

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – LESSONS FROM OUR SPATIAL PLANNING HERITAGE

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 thirteenth in a series of Think Pieces, Vincent Goodstadt sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically on lessons on our spatial planning heritage. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

The issues and opportunities:

There are 3 groups of issues: Firstly, the current challenges of social inequality and economic underperformance and imbalance which has long persisted are likely to continue without radical shifts in scale and nature of action.

Secondly, there will be great uncertainty created by the challenges created by climate and technological change which in particular means that the use of past trends will be no guide to the future. There will be discontinuities that need to be anticipated in particular in planning for a zero-carbon society and Industry 4.0 Economy.

Thirdly there is limited institutional capacity to provide the necessary local political, professional and technical leadership required to address these issues – in particular the lack of effective strategic planning, with the possible exception of the west of Scotland

These are challenges are global but there are great opportunities in Scotland to take action. These opportunities relate to:

- The strength of its R&D base for example in which its universities punch well above their weight;
- The strength of its ecosystems and the services they provide – e.g. its 'soil', water and energy base is very high for a nation of this size;
- Its urban structures lend themselves to adaptation and the development of polycentric network to create a competitive, coherent and cohesive global economic region

These issues require fresh approaches to planning

- developing a more integrated approach for example in land use and transport policy making – despite the rhetoric they are not properly integrated and this will be critical in a move to zero-carbon
- a more proactive approach to planning policies with clear targets (for delivering change), proactive policies (e.g. in heritage policies); link to implementation (e.g. in linkage to infrastructure investment such as the French style 'contrats'); and integrate economic social and environmental policies (e.g. with the introduction of 'national urban parks');

- rediscovering the role of planning in issues for example like agricultural policy and innovate in its environmental policies
- investing in strategic planning which has been eroded over the last decade,

These issues are different in different parts of Scotland, which is why the NPF has to be backed up by strong strategic planning arrangements for the component parts of Scotland – the city regions and major rural regions. This is necessary to better inform the NPF making process; to better deliver it; and to translate it into local action programmes.

Planning solutions:

The planning system has most influence when it sets out a clear spatial vision and is not just a collection of policy objectives. The most recent NPF has lost some of its spatiality which is heightened by the downgrading of local strategic development planning.

National Planning Framework 4 therefore should be broader in scope (addressing the new and emerging issues), clearer in its targets for change and using its role to bring policy sectors together and not just operate in silos. It should also set out a clear framework for the constituent parts of Scotland which provides a basis for incentivising and supporting local strategic action. At present there must be a concern that there is going to be a gap created in the system by the recent changes to strategic planning. I.e. under the new system the NPF has to be more spatially specific if it is to be effective.

Summary:

Short term (next 10 years) – Scotland will continue to fail to address the deep-rooted social issues that still blight communities.

Long term – the risk is Scotland will go backwards without radically new policy approaches.

Overall – Scotland should be one of the more resilient societies in the western world able to cope with and respond to the fundamental changes that are having to be faced globally.

Author Biography:

Vincent has held senior positions in local government and is an adviser to the public and private sector on strategic planning and collaborative partnerships. He chairs the steering group for the UK2070 Independent Commission; Honorary President ECTP-CEU; Honorary Professorial Fellow (University of Manchester). Vice-president TCPA; and is a past President of the RTPi.