

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – SELF-PROVIDED HOMES AND COMMUNITIES

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 thirtieth in a series of Think Pieces, Dr Mathew Lane, Post-Doctoral researcher at the University of Edinburgh, sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically on self-provided homes and communities. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

Self-Provided Homes and Communities: Self and Custom Build for Sustainable Place-Making

Research we have recently completed illustrates the relationship between facilitating individuals to construct their own homes, and the construction of both better quality, more sustainable homes, and more place-centred, environmentally harmonious communities. By injecting home-owner agency into the new-build housing value chain, and encouraging long term perspectives on value, we open up the potential for home-making to exist as a central building block of sustainable place-making.

This research is currently being carried forward through work undertaken alongside the Scottish Government's 'Self and Custom Build Challenge Fund' project, through which a series of collective self and custom build projects have been conceptualised for locations across Scotland. With the issue of self and custom build varying geographically across the country, as well as having a rich and diverse historical dimension, a number of opportunities result from this:

- 1) Expanding self-build housing beyond its status as a niche sub-sector, to instead encompass a diverse range of 'self-provided' methodologies.
- 2) Recognising that the sorts of problems which can potentially be addressed by self-provided routes are diverse and geographically variable. These include, for example, stimulating local economies through SME growth in rural areas, and engaging with problems of build-out and market absorption rates in higher value urban and sub-urban regions.
- 3) Embracing and recovering Scotland's tradition of self-provided homes and communities in setting the foundations for a more resilient and stable future housing system.

Planning solutions

Through its ownership of issues around land value and the provision of plots, the planning system has the ability to shape the relationship between achieving targets of building both more homes and better homes.

A great deal more work needs to be done to build on the Land Commission's study of land value capture and how – if at all – these mechanisms deviate from planning gains already in existence through section 75 agreements. However, in the meantime, self-build housing presents a unique opportunity to focus on value *creation* through elevating the actual use value of owner-built homes over the speculative, asset value, associated with more 'standard' new-build products.

What might National Planning Framework 4 do to address these issues?

At this stage, I see two possible ways in which planning, via National Planning Framework 4, could actively pursue progressive change in this area. In both cases this would take forward the requirement for local authorities to keep a register of those seeking to self-build and the ability to embed self-build into master plan consent zones, as contained within the Planning (Scotland) Bill:

- 1) Embed a means of capturing data on owner involvement in home design and construction into planning applications in order to monitor the relationship between self-provision and metrics around sustainability, energy efficiency, and environmental impact assessment.
- 2) Explore the potential to embed serviced plots into section 75 agreements as part of developer obligations

Summary

Short term – What will happen: Self-build housing will likely become increasingly popular and desirable in line with increasing dissatisfaction with both the product and service on offer from existing volume house-builders (Homeowner Alliance 2019).

Long term- What could happen: Local authorities come under increasing pressure to:

- a) Meet increased demand for self-build housing through the supply of land;
- b) Identify tangible ways of achieving the net-zero carbon transition within the housing sector.

Overall – What should happen:

A self and custom build renaissance should take place across Scotland, rooted in its historical affiliation, particularly with highland and rural communities. As a result, the question of upscaling the self and custom build sector more widely, can transition from one of another housing problem to be solved, to a solver of existing problems...

Biography

Mathew Lane is a Post-Doctoral researcher at the University of Edinburgh, School of Geosciences. I specialise in issues of urban planning for sustainability, low-carbon house building, and city climate governance. My research has been funded by the ESRC, the EPSRC, the Scottish Government, and by private organisations in the Energy sector.