

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

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 twenty-eighth in a series of Think Pieces Elaine Fotheringham, Senior Planning Officer for the Flood Risk Management Act at the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), sets out her thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically flood risk management. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

Think Piece

Flood resilience, as part of climate change adaptation, must be central to any new national planning policy on flood risk management. Development awarded planning permission today will, in all likelihood, still be standing in 2050, a mere 31 years from now. 2050 is not a dim and distant time horizon, but a future date that is as close to us today as is the advent of the internet. It will arrive with us remarkably quickly.

Climate change is not a matter for future generations, policies, or planning systems to grapple with. We have a declared climate emergency – climate change is happening and it is happening now. Its impacts are evident, with global temperatures 1^oC higher than pre-industrial levels, and sea level rise locked in well beyond the end of the 21st century. In Scotland, it will bring a greater chance of extreme hazards including flooding, drought, heatwaves and sea level rise. Even if we are able to take the radical action necessary to limit the rise in global temperature, we still need to find ways of dealing with the climate change that we have already caused, and in Scotland, that means adapting to flooding.

Around 284,000 properties (homes, businesses, services), are at medium risk of flooding in Scotland. By the 2080s this could increase by 110,000 properties due solely to the impact of climate change on flooding if action to tackle global greenhouse gas emissions is limited. This figure does not take account of new development yet to take place, including undeveloped sites in Local Development Plans, some of which inevitably will be at risk of climate change-related flooding in future. This demonstrates the enormity of the challenge we face.

Scotland is a fortunate country in that, relatively speaking, it does not face the scale of challenge other countries do in finding flood-free developable land. This provides us with an opportunity to deliver inclusive growth and development that is truly economically sustainable: investment (particularly of public money), in new infrastructure and housing is only financially sound if it is flood-free. The cost of dealing with flooding events to the public and the private purse is considerable, and creating places now that by 2050 require expensive flood protection schemes in order to remain viable places to live and work is no longer a prudent approach. Future-proofed, flood-

free development can also bring attendant benefits that actually help save Scotland money, such as the health and wellbeing gains that come from high-quality blue-green infrastructure.

We must decide now how we will use and modify the systems at our disposal to help us adapt to, as well as mitigate, climate change. The land use planning system is a tool that can help us create great places that can cope with a changing climate. NPF4 presents a prime opportunity to articulate exactly how our planning system will ensure new development does not add to the number of properties already at risk, by determining where and how our future homes, places of work and leisure will be built such that they are resilient to climate change-related flood risk.

The very best – that is to say the most liveable, desirable and importantly, climate-just - development undertaken today will be flood-free now, in 2050, and at the end of the 21st century. One way of achieving this is for NPF4 to replicate and reinforce the principle of avoidance set out in Scottish Planning Policy (2014), and in particular, factor an allowance for climate change in to the functional floodplain. I am keen to hear the views of other stakeholders on workable alternatives to or extensions of this approach.

Biography

Elaine Fotheringham is a Senior Planning Officer with SEPA, helping to implement the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 through its role as a statutory consultee. A Geography graduate, with a Masters in Planning, she is a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, and has worked in land use planning since 2008.