

Architecture & Design Scotland

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

Response to the Scottish Government's Call for Ideas in relation to NPF4

Background

Architecture & Design Scotland is Scotland's champion for design and the built environment. We are a public body, funded by the Scottish Government to promote good design in the built environment and provide advice and support to a range of building projects and wider spatial strategies. Our primary focus is on using design to realise benefits for communities and users at a place level.

The ambition of NPF4 to provide a national spatial framework for the future development of Scotland is one we welcome, so we are pleased to be able to share our thoughts at this formative stage. These thoughts are based on experience drawn from our work and from our wider knowledge of practice in architecture, urban design and related activities. They represent our collective view and have been endorsed by our Board.

Response

In addition to responses to the consultation questions (Annex A), the following summary is framed against 4 key issues:

- **Opportunities** presented by NPF4
- What **SPP** can do to support the success of NPF4
- **Lessons** to apply from other NPF projects
- How **A&DS** can support the delivery of NPF4

Opportunities

We welcome the Scottish Government's intention to: "*use the National Planning Framework 4 to promote sustainable and inclusive growth across all of our regions, and to create high quality, diverse and sustainable places that promote well-being and attract investment.*"

Alignment

In this context, NPF4 provides the opportunity to improve the alignment between a range of spatial strategies and the policies that support them at national, regional and local levels, e.g. the ongoing work of Scotland's Infrastructure Commission. Within this we would highlight the opportunity to include a clear definition of, and commitment to, placemaking and design quality that is about fitness for purpose, sustainability, value for money and a source of utility and delight for the users. For us, the purpose of good design and a design approach is to make everything (and everyone) work better together.

Alongside this, there is an opportunity to create the basis for a more joined-up, place-based approach to development planning and delivery. This will require the alignment of a range of spatial strategies & policies currently developed outwith planning, collaboration amongst the people involved in preparing, funding, delivering and using developments and rethinking the range of processes which currently operate in isolation from each other. The success of the Place Principle would be that any intervention, investment, plan or design work towards more than one of the priorities of the place, and not counter to any of them. This will

require trade-offs and the need for mediation but the aim should always be to achieve as many public benefits as possible from any investment or place-based action.

Outcomes

We very much welcome the opportunity presented by NPF4 to focus on delivering the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and the outcomes within it. This provides the scope to think about what Scotland will be in e.g. 2032, how place can deliver the outcomes sought e.g. well-being, equality and fairness and present NPF4 as a spatial expression of the Scotland we want.

Measuring Success

Linked to the previous point, NPF4 could enable a new way of measuring success that reflects the fundamental purpose of planning as opposed to what planning does/deals with. This would mean a shift in focus from simply measuring performance to cover the outcomes sought through the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework.

Communication & Engagement

In our experience, presenting complex development proposals in spatial terms helps people from a range of backgrounds understand and engage with them. There is therefore an opportunity to think about NPF as a tool to communicate our ambitions for Scotland and to engage the community in a conversation around this. We have experience of doing this on a local and regional scale and understand the hurdles as well as the opportunities offered by careful communication of proposals and underlying vision.

Sites and Land Assembly

The creation of a national spatial framework requires new criteria for choosing development sites. This means a national strategy rather than a 'call for sites' and a whole system approach to the preparation, financing and delivery of the strategy. Within this, alignment of e.g. infrastructure commission, National Investment Bank priorities and the requirement to connect business case to the NPF4 would strengthen its role.

Leadership

Placing the NPF4 at the heart of how we plan has the potential to enable collective leadership across the public sector and with it, a move to a more positive, visionary 'enabling' culture. The result would be a system where risk and the attendant costs are better balanced between sectors leading to more of the right development in the right place at the right time.

SPP

SPP has a key role to play in setting out the principles for the delivery of NPF4 and the local development plans that flow from it. As part of this we would strongly encourage the inclusion of guidance on how to include placemaking in local development plans, e.g. a commitment to applying the place principle to ensure the range of local spatial strategies currently prepared separately are in future development collaboratively within the frame of the development plan.

This will require competing priorities to be resolved in the wider interest as policies become increasingly interconnected. In this way, SPP could require LDPs to reflect all local spatial strategies across climate resilience, energy generation, housing, healthcare, connectivity etc. so as to support a place-based approach.

Lessons

- Whole system policy, including land use and planning policy, at national and regional level should drive investment planning and business case systems should be adapted to support the delivery of development. Examples we encounter too often involve the reverse where delivery of development is a function of separate and non-aligned funding streams, which runs counter to the ambition for a co-ordinated and streamlined approach to funding and delivery.
- It is important to start with a clearer understanding of the purpose/vision of a whole place before developing detailed policies for the delivery of its various elements. Without this, the ambition of a place-based approach will founder.
- Achieving strong, long-term visions for our places requires local leadership and collaboration which itself requires support and investment in new ways of working
- It is essential to prioritise collective solutions over individual interests and the best way to do this is by looking at these interests together and the range of public goods that can be delivered.

A&DS

We can offer support in the following ways:

- Bringing national projects together to provide advice (see Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund)
- Supporting and shaping design and visioning approaches to deal with complexity and the need to address competing demands
- Understanding value and building models for measuring/checking success
- Communicating spatial proposals and frameworks to a range of audiences
- Building the brief around the outcomes wanted across several policy areas
- Gathering and sharing lessons learned around effective place making
- Providing an overview of practice across Scotland

Annex A

What development will we need to address climate change?

Part of the answer will be the creation of mixed-use neighbourhoods and communities benefiting from active travel, energy efficient buildings and renewable energy generation. Such places create increased opportunities, e.g. for small businesses through necessary changes to retail servicing through shift away from car-based models.

In this way we can ensure the right development in the right place, particularly important when it comes to planning for new housing where the benefits of a place-based approach to addressing climate change are significant.

Design can play a part in both adapting existing places and designing new places to achieve this and to make them more resilient to longer-term impacts around climate. The latter can be managed through integrating green infrastructure as part of a wider landscape-based approach to address water, heat and other climate-related issues.

Thought should therefore be given to using NPF4 to prevent or discourage development in flood plains or parts of the coast likely to be eroded, to require strategic planning of transport, energy generation, water and wastewater to address changing climates, supporting delivery of Green Infrastructure at scale and ensuring recycling and waste are addressed nationally/strategically, regionally and locally to encourage reuse, limit transport miles.

How can planning best support our quality of life, health and wellbeing in the future?

Planning can best support these ambitions by enabling the type of development described above. Planners and the planning system are ideally placed to lead the wider community of decision-makers, investors, designers and, above all, users towards this although doing so is complex and challenging.

From our perspective this will involve providing the focus for creating local, place-based 'visions' that communities can work to deliver. It will mean making choices and decisions based on long-term priorities over short-term ones. It will mean encouraging and supporting innovation in the design of buildings, landscapes and infrastructure. It will mean changing the way we work to ensure the whole community is represented in decisions that will ultimately impact on their quality of life, health and well-being.

It is undoubtedly possible to do this and there are examples of where aspects of this approach are already happening. To do so will require planners and planning to change but it will also require change from everyone else involved in the multiple decisions and choices that ultimately shape our places, not least our elected members at local and national level.

What does planning need to do to enable development and investment to benefit everyone?

In the same way as planning can support quality of life, health and wellbeing, it can ensure we invest in development that benefits everyone. This again means ensuring everyone's interests are factored in through a process that is collaborative rather than adversarial; that puts the wider community interest ahead of that of individual interests.

It is likely that increasing use of digital and AI across our economy will impact on labour markets, fewer of us will work in large, centralised offices etc. and that the economy in Scotland will be even more dependent on global investment choices. That said, no-one really

knows what our economy will look like in a few years' time, never mind in 2050 but what we do know is that the places that have proved most resilient to economic change in the past are those that are flexible, well-connected and have access to the human and natural resources that we all need. These are the kind of mixed-use, human scale places that good urban design can help nurture.

What infrastructure do we need to plan and build to realise our long-term ambitions?

In relation to connective infrastructure, the evidence we see suggests that our focus should be on investing in increased mass transit, active travel and digital. While this is about much more than planning, if our spatial strategies do not reflect this, then it is likely that in the long term the current reliance on car-based travel modes will continue to the detriment of both our individual health and wellbeing and the effective management of climate change.

We would also highlight that investment in new infrastructure has impacts beyond its immediate location. For this reason, a place-based approach allows the benefits of this investment to be understood in a wider context, making it more likely that communities can realise long-term aspirations.