



NPF4 GSAB Response

Background

NPF4 sets out to be an ambitious plan that will touch on all of our lives in Scotland and the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere (GSAB) Partnership believes that with the right approach it could make a fundamental difference to many aspects of our economy, society and environment. UNESCO Biospheres are based on a three tier zoned approach with a gradation of human interventions from “core areas” of designated high nature conservation value, protected by a “buffer area” that acts as a bridge creating ecological connectivity and an outer “transition area” where sustainable development is actively encouraged. This zonal framework provides a structure well-placed to contribute to several of the high level outcomes sought viz meeting greenhouse gas targets, benefiting biodiversity, improving health and well-being and increasing rural population.

Sustainable development in the UNESCO Biosphere seeks to address social, economic and environmental challenges through developing new opportunities and solutions that will ultimately benefit us all. It involves aspects such as health and wellbeing, the local economy and how we impact on our natural environment. It is fundamental to much of what we do and is one of the key ways that we actively seek to link people with the natural environment in ways that will help support the local economy without compromising the needs of future generations.

Response to ‘Call for ideas’ question

Of the specific question posed in the NPF4 consultation, the GSAB offer the following comments on those question of particular relevance to the organisation.

What development will we need to address climate change?

The UNESCO Biosphere recognises the over-riding issue of climate change and is firmly of the view that the need to respond to the climate change challenge must be the foundation of NPF4.

Healthy soils

Much of our modern lives ultimately come down to the quality of the soil – without well managed soils we cannot sustain life, we don’t have a strong economy, we don’t

have a healthy society. Healthy soils store and regulate water flow, are essential to the production of our food and drink, to a healthy ecosystem and, critically, mitigating against climate change. A key means of ensuring we have healthy soils is through taking a more balanced approach to the way we use land.

NPF4 offers an opportunity to achieve this through giving recognition and support to the proposed Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUP) as a means of creating a more joined up approach to land use. Through recognising RLUP and the regional priorities they identify as being a key reference for Local Development Plans, Regional Forestry Strategies, Regional Economic Partnerships etc. NPF4 can ensure that sustainable land use is at the very heart of Scotland's future. This is a key means by which rural Scotland can take action to address climate change.

A balanced approach to renewable energy

The shift to a zero carbon energy system is central to the response to the climate change agenda. The role of renewable energy is not disputed.

The GSAB Partnership is very aware of the demand for onshore wind development across South West Scotland, including sites within the UNESCO Biosphere. The GSAB Partnership is concerned about the lack of a planned approach to how ambitious national targets for renewable energy generation should be achieved spatially.

Given the level of development that has now taken place and is in the pipeline in the region, capacity for further development is fast disappearing. The GSAB Partnership would support planning authorities taking a robust approach assessing capacity for further development. If capacity has been reached in some parts of an authority, or if a local landscape is not suitable for onshore wind development, local development plans should have the ability to say so.

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

Collaborative planning

NPF should recognise the need for planning to work collaboratively with key agencies and partners in health and social care, education, infrastructure provision, the environment and transport. The GSAB Partnership is committed to engaging in the planning process and in particular in terms of Development Plans, sees the value in working alongside planning authorities to prepare informed and balanced development plans. The need for collaborative planning should be central to NPF4.

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

Ambition, equity and sustainability

NPF needs to be ambitious in relation to enabling economic growth and inward investment. Rural Scotland should be central to this, as should the need for economic investment to be planned in a sustainable manner, which takes full account of the need to maximise positive environmental and social impacts and minimise negative impacts.

Rebalancing development across Scotland

At a national level, there needs to be consideration of the different needs in different parts of Scotland. Economic activity, investment patterns and infrastructure investment, contrasts significantly across Scotland, particularly in terms of an east-west split. NPF4 needs to recognise this and recognise that for inclusive growth across the country to be achieved, NPF should prioritise investment in areas where growth has lagged behind.

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

Recognising important designations

National policy needs to recognise the importance of local designations and features that are unique to their area. There are only two internationally designated UNESCO Biospheres in Scotland. The GSAB Partnership considers the UNESCO designation to be hugely important to South West Scotland, an area that faces a number of challenges in terms of its relative remoteness. Taken together with other local designations, primarily the Galloway Dark Sky Park, the designation already does, but could far more so, contribute significantly to both tourism and the sense of place of local communities. Locally valued landscapes must also be recognised as central to the special character of our places and to the sense of place of communities living within the landscapes.

NPF 4 also offers an opportunity to recognise the value and purposes of the different zones within UNESCO Biospheres as a means of contributing to a healthy life for all. Particularly through recognising the value of the “buffer” as an area for sympathetic forest management with low key development that supports sustainable tourism and contributes towards ecological connectivity, peatland restoration and creation of open ground habitats.

NPF4 must give the flexibility for Local Development Plans to fully recognise and support designations such as biospheres, and to plan proactively to ensure their potential value is fully maximised.

28th April 2020