

# SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – OUR ACTIVE TRAVEL NETWORKS

## 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 fourteenth in a series of Think Pieces, John Lauder, Deputy CEO of Sustrans, sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically our active travel networks. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion. Think Pieces will be published over the coming weeks.

## The issues and opportunities

Many of our towns and cities have to deal with the multiple ills created by car dependence which has been hard-wired into our planning system. The result of car dominance in our towns and cities includes air pollution, carbon emissions, traffic congestion, community severance, social isolation, social inequality, lack of physical activity for adults and children, and lack of resilience to the effects of climate change.

Many of these are issues now. If ignored, they will cause profound societal problems by 2050.

But there are opportunities. Sustrans believe that cities and towns can become vibrant, healthy and liveable places for everyone. They can also be places that are at the vanguard of the battle against climate change. Infrastructure for walking and cycling, links to sustainable transport hubs, better placemaking and access to greenspaces can all be part of the solution. Integration of transport planning, local area planning and spatial planning are key.

## Planning solutions

*What are the factors over which the planning system has the most influence?  
What might National Planning Framework 4 do to address these issues?*

### **Integrate transport and spatial planning with other social objectives**

Local planning authorities should better integrate their goals for spatial planning, housing growth, sustainable transport, climate change, urban regeneration and public health to ensure mutual objectives can be realised. Tools like Scotland's Place Standard are useful in this context and should be part of national policy.

### **Empower communities to play an active role in planning**

Existing and new communities increasingly play an active role in the planning process and should be engaged to ensure sustainable transport infrastructure associated with new developments and quality of spaces meets their needs. We need to do more to ensure people from all demographics, abilities and backgrounds are represented and heard in this process.

### **Reduce car dependency with 20-minute neighbourhoods**

Planning guidance must be reformed to enable all people living in cities and towns to live within a 20 minute walk from their everyday services, transport links and needs. Not everyone can afford a car, however, and currently 30% of Scottish households do not have access to a car. The planning system in its current form is contributing to a structural disadvantage weighted against the poorest, by making access to essential services harder for people who cannot afford a car.

Planning guidance could go a step further and allow for purposefully designed 'car-free' neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods for people at all stages of life and across the social spectrum that have excellent walking and cycling connections, bike storage, e-bike charging points and well-connected to public transport links can be attractive and sustainable.

Transport planning should properly reflect the sustainable transport hierarchy: planners should designate key roads for driving, with direct segregated cycle lanes on either side, streets should be for people, where the car is the guest, and for walking, cycling, wheeling and the bus.

### **Increase urban density without compromising on quality of place**

Urban and suburban sprawl has made people dependent on private cars for their regular journeys. There is a wide body of evidence which shows that concentrating development in urban areas (including brownfield sites), and building at appropriate but higher densities is key to reducing the need for car travel and distances travelled. NPF4 should therefore require local development plans to prioritise brownfield over greenfield development when it comes to housing and other developments.

Building at higher densities and in urban areas should not be at odds with creating attractive and liveable spaces. In fact, done well, increasing density with good placemaking can build communities. Increasing density also creates greater demand for local services, for example schools and health centres, and can help revitalise local high streets. Increasing density also creates more green and public space for recreation, events and socialising.

Higher density also means greater use of public transport helping to ensure financial viability, whilst improving service levels and frequency.

### **Summary**

Scotland is already well served with the Place Principle, with the commitment that "all those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together, and with local communities, to improve the lives of people, support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and create more successful places".

What needs to happen in the long term is that the definition of what constitutes successful places must even more explicitly take into account the impacts on social equality, on mental and physical health, on local environments and on the climate. Then, we will have a National Planning Framework that is equipped to tackle the major challenges facing Scotland in 2050.

## **Biography**

John Lauder has over a decade of experience in sustainable transport delivery, particularly in placemaking, walking, cycling and wheeling. He is Deputy CEO of Sustrans and sits on its Executive. John is responsible for Sustrans operations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. He sits on a number of key transport policy committees and is a regular contributor to the media and policy development.