

Planning for Scotland in 2050

Call for Ideas for National Planning Framework 4

Response from greenspace scotland – May 2020



Introduction

1. greenspace scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Call for Ideas on National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).
2. greenspace scotland is an independent charitable company and social enterprise. Since 2002, we have provided a national lead on greenspace, working with others, towards our goal that everyone can access and enjoy quality greenspaces which meet their needs and improves quality of life.
3. This submission is based on our experience of community placemaking and working across urban Scotland with local authorities, national agencies, regional and local organisations, environmental trusts and community groups on the planning, development and sustainable management of greenspaces as a key part of the infrastructure of our towns and cities.
4. It also draws on learning from our pioneer projects, particularly in relation to climate resilience, ParkPower and green health, and the growing evidence base on the role of greenspace and green infrastructure in contributing to outcomes across the National Performance Framework and UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Context

5. The Call for Ideas was launched as Councils across Scotland were following the Scottish Government's lead in declaring a Climate Emergency (and in some cases an Ecological Emergency) and starting to develop Climate Emergency Action Plans.
6. Writing this response in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis has thrown into even sharper relief the inequalities experienced by people and communities across Scotland in terms of health, housing, access to food, education, employment, transport, environmental quality, access to gardens and quality public green and open space.
7. NPF4 provides an opportunity for a radical rethink about the Scotland that we want to live in and the pivotal role of planning in shaping sustainable, resilient and thriving places.
8. This is not only an opportunity to take the bold actions which will genuinely deliver on the ambitions already expressed in Scottish Policy, but also to take a radical and innovative approach to support a green recovery from the current crisis which tackles both inequalities and the climate emergency.
9. *The consultation asks five key questions about climate change, health, economy, infrastructure and the special character of places to gather views on the future of planning in Scotland. We have identified one over-arching and underpinning response which addresses all five questions.*

Green & Blue Infrastructure first approach and national network

NPF4 should set out:

- a 'Green-Blue Infrastructure first' approach, and
- identify a National Green & Blue Infrastructure Network as a new National Development

10. A green-blue infrastructure first approach would require a strategic, systematic and systemic approach to planning and developing green and blue infrastructure as a vital and integral element of place from national to regional, local and site level.

11. This would include a national requirement that multi-functional green and blue infrastructure is a key component of all new developments and retrofitted into existing areas.

12. NPF4 should set out plans for developing a national green and blue infrastructure network and processes for developing this network in regional spatial strategies, local development plans and local place plans.

13. A growing body of evidence shows how green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and multi-functional green networks can help support climate-resilient communities; improve the quality and liveability of places; contribute to improving health and wellbeing, and narrowing health inequalities; and act as host to low carbon energy infrastructure.

14. A National Green & Blue Infrastructure Network would contribute to:

- climate resilient communities
- climate change adaptation and mitigation, flood management and SUDs¹
- net zero carbon targets – supply and support renewable energy²
- improving health and wellbeing – reducing health inequalities³
- access to healthy food and diets – providing space for local food production⁴
- accessible and inclusive places – active travel – access to quality greenspace – playable environments
- biodiversity enhancement and habitat connectivity

15. Planning has a fundamental role to play in shaping how we live in the future. We therefore also recommend the following **policy principles**:

- new developments must be designed with high placemaking standards – provision and access to green and blue spaces must be planned for at the design stage – connecting to and integrating with the national green & blue infrastructure network – national standards and guidance for provision, access and quality of greenspace
- developments and infrastructure must be located and designed for zero carbon, adaptability, resilience and longevity
- developments and infrastructure should deliver biodiversity net gain
- a wellbeing of future generations test should be applied to all new developments and infrastructure

¹ See for example <https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/Pages/Category/climate-resilience>

² See for example www.parkpower.org.uk

³ See for example <https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/Pages/Category/health>

⁴ See for example <https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/food-growing-publications>

16. We would also support NPF4 being more strongly aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

17. *The following sections provide more detail in relation to a green-blue infrastructure first and a National Green & Blue Infrastructure Network for renewable heat, health and wellbeing, access to quality greenspace, active travel, inclusive and playable environments, and food production.*

Climate change and renewable heat

18. Planning must play a key role in addressing climate change and supporting the transformation to decarbonise energy, transport and consumer behaviour. While it has a role in all these areas, green and blue infrastructure has a particularly crucial role in the supply and transmission of low carbon heat to support localised energy systems.

19. Scotland has an impressive track record on renewables in terms of electricity generation, but according to the Scottish Government's (2019) 'Annual Compendium of Scottish Energy Statistics' it has the worst record in Europe for renewable heat. Decarbonising heat over the next two decades is one of the biggest challenges for achieving Scotland's net zero carbon target.

20. greenspace scotland's ParkPower project⁵ has shown how parks and greenspaces can make a significant contribution to supporting widespread adoption of local energy systems to provide low carbon heat.

21. Two-thirds of Scotland's parks are in areas that are considered suitable for district heat networks - they have the potential to become our (largely underground) community power stations supplying heat to surrounding neighbourhoods. By utilising only 20% of the viable, available land within parks across Scotland we could generate 4,600 GWh of renewable heat - that's 5.5% of our total non-electrical heat demand - or enough heat for 15% of all Scotland's households (over 383,300 houses). Ground source heat from parks could generate savings of 580,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year – that's approximately 1.4% of the Scotland's total emissions.

22. A green-blue infrastructure first approach would ensure that the opportunity to utilise these largely untapped land assets is optimised to its full potential to support low carbon energy development.

23. The planning system has a vital role to play in facilitating the widespread adoption of low carbon heat by supporting its development within green and blue infrastructure and enabling an increase in the number and extent of district heat networks within urban areas.

24. NPF4 should require that all new development meets high standards of energy efficiency and utilises low carbon sources of heat and cooling. Appropriate green and blue infrastructure must be 'designed in' to any new development through the planning process to provide the space and connectivity to allow low carbon heat to be generated and distributed to all new buildings.

25. NPF4 must ensure that district heat zones and potential sources of heat (both of which are likely to be identified in Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies) are fully integrated into local development plans. All suitable developments (new and existing)

⁵ www.parkpower.org.uk

within these zones should be directed to use these district heat networks through planning conditions and/or other mechanisms.

26. A National Green-Blue Infrastructure Network would highlight the opportunities for renewable heat networks at a national, regional and local scale, including the currently untapped energy potential of Scotland parks and greenspaces.

Health, wellbeing and access to greenspace

27. Where we live, work and play has an important impact on our health and wellbeing. People living in more deprived areas tend to have worse health and live in poorer quality environments.
28. NPF4 should be a powerful driver for the role of planning in adopting a whole system approach to improving health and reducing inequalities. The health and wellbeing of the resident and working population should be a key consideration in local development plans.
29. There is a growing body of evidence showing that access to quality greenspaces improves health and wellbeing outcomes and reduces health inequalities. Access to greenspace matters (and the National Indicator on access to greenspace sets out a target of within a 5 minute walk from home) but the quality of greenspace is of vital importance too.
30. There should be national standards and guidance for provision, accessibility and quality of greenspace within new developments and retrofitting in existing places, as part of a National Green & Blue Infrastructure Network, and supported by open space audits, strategies and play sufficiency assessments.
31. The Covid-19 lockdown demonstrated that people need space within and around buildings, and so alongside national standards and guidance for public open space, there should be enhanced requirements and standards for private and communal spaces including gardens, back greens, roof gardens, balconies and green walls, as well as more generous building space requirements.
32. Our work with NHS Lothian and the Edinburgh & Lothians Health Foundation to develop the *Greenspace & Health Strategic Framework for Edinburgh and the Lothians*⁶ demonstrated the importance of accessible greenspace in and around the NHS estate for the benefit of staff, patients and visitors. Enhanced standards and guidance are required for green and open space in the design and development of all new health facilities.

Active travel – inclusive, accessible and playable environments

33. Looking around Scotland, it is obvious that our spaces and places have been designed for cars, not for people. This must change. Walking needs to be at the heart of urban planning to create walkable environments that encourage and support healthy choices and active lifestyles.
34. The lockdown during COVID-19 has reminded us of the importance of neighbourhoods and being able to access local services. It has demonstrated the need for inclusive and accessible design for people of all ages and abilities – ensuring our streets and neighbourhoods are walkable and playable.

⁶ <https://www.elhf.co.uk/greenspace-and-health/>

Towards a Good Food Nation

35. Food matters – it shapes the way we live and how we connect with the land, and even more crucially, it underpins our health and wellbeing.
36. NPF4 should have a significant role in enabling Scotland to become a Good Food Nation.
37. With the Community Empowerment Act and Local Food Growing Strategies, the focus has primarily been on ‘growing your own’ in allotments and community gardens. It is important for food growing spaces to be provided in new developments, but more fundamentally there is an opportunity for NPF4 to support a paradigm shift in food growing, with regional spatial strategies and local development plans identifying and designating land suitable for food production in urban and peri-urban areas – leading to a new generation of market gardens and community supported agriculture, as well as innovative opportunities for urban food production using aquaponics and other techniques (as seen recently in plans for an urban farm in Swansea⁷).
38. Scaling up food production, closer to the customer would reduce food miles and greenhouse gas emissions. It could also result in a more ‘productive’ green belt and unlock the potential of vacant and derelict sites with containerised growing modules or aquaponic infrastructure. New developments could be encouraged to include their own ‘farms’ with growing infrastructure utilising energy generated locally from ground source heat and PV solar/thermal. There could be an edible strand to Forestry and Woodland Strategies supporting productive orchards and fruit-growing.
39. In 2002, ERZ prepared a detailed scoping study for the Glasgow & Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership which took a transect from the city centre to the urban fringe illustrating a ‘Sow and Grow Everywhere’ approach.⁸ This could provide a template for the food production strand of the National Green & Blue Infrastructure Network.

Empowering communities – Local Place Plans

40. More resources are needed to support communities to develop and crucially deliver their Local Place Plans. Too many communities have the ‘*charette – so what?*’ experience, where the professional input to support communities to develop plans is not followed by resources and support to realise the ambitions and actions set out in the plan.
41. Planning policy should ensure that developers respond to the ambitions expressed by communities in Local Place Plans.

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⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-51387695>

⁸ https://issuu.com/gcvgreenetworkpartnership/docs/urban_growing_sage_final_report_os