

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – OUR FUTURE HOMES

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 latest in a series of Think Pieces, Sally Thomas, Chief Executive of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, sets out her thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically our future homes. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

Think Piece

The Scottish Government's *Housing to 2040* paper sets out a vision of a country which encompasses: a well-functioning housing system, high-quality sustainable homes, sustainable communities, and the homes that people need. I'm proud to represent a sector that is already delivering on these aims, contributing to the vision of Scotland in 2050.

There's not enough space here to do justice to what SFHA members have been able to deliver under the current Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP). It's not only that they're delivering much-needed new homes and, therefore, helping to tackle issues like homelessness. Due to registered social landlords (RSLs) being held to higher standards around energy efficiency, for example, they're also helping to achieve targets around fuel poverty and the climate emergency. Furthermore, the work RSLs carry out through their 'wider role' activity directly contributes to the achievement of National Performance Framework outcomes around social justice. Combining this with the development of new housing, means that RSLs are creating physical and social links that would otherwise not exist.

However, members are currently delivering this work in a time of uncertainty. While the Government's paper outlines a vision to 2040, we are still waiting for confirmation of what will happen to the AHSP post-2021. This is something the sector urgently requires in order to sustain its economic and social impact.

A key part of SFHA's recent work has been our Innovation and Future Thinking Programme, which has really demonstrated how innovative our members can be. Projects include looking at how to deliver greener infrastructure through development activity. The learning from this project will offer important lessons on how housing and the planning system can work together to deliver more of this infrastructure, crucial to the placemaking agenda. Lessons not only in terms of physical planning but involving local people in development – a key focus of our renewed planning legislation.

The planning system is a key enabler of the delivery of the housing Scotland needs. Rather than the bureaucratic image that the system is perhaps prone to suffer from,

its role is an important one in terms of the achievement of strategies around areas such as placemaking and inclusive growth.

It's for this reason that we closely followed the passage of the Planning Bill through Parliament, as part of the Scottish Alliance for Places and People (SAPP). We were pleased that some of the key SAPP 'asks', including the introduction of a purpose for planning made it into the final bill. However, some of the most important issues for our members, notably land value capture and the inclusion of housebuilding targets in the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) are now being looked at later than we would have preferred. Our 2015 research with Shelter and CIH informed the current 50,000 target; this research is currently being refreshed, and we look forward to sharing revised recommendations in spring 2020.

I must reiterate the impact that uncertainty over plans post-2021 is having. We simply cannot wait for the two years it is anticipated the implementation of the new legislation will take. We have supply chains and jobs to secure – and the delivery of additional housing. The most recent housing statistics show that RSL stock is up just 1% overall and council stock is static: we are only just now breaking even in replacing affordable homes lost to Right to Buy. At the same time, there are 160,000 people still on waiting lists for social housing. It is crucial that we use important mechanisms like the planning system to alleviate this, creating great homes in great places.

*Short term (next 10 years) – what **will** happen?*

RSLs will continue to prove their resilience during a period of uncertainty, delivering much-needed housing and on wider social justice ambitions.

*Long term – what **could** happen?*

If the Scottish Government re-commits its investment in the housing sector through another AHSP, we can continue the momentum in terms of replacing homes lost to Right to Buy.

*Overall – what **should** happen?*

Investment in housebuilding should not fluctuate according to parliamentary cycles. The Scottish Government has demonstrated that it wants to think long-term through its vision of the country in 2050. Housing has an impact on so many areas of our lives; only a long-term investment in delivering housing which meets our needs throughout our lives will ensure that vision is realised.

Biography

Sally Thomas is Chief Executive of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the national representative body for Scotland's housing associations and co-operatives.

She has extensive experience of working in the housing association and regeneration sectors and has co-authored several publications for the Joseph

Rowntree Foundation, the Chartered Institute of Housing, HACT, think tanks and government departments.

She has chaired and served on a variety of boards in the housing, arts, health and charitable sectors and is currently Vice-Chair of the Town and Country Planning Association.