

NPF4 Call for Ideas

Response from Reforesting Scotland's 1000 Huts campaign – www.thousandhuts.org

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How can huts be part of the solution to the key questions in the NPF4 Call for Ideas?

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

- Spending time in a simple, rustic hut is a highly effective way of learning how to reduce our impact locally and globally. We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production. There is also great potential of hutting culture to offer experience and reinstatement of the sort of life skills which so much of society has lost over the generations – for example practical skills in reusing resources creatively, countryside crafts and green woodwork. In short, it can form the perfect basis for genuinely low carbon living.
- Hutters experience the natural environment at close proximity and learn to understand how human behaviour can impact it.
- Hutting life tends to be economic with resources, producing minimal waste, and with a high rate of re-use of materials, both for the building and in daily life.
- Local hutting can reduce people's urge to fly to other countries for their holidays (flying is a major contributor to individual carbon footprints).
- At a budding hut site in the borders they have calculated that the traffic generated for 15 huts would generate less carbon than one house.

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

Huts and hutting can make immense positive impact on quality of life, health and wellbeing:

- *Wellbeing* - We have seen from existing hutting communities in Scotland, such as Carbeth (where hutters recently succeeded in buying the land their huts sit on), that hutting builds community support and resilience, and empowers people to take responsibility through the creative opportunities hutting affords – from building huts to creating a community woodland. The additional benefits for mental health and increased wellbeing also help a community become more resilient.
- *Physical health and wellbeing* - Hutting creates new ways for people to be active outdoors. It gives people a purpose and a connection with a community of interest and nature that promotes wellbeing.
- *Mental health* - There are very strong links between time spent in peaceful rustic environments and improved mental health for children and adults.
- *Building a connectedness to each other and to place.* Hutters return again and again to the same hut, building a relationship with the place. Hutting has great potential to achieve connectedness to place and to each other through inspirational and creative opportunities to spend time in nature in proximity to other hutters.
- Huts are a pressure valve so people can come back to society after hutting and relate better to each other.

3. What does planning need to do to enable development and investment in our economy to benefit everyone?

We need supportive planning policy to roll out from the national level to the local levels so that the full benefit of huts and hutting can be seen. Experience suggests that the positive policy position set out for hutting at national level is not fully reflected in decisions and assessment of hutting proposals by planning authorities.

Appropriately placed huts can benefit everyone in the following ways:

- *Sustainable local economic development* - Hutting can form the basis of innovation in rural land use, stimulating local low carbon economies. Responsibly developed hutting creates an opportunity for innovative and exemplary rural development that stimulates demand for local foresters, craftspeople and tradespeople. We recommend that the construction of the huts relies as much as possible on the use of sustainably grown and processed local materials, and the skills of local trades-people and craftspeople. There are already good examples of this happening in Scotland, and we have ample proof that it is possible to produce well-designed simple, low-tech buildings using local expertise and materials. One example of this is the Woodsman's Hut at Nethybridge which was built for £10,000, using local timber and skills, and won the Cairngorm National Park Design Award in 2012. An emphasis on local timber use could also help deliver the aim of the Scottish Planning Policy to promote responsible extraction of resources
- *Sustainable local tourism* - The sustainable tourism created by hutting communities brings local economic activity into the area.
- *Using our existing expertise and sustainably available resources* - Scotland already has a rich resource of best practice in innovative ecological design to draw from. We see huts as simple, low-tech buildings that can be designed and built in many different ways. However, there is a vast expertise and inspiration for Scotland's hutters to draw from, including the experience of the architects and builders of the Scottish Ecological Design Association. Hutting is an affordable and achievable way to create places that really enrich people's lives, without the need for highly processed materials which have high embodied energy and a large carbon footprint.
- *Children and young people* thrive on access to the rustic, simple life in natural surroundings that hutting brings. The evidence of this is contained in the upsurge of Outdoor Nurseries for young children, and for young people with limited opportunities (such as those who have benefitted from Venture Scotland's bothy in Glen Etive). Research shows that one of the main reasons for hutting is to increase family bonds – so the effects of access to hutting for families could have long-lasting benefits for many children and young people.
- *Families* - Studies show that the most common reason for hutting is as an opportunity for bonding with family members. As such, huts can nurture family relationships. We escape from the day-to-day and have the chance to connect with friends and family in a natural context. Often people's happiest memories of childhood are times spent in simple rustic surroundings close to nature. Huts can create magical family times, supporting family bonds and creating memories that will stay with children for the rest of their lives.
- *Affordable, accessible huts*, within reach of Scotland's urban centres, could make this possible for people of all income brackets. Hutting offers the benefit of well-designed, sustainable places to everyone. Whether people rent or own a simple hut on a hutting site, hutting could, for the first time in a generation, widen access for people of all income brackets to Scotland's countryside. Affordable recreational opportunities in Scotland's countryside means that people will enjoy low carbon tourism (reducing the desire to fly abroad, and thereby removing the single biggest contributor to an individual's carbon footprint).
- We need to *look differently at work and productivity*. The 'soft end' of the local economy is where huts can really help: local timber; local skills; freedom to try things, build things themselves; empowering people individually and socially to do things for themselves and to interact with others as a group.
- *The importance of space to think creatively*. A room of one's own is necessary for uninterrupted thinking time for ideas and creativity to flourish.

4. How can planning improve, protect and strengthen the special character of our places?

Huts can contribute to this aim in many ways:

- Since our campaign began in 2011, we have been overwhelmed by the strength of feeling that people have for huts. There is a real passion, commitment and demand for simple, low-tech, rustic buildings where people may sleep from time to time in natural surroundings. Hutting can break down the sense of separation between urban people and the natural landscape, as they have access to a simple building amidst the hills, forests or farmland from which so many came. This connectedness is itself a crucial part of the special character of our places. Rural Scotland needs its people to love, respect and care for it, and they will only do that when they feel like they truly belong there.
- The big spatial planning question which huts are at the heart of is, “What is a sustainable, efficient and effective use of rural land?” Along the Moray Firth, there are controls on ‘hinterland’ developments around main settlements. Huts could be appropriate developments there – low impact and easily accessible from the local town. In terms of the planning system’s approach to development in the countryside, there is a very sharp delineation between rural and urban. This isn’t necessarily appropriate for huts. In Scandinavia, huts form the bridge between the rural and urban population and the same could be true here.

5. What infrastructure is needed?

- We need a better, fully resourced and fully informed planning system at the local level that is more efficient. Rather than material infrastructure, what we really need is well-thought-out policy and supplementary guidance within each planning authority to ensure planners make good decisions to ensure accessible, low-impact hutting is possible wherever appropriate
- Huts make more efficient use of existing infrastructure. Impacts on roads are extremely low for hutting – and they can help to make better use of core path and cycle routes. They don’t need new services and drainage – they tend to be off grid.
- Well-planned hutting sites can form a crucial part of Green Infrastructure. Huts are the archetypal bridge between nature and culture, and as such, form a healthy access point into the outdoors and the natural heritage.

How can huts and hutting contribute to NPF4’S high level outcomes:

• Meeting the housing needs of people living in Scotland including, in particular, the housing needs for older people and disabled people

Huts as a way to reduce demand for second homes, and therefore pressure on available housing in rural areas. By building a hut, people create an overnight accommodation solution that does not take up local housing stock, leaving it available for local people, first time buyers and the general market. In this way, low impact huts for recreational use could be seen as a means of rapidly and cost-effectively reducing the prevalence of second homes and supporting local housing capacity. Supportive planning policy and decisions could effectively shift part of the second home market into huts and free up housing stock.

Huts help to bring people to the rural economy, through more people visiting the area, support for local services, and thereby helping to stabilise the population in rural areas. Huts could be a form of rural diversification.

Huts as a learning experience for Tiny Housing - The SPP definition of huts clearly states that they are for recreational use only, and not intended as permanent dwellings. However, with the burgeoning Tiny House movement expanding around the world, it may be that the Scottish planning system can learn lessons from hutting, as it seeks to examine its own policies relating to small, low impact

dwelling for permanent occupation. There are opportunities in planning policy to create a route through the planning system for people, young or old, if they want to build and occupy a Tiny House.

- **Improving the health and well-being of people living in Scotland**

See the detailed response on this topic above.

- **Increasing the population of rural areas of Scotland**

See above for examples of how huts can bring people into rural areas

- **Improving equality and eliminating discrimination**

Huts can have a role in increasing access to land, which has relevance to equality and discrimination. Marginalised sectors of society may have no access to land, with limited ability to navigate regulatory procedures, and little finance: All these are limitations on equality of access to all. There needs to be a level playing field for decisions on planning.

There are examples of planning authorities treating hutting more strictly than rural housing or other uses requiring a rural site. This relates to a number of planning considerations such as road and path access, public transport, visibility in the landscape, site servicing, etc. It is important that huts are accepted as a legitimate use of land in rural areas. For the hutting movement as a whole, we see that hutting is being discriminated against, in comparison with other uses that are accepted in rural areas.

- **Meeting any targets relating to the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases** - Hutting provides a unique opportunity for transformational change to lower carbon living. The simpler lifestyle is efficient in resource and energy use, and people get an opportunity to really experience transformation away from the habits of their everyday lives.

- **Securing positive effects for biodiversity** - Huts are a way for urban people to connect with, and understand, nature. As more people connect with nature, we, as a society, will be better stewards of our natural environment. Also, hutting is another way of managing land for biodiversity. For example, land could come out of heavy grazing. An example can be seen at the Encampment (a new hut site development which has recently been granted planning permission) where wildlife amenity and biodiversity will be enhanced through woodland management by the hutters group.

What do we want to see in NPF4?

1. We would like to see an expansion of the support for hutting already set out in Scottish Planning Policy.

2. We would like to see a stronger requirement for planning authorities to reflect this national support for hutting in their policies, guidance and decisions.

How might the Covid-19 pandemic affect the changes we need to see?

Local visitor and staycation markets will likely recover more quickly than international travel, and recreational huts could be an important part of that. People will be looking for low cost, local recreation and leisure options, with a stronger focus on wellbeing, family, the outdoors and community. As a country, we will be looking to support local enterprise, local shops and economies. Hutting is truly placed well to meet all these needs.