

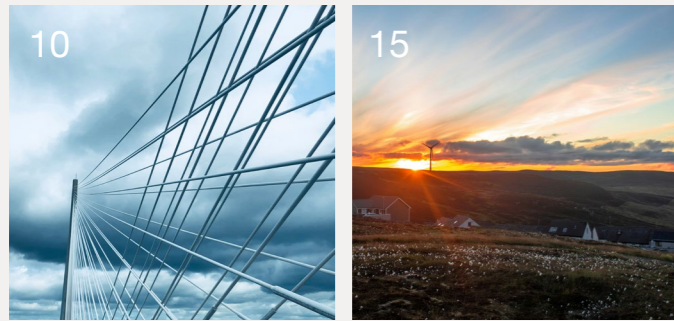
# SP

Scottish Planner

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## National Planning Framework 4: A Year on





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## EDITORIAL

WELCOME TO THE Spring issue of the Scottish Planner – albeit a little later than usual. The delay was caused by the retender process for the design of the Journal, and we are pleased to announce that we have awarded the tender to Reid Design, a local Edinburgh business. As you might expect, this brings a new approach to the look and feel of the Journal so, you may notice some changes in this issue. We hope to give the Scottish Planner a fresh look whilst still being recognisable and continuing to provide our members and stakeholders with valuable and informative news and different perspectives on a wide range of topics.

In this Issue, we focus our attention on Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework – looking back at the first year of its implementation to track our progress, our successes, and the challenges we have already faced and what is still to come in the delivery of our National Spatial Strategy and National Planning Policies. On 7 May, RTPI Scotland gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee as part of the Committee's first annual checkup of NPF4. We hope that this issue of the Scottish Planner will continue that conversation, which is so important to ensure we are on the right track to deliver on NPF4's bold ambitions.

**Jenny Munro**  
Policy, Practice and Research Officer  
Co-editor

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## CONVENOR'S COMMENT



**PAMELA CLIFFORD** MRTPI, RTPI, *Scotland Convenor, Chief Planning Officer at East Ayrshire Council, Senior Vice Chair of Heads of Planning Scotland*

# A year on from NPF4 – what does it mean?

**Pamela Clifford** MRTPI, RTPI Scotland Convenor, Chief Planning Officer at East Ayrshire Council, Senior Vice Chair of Heads of Planning Scotland, reflects on Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework over a year on from its adoption.

**I am delighted to write my first Convenor's comments and I hope you have found the monthly bulletins informative of how RTPI Scotland are taking forward the planning profession. It is good to reflect on just over one year of NPF4 and how is it embedding down both in Local Authorities, Scottish Government, Private Sector and Third Sector in this edition.**

NPF4 was adopted and published on 13th February 2023 and it became part of the Development Plan replacing NPF3 and Scottish Planning Policy. It introduced very significant changes to the status and role of the National Planning Framework – covering procedural matters relating to the production and status of the NPF but importantly addressing outcomes such as meeting housing needs of people living in Scotland, improving health and wellbeing, improving equality and eliminating discrimination and securing positive effects for biodiversity. For the first time spatial and thematic national planning policies are addressed in one place and NPF4 has the status of the Development Plan for planning purposes at a national level. I believe it is a bold, ambitious and forward-thinking policy document showing intent and national direction. The Former Planning Minister, Joe FitzPatrick MSP, at the RTPI's Scottish Young Planners' Conference (#SYPC24) encouraged 180 delegates to plan boldly. I feel strongly that Planners young and old need to be more bold and NPF4 encourages it. What have you to lose!

NPF4 is totally different from the previous three National Planning Frameworks and for the first time forms part of the statutory development plan. It is putting planning at the forefront of a powerful tool for delivering good

change on the ground. Working in a Local Authority it was quite a culture shift. For the first time, planning authorities had to interpret and apply a development plan document which they did not prepare. Different local authorities appeared to be interpreting or treating it differently as each planning authority tried to apply national policies to its own local circumstances. Through collaboration by HOPS(Scotland), RTPI and Scottish Government this is being addressed with 33 National Planning Policies being key reference points for approving or refusing planning applications Scotland wide, with many enjoying the structured approach of the policy considerations. Although, more guidance is needed in terms of certain policy aspects such as Climate Crisis and Biodiversity.

NPF4 has introduced new planning policy themes such as: Tackling the Nature and Biodiversity Crises, Community Wealth Building, Zero Waste, Local Living, and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods. However, this has put additional pressure on planning and other services that support it, such as the key agencies and other Council Services. Additional assessments are needed under NPF4 and the lack of expertise and resources

**“NPF4 is totally different from the previous three National Planning Frameworks and for the first time forms part of the statutory development plan. It is putting planning at the forefront of a powerful tool for delivering good change on the ground.”**

to review the assessments is evident. The recent Scottish Government Consultation “Investing in Planning - Resourcing Scotland's planning system” is promising. But with planning fees increasing, a more holistic approach needs to be taken forward to cover the cost of all stakeholders that support the Planning System.

With most new policy documents there is always going to be a period of adjustment and proportionality. NPF4 says the policies should be read as a whole. This requires an approach which requires all policies to be satisfied. Policy 22 provides a strong approach to flooding due to climate change but there needs to be a pragmatic solution in order that it does not undermine the other policies on town centre regeneration, use of brownfield and local living. Again, a collaborative approach is being taken forward with Scottish Government officials, SEPA and Local Planning Authorities to work towards a pragmatic solution which allows all outcomes of NPF4 to be met.

I believe that Scotland is better placed with NPF4. In my role as RTPI Scotland Convenor I get the opportunity to speak to Planning Professionals from other Nations and they certainly look towards Scotland with envy in terms of the boldness and ambition of NPF4 and national policy, and the strong collaborative working relationship with all involved in Planning in Scotland. I am looking forward to seeing the outcomes of NPF4 being delivered in the forthcoming years. **SP**



**Heather Boswell MRTPI, Consultant Planner, Environment and Sustainability, AECOM**

# Reflections of a Chief Planner of tomorrow

**Heather Boswell MRTPI, Consultant Planner, Environment and Sustainability, AECOM, reflects back on her experiences participating in the RTPI's Chief Planners of Tomorrow Initiative shadowing Pam Ewen at Fife Council.**

**When I learned about the Chief Planners of Tomorrow Initiative I was drawn by the opportunity to shadow a local authority Chief Planner. My career so far has been in the private sector, and this felt like an amazing opportunity to understand the work of those in the public sector. The initiative aims to showcase the work of Chief Planners throughout the UK to provide Young Planners with the opportunity to appreciate the roles and responsibilities involved.**

Following my successful application to the programme in May last year I was introduced to Pam Ewen, the Head of Planning Services at Fife Council in Scotland. Pam's passion for both her role in the local authority and wider planning sector quickly became apparent as I learned of her various contributions to Scottish Government planning policy, RTPI Scotland and Heads of Planning Scotland. Pam provided an overview of the service, explained her role as a Chief Planner and outlined the various meetings I would have the opportunity to attend. The programme's flexible structure enabled me to observe various board meetings and stakeholder workshops throughout the month of June.

The experience taught me a great deal. I learned about the challenges and opportunities faced by local authority planners; how eroding budgets and increasing demands were necessitating discussions around the monetisation of the planning service. Shadowing Pam, I experienced how a Head of Planning works with other service leads to investigate new funding streams which ensure the local authority continues to deliver a high quality planning service whilst managing



**"The [CPOT] initiative aims to showcase the work of Chief Planners throughout the UK to provide Young Planners with the opportunity to appreciate the roles and responsibilities involved."**

competing budgetary demands. I witnessed the associated challenges and how top level, strategic decision making is essential to maintain the Council's reputation.

I learned of Fife Council's methods of engaging with a variety of stakeholders including local organisations, businesses and the general public. Providing these groups with the opportunity to inform the development of strategies and plans empowers and engages them in the plan-making process. Therefore, I can appreciate how Fife Council ensures that the Local Development Plan accurately reflects the needs of the communities that they serve. I gained a greater understanding of the steps involved in creating a well-informed LDP, and ultimately the need to produce plans, policies and strategies which are clear, consistent and easy to follow for all members of the public.

In addition to the planning experience I gained over the course of my shadowing period, I witnessed the skills necessary to excel as a Chief Planner. Pam's communication and collaborative skills with all stakeholders were evident in each workshop and meeting. Her

leadership skills clearly created an engaged and motivated team and her passion and enthusiasm were mirrored by the various Fife Council planners I met over the course



Pam Ewen at Fife Council



**"I now have a deeper insight into the varied nature of the Chief Planner position and the roles and responsibilities this entails. It was incredibly inspiring to have the chance to engage with and learn from a variety of planning professionals and see the range of work they undertake."**

of the programme. Liaising with politicians, developers and community stakeholders, the Fife Council Planning team promote cross-sector working and ensure a consideration of place remains central to all policies, strategies and plans.

I now have a deeper insight into the varied nature of the Chief Planner position and the roles and responsibilities this entails. It was incredibly inspiring to have the chance to engage with and learn from a variety of planning professionals and see the range of work they undertake. This reinforced the importance of remaining mindful of place when addressing planning issues and ensuring that this remains central to all decision making.

In addition to the shadowing experience, participants were given the opportunity to attend a series of workshop events run by the RTPI in association with the Chief Planners of Tomorrow Initiative. I was grateful to attend the initial event in London in July where I met other Young Planners and gained further insight into

the variety of planning sectors across the UK. This workshop focused on the future of planning with the RTPI Chief Executive and 2023 President, Victoria Hills and Sue Bridge, leading the session and sharing their insights into the national direction of planning.

Discussions explored opportunities for planners to help address global challenges including rapid urbanisation, increasing flood risk and water scarcity. As the climate emergency becomes an ever more pressing issue, discussions focused on how planners can work in partnership with professionals from other sectors to drive progress. The workshop session emphasised our unique position as planners and our potential to encourage others to incorporate climate resilience and adaptation into their planning approach. The skills and experience we hold enables us to mediate between the different disciplines, allowing progression towards cross-sector solutions as we address the nature, climate and biodiversity crises. Our

responsibility to proactively apply our expertise in tackling these crises was reiterated. It was heartening to draw parallels between the planning approach I observed in Fife Council and the recommendations made at the RTPI workshop.

The workshop series continued with themes of 'best planner vs best senior manager' and 'How to work with Elected Members' addressed over subsequent weeks, providing the opportunity to engage further with other Young Planner participants and gain additional knowledge through these group sessions.

On reflection, I feel truly grateful to have been granted this opportunity. I firmly believe that I will harness the lessons learned throughout and apply them to my career going forward. The opportunity to observe a different planning sector, meet different planning professionals and engage with the planners of tomorrow has been fundamental to my learning and development and will continue to inform my practice as I progress. **SP**

? Q&A



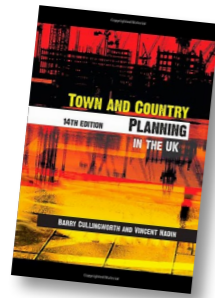
**Dr Caroline Brown** MRTPI, RTPI  
Director of Scotland, Ireland and English Regions

# Public enquiries

**Dr Caroline Brown, MRTPI, RTPI** Director of Scotland, Ireland and English Regions, answers our questions

**Q Who has been the biggest inspiration or influence on your career and why?**

Given my career in academia, it's probably not a surprise that I've picked a fellow academic – Vincent Nadin. Many folks will recognise him as the co-author of one of the staple text books about planning (Cullingworth & Nadin) but he was also my first boss at UWE, Bristol. We worked together on a lovely European research project about sustainability and planning practice – grappling with sustainability principles and planning systems in 5 European countries. As well as deepening my interest in European planning concepts, Vincent was a great advocate of comparative studies and drawing the lessons from different places and different approaches – something which I still find so useful in my work. More practically he recommended learning to touch type – and I've never regretted following that advice!



**Q What do you feel is the biggest issue facing planners and planning at the moment?**

Resourcing is a big issue, particularly in the public sector, but pretty much everyone accepts that now. So I'm going to say the biggest challenge is the evolution in planning policy and the duties of planners. I see this as the simultaneous broadening and deepening of the profession – and it's creating some fairly acute skills issues in areas such as biodiversity enhancement and carbon assessments. It's not simply that planners are being asked to take more and more topics into account in their

work, it's also that some of those new topics require quite a depth of technical knowledge and understanding. Within an under-resourced system that's a real challenge.

**Q Where do you think best exemplifies planning's role in creating great places for people?**

With a nod to Vincent Nadin and the value of comparative approaches, I'm going to say Copenhagen. It's a great city in so many ways, with lots of inspirational buildings – but the reason I've chosen it is the way in which the city authorities combine strategic planning approaches with great design details. I love the quirky play parks, continuous pavements, sinuous bridges and modern architecture as well as the strategic planning of their greenspace and cycle networks. Plus of course it's a gateway into the work and ideas of Jan Gehl.



**"I love the quirky play parks, continuous pavements, sinuous bridges and modern architecture as well as the strategic planning of their greenspace and cycle networks."**

**Q Reflecting on a year of NPF4, what is your favourite NPF4 policy and why?**



My favourite policy is policy 1: tackling the nature and climate crises. Putting climate change and biodiversity as top priority in planning decisions was a bold move, but was necessary to make sense of the Scottish Government's other targets on climate change and biodiversity. We've been talking about environmental issues for a good long while now, and this policy felt like a step change for Scottish planning. It sets a really clear direction and intention – although of course it's still a bit early to see how (or if) it will change things in practice.

**Q What are you most looking forward to achieving this year as RTPI Scotland's Director**

One of my main priorities is to coordinate efforts to recruit, train and retain young planners in Scotland, and to grow the numbers of students on accredited planning degrees. There are a lot of keen stakeholders willing to help, so I'm hopeful that we can do some good things if we work together.

## IMMATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

### An irreverent look at the world of planning...



Credit: Jacksonville.com

← **Slim Pickings**

Land is a valuable and often highly contested asset, as demonstrated recently in Florida when a neighbourhood came out in force against the relaxation of building codes to build a standard sized home on a 25ft-wide lot. However, the result was not what anyone anticipated – the construction of a slender 10ft-wide 80ft-deep home in line with the zoning laws. Referred to as a "spite house" in the numerous articles featured on this story, you can get a glimpse of the home's interior on Jacksonville.com [and assess for yourself](#).

**Need a building repair? Get out the LEGO** →

LEGO is no longer just a children's toy. From a few years ago, this article in [apartmenttherapy.com](#) shows us the potential of these small plastic construction bricks. Artist Jan Vormann has travelled the world repairing damaged walls with LEGO bricks through his Dispatchwork project, adding a bit of colour to our urban spaces.

In 2019 his work appeared at [Aberdeen's Nuart Festival](#), adding a new dimension to the street art festival that featured in our [Autumn 2023](#) edition of the Scottish Planner.



Credit: Jan Vormann / VG Bild, from 2019 article in Apartment Therapy



Credit: The Edinburgh News, February 2024

← **Give me some peace**

Need some peace? Turns out the most peaceful spot in the UK is not far away at all. After being ranked the 'noisiest' city in the UK, Edinburgh is also home to the 'most peaceful spot' according to [an article in the Edinburgh News](#) – Dr Neil's Garden. Located next to Duddingston Kirk and open to the public between March and October, this tranquil space was created by GPs Nancy and Andrew Neil in 1963 and has been giving locals and visitors who stumble across it respite from Edinburgh's hustle and bustle ever since.

**A long rest...** →

Take a trip to Scarborough for a rest on the longest railway bench in the world. Restored in 2020 through a £14,500 heritage investment, the bench is reported to be 139 metres long (or the length of 12 double-decker buses) and was constructed in 1883 to accommodate escalating tourist numbers to the area. [The Yorkshire Post featured an article](#) on the bench in 2020, which contains more interesting facts about its restoration.



Credit: The Yorkshire Post, 2020

 IN FOCUS
**DR MAY EAST**

Associate Fellow of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Member of the Advisory Board Division for People and Social Inclusion.

# What if women designed the city?

## Redistributing land use and budget allocation for equality and gendered landscapes

**Dr May East**, Associate Fellow of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Member of the Advisory Board Division for People and Social Inclusion addresses gender disparities in green space allocation, advocating for policy changes and budget allocations to create more inclusive and diverse recreational opportunities for women and girls.

**T**raditionally male competitive sports dominate the allocation of land in green spaces, compared with land dedicated for non-competitive activities. In other words, sports opportunities are not a level playing field.

Ensuring that the right to open green space is more evenly distributed, requires those who hold power within local government to measure the area dedicated to male-dominated sports, and formulate policy and planning guidelines to address the gendered imbalances in green space planning and use.

Planning guidelines could promote combining smaller-scale and larger-scale sub-zones in green spaces, better balancing multiple users and uses. Within this framework, older generations should be allocated protected, shady spaces with visual axes to more lively zones of green spaces, strengthening links of belonging and enhancing their sense of self-worth. Such an approach has been implemented in Vienna's Rudolf-Rednar-Park, designing the greenspace to include tranquil zones in the form of neighbourhood gardens, gender-balanced sports zones, areas for play and exercise for all age groups and a footpath network to allow for circular walking routes in the park.<sup>1</sup>

To transform the unequal distribution of green space, there is a need to allocate budget lines to widen the repertoires of activities catering for women's and girls' needs. This has been effectively done in Lyon – the largest French city to implement a gender-sensitive budget – ensuring, for instance, that women's sports clubs receive as many subsidies as men's.<sup>2</sup> Officials in Lyon view the gendered budget as a transformative instrument

addressing societal inequalities. In fact, there is a gender-responsive budget revolution spreading across cities in Europe. Known as *Budget-Genré* in France and *Presupuesto con Enfoque de Género* (PEG) in Spain, gender-responsive budgets adopt principles for gender equality as a framework for making decisions in all phases of the budget cycle.

Former US President Barack Obama asserted that a budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values.<sup>3</sup> The participatory budgeting

**“To make green spaces equally inviting for and engaged in by women, there is a need to challenge the rules of the system (and those who hold them).”**

methodology invented in Porto Alegre and since adopted in many cities around the world,<sup>4</sup> is a manifestation of genuine citizen engagement, prioritising what is needed and meaningful at their local level. To make green spaces equally inviting for and engaged in by women, there is a need to challenge the rules of the system (and those who hold them). We can do this by measuring the amount of land dedicated to competitive sports addressing the inequities we find, and putting budgets to work to reflect the values of gendered landscapes that widen the space and repertoires of physical activities available for women and girls.

This has been successfully done in Umeå,

Sweden, which is recognised as a model city for gender-responsive urban planning and mobility. Umeå promotes collaboration between the municipality and groups of girls, resulting in its exemplary 'gendered landscape', supporting young girls to take their place confidently in the public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

The above is further explored in the book *What if Women Designed the City?* This book emerges from a unique perspective on urban development as seen through the eyes of women from different countries and diverse backgrounds who reveal multiple untapped potentials rooted in the uniqueness of their neighbourhoods. It is grounded in research conducted through walking interviews with 274 women seen as experts in their neighbourhoods from both affluent and hard-to-reach areas in three Scottish cities: Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Perth.

Embedded in the richness of women's everyday lives in the city, the results are organised in 33 leverage points understood as places in a complex system where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything. One of them is related to how we create the context for what we measure.

Participants of my research declared that the future depends on cooperation between decision-makers and communities. Cooperation in this context refers to designing to increase rather than limit women, girls, and children's options in green spaces. It includes designing to support less confident groups – young girls, people with health conditions or impairments, and the elderly – to stake a claim to their green areas. **SP**

*Scottish Planner readers can enjoy a 30% discount by using the promotional code RTP130 (case sensitive) when ordering [What if Women Designed the City](https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/lyon-to-adopt-the-first-gender-budget-in-france-7393), directly from publisher Triarchy Press.*

<sup>1</sup>Damyjanovic, D., Reinwald, F., & Weikmann, A. (2013). Manual for Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Urban Development. Urban Development and Planning. The City of Vienna.

<sup>2</sup>Dimitrova, A. (2021). Lyon to adopt the first "gender budget" in France. The Mayor EU. [online] Available at: <https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/lyon-to-adopt-the-first-gender-budget-in-france-7393>

<sup>3</sup>Obama, B. (2016). The Budget Message of the President. Office of the Press Secretary. The White House.

<sup>4</sup>De Sousa Santos, B. (1998). Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a Redistributive Democracy. *Politics & Society*, 26(4), pp. 461-510.

<sup>5</sup>Gustafsson, L. (2017). Umeå – Gender equality at the heart of the city. URBACT EU. [online] Available at: <https://www.blog.urbact.eu/2017/12/umea-gender-equality-at-the-heart-of-the-city/>

 IN PRACTICE
**JENNY WOOD**

Co-founder and Co-director of Policy and Research at A Place in Childhood (APiC)

**ANNA GAFFNEY**

Board Director and Policy and Project Manager at A Place in Childhood (APiC)

# Co-creating plans with children and young people

**Jenny Wood**, Co-founder and Co-director of Policy and Research, and **Anna Gaffney**, Board Director and Policy and Project Manager at A Place in Childhood (APiC) explore the integration of children and young people's voices in town planning, highlighting the importance of engaging youth in local place projects.

**T**own planning as a practice has struggled to fully integrate the voices of children and young people across plans and decision-making. NPF4, however, has set an exciting new direction for children and planning. It has also come at the same time that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is being incorporated into Scottish law.

A right for children and young people to be engaged in the development of Local Development Plans, and also for statutory Play Sufficiency Assessments, are part of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. Meanwhile, the introduction of Local Place Plans provides further local-level opportunities for child and youth involvement. Furthermore, NPF4 takes a strategic focus on local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods, as part of improving communities for more people and adapting to climate change. It has thus never been more important, and more fruitful, to engage directly with children and young people on local place projects.

At APiC, our work is about bringing children's and young people's voices into the decisions that affect them, with a particular

**“Engaging children and young people in the planning process thus offers the opportunity to understand a place from both the perspective of its most vulnerable but also most present experts.”**

focus on place-making. We have recently completed The Children and Teenagers Neighbourhood Project where we worked with children and teenagers in five different local authorities to co-create 5 unique neighbourhood plans. These have been match-funded through Paths for All's Smarter Choices, Smarter Places Programme. These plans identify the key needs of each place and are now being taken forward in several different ways. We have also published a 'How to' Guide to support others enacting the process. You can find this on our website.

To highlight what this looked like, we focus on our work with Falkirk Council, where we collaborated with approximately 60 children and teenagers in the Bainsford and Langlees neighbourhood. We undertook experiential mapping exercises, and developed key priorities for action, which focused on:

- What was good,
- What could be better; and
- What specifically needs to change to make it a better place for children and young people?

The finalised plan highlights many positive aspects of living in the area which include access to nature; opportunities to walk and cycle; and appreciation of local heritage, with children and teenagers keen to preserve and showcase these vital attributes of their place. However, the plan also identified fast-moving traffic, damaged play equipment, lack of welcoming space for teenagers, and litter. These issues will tell a familiar story to any placemaking professional.

To galvanise action on their priorities, we coordinated a Showcase Event which invited council and community stakeholders to speak directly with the children and teenagers, who



Falkirk High



Bainsford Primary School

explained what mattered to them most. This created a route to trustful dialogue across generations. Additionally, professionals and wider community stakeholders met each other and could discuss alignment in their work for achieving the needs of people in a specific place.

As a cross-disciplinary practice, both place-making and town planning require the coordination of many different voices, ideas, and priorities. In a time of depleted budgets and intensifying pressure, a real challenge exists for local authorities to deliver change on the ground. We therefore need efficient partnership-working and relationships that build mutual trust and confidence. This is impossible to achieve in a context of silo thinking, stop-start funding, tick-box engagement, parachuting consultants, and ever-shifting partners, teams, and roles.

However, children and teenagers do not typically leave their neighbourhoods without adult supervision, and often their schools are locally based. Engaging children and young people in the planning process thus offers the opportunity to understand a place from both the perspective of its most vulnerable but also most present experts. Who better to start with when looking to plan our places? **SP**

## ARTICLE



**FIONA SIMPSON MRTPI**  
Scottish Government Chief Planner

# Scottish Government perspective on National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

**Fiona Simpson MRTPI**, Scottish Government Chief Planner, reflects on the implementation of NPF4 in Scotland, examining its impact on planning practices, highlighting key challenges and priorities for the future, and emphasising the need for collaboration and adaptation.

**A**dopting NPF4 in February 2023 was a decisive moment for planning in Scotland – a moment when we collectively committed to doing all we could to tackle the challenges our society faces.

For the first time, our national plan forms part of the statutory plan – as supported by parties across the Scottish Parliament during the debate on the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. It is this status, and its application to decision-making, which sets NPF4 apart from its predecessors and gives us an exceptional opportunity to make the Scottish planning system far more accessible, consistent, and predictable for its users.

## Looking back – a year of NPF4 in practice

When NPF4 was adopted, we were excited about the prospect of positive change and its ambition for Scotland to be a sustainable, liveable, and productive place. We also anticipated

that there would be a need for patience and cooperation to implement the strategy and policies in practice. We have since kept a watching brief on the implementation of NPF4 and have worked with stakeholders to identify what's working well, and what may benefit from further clarification. It takes quite some time to fully understand the impact of any change to planning policy, given construction timescales. However, we are already learning a lot about what's working, and about those issues that may benefit from further collaboration, guidance, or adjustment in the future.

Our initial focus has been on how the thirty-three policies in NPF4 are working in practice. It is inevitable that their application will vary depending on the circumstances, and decisions are ultimately unique to each case.

Many of the policies are now being regularly applied with little comment or debate, perhaps because the drafting of NPF4 drew on best practice policies which have long featured, albeit with slightly different wording, in local development plans throughout Scotland.

However, some policies, particularly those which are seeking to break new ground and achieve a more significant shift, have understandably generated higher levels of discussion. These policies will continue to be a focus for monitoring and support in the coming months:

- **Policies 1, 2 and 3 relate to the core priorities for NPF4: the climate and nature crises.** We published guidance on biodiversity last year and have commissioned NatureScot to develop an adapted biodiversity metric suitable for use in supporting the delivery of policy 3b). Draft guidance on climate change, which builds on wide-ranging existing approaches, is currently in preparation and will be informed by independent research.
- **Policy 11 focuses on energy and there will continue to be significant pressures on the system arising from new and different technologies and the pace of development required.** Over the year, we have supported the Onshore Wind Sector Deal and Scotwind. We have also engaged with communities who have multiple applications in their area and will reflect on this to help guide good practice. Community benefit has also been discussed and we expect to see more on this in the forthcoming energy strategy this summer.
- **Policy 16 sets out a new approach to planning for housing.** This has been the subject of extensive debate, and a legal challenge. We will take stock of the outcome of that case to determine how

best to ensure the policy can be effectively operated in practice. In the meantime, our focus is on building positive co-operation between planning and housing delivery partners. We are also aware that Policy 17 on rural homes is being applied in different ways, and we will continue to work with partners to ensure that the intent of growing rural communities guides its application in practice.

- **Policy 22 on flooding is generating debate.** Evidence shows that more areas are experiencing increased flood exposure and there is uncertainty in how these risks will continue to develop over time. It will be for decision-makers to weigh these risks together with wider priorities including town centre regeneration and the reuse of existing properties. This is likely to be a key challenge for planning to continue to grapple with in the coming years, and we are discussing with SEPA and Heads of Planning Scotland where there may be scope for further clarification and new solutions which can help us to navigate a practical way forward.

“...we should be proud that NPF4 has been internationally recognised as a ground-breaking example of strong and decisive spatial planning”

## Looking forward – priorities over the coming year

The NPF4 spatial strategy has a crucial role to play in guiding planning at a regional and local level. This includes, most significantly in the coming years, new style local development plans that will be able to rely on the single, consistent, policy framework provided by NPF4 and focus instead on local place-based policy. Plans will be supported by delivery programmes which can be used [to actively manage the pipeline of land for development. We are therefore supporting authorities, to help ensure the spatial vision in NPF4 is developed and carried forward to the local level.

By giving more leverage to the planning system to achieve our national outcomes, we are aware that there will be more demands on the time and skills of local authority planners and a greater need to work together with applicants to achieve better outcomes. We are also conscious that there has been a decline in planning authority capacity for some years.

We are working on improving resourcing for planning authorities as a priority, with a consultation exploring options for smarter ways of working, as well as increased fees and charges to help us move closer to full cost recovery.

In the autumn we will again update the NPF4 delivery programme to show the progress that we have made and identify future priorities. Many of the short-term commitments have already been delivered and others are in progress. For example, we currently have live consultations on regulations for Masterplan Consent Areas and procedures for amending the NPF and LDPs which will further improve the flexibility of the planning system. Work on Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) reform is now underway, and we expect to commence early engagement to inform our approach to the introduction of regulations for an infrastructure levy soon. These important changes will provide planning authorities with further tools to actively enable good quality development by working in partnership with the development sector.

## Some reflections

The transition to applying the NPF4 policies in the first year has undoubtedly created some short-term demands on planners throughout Scotland, as well as applicants – it is not unexpected that such a bold and ambitious agenda for change will stretch our skills and generate debate. But we also expect that these challenges will continue to subside as our collective experience and confidence grow and the policies become a more familiar part of the system.

The world has continued to evolve since NPF4 was published. Key challenges, including the cost-of-living crisis, the slow recovery of the construction sector, rising development costs and emerging evidence on the impact of climate change, have underlined the need for planning to flex and respond to short-term challenges, whilst also maintaining a steady course towards realising long-term goals including our net zero ambition.

Whilst we can tend to underplay our achievements in Scotland, we should be proud that NPF4 has been internationally recognised as a ground-breaking example of strong and decisive spatial planning. It is a product of positive collaboration, and over the last year, we have been encouraged by the continuing sense of shared responsibility for, and commitment to, its delivery. We will only unlock the opportunity that NPF4 gives us to build the strength and predictability of the Scottish planning system, improve investor confidence, and benefit people and places throughout Scotland if we continue to work together effectively. **SP**



**JOHANNA BOYD**  
Chief Executive of Planning Aid Scotland

# Planning for Scotland's communities: NPF4 and reflections one year on

**Johanna Boyd**, Chief Executive of Planning Aid Scotland, examines the opportunities and challenges of Scotland's NPF4 so far, as well as its impact on decision-making and community planning.

**T**he National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) must contribute to six key outcomes for Scotland, including meeting housing needs (particularly for older and disabled people), improving health and wellbeing, increasing the rural population, improving equality and eliminating discrimination, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting biodiversity.

These are roughly translated into the six overarching spatial principles set out at the start of NPF4 that guide everything that follows in the document: just transition, conserving and recycling assets, local living, compact urban growth, rebalanced development, and rural revitalisation.

NPF4's ability to meaningfully deliver toward these outcomes and spatial principles will be the metric by which we ultimately assess its effectiveness. However, just over one year from its publication in February 2023, it is still too early to ascertain its impact with any degree of

certainty. It is more useful perhaps to consider some of the context and processes behind the implementation of the Framework and where these may lead us in terms of delivery.

"NPF4's ability to meaningfully deliver toward these outcomes and spatial principles will be the metric by which we ultimately assess its effectiveness. However, just over one year from its publication in February 2023, it is still too early to ascertain its impact with any degree of certainty."

## Influence on decision-making

How NPF4 will impact, and guide development is already facing significant scrutiny. Appeals and challenges concerning policy 16 (f) and housing allocation have resulted in significant tension between existing (old-style) LDPs and NPF4. With the provision of affordable housing remaining high on the planning agenda, the early resolution of these matters remains critical.

The early impact of NPF4 can also be seen in recent planning decisions based upon new policies contained within NPF4 (such as 20-minute neighbourhoods (policy 15) and Town Centre First (policy 27)), highlighting the finely balanced nature of NPF4 compliant decisions (see two recent planning decisions concerning Aldi stores in the Perth & Kinross Council area). If the mandatory outcomes NPF4 is required to realise are to be achieved, training will be key for robust and defensible decisions to be taken. This is particularly so given that NPF4 is not a 'home-grown' document for either officers or elected members.

## Communities and NPF4

In terms of enquiries to our Advice Service, many individuals and community groups have a developing awareness of the central importance of NPF4 to planning decision-making.

In addition, we are experiencing a continued rise in the number of communities looking to find out about and (potentially) embark upon producing a Local Place Plan (LPP), with an associated requirement that the LPP has regard to NPF4. To that end, we are continuing to develop our training and support for community groups and planning authorities (including a specific training module on understanding NPF4) to better meet that growing demand.

While it is encouraging to see such a number of communities moving to create their own LPPs, we are also mindful of our values at Planning Aid Scotland around advocating for inclusive participation as an educational charity. Indeed, one of the six outcomes of NPF4 required by law (to increase equality and eliminate discrimination) invites reflection on how we can all strive to make the LPP process as inclusive and accessible as possible to all communities. The current risk is that we progress with a two-tiered system: communities with significant existing resources find the LPP process more accessible to them and are better positioned and funded to deliver an LPP, whereas disadvantaged communities without the same resource approach an LPP from a very different starting point (or don't consider one at all).

Our aspiration this time next year is to see a rebalancing of the equation when it comes to which communities are preparing and submitting Local Place Plans. The monitoring and evaluation of whether the outcome is related to improving equality and eliminating discrimination will be key to this. Preparing an LPP is an opportunity which is, in principle, open to any and all communities. We hope to see LPPs coming forward that represent the diversity of Scotland's communities – and in doing so, contribute towards meeting NPF4's required outcomes.

## Resourcing the planning system

An off-heard refrain throughout the recent process of planning reform concerns the adequate resourcing of the system. Without a sufficient level of resources for planning authorities to attract and retain the experienced officers they need, as well as sufficient funding for internal and statutory consultees, the implementation and effectiveness of NPF4 will be challenging, if not outright impossible. **SP**



**AMY BRISTOW**  
Planning Officer at  
East Ayrshire Council

# One year of NPF4 - Reflections from a young planner

**Amy Bristow**, winner of the 2022 RTPI Early Career Researcher Award and Planning Officer at East Ayrshire Council, discusses the transformative impact of NPF4 on planning in Scotland, and the challenges and opportunities it presents for planners in shaping a sustainable future.

**W**hen the finalised NPF4 was first adopted back in 2023, the strong focus on tackling the climate crisis marked a bold shift in national planning policy, one that was much needed given the increasing challenges facing our world. The aims of NPF4 place a clear emphasis on enhancing planning's contribution to a more sustainable future, and for those of us starting in the profession I am sure this timely intervention will do much to shape our work and career direction as we move into a new, greener era for planning. After all, we need to secure the future of a planet on which to plan!

One of the most interesting changes brought about by NPF4 pertains to Policy 3 and the requirement to ensure that developments achieve biodiversity enhancement. Implementing this policy will not be without its challenges, particularly within major developments, and upcoming guidance on this will be welcomed by planners looking to get the most out of this ambitious new policy. In the meantime, seeing how it has been utilised so far on a local scale to increase planting, habitat creation and species diversification in smaller developments gives me plenty of hope for the improvements that this policy could bring about for Scotland's urban areas going forward.

A second main change within NPF4 is the new, more stringent, requirements surrounding development in areas of flood risk, as detailed under Policy 22. This means that there are now some urban areas that will not be developable, based on the increased climate change uplift applied to future flood

risk. For some proposed regeneration areas in particular, new solutions will need to be found that can work with nature rather than against it. On the surface, this presents a major challenge for planners. However, it could also pose an exciting opportunity to think outside of the box when it comes to securing a more sustainable future for our towns and cities – perhaps we may even see the creation of more urban parks and green spaces in the future, to counteract the effects of surface water flooding.

At East Ayrshire Council, our Local Development Plan 2 was adopted on 8 April 2024. This is an 'old-style' plan, but underwent Examination after the adoption of NPF4, making it one of the first plans in Scotland to broadly align with the new national policy. We will, however, soon start work on our LDP3 under the provisions of the 2019 Planning Act, and I am looking forward to seeing how we can build on the positive work within LDP2 to secure an even more resilient, climate-ready future for East Ayrshire.

One question that remains is whether there is enough resource within the planning sector in Scotland to deliver on all of the ambitious goals within NPF4 – local authority staff numbers continue to decrease, whilst the asks of planners continue to increase. For now, those of us working in Scotland's Councils will continue to add new strings to our bows, as the definition of what it means to be a planner expands with the introduction of NPF4. It is an exciting time to be a young planner in Scotland; though the future of the built environment may remain uncertain, whatever direction it takes, we can be sure that we will have an important role to play in it. **SP**



 **ARTICLE**


**DUNCAN MACLENNAN** CBE FRSE FASS HonMRTPI MCIH (Hon) MRICS (Hon) is Emeritus Professor of Urban Economics at the University of Glasgow, Visiting Professor in Housing Economics at the City Futures Research Centre at UNSW (Sydney) and Adjunct Professor in Housing Economics at McMaster University and Special Adviser to the First Ministers of Scotland from 1999-2003.

# Planning after a quarter century of Devolution: Time for reflections

**Duncan MacLennan** CBE FRSE FASS HonMRTPI MCIH (Hon) MRICS (Hon) discusses Scotland's new policy framework, highlighting the need for coherent strategic planning to achieve net zero targets.

**T**he development of Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) continues as the Scottish Parliament reaches its 25th anniversary.

Scotland has a strong tradition of planning innovation and action through the successes of the New Towns, regeneration programs such as GEAR, Glasgow's Merchant City, the strategic planning of Strathclyde Region and actions across all Scotland's towns and rural areas, most notably the emergence of the Highlands and Islands Development Board in the 1950s. These all reflected a 'spatially aware' approach that had confidence in strategic spatial planning at local to national scales.

Such a tradition of planning and delivery continued into the devolved Parliament. Between 1999-2003, I served as Special Adviser to First Ministers. At that time spatial planning was a key player with housing associations in delivering wider neighborhoods' action and addressing the social justice agenda. Planning was also involved in the Review of Scotland's Cities, and in shaping the Cities Development Grant. Scottish and local government planning officials understood what constituted 'good' neighbourhood and city functioning and what was required to deliver better place outcomes. Actions were shaped by great city-planning thinkers such as Sir Robert Grieve, Gordon Cameron and David Donnison, and their ideas remain as the vintage content in the old bottle relabeled as '20-minute neighbourhoods, 'community wealth' and 'inclusive growth'. The only substantive change between 1999 and now is the urgent need to reach net zero. Targets cannot be achieved by rules alone but require signposts and route guidance. As part

of the imminent Holyrood Jubilee, we should be celebrating 'Planning' but we are not. Why?

After 2008, the Scottish Government largely disowned the previous urban policy framework. Planning staff in Councils almost halved between 2008 and 2020 with planning policy resources and powers increasingly centralised to Holyrood. Councils were no longer required to develop strategic spatial plans and spatially interested quangos were scrapped or shrunk. The Scottish Futures Trust was not required, whilst shaping infrastructure delivery, to envision the future locus of the Scottish

economy. While the Scottish Cities Alliance provided some strategic promise, this quickly deteriorated into a marketing tool for Scottish cities. Regional Economic Partnerships lacked core budgets and statutory powers and had action boundaries unaligned with those of the multiple change partner agencies. Strategic, spatial economic planning for major places needs the coordination of infrastructure, planning and economic policies on how they might be melded to deliver net zero and prosperity. Remarkably, after a decade of major City Deals, neither of the metropolitan areas around Glasgow and Edinburgh have a strategic infrastructure plan nor a spatial economic strategy.

Such a lack of connectedness and absence

of coherent strategy is inherent in the UK Climate Change Committee's critique of the Scottish Government's failure to meet their ambitious net-zero targets. Other reports, such as 'Our Scottish Futures' on regional/metropolitan policy and Edinburgh Airport's critique of the lack of coherent aviation, economic and planning strategies, highlight failings in delivering net zero action due to poor strategic thinking. 'Place-based' action is promoted to achieve net zero goals, but these must include strategies that best shape the economic geographies of Scotland that will ensure prosperity as well as sustainability.

NPF4 is now being re-engineered. This should include clear signposting on how to reshape the future of Scotland's spatial economy to meet net zero. It should also refocus its spatial basis on Regional Economic Partnerships and give new attention to the strategic mobility systems that connect Scottish cities and the wider world. Scotland's promotion of 'thinking small' is commendable but it must promote more than neighbourhood

place principles and give new attention to the wider geographies at which housing, labour markets and bigger infrastructure systems cohere and that create new city forms to meet the net zero mission. This is a challenge at a time when municipalities are strapped of cash, stripped of planning staff, and lack political experience in making major strategic decisions.

It is good that Councils will have a Chief Planning Officer and planning has significant leadership from The Improvement Service. However, the Parliament's politicians in the next crucial 25 years must recognise spatial patterns within their plans that support resource allocation geographies to serve the future not the past. Such plans need better realistic missions that address 'big and long' rather than merely 'short and small' place changes. Applying informed strategies will restore credibility for the National Planning Framework and the spatial governance reputations of Scottish governments. For planning, in the language of the Parliament, this is 'Time for Reflection' and not a celebration. **SP**

"...the Parliament's politicians in the next crucial 25 years must recognise spatial patterns within their plans that support resource allocation geographies to serve the future not the past."

 **ARTICLE**


**ROBERT PORTMAN** MRTPI  
Convenor of RTPI Highland and Islands Chapter and Planning Officer, Development Plans Services at Shetland Island Council

# Shetland's approach to the implementation of NPF4



**Robert Portman** MRTPI, Convenor of RTPI Highlands and Islands Chapter and Planning Officer, development Plans Services at Shetland Island Council, discusses the implementation of NPF4 in Shetland in the context of its unique housing traditions and rural characteristics.

**M**uch of NPF4's implementation here in Shetland has revolved around how to apply the key concepts of national policy to our islands' unique regional characteristics and development patterns. Applying NPF4 in a way that is compatible with Shetland's distinct features will be crucial to its future success in contributing positively to the planning environment here. Being able to view such a wide-reaching document in the round has been appreciated as pivotal in interpreting national policy concepts over the past year.

Shetland has a vital and sustained tradition of individual housebuilding, coming through to the local authority as unallocated individual dwelling applications. Such windfall development has historically been critical to the supply of housing beyond the central settlement areas in and between Scalloway and Lerwick. A large proportion of the population resides in remote and rural areas in a Shetland context, with the entire island group being 'very remote

rural' in the wider definition of settlement patterns in Scotland. To meet future housing needs, particularly those in outlying localities and islands, windfall is expected to continue to play a pivotal role.

In this light we've seen Policy 16 of NPF4, particularly paragraph F, create challenges in how it interplays with Shetland's housebuilding tradition, and this has been one of the main features of application casework over NPF4's first year of use. Policy 17 (rural homes) is also part of this picture, where it supports and

"To meet future housing needs, particularly those in outlying localities and islands, windfall is expected to continue to play a pivotal role".

sustains existing fragile communities and local housing outcomes. As aforementioned, NPF4's viewing as a complete document rather than its policies being individual and prescriptive enables its adaptability to a Shetland context and support by rural housing policy is key to the future of this.

Another potential nuance associated with having a significant proportion of housing stock being met by single-house developments is how Policies 1 and 2 of NPF4 are approached for such proposals. Identifying and mitigating the cumulative climate impact of repeated applications for individual dwellings is a challenge. Much of Shetland resides on peat and with 'significant weight' being applied to the first two policies of NPF4, we anticipate the potential for further policy refinement of these policies to the local characteristics of communities within large regions of our local authority area.

Our next Local Development Plan will have to look at 20-minute neighbourhoods and local living within Shetland's own distinct context. Some of the potential approaches to this were outlined in the Shetland case study within the Scottish Government's consultation draft on Local Living and 20-minute neighbourhoods. Shetland covers a relatively large area for its population size, with journey distances extending way above 20 minutes for most beyond the larger settlements. A strict read on local living would have a significant and unbalanced impact on outlying areas, much of which are supported by new dwellings and their would-be residents enabling the ongoing operation and viability of local businesses, services such as schools and other community facilities.

Therefore, the culture and settlement pattern here is more likely to work with such concepts as locality hubs, where services can be collated to reduce the extent and frequency of journeys, rather than expecting a complete change in the development pattern and means by which housing stock comes forward. People in Shetland will likely continue to be reliant on the car to reach certain services, but the Local Development Plan can seek to reduce the extent of this reliance and consequential journey times. In doing so Shetland has the potential to respond to climate and nature crises, while also maintaining the strength, vitality, and character of all its distinct localities. **SP**



## ARTICLE



**KEVIN MURPHY MRTPI**  
Head of Planning at Homes for Scotland

# NPF4 – how did we get here and where do we go next?

**Kevin Murphy MRTPI**, Head of Planning at Homes for Scotland, highlights the need for collaboration, interim planning guidance, and addressing resource constraints to meet housing needs amid declining planner numbers.

**NPF4 and the new development plan structure is the response to an independent panel review of the planning system. This identified six key outcomes to guide planning reform:**

1. Strong and flexible development plans
2. The delivery of more high-quality homes
3. An infrastructure-first approach to planning and development
4. Efficient and transparent development management
5. Stronger leadership, smarter resourcing and sharing of skills
6. Collaboration rather than conflict – inclusion and empowerment

At the time of writing, and against the backdrop of a decline in the number of residential planning applications but increased processing times and a fall in site starts, six Local Authorities have declared housing emergencies with more anticipated.

NPF4 prevails over the majority of Local Development Plans (LDPs) in Scotland and the interpretation of its policies is key to delivering the homes of all tenures required to meet the housing needs and aspirations of all those who live here. However, we very much remain in a state of transition. Guidance on 'Local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods' has only recently been published and 'Biodiversity' guidance is still awaited following consultation. Furthermore, the first LDPs are not anticipated until c2027. In the meantime, the Mossend legal challenge regarding the interpretation of NPF4 and its interaction with local development plans is being considered. This has implications for the delivery of 3,800



"Ultimately, we all want to be delivering more homes for Scotland so opportunities to collaborate with willing partners should be welcomed."

homes across the country which have been sisted pending the outcome.

Based on existing timetables, some new LDPs won't be in place for another 3-5 years. In one case, at the time of intended adoption, the LDP will be 13 years old. Given acknowledged resource constraints there may be further slippage in delivering the new system. To address this in the short term, it

is suggested that the Scottish Government prepare national interim planning guidance for unallocated sites where there is a systemic shortfall in the effective housing land supply and demonstrated need. This will ensure, as the independent panel advised, that we have a flexible development plan that responds to immediate issues.

Secondary guidance aside, collaboration is key to implementing the new system. The system is new to all of us, public and private sector alike. We all want the new system to work, and planning authorities will, over the next few years, start to create a plethora of new processes, templates etc. Rather than each planning authority creating 34 different versions with limited resources, why not set up public and private sector project teams for specific shared pieces of work or utilise existing templates? Homes for Scotland for example has prepared draft guidance on Housing Land Audits and Site Assessments. Ultimately, we all want to be delivering more homes for Scotland so opportunities to collaborate with willing partners should be welcomed. In theory, working together should also result in less disputes later in the process.

If there are insufficient allocated, or deliverable, sites available for development between now and when the new LDPs are in place, it will drive up the value of the remaining sites at a time when development costs have increased, and finance has become more difficult to obtain. Given that very few new NPF4-compliant LDPs will be approved in the next 3-4 years, the supply of new housing will be reduced where there is a reduced supply of land resulting in higher land prices, higher house prices and reduced affordable housing delivery. The interim planning guidance referred to above is a potential mechanism to ensure the continued delivery of much needed new homes in Scotland.

The RTPI has identified that the number of planners in Scotland has fallen by 9.5% in the past five years and that almost 40% of the workforce is over 50. Delivering a new system with 49 unfunded duties and fewer planners will be challenging, especially when Planning is already the most underfunded department across all local authorities.

There is no silver bullet but we're all in this together and need to collaborate to deliver the new system and the homes people need across the country. **SP**

## ARTICLE



**NEIL COLLAR LARTPI**  
Head of Planning Law at Brodies LLP

# NPF4 and renewables

**Neil Collar LARTPI**, Head of Planning Law at Brodies LLP examines the impact of NPF4 on renewable energy development, highlighting shifts in policy interpretations and uncertainties regarding biodiversity enhancement requirements.

**NPF4 has had a big impact on renewable energy development. Early on, that was seen in reporter recommendations which changed from refusal to approval (e.g., Shepherds' Rig wind farm), and in withdrawal of planning authority objections.**

Key changes are localised landscape and visual impacts no longer being reasons for refusal, and the removal of the restriction on renewable developments in wildland areas.

## Support for renewables

More recently, two battery storage decisions (Shetland, Devilla) show the significant support given to renewable energy development. In each, the Ministers concluded the development was supported by NPF4 when read as a whole, despite non-compliance with the policy 3 requirement for biodiversity enhancement. That is a much more powerful statement than

the alternative of granting permission as a departure from the development plan.

In contrast, an appeal reporter (Garcrogo) refused permission because of the lack of evidence of biodiversity enhancement, noting that Policy 1 gives significant weight to both the global climate and nature crises.

These conflicting approaches suggest there is a need for guidance from the Ministers on how they intend the biodiversity enhancement requirement to be applied to renewable energy developments.

## Uncertainties

New policies inevitably mean an element of uncertainty. For example, the Wildcat Haven judicial review involved a dispute about the approach to the mitigation hierarchy required by policy 3. The consent – for the Clashindarroch II wind farm – was upheld, but an appeal has

been submitted to the Inner House of the Court of Session.

There is also uncertainty about the extent to which consent conditions are justified by NPF4 policies. In the Shetland decision, the Ministers concluded it was not necessary or justified to impose a condition requiring biodiversity enhancement, because of the lack of adverse ecological impact.

For the Bunloinn wind farm, the planning authority proposed two conditions seeking to guarantee economic/ financial benefits, picking up the reference in policy 11c) to maximise net economic impact. The conditions were rejected by the Scottish Ministers, because of the references to setting up of a scheme for community benefit, which they did not consider is a material consideration.

## Refusals

Of course, the strong support in NPF4 does not mean that consent will always be granted.

Landscape and visual impacts can still be unacceptable: in the Narachan decision, the Ministers decided that the benefits of the project did not outweigh the adverse effects of the aviation lighting on the special qualities of the North Arran National Scenic Area; consent for the Clauchrie wind farm was refused because of the detrimental visual impacts on The Merrick, a very important visual receptor in South-West Scotland.

Two projects have been refused consent because of the impact on cultural heritage assets (Lethen, Sheirdrim).

Except for Garcrogo, the decisions mentioned in this article were made by Scottish Ministers on section 36 applications (projects exceeding 50MW). The decisions illustrate how the Ministers are applying their own policies in NPF4. Local councillors may apply those policies differently, and refuse permission or object to a section 36 project – it will be interesting to see how many of those refusals/ objections will be upheld.

## Comment

NPF4 refers to ensuring the right development happens in the right place. The Ministers' decisions show NPF4 policies recognise renewables are the "right development". The decisions also show it is still about "location, location, location", although a less restrictive approach is taken to assessing the "right place". **SP**



 **ARTICLE**


**IAN AIKMAN MRTPI**  
Chief Planning Officer at Scottish Borders Council and Chair of Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS)

# A Local Planning Authority perspective on the challenges and opportunities of implementing Scotland's new National Planning Framework

**Ian Aikman MRTPI**, Chief Planning Officer at Scottish Borders Council and Chair of Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS), discusses the significant changes brought by the National Planning Framework 4 and the efforts of HOPS to ensure successful implementation and address challenges in policy interpretation and guidance.

**My term as Chair of Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) has coincided with the most significant change in planning policy and the planning system in many years. I knew it would be an interesting and stimulating year, full of challenges and opportunities and in that regard, I have not been disappointed.**

The adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (along with the implementation of the Planning Act 2019) has fundamentally reframed the planning system. HOPS's key priority this year has been

focusing efforts on its successful implementation. Planning is positioned as key to delivering our climate commitments and driving the positive cultural/societal changes necessary to deliver sustainable, liveable, and productive places. This is a significant opportunity for planners to make a real difference and make our country an even better place in which to live, work and play.

The first year of NPF4 has been one of transition, where we have been collectively coming to terms with the changed policy

context, seeking clarity on the interpretation of the policies, adapting working practices and challenging ourselves and other stakeholders about how we can collectively deliver NPF4's aspirations.

The lack of policy and procedural guidance at the time NPF4 was adopted, has meant HOPS has been working hard to

**"The adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (along with the implementation of the Planning Act 2019) has fundamentally reframed the planning system".**

ensure a sensible, pragmatic, and proportionate application of the new policies, as well as contributing to the production of guidance and sharing good practices between local authorities. There are a number of policy areas that still require greater clarity and understanding, particularly around housing, renewables, biodiversity and flooding. However, I have been encouraged by the willingness of the Scottish Government to engage with HOPS and various stakeholders and professional organisations, in developing the required guidance and for their constructive dialogue on procedural matters and these policy issues.

Critical to the delivery of NPF4's policy objectives is a suitably resourced, staffed and skilled planning system. Scottish Government has now issued the long-awaited consultation

**"Investing in planning – resourcing Scotland's planning system"** and I would urge all that have an interest in the planning system to contribute to this important consultation and the dialogue about how the investment can be directed effectively and retained within planning services.

It is important to get new people into the profession and that we provide a range of access routes into planning for them. HOPS has continued work through Partners in Planning on the Future Planners Programme, to identify ways to deliver the 700+ new planners it is estimated will be needed over the next 10-15 years. However, Planning Services continues to manage this shortage and lack of experienced staff in the meantime.

I was pleased to see Craig McLaren appointed National Planning Improvement Champion last year and that the new National Planning Improvement Framework is being rolled out for its pilot year in 2024. The framework moves away from a scorecard mentality to that of embedding continuous improvement, is evidence led, seeks to identify what a high performing planning authority looks like and is focussed on delivering positive outcomes linked to NPF4.

The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee is undertaking a check-up on NPF4 a year on from its adoption and HOPS have given evidence to the Committee. My view is that despite the enormity and scale of what we are dealing with, we have made a good start if a little stuttering in places.

There is still a lot more to do but with a willingness from parties to work positively, collaboratively and in the spirit of collective endeavour and trust, we can make real progress in the next year. **SP**

## RTPI

### » Policy Consultations

RTPI Scotland have submitted responses to the following consultations and requests for written and verbal evidence:

- Scottish Government Investing in Planning: a consultation on resourcing Scotland's planning system
- Scottish Government Development Plan Amendment Regulations Consultation
- Scottish Government Masterplan Consent Area Regulations Consultation
- NatureScot's consultation on a Biodiversity Metric for Scotland's Planning System – Key Issues consultation
- Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee check-up on NPF4
- Scottish Government consultation on the Climate Change – draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan 3
- Transport Scotland's draft Guidance on inclusive design for town centres and busy streets
- Scottish Government consultation on Scotland's draft Circular Economy and Waste Route Map to 2030
- Scottish Government Democracy Matters Consultation
- Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee inquiry into Housing to 2040
- Scottish Government consultation on the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill
- Scottish Government consultation on Tackling the Nature Emergency: Delivery Plan on Biodiversity

All RTPI's written responses are published on our website.

Consultations currently under consideration are:

- A consultation on time limits for enforcement action for unauthorised Environmental Impact Assessment development
- National Performance Framework: Inquiry into proposed National Outcomes

### » Apprenticeships

Two Scottish Higher Education Institutions are developing new practice-based routeways at undergraduate level. The University of the West of Scotland is hoping to launch their new programme in January 2025, and they have been in discussion with the RTPI about accreditation requirements. The University of Dundee has gained internal approval for their apprenticeship pathway, and is working towards a September 2025 start.

### » Digital Skills Portal Launched

We are really pleased to have completed the work on the [Digital Planning Skills Portal](#) which went live on Thursday 21 March.

The project is part of the Scottish Government's Digital Planning Programme, and will provide planners with a hub for information about digital planning tools, training and skills. RTPI Scotland will maintain the portal and linked events - stay tuned for the first webinar.

### » Scottish Young Planners' Conference 2024

It was a pleasure to welcome over 170 delegates to the University of Strathclyde's Technology and Innovation Centre in Glasgow on 25 April for this year's Scottish Young Planners' Conference.

This year's conference theme was Future Planners and featured a number of excellent speakers discussing topics including carbon literacy, community benefit, and a panel discussion about the very different career paths planners can take in the profession. In the afternoon, our delegates got a chance to attend a range of practical skills workshops on the topics of recruitment, effective communication and digital mapping skills.

We were also delighted to celebrate Planning Aid Scotland's 30th anniversary, with presentations from Jo Elston and Erin Fulton about the important work of this volunteer-led organisation in supporting our young planner network as well as communities across Scotland.

The conference wrapped up with a Keynote presentation from our National Planning Improvement Champion, Craig McLaren FRTPI, about the important work he is doing to develop a new National Planning Improvement Framework.

There was a fantastic atmosphere throughout the day and a great buzz of enthusiasm as our excellent speakers shared their valuable knowledge and experience. Thank you to everyone who joined us, and to our sponsors whose support helped make the conference possible – Geddes Consulting, Icen, Homes for Scotland, Planning Aid Scotland and Ryden.

### » RTPI Fellow Announcements

Many congratulations to:

- Irene Beautyman FRTPI
- Nick Wright FRTPI

who have been awarded Chartered Fellowship of the Institute

RTPI Scotland will celebrate their achievement at the Summer Celebration & Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence on 24 June.

### » RTPI Publishes 'Great Debate' Report

The RTPI has released its ['Great Debate' report](#), which looks at the most pressing issues facing planning today.

The report, which is a summary of the debates held by the General Assembly of the Institute throughout 2023, features discussions on strategic planning, digital planning and artificial intelligence (AI), the future of the green belt, and how the profession can self-promote to reduce abuse and harassment.

The Great Debate series was established by Sue Bridge during her tenure as the President of the RTPI in 2023. It aimed to give the General Assembly, which includes practitioners and experts from across the profession, some of the knottiest or most pressing issues facing planning today to debate and establish a way to tackle them.

 UPDATE

### » RTPI Planning Excellence Awards

Entries to the 2024 RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence are now closed – winners will be announced on June 24th.

### » Sir Patrick Geddes Commemorative Lecture

This year's Lecture was delivered by Kevin P. Gilday on the Poetics of Planning. Kevin is an award-winning poet and performer from Glasgow. He is an associate artist with the National Theatre of Scotland, a BBC Writersroom Scottish Voice and one of Scotland's most celebrated contemporary poets. He was recently included in the Saltire Society's '40 under 40' list celebrating outstanding Scottish creative talent.

This wasn't your standard online lecture. Kevin managed to break down the digital divide that is usually an unavoidable consequence of online events and got us in touch with our inner artists by writing our own poems about towns, planning and planners. Through the lecture, Kevin beautifully illustrated to us the power of poetry to create and shape new concepts and ideas, and to recognise the important role that planners play as the "unacknowledged poets of the physical world".

Kevin also reminded us that Sir Patrick Geddes was himself a planner and a poet who recognised the power of art and planning to go hand in hand in shaping places and enriching people's lives.

If you missed this year's lecture, you can catchup on the [RTPI's YouTube channel](#).

### Social Media

The @RTPIScotland Twitter account has 5196 followers and the @ConvenorRTPI account has 1805.

## Scottish Government

### » Permitted Development Rights Review – Phase 3

The Scottish Government has been carrying out a substantial review of permitted development rights (PDR) as part of its wider planning reform programme. The review has been on a phased basis, with each phase focusing on new and extended PDR for specific types of development. Following a [public consultation](#) last summer, the Scottish Government has laid in Parliament the [Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted Development\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Order 2024](#). The Order contains new and extended PDR which are intended to support:

- Deployment of domestic and non-domestic renewables equipment.
- Alteration/replacement of windows to improve energy efficiency.
- Roll-out of electricity network infrastructure.

This new legislation came into force on 24 May 2024. More information on Phase 3 measures and the wider PDR review can be found on [Transforming Planning](#).

### » Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods Rights Review – Phase 3

Following consultation on draft [guidance](#) in summer 2023, the Scottish Government has published guidance on Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods on 25 April 2024. The finalised version takes account of the consultation themes and the [independent analysis](#) of responses and is intended to assist planning authorities, communities, businesses and others with key roles in delivering local living.

The guidance presents a Local Living Framework which together with a list of key considerations will support the implementation of local living, ensuring that daily needs can be met appropriately in a place. It is designed to complement tools and resources already available for placemaking and design, including the Place Standard Tool and the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes.

The guidance also introduces a structured approach to the delivery of local living in a


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Scottish context, recognising the incremental nature of delivery, the need for a clear understanding of context and the role of the Place Principle to help deliver places that support a good quality of life and balance our environmental impact.

A range of case studies are also presented within the guidance illustrating the implementation of local living across a variety of scales, contexts and geographic locations. These will be supplemented with additional examples on [www.ourplace.scot](#)

### » Enforcement Time Limits and Unauthorised Environmental Impact Assessment Development

The Scottish Government is undertaking a consultation on a proposal to disapply [Section 124 of the Town and Country Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#) and the time limits for taking enforcement action on unauthorised development which requires an Environmental Impact Assessment ("EIA").

The [consultation](#) is live until 11 July 2024. The consultation follows the findings of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee around an unauthorised EIA development in Northern Ireland, for which an EIA was not undertaken but which was retrospectively granted planning permission. The need for EIA was only identified after the time limit for enforcement had expired and the development was immune from enforcement action. As the Scottish planning system is similar to the system in Northern Ireland, the Scottish Government considers it is possible, although unlikely, that a similar situation could arise in Scotland.

Although the Scottish Government consider that the range of enforcement powers is sufficient to enable planning authorities to take effective enforcement action to halt, or address the adverse impacts of unauthorised development, the requirement for enforcement action to be taken within a set period could theoretically give rise to a situation where a development, which should be subject to EIA procedures, becomes immune from enforcement action.

### » The Planning, Infrastructure and Place Advisory Group

The Planning, Infrastructure and Place Advisory Group (PIPAG), co-chaired by Scottish Government and Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) have continued to meet quarterly. Early in 2024, the advisory group agreed a work programme for the year ahead, agreeing to make the majority of meetings online. The group have heard from guest speakers on energy networks, town centre regeneration, rural infrastructure and net zero. This has involved taking a closer look at case studies in Selkirk, Crieff, Fraserburgh, Hagshaw Energy Cluster and Port of Cromarty. A Short Life Working Group is considering in more detail issues of funding and finance raised by the Winchburgh case study last year. Outputs continue to be made available on [Transforming Planning](#), and an annual report will be produced by the end of 2024.

### » Compulsory Purchase Reform

Scottish Government has committed to reform and modernise the compulsory purchase system in Scotland with the overarching aim of making it simpler, more streamlined and fairer for all. In doing so it is intended to support the delivery of much-needed development, infrastructure and regeneration projects in the public interest. In line with the commitment in the [2023-24 Programme for Government](#), an expert advisory group was established in March to help support the reform process. The advisory group is co-chaired by the Chief Planner and Roseanna Cunningham. We will be engaging with the advisory group and a range of other stakeholders to develop reform proposals, with a view to publishing a public consultation in Autumn 2025. More information about the reform programme and the advisory group can be found on [Transforming Planning](#).

### » Reports to the Scottish Parliament

The required [annual report](#) on the operation of [Section 3F of the Town and Country Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#) (introduced by [Section 72 of the Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#)) was laid before the Scottish Parliament on March 28 2024. It finds that from 1 April, the legislation has been surpassed by latest policy and regulation, and is considered to be no longer necessary. A repeal order will be prepared for consideration by the Scottish Parliament.

### » Chief Planning Officer Guidance

The appointment and role of Chief Planning Officer became a statutory requirement in April 2024. Chief Planning Officers, play a crucial role in supporting placemaking in Scotland, delivering national and local planning priorities and ensuring delivery of an inclusive and high performing planning system. To support this the Scottish Government has published new [guidance](#) on this key role in planning authorities.

### » The Scottish Planning Innovation Awards

The Scottish Planning Innovation Awards (SPIA) took place on the 21 March 2024 at the site of previous winner, Carron Dams local nature reserve in Falkirk. More information about the awards and winners can be viewed on [www.ourplace.scot](#)

### » Digital Programme

At the end of 2023 it was decided to close the Digital Transformation programme and a controlled closure programme began in January 2024 and has now concluded. Whilst the digital planning programme, as originally envisaged, has concluded, a number of elements within the programme will be taken forward as a

**UPDATE**

priority for 24/25 with a joint approach between Planning, Architecture & Regeneration (PAR) and Digital Directorate within the Scottish Government. This can build on the progress that was being made by the programme, prior to its closure, towards securing delivery. PAR and Digital recognise the importance of continuing to involve wider partners and stakeholders in this work and updates will be provided as different elements of this work move forward and our wider digital thinking continues.

**» Transforming Planning website**

Our [Transforming Planning](#) website was set up temporarily to host updates on the development of NPF4 and our digital strategy. Later this year we will close down this temporary website. Some content will be moved to our planning webpages on [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot) but historical information on the engagement phases during the development of NPF4 will be removed. If there are any particular pages or documents you use regularly and wish transferred to [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot) please do let us know. We will be updating our progress on regular e-alerts so we encourage anyone who already hasn't signed up to do so [here](#).

**National Planning Improvement Champion**

It's been a busy two months for the National Planning Improvement team. I started my role in January and now as a team of two, we have been focusing on developing the new [National Planning Improvement Framework \(NPIF\)](#).

We are piloting the new framework across 2024/25 in three cohorts. We are happy to share that we have had 10 planning authorities volunteer to be part of the first cohort and this will run from April to June.

We published the findings from our 'call for ideas' which took place last year. The findings from this helped us to develop the '12 attributes of a high performing planning authority'. They are split into five themes of people, culture, tools, engagement, and place. These form the basis of the self-assessment part of the new NPIF.

Our first task was to consider how the 12 attributes can be measured. We have developed several 'contributing factors' that sit behind them, and testing these factors will be the focus of the first cohort. The new process

aims to use this as a stimulus for identifying areas of improvement. The planning authorities will consider these factors and create an improvement action plan, alongside their performance assessment.

Another key part of the new NPIF is the peer collaborative review, which aims to provide constructive challenge on the improvement action plan and performance assessment and recognizes the need for collaboration.

We see the pilot as an opportunity to test what works and what doesn't. We've now met with all 10 planning authorities in cohort 1 and will be keeping in contact throughout the next three months as they go through the process. Our next steps will be reflecting on the learning for this cohort, and we will be looking to establish a network for leads of planning improvement to share learning.

**Susan Rintoul**  
National Planning Improvement Project Officer at the Improvement Service

**Planning Aid Scotland**

On 15 May, our volunteers, partners, and supporters gathered in the Scottish Parliament to celebrate Planning Aid Scotland's remarkable 30-year journey. The event was kindly sponsored and hosted by Sarah Boyack MSP and included an address by the new Minister for Public Finance, Ivan McKee.

The highlight of the event was a presentation by the Minister of the Scottish Planning Innovation Awards, with Planning Aid Scotland winning the Sustainable category as well as being named overall winner.

The award-winning initiative, Live Life Morvern, is a Community Vision and Action Plan created in collaboration with the Morvern peninsula community. This community-led plan was constructed with sustainability and climate resilience at its core.

Much of the project's success can be attributed to the synergy of local leadership and external support through Planning Aid Scotland, including the strategic hiring of a local resident as a delivery associate, which

further leveraged community expertise and promoted community wealth building during the consultation phase itself.

During the project, we trialled new approaches to community visioning workshops, offering a fresh take on scenario planning to tackle climate issues and to inspire participants to imagine thriving futures for Morvern. The outcome was a preferred vision that showcased sustainable land and sea-use strategies, focusing on carbon capture and environmental stewardship.

The community is now in the early stages of turning their Community Action Plan into a Local Place Plan, and we are pleased to support them in taking that next step.

Fresh on the heels of Volunteer Week (3-9 June), a reminder to all Planning Aid Scotland volunteers: please mark your calendars for the Volunteer Celebration event on Saturday, June 29th. Look out for further details in your inbox.

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