

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – SCOTTISH CITIES

Introduction

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In the most recent in a series of Think Pieces, Jim Valentine, the Depute Director at Perth and Kinross Council, sets out his thoughts on behalf of the Scottish Cities Alliance on Scotland2050. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion. The final Think Pieces will be published over the next few days.

The issues and opportunities:

Scotland's 7 cities make a significant contribution to Scotland's economy with over two thirds of Scotland's economic activity taking place either in city boundaries or surrounding areas. They share a number of strengths from their skilled workforce, their international reputation and as the location of some of the country's major economic and cultural assets however, they also have marked differences, in terms of their scale, relative performance, resilience and industrial structure.

For Edinburgh – challenges relate to managing a strongly growing economy in a sustainable and inclusive way;

In Aberdeen, there is a need to focus on diversification, whilst maintaining its strength as a leading centre for oil and gas and wider energy technologies and services;

In Glasgow and Dundee, there are opportunities to build upon existing strengths and re-invigorate and re-generate existing economic assets; and

In Perth, Stirling and Inverness there is a concerted focus upon their attractiveness as a place to live and work, whilst recognising the distinct strengths each city has to offer in key sectors and developing strategic investments around such strengths.

Some of the greatest levels of regional inequality in terms of economic outcomes exist within the Scottish cities. To create a sustainable and diverse economy, NPF4 should support the cities to tackle these inequalities by focusing on 5 key challenges and opportunities.

The Growth Challenge – The conventional view is housing is primarily a social role for government but sufficient affordable housing, nurseries and leisure spaces at reasonable distances from where people work is crucial to increasing participation and productivity. There is a need to think radically about how our land use, housing and transport policies can be used to promote growth. Flexible housing products could provide a house for life and there might also be a shift in people buying property to them choosing long term rents. In addition, the changing face of the retail sector will require a re-shaping of city centres which focus on bringing quality flexible housing, work spaces, nurseries and leisure facilities back in to the heart of the cities

and encourage public bodies to share space in public buildings with retail outlets and other commercial opportunities.

Technological Change – NPF4 should position Scotland’s cities to take advantage of new innovations and technologies as they emerge by having regard to the business make-up, skills-base and overall city environment that will support their growth in the technological age. As the world of work changes, people’s work patterns will become more flexible and enhanced digital connectivity means that travel patterns will also change.

Transition to Net Zero Carbon Economy – Climate change is a challenge and opportunity for Scotland’s cities, in terms of industrial opportunities and re-thinking how we move people around our cities for business and leisure. Alongside conversion programmes, the drive for alternative forms of energies will require a re-shaping of our utilities networks with a continuing shift to local energy systems. Intra-urban/city regional transport systems which link people with jobs and city centres will be key to improving air quality and reducing emissions. The passing of “peak car” will allow a concentration of active travel and more social spaces in cities linked in with more green spaces (including vertical growing) to re-balance our carbon emissions. The idea of a circular economy also needs to be accelerated to enable people to maximise the use of resources.

Population Change – The major “known” long-term economic shift over the next 20 years which will have a profound effect on Scotland’s cities will be demographic change with the number of people over 75 expected to increase by 79% over the next 25 years. To counterbalance an ageing population, cities will need to re-think their role as places to live and enjoy at all stages of life including how they attract skilled people with young families through high quality housing, vibrant city centres and outdoor leisure.

Tackle Inequalities – The cities recognise that poverty and its consequences are bad for their regional economies. NPF4 should support the cities to provide strong leadership on inclusive growth, working with their local communities to make decisions which strike a balance between investing in infrastructure in strongly growing parts of cities and generating growth in the first place in weaker areas.

Planning solutions:

NPF4 needs to provide the framework, supported by new legislation where appropriate, for significant changes in how we use land moving towards a zero carbon economy with inclusive opportunities across all sectors of the population.

Summary:

In summary, Scottish Cities are of the view that NPF4 should:-

- Support the cities to make bold decisions, with a long-term strategic focus to ensure they are resilient to major structural changes in the economy.
- Recognise the diversity of Scotland’s cities by understanding that a one size fits all approach will not work and there is a need for local divergence, support for policy experimentation and investing in scale.

- Support the cities to inform national decision making in skills, transport, housing and the environment.
- Acknowledge that the value of place is key to linking the cities' ambitions around growth, tackling inequalities and the low carbon economy.

Author Biography

Jim Valentine is the Depute Director at Perth and Kinross Council and an advisor to the Scottish Cities on infrastructure including the Scottish Cities submission to the National Infrastructure for Scotland's call for evidence available at:-

<https://www.scottishcities.org.uk/media/publications>. Jim has been involved in a variety of national projects over many years involving transport, planning and economic development. He is a Chartered Civil engineer and a Chartered Environmentalist.