
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

22 February 2023

Planning Committee

Title: National Planning Framework 4

Purpose: To advise the Planning Committee that Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) has been adopted and the provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 which amend the composition of the development plan to include the National Planning Framework have been commenced.

Recommendation: To note the adoption of National Planning Framework 4 and that it is now part of the development plan for North Ayrshire.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 13 February 2023, Scottish Ministers adopted and published National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). On adoption, NPF4 became part of the statutory development plan for North Ayrshire. Prepared by the Scottish Government, the National Planning Framework is a long-term spatial strategy, establishing the principles and policies which underpin the planning system and guide where and how development should take place.
- 1.2 NPF4 sets out a national spatial strategy looking forward to 2045. It places the twin global climate and nature crises at the heart of a vision for a future Scotland to ensure decisions made today are in the long-term public interest. NPF4 seeks to support the planning and delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places which reduce emissions; restore and better connect biodiversity; enable us to live better, healthier lives; and create a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. The delivery of the spatial strategy is supported by the designation of eighteen national developments, including Hunterston, regional spatial priorities for five broad regions of Scotland and 33 national planning policies.
- 1.3 Changes to planning legislation in 2019 – which commenced this month alongside the adoption of NPF4 – mean that the National Planning Framework has increased status in decision-making. Decisions on planning applications must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise: NPF4 now sits alongside North Ayrshire's adopted Local Development Plan (LDP2) as the development plan. Its policies are directly relevant in the assessment and determination of planning applications. The Council's next Local Development Plan (LDP3) and any Local Place Plans prepared by community bodies to inform LDP3 must take account of NPF4.

2. Background

- 2.1 *Scotland 2045: our Fourth National Planning Framework*, commonly known as NPF4, is required by law to set out the Scottish Ministers' policies and proposals for the development and use of land. It plays a key role in supporting the delivery of Scotland's national outcomes and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Legislation also requires the NPF to contribute to six outcomes, namely: meeting the housing needs and improving the health and wellbeing of people living in Scotland; increasing the population of rural areas; improving equality and eliminating discrimination; meeting targets relating to the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases, and; securing positive effects for biodiversity. Aligned with a wider programme of planning reform, work commenced to prepare Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) at the beginning of 2020.
- 2.2 During January to April 2020, the Scottish Government sought early views on NPF4 through a 'Call for Ideas', inviting stakeholders to consider Scotland in 2045 and reflecting on planning policy changes and national developments needed to get there. In November 2020, Government published its Position Statement which reflected on the Call for Ideas and set out thinking on potential policy changes. In November 2021, Draft NPF4 was laid in the Scottish Parliament. Alongside Parliamentary scrutiny of the draft, a public consultation to invite comments on the content of the draft ran until the end of March 2022. Planning Committee approved North Ayrshire Council's input into this process at meetings in March 2020, January 2021 and March 2022.
- 2.3 A Revised Draft National Planning Framework was laid in the Scottish Parliament for approval in November 2022, alongside a Delivery Programme, an Explanatory Report that outlines the changes from Draft NPF4 to the Revised Draft and other supporting documents and assessments. Parliament debated the Revised Draft on 11 January 2023 and voted to approve NPF4. Scottish Ministers moved to formally adopt and publish NPF4 on 13 February 2023 at 9am. The provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 which amend the composition of the development plan have also been commenced, making the National Planning Framework part of the development plan.
- 2.4 NPF4 comprises two parts: A National Spatial Strategy for Scotland 2045 and National Planning Policy:

Part 1 – A National Spatial Strategy for Scotland 2045

- 2.5 NPF4 puts the twin global climate and nature crises at the heart of a national spatial strategy which seeks to maximise the potential of planning as a powerful tool for delivering change on the ground in the long-term public interest. In doing so, the strategy seeks to bring together competing interests to make the right choices about where development should be located in the context of past, present and future challenges. Future places are to be planned in accordance with six overarching spatial principles of just transition; conserving and recycling assets; local living; compact urban growth; rebalanced development and rural revitalisation.
- 2.6 By applying these spatial principles, the national spatial strategy supports the planning and delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places which reduce emissions; restore and better connect biodiversity; enable us to live better, healthier lives; and create a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

- 2.7 NPF4 identifies National Developments to support the delivery of the spatial strategy. National Developments are expected to act as exemplars of the place principle and placemaking approaches and be designed and progressed in a way which supports community wealth building. Designation as a National Development means that the principle of the development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes, providing more certainty for communities, business and investors. Hunterston has been designated as one of 18 national developments in total. Six of the National Developments are Scotland-wide relating to the digital fibre network; a national walking, cycling and wheeling network; facilities to support the Circular Economy and renewable electricity and transmission infrastructure. The Central Scotland Green Network, which extends to North Ayrshire, is also retained as a National Development.
- 2.8 North Ayrshire Council, as set out in the Adopted Local Development Plan – alongside Scottish Enterprise and port owners Peels Ports – have promoted the designation of Hunterston as a National Development within the NPF4. The designation supports the repurposing of Hunterston with the location and infrastructure identified as offering potential for electricity generation from renewables, and a variety of commercial uses including port, research and development, aquaculture, the circular economy, and environmental and economic opportunities around nuclear decommissioning expertise. Following submissions from NAC in response to Draft NPF4, the spatial extent of the National Development has been expanded and is defined as Hunterston Port, nuclear power station sites and marketable employment land at Hunterston Estate.
- 2.9 In recognition the diversity of character, assets and challenges across the country the spatial strategy will be taken forward in different ways across Scotland. To guide this, NPF4 identifies regional spatial priorities for five broad regions. North Ayrshire sits within the Central region where the focus is on climate change and responding to the challenges of the pandemic, driving forward change to tackle inequalities and build a new, greener, future for this part of the country. Although not identified as a National Development, NPF4 does recognise the Ardeer peninsula as a significant site for redevelopment of the wider Ayrshire area within the context of targeting economic investment and building community wealth to overcome disadvantage and support a greener wellbeing economy. As intimated in LDP2, the future development including the environmental and infrastructure capacity of Ardeer will be considered in the preparation of LDP3.
- 2.10 Our representations on the Draft NPF4 highlighted that North Ayrshire's location within the Central region was not a good fit for our islands, Arran and Cumbrae, which it was considered would be a better placed within the 'north west and coast innovation' action area, with a focus on making sustainable use of our coasts and islands to sustain communities and pioneer investment in the blue economy. While not expressly addressed within the final NPF, the principle of Action Areas has been refined. The areas are refocused as Regional Spatial Priorities, with an emphasis on context, challenges, priorities and delivery and the strategic diagram showing boundaries has been removed to allow for flexibility in application. The Carbon Neutral Island project on Great Cumbrae is now specifically referenced within the renamed 'North and West Coast and Islands' area.

Part 2 – National Planning Policy

- 2.11 NPF4 incorporates updated Scottish Planning Policy which contains detailed national policy on a number of themes. For the first time, spatial and thematic planning policies are brought together in one place at a national level as part of the development plan. Aligned with the creation of sustainable, liveable, productive places, NPF4 sets out 33 national planning policies. For each theme, the policy intent, outcomes, role of the Local Development Plan and policy is provided, with the latter for use in the determination of planning applications. Key policy connections and the spatial principles the policy will deliver are also highlighted. Significant concern was expressed at Draft stage that the wording of these policies was imprecise and lacked robustness, for example stating development 'should' rather than 'must'. This has largely been addressed in the Adopted NPF4.
- 2.12 In relation to the delivery of housing, The Planning (Scotland) Act, 2019 requires Scottish Ministers, in preparing the National Planning Framework to include 'targets for the use of land in different areas for Scotland for housing'. This has been addressed in NPF4 by the establishment of a ten-year Minimum All Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) for each planning authority. The MATHLR set for North Ayrshire in Annex B is 2950 homes which is the minimum figure for new housing in the Plan period. For reference, this compares to the target of 4071 homes between 2019-2029 set out in LDP2.

Delivery

- 2.13 A key focus of planning reform is delivery, however, Draft NPF4 was not accompanied by detailed proposals for delivering the spatial strategy. This has been addressed with version 1 of the National Planning Framework 4 Delivery Programme published in November 2022. The first Delivery Programme considered governance; delivery mechanisms; infrastructure funding and finance; skills resources and performance; and monitoring and evaluation before setting out a number of actions. To be updated within six months and thereafter on an annual basis, the Delivery Programme acknowledges the concerns raised over a lack of resources in terms of headcount and skills to implement and support the delivery of NPF4.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the adoption of National Planning Framework 4 and that it is now part of the development plan for North Ayrshire.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 NPF4 is accompanied by a Final Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BIRA) which identifies 14 areas of policy that may have a resourcing and skills impact on planning authorities, for example through the requirement to consider new or expanded policies, evidence or assessments. RTPI Scotland have stated the BRIA has not fully considered the real-world costs of the revised NPF4 on planning authorities and underestimates the potential for resourcing and skills impact. Resourcing the planning system is likely to remain a key consideration with NPF4's

Delivery Programme. We anticipate that NPF 4 can be delivered within existing budget.

Human Resources

- 4.2 See above, and note that we anticipate that NPF 4 can be delivered within existing staff resources.

Legal

- 4.3 National Planning Framework 4 forms part of the development plan for North Ayrshire, in addition to the Adopted Local Development Plan (LDP2). Decisions on planning applications must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material consideration indicate otherwise.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 A number of statutory and non-statutory assessments have informed the preparation of NPF4 and an Integrated Impact Assessment Report has been published alongside the draft NPF4. These include a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Society and Equalities Impact Assessment, incorporating an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA), including human rights considerations, Child Rights & Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA), Fairer Scotland Duty assessment (FSD) and Island Communities Impact Assessment.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 See above.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 NPF4 aligns with wider national priorities, programmes and strategies, including on infrastructure and economic investment. These align with many the Council's key priorities, including a sustainable environment; affordable, modern and well-designed homes; and effective infrastructure.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 References to Community Wealth Building are made throughout NPF4. This includes Policy 25 that seeks to encourage, promote and facilitate a 'new strategic approach to economic development that also provides a practical model for building a wellbeing economy at local, regional and national levels' by supporting local economic development that focuses on community and place benefits as a central and primary consideration.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 A comprehensive engagement programme has informed the preparation of the National Planning Framework, including three rounds of consultation: Call for Ideas

(2020), Position Statement (2020) and Draft NPF4 (2021). Planning Committee approved North Ayrshire Council's input into this process at these stages.

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For further information please contact **Alistair Gemmell, Strategic Planning Manager**, on **01294 324021**.

Background Papers

Adopted National Planning Framework 4 and supporting documents

[Approved NPF4 | Transforming Planning](#)