

# SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – REBALANCING AND REGENERATING PLANNING FOR PEOPLE AND PLACES



## 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 thirty-first in a series of Think Pieces Andy Milne, CEO of SURF, sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically Rebalancing and Regenerating Planning for People and Places. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

## Think Piece

As Scotland's Regeneration Forum, SURF's main focus is on tackling the poverty and inequalities, which prevent successful change in disadvantaged and disconnected communities across the country.

Despite being part of the 6<sup>th</sup> biggest economy in the world, and recent lofty proclamations of the 'end of austerity', the cooperative efforts of SURF's 300 plus highly committed, cross sector member organisations, remain greatly constrained by a lack of resources. At the same time, creative enterprise flourishes in adversity. Every year, the SURF Awards highlight inspiring examples of successfully practical and collaborative community regeneration.

In the rapidly evolving context of employment, demographics, technology and environmental crisis, the central challenge is to more creatively connect local assets and knowledge with regional and national policy and resources.

SURF has actively encouraged the Scottish Government's current enthusiasm for better linking people, place and inclusive growth. Over the last 25 years, we have learned that one of the main barriers to success is the wildly disproportionate gap between active citizens and their first level of formal decision making. Where the European average is around 6K, local authorities in Scotland struggle to connect with the diversity and demands of the myriad of communities within their average

160K constituency populations. The result is dislocation, misunderstanding and mistrust, which corrodes participation and cooperation.

So, what are the future issues and opportunities, looking ahead towards 2050?

Well, only total climate and civilisation breakdown (a reasonable possibility at the time of writing) will prevent accelerating technological evolution and the resultant atomisation of roles, identity and belonging. Successful collaboration in the face of such challenges will depend, as it always has done, on well informed planning towards the most productive distribution and effective connection of people, places and resources.

In terms of heritage, scale and population location, Scotland remains a nation of towns. To better reflect that reality and to make the most of our diverse resources in a more localised future, we should be planning beyond the (not so) big four main cities and their imagined 'regions'.

### **Planning solutions:**

*What are the factors over which the planning system has the most influence?*

Planning could usefully ensure the more effective deployment and connection of its own people and their socially and economically important skills and expertise. It could stop spending so much precious time and resources on routine, restrictive planning bureaucracy. It should engage its considerable knowledge and energy with the creation of practical and progressive community plans to imaginatively link physical communities with their services, wellbeing and enterprises.

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

It should connect existing knowledge and experience with projected information and conceptions, to help form a realistic, understandable and supportive framework, within which local communities and enterprises can flourish in their own way. To that end, in collaboration with other partners and processes, it should invest in resourcing authentic local participation and assets, to better inform a relevant and responsive framework. SURF can help with all of that.

### **Summary:**

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

A continuing constriction of adequate resources, the eruption of some creative local responses, resulting in more diversity, some beneficial some problematic.

*Long term – what **could** happen?*

In the accelerating global climate emergency, Scotland successfully links its abundant civic and natural resources, to become a beacon of inclusive and sustainable growth.

*Overall – what **should** happen?*

For any chance of success in well informed planning, we should grasp the wildly overgrown governance nettle to reform our hopelessly out of scale 'local' representative structures.

## **Biography**

Andy Milne is CEO of SURF, Scotland's Regeneration Forum for practitioners, policy makers and academics. By sharing and channeling the experience, views and ideas and of its extensive membership of over 300 cross-sector organisations, SURF helps to inform better policy and practice. SURF is primarily concerned with shared efforts to tackle the causes and degenerative impacts of poverty and inequalities.