



National Planning Framework 4 Early Engagement – Policies

PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE EXTRACTION OF RESOURCES

Scottish Planning Policy (2014)

Planning policy should:

- recognise the national benefit of indigenous coal, oil and gas production in maintaining a diverse energy mix and improving energy security;
- safeguard workable resources and ensure that an adequate and steady supply is available to meet the needs of the construction, energy and other sectors;
- minimise the impacts of extraction on local communities, the environment and the built and natural heritage; and
- secure the sustainable restoration of sites to beneficial afteruse after working has ceased.

SDPs should ensure that adequate supplies of construction aggregates can be made available from within the plan area.

Development plans should:

- safeguard all workable mineral resources which are of economic or conservation value and ensure that these are not sterilised by other development.
- set out the factors that specific proposals will need to address, including impacts on communities and the environment.
- support the maintenance of a landbank of permitted reserves for construction aggregates of at least 10 years at all times in all market areas through the identification of areas of search.
- identify areas of search where surface coal extraction is most likely to be acceptable during the plan period and set out the preferred programme for the development of other safeguarded areas beyond the plan period.

Policies should protect areas of peatland and only permit commercial extraction in areas suffering historic, significant damage through human activity and where the conservation value is low and restoration is impossible. **This issue is covered further in the separate policy paper on preserving peatland.**

Operators should provide sufficient information to enable a full assessment to be made of the likely effects of development together with appropriate control, mitigation and monitoring measures.

Borrow pits should only be permitted if there are significant environmental or economic benefits compared to obtaining material from local quarries; they are time-limited; tied to a particular project and appropriate reclamation measures are in place.

Consent should only be granted for surface coal extraction proposals which are either environmentally acceptable (or can be made so by planning conditions) or provide local or community benefits which clearly outweigh the likely impacts of extraction.

Planning authorities should, through planning conditions and legal agreements, continue to ensure that a high standard of restoration and aftercare is managed effectively and that such work is undertaken at the earliest opportunity.

Planning authorities should ensure that rigorous procedures are in place to monitor consents, including restoration arrangements, at appropriate intervals, and ensure that appropriate action is taken when necessary.

What has changed since 2014?

- The closure of Longannet coal-fired power station in 2016.
- The Town and Country Planning (Fees for Monitoring Surface Coal Mining Sites) (Scotland) Regulations 2017¹ introduced new provision for planning authorities to be paid a fee for monitoring surface coal mining sites.
- “The future of energy in Scotland: Scottish energy strategy²” (December 2017) set out the Scottish Government’s vision for the future energy system in Scotland.
- Heads of Planning Scotland published a Position Statement on the Operation of Financial Mechanisms to Secure Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare of Development Sites³ in October 2018.
- The Scottish Government’s Climate Change Plan: third report on proposals and policies 2018-2032⁴ highlights the diminishing role of coal as Scotland moves further towards a low carbon economy.
- The Scottish Government confirmed in October 2019 that it does not support the development of unconventional oil and gas in Scotland⁵. The Scottish Ministers have committed to reflecting this finalised policy in NPF4.
- Research undertaken by Ironside Farrar on the adoption of Scottish planning policy in local development plans⁶ highlighted very few issues although a concern that the policy on borrow pits potentially discourages the use of materials available on site was highlighted. This increases the transport effects and carbon emissions associated with some developments (e.g. wind farms in remote upland locations).

Key objective of NPF4: To safeguard workable resources and ensure that an adequate and steady supply of aggregates is available to meet demand whilst ensuring that the impacts of extraction on local communities, the environment and the built and natural heritage are properly addressed. The policy will also reflect the Scottish Government’s finalised policy position on unconventional oil and gas.

Issues to consider:

¹ [Planning Circular 2/2017: Town and country planning \(fees for monitoring surface coal mining sites\) \(Scotland\) regulations 2017](#)

² [The future of energy in Scotland: Scottish energy strategy](#)

³ [Position Statement on the Operation of Financial Mechanisms to Secure Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare of Development Sites](#)

⁴ [Climate Change Plan: third report on proposals and policies 2018-2032 \(RPP3\)](#)

⁵ [Statement on Unconventional Oil and Gas](#)

⁶ [Adoption of Scottish planning policy in local development plans](#)

- How can NPF4 best ensure that sufficient materials are available to deliver planned and projected infrastructure and building projects, particularly within city regions in the absence of strategic development planning authorities?
- What are the implications for landbanks of moving to 10 year development plan preparation?
- Should development plans identify favoured areas of search for new quarries or is a criteria based approach appropriate in certain circumstances?
- How can policy criteria best ensure that the impacts of extraction on local communities, the environment and the built and natural heritage are fully assessed?
- How far should the planning system go to safeguard mineral deposits?
- Does more need to be done to ensure appropriate restoration procedures are in place and, where possible, restoration provides beneficial biodiversity gains?
- Does the existing policy on borrow pits strike the right balance between environmental and economic benefits?
- Is there still a need for a planning policy on opencast coal extraction?

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