



National Planning Framework 4 Early Engagement – Policies

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Scottish Planning Policy (2014)

*Paragraph 74 sets out that planning in rural and island areas should promote a pattern of development that is appropriate to the character and challenges of each area. Rural development that supports prosperous and sustainable communities and businesses, whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality should be encouraged.*

*Plans should set out spatial strategies which reflect development pressure, promote economic activity, provide housing, provide leisure accommodation, links development with services and considers the environmental services provided by the natural environment.*

*Paragraphs 76 – 78, set out differentiated development considerations where a rural area is ‘pressured’ and easily accessible from cities and main towns; ‘remote and fragile’ and island areas; and, for areas ‘of intermediate accessibility’.*

*In pressurised areas most new development should be guided to locations within or adjacent to settlements. The circumstances in which new housing outwith settlements may be appropriate should also be set out. The designation of green belts may be appropriate in some most pressured areas.*

*In remote rural areas, where new development can sustain fragile communities, sustainable development providing employment should be encouraged, and appropriate development should be provided for, especially housing and community-owned energy. Single houses should be allowed providing they are well sited and fit with local landscape character.*

*Development on prime agricultural land or lesser quality land which is locally important should not be permitted except where is essential: as part of a settlement strategy, for small scale development linked to a rural business; or for renewable energy or minerals extraction that is supported by provision for restoration.*

*Where considered appropriate local development plans should set out policies and proposals for leisure accommodation, such as holiday units, caravans, and huts.*

*Occupancy restrictions should be avoided.*

*Paragraph 130 (on affordable housing) confirms that, in rural areas, where significant unmet local need for affordable housing has been shown, it may be appropriate to introduce a “rural exceptions” policy which allows planning permission to be granted for affordable housing on small sites that would not normally be used for housing for example because they lie outwith the adjacent built up area and are subject to policies of restraint.*

**What has changed since 2014?**

- The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced a requirement for NPF4 to set out how it will contribute to the outcome of increasing the population of rural areas of Scotland. In addition, when the NPF4 is reviewed, Ministers are to have regard to the desirability of resettling rural areas that have become depopulated.

- The James Hutton Institute published a report on rural depopulation<sup>1</sup>, which projected population changes for the most remote Sparsely Populated Areas of Scotland. The research confirms that these areas have also been suffering from long term population decline, and in a thinning of the core working age population, and a significant decline in the number of children living in these areas.
- The Scottish Government has established a Ministerial Task Group to consider Scotland's future population challenges.
- Protecting Scotland's Future: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2019-20<sup>2</sup> confirms that NPF4 will explore new, proactive policy options for planning to enable development that supports dynamic rural economies and helps to sustain and support rural communities in the future. There is also a commitment to review permitted development to examine what additional measures can be introduced to further support the delivery of affordable homes in rural areas.
- The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 was granted Royal Assent in July 2018. The Act makes provision for a national islands plan; to impose duties in relation to island communities on certain public authorities; to make provision about the electoral representation of island communities; and to establish a licensing scheme in respect of marine development adjacent to islands.
- The National Council of Rural Advisors' (NCRA) report: *A new blueprint for Scotland's rural economy: Recommendations to Scottish Ministers (2018)*<sup>3</sup> highlighted the need to address restrictive regulations that affect housing (such as retirement options for tenant farmers without capital) and remove regulatory barriers to collaborative planning. The Rural Economy Action Group has been established to drive forward NCRA recommendations, oversee delivery, provide leadership and progress and set the tone for change across the Scottish Government.
- The Scottish Government commissioned research; *Rural Planning Policy to 2050: Research to Inform Preparation of NPF4* to explore how planning policy can support strong and vibrant rural communities and economies in the coming years. The purpose of the research is to provide the Scottish Government with a better understanding of the current challenges and the future opportunities for land use diversification in rural Scotland to inform preparation of National Planning Framework, NPF4.
- The Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan identifies both the positive and negative impacts that the agriculture sector has on climate change. This sector is being supported to reduce its emissions, to help contribute to the fight against climate change, and to adapt its practices to cope with these consequences.
- Research undertaken by Ironside Farrar on the adoption of Scottish planning policy in local development plans<sup>4</sup> suggests that current policies were considered to work well for plan making purposes as they provide a sensible distinction between pressured and remote areas. For development management, the wording of the policy was noted as articulate and still allows for appropriate variation when required. It was

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<sup>1</sup> [Demographic change in the Sparsely Populated Areas of Scotland \(1991-2046\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Protecting Scotland's Future: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2019-20](#)

<sup>3</sup> [New blueprint for Scotland's rural economy: recommendations to Scottish Ministers](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Adoption of Scottish planning policy in local development plans](#)

considered that the policy could be improved by providing more detail on how wild land policies should be applied, adopting a more lenient approach to protecting land of less than prime agricultural quality and a more consistent approach to rural housing. The policy was selected as the one that requires most local flexibility as each rural locality has widely different priorities.

**Key objective of NPF4:** To promote rural development that supports prosperous and sustainable communities and businesses whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality.

**Issues to consider:**

- How can NPF policy criteria most effectively contribute to the Planning Act outcome of increasing the population of our rural areas, and in consideration of resettling of rural areas that have become depopulated?
- Scottish Planning Policy takes a differentiated approach to rural planning policy and distinguishes between three main types of rural areas based on their accessibility and degree of pressure for development. Since SPP was published, classifications have evolved, for example on sparsely populated areas. How should policy criteria be framed to recognise the needs of different types of rural areas?
- Which planning policies need to be more permissive to support sustainable rural development and help sustain and grow communities?
- What policy criteria is needed to support rural businesses, including agricultural and land-based ones, to develop and diversify, taking into account the changing face of the rural economy?
- What additional policy criteria is needed to support sustainable rural growth, for example through small-scale innovation at local level, given the likely challenges rural communities and economies will face as a result of changing economic climates?
- Should national policy criteria be introduced to promote leisure accommodation, such as hutting and other recreational accommodation in rural areas?
- What policy criteria are needed to facilitate growth in the tourism sector in a way that is sustainable, particularly where activities will help support and sustain communities in rural areas?
- What is the best way to balance demand for tourist accommodation with the need to ensure there is adequate and appropriate housing for rural populations?
- SPP recognises that rural exceptions policies can be used to support sites for affordable housing that would not normally be used for housing. What more can be done to recognise the transformational role of housing in relation to the wider rural economy and the need to deliver untapped housing demand?

## Get Involved

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