

# SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – PLANNING FOR NET ZERO

## 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 twelfth in a series of Think Pieces Stephanie Conesa of Scottish Renewables sets out her thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically on planning for net zero. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

## **The issues and opportunities:**

Scotland has set a legally-binding target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2045 as the review of the Scottish planning system gets underway. It is critical that National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) underpins a planning system that enables Scotland to achieve net-zero and meet our energy needs using renewable technologies.

The earliest wind farms are reaching the end of their consented operation, and this trend will continue as we approach 2030. These will need to either undergo life extension to continue operating past their consented periods, repower or decommission.

Repowering enables the use of the latest technologies to maximise existing onshore wind sites. A planning system that supports repowering and life extension will be crucial in ensuring that Scotland continues to enjoy the socio-economic benefits that onshore wind power brings while meeting its net-zero target.

It is essential that Scotland's renewable energy capacity does not regress, and that our targets for increased renewable electricity generation are achieved. Existing sites have been deemed suitable for onshore wind farms and, supported by good design and technological innovation, they should continue to contribute to net-zero as repowered sites. Wherever feasible, this contribution should be enhanced by the co-location of compatible technologies such as energy storage and solar.

As energy systems become more decentralised, rural communities and businesses will benefit from installing a variety of renewables. Technologies from wind to anaerobic digestion have been deployed by rural businesses and communities to reduce energy costs and increase economic sustainability. Battery storage and electric vehicles will offer further opportunities to utilise renewable energy resources, create local energy systems, and reduce energy usage.

The decarbonisation of heat over the next two decades will be one of the greatest challenges in hitting Scotland's net-zero target.

The planning system will have an important role to play in facilitating the roll-out of low-carbon heat by increasing usage of heat networks, which enable harnessing renewable sources of heat in rivers, sewers and the ground. Planning policy is vital given heat networks' spatial characteristics– they must be built in dense areas and across multiple developments. Development planning in combination with planning obligations and conditions has proven to be successful in enabling rapid deployment of heat networks in London.<sup>1</sup>

The Scottish Government has proposed a mandatory requirement on local authorities to produce a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) to zone areas most suitable for heat networks in existing buildings and land for development. It will be vital that NPF4 clearly states that LHEES district heat zones and the new-build areas flagged within them, as well as potential sources of heat, should be integrated into Local Development Plans.

Where appropriate, suitable developments within these zones should be directed to use heat networks through planning obligations and conditions. Scottish local authorities will need direction through NPF4 to achieve this.

### **Planning solutions:**

Planning must play a key role in addressing climate change, supporting increased renewable energy generation and the move to low-carbon heat. We welcome the recognition of this in Scottish Government's 2019-20 Programme for Government and look forward to NPF4 providing a planning system which enables the achievement of Scotland's world-leading climate change ambitions.

### **Summary:**

- ***In the next 10 years***, existing wind farms will be repowered or their life extended, the switch to low-carbon heat will increase in scale, and battery storage and EVs will become more common.
- ***In the long term*** there is widespread deployment of renewables, all Scotland's existing buildings are zero-carbon and EVs are the norm.
- ***Overall*** NPF4 should provide a framework that enables Scotland's world-leading climate change ambitions by supporting increased renewable energy generation.

### **Author Biography**

Stephanie Conesa is a Policy Manager at Scottish Renewables. She leads the organisation's planning and consents work, which is focussed on securing the optimum planning framework for the growth of onshore and offshore renewables at the national, regional and local level in Scotland.