

## **NPF4 RTPI Scotland Chapter Workshops – Grampian**

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### **‘NPF Reimagined’**

Most planners would agree that 2020 is going to be an interesting year for planning as Scottish Government prepares the fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), a document that sets out a long-term vision for guiding development, infrastructure and investment for Scotland.

There has been intensive early engagement across various parts of Scotland to seek views on the scope and content of NPF4. The RTPI Scotland Grampian chapter was pleased to be the first stop in Aberdeen on 12 February. Scottish Government presented their national programme for engagement and gave an overview of the timescales for NPF4. The workshop saw a range of professionals from the planning industry and third sector in the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire area come together to present their ideas on the future content of NPF4.

Six groups presented their thoughts for how NPF4 should trigger climate action under the themes of People, Work and Place. Various ideas were put forward (as elaborated below), but the main highlight was two groups discussing the topic of district heating.

### **People**

#### *Common Heat*

Scaling up district heating – how can we connect different systems to make the district heating network more resilient? Discussions centred on the fact that district heating is usually delivered by local authorities and private developers and is limited to council and social housing. A suggestion put forward was the need to increase voluntary participation and information sharing between the local authority, stakeholders and communities.

#### *Implementing Ecosystems Services and Functions*

Carbon-saving and the importance of ecosystem services in local planning systems was then discussed. It was suggested that additional research needs to be undertaken to better understand how individual developments will affect different ecosystems. This data could then be used to inform planning decisions.

### **Work**

#### *Connectivity*

The group suggested having a national and regional framework for ‘connectivity’ to address the increasing requirements for connectivity in all forms (digital, transport and energy).

#### *District Heating*

Further to the above, tackling fuel poverty through district heating networks was raised as a key point within the theme of ‘Work’. District heating was noted as a modern way of using heat from waste plants which will help achieve the removal of ‘combi’ boilers and reduce carbon footprints.

### **Place**

#### *Invested Place*

The group discussed how we can make best use of infrastructure and land through repurposing and reusing existing places rather than building an entirely new development.

This will support a changed focus to sustainable investment and building for communities and the environment, over 'building for profit'.

### *Green Infrastructure Standards*

The group suggested that policy could merge various green and blue infrastructure requirements into one cohesive green infrastructure standard that is easier for planners and stakeholders to understand.

Each group presented their ideas, and then a vote decided the finalists: Common Heat, Invested Place and Green Infrastructure Standards, who then went on to discuss the synergies and challenges for the proposals with other policy and societal priorities.

A final vote was taken, and Common Heat was crowned the Grampian champion after noting benefits of scaling up district heat networks (i.e. air quality, energy transition, community development and local economic development) and associated challenges (transport corridors can sometimes conflict with heat corridors, funding, etc.).

In the preparation to realise NPF4, engagement will continue to be significant. In addition to the workshop in Aberdeen, there are several more events scheduled to gather ideas from a wide range of stakeholders. By engaging as many stakeholders in the discussion as possible, steps can truly be made towards an inclusive Planning Framework.

Having attended this event, I would encourage all planners to be part of the discussion and open up the dialogue to any of your colleagues who could help shape our next NPF.