



National Planning Framework 4 Call for Ideas

A response from the Director of Living Streets Scotland

Introduction

Living Street Scotland is part of the UK charity for everyday walking and has been so since 1929 when we were first founded as the Pedestrians' Association. We want to see a Scotland where all generations benefit from streets fit for walking.

Living Streets welcomes the Scottish Government's calls for ideas to help form Scotland's 4th National Planning Framework. Whilst there are many ideas of merit, we have focused on one big unifying idea that fits the strategic scope of the NPF. Below we outline the case for a national city centre transformation programme for Scotland. This sets out how the areas around Scotland's main stations can be transformed with a strong focus on walking, active travel and public transport.

A National City Centre Transformation Programme for Scotland

Living Streets is in the process of finalising research into the environment around Scotland's main stations. Our initial findings are that these areas are not fit for purpose as public spaces or for easy transport interchange. We therefore believe ten strategic sites across Scotland should be designated for transformation bringing together planning for both transport, public realm enhancement and economic regeneration. In terms of projects the following all have merit as part of a national programme:

1. Edinburgh Waverly station and Haymarket Station Edinburgh
2. Waverly / Edinburgh Royal Mile / Scottish Parliament
3. Glasgow Queen Street and Central Stations
4. Aberdeen Station / Union Street

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5. Inverness Station and vicinity
6. Dundee Station and vicinity
7. Perth Station and Bus Station
8. Stirling Station, bus station and links to town centre

Its notable that of these sites, only Dundee Station is associated with the current framework's list of national developments. Its perhaps not surprising that there is a lack of coordinated investment in other places not on the list.

Despite not being on the NPF3 national project list, Haymarket and Queen Street stations have received large scale strategic investment, but in neither case did this extend into the wider public realm. Notably, airports featured in NPF3 whilst stations and town centres did not. Arguably, the current planning framework is blind to opportunities in the heart of our cities. Without a strategic focus it is not surprising these places largely missed out on City Deal funding. Strategic public realm projects in Edinburgh's City Centre have stalled (e.g. City Centre East West Cycle Way) and there is a lack of clarity on funding for the City Centre Transformation. Aberdeen Stirling, Perth and Dundee have seen many false dawns in terms of city centre investment.

Most embarrassing of all the primary walking route from the capital's main station (Waverly) to the Scottish Parliament has not seen any investment for over 30 years. The worst, consequence is that disabled people cannot access the Scottish Parliament safely or easily because of the street environment. This is just one example where a series of improvements need to be brought together into a strategic project.

In short, Scotland has not been investing effectively in strategic city centre places and the critical public transport gateways between its main cities. NPF4 can change this and in doing so address the Scottish Government key policy goals.

1. What development will we need to address climate change?

Scotland needs to invest strategically in the central core of its seven cities focused on

train and bus stations as green means of city and regional travel. This must recognize that all journeys starting or ending in city centers will involve a degree of walking and hence an excellent public realm is needed for both pedestrian movement and civic life.

The lack of space and the impacts of traffic congestion and associated emissions must be addressed. This requires a large-scale transformation to allow people to walk, cycle and access public transport safely, efficiently and enjoy the experience. City centers also need to compete with peripheral car dependent locations in terms quality of the experience (walking environment) and high-quality public transport and active travel connections.

Altering these areas to reduce traffic also unlocks opportunities for urban greening and sustainable urban drainage, which are a vital part of Scotland's climate change response.

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

The areas around Scotland's city centres are the busiest places in Scotland for footfall (a key marker of economic activity), especially people passing through them as part of their daily commute. Each has a unique history and sense of identity. Furthermore, good public spaces bring people together both informally and formally through public events and gatherings.

Many of Scotland's city centre streets exclude people with disabilities who lack safe spaces for movement and are acutely affected by overcrowding or conflicts with traffic. Covid 19 has reinforced the need for a radical rebalancing of space because social distancing is not possible on narrow pavements.

Meanwhile, the level of road traffic casualties in these areas is high, offering immediate health benefits from reducing car use. There is a strong body of evidence showing that a better walking environment will lead to more physical activity in the heart of our cities thus delivering better health outcomes.

3. What does planning need to do to enable development and investment in our economy so that it benefits everyone

The investment in core city centres needs to be much better led and coordinated by the Scottish Government, city councils and other strategic partners, particularly rail industry station projects. NPF4 can provide this strategic focus and encourage master planning beyond the immediate perimeter of stations. As a minimum each project need to include local walking routes (1 mile / 20 minutes) beyond the station. For instance, tackling links between Aberdeen Station, Union Street and key destinations

City centres need to be at the end of safe cycle ways (e.g. useable by an unaccompanied 12-year-old). Bus priority is also critical. Conversely, removal of car parks is needed to reduce demand for road space and create new opportunities for other uses particularly city centre residential living.

Finally, city centres need to thrive in world where retail is a secondary function. This means bolstering other uses, including residential, employment and public services. Such a transformation will have substantial spatial implications which require management.

NPF4 must bring together active travel funding (e.g. Sustrans Places for People), economic development funding (e.g. City Deal), town centre enhancement funds, private sector funds (housing), climate funding (city greening and flood resilience) and strategic rail investment.

4. What policies are needed to improve, protect and strengthen the special character of our places?

Quality of place must be maintained and can be measured by footfall and the time people are prepared to spend in a location. Experience matters and can only be improved via policies that:

- Tackle traffic dominance, congestion and pollution

- Creating more civic and pedestrian space
- Reversing the dilapidation of the public realm through replacement and renewal of surfaces and street furniture
- Give more priority to walking, cycling and public transport
- Ensures accessibility for people with disabilities, older people and children
- Street greening and sustainable urban drainage

Whilst flagship investment in city centres is critical, this needs to be part of a wider pattern of investment at regional level focused on town centres, active travel routes and accessible (e.g. without car reliance) sites for housing and employment. Park and ride will also be critical in accelerating the removal of city centre parking across Scotland.

5. What infrastructure do we need to build to realize our long-term aspirations?

The infrastructure in Scotland's city centres compares poorly with most North European Cities, especially in relation to dedicated pedestrian space. Only investment at a nation scale can deliver:

1. Consultation with the public on the future of Scotland's key gateway spaces, their functions and improvement
2. Land assembly and repurposing of existing spaces, including transferring under used buildings into new uses, particularly affordable housing
3. Public realm improvements in terms of better surfaces walking and cycling and clutter removal including guard rail and where possible pedestrianization
4. Where appropriate creating new civic or green spaces for formal and informal public assembly
5. Repurposing spaces from traffic to public uses through removal or narrowing of lanes, rationalizing large junctions and replacing features such as gyratory roundabouts
6. Prioritizing the movement of public transport via bus lanes and advanced signaling
7. Linking with projects on arterial routes to improve the experience for walkers and

- cyclists, making city centre access safe and convenient
8. Activating frontages and better lighting way that brings enlivens public spaces through encouraging new business uses
 9. Where appropriate creating city centre freight hubs
 10. Restricting non-essential traffic where possible, with access only for people with disabilities and business deliveries
 11. Street greening and sustainable urban drainage

Conclusion

The heart of Scotland's City Centres can be so much better than they are today. NPF4 should focus investment on improving the areas around Scotland's main stations and associated thoroughfares which see (or should be seeing) the highest footfall in Scotland. This submission contains a list ten places which can and should be transformed in the next decade. Recognising the national importance of these places, and taking action, is vital for Scotland's social, economic and environmental wellbeing

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