outcomes for each policy have been set out to assist with interpretation, and the policy wording has been revised to be more consistent and definitive. The glossary has also been substantially updated.<sup>vii</sup>

32. Witnesses welcomed the improvement that has been made to the document through this redrafting. Dr Caroline Brown welcomed the increased clarity and consistency:

” Thank you for inviting me back. As others have commented, I think that the revision to NPF4 has brought greater clarity and consistency of language, which is very welcome. The high-level principles about the climate emergency and the nature emergency also emerge much more clearly in the revised version. There is a lot to be very positive about. The clarity and consistency of language are very helpful.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Dr Caroline Brown (Heriot-Watt University), contrib. 159<sup>5</sup>

33. Heads of Planning Scotland also welcomed the improvements made in the drafting, but noted that it still has outstanding concerns about the drafting that could undermine the capacity of planners to deliver on the ambitions of NPF4:

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vii <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/local-gov/correspondence/2022/layingofnfpf4.pdf>

- ” There remain however, a range of policies which require revision to be more consistent and to remove anomalies. There are conflicts in several policy areas which need to be reconciled e.g. wind energy in Wild Land Areas and renewables and biodiversity.

There also clear policy conflicts across policies and although it is a matter for the decision maker to place the balance, materiality and weighting of all policies and the supporting context, clearer and consistent policies would lessen the complexity of that process. Lack of evidence to substantiate Policies, as required by LDPs, and lack of Guidance to assist implementation and interpretation. We still await LDP Guidance and therefore not able to comment on the commitments required by Planning Authorities to deliver NPF4 through our LDPs.<sup>viii</sup>

34. Heads of Planning Scotland has made specific suggestions for change in the technical appendix in its submission.<sup>ix</sup>

35. The Committee has not had the opportunity to interrogate the specific suggestions from Heads of Planning Scotland, but invites the Scottish Government to consider these suggestions. The Committee appreciates that no more changes will be made to the draft prior to Parliament being invited to approve it. Nevertheless, the Committee welcomes the Minister's assurance that further changes can be made after approval and asks that careful consideration is given to these suggestions, so we can ensure that NPF4 works as well as it possibly can. The Committee will be considering these matters as it continues to monitor NPF4.

## 20-minute neighbourhoods

36. In its report on the original draft the Committee sought greater clarity on how 20-minute neighbourhoods will be delivered, in both new and existing communities, including in rural areas where issues of population density and travel distances make such an approach difficult to realise.
37. In its response to the Committee the Scottish Government recognises the concerns expressed by the Committee and other stakeholders about the viability of 20-minute neighbourhoods in certain settings. The letter sets out a revised approach to this issue:

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viii [Written submission from Heads of Planning Scotland](#)

ix [Written submission from Heads of Planning Scotland - Appendix A](#)

” The policy on this has been substantially revised to focus on the broader terms of local living which allows for greater flexibility, particularly for rural communities. We consider 20 minute neighbourhoods to be one, but not the only, approach to achieving improved local liveability. At its most basic, this policy simply aims to ensure that planning considers the wider context of each application and seeks to improve existing places and / or create new places where daily needs can be met locally where possible. It also supports delivery of our local living and compact urban growth spatial principles. Work is ongoing to explore the application of this concept, and we have been developing draft guidance to support a better understanding of what this will mean in practice. <sup>x</sup>

38. Robbie Calvert of RTPI Scotland reflected that this approach was a vast improvement on the one taken in the original draft. He further noted that there will be more detail to come in the Local Development Plan regulations and guidance. This support was echoed by other witnesses including Dr Caroline Brown.

39. Professor Hague, however, expressed some concern about the concept of local livability, highlighting concerns expressed to him by Professor Klaus Kunzmann:

” First, Professor Kunzmann argues that a similar idea was used as a kind of political ploy by Anne Hidalgo in Paris to mobilise support. More fundamentally, though, he argues that there is a risk in putting similar people in similar neighbourhoods, because you kind of trap people. You trap poorer people in poorer neighbourhoods and wealthier people in wealthier ones, and the more that key resources get concentrated in a neighbourhood, the more that that social divide exists.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Professor Hague, contrib. 172<sup>6</sup>

40. The Committee welcomes the improvement in the definition of 20-minute neighbourhoods and notes the support expressed by stakeholders for it. The Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the approach taken by the Scottish Government to local liveability and will be keen to see the detail contained in the Local Development Plan guidance and regulations. The Committee will also be mindful of the concerns expressed to it by Professor Hague as it monitors NPF4.

## Community wealth building

41. The Committee also expressed concern in its original report about the definition of "community wealth building". While there was consensus among stakeholders that the approach to 20-minute neighbourhoods reflected an improvement, some witnesses were less convinced about the re-working of the approach to community wealth building.

42. Dr Caroline Brown noted that while there was some improvement in setting out

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<sup>x</sup> <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/local-gov/correspondence/2022/layingofnfp4.pdf>

what is meant by community wealth building in the revised draft there was still room for greater clarity although she appreciated this might come through other documents. This view was echoed by Scottish Renewables and Homes for Scotland.

43. Ailsa Raeburn of Community Land Scotland commended the Minister for the inclusion of community wealth building in NPF4, but felt that there could have been more emphasis on it in the context of new renewables development.

44. Professor Hague also stressed that Policy 26(e), on business and industry, and 27(a), on town centres, should include a requirement to demonstrate a contribution to community wealth building, to embed it through the system.<sup>7</sup>

45. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister emphasised the importance of community wealth building in town centre regeneration:

” Community wealth building—which we will have a lot more to say about in the new year—can have an important role to play in ensuring that our economies and local communities retain more wealth. That, in itself, will support vibrant and flourishing town centres.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Tom Arthur, contrib. 15<sup>8</sup>

46. From a local authority perspective Jim Miller of HOPS noted support for the expression of community wealth building in NPF4:

” North Ayrshire Council, which is my local authority, is well versed in community wealth building. There are great opportunities for community wealth building in the planning system. Maybe it is not clear from the explanatory notes and the guidance exactly how that is rolled out, but my experience in delivering those opportunities over the past two years or so in North Ayrshire has been that it is achievable and deliverable. Community wealth building is now a policy based in the NPF, so there is a statutory requirement, whereas previously it was negotiated voluntarily. I am more than content that the planning system is well placed to deliver community wealth building.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Jim Miller, contrib. 23<sup>9</sup>

47. The Committee welcomes the inclusion of community wealth building in NPF4. The evidence presented to the Committee by some witnesses would suggest, however, that there remains some uncertainty about what is meant by community wealth building. Meanwhile others have suggested that it could be embedded in other areas. The Committee will pay close regard to how NPF4 furthers the development of community wealth building.

## Drive-through developments

48. Policy 27(d) provides that "Drive-through developments will only be supported where they are specifically supported in the *LDP*." Prior to the session McDonalds

wrote to the Committee arguing that the policy "...is unnecessarily restrictive and puts at risks future investment and job creation."

49. The Committee explored these concerns with RTPI Scotland and Heads of Planning Scotland at its meeting on 22 November. Both suggested that it was not an outright ban on drive-through developments, but welcomed the high threshold it set for such developments. Jim Miller of Head of Planning Scotland explained his understanding of the policy and why he was supportive of it:

” There were headlines about banning drive-throughs. When we are thinking about net zero and reducing our carbon footprint, it strikes me that drive-throughs are something that we should oppose because we need to get people out of cars, on to public transport and into town centres. Therefore, I welcome that approach.

There was a wee bit of ridicule about the proposal and whether people would be able to pick up their shopping at the supermarket. I think that we all know what it means—we are looking to reduce the number of out-of-town drive-throughs and retail outlets.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Jim Miller, contrib. 67<sup>10</sup>

50. The Minister provided the Committee with further clarity on this policy:

” The policy is clear, and I think that, when the policy is read, its intention is straightforward to understand. As I said, I will engage with relevant stakeholders in the sector to ensure that the intent of the policy is clearly understood. I recognise that some confusion may have been caused by how it was misreported, but the policy is consistent with what we want to see in a plan-led approach.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Tom Arthur, contrib. 71<sup>11</sup>

51. The Committee welcomes the further clarity provided on the intention of this policy and notes that it is not intended to precipitate an outright ban on drive-throughs. The Committee further welcomes the Minister's commitment to work with stakeholders to ensure the policy is clearly understood and translated to local development plans.

## Development proposals for retail

52. Concerns were also expressed to the Committee about policy 28. Policy 28 provides that:

- ” c) Proposals for new small scale neighbourhood retail development will be supported where the proposed development:
- i. contributes to local living, including where relevant 20 minute neighbourhoods and/or
  - ii. can be demonstrated to contribute to the health and wellbeing of the local community.

53. Aldi wrote to the Committee suggesting that the use of the term “small scale neighbourhood retail development” is “overly prescriptive”. It suggests instead the use of the term “appropriately scaled retail development” arguing that:

- ” “This would ensure that the policy could respond to the needs of each individual community across Scotland, whilst continuing to achieve the overall objectives of NPF4.”<sup>xi</sup>

**54. The Committee has not had the opportunity to explore this suggestion further, but would welcome the Scottish Government’s reflections upon it.**

## Local Place Plans

55. Every Local Place Plan will have to “have regard” to NPF4. In its original report the Committee considered how communities could best be supported to engage and contribute to a genuine public interest led planning system.

56. Ailsa Raeburn of Community Land Scotland in evidence to the Committee stressed the importance of local place plans and of resourcing communities to properly engage with them. She noted that to date there have not been many local place plans and suggested that in some cases those plans have been ignored.

57. Liz Hamilton of Homes for Scotland expressed a willingness to engage with local place plans and recognised there is work to be done to better engage with communities.

58. The Minister in evidence to the Committee stressed how important community engagement is to the success of NPF4. In particular, he stressed the need to move from a planning system that is characterised by conflict to one that is driven by collaboration. He also gave a commitment to the Committee to look at producing a non-technical summary of NPF4 to aid with community engagement and understanding.

**59. The Committee welcomes the sentiments expressed by the Minister. The Committee strongly supports the intention to move to a collaborative rather than**

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<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/local-gov/correspondence/2022/reviseddraftnationalplanningframework4submission.pdf>

combative planning system that is driven by the ambitions of local communities. The Committee notes the Minister's willingness to look at the development of a non-technical summary of NPF4 and would strongly welcome such a document.

60. For NPF4 to succeed it is critical that communities are not only engaged in the planning process, but that their ambitions for the areas in which they live are realised. The Committee will be paying close attention to how effectively NPF4 is making a change in planning culture and fostering a public interest led planning system.

## Renewable energy developments

61. In its original report the Committee asked for greater clarity for local authorities on the delivery of renewable energy developments, including how these balance with biodiversity aims.
62. The Committee notes that the policies on renewable energy developments have been considerably re-written with a view to providing a firm basis for consistent decision making on renewable energy developments.
63. Scottish Renewables expressed strong support for the clarity provided by the re-written policies, but did highlight some concerns. Specifically it highlighted the conflict between policy 11, which recognises the need for grid reinforcement and policy 6(b), which concerns the protection of ancient woodlands. Scottish Renewables suggests that it will not be possible to make grid reinforcements without in some way impinging on ancient woodlands.
64. This issue was raised with the Minister and the Committee notes his intention to meet with stakeholders to discuss this further.
65. Bruce Wilson giving evidence on behalf of Scottish Environment LINK also raised some concerns about the policies on renewables, specifically policy 4(g):
- ” We would also like to discuss policy 4(g), and particularly the statements on wild land. I agree with Morag Watson that there is strong support for renewables in the document, but we need to make sure that that is not going to have an impact on biodiversity and nature.
- Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Bruce Wilson (Scottish Environment LINK), contrib. 90<sup>12</sup>
66. This concern about policy 4(g) was also highlighted by the John Muir Trust:
- ” As drafted Policy 4 g) i) is ambiguous and does not provide a proper test for Planning Authorities. It is therefore open to legal challenge and associated wasted time, energy and resource, if not resolved at this stage. The drafting is also at odds with the policy 4's intent, which is to 'protect, restore and enhance natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions'. This conflict between policy wording and policy purpose should be addressed.<sup>xii</sup>

xii <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/local-gov/correspondence/2022/>

67. The Committee explored this issue with the Minister who assured the Committee that there are protections in place for wild land and further emphasised the importance of taking NPF4 as a whole rather than focussing on a specific policy.
68. The Committee welcomes the significant improvements that have been made to the policies on renewables. The Committee also welcomes the Minister's commitment to continue exploring issues of concern to stakeholders. We will monitor the effectiveness of these policies and the extent to which an appropriate balance has been struck between protecting wild land and progressing the development of renewables.

## **MATHLR and HNDA**

69. In its report on the original draft of NPF4 the Committee noted the concerns of housebuilders about the Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) and asked that the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (HNDA) tool be reviewed and details provided of how MATHLR figures dovetail with the policies set out in Housing to 2040.
70. In its response to the Committee's report the Scottish Government emphasised its ongoing support for MATHLR and HNDA.
71. In evidence to the Committee Homes for Scotland argued that the HNDA tool used as the basis for MATHLR figures underestimates housing needs as it only considers a limited number of factors. Planning Democracy, however, argued that experience of the system shows that the HNDA tool overestimates housing need, requiring planning authorities to over-allocate sites for housing in Local Development Plans. Planning Democracy made clear to the Committee that this was not because of any opposition it had to building new housing, but rather that allocating land in the way currently envisaged will not contribute in the way it could to more progressive policies on climate change and biodiversity.
72. The Minister committed to keeping MATHLR and HNDA under review and to continuing to discuss them with stakeholders.
73. The Committee welcomes the Minister's willingness to continue conversations on the appropriateness of MATHLR and HNDA. The Committee itself intends to look at them in more detail too in the coming year and as it continues to monitor NPF4 and the significant challenges faced in Scotland in meeting housing needs whilst balancing the challenging around climate change and biodiversity.

## **Town centre regeneration**

74. The Committee also continued to explore concerns around how NPF4 can drive

town centre regeneration. In its original report the Committee recognised that NPF4 in of itself can not drive that change.

75. The Committee explored this ongoing issue with the Minister who recognised the role for NPF4, but noted that it was only one of many levers in regenerating town centres. The Committee also notes the work undertaken by the Economy and Fair Work Committee on this issue and will continue to consider what further work it can usefully pursue on this issue.

## Impact on self-catering sector

76. The Committee also notes the concerns expressed by the Association of Scottish Self-Caterers about policy 30 and its potential impact on the self-catering sector. The Committee will be giving careful consideration to the impact of policy 30 and the regulation of short-term lets more generally in the coming year.

## Delivering NPF4

77. In this section of the report the Committee considers not only the delivery programme itself, but what needs to be in place to give effect to it. Specifically it considers:
- The Delivery programme
  - Capital investment
  - The resourcing and upskilling of planning departments
  - Cross-Government commitment to NPF4
  - Backlog of Local Development plans
  - Transitional arrangements
  - Monitoring
78. As much as the re-drafting of NPF4 has been well received and reflects a significant improvement on the original draft, stakeholders have continued to express concerns about its overall deliverability. Professor Hague highlighted the significant challenges ahead:
- ” That said, there is still a risk that we will fall short of the aspirations. In a sense, the easy bit is writing the overarching strategy and striking the high notes. As others have said this morning, a lot more work will be needed to spell out the detail and how we will deliver.

## Delivery programme

79. During the Committee's consideration of the original draft there were widespread calls for a delivery programme to be published. The Minister, however, stressed to the Committee at the time that it would not be appropriate to produce a delivery plan until the framework had been finalised.<sup>xiii</sup>
80. The Committee is therefore pleased to welcome the production of a delivery programme.
81. Amongst others, Heads of Planning Scotland, welcomed the delivery programme. At the same time, it noted that this was the first draft of the programme and made recommendations for its improvement:
- ” HOPS recommend that the Delivery Programme includes more definitive funding commitments, a timetable for delivery and rigorous mechanisms for monitoring and assessing progress against commitments. (As we highlighted previously the NPF for the Republic Ireland has an integrated Capital Plan accompanying the NPF and this would have been a more useful approach to follow).<sup>xiv</sup>
82. Homes for Scotland and Scottish Renewables also raised concerns about the lack of detail in the delivery programme.
83. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister welcomed comments on the delivery programme and highlighted the intention to review it after six months.
84. The Committee welcomes the commitment to reviewing the delivery programme after six months and looks forward to playing its part in that process.

## Capital investment

85. Delivery of NPF4 policy ambitions is reliant on concrete action across national and local government and the private sector. RTPI Scotland suggested that to drive such co-ordinated action NPF4 should be accompanied by a Capital Investment Plan, similar to the Irish National Development Plan 2018-2027 which accompanies Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework. It suggested that at the least the priorities set out in the next iteration of the Infrastructure Investment Plan (due in 2026) should closely align with the policies set out in NPF4.
86. The Minister highlighted to the Committee that the delivery programme reflects existing investment and highlighted the importance of having flexibility in how NPF4 is funded:

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<sup>xiii</sup> Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, *Official Report*, 22 February 2022

<sup>xiv</sup> [Written submission from Heads of Planning Scotland](#)

” The delivery programme sets out the existing funding, whether it be through the infrastructure investment plan, the place-based investment programme, the vacant and derelict land investment programme, our strategic investment in transport or the investment in housing. All of that will contribute to delivering the ambitions of NPF4. Therefore, there is a range of existing investment plans with which NPF4 aligns. As those plans go on to further iterations, NPF4 will help to inform that.

That speaks to the importance of the delivery programme being a live document. As the funding landscape changes unfortunately, in the circumstances that we face, our funding landscape can be volatile as a consequence of how devolution and the fiscal framework operate? it is important to have that flexibility. However, through the delivery plan, we will be in a position to demonstrate how existing and new funding streams, as they emerge, align with the ambitions in NPF4. I recognise that there is a call for a neat, concise and specific capital investment plan to be published alongside NPF4 but, in essence, the delivery programme captures that intent.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Tom Arthur, contrib. 29<sup>13</sup>

87. The Committee notes that some stakeholders sought a capital investment plan. The Committee welcomes the Minister's explanation for why such a plan has not been provided and recognises the need for flexibility. Nevertheless, as the Committee monitors NPF4 and its delivery we will be paying close regard to whether the absence of a specific capital investment programme has in any way undermined the delivery of NPF4.

## Resourcing of planning departments

88. To provide for the kind of public interest led planning needed to deliver the ambitions of NPF4 local authority planning departments need to be properly resourced. This was a key concern throughout the Committee's scrutiny of the original NPF4 and all witnesses raised this as an issue in evidence again.
89. In its written evidence to the Committee, HOPS advocates for an urgent review of the resourcing of local authority planning departments. It welcomed the increase in planning fees, effective from the 1 April 2022, as part of this process but noted that much more investment is needed.
90. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister recognised the significance of the resourcing issue and accepted there was no quick fix to it. He highlighted that all avenues were being explored to increase the number of planners. The Chief Planner explained to the Committee about the future planners project:

” The project makes a range of practical suggestions, including a planning apprenticeship scheme and working with graduates coming into the profession to give them a rounded experience. After all, this is partly about how we retain planners in local authority services instead of seeing them move to the private sector. There is a range of issues that we can work on with the profession and with heads of planning, who are really keen to progress all this.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Fiona Simpson, contrib. 60<sup>14</sup>

91. The absence of sufficient numbers of planners appears to the Committee to be the greatest obstacle to delivery of NPF4. As the Minister recognises, there is no quick fix to this issue, but all endeavours must be made to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of planners in place to deliver on the ambitions of NPF4. The Committee will be closely monitoring the progress being made in resourcing planning departments.

## Upskilling

92. The Committee recognises that not only does there need to be a marked increase in the number of planners, but they need to have the skills to deliver on the kind of planning system envisaged in NPF4.

93. HOPS recommends that a comprehensive training and skills package, (in conjunction with Scottish Government, RTPI and HOPS) be established in the short term to reflect the new demands being placed on Planning Authorities. It also recommends that this must be properly costed and delivered within realistic timescales. The need for upskilling was also highlighted by RTPI Scotland and Scottish Environment LINK.

94. Having planners with the necessary skills to deliver on NPF4 will be essential. The Committee encourages the Scottish Government to work with HOPS, RTPI Scotland and other stakeholders to develop the necessary training. The Committee will be closely monitoring how effectively training is being made available.

## Cross-Government adoption of NPF4

95. Planning affects all aspects of Scottish Government policy. This is something that the Committee recognised in developing a cross-committee approach to scrutiny of the original draft.

96. Equally, the successful delivery of NPF4 is reliant on its policies being adopted across all arms of national and local government. It cannot be thought of as solely a planning document. The Committee notes that in Ireland Cabinet Ministers must set out how their departments intend to deliver policies set out in Project Ireland 2040:

National Planning Framework.

97. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister agreed with the Committee about the far reaching nature of planning and noted that this had been a cross-Government endeavour.

98. The Committee welcomes the Minister's recognition of the cross-cutting nature of planning. The Committee would also welcome a commitment by Cabinet Secretaries to making an annual statement to Parliament on how they have taken NPF4 into account in making policy within their departments and how this cross-Government commitment to NPF4 has been fulfilled.

## Guidance and Regulations

99. As the Minister has recognised the adoption of NPF4 is far from the end of the process. There is an urgent need for guidance on the drafting of Local Development Plans following the publication of NPF4, plus possible phasing of plan development and publication – to ensure planning stakeholders and the Scottish Government Planning and Environmental Appeals Divisions (the DPEA) are not swamped by the requirement to consider 34 draft plans within a short period of time. HOPS suggested to the Committee this could be achieved by a Chief Planner Letter to all planning authorities, which can be done almost immediately without the need for extensive consultation attached to other planning guidance. This could also avoid the potential for misinterpretation of NPF4 in the drafting of Local Development Plans.

100. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister committed to providing guidance on Local Development Plans alongside the Regulations on Local Development Plans to be laid early next year.

101. The Committee will be applying close scrutiny to the Regulations and Guidance. They must give clarity to planning authorities on how to realise the ambitions of NPF4 for Local Development Plans. The Committee will be keen to hear from planning authorities on how they are able to apply this guidance.

## Transitional arrangements

102. The Committee also notes the concerns expressed to it about the transition to NPF4. Stakeholders including HOPS suggested to the Committee there is a need for “transitional guidance”, setting out how planning applications currently within the system will be handled when NPF4 takes effect. The main issue being whether planning applications registered by that date will be considered under the existing policy framework or have to be reassessed against policies set out in NPF4.

103. Homes for Scotland also expressed concern about the absence of transitional guidance, suggesting that the industry had expected to see such guidance

accompany NPF4.

104. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister committed to providing transitional guidance shortly after the conclusion of Parliamentary consideration of the draft NPF4.

105. The Committee welcomes this commitment. The Committee intends to consider that guidance and would be keen to hear from stakeholders on whether it provides the clarity they are seeking.

## Monitoring

106. As the Committee recognised in its report on the original draft of NPF4, monitoring of NPF4 will be critical to ensuring that it meets its ambitions. The Committee is keen to understand more about the role envisaged for the planning, infrastructure and place advisory group in that monitoring. The Committee was pleased, however, to hear from the Minister about the emphasis he placed on monitoring.

107. The Committee has set out in this report a number of issues it will pay close regard to as it monitors the effectiveness of NPF4, perhaps most notably the capacity and skills within planning authorities to deliver on the ambitions of NPF4.

108. The Committee will continue to reflect on how it can best monitor the effectiveness of NPF4. The Committee, however, notes that in measuring the effectiveness of NPF4 it will not always be possible to measure that success in statistical terms. Professor Hague set out how its effect could be measured differently:

” There is a leadership role to be taken. We need high-profile statements saying how the change in the planning system is going to work—how it is about climate change, net zero and biodiversity and how that will be reflected throughout the system. If you start talking in those terms and put in monitoring indicators, as well as a key list, you can begin to turn around the image of the system being a process-driven and bureaucratic system that is impenetrable for the ordinary person and is dominated by King’s counsels and big investors. We need to show that using the planning system with local place plans will enhance local biodiversity, and that through using the planning system and the local place plan we can explore the concept of community wealth building and see local benefits. You could begin to change how such involvement is seen.

Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Professor Hague, contrib. 180<sup>15</sup>

109. The Committee welcomes this outcomes focussed approach and notes that the Minister also highlighted the comments of Professor Hague. The Committee is keen to play an integral role in the monitoring of NPF4, but will also be keen to see how the Minister’s commitment to monitoring is fulfilled. At the very least the Committee will be returning to NPF4 on an annual basis, but we recognise that NPF4 will run through so many other aspects of our work throughout the year.

## Conclusion

110. The Committee welcomes the revised draft of NPF4. It is clearly a significant improvement on the original draft and one for which the Minister and his officials should be commended. Nevertheless, this is only the beginning of the process. It is not satisfactory to simply assume that planning policy is now set for ten years and can be left as it is. We recognise that there are still elements of NPF4 that could be improved and the Minister's willingness to revisit these after adoption is to be welcomed. Of greatest concern to the Committee is that the ambitions of NPF4 will simply not be met due to a lack of planners and more specifically a lack of planners with the skills to meet the challenges of NPF4. This must be addressed with some urgency. There must also be clear cross-Government commitment to NPF4, ideally adopting a similar approach to the one taken in Ireland. Moreover it is critical that NPF4 and the planning authorities who are there to deliver it are subject to effective monitoring to ensure that the ambitions of NPF4 are actually delivered. The Committee looks forward to playing its part in that process.

- [1] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Jim Miller (Heads of Planning Scotland), contrib. 5, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445042>
- [2] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Morag Watson (Scottish Renewables), contrib. 87, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445124>
- [3] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Professor Hague, contrib. 163, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445200>
- [4] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Carrie Thomson (Scottish Government), contrib. 19, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14026&c=2446762>
- [5] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Dr Caroline Brown (Heriot-Watt University), contrib. 159, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445196>
- [6] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Professor Hague, contrib. 172, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445209>
- [7] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Professor Cliff Hague (Cockburn Association), contrib. 161, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445198>
- [8] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Tom Arthur, contrib. 15, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14026&c=2446758>
- [9] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Jim Miller, contrib. 23, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445060>
- [10] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Jim Miller, contrib. 67, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445104>
- [11] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Tom Arthur, contrib. 71, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14026&c=2446814>
- [12] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Bruce Wilson (Scottish Environment LINK), contrib. 90, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445127>
- [13] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Tom Arthur, contrib. 29, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14026&c=2446772>

- [14] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 29 November 2022 [Draft], Fiona Simpson, contrib. 60, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14026&c=2446803>
- [15] Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 22 November 2022 [Draft], Professor Hague, contrib. 180, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=14013&c=2445217>

