

Our Ref.: TC

30 April 2020

By email: scotplan@gov.scot

NPF4 Call for Ideas – Submission from Theatres Trust

Theatres Trust welcomes the opportunity to provide our thoughts and priorities for Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework. The Trust has participated in the programme of engagement undertaken, having attended the session facilitated by the Royal Town Planning Institute in Falkirk on February 27th. We have also engaged with Culture Counts which is the collective voice of Scotland's cultural sector who have met separately with representatives of the Government producing NPF4; they are submitting comments on behalf of the broader sector under separate cover. We are keen to engage further and work positively with the Government as work on NPF4 further progresses.

About Theatres Trust and our work within Scotland's planning system:

Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Body for Theatres. We were established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 and The Theatres Trust (Scotland) Act 1978 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. These Acts apply to all theatre buildings in Scotland, England and Wales. Our fifteen trustees are appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and through the 1978 Scotland Act includes a trustee approved by Scottish Ministers.

Theatres Trust is a statutory consultee in the planning system. The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulation 2013, Schedule 5, Paragraph 11 requires local authorities to consult the Trust on planning applications for '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre*'. The Act defines a theatre as any building or part of a building constructed or used for the public performance of plays, and therefore applies to theatres, playhouses, arts centres, ciné-varieties or buildings converted for theatre use, old and new, in other uses or disused. Theatres are *sui-generis* and are therefore considered separately to Class 11 uses.

In the 2019-20 year we commented on nineteen applications for planning permission and ten applications for listed building consent within Scotland. These ranged from proposed new theatres in Dalbeattie and Paisley to minor works to theatres and arts centres in Stornoway and Wick to new signage in Edinburgh. We commented on neighbouring developments which could impact on theatre use in Arbroath and Ayr, the significance of which has been elevated within the Scottish planning system with the inclusion of the 'Agent of Change' principle into the Planning (Scotland) Act in 2019.

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The Trust also engages in the preparation of local development plans, and encourages the inclusion of local policies that support cultural facilities and cultural wellbeing. We identify 'Theatres at Risk' which in Scotland includes Leith Theatre, King's Theatre in Dundee and King's Theatre in Kirkcaldy. We provide advice and assistance to empower owners and community groups to purchase, restore and/ or reuse theatre buildings to create opportunities for local cultural participation, to find sustainable new uses, and to use culture as a catalyst for wider regeneration in their communities.

We are often the only source of expert advice on theatre use, design, conservation, and planning matters available to theatre operators, local authorities and official bodies. Whilst our main objective is to safeguard and promote theatre use, or the potential for such use, we also seek to provide impartial expert advice to establish the most viable and effective solutions for proposed, existing and former theatre buildings at the earliest possible stages of development. We have also engaged in wider town centre strategies and masterplans on the basis of our specialist planning knowledge in relation to cultural uses.

Overarching comments in response to this Call for Ideas:

From the Trust's perspective our particular focus is on buildings – theatres and other places of live performance – although many of the principles and cultural, economic and social benefits they generate are equally applicable to other cultural facilities including cinemas, galleries and museums. It is also important that the design of places in the broader sense encourages and facilitates engagement in arts and culture, and that appropriate land and facilities exist to support the creation of culture as a product such as studios, workshops and rehearsal facilities.

Scotland has a tremendous reputation for the arts and culture which is recognised internationally and contributes much to the economy – Edinburgh Festival Fringe is for example the world's largest arts festival and alongside that Scotland has produced and exported many renowned bands and musicians, comedians and entertainers, films, productions and artworks. Scotland contains a wealth of venues large and small, from arenas, Edinburgh Playhouse and Barrowlands in Glasgow which host major international acts and productions and attract tourists and visitors to the likes of Lyth Arts Centre near Wick which provide access to the arts for more remote communities in the far north of Scotland. These facilities in their own way contribute to wellbeing; they provide opportunities to engage in arts and cultural activity and where located in smaller and more rural locations are also vital in helping reduce isolation and loneliness and provide opportunities to participate volunteer. They help bring communities together.

From an economic perspective cultural facilities are becoming increasingly essential in supporting the wider function and attractiveness of town centres – as the retail market has changed and come under increasing challenge cultural venues help bring people into town centres which supports other businesses. The town of Paisley has recognised this and is putting large investments into its existing facilities (in particular its Town Hall venue and Paisley Museum) along with encouraging new facilities such as a youth theatre. Within other towns and

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cities there are bespoke cultural investments. We are able to provide, upon request, specific examples of economic impact arising from investment in culture.

Despite this demonstrable value and Scotland's strong heritage as a nation of arts and culture, it features only to a limited extent within the existing NPF3 and Scottish Planning Policy. We consider there is considerable scope to elevate the importance of arts and culture within planning policy which will feed through to local policies and decisions, not just promoting culture but providing the strongest possible protection for cultural venues; threats to Scotland's cultural provision from competing development is acknowledged by the insertion of the 'Agent of Change' principle into the Planning (Scotland) Act and cultural facilities more generally can be undermined by other uses in particular residential generating greater land values.

Fundamentally, the Trust is keen to see that arts and culture are strongly promoted and represented throughout NPF4. We consider there is compelling justification for such an approach, not least that arts and culture strongly contribute to the priorities the Scottish Government had identified that planning could focus on in the future. Those are climate, people, work and growth. Moreover, part 3AC (2) (a) of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 cites cultural matters to assist in preparation of National Planning Framework with part 7 (2) (e) (v) (ch) inserting "the desirability of maintaining an appropriate number and range of cultural venues and facilities (including in particular, but not limited to, live music venues)" in regard to the preparation of local development plans. Part 25 introduces the 'Agent of Change' principle which seeks to protect the operations of existing venues from negative impacts of new development. This clearly sets a direction and expectation that culture in Scotland should feature to a greater extent in national planning policy and specifically that policy should protect such facilities and venues. The recently published Culture Strategy for Scotland also reflects many of these key themes, not least that "culture is central to Scotland's wellbeing and cultural, social, economic and environmental prosperity".

How the arts and culture correspond with the identified NPF4 priorities and specific consultation questions:

Like many industries, the cultural sector has explicitly pledged to respond to the global climate emergency through its own actions. We are supportive of this being made front and centre of the future NPF4, and many of the benefits of arts and culture contribute to this priority in a broader sense. For example, if cultural facilities help maintain the attractiveness, function and viability of town centres it will retain custom within the local area and reduce journeys by car elsewhere. There is scope for cultural facilities and venues to provide adaptations which minimise their own carbon footprints but this would fall under broader policy. Cultural output also has a role in educating and informing on matters of climate change and how individuals can act.

It is in People, Work and Place where there are clearer and more explicit advantages and need for NPF4 to promote, protect and support arts and culture and the facilities which provide access to it.

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The priorities outlined in documents accompanying this consultation state:

“People - planning can support wellbeing ensuring communities have access to services and facilities”

In short, as set out in our over-arching comments, arts and culture reflect this priority in its entirety. Cultural facilities and venues support wellbeing and provide access to services and facilities; particularly in more rural and isolated areas cultural facilities tend to facilitate wider services which meet the needs of their communities.

“Work - effective and efficient planning can support inclusive growth”

Again as noted above arts and culture has a key role to play in supporting and developing Scotland’s economy, from retaining footfall within town centres which can help minimise vacancies to the additional tourists and visitors it can draw in to the export of cultural output nationally and internationally. The planning system has a key role to play in this respect, from ensuring places are well designed and facilitate such uses to protecting existing valued venues which are threatened.

“Place - planning can maintain and enhance the unique character and identity of our natural and built environment”

Many cultural venues contribute to local character and distinctiveness; a number are also heritage assets. They are and can be the focal point of local communities.

The Trust’s recommendations for NPF4:

The Trust recognises the climate emergency and the pressing need to ensure the planning system minimises the environmental impact of development and facilitates the adaptations necessary to make existing buildings and spaces more efficient. We also appreciate the importance of the delivery of housing, jobs and supporting infrastructure to meet Scotland’s future needs and ensure its people enjoy a good quality of life. We are fully supportive of efforts to promote wellbeing and to protect the function and vitality of the nation’s town centres. We consider that the arts and culture is a fundamental element supporting and underpinning those needs and demands of NPF4. The planning system can and should facilitate development and change in a way that promotes and engenders culture across Scotland ensuring it does not come at the expense of Scotland’s diverse cultural mix and the buildings and venues which support provision of culture.

This Call for Ideas provides an opportunity to justifiably elevate the role of arts and culture within NPF4 to recognise and maximise the benefits of cultural activity and provision to well-being, the economy and sustainable communities for the benefit of Scotland and its planning system. The Trust makes the following recommendations which broadly reflect the consultation questions suggested and incorporate the identified priorities. These would also ensure accordance and consistency with the Culture Strategy for Scotland which states,

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“Culture lies at the heart of successful place-making, drawing on our natural and cultural heritage, to create shared visions for the future. Cultural activities are an important economic driver in their own right, as well as increasing the interest and appeal of our built environments. By taking cultural impacts into account at an early stage, the planning system can sustain and enhance our cultural offerings.”

Our recommendations are:

- For NPF4 to contain an overall vision and national strategic objectives which reference at the highest level the value of arts and culture to Scotland, and how provision of cultural facilities should be promoted to support wellbeing, economic development and strengthen town centres.
- To instruct local authorities to consider the cultural needs of their areas when drafting local development plans and other local policy alongside needs for housing, employment, open space and other important infrastructure.
- For policy on wellbeing to include cultural wellbeing alongside physical and social wellbeing, and to promote the particular role and value of cultural provision in smaller towns and more rural communities in bringing people together and minimising loneliness and isolation.
- For town centre policy to place cultural facilities and venues including cinemas, music venues and theatres front and centre of main town centre uses as a key driver of town centre activity and promote their future development; to encourage and facilitate the temporary use and repurposing of spaces and vacant units within town centres including for arts and cultural purposes.
- For NPF4 to include policy specifically supporting and promoting the arts and culture within planning policy and decision-making, and making clear that protection of valued facilities must be a priority where they continue to meet a need and are valued by their communities. Such a policy might be an appropriate position with which to introduce the ‘Agent of Change’ principle and translate what is within the Planning (Scotland) Act into policy; equally an ‘Agent of Change’ policy could be discussed within wider design content or be afforded a policy of its own.

Concluding comments:

We hope and trust these comments will prove useful as NPF4 is developed, and demonstrate why and how promotion and protection of arts and culture would benefit the document and planning outcomes in Scotland.

The Trust has significant experience of matters related to theatres and other arts and cultural uses and as a statutory consultee with a professional Planner with policy-making experience we would welcome the opportunity to assist further with the drafting of NPF4 including providing

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suggested wording. We would also welcome further discussion on this contribution to the Call for Ideas. We look forward to hearing more about NPF4 and being further consulted as it is developed.



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