



National Planning Framework 4 Early Engagement – Policies

SUSTAINABILITY

Scottish Planning Policy (2014):

*The **planning system** should support economically, environmentally and socially sustainable places by enabling development that balances the costs and benefits of a proposal over the longer term. The aim is to achieve the right development in the right place; it is not to allow development at any cost. This means that policies and decisions should be guided by the following principles:*

- *giving due weight to net economic benefit;*
- *responding to economic issues, challenges and opportunities, as outlined in local economic strategies;*
- *supporting good design and the six qualities of successful places;*
- *making efficient use of existing capacities of land, buildings and infrastructure including supporting town centre and regeneration priorities;*
- *supporting delivery of accessible housing, business, retailing and leisure development;*
- *supporting delivery of infrastructure, for example transport, education, energy, digital and water;*
- *supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation including taking account of flood risk;*
- *improving health and well-being by offering opportunities for social interaction and physical activity, including sport and recreation;*
- *having regard to the principles for sustainable land use set out in the Land Use Strategy;*
- *protecting, enhancing and promoting access to cultural heritage, including the historic environment;*
- *protecting, enhancing and promoting access to natural heritage, including green infrastructure, landscape and the wider environment;*
- *reducing waste, facilitating its management and promoting resource recovery; and*
- *avoiding over-development, protecting the amenity of new and existing development and considering the implications of development for water, air and soil quality.*

Development plans should

- *be consistent with the policies set out in the SPP, including the presumption in favour of development that contributes to sustainable development;*
- *positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the plan area in a way which is flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances over time;*
- *support existing business sectors, taking account of whether they are expanding or contracting and, where possible, identify and plan for new or emerging sectors likely to locate in their area;*
- *be up-to-date, place-based and enabling with a spatial strategy that is implemented through policies and proposals; and*
- *set out a spatial strategy which is both sustainable and deliverable, providing confidence to stakeholders that the outcomes can be achieved.*

- *Action programmes should be actively used to drive delivery of planned developments: to align stakeholders, phasing, financing and infrastructure investment over the long term.*

What has changed since 2014?

- Research undertaken by Ironside Farrar on the adoption of Scottish Planning Policy in local development plans¹ recommended that the presumption in favour of sustainable development remains at the forefront of the plan making process and that policy wording should ensure sufficient weight is given in the development management process.
- Existing policies were generally thought to work well although there were some concerns about how to consistently apply the policy in planning decisions. There were some issues around interpretation and weight and how to balance the policy if it is sustainable in certain aspects but not in others.
- The preparation of NPF4 is highlighted as a major commitment in response to the climate emergency in the Programme for Government. Issues relating to emissions reduction are covered in the separate template on Climate Change.
- There has also been a Scottish Government policy shift away from sustainable economic growth towards sustainable and inclusive growth.
- The Economic Action Plan² fully incorporates a Rural Economy Action Plan - sets out the range of activities the Scottish Government and its delivery partners are undertaking to deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth across all parts of Scotland. This plan also reflects the importance of Place and Sustainability and the planning system on delivering the aims of Inclusive Growth.
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals³, as mapped onto the National Performance Framework, are now also included in Scottish climate change legislation to add definition to what sustainable development means for Scottish Ministers in exercising their functions in relation to reducing emissions under the terms of the Act.
- The Scottish Government's Climate Ready Scotland: climate change adaptation programme 2019 – 2024⁴, published in September 2019, which sets out policies and proposals to increase the capacity of Scotland's communities, businesses and natural environment to adapt to a changing climate. The programme is structured around seven high-level outcomes, aligned to the UN SDGs and the National Performance Framework.
- The Fairer Scotland Action Plan⁵ and Fairer Scotland Duty look to reducing inequality and using key local decisions to tackle social and economic disadvantage.

¹ [Adoption of Scottish planning policy in local development plans](#)

² [Economic Action Plan 2018-20](#)

³ United Nations [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015](#)

⁴ [Climate Ready Scotland: climate change adaptation programme 2019-2024](#)

⁵ [Fairer Scotland Action Plan, 2016](#)

- Scottish Government and COSLA adopted the Place Principle in 2019⁶ signaled a more common sense approach to decision making about services land and buildings. It provides a collective focus to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth that helps improve lives and creates more successful places.
- Launch of Place Standard tool in 2015⁷ as a way of structuring conversations to assess and understand places be they well-established, facing change or still being planned.

Proposed key objective of NPF4: To ensure that the planning system supports the Scottish Government's purpose of focussing on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth which is achieved with a view to achieving net-zero emissions by 2045.

Issues to consider:

- Should the presumption in favour of sustainable development remain a component of the NPF given the move to 10 year development plan preparation and the new statutory role of national planning policy?
- The merits of maintaining an overarching policy on sustainability and whether it needs to be changed as a result of the climate emergency?
- How should any sustainability policy be presented in NPF4 to ensure it can be easily and consistently interpreted and applied?
- Does 'sustainability' remain an appropriate catch-all outcome for increasingly significant policy drivers such as climate change, inclusive growth and human wellbeing?
- Should NPF be more strongly/clearly allied to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and, if so, are there particular goals which should be given particular attention through spatial or thematic policies?
- Are there particular locations/areas where planning policy could help transformative action within the inclusive growth agenda?
- How do we ensure we increase opportunities for community engagement, including community-led local place plans, so that people's views are heard and can influence policy development?

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/place-principle-introduction/>

⁷ <https://placestandard.scot/>

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