
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**27 January 2021****Planning Committee**

Title: **Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework Position Statement**

Purpose: To update Members on the preparation of National Planning Framework 4 and approve the Council's response to the Scottish Government's latest Position Statement.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Planning Committee approves a response to the Scottish Government's NPF4 Position Statement, as set out in Appendix 1.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Government has published a Position Statement setting out its current thinking on a new National Planning Framework. The Position Statement signals a key shift towards a net zero agenda and sets out a proposed approach covering four key themes – net zero emissions, resilient communities, wellbeing economy and better greener places.
- 1.2 The identified key opportunities, as set out in the Position Statement include: 20 minute neighbourhoods, re-use existing buildings rather than new developments, redevelopment of vacant and derelict land, support for town centres, restricting out-of-town for retail and leisure, low carbon living, low and zero carbon design and heating solutions, support renewable energy, support rural development, and expanding green infrastructure.
- 1.3 There will be an emphasis to do more to ensure delivery of the strategy and policies. Alignment with the Infrastructure Investment Plan, and the Government's response to the recommendations of the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland, are noted to be key to achieving this.

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of a wider programme for implementing planning reform and the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, the Scottish Government has begun the process of preparing a new National Planning Framework (NPF). NPF4 will have elevated status within the planning system as part of the development plan and, unlike previous versions, will contain detailed national policy on a wide range of planning topics, currently set out in Scottish Planning Policy (SPP).

- 2.2 On 3 April 2020, the Chief Executive on behalf of the Council agreed to approve a response to the Scottish Government's early engagement on the preparation of National Planning Framework 4 under the Emergency COVID-19 Governance Arrangements. This response to the 'Call for Ideas' stage focused on the themes of climate change, health and wellbeing, economy, place and infrastructure and promoted Hunterston as a national development.
- 2.3 On 26 November 2020, Scottish Government published a Position Statement setting out its current thinking. The Position Statement is not itself a document setting out policy but aims to inform further discussions. It reflects the wealth of information submitted through early engagement, including the 'Call for Ideas' stage and indicative Regional Spatial Strategies. Scottish Government has invited comment on the Position Statement by 19 February 2021.
- 2.4 The Position Statement sets out that NPF4 will be a new spatial plan for Scotland that looks ahead to 2050 to set out where future development can bring benefits for people, the economy and environment. It will provide a clear and coherent plan for our future development and inform day-to-day planning decisions.
- 2.5 NPF4 will be driven by the overarching goal of addressing climate change, acknowledging that a significant shift is required to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. It states that "*we cannot afford to compromise on climate change*" and need to "*rebalance the planning system so that climate change is a guiding principle for all plans and decisions*". This is not about introducing restrictions on development but stimulating the green economy.
- 2.6 It is expected that NPF4 will focus on four key outcomes which will embed UN Sustainable Development Goals and Scotland's national outcomes within the planning system. There will be an emphasis on improving places and supporting delivery of projects and proposals on the ground, with a focus on: carbon reduction; housing (particularly elderly and disabled); health & wellbeing; equalities & diversity; biodiversity; and the repopulation of rural areas.
- 2.7 The four key outcomes proposed are:

Net-Zero Emissions: Prioritising emissions reduction by guiding long-term land use change, delivering infrastructure and facilitating design solutions and innovation in a way that helps to reverse patterns of behaviour that are already contributing to emissions.

Resilient Communities: Applying the 20-minute neighbourhood concept, creation of quality places and use of natural networks to strengthen resilience to climate change; deliver better health outcomes and actively planning for and supporting the delivery of new homes which meet diverse needs.

Wellbeing Economy: Supporting green economic recovery and inclusive growth so that development brings the most benefit to society, with a specific focus on a shift towards the circular economy; growing our food and drink sector and culture and the creative industries; supporting sustainable tourism development; and securing strategic transport and improved digital connectivity.

Better, Greener Places: A focus on the Place Principle to ensure all action and investment is place-based to secure multiple-benefits, including reimagining town centres; re-using vacant and derelict land and empty buildings; actively promoting working and living in rural Scotland and the islands; and protecting and enhancing our built and natural heritage, including the coast.

- 2.8 The Position Statement does not offer the Scottish Government's latest thinking on proposed national developments, including Hunterston. These remain under consideration as to how they would support the spatial strategy. The list of national developments that Ministers will propose to designate in NPF4 will be set out in the draft which will be laid in parliament in autumn 2021.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the current 'direction of travel' of the new National Planning Framework as set out in the Scottish Government's Position Statement and approves a proposed response set out in Appendix 1.

4. Implications

Financial

- 4.1 None

Human Resources

- 4.2 None

Legal

- 4.3 Once adopted, National Planning Framework 4 will form part of the Development Plan for North Ayrshire. Decisions on planning applications and the next Local Development Plan will be required to accord with NPF4.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 NPF4 will be subject to a number of statutory and non-statutory impact assessments, which the Scottish Government aim to integrate where possible. To date, the Government has prepared an Integrated Assessment Scoping Report, setting out the Scottish Government's view on which impact assessments should be undertaken (known as 'screening') and information on the assessment method(s), and the baseline information on which the assessments will be based.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 See above.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 NPF4 will align 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 The Position Statement states that national planning policies will refocus on community wealth building and sustainability.

5. Consultation

5.1 The Scottish Government remain committed to collaboration, consultation and the co-production of the national spatial strategy. A draft NPF4 will be laid in Parliament in autumn 2021 at which point there will then be a period of formal consultation that will run in tandem with parliamentary scrutiny of the draft. It is anticipated that the final approved NPF4 will be adopted by the summer of 2022.

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

Background Papers

National Planning Framework 4 Call for Ideas - North Ayrshire Council Response (18 March 2020).

[Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework Position Statement – November 2020](#)

Appendix 1

Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework Position Statement

North Ayrshire Council Response

North Ayrshire Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's Position Statement which sets out its current thinking on the issues that will need to be addressed when preparing Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4).

It is noted that there is no requirement to restate our comments from the Call for Ideas stage, approved and submitted in April 2020. It should be acknowledged, however, that at that point in time nobody could have anticipated the full implications and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, as the crisis continues to loom large in all aspects of our life, the true impact of the virus, lessons to be learned and required response from the planning system requires further consideration.

The Position Statement alludes to a step-change in our response to climate change and the way we think about planning and our places to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. We strongly agree that we cannot afford to compromise on climate change and need to rebalance the planning system so that climate change is a guiding principle for all plans and decisions. However, this cannot be a single-focus plan. COVID-19 has created another significant challenge, the gravity of which – to support the recovery and renewal of our communities and economy out of this crisis – is arguably not adequately reflected in the Position Statement. We would expect a greater emphasis on planning's response to COVID-19 within Draft NPF4.

Other comments on the Position Statement:

Regional Inequality

Under the Wellbeing Economy theme, we welcome the aspiration to create healthier, fairer and more prosperous places and ensure future development contributes to a green, sustainable, and inclusive economic recovery. Focusing on the issue of inequality – in this context regional inequality – it is important that development in the parts of Scotland where quality jobs and investment are most needed is supported, as stated in the Position Statement.

As set out in the Position Statement, sustainable and inclusive growth will depend on a planned approach to ensure that development happens in locations that provide the greatest benefits for society – and Scotland – as a whole. Economic performance and access to employment varies across Scotland and spatial planning has the potential to close the gap between the highest and lowest performing areas by intervening to create opportunities which are accessible to everyone. There cannot just be focus in areas of 'future growth' – there needs to be deliberate policy and investment change to rebalance growth. This requires a policy change which doesn't appear to feature on the list at pages 27-28.

Population Decline

Linked to the issue of regional inequality is population decline. The Position Statement refers to depopulation and rural repopulation, however, depopulation is not only an issue for rural Scotland. North Ayrshire has the fourth highest predicted population decline in Scotland, with some mainland localities expected to suffer population decline of up to 7.4% between 2018-2030.

This calls for a national approach to economic development and housing policy, implemented by NPF4, that supports all areas suffering depopulation. Reflecting long-term population and household trends in the long-term view of where homes are required to meet our future needs should not serve to exacerbate the imbalance in Scotland's housing market and existing inequalities. Housing is a key component of supporting quality of life, health and wellbeing and housebuilding is an important part of any local economy. By distributing future infrastructure spending; increasing the attractiveness and de-risking sites in areas of depopulation, NPF4 can enable the benefits of the delivery of new homes to be shared more equitably across Scotland.

20-Minute Neighbourhoods and Community Wealth Building

As noted in our 'Call for Ideas' response, North Ayrshire Council is implementing a 'Community Wealth Building' approach: a people-centred approach to local economic development which redirects wealth back into the local economy and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. The Position Statement makes links between Community Wealth Building and localism and town centres, however, we consider there is great potential to link and consider the 20-minute neighbourhood concept in the context of Community Wealth Building. This would bring into focus the importance of local employment opportunities (i.e. more people working locally or remotely and a focus on local job density); maximising existing land and assets including town centres and vacant and derelict sites; and promoting and encouraging local supply chains, spend and circular economy approaches. Economic development will play a key role in the realisation of 20-minute neighbourhoods which should be recognised as this concept is developed, including through NPF4.

Town Centres

Strengthening support for development in town centres and restricting out-of-town retail and leisure to help a transition away from car-dependent developments towards those that enable walking, cycling, wheeling and public transport accessibility is identified as a key opportunity to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. It is important that the NPF considers how the town centre first principle interacts with the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods to ensure that the scale of development of, for example, new retail and leisure developments is appropriate to serve a '20-minute neighbourhood' without undermining town centres.

Climate Change

The Position Statement makes bold and welcome statements about NPF4 being driven by the overarching goal of addressing climate change and the need to rebalance the planning system so that climate change is a guiding principle for all plans and decisions. Potential policy changes to make it more difficult for new developments that generate significant emissions to gain planning permission and minimise the need to travel by unsustainable modes must be robust if this is going to be achieved as currently the planning system – and developers – are

falling short in delivering the roll-out of low-carbon technologies such as heat networks. This should be considered in the context of other approaches, including legislation, that may be more effective.

Tourism

We support the intention that the NPF strategy and supporting policies will include a renewed focus on enabling sustainable development that helps to strengthen and grow our tourism sector. Addressing the environmental impact of tourism; the relationship between tourism accommodation and the provision of adequate and affordable housing supply to support and retain existing communities and the provision of accommodation for the sector's workforce are all important issues on the Isle of Arran.

In addition, active travel opportunities and travel reliability on islands to enhance visitor experience are important issues; the connectivity of our islands will play a key determining role in their economic recovery.