Scottish Government
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National Planning Framework 4 Early Engagement – Policies

Digital Connectivity

Scottish Planning Policy 2014

The planning system should support development which helps deliver the Scottish Government's commitment to world-class digital connectivity; including digital infrastructure in new homes and business premises.

Development plans should:

reflect the infrastructure roll-out of digital communications development.

provide a consistent basis for decision-making by setting out the criteria which will be applied when determining planning applications for communications equipment. They should ensure that the following options are considered when selecting sites and designing base stations:

- *mast or site sharing;*
- *installation on buildings or other existing structures;*
- *installing the smallest suitable equipment, commensurate with technological requirements;*
- *concealing or disguising masts, antennas, equipment housing and cable runs using design and camouflage techniques where appropriate; and*
- *installation of ground-based masts.*

set out the matters to be addressed in planning applications for specific developments, including:

- *an explanation of how the proposed equipment fits into the wider network;*
- *a description of the siting options (primarily for new sites) and design options which satisfy operational requirements, alternatives considered, and the reasons for the chosen solution;*
- *details of the design, including height, materials and all components of the proposal;*
- *details of any proposed landscaping and screen planting, where appropriate;*
- *an assessment of the cumulative effects of the proposed development in combination with existing equipment in the area;*
- *a declaration that the equipment and installation is designed to be in full compliance with the appropriate ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure to radiofrequency radiation; and*
- *an assessment of visual impact, if relevant.*

Planning decisions should take account of the capability of proposals to contribute to the delivery of new or improved services. Developments should not physically obstruct aerodrome operations, technical sites or existing transmitter/receiver facilities. The cumulative visual effects of equipment should be considered. Planning authorities should not question the need for the service to be provided nor seek to prevent competition between operators. Planning authorities do not need to treat radiofrequency radiation as a material consideration.

> *Policies should encourage developers to explore opportunities for the provision of digital infrastructure to new homes and business premises as an integral part of development. This should be done in consultation with service providers so that appropriate, universal and futureproofed infrastructure is installed and utilised.*

What has changed since 2014?

- The publication, in August 2019, of Forging Our Digital Future with 5G[1] which outlines the Scottish Government's vision for 5G and a commitment to embracing the opportunities it will give to establish Scotland as a forward looking digital nation.

- The publication, in 2017, of the Scottish Government's digital strategy, Realising Scotland's Full Potential in a Digital World[2], which sets out how the Scottish Government will make sure that digital is at the heart of everything it does.

- The roll-out of the two Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband contracts met and exceeded targets, with deployment set to continue into 2020.

- To ensure every home and business has access to at least superfast speeds, the Scottish Government has committed to a further £600 million, with deployment of three new contracts due to start in 2020.

- The Scottish 4G Infill programme will continue delivering 4G infrastructure and services to selected mobile "notspots" in rural areas until 2022, while in parallel, existing and emerging mobile connectivity initiatives led by the UK Government will see continued rollout across the country.

Key objectives of NPF4: To support the roll-out of digital infrastructure across Scotland so that the social, economic and environmental benefits of digital technologies are delivered in a way that keeps environmental impacts to a minimum.

Issues to consider:

- The development of the digital fibre network was designated a national development in NPF3. How can NPF4 continue to support its ongoing national roll-out and enhanced telecommunications infrastructure particularly in rural areas?

- How can NPF4 ensure that the planning system supports the deployment of fibre, 5G and other connectivity technologies and is able to anticipate and react, in an agile way, to the ever-changing opportunities of the digital age?

- How can we maximise the contribution of digital connectivity to reducing emissions for example by limiting the need to travel by providing remote access to work and services?

- Can we develop policies that ensure that digital connectivity supports wider objectives, including increasing the population of rural Scotland?

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[1] Forging Our Digital Future with 5G: A Strategy for Scotland
[2] Realising Scotland's Full Potential in a Digital World

Planning and Architecture Division, Scottish Government

- What policy criteria should be used when considering planning applications for new masts – is there a need for this to be tailored to local circumstances?

- How can planning policies best ensure the inclusion of digital infrastructure in new homes and business premises?

Get Involved

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