

NPF4: Key messages from SNH response to the *Call for Ideas*, April 2020

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

It is widely recognised that we need development that supports a rapid transition to a net zero economy and which enables communities and nature to adapt to, and address, the impacts of climate change. The 2050 think pieces submitted by other organisations illustrate the wide support for this transition.

'Nature' is key to this transition and offers many solutions to the challenges we face. As set out in our [Climate Change Commitments](#), nature can help absorb carbon from the atmosphere, facilitate land uses that reduce future carbon emissions and help us adapt to challenges such as greater flood risk and increased temperatures in towns and cities.

The [Infrastructure Commission](#) recognised this, highlighting that nature-based solutions can help us respond to climate change by:

- protecting grey infrastructure as the climate changes by reducing flood risk, and by cooling urban areas
- improving quality of life and well-being by connecting people with nature close to where they live
- maintaining natural carbon stores and absorbing new carbon.

In order to deliver these nature-based solutions to climate change, we need to transform the way that land is allocated for development and the way that development is designed, delivered and maintained.

The climate emergency is inextricably linked to the loss of nature. Our changing climate is accelerating the loss of nature and the loss of nature intensifies climate change and its impacts. To address this twin challenge, we need to move from an approach to planning that is based on avoiding and minimising the worst impacts on nature, to one where development enhances nature – leaving it in a better state than before.

NPF4 could help deliver this and guide development that addresses climate change through:

- a policy commitment that puts nature and the benefits it provides for people at the heart of the planning system.
- encouraging strategic planning that sets out green network strategies at a regional scale and affords greater protection for Scotland's irreplaceable habitats, which are integral to our adaptation to climate change.
- a commitment to a new suite of Local Development Plans that go beyond 'managing constraints' on development to articulating a positive framework for the right development in the right place, based on a full assessment of the services that nature provides in addressing climate change.
- supporting new development to create more climate resilient communities - for example, by providing open spaces and routes for recreation and active travel; or protecting housing development from flood risk using nature based solutions - and applying these ambitions to existing developments by retrofitting essential green infrastructure.
- enabling development that addresses climate change – both reducing carbon emissions and supporting adaptation – by providing a steer on the relative benefits of development proposals in relation to wider considerations.



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

Nature and green / blue infrastructure is integral to our future quality of life, health and wellbeing. Planning can best support this by providing the framework for greater investment in and development of this infrastructure, and thereby deliver multiple benefits to people and the economy.

Building on the foundations set out in NPF3, and reflecting the dual crises for climate change and biodiversity now faced, we would like NPF4 to provide greater impetus for the delivery of green and blue infrastructure on the ground by:

- setting out a vision for a nature-rich future for the places we want to live, work in and visit – a vision that is ambitious and forward looking and learns from what has worked well and less well in the past.
- emphasising the importance of nature-based solutions, including open space and routes for recreation and active travel that have become so important to public wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- providing a framework for stronger connections and alignment between sectoral land use plans and strategies so that delivery efforts are channelled in the same direction.
- requiring a more transparent mechanism for development interests to demonstrate that they have considered how they can maximise the benefits of green infrastructure.
- introducing a requirement for the use of green infrastructure plans and national standards for green infrastructure to maximise the multiple benefits of nature.
- recognising that retrofitting and greening existing grey infrastructure is just as important as new green development.

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

NPF4 will be critical to the response to the economic challenge created by the coronavirus outbreak and can support a green recovery. It can reduce the risk of the pre-COVID-19 challenges for climate change and biodiversity by maximising the role of nature-based solutions in a new economy and supporting lower carbon lifestyles with the long term benefits they bring.

Planning can support protection, restoration and facilitation of investment in nature that can help support a new, socially just economy that has responded to the challenge of climate change and helps communities which continue to suffer from poor quality of environment. Planning can establish an inclusive process for articulating a post-COVID 19 vision and supporting the delivery of nature-rich benefits in a way that is fair and equitable to all – at national, regional and local levels.

NPF4 can support this by:

- providing greater certainty for investors and communities by using a stronger, more inclusive and plan-led approach to a long-term green recovery. It can support conversations that shift the planning culture towards delivery of more 'win-wins'
- adopting a 'green infrastructure first' approach that puts nature-based solutions at the heart of the recovery. This would require new development to leave nature in a better state than before and secure positive effects for biodiversity
- supporting investment from a wide-range of sectors in green infrastructure. This should be guided by RSSs and LDPs and targeted at areas of high deprivation.

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

Planning can explain what is special about our current places and set out what we need to do to protect and enhance these characteristics in the future. It can provide a mechanism for more inclusive, integrated and joined up public sector planning which has, in the past, lent towards individual sectoral interests.

Guided by the new NPF4, planning can do this by:

- continuing the protection for our broad range of natural assets which support the economy and quality of life
- encouraging further investment in habitats and landscapes which form part of the special character of many of our cities, towns and villages
- securing positive effects for biodiversity in local places through influencing the specification of new developments and by retrofitting green and blue infrastructure into existing communities
- managing land use change in a way that safeguards the character and special qualities of landscapes alongside other development
- planning for the protection of our places, particularly our coasts, which are at most risk from climate change, using nature based solutions.

5. What infrastructure do we need to plan and build to realise our long term aspirations?

Given the important role of nature-based solutions in delivering a green recovery, a low carbon future and an equitable approach to public wellbeing, we think the key infrastructure needed is:

- green and blue infrastructure, including open spaces and routes for recreation and active travel, which permeates through and connects all our cities towns and villages
- built infrastructure which addresses climate change and delivers positive effects for biodiversity.

NPF4 can help plan better plan for this by:

- making the link between the economic, health and natural infrastructure requirements
- guiding investment in infrastructure to the right locations, using Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Plans to set the context for local delivery
- identifying priorities for investment from the new £3bn green growth accelerator in the [Programme for Government](#) as well as investment flowing through the Growth deals, STPR2, the Infrastructure Investment Plan and other plans / strategies
- planning for new infrastructure to support the changing economy, for example, by providing low carbon travel options for visitors and developing local and national path networks for active and recreation travel.