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SPP Policy Title:	Gypsy / Travellers
NPF4 Objective:	To ensure that the current and future accommodation needs of Gypsy/Travellers are met so that they are provided with access to good quality, safe and appropriately located sites.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We support the principle of matching the supply and demand for gypsy traveller accommodation. This topic should be integrated within the housing section of NPF4. Most of Highland's un-met need is transient and seasonal and therefore there is more need for coordinated management of gypsy traveller requirements than fixed site provision. However, we support the principle of locational guidance criteria in NPF4 for new permanent gypsy / traveller sites where necessary.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

Highland agrees partly with the Scottish Government's Objective for this policy area. The reference to "sites" implies that needs are usually expressed and met at permanent, discrete locations. In Highland, in terms of permanent sites we have 47 pitches across 4 sites with high occupancy rates. However, most of Highland's recorded un-met need is transient, flexible in location, variable and/or seasonal. Moreover, our preferred option for managing unauthorised camps is a 'negotiated stopping' approach. The impact of this on land use and land use planning needs to be understood e.g. identifying land 'sanctioned' as a stopping place (not necessarily needing to be done through the Local Development Plan); planning requirements if camps were to nevertheless stay for extended periods.

Similarly, the needs of the gypsy traveller communities are not just for accommodation – they also need / seek advice on access to employment, waste management, education, leisure and healthcare provision. The Objective and likely approach for this policy area could be improved, by broadening its scope as described above.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

Yes (see answers to the 'Issues to Consider' 1 to 8 below). It seems likely that NPF4 will incorporate policies and LDP requirements that will be unnecessary for Highland.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

No, but NPF4 policies and LDP requirements on this issue should be optional or flexible to local (Highland) circumstances.

Any Other Comments?

Should any future changes to regulations, such as for example fire regulations affecting the spacing requirements on Gypsy/Traveller sites, lead to a requirement for additional permanent sites or extensions to such sites (and to comply, some reconfiguration of the existing sites), then access to land and capital funding could be issues. Additional funding may be needed from Scottish Government for affected Local Authorities, to address any un-met needs arising as a consequence of complying with the regulatory change.

On another matter: in recent years there has been growth in 'van dwellers', which are people who live full time in often converted vans or motorhomes and travel around, sometimes internationally, living life in alternative locations, often staying by roadsides or on other adjacent land such as car parks, sometimes earning income from some business or employment undertaken from their van 'home office/studio'. Highland has seen a particular increase in this type of activity especially on Skye and at other tourist hotspots. The trend does not seem to be diminishing and is in fact, noted as increasing year on year, as such we believe this aspect should be reflected within NPF4 and query if it should be part of this policy topic. Perhaps overlapping with this issue is the increasing challenges caused by touring motorhome owners choosing to 'wild camp' on tour, particularly felt in Highland, which is relevant to the 'Tourism' policy topic.

Issues to Consider:

- 1) How can NPF4 ensure that land for appropriately located public sites is made available in development plans to meet a need identified through the HNDA process?**

By a simple, stated requirement for Local Development Plans (LDPs) to allocate suitable and sufficient land for gypsy / traveller needs that are confirmed through the HNDA process. In Highland, our latest draft HNDA indicates no need for additional, permanent site/pitch provision. Instead the needs to be addressed in Highland are for a flexible network of ideally serviced, managed, temporary stopping places (the preferred option being a 'negotiated stopping approach') to better manage the transitory needs of gypsy / travellers and to control any adverse impacts that may occur. The findings of the 2019 Gypsy Traveller Needs Assessment Report are relevant here. These temporary stopping places are unlikely to require planning permission (if used for temporary and short-term stops only) and therefore it is debatable whether NPF4 (or even Highland LDPs) should make definitive reference to them.

2) What locational guidance should be provided to direct new development proposals to suitable sites?

Highland's experience is that permanent and temporary gypsy / traveller sites may have very different locational criteria. Moreover gypsy / travellers are not a single community with common needs but a very diverse one with varying needs. For example, some gypsy / travellers in Highland do not travel and are permanent / semi permanent tenants at established, serviced sites. Others are seasonal visitors who come to the Highlands because of family connections. Others are seasonal visitors who wish to stay temporarily, close to sources of seasonal employment. Accordingly, NPF4 should be very wary of including site location criteria. If other authorities suggest such criteria would be useful then they should be tailored to the particular gypsy traveller community intended to be accommodated and the type of provision (i.e. temporary or permanent).

3) Should NPF4 include policy criteria to support acceptable proposals coming forward if there are no suitable sites identified in the development plan?

Same answer as to question 2 above.

4) Should NPF4 include policy criteria setting out the issues that should be addressed by proposals for small privately owned sites?

Currently, Highland doesn't have any recorded privately owned sites and therefore has no experience to share. We would assume that private sites raise similar, mainly servicing and management, issues as public sites.

5) Is there a need to include mapping of transit routes and sites in the spatial analysis and proposals for NPF4, so that authorities can refer to this as part of the evidence base for their plans?

No, unless Scottish Government decides that the answer to questions 3 and 4 above is yes. It would be very unusual for any particular type of development to be picked out for detailed, prescriptive, locational, mapped guidance in a national planning framework. For example, there is no such guidance for on-shore wind farms, waste management facilities, strategic education developments etc. To pick out gypsy / traveller site development for such treatment when its locational criteria are so diverse and changing, and its impacts so localised, would be even more surprising.

6) Is there a need to set out what is expected to engage with, and meet the needs of, Gypsy/Travellers in local development plan evidence reports?

No. As in question 5 above, it would be unusual for a national planning framework to prescribe the type and method of engagement with a particular group that an LDP should follow. This type of guidance, if needed, should be in regulations or in a technical circular or similar.

7) What can the planning system do to support the human rights of Gypsy / Travellers to travel? What approach and criteria should be used to inform consideration of transit sites in local development plans?

In Highland's experience, the planning system should support a flexible network of well managed / supervised, ideally part serviced, temporary stop "sites" in locations popular with the gypsy traveller communities and permanent sites with pitches for those gypsy / travellers that don't or rarely travel. As in the responses to questions 1 and 2 above, the popular temporary stop "sites" in Highland are often sites undesignated for that purpose like roadside lay-bys, underutilised industrial areas and remote parking areas. Most gypsy / traveller need in Highland is transient, seasonal, and/or variable so the optimum response is through flexible management of gypsy / traveller needs. In practice this often means "mobile" support to the gypsy / traveller communities – i.e. coordinating stakeholders at the locations chosen by the gypsy/ travellers to provide advice and services on waste management, education, healthcare, leisure, employment and relationships with the local, permanently resident community. Accordingly, a prescriptive national policy on the designation of transit sites would not be appropriate to circumstances in Highland.

8) How can the planning system also support the accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople?

Highland's understanding is that Showpeople are not generally regarded as gypsy / travellers. However, most current showgrounds in Highland are large enough to accommodate both the fairground facilities and the Showpeople's accommodation. It may be noted that Highland has not been chosen by any Travelling Show as their out-of-season base location for their trailers, etc.

SPP Policy Title:	Community Facilities
NPF4 Objective:	To promote and support the provision of accessible community facilities where a need has been identified in local development plans.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We accept the principle of auditing needs through each (Local Development Plan) LDP but an LDP cannot provide a comprehensive list of all community facility requirements because these change over time. Therefore, there is a need for flexibility through more frequent updates to delivery programmes. NPF4 should promote key agency and other stakeholder buy-in to the LDP process to identify and deliver facility requirements e.g. local NHS provision.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

It is noted that references to community facility within the Scottish Government's information note for this policy topic appears to include education and healthcare provision. Within the Council's Development Plan, community facilities are typically indoor and outdoor sports facilities and multi-purpose community hubs. For the purposes of commenting on NPF4, we will use the broader definition.

As part of the preparation of our LDP's, we assess the range and provision of community facilities in each settlement in consultation with relevant stakeholders and identify any shortfall and the potential resolution to address these shortfalls. We believe this is an important consideration for informing the settlement hierarchy and the level of development we would wish to direct to the settlement.

As part of the preparation and maintenance of our LDP Delivery Programme, we identify, monitor and potential cost infrastructure projects necessary to accommodate development (including those being taken forward by the public sector or community led schemes). Where there are multiple infrastructure projects, the level of developer contributions can be a defining feature. To address this, we allow developers to present a viability study and if the scheme is considered unviable (following Council review), we have built in a degree of flexibility to allow a reduction in developer contribution for that specific development.

Obviously, this therefore fails to address any Community Facility shortfall within that specific community, and we contend that the planning system should manage the delivery of development to coincide with a certain level of community facility availability and restrict development occupation until the level of community facility required is in place/ available. Sufficient Government resourcing to allow for long term planning of community facilities is important when balancing development aspirations with capital investment programmes of particular service providers.

The Delivery Programme has the potential to be a key tool for identifying the community facility (or other infrastructure required) and coordinating its delivery and therefore its role should be strengthen through this Policy Topic.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

Protection and provision of cemeteries – Highland Council do not currently have a general policy on this issue however it would be a useful aspect of policy to have at a national level.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.

Any Other Comments?

Care should be taken in drafting a policy to allow local communities sufficient flexibility to respond promptly to changing and emerging economic situations, for example in terms of facilities and services associated with the provision of tourist related markets.

Finally, the policy should define what are considered 'Community Facilities' under the terms of this policy topic and we question if it includes all the following:

NPF4 CALL FOR IDEAS RESPONSE

- Local Healthcare services (including mental health);
- Regional Healthcare facilities;
- Early years, primary, secondary, further and higher education facilities;
- Leisure and sporting facilities;
- Community Centres/meeting spaces;
- Public recreational and open spaces/play parks;
- Libraries;
- Civic spaces;
- Civic built heritage assets; and
- Community energy projects.

SPP Policy Title:	Supporting Culture And The Arts
NPF4 Objective:	To recognise and support the contribution of cultural activities to individual, community and national wellbeing and prosperity, including the protection of existing cultural and live music venues by ensuring that applications for new developments include sufficient measures to mitigate, minimise or manage any noise so that existing users do not have restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We agree with the agent of change principle and the idea of identifying and safeguarding arts / cultural uses but request that NPF4 includes exceptions where the arts / cultural use can be relocated within the same locality to a more viable site / building – i.e. there is no adverse impact on the use or the centre within which it is located.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>The best way in which the planning system can support the economic and social benefits that cultural organisations and venues provide is to safeguard existing facilities from inappropriate development (e.g. redevelopment of the site itself to another use, or development of a nearby site in a way that could impinge on the operation of the cultural venue) and to prioritise (and possibly safeguard) suitable sites for new facilities. Proposals to redevelop or erect public sector owned/managed cultural venues will have a certain level of transparency and accountability; however it may be more difficult to determine the suitability of private sector proposals.</p> <p>The Council has some relevant experience. For example, it has recently been faced with proposals for demolition of a cultural (music) venue in the centre of Inverness and redevelopment of the site to create a large hotel and those proposals tested the current policy framework and exposed its limitations. In the circumstances of the case, it became apparent that the current town centre policy and Scottish Planning Policy did not provide a strong framework for fully assessing the suitability of the proposal and the concerns over the loss of an important cultural venue. Whilst this type of proposal is rare it can be controversial and complex. Therefore, it is suggested that NPF4 provides a framework for assessing such proposals and we would welcome opportunity to input further to development of such policy, drawing on our experience including specific circumstances of the case referred to as appropriate. What may be useful is for national policy to provide a steer on the process for determining the suitability of such a proposal to remove a cultural venue, including how to test the ‘need’ to retain it. It may be that some kind of sequential approach should be considered. That might, for example, require the applicant to clearly justify the repurposing of the site, assess the net change to the vibrancy and vitality to the town centre and evidence on whether or not the existing facility is fit for purpose. Criteria could perhaps be set out for the assessment of net change to vitality/vibrancy, and guidance provided for how much value should be placed on cultural venues, diversity of uses and the relative value of promoting/securing a night time economy.</p> <p>At present the Council’s Town Centre First Policy required applicants to demonstrate an existing use is no longer viable before it can be converted to residential. The aim of this is to prevent landowners redeveloping the site after running down the business (deliberately or not) in an area where there is likely to be reasonable demand for such a facility (e.g. hotel). Consideration could be given to expanding this approach, to safeguard other uses, such as cultural organisations and venues.</p> <p>Emphasis could also be placed on innovative ways to decentralise and through that to reach rural communities, including provision of internal and external spaces of different scales for travelling theatres, bands and events and better use of digital technology to deliver local experiences.</p> <p>This policy should also respect and support our historic and cultural legacy assets and the importance these play of supporting rural communities in terms of wealth and employment generation.</p> <p>The provision of Public Art within urban areas is considered important to the vibrancy of these areas, where it is bespoke art installations, ‘gateway features’ or high-quality public realm furniture. Nonetheless, it is important that the long-term maintenance and control of these assets is fully considered and appropriately funded at the outset.</p> <p>Please note that the “Research Project: Adoption of Scottish Planning Policy in Local Development Plans” did not</p>

consider Highland Council planning policy as the review of Highland-wide LDP was postponed until after the Planning Bill. This excluded general planning policies included within the three area LDPs, including the Town Centre First Policy.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

As above.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.

Any Other Comments?

None.

SPP Policy Title:	Digital
NPF4 Objective:	To support the roll-out of digital infrastructure across Scotland so that the social, economic and environmental benefits of digital technologies are delivered in a way that keeps environmental impacts to a minimum.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We support the roll-out of digital infrastructure because it fits with our low carbon region vision. However, NPF4 should contain stronger national policy support for innovative solutions to suit rural / remote areas where there is an existing population. We do not back national in-principle support for new dish / mast provision in unpopulated areas where development may compromise environmental constraints	

A. Does Highland agree with the Scottish Government's Objective for this policy area?
Partly (see response to B below).

B. Could the Objective and likely approach for this policy area be improved and if so how?
<p>The Objective and its resultant policy should recognise that in some cases there will be a necessary trade-off between environmental impact and digital infrastructure roll-out. A Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) methodology should apply given the Scottish Government has already committed to connect all premises to minimum internet download speeds of 30Mb/s. NPF3 only classified 8km+ extensions to the national digital fibre network as a national development. NPF4 should clarify that a development whose sole purpose is to provide/allow a high speed (30Mb/s+) internet connection to currently poorly served premises, is accepted in principle. Environmental effects assessment of options – and mitigation consideration – should be framed against this positive policy presumption.</p> <p>The justification for this approach is that the digital infrastructure rollout will have a bigger positive carbon impact (principally by reducing the need for car travel) than it will have a localised negative carbon impact (e.g. peat or other soil disturbance). Similarly, visual impacts are not relevant to climate change implications. The Scottish Government's NPF4 high level Outcomes and Key Issues to Consider make several explicit references to climate change and no direct reference to visual impact. Arguably this relative weighting should be formalised through NPF4, so as to support decision makers if the particular post mitigation positive and negative impacts of an application are very balanced and a determining factor is required (i.e. the net climate change impact of a development should be that determining factor).</p> <p>Further investment in digital infrastructure is still required, with priority roll out to rural areas to enable more opportunities to tackle the need for travel by enabling home working and innovative arts and culture packages across all areas of the Highlands. However, as with other public / private infrastructure investment, this must be made in a cost-effective manner. The Scottish Government's commitment to connect all premises could involve inordinate public expenditure if NPF4's approach to new development in very remote rural areas is too positive. Resettlement of presently uninhabited or very sparsely populated islands and glens is at odds with cost-effective public service provision (and likely to have negative net carbon impacts). Consequently, NPF4's policy on the digital rollout should be compatible with NPF4's policy on development in very remote rural areas. New development should have a locational imperative to be in that very remote rural area – for example Highland has seen recent applications for second homes on presently uninhabited islands which have no imperative to be there. Conversely, a crofter wishing to expand his/her existing operation in a very sparsely populated remote glen should be supported in principle.</p>

Does the likely national policy approach for this policy area raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?
No, although NPF's approach to the related policy area of Rural Development might cause concerns for Highland.

At a local level do we think we need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?
No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.

Any Other Comments?
Resilience of Civil Contingency agencies should be an early priority.

Issues to Consider:

The development of the digital fibre network was designated a national development in NPF3. How can NPF4 continue to support its ongoing national roll-out and enhanced telecommunications infrastructure particularly in rural areas?

By reaffirming a financial commitment (whether that funding comes from Ofcom, UK Government or Scottish Government) to complete the digital infrastructure roll-out (currently 20% of Highland premises do not meet the Scottish Government internet target download speed of 30Mb/s). By establishing a national policy presumption in favour of the principle of digital infrastructure roll-out development applications (see response to B above). By targeted investment in remote rural areas and a sensible policy on new development in very remote rural areas (see response to B above).

How can NPF4 ensure that the planning system supports the deployment of fibre, 5G and other connectivity technologies and is able to anticipate and react, in an agile way, to the ever-changing opportunities of the digital age?

By reaffirming a financial commitment to complete the digital infrastructure roll-out. By establishing a national policy presumption in favour of the principle of digital infrastructure roll-out development applications (see response to B above).

How can we maximise the contribution of digital connectivity to reducing emissions for example by limiting the need to travel by providing remote access to work and services?

The digital infrastructure roll-out should prioritise fibre network extensions in remote rural areas in and to “digital hub” settlements. Very remote rural areas with very low and sparse populations should have different mobile / satellite solutions. The “digital hubs” in these settlements should be public / work spaces for the provision of a wide range of services – e.g. tele-healthcare appointments / advice, video conference meeting facilities, council officer advice sessions etc. The building location will vary but could be the local primary school, shop, church, village hall or other suitable facility. These will be particularly useful for the ageing population, limiting the distance and time of travel particularly in winter conditions and/or where no suitable public transport option is available. Carers will also find it easier to transport elderly clients to a local hub to help them access tele-healthcare and other services. Often it won’t be safe, secure or practicable to expect the elderly person (even with the help of their carer) to access Skype or similar software from their own home and increased online service provision may only increase the feeling of isolation of elderly residents.

Can we develop policies that ensure that digital connectivity supports wider objectives, including increasing the population of rural Scotland?

Yes, but we need to be sensible as to which locations are chosen for resettlement / repopulation (see response to B above). Bolstering digital infrastructure (and other public infrastructure) provision in local hub settlements within the remote / sparsely populated rural areas is a more cost effective, carbon clever and practicable solution for stabilising a local population than resettling empty Highland glens with people / enterprises with no locational or economic justification for being there.

What policy criteria should be used when considering planning applications for new masts – is there a need for this to be tailored to local circumstances?

National siting and design guidance or principles would be appropriate and these should impose higher standards (of siting and design) in sensitive locations. There should be a national presumption in favour of the reuse, sharing and restoration of mast location sites. Underground, fibre network solutions should be the default solution unless there is a technical / economic imperative to pursue a mast / satellite dish solution.

How can planning policies best ensure the inclusion of digital infrastructure in new homes and business premises?

By reaffirming a financial commitment (whether that funding comes from Ofcom, UK Government or Scottish Government) to complete the digital infrastructure roll-out, including maintaining financial incentives to developers to incorporate digital infrastructure facilities in new buildings. New building standards regulations would be the most comprehensive and effective way to ensure incorporation of such facilities. A national planning policy to require such facilities may not be effective.

SPP Policy Title:	Green Infrastructure
NPF4 Objective:	To protect, enhance and promote green infrastructure, including open space and green networks, as an integral component of successful placemaking.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We support the identification and safeguarding of these areas through LDPs. NPF4 should recognise quality green-blue infrastructure as essential infrastructure for development and as such should be factored into an “infrastructure first” approach advocated in NPF, thereby contributing to strong and resilient communities. NPF4 should also promote a stronger presumption against development within LDP-identified greenspaces, green networks and also support LDP policies that commit developers to provide more tree planting and community growing space within the greenspace of new developments.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

Yes, agreed. However, there is a risk that green infrastructure (GI) is too general a term as terminology has moved on and it is now more common to refer to “blue-green infrastructure” as an acknowledgement of the key role the water environment plays in our open spaces; this should be addressed in the NPF4 and the importance of the quality in provision, not just quantity, recognised.

Our current Development Plan also goes further and identifies GI for safeguarding, including: allotment sites, sports pitches/facilities, core path networks, compensatory planting areas and temporary spaces for GI. There is also no specific mention of safeguarding existing valued greenspaces like community woodlands, parks, gardens or other areas, the first bullet mentions enhancing through a design-led approach, but what about fit for purpose existing greenspace? It should be explicitly mentioned that Development Plans, in a similar way as have SDPs, are to safeguard existing and identify future strategic or regionally important assets.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

The main impacts are resourcing: if we are to have relevant, up-to-date audits, strategies and actions plans, who is to take on this work, is it statutorily required? An audit to inform the safeguarding of greenspace/ networks in a plan is a fundamental part of the evidence based, the Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy (HFWS) is prepared by our Forestry team, but beyond listing specific items in the Delivery Programme, what other elements would be statutorily required and what timescales for review (e.g. Open Space Strategies, Play Sufficiency Assessments)?

A revised, strengthened policy linking blue-green infrastructure and other essential infrastructure such as transport (active travel connections), drainage (surface water management) and flood risk management (natural flood management), whilst protecting areas of peatland is considered to offer significant opportunities for the Highlands.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

There is potential that no Highland-specific policy for ‘Open Space’ (as in our current HwLDP) or ‘Greenspace’ (as in our recent Area LDPs) would be needed, provided it addresses the issues above. Our emerging IMFLDP2 approach is to say: if it is identified as Greenspace, it cannot be built on; if it is identified as a Green network, it needs to be safeguarded and incorporated as a positive part of a development. If we rely on a national policy, this distinction is essential; we do not want loopholes that can circumvent the safeguarding purpose of our emerging new policy.

Any Other Comments?

We think this policy is most relevant to larger urban areas and the NPF approach is probably looking to the central belt rather than more rural areas.

We welcome SNH national standard and national requirement for green (and blue) infrastructure to be included in new developments; achieving carbon sequestration through tree planting could help to address climate issues, and setting some standards based on development thresholds could help. However, this aspect should not be just for Major developments.

NPF4 CALL FOR IDEAS RESPONSE

There is a risk with allotments and community growing spaces that national policy continues to place emphasis on local authorities to deliver. There should be recognition of and resource to support willing communities to deliver their food growing strategy, supported by Planning and other Council functions; there is some irony that some of the local examples of food growing (Nairn, Muir of Ord, Balloch) tend not to be in areas with lower socio-economic communities, where such strategies could be transformational for access to greenspace, cheap/free food and empowerment of disadvantaged people

Highland Council has yet to consider and decide if we want to make flood risk management areas protected green infrastructure; their natural flood management function is important but there is likely to be flooding issues that would prevent built development and/or community use.

SPP Policy Title:	Health
NPF4 Objective:	To ensure that planning policies and decisions take account of the health needs of local communities and have regard to the need to improve the diet, health and wellbeing of people living in Scotland.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We support a national policy on this topic and assessment of all relevant applications against nationally agreed health outcomes. It would be useful if NPF4 could encourage better NHS input in defining health facility impacts. We request that NPF4's placemaking policy cross refers to its health policy.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
<p>The paper on this topic is quite broad. Generally, there is recognition of the role of the Planning system in promoting public health, but a lack of tangible, measurable means to test a local policy, site, or application against. NPF4 should take the public health objectives it lists in the topic paper to develop a criteria-based way of assessing the implications of a proposal on public health, this should recognise the breadth of impacts (e.g. location resulting in inactivity due to car being only transport option, hot food establishment in a particular proximity to sensitive users etc.) whilst being simple, quick and easy to apply for any Planner.</p> <p>Local authorities and NHS need to work together to forecast demands on health infrastructure, then ensure a methodology to recover costs to the public sector from developers that is consistent across Scotland/ NHS Boards.</p>	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
<p>National and major developments have to consider likely health effects, specific guidance and criteria is needed on how to consider this; what evidence should be submitted in support of a site or application, and what agency will be the consultee that can support a planning authority in determination? Why only national and major, should all development not be considered in terms of its likely health effects, albeit with a need for assessment to be proportionate?</p> <p>Detail should be provided on how LDPs are to measure and take account of the health needs of the population of the Plan area. There is a risk of an over-emphasis of the Place Standard tool for this, which is an early-stage charrette-style community engagement tool. There is likely to be more effective public health data held by NHS that can provide such information or be used alongside a Place Standard exercise and therefore the role of partnership working should be emphasised.</p> <p>We should support the approach to ensure particular developments (hot food takeaway, vans outside schools etc.) do not undermine health and well-being of communities but it is important that a clear and prescriptive approach (e.g. number of units of a particular use acceptable within X people in a given area) is provided so we don't end up bogged down in appeals over local-scale developments.</p> <p>It is also important to recognise the health benefits active travel can have on physical and mental wellbeing and therefore these aspects should be enshrined in new developments through the Placemaking Policy. Additionally, low cost and clean energy will improve living conditions and welfare through reductions in fuel poverty and better living environments, whilst reductions in emissions from cars, transport, and heating will provide direct health benefits.</p>	
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?	
No.	
Any Other Comments?	
Given the geographical spread of Highlands, there is a huge issue over the cost provision of providing local community healthcare (including maternity and care home provision) in rural areas, which is considered necessary to eliminate social isolation. Such provision must be appropriately funded and resourced to achieve any meaningful repopulation of the rural areas.	

SPP Policy Title:	Housing- General, Affordable, Specialist
NPF4 Objective:	<p>To maintain the existing policy support for affordable housing provision. There is a lack of evidence that the policy is failing to deliver affordable homes, taking into account accelerated delivery in recent years and the success of the More Homes approach.</p> <p>To ensure that development plans allocate the right land in the right place at the right time and to facilitate and monitor the delivery of this land.</p> <p>To improve the policy so that the housing needs of older and disabled people are better accounted for in the planning system.</p>
Highland Council Headline Response:	
<p>We support the principle of minimum targets and standards for all housing sectors. However, these targets and standards should be aligned with the funding and delivery mechanisms necessary to achieve them. National outcomes on carbon reduction, health, etc will not be met unless this happens. For example, national legislation, policy and funding should be used to allow land acquisition and servicing of strategic housing sites. For affordable housing, we believe national policy should allow local planning authorities (LPAs) scope to vary the minimum % provision as appropriate to local circumstances.</p>	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
Housing General:	
<p>Within Scottish Government's information note for this policy topic, there is considerable focus in the 'what has happened' section on the definition of areas, calculation of housing targets and other quantitative elements of the Plan; however, there is a clear lack of detail on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • placemaking, quality of the built environment and sustainability, particularly around new housing locations related to local trip attractors and destinations (this is acknowledged but not dealt with in sufficient detail); • town/city centre living and consolidation of the built environment; • density as a means of improving the sustainability, efficiency and vibrancy of housing; • acknowledgement of the role of contemporary housing development in creating car-dominated suburban development lacking in services and facilities; • emerging specialist housing needs, design and delivery. <p>Town centre living should feature as a major aim of the policy, addressing multi-generational living and the services, facilities and other infrastructure required to support such a policy aim. It should include how to retrofit 'above retail' and other non-standard properties and provide guidance on where standards over parking etc. should be relaxed or removed. Should there be a town centre first policy for housing?</p> <p>Sustainable housing should feature as a major aim of the policy, addressing the location of new housing, minimum acceptable densities (based on proximity to local trip attractors or sustainable travel infrastructure), and energy and heating methods.</p> <p>Given the potential role of the Housing Land Audit for monitoring the Plan's progress, it is important, particularly given the findings from the PSAD research about lack of consistency, that sufficient resource is allocated to this work; how can planning fees support this important monitoring activity?</p> <p>NPF4 will set targets for use of land in different areas of Scotland. Will this be based on a regional figure (Highland), super-region (Highlands and Islands) or will it look at Housing Market Areas? There is a significant risk of a 'race to the bottom' in setting any kind of housing targets beyond the HNDA: in England there has been criticism (like this) about the allocation of large, relatively cheap greenfield sites with access to a high capacity motorway junction to meet housing targets. It is a quick and easy win for Local Authorities but simply measuring success by statistics in the absence of more holistic factors is dangerous and risks a proliferation of 'car-based living' with impacts on placemaking, transport, climate change and other major issues. Other measures should include proximity and access to jobs, services, education and leisure. We welcome the suggestion that any such approach is intended to be</p>	

undertaken collaboratively.

Since the LDP has to look at particular housing needs of different groups there needs to be greater integration between Local Housing Strategy (LHS) and LDP- perhaps this is not considered an issue across Scotland, but certainly in Highland these are two separate processes on two separate timescales developed by two separate services.

Affordable Housing: It looks likely that the 25% limit for affordable housing will be carried forward to SPP/NPF4 but we challenge this for the following reasons:

As recognised in the Ironside Farrar report cited, delivery of affordable housing in some cities will be challenging, a blanket approach masks regional demand and variation. For example, in Caithness, when compared with demand, there is an excess of Affordable/Below Market Rent housing stock (approx. 100 requiring housing compared with 326 houses being available, conversely Inverness requires 40% of all new affordable housing to meet demand based on the Highland Housing Register first preference. If the 25% approach is carried forward, we need to emphasise that the emerging 'Housing to 2040' policy and SPP/NPF4 should recognise:

- It is challenging for the public sector to compete in an open market to deliver schemes where developers have greater access to different funding mechanisms. It should be acknowledged that this is not a planning issue, but simply part of the context affordable housing is delivered in.
- Reinforcing the point above, the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan has a large oversupply of housing land compared to the Housing Supply Target, yet in the lifetime of the Plan (2015-2020) the affordable housing backlog has not been cleared and a significant number on the Highland Housing Register have Inverness as their first preference. This means that land supply and availability are not necessarily the issue, but that there are other market factors at play and perhaps limited effective funding mechanisms available to those delivering affordable housing.
- The idea that the affordable backlog will never be cleared because there will always be more people in need of affordable housing needs to be acknowledged and expressed in any new policy.

Specialist Housing:

We welcome any improvement and elaboration in housing policy to provide housing for a greater range of people in society, and particularly those with protected characteristics. Accessible housing should be part of this approach. We are looking to promote that in all new development a percentage are delivered as accessible and adaptable homes and this should be highlighted as a possible option to roll out across Scotland, bespoke to local circumstances and needs.

More accessible (or easily adaptable) homes are needed for sale and for rent across Highland. The newer "Barrier free" homes that do meet general Housing to Varying Needs Standards, while offering choice for some disabled people, do not provide the ease of access required by many others, or the additional space needed by wheelchair users. In relation to new build housing in the private sector, the Building Standards in many cases leads to houses being built that may be 'visit-able' by a disabled person but which do not provide sufficient space standards to make them liveable in.

There is also a significant lack of housing suitable for wheelchair users as demonstrated by the number of wheelchair users looking to be housed via the Highland Housing Register and incidences of NHS Highland delayed discharges.

It is important that the market is fully aware of the projected population change and is supported to respond in an effective way. This could involve explanation in national policy and vision for how Scotland is building new inclusive communities. Any policy changes should avoid the creation of 'specialist housing schemes' wherever possible, and should instead ensure that such development forms integrated elements of mixed, equitable neighbourhoods.

Given the geographical spread of the Highlands, there are still challenges of delivering appropriate, fit for purpose housing in rural / remote rural areas to ensure a good balance is achieved in: meeting needs; helping households

achieve their aspirations; building inclusive sustainable communities and ensuring health and social services can be delivered.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

Housing General: We support the requirements for self-build plots delivery in urban areas and this is reflected in our emerging approach in our IMFLDP2 MIR currently being prepared. Our support is limited to delivery of the self-build plots of larger housing sites only, as we believe a policy requirement on smaller sites would be an excessive burden.

Affordable Housing: A blanket % of affordable on open market sites does not seem appropriate for Highland, let alone Scotland. Regional variations in need, market factors, land values and probably other issues will have an impact and should be considered further.

The Scottish Government's policy information note highlights issues about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving health and wellbeing, then highlights the aim to increase the population of rural areas of Scotland. It is important that this latter part of the policy is carefully considered so that the former two can be realised. Sustaining population may be a more appropriate aim, but increasing population (like repopulating Highland glens) is a major challenge that could only be sustainably achieved with major policy and public investment into local health, education and community infrastructure as well as local employment opportunities.

At a local level will we need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

If there is a blanket % affordable housing 'cap' there may be a case for having a local policy to address the impacts of this, such as Edinburgh City Council's recent proposals in their Main Issues Report (where any site not specifically allocated for a particular use that is over 0.25ha must deliver housing on 50% of it & increasing to 35% affordable requirement).

Any Other Comments?

Housing needs to be moving to net zero carbon and low running cost as a priority within the scope of Net Zero Carbon. This requires a strict and definite set of requirements to be adopted to achieve this, with both new and retrofit housing adopting energy efficiency and low carbon heating as standard to ensure that the climate emergency outcomes are delivered and are sustained.

Finally, whilst we accept there has been steady progress over a number of years to improving housing standards for ambient disabled, there are still areas which have had little thought/input including:

- Cupboards, cabinets
- Activity space
- Acoustics and ventilation
- Streets, kerbs
- Assistive technology
- Green spaces
- Car parking
- Service user involvement.

As part of NPF4 these areas of concern could be addressed and resolved by having a national policy that drives transformation in provision to properly address needs.

SPP Policy Title:	Waste
NPF4 Objective:	To support the management of waste in line with the waste hierarchy (waste prevention; reuse; recycling; energy recovery and waste disposal) and to guide development for new infrastructure to appropriate locations.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We want to make sure that national policy does not preclude an Energy from Waste facility in Highland (including a heat plan, likely for an integral district heating system). We support the national policy principle of waste management and advocate for a circular economy approach to material use (and the wider waste hierarchy) as close as possible to source.	
Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
Agreed. A strong policy framework is required to ensure the waste hierarchy associated with new development is adhered to throughout its lifecycle. However, this is an area where policy success/rigorous application is not easily quantifiable and may require the support of legislation such as building or waste regulations.	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
Not unless it is proposed to remove or significantly amend the existing provisions for energy from waste.	
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?	
No, on the proviso the national policy reflects that 'One size doesn't fit all'.	
Any Other Comments?	
There is scope for a range of opportunities in waste use and repurposing to be brought forward. Construction waste is of particular use, and energy provision from waste products can be a very self-sustaining circular activity, bringing value to the community. The use of the resource hierarchy as a framework for development to make the most efficient use of all resources – materials (and buildings), land, water and energy - should be an integral part of placemaking.	
Issues to consider:	
How can the planning system help facilitate progress towards a circular economy in a way that delivers benefits for the environment, the economy and local communities?	
In a circular economy, systems are designed to make better use of valuable products and materials - changing the way they are produced and managed to have less impact on finite natural resources and create greater economic benefit.	
The built environment is a valuable product and the planning system can help influence the way the built environment is produced by: reducing wasteful energy consumption by requiring a greater emphasis on site choice, layout and detailed designs to maximise energy efficiency (including travel and servicing) throughout the lifetime of the development; designing flexibility of use into buildings e.g. whole life homes, shared space buildings, ease of making alterations or extension where necessary; making use of modular building techniques to enable reuse/recycling; use building materials that can be adapted and repaired easily or have an 'end of life value'.	
How can the planning system best support ambitions for energy from waste?	
By ensuring that suitable sites are safeguarded in local development plans.	

SPP Policy Title:	Aquaculture
NPF4 Objective:	To support the sustainable growth of the finfish and shellfish sectors to ensure that the aquaculture industry is diverse, competitive and economically viable and that new development is guided to coastal locations that best suit industry needs with due regard to the marine environment.

Highland Council Headline Response:
We believe NPF4's approach should be balanced between the marine environment and industry needs. We are concerned about the impacts of aquaculture on the wild salmonid population and the need for better data / guidance for the West Coast. NPF4 should ensure that Marine Regional Plans should contain locational guidance, be adequately resourced across all stakeholders and be based upon better scientific data.

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

We agree with the aquaculture NPF4 objective (detailed above).

The economic and societal benefits of aquaculture to remote and island communities cannot be understated. It provides income and employment opportunities to residents of geographically peripheral parts of Scotland, including in the Highland Council area. It provides year-round employment opportunities in the west of the Highlands, an area where relatively few employment opportunities exist and which is subject to high and low periods due its reliance on tourism. In a recent report commissioned by the Highland Council it was estimated 1,100 people were employed either directly by the aquaculture industry or indirectly by supply chain services such as salmon processing [1]. In terms of wages per annum this represents a conservative estimate of around £34M in the Highland Council area.

Growth in this industry would likely add to the positive economic benefits this industry provides to these areas and therefore should be encouraged. However, this growth must be balanced with a need to limit the negative environmental impacts aquaculture has on the marine environment. This is particularly pertinent for finfish farms which can have greater environmental impact than shellfish farms due to the discharge of waste, chemicals and medicines from pens and negative interactions with wild fish populations.

Scotland's wild salmonid population is in serious decline. A variety of environmental pressures appear to be responsible and some of these are directly related to aquaculture. These include the spread of sea-lice from fish farms to wild salmonids and genetic introgression through crossbreeding between wild fish and escaped fish. National aquaculture planning policy must ensure that the future expansion of Scottish aquaculture makes no further net contribution to this decline through its emissions of sea lice and chemical and biological waste; the policy should also seek to ensure that every effort is made to reduce current levels.

In this regard we are in favour of the continued 'presumption against' marine finfish farms developments on the north and east coast to safeguard wild salmon in an area where significant salmonid populations are found. Further locational guidance on the west coast based on wild salmon migratory routes and sea lice interactions currently being prepared by SEPA and Marine Scotland would be extremely beneficial for the planning system, allowing it to better fulfil its role of siting farms in locations both beneficial to the aquaculture industry and to the environment.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

We would like to understand how finfish farming regulation reform will be considered in NPF4.

Recent parliamentary committee reports [2,3] have highlighted there are currently regulatory deficiencies in protecting wild fish. As part of the government response to parliamentary reports cross agency working groups (which include planning authority representation) have been set up to examine issue of wild fish interactions and finfish farming regulation is currently in the process of reform. Decisions regarding changes to regulation on safeguarding wild fish populations are very relevant to NPF4 because it will influence the planning system's role in mitigating these negative interactions.

So far, changes to aquaculture regulation have been related to monitoring of sea lice at fish farms and have/will not had an impact on the planning system. However, as mentioned above, SEPA and Marine Scotland are currently developing a spatial planning framework tool to help inform decision making which should be explicitly supported by NPF4.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

No, it is likely policy will be equally relevant across all council areas with aquaculture production.

In terms of aquaculture production by geography, the Highland Council area represents a large proportion of salmon production (29% [4]).

Any Other Comments?

Collaboration

In order to ensure NPF4 policy promotes a planning system which works in line with an effective regulatory framework for aquaculture, clarification should be sought from all agencies involved in aquaculture regulation regarding their position for NPF4. These agencies include: Marine Scotland Science, Marine Scotland Licencing, SEPA, and SNH. This will encourage cross agency alignment, which is particularly important for aquaculture due to the current intentions for regulatory reform.

Spatial planning

Locational guidance for fish farm expansion based marine environment sensitivities will be hugely beneficial for the planning system. Currently Marine Scotland Science produces a traffic light classification system for sea lochs and inlets which describes their capacity to carry more fish farm biomass based on nutrient levels and benthic impacts. This MSS locational guidance combined with SEPA and Marine Scotland's upcoming maps of sea lice interaction risk areas will be a very useful tool for planners and developers alike.

NPF4 should explicitly steer authorities to incorporating this information into a more wide-ranging spatial aquaculture guidance policy and map within their development plans which would also include the other constraints currently identified in SPP – visual, habitats, other users etc. The aquaculture industry and other stakeholders should be able to read a LDP and identify where to locate their future farms or, at least, understand clearly the planning issues they will need to positively address in order to gain consent in a particular location. NPF4 should ensure that Marine Regional Plans should contain locational guidance, be adequately resourced across all stakeholders and be based upon better scientific data.

It is possible that this approach will call into question the blanket assumption against fish farming off the north and east coasts of Scotland, as these areas could also be mapped in respect of their set of constraints including wild fish populations and their migratory routes.

References

1. Highland Council and Highland & Moray FLAG. 2019. Highland Region Aquaculture and Fisheries Socio-Economic Study: Socio-economic profile and importance. Report prepared by Nautilus Consultants Ltd.
2. Scottish Parliament. 2018. Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (ECCLR) Committee report on the environmental impacts of salmon farming.
3. Scottish Parliament. 2018. Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) Committee on Salmon farming in Scotland.
4. Scottish Government. 2019. Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2017.
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-marine-economic-statistics-2017/pages/17/>

SPP Policy Title:	Business and Employment
NPF4 Objective:	To promote business and industrial development that support sustainable and inclusive economic growth while safeguarding and enhancing the natural and built environments.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
<p>We request that Scotland’s supported growth sectors be broadened. Traditional sectors such as engineering are not referenced and much of Highland’s employment comes from construction and more conventional enterprises. There is also need for effective linkage between terrestrial and marine planning in order to realise the potential for appropriate growth of the marine economy. NPF4 should recognise that an adequate supply of serviced employment land is just as important as adequate housing land and that the delivery of both is linked. Similarly, the land supply should be flexible to cater for any emerging industries. NPF4 will be important in aiding the economic recovery of Scotland post COVID-19 and in addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency.</p>	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>Overall we agree with the suggested approach at a national level, subject to a few changes which are considered important. Firstly, the key growth sectors as identified in SPP (2014) should be extended (e.g. inclusion of the technology and engineering sector) in order to promote the diversification of the economy which is a key aim at a regional level. Within Highland, there are several nationally important businesses operating which do not fall into the four sectors currently listed in SPP. For example, Norbord which makes panels for the vital construction industry and following a £100M investment in 2018 is one of the region’s largest employers. In addition, recognition and support should be given to the role which Liberty Group could have to the Scottish economy with their planned alloy wheel manufacturing plant in Fort William. Agriculture remains important for Highland and the nation, providing employment in helping meet demands for food; there is increasing focus on the need to support local growing and opportunities for small-scale food enterprises. For community energy, exporting the wealth of skills in this that are available in Highland is a further opportunity to build on.</p> <p>It is noted that there is no reference in Scottish Government’s background note to the Climate and Ecological Emergency. This imperative issue should inform all policy areas. Furthermore, the national planning policy will be vital in helping to deliver economic recovery from the consequences of COVID-19 (coronavirus) and of the currently ongoing lockdown that has been necessary. This could include support for novel means of enhancing investment and employment opportunities. For example, the implementation of ‘freeports’ could be considered, subject to having a full understanding of, and considering, any positive and negative impacts on the economy at local, regional and national levels.</p> <p>The potential for hugely increasing value of the marine economy, as referenced in the BEIS-sponsored report “MAXiMAR: Maximising the marine economy in the Highlands and Islands”, should be taken into account. This growth will involve a number of the sectors that have been identified, whereby their activity is reliant on marine resources and serviced by infrastructure in the coastal zone. Linkage between terrestrial planning and marine planning is therefore important and should be reflected in NPF4, in order that appropriate growth of the marine economy may be recognised and supported.</p> <p>There also appears to be strong demand for and significant under investment in small scale industrial units (50 to 150sqm) which serve local businesses and communities. These units form an important part of the commercial property market providing incubator and start up opportunities. In recent times, this type of premises has been viewed as financially unattractive, returning low land values, low levels of rental yield and high management costs. The majority of the existing stock was delivered by the public sector during the second half of the 20th century. Since then, public sector investment has shifted to the provision of large, higher quality, serviced sites in strategic locations, e.g. Inverness Airport Business Park and Inverness Campus. A reassessment is required of this approach and of the potential means of delivering small scale industrial units, to ensure these opportunities are available.</p>
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the

Highlands?

We agree that commercial need and demand analysis should be undertaken more consistently; however, there should also be a degree of flexibility due to the differing contexts across Scotland.

To ensure that the planning system helps deliver change, national bodies must also consider the findings of these studies and how the barriers to development can be overcome. For example, an economic analysis of a region may find certain market failures which are preventing certain types of employment generating development coming forward. The LDP is unlikely to be able to address these on its own and a coordinated, inter-partner approach will be necessary. Relevant public sector bodies, including the Scottish Government, should proactively identify these and look to direct resources and coordinate measures and the bringing about of effects to overcome them.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

There may be scope for a single national policy framework; however, it would require to be flexible enough to allow for emerging industries which fitted with the economic strategy of the RSS and/or LDP area to be supported. At present the HwLDP policy identifies many business and industrial estates across Highland which we protect from other, competing uses. This approach allows us to avoid the need to allocate existing business and industrial estates for such uses when they may already be largely built. With pressure on certain sites from other uses (such as trade counter retail, gyms and churches), and the lack of investment in the expansion of these estates, then an alternative approach may be needed.

There may also be a need for a Council policy to set out a clearer, more comprehensive framework for business and industrial land. Currently HwLDP Policy 40 focuses on strategic development sites; however, there may be merit in setting out a new policy framework which identifies sites of national importance, regionally important employment centres (e.g. all other Economic Development Areas as identified in our LDPs), and smaller scale allocations in our LDPs. The revised policy is also expected to need to be broadened to presume against the redevelopment of all existing business and industrial sites from other incompatible forms of development.

Any Other Comments?

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on delivering economic growth. There is a relatively clear and robust framework for identifying housing need and it has been backed up by a substantial affordable housing programme by the Scottish Government. In comparison, there is little guidance and few requirements for undertaking employment audits and the results may not be considered by any other public sector body. If greater collaboration and coordination could be achieved by public agencies (and the private sector) then it is expected that we could overcome particular market failures and deliver greater levels of economic growth.

There is also the issue that homes and jobs are related. The prospects of attracting investments in business and industry, and the ability of businesses to recruit the skills and numbers required, will depend upon having the appropriate housing stock available – an issue that can be exacerbated in a Highland context where quite substantial communities can be a considerable distance from similarly sized or bigger ones, such that the choice within the travel to work area is limited. Conversely, the design and construction skills need to be available (including specialists) in order to deliver the homes themselves, especially if to low or zero carbon standards.

As part of rural-proofing NPF4, it is suggested that Scottish Government have regard to relevant recommendations in the Scottish Council for Development and Industry's Rural Commission report "[An Economy for All of Scotland – Harnessing Our Potential for Everyone, Everywhere](#)" (2019).

SPP Policy Title:	Energy – Electricity
NPF4 Objective:	To maximise the contribution of renewable electricity generation to meeting our net zero target in a sustainable way.

Highland Council Headline Response

We believe NPF4 should take a more holistic approach to the whole energy sector not just electricity and heat – i.e. the generation, transmission, distribution, and consumption of energy and how each of them is funded should be better coordinated. It should also cover on and off shore energy. Government policy should support the creation of more local networks for energy generation, storage and use and the implementation of ‘smart grids’ particularly where the network is constrained. This emphasis on ‘local’ should apply as far as is practical throughout Scotland (and the UK). We recognise that Highland will nevertheless continue to have a key role in providing for large scale renewable energy generation, given the resource in the region, and that installed capacity will need to further increase significantly. The national debate on NPF4 needs to consider how the areas with high resource levels can accommodate this whilst keeping with the principle of ‘the right development in the right place’ taking account of the impact of developments, individually and cumulatively. NPF4 should include firmer locational guidance for onshore wind farm proposals. Government should consider whether there should be an increase in the relative weight given to climate change factors versus non-climate change factors in decisions on energy applications – e.g. should climate change impact be given greater weight relative to visual impact? There needs to be a national conversation about landscape change, including a wide-ranging assessment and consideration of what impacts landscape change would have in order to inform strategy and policy, plus decision-making on individual schemes.

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

In terms of the NPF4 Objective for Energy – Electricity suggested by Scottish Government (to maximise the contribution of renewable electricity generation to meeting our net zero target in a sustainable way), it is agreed that this will be a key part of the energy picture. However, if NPF4 is envisioning Scotland in 2050, albeit that there will be a 10-year review cycle, it ought to cover energy considerations other than just (renewable) electricity and heat. The vision and objectives should help drive greater transformation in energy systems, acknowledge challenges with network capacities and take a ‘whole systems’ approach. This will require more joined up thinking between projects and sectors. Novel approaches to generating, storing and using electricity need to be encouraged – particularly in rural communities with constrained grids. Ways are needed to engage Distribution Network Operators with developments. New developments should consider novel approaches to low carbon electricity.

The following provides additional comment, framed by the ‘Issues to Consider’ that were set out by Scottish Government in the relevant Policy Information Note.

- *Is the existing policy approach fit for purpose? What aspects need to change?*

It is acknowledged that more renewable electricity generation is required and that more onshore wind energy capacity will be a key component of that – including entirely new schemes, extensions to existing and repowering. The current policy and assessment approach is continuing to deliver consents; the implementation of those consents has slowed due to changing levels of support from the UK Government for onshore wind energy (and grid matters), though we note that the UK Government has (March 2020) announced re-support of onshore wind energy which is seen as vital to achieving emissions reduction targets.

If the spatial framework in SPP (2014) is to be continued into NPF4 then there is an argument that the framework itself should be provided in NPF4 (which will be part of the Development Plan). The currently prescribed methodology leaves no room for local manoeuvre other than the definition of the community separation distance (CSD). CSD aside, the spatial framework could be mapped by NPF4.

There are a number of locally identified, mapped considerations (including for example local landscape areas and outputs from landscape sensitivity appraisals) but only CSD is currently allowed to be included in the spatial framework. The current methodology limits CSD to up to (no more than) 2km from settlement development areas

defined in local development plans, but how useful is that given that much rural settlement is not defined with a boundary and how relevant does the 2km outer limit remain as onshore turbines types are increasingly larger than they used to be, with visual amenity effects potentially over a greater area?

In the national interest of enabling increased capacity of renewable electricity generation including more onshore wind energy, consideration should be given to the following in NPF4:

- Whether, in the context of the climate emergency and stretching targets for emissions reduction, there should be greater weight given in the 'planning balance' to contribution made to renewable electricity generation (as long as it is compatible with other climate change considerations such as carbon sequestration);
- How, in that context and an increasing cumulative windfarm situation, due regard can still be given to landscape, visual and amenity considerations so that development is still managed; the case may be building to formally recognise the value of 'respite' from windfarm experience;
- How conflicts between different interests for carbon reduction and sequestration might be addressed e.g. between renewable electricity generation, peatland, afforestation, local growing, floodplains.

Electricity is easier to transport and for buildings to use. The policy needs to recognise that the supply network arrangements are the stumbling factor in achieving change. It needs to be recognised that the transmission, distribution and local grids are too restricted and limited. Building flexibility into the network is essential so that generation, storage and dynamic management can be put in place. Only with this change can the linear generation/use model be changed. Buildings and towns should become the power stations that feed and share energy between neighbours "on demand".

- *How can national planning policies support future repowering of wind farms?*

Repowering could provide particular, valued opportunities to maintain the level of installed capacity and to increase it. This should be part of the considerations mentioned elsewhere in this response regarding considerations for accommodating substantial increases in generation capacity overall.

Can planning help to bring change in the generation of locally produced and used electricity? The options for local supplies and the use of storage or integrated hydrogen generation for heat supplies may be appropriate.

- *What other technologies need to be addressed by the policy?*

The existing policies only cover in detail onshore wind energy and we consider that they should more explicitly help plan for offshore wind, hydro (including pump storage), tidal (genuine support to develop this and in preference to wave), hydrogen and (other) storage. NPF4 needs to cover planning aspects but also needs to be joined up with other Scottish Government policy as well as with investment programmes, in order to genuinely drive and nurture the transformation.

- *How can NPF4 support strategic energy infrastructure (including generation, storage, transmission and distribution networks)?*

This is the essential change that will lengthen the life and use of the network and allow the change to a flexible resource. Storage and time of use tariff will be the "game changer" for heat and electric vehicles. It will only be possible if the facilities are there to retain the electricity, plus what is necessary in terms of Electric Vehicle and Hydrogen re-fuelling capacity.

The island interconnectors will be important in order that the islands may play a full and active role in achieving Net Zero ambitions. Decentralised local energy systems too have a contribution to make, by supporting a more balanced supply and demand of renewable energy (we are currently involved with partners on local energy planning for Fort William which may provide an example). Also, the network operators RIIO-T2 plans need to influence NPF4 – we need fit for purpose networks to support new look energy systems.

- *How can NPF4 help deliver the aims of the Energy Strategy?*

Integration of the electricity supplies, storage and use within the Local Energy Plan will allow whole system change.

- *How do we balance renewable energy ambitions with the need to protect our natural environmental assets? (e.g. Wild land/Landscape)?*

The national debate on NPF4 needs to consider how the areas with high resource levels can accommodate substantial further development whilst keeping with the principle of 'the right development in the right place' taking account of the impact of developments, individually and cumulatively. NPF4 should include firmer locational guidance for onshore wind farm proposals. Government should consider whether there should be an increase in the relative weight given to climate change factors versus non-climate change factors in decisions on energy applications – e.g. should climate change impact be given greater weight relative to visual impact? There needs to be a national conversation about landscape change, including a wide-ranging assessment and consideration of what impacts landscape change would have in order to inform strategy and policy, plus decision-making on individual schemes. This may feed in to a revisit of issues and provide a fresh position statement on positive and negative impacts on a variety of economic sectors and on population, taking into account development scale and cumulative impact and pressure from other sectors and their climate response aspirations.

There needs to be a strategy to develop more local systems, i.e. building, street, community and town generation. This provides energy at the closest point and reduces waste; as buildings are already present on the land, the impact has been made and integrating generation will be the least regret option. Also, there is a need for "smart" grids, especially in areas where there is current constraint in the National Grid (i.e. the whole of Highland region except Inverness).

This may lessen the pressure for large-scale energy development in nationally sensitive areas, provide a case for supporting local community energy schemes within those areas and mean that energy development in or near any settlement is seen as associated with and in scale with those places. This could be especially relevant and helpful in seeking to absorb additional generation capacity in places such as Highland, where much of the existing generation is large scale for national needs with all of its impacts (including cumulative impacts) but little of the economic benefit e.g. manufacturing jobs.

- *How can national planning policies support planning for interdependencies between energy networks (e.g. electricity and heat)?*

As mentioned above, the "whole system" approach for planning is essential. It is a problem if the approach fails to bring the systems together to allow further reduction of waste, emissions and loss. Recognising this is the most effective change that can be made in any strategic approach that will match with the Local Development Plan.

- *How can national planning policies support delivering energy efficiency and the recovery of energy that would be otherwise wasted?*

The emphasis should be on Local, Local, Local.

Development needs to be underpinned by the energy hierarchy, so the greatest priority needs to be given to *reducing* energy demand through location, siting, form, design and connectivity. While much of this will be addressed via building standards, there are also opportunities within the planning system.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

Our thoughts on these are provided elsewhere in our response.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

This depends upon the degree of ambition that NPF4 provides on energy matters.

Also, for onshore wind a substantial part of The Highland Council's current Development Plan content is within Supplementary Guidance. Given that SG's status as part of the Development Plan will 'fall' upon adoption of our forthcoming new-generation LDP(s) under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, once we see Draft NPF4 then we will be able to assess whether we need any of the SG 'detail', subject to any need to review it, to be in a new LDP in order that certain principles retain Development Plan status.

Any Other Comments?

Changes and developments required to energy systems support the case for necessary manufacturing, assembly, construction and operation and maintenance infrastructure to support deployment for example around our shores and particularly for example in relation to the ScotWind round to be launched imminently.

With increasing expectation that the planning system has a key role to play in driving transformation of our energy systems (electricity and heat), addressing climate change and achieving development that is sustainable – not all of which are matters that planners are used to dealing with and quizzing developers on – it would be of considerable benefit if NPF4 could specify certain specific matters as being, in principle, material planning considerations in the consideration of proposals for development. That would provide some consistency and comfort in seeking these things through planning. There would also be benefit in building up a national resource of case study examples, for example of low carbon energy systems in use in developments; ideally these would be examples from the Scottish or wider UK context and accompanied by sufficient detail of the context in which these succeeded – for example in terms of scale, type of delivery partners, funding mechanisms – plus any learning points. These would help to broaden understanding and illustrate the art of the possible.

SPP Policy Title:	Energy - Heat
NPF4 Objective:	To maximise the contribution of renewable heat generation and systems to deliver renewable heat (such as district heating, electrical network upgrades) and reduce the cost of delivering this transition (such as supporting heat and electrical storage systems) to meeting our net zero targets in a sustainable way.

Highland Council Headline Response

We believe NPF4 should take a more holistic approach to the whole energy sector not just electricity and heat – i.e. the generation, transmission, distribution, and consumption of energy and how each of them is funded should be better coordinated. NPF4 policy on the decarbonisation of heat should take account of generally remoter, rural, existing development where options to decarbonise are limited and/or uneconomic. We support Government encouragement of Local Energy Plans but request that the implementation of such plans be adequately funded or incentivised. We believe that changes to national Building Standards regulations is the best way to ensure national conformity on improving the energy efficiency of individual buildings and essential if Scotland is to meet its net-zero target by 2045. A ‘whole systems’ approach should be taken to energy planning and local energy networks promoted, including local use of renewable energy generated.

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

Scottish Government’s suggested broad objective for NPF4 for ‘Energy – Heat’ is supported. It is vital however that NPF4 is joined up with other national policies and investment programmes in order to deliver the necessary transformation. The planning system will have parts to play, both proactive and reactionary. Whilst a variety of solutions to the challenge may apply, each suited to particular (local) circumstances – and policy must provide for that – strong and specific national policies are required and a clear position on the necessary role of the planning system in that. NPF3 and SPP (2014) were written in the context of a broad ambition to decarbonise heating and particularly ‘plugged’ district heating, which does have a role but there is now a more fundamental challenge as to how to transition substantial areas to new solutions and it is not clear how that will be made and guaranteed to happen in time to meet targets. There will remain some areas and properties that are very difficult to decarbonise and realistically may not be within timescale and the carbon footprint of those will need to be offset by exemplary performance elsewhere. A ‘whole systems’ approach should be taken to energy planning and local energy networks promoted, including local use of renewable energy generated. Decentralised local energy systems too have a contribution to make, by supporting a more balanced supply and demand of renewable energy (we are currently involved with partners on local energy planning for Fort William which may provide an example). Also, the network operators RIIIO-T2 plans need to influence NPF4 – we need fit for purpose networks to support new look energy systems. The demand for electricity (which should be from renewable sources) will increase as it needs to be turned to in helping to decarbonise heating and transportation. Development needs to be underpinned by the energy hierarchy, so the greatest priority needs to be given to *reducing* energy demand through location, siting, form, design and connectivity. Also, there needs to be flexibility within the system to support heat networks of differing scales and/or varying solutions for more remote and rural areas; communal or community heating may be appropriate in areas where district heating is not possible due to density. Policy should support low carbon heat wherever possible as the first choice of heating. Low carbon heat production should work alongside considerations of land use, water, etc in a way that protects natural resources but allows low carbon heat to be produced. Developers should consider joining with other developments and take an area approach to selecting heating options. It is also necessary to consider what will be necessary in terms of Electric Vehicle and Hydrogen re-fuelling capacity.

The following provides further comment, within the context of the issues set out in Scottish Government’s information note for this policy topic.

Issues to consider:

Is the existing policy approach fit for purpose? What aspects need to change?

The existing policy leaves a wide margin for compliance. This really leads to a determination to focus on the least cost solution rather than the best. The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) requirements are crude and although there may be a need to have scope to innovate and provide economic efficiencies, linking actual performance to energy use, carbon emissions or both are preferred. (EPC is an ideal rating, whereas the actual use would be a better measure.)

How can land use planning support our wider objectives for heat efficiency, and renewable heat generation and distribution as set out in the Heat Networks Bill and LHEES – and when Heat Decarbonisation Policy Statement issues?

The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) process is the most promising, although perhaps better considered as Local Energy Plan (LEP) as it needs to look at a whole system approach and deal with all energy within a strategy. Heat and electricity are interlinked and if the desire is for a low carbon approach they must be considered in the whole along with strategic generation, heat and transport. The LHEES pilot for Inverness suffered from the lack of a local input or focus and the “stock” approach had a lot to be desired. For Highland, the LHEES + that we are involved in is a superior approach and the Knowledge Sharing Group (including Perth, Stirling, Fife, Falkirk) will bring a backbone to the ways to apply the local plan.

LEP containing strategic building and area energy strategies will bring significant benefits in achieving the low energy and carbon (greenhouse gas) places. These are only successful if they are combined with the approach to the Local Development Plan (LDP) so that there is an integrated and “evidence based” enforceable strategy.

There are many ways that land and water can be utilised for energy, for example: heat from the ground under a playing area, heat or cooling from water, can be utilised.

How can implementation of the principle be better supported?

The principles will require regulation that allows planning requirements to be placed and enforced, linking with enhanced Building Standards which would help to set in place a national consistency of expectations and requirements in order to drive transformation. Provision of a robust approach to the energy aspects of any development will help to ensure that the required change is made. Requirements should aid transformation and also be achievable, backed up by evidence, particularly in the period before they can be regarded as ‘normal business’ or ‘default approach’.

What heat generation and supply technologies need to be addressed by the policy framework?

Low carbon heat or low carbon community heat needs to be from a mix of solutions that will allow the most appropriate heat source to be employed. Anaerobic Digestion (AD) to heat may be a local solution that may be included along with Hydrogen gas as a mainstream solution.

Should the policies say more about co-location and requirements for connections to heat networks?

There are a number of instances where a large heat provision is part of a development, but is not used beyond the site boundary and that is a lost opportunity. How might options be compelled or encouraged? It would have a significant overall impact. Land uses may be co-located but unless individual organisations can come together and co-operate on energy issues and not be restrained by the ‘normal business’ approach to individual investment projects, the potential benefits will not be realised.

What else is required to help deliver the aims of the Energy Strategy and net zero ambitions for buildings?

A Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) for each region would be a starting point. Combined with a strategic building energy plan (or carbon plan) would help. If the carbon emissions are a driver that would be ideal. Otherwise ensuring that any EPC recommendations are enacted.

How far should the policy go in supporting renewable heat, and what can be addressed in guidance?

The planning policy really needs to back up the requirements.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

Our thoughts on these are provided elsewhere in our response.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

No, as long as NPF4 addresses the points raised in this response.

Any Other Comments?

With increasing expectation that the planning system has a key role to play in driving transformation of our energy systems (electricity and heat), addressing climate change and achieving development that is sustainable – not all of which are matters that planners are used to dealing with and quizzing developers on – it would be of considerable benefit if NPF4 could specify certain specific matters as being, in principle, material planning considerations in the consideration of proposals for development. That would provide some consistency and comfort in seeking these things through planning. There would also be benefit in building up a national resource of case study examples, for example of low carbon energy systems in use in developments; ideally these would be examples from the Scottish or wider UK context and accompanied by sufficient detail of the context in which these succeeded – for example in terms of scale, type of delivery partners, funding mechanisms – plus any learning points. These would help to broaden understanding and illustrate the art of the possible.

SPP Policy Title:	Promoting Responsible Extraction of Resources
NPF4 Objective:	To safeguard workable resources and ensure that an adequate and steady supply of aggregates is available to meet demand whilst ensuring that the impacts of extraction on local communities, the environment and the built and natural heritage are properly addressed. The policy will also reflect the Scottish Government's finalised policy position on unconventional oil and gas.
Highland Council Headline Response	
We believe that this section of NPF4 should recognise climate change issues including the need to reduce, reuse and recycle mineral resources. It should also reference the need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. NPF4 should promote national data collection on minerals supply and demand for each local market area and the option of a national financial fund for community mitigation.	
Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
Scottish Government's policy information note, whilst setting out issues for consideration with respect to each part of its suggested NPF4 Objective for this policy topic, does not give detail or indication as to how those aspects could, or should, be delivered or what function NPF4 could have in terms of delivering a clear spatial strategy with accompanying policy. With the exception of oil and gas, the suggested approach at the national level appears to be business as usual – very little or no change required. Suggestions for improvement and strengthening are set out below.	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
<p>The Council's HwLDP2 Main Issues Report and the related interim position following consideration of comments we received provides our most recent statement of thinking on minerals. To simplify and avoid duplication of efforts across several Planning Authority LDPs, the following should be undertaken at the national level to help achieve NPF4 Objective elements for safeguarding workable resources and maintaining a landbank:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish more comprehensive and detailed policies. - Have a national database of consented sites by mineral type worked, to be spatially mapped (the Highland Minerals Audit 2015-16 provides an example of how this might look). We note that Scottish Government has recently issued a questionnaire to Local Planning Authorities about peat extraction consents specifically; The Highland Council intends to prepare a response in due course. - Maintain a record of consents, reserves at each site with legislation requiring <u>annual mineral survey returns</u> to obtain details of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o site restoration bond details and review periods; o site waste management plans and review periods; o site production rates (with these being ratified against weighbridge HMRC Aggregates Levy returns which would be in the interest of protecting national revenue); and o mineral distribution areas by records of sales (potentially on an interactive map, or by list of settlements / areas or by the operator's defined maximum one way drive time in minutes). - Use the above returns to create and define clear 'local market areas' and quantify the consented landbank which may often be split across several Planning Authority boundaries which makes it almost impossible for each Planning Authority to undertake this task. - By establishing the landbank nationally this gives credible and robust evidence which can then be relied upon in determining applications, particularly for new sites, which should not be opened on any 'unacceptable' sites / (sites which cause major significant adverse effects), unless this is justifiable due to a severe shortfall in the landbank (which should be set at 20 years to reflect the requirement to maintain a 10 year supply throughout the currency of all LDPs). A policy to support extensions of 	

mineral sites should also be made clear before opening new sites which don't have the established pattern of trip rates or existing site infrastructure.

- With defined local market areas, the policy on limiting borrow pits can then also be better defined to state that if the site is well served within an existing local market area, and mineral imports to serve construction projects would be via Trunk Roads / A roads (which would not result in significant adverse impacts upon communities), no borrow pits would be permitted. Equally, in more remote areas the need for borrow pits is then more clear cut and favourable in terms of reducing transport related carbon emissions.
- With clearly defined local market areas, this could then identify where there is limited market coverage or a shortfall in the landbank where areas for mineral search could be promoted, possibly through NPF4 to overlay with major infrastructure demands, major water / road transportation accessibility, community buffer zones, as well as through applying other critical constraints including designations, areas of deep peat, prime soils etc. similar to the Spatial Framework for Onshore Wind Energy.

For NPF4 Objective element for managing impacts on communities, the environment and the natural / built heritage, national policy must recognise that planning fees do not achieve full cost recovery at present and sufficient financial resources are needed to ensure mineral sites can opportune within environmentally acceptable limits. To enable compliance monitoring legislation or national policy is needed to set out the requirement for an 'annual mineral operation charge / operating licence' to cover the Planning Authority's time to review annual quarry progress reports / restoration bonds / waste management plans / regular ECoW reports / enable at least one annual site inspection by the Planning Authority. With continued reliance on under-resourced Planning Authorities to undertake compliance monitoring, adverse impacts on communities, the environment and the natural / built heritage is inevitable and detrimental to the reputation of the minerals industry.

The acceptable terms and types for site restoration guarantees should also be explained in national policy and the requirement for independent verification of potential site restoration costs should also be outlined with 3rd party certification checks being funded by the applicant. A national infrastructure fund to support the availability of financial restoration guarantees could also be investigated to support the industry.

The issue of Review of Old Mineral Permissions (ROMPs) not generating an application fee must also be addressed, as well as scope for setting higher fees for Section 42 applications which are being used to significantly increase the duration of temporary permissions. In Highland we have recently had two large applications under Section 42 for 25+ year extensions with these only attracting nominal application fees which isn't sustainable for the scale and complexity of these applications which combined, equate to a 16.5 million tonne mineral reserve.

A national policy for financial contributions towards communities adversely impact by nearby mineral operations should also be considered, with scope for any financial amount to be set aside should mineral supplies be provided for local community projects / delivery of infrastructure. Other standardised contributions towards habitat / ornithology conservation projects to ensure biodiversity net gain should also be explored.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

If the above matters are fully addressed in NPF4 with possibly updated national guidance, the need for Highland specific policy can be removed which would be for the betterment of the planning process for both the minerals industry and Planning Authorities.

Any Other Comments?

Minerals are a nationally important resource that demands more attention in the NPF4, particularly in light of seeking reduction of the development industry's carbon footprint and minimisation of supply drive times. Without undertaking the work outlined above, the national strategy would appear to be reliant upon market-led provision with Planning Authorities being more reactive to proposals, rather than directing

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mineral developments towards the best possible sites / areas.

NPF4 should also embed policy in this area with a circular economy approach to material use and in relation to this seek to minimise the need for primary resources via reduction, reuse and recycling.

We are happy to share the content of the Highland Minerals Audit 2015-16 form, related correspondence and map, should the Scottish Government not already have had sight of this. Whilst this audit was not repeated due to pursuing other LDP priorities, this could be revisited by the Scottish Government.

SPP Policy Title:	Rural Development
NPF4 Objective:	To promote rural development that supports prosperous and sustainable communities and businesses whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality.

Highland Council Headline Response

We support the aim of ensuring rural prosperity. NPF4 policy on reversing depopulation, should bolster and expand existing communities in rural areas, not try to create new communities in presently unpopulated areas. There should be recognition of the cost of public service provision in remote rural areas – and a recognition of the cost to the local community if public services are not provided. Our rural communities do require ongoing and future public sector investment in services and this needs to support and enable their growth and the ability to do so could be harmed if costly-to-service additional rural communities are created. Irrespective of an area’s fragility or rurality we suggest that the approach should be to maintain the vitality and viability of all established settlements. 74% of people in Highland live in settlements. We can continue to encourage development in more rural areas using the example of Highland’s Growing Settlements policy. National policy should support the provision of affordable housing in rural areas in particular where the housing market in these areas is distorted by high demand for tourism accommodation.

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

We want to support vibrant rural, coastal and island areas, with growing, sustainable communities supported by new opportunities for employment. We agree with the emphasis SPP places on maintaining and growing communities in remote and Fragile Areas by encouraging development that provides sustainable economic activity, while preserving important environmental assets that underpin tourism and quality of place. The Council already has a relatively permissive policy on both housing in the wider countryside and rural business development and is supportive of new crofting townships. Demand is relatively low in many of the more rural parts of Highland due to fewer job opportunities and a long term centralisation of facilities and services. Planning policy is therefore not considered a significant barrier to the economic or population growth of the more rural areas.

Policy criteria for the growth of the tourism industry should focus on supporting responsible and sustainable tourism related development which improves and enhances the visitor experience. Due to issues with the concentration of visitors in a small number of places, proposals which broaden the spread of attractions/destinations and diversify the range of facilities should be promoted. Encouraging visitors to explore further will help avoid the saturation of certain destinations and extend the length of visitors' stay. Proposals which strengthen and bolster key/fragile rural communities should also be welcomed.

A key consideration for any tourism proposal should continue to be the potential impact, including cumulatively, on the landscape or other features which are central to the area’s appeal. Development which would be likely to undermine or adversely impact on these features should not be supported. Inappropriate commercialisation should not be supported if it is considered to cause damage to the asset itself.

Whilst (pre the situation with the impacts of the current COVID-19 pandemic) the tourism industry is having a positive impact on the economy of many rural parts of Highland, it is also causing affordability pressures for the housing market. In some places, such as Skye, the conversion of housing stock to tourist accommodation is likely to be having a significant impact on the affordability of housing, particularly in scenic and accessible locations. As this growth of tourist accommodation is often created through permitted development rights, the planning authority has little influence. The ability to introduce licensing schemes for short-term lets from 2021 may have some positive impact, however, national policy should consider how this can be addressed, preferably through increased support for the provision of rural affordable housing rather than restrictions on tourist accommodation provision. Whilst the concentration of short term letting may be a problem for community cohesion in certain urban areas, the more pertinent issue in rural areas is more likely to be the limited housing stock and the increasing lack of affordable housing.

The difficulty in delivering much needed affordable housing and business units in Staffin, Skye, provides a good example of how greater coordination and collaboration is required amongst key public bodies and other stakeholders.

The community trust had been campaigning for additional affordable housing for over 10 years, which included commissioning a study which found that the lack of affordable housing was forcing young people and families to relocate from the area.

The accommodation needs of workers in rural areas – be they employed locally either permanently or short-term in permanent activities or present on a temporary basis working on project delivery – brings additional pressures on an already stretched stock of accommodation and this needs to be factored in.

There needs to be a focus on streamlining the processes involved in getting a project to breaking ground, particularly land ownership (in many cases that will be transferred to a community group or RSL), the planning process (e.g. ensuring consultees engage early and respond promptly) and funding packages (reducing barriers). National policies across stakeholders should be aligned to provide clear priorities and avoid contradictory positions.

The promotion of 'leisure accommodation', e.g. hutting, appears to have had some momentum several years ago but we are not aware of any proposals which have come forward within Highland.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

The proposal to resettle rural areas that have become depopulated raises significant concerns from a service provision point of view. In Highland we have many rural communities for which we would be supportive of strengthening and bolstering the population and facilities available to them; this in turn could be an effective way of helping to slow and potentially reverse population decline, such as that being experienced in the far north. Many of the schools and healthcare facilities in these areas have sufficient capacity to deal with additional residents; whilst it is challenging to maintain the framework of such facilities and evolve the models of provision, these particular services are vital for existing rural communities to grow and be sustained. Having the services and facilities is important; not having them would be a great cost to communities. The ability to safeguard and support services for existing communities could be harmed if costly-to-service additional rural communities are created. Within Highland we also have areas which experienced severe depopulation during the 18th and 19th centuries which we would consider unsuitable for supporting (less proactively encouraging) resettlement of any notable scale. The difficulties outlined in the community facilities note highlight the challenges in delivering and maintaining sufficient provision within more urban centres. It appears idealistic and impractical to consider a noteworthy repopulation of these areas with sufficient local facilities.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

If the Scottish Government is to include a spatial strategy which contributes to increasing the population of rural Scotland then it should also set out what community facilities will be required, the cost of them and identify the means for them being delivered. This should not simply be passed to Local Authorities to sort out through LDPs.

Any Other Comments?

Energy

Rural development that has energy as a main part of the scheme is important. Engaging in autonomous or self-generated electricity and heat can make marginal developments more robust and sustainable.

Outline for Rural Economic Development policy

In 2015, as part of the Main Issues Report for the HwLDP2 we proposed the following outline for a new Rural Economic Development policy to provide greater support for rural and Fragile Areas and in turn makes rural communities more resilient and sustainable.

- Promote employment related development that is appropriate to the character and natural assets of the particular rural area and support tourism and land management.

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- Recognise the differences between rural/Fragile Areas and more urban areas. For example, we will still require development which generates significant footfall by the general public to be located in town centres in order to support the services which they provide. However, all other types and scales of development will be strongly supported in Growing Settlements and in rural and Fragile Areas.
- Support the retention of rural services and facilities through careful consideration of proposals for changes of use.
- Encourage community-led development and community owned land and assets.

SPP Policy Title:	Tourism
NPF4 Objective:	To support the inclusive economic growth of the tourism industry in a way that benefits and strengthens the resilience of local communities, including those in rural and coastal areas.
Highland Council Headline Response	
We support the recognition of the importance of the tourism industry to Scotland and request that Highland be similarly recognised as the location of internationally significant tourism assets such as Loch Ness and Skye. National policy (and future funding) should be directed to maintain the social, economic and environmental quality of these assets so that quality of the visitor experience is maintained or improved. In practice this means that the support infrastructure for visitors should be maintained and improved whether this is transport links or facilities such as car parking, paths between car parks and key destinations, sewerage and water supply improvements. More effective data gathering should inform decisions about where and how to invest. The low carbon and digital visitor offer should be developed.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

Supporting tourism in Scotland

We agree with the need to highlight and support the importance of the tourism industry to the Scottish economy. In Highland it is an industry which is continuing to grow and is having significant socioeconomic benefits to both urban centres and rural communities.

With internationally renowned attractions such as Loch Ness, Isle of Skye, locations made famous by film and TV such as Glenfinnan and locations on the North Coast 500, the Highland tourism product is of national importance. With the growth in visitor numbers it is vital that it is matched with suitable levels of investment in infrastructure and long term strategic planning to enhance the transport network (sea, air and land based travel), interpretation, digital connectivity and waste management. The Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund has been effective in addressing the places under the highest levels of pressure. However, to ensure the sustainability and longevity of the industry, greater support and recognition is likely to be required. This would benefit from being informed by more effective data gathering and analysis on certain themes and locations e.g. visitor numbers at Glenfinnan, usage of ferry services.

Protecting tourism assets & considering impacts on environment and communities

As identified in the Rural Development response note, policy criteria for the growth of the tourism industry should focus on supporting responsible and sustainable tourism related development which improves and enhances the visitor experience, rather than simply exploiting it. In particular, proposals which broaden the spread of destinations and diversify the range of facilities and attractions on offer. By encouraging visitors to explore further it will help avoid the saturation of certain destinations and extend the length of visitors' stay. Proposals which strengthen and bolster key/fragile rural communities should be particularly welcomed.

A key consideration for any tourism proposal should continue to be the potential impact, including cumulatively, on the landscape or other features which are central to the area's appeal. Development which which would be likely to undermine or adversely impact on these features should not be supported. Inappropriate commercialisation will not be supported if it is considered to cause damage to the asset itself.

Other policy areas – active travel, green networks energy, etc

One of the main selling points of visiting Scotland is the visitor's ability to 'explore'. For many, particularly within Highland this means using motorised vehicles. Tourist attractions and accommodation are often located within scenic areas which are not particularly well connected to other facilities. NPF4 could do more to promote active tourism by supporting active travel enhancements to, from and within key destinations and tourism routes.

Provision of low carbon destinations, facilities and infrastructure would help boost tourism in terms of cost and

attraction. Digital opportunities should be taken for improved information provision and enhanced tourist experiences.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

The national policy approach does not raise any significant concerns; however, we would welcome guidance on supporting and managing the development of tourism facilities and infrastructure as recommended by research commissioned by the Scottish Government.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

A Highland specific general tourism policy is not necessary (depending on the appropriateness of a national policy).

Recognition should be given to the need for regional spatial strategies to be set for locations of strategic importance, such as the Great Glen, and the Isle of Skye.

Any Other Comments?

No.

SPP Policy Title:	Promoting Town Centres
NPF4 Objective:	To ensure that planning policies recognise and address the challenges facing town centres so that they are better able to adapt and be vibrant, creative, enterprising and accessible places to live, work and visit.

Highland Council Headline Response

We support the continued application of the Town Centre First Principle but would suggest that it be supported by other national policies and resources – e.g. land acquisition and assembly by the public sector of problem/opportunity sites. Retail impact assessments should be broadened to assess impact on other town centre facilities such as music/cultural venues.

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

Overall, we would agree with the approach for town centres at a national level. As has been identified through research undertaken at a national level, our town centres are under continuing pressure and face significant challenges.

The Town Centre First principle which first emerged out of the National Town Centre Review has been implemented by all planning authorities in some form. Within Highland the area LDPs have introduced and subsequently refined the town centre first policy framework. These essentially replaced a general retail policy which was largely aimed at restricting out of town retail parks – the adverse impacts of which arose during the 2000s. On the whole, the pressure for new retail development has disappeared with very little investment in new, large scale retail development outwith the prime locations. Within Highland, the introduction of the Policy has helped to direct significant footfall generating uses to the town centre and require applicants proposing development outwith the town centre to assess the potential impact.

The new style Town Centre First policies encompass a wider range of uses, including housing, and seek that they are located within the town centre in the first instance. There needs to be recognition that almost all city/town centre housing investment has been public sector led. This has had significant regeneration impacts; however the lack of private sector interest in the centre risks the areas becoming concentrated areas of low income households. The Government needs to consider how to attract private sector investment in town centres. For example, at a recent Scottish Land Commission led workshop which investigated Housing and Land Supply, a property developer commented that the tax regime does not make it financially attractive to change the use of upper storey buildings in town centres.

As outlined in the People, Culture and Arts note, there is no safeguard of community facilities or other desirable uses from redevelopment to other commercial uses.

It is not considered necessary to assist planning authorities with the identification of local networks, centres or their boundaries. This should be left to the planning authority. National guidance could actually be counter-productive here as it could be used against planning authority positions identified in the LDP.

The existing guidance in SPP regarding town centre health checks is useful and provides a level of flexibility for its application.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

No.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

It depends on how effective the national policy is at safeguarding/supporting the town centre. For example, another

addition to the town centre policy which was first introduced as part of the Caithness and Sutherland LDP and refined further in West Highland and Islands LDP, is the need for proper scrutiny of change of use applications from commercial to housing. The policy states:

Proposals for conversion of buildings to residential use in town centres may be supported, providing there is no loss of existing or potential viable footfall generating use(s). Proposals for conversion to residential use must demonstrate that the property has been marketed for its existing use at a reasonable price / rent without success for a minimum period of 12 months. For vacant upper floor conversions (excluding hotels) support may be given without the requirement for marketing where it can be demonstrated that the proposals would contribute towards a balanced mix of uses.

We also have set out a requirement for not just a retail impact assessment but for 'town centre impact assessment' if the Council considers that a proposal may result in an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any defined town centre. This has allowed for other uses to be assessed further, including a drive through restaurant proposal (which is classified as sui generis) and an edge of town centre hotel proposal. We would request that NPF4 incorporates this into national policy. Currently, the threshold for a retail impact assessment (RIA) in SPP is set too low for rural authorities where a smaller development can have a profound effect on a local network of centres, which equally need to be safeguarded and strengthened. Therefore we would argue that no national threshold should be set in NPF4.

Any Other Comments?

Innovative measures will need to be considered to aide economic recovery post the COVID-19 pandemic, including measures to support and strengthen town centres. Whilst some measures may be deliverable outwith the planning system, planning may have a role in some cases and this could provide opportunity for taking on board the place principle as well as considering low carbon opportunities and other Climate Change and Ecological Emergency considerations.

SPP Policy Title:	Air Quality
NPF4 Objective:	To ensure that the planning system helps tackle poor air quality and promote good air quality through the promotion of sustainable placemaking and transport links and ensuring that new developments are guided towards appropriate locations.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We request that Inverness be referenced as a potential future Low Emission Zone. We may progress such a measure if it links to funding for active travel and zero carbon public transport alternatives. Other centres in Highland such as Fort William should also be able to be considered for air quality monitoring and, if necessary, mitigation measures.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>We welcome the potential for zero or ultra-low emission city centres by 2030, with Highland already declaring our own Climate and Ecological Emergency in recognition of the issues faced and the need to address them. Consequently, we support the earliest transition to zero or ultra-low emission town and city centres.</p> <p>To achieve this ambition, this Policy Topic should cross-reference to Sustainability, Placemaking and the Transport policies. The development of greener technology for public transport (e.g. electric buses) and more direct, prioritised public transport corridors and improved interchanges will all aid the above ambition. However, currently there is a poor connection between new development and transport-derived air quality impacts, especially where this is remote from the site. If a new development at an edge of settlement location is proposed and the easiest way to reach the town or city centre is by car, more car trips will be created therefore impacting on air quality.</p> <p>There is need for much greater emphasis on the relationship between air quality and transport and the need for much improved active travel provision to reduce these impacts, particularly in urban environments where air quality is generally worst.</p> <p>Furthermore, there should be cross-reference to green and blue infrastructure, including greening urban environments, as an opportunity to improve air quality as well as the multiple other environmental and place benefits that this brings. An explicit policy or link to greenhouse gas absorbing development/ land uses would be welcome.</p> <p>Highland is famed for offering clean air and is one of the reasons it attracts tourism. However, whilst the tourist spend is welcomed, its impact on air quality is not to be overlooked. In recent years, we have suffered air pollution due to the number of visiting vehicles overwhelming parts of our road networks, a good example of which is the A82 around Fort William which becomes gridlocked throughout the summer months. Greater promotion and joined up funding to promote active travel could help alleviate these pressures along with Government funding for air quality zones.</p>
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?
We note that neither Inverness city centre nor any of Highland's town centres are currently included in the LEZs currently scheduled to be established and to attract associated funding. We wish to query why that is the case and would urge consideration to be given to additional LEZs and associated funding opportunities. If the reason why no Highland centres have so far been identified is because they did not meet certain criteria then the Council would suggest that the assessment and criteria should be revisited.
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?
No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.
Any Other Comments?
If there is an aim to have zero or ultra low emission centres by 2030, clear guidance should be provided on where these should be (e.g. where an AQMA exists?), what is required to implement one and how it will be supported both financially and in policy terms. Will there be punitive measures for failure to deliver? Will this only impact on transport, or wider air pollution sources like those from industrial processes, wood burning stoves etc.?

SPP Policy Title:	Climate Change
NPF4 Objective:	To ensure planning policy results in spatial and land use change that facilitates Scotland's ambition to have net-zero emissions by 2045 and other statutory emissions reduction targets whilst supporting communities and businesses in making the changes needed to meet the targets.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We believe this should be an overarching aim of NPF4 to ensure its consideration is embedded into all other policy areas and that all relevant policies unequivocally support this objective. Highland's emerging vision is to be an exemplar net zero carbon region by 2025, so we need national policy support now. NPF4 should include a net zero target for all new developments by 2025. Failing to achieve this will ultimately lead to a need for more, expensive retrofitting.	
Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
<p>The Scottish Government's proposed key objective for NPF4 for the climate change theme is strongly supported and should be an overarching aim of NPF4 to ensure its consideration is embedded into all other policy areas. However, it is suggested that it be reworded from "whilst supporting communities and businesses" to "and which supports communities and businesses" and that it must be realistic and strategic.</p> <p>Moreover, the proposed objective makes no reference to the important role that planning must play in adapting to change already locked into the climate system. Whilst the current focus of government is on emissions reduction, it would be remiss not to include the need for our adaptation action within the objective. The policy should also provide stronger enforcement and back up the declaration of a climate emergency in Scotland and the Highlands.</p>	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
The policy must provide strong enforcement and back up the Highland Council's emerging vision to be an exemplar net zero carbon region by 2025.	
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?	
No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.	
Any Other Comments?	
<p>Whilst the issues section of Scottish Government's information note for this policy topic does reflect that there is a need to minimise vulnerability and improve resilience, we are of the opinion that adaptation needs to be explicitly referenced within the framing of the key objective.</p> <p>With increasing expectation that the planning system has a key role to play in driving transformation of our energy systems (electricity and heat), addressing climate change and achieving development that is sustainable – not all of which are matters that planners are used to dealing with and quizzing developers on – it would be of considerable benefit if NPF4 could specify certain specific matters as being, in principle, material planning considerations in the consideration of proposals for development. That would provide some consistency and comfort in seeking these things through planning. There would also be benefit in building up a national resource of case study examples, for example of low carbon energy systems in use in developments; ideally these would be examples from the Scottish or wider UK context and accompanied by sufficient detail of the context in which these succeeded – for example in terms of scale, type of delivery partners, funding mechanisms – plus any learning points. These would help to broaden understanding and illustrate the art of the possible.</p>	
Issues to consider:	
How best to ensure that our national planning policies respond to the new and urgent context of the global climate emergency and associated national strategies?	

A transformative approach is required and anything less than true transformation will signal failure. Putting in place effective monitoring and review will be particularly important. A clear, unequivocal national policy position on climate change is essential – particularly to help us deliver Highland’s target (net zero by 2025), which is even more stretching than the Scottish target.

The associated long term need to minimise vulnerability and improve the resilience of places and communities to anticipated effects of climate change?

It will be vital to build up a resource of real life, relevant case studies so that places and communities can learn from others’ experience and identify transferable opportunities. How will adaptation be resourced? We need strong, clear and specific national policies linked to investment programmes.

How can our policies support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure, including a response to on-site renewable energy generation?

Policies do support this but need to do more to drive transformative change. Again, if there was a library of real life, relevant case studies to draw on – preferably including Scottish or UK examples and documenting sufficient detail of the specific cases and context for delivery – that could help to make the case for what can be achieved – or indeed what changes and/or supportive frameworks are required to ensure successful transformation. High energy efficiency and inclusion of fit-for-purpose on-site renewables in new developments will be vital to mitigate hardest-to-address emissions (e.g. some existing properties in some parts of rural Highland) and enable achievement of net zero overall. NPF4 could require new developments to adhere to a ‘carbon hierarchy’ which would require building and energy efficiency, net and zero carbon provisions; providing a menu of options and demanding consideration of those, with implementation where achievable, ahead of less preferred options being employed.

SPP Policy Title:	Coastal Planning
NPF4 Objective:	To recognise and support the unique challenges facing Scottish coastal areas and communities and promote development that supports their needs.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
NPF4 should properly reference the crossover with – and between – the climate change and flooding sections. NPF4 should recognise potential constraints to development on the coast. We believe coastal communities should be supported but development within these communities should be subject to adequate adaptation and resilience measures. NPF4 should continue to support existing coastal lifeline infrastructure.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>With such an extensive coastline and a large proportion of Scotland's coast, coastal planning issues are high profile for Highland. Most of our population lives near the coast, in many communities linked by lifeline transport routes. Our coastal areas are experienced and depended upon by many in their day to day live. These areas are also at the transition between terrestrial and marine environments and therefore within the wider area of focus for valued resources and economic opportunities across a range of sectors.</p> <p>We broadly agree with SPP 2014 policies regarding coastal planning although they are in need of updating to reflect current thinking and ambition.</p> <p>Paragraph 87 in SPP needs updating so that it incorporates outputs of Scottish Government published Circular 1/2015 addressing the interface between land use and marine planning.</p> <p>Coastal change represents one of the biggest climate change impacts facing Scotland [1]. Whilst current policy does address coastal flooding risk (paragraph 88) it needs to stress the importance of adaptation planning in ensuring coastal communities are resilient to climate change. Policy should be updated to describe how Local Planning Authorities should incorporate outputs of the Dynamic Coast project into their planning decisions as alongside consideration of SEPA flood risk maps. (See section related to this in 'Any Other Comments').</p> <p>In relation to adaptation planning, paragraph 91 of SPP could be improved to incorporate safeguarding areas of coastline to provide nature based solutions to help tackle coastal flooding so that they can continue to do so, this could have a twofold effect of securing positive effects of biodiversity and improving health and well-being of people living and working in lee of these areas.</p> <p>Integration of coastal planning policy and marine development (and hence integration with marine planning) is also essential. Energy, Aquaculture and Tourism sectors will require development to take place at the coast. This should be encouraged as it provides vital employment and contributes to economic sustainability in rural and urban areas of the Highlands. For example, expansion and re-development of ports should be encouraged where they are engineered to be resilient to climate change but whilst preserving important environmental assets that underpin the quality of the coastline.</p>

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?
<p>NPF4's outcomes sought, of increasing population in rural areas and meeting housing requirements, needs to acknowledge coastal planning policy where urban and rural areas lie on or close to the coast (e.g. parts of Inverness, Fort William, Brora, Golspie). Policy will need to be flexible, so it allows development close to coast where it is resilient to coastal flooding and erosion and does not increase risk to existing assets.</p> <p>Given Highland Council's significant coastline, the number of existing lifeline ferry services (within its area and linking to the wider Highlands and Islands region) and number of smaller harbours, this policy could bring about major investment and employment opportunities and in the future result in greater use of seas for transporting of goods and people.</p>

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output?

If so why?

No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.

Any Other Comments?

Adaptation to climate change is a key challenge facing coastal communities in Scotland. In the timeframe of NPF4 (Now-2050) sea level rise and increased storm frequency will result in increased coastal flooding and coastal erosion. These changes could affect the viability of coastal communities and coastal assets if they are not protected. Planning policy should ensure forecasts of coastal change are factored into planning decisions so that developments close to the coast are resilient to climate change.

NPF4 needs to incorporate outputs of the Dynamic Coast project and SNH's *Looking ahead: planning for coastal change* guidance^[2] to ensure local authorities are guided in how best to meet their planning obligations for coastal change adaptation.

References

1. ASC, 2016, UK climate change risk assessment 2017 evidence report: summary for Scotland:
<https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/UK-CCRA-2017-Scotland-National-Summary.pdf>
2. SNH. 2019. Looking ahead: planning for coastal change:
<https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/201905/Planning%20ahead%20for%20coastal%20change%20guidance.pdf>

SPP Policy Title:	Flooding
NPF4 Objective:	To reduce the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
NPF4 should include a realistic and achievable policy for applications to achieve net betterment in terms of post development off-site flows within problem catchments. We seek clarification of the status of natural flood measures versus engineered solutions, SEPA's guidance (particularly the land use vulnerability matrix), and strategic surface water drainage devices. We request NPF4 support for flood scheme land safeguards in LDPs.	

A. Does Highland agree with the Scottish Government's Objective for this policy area?
 Yes, but it should be re-phrased. "Reducing vulnerability" implies a quantifiable improvement is aimed for. If so then a baseline, target and timescale should be stated. If there is no intended, quantifiable improvement then a more generalised objective of "minimising flood risk to all properties" would be more appropriate.

B. Could the Objective and likely approach for this policy area be improved and if so how?

The suite of existing national, SEPA and local authority policies are far too complex for the public, developers and decision makers to understand and apply in a consistent manner – simplification is required. At present in Highland, flood risk probability mapping is just used as a trigger to ask an applicant to produce a flood risk assessment (FRA) not as a policy presumption tool. It would be clearer to specify an unacceptable (in national policy terms), residual (post mitigation) flood risk probability to be used in determining planning applications even if this varies by location and land use and has defined exceptions. NPF4 should also consider the inclusion of a requirement for developers to undertake a FRA to justify an Local Development Plan (LDP) allocation at the LDP's Call for Sites stage rather than wait until LDP Examination or planning application stage.

Highland would be concerned if all of SEPA's guidance on flood risk is given elevated, statutory status via NPF4. For example, Highland has concerns about SEPA's Land Use Vulnerability Classification and related Matrix of Flood Risk in its definition of "Most Vulnerable Uses". For example, "isolated dwelling(s) in sparsely populated areas" and "camping sites" are classified as "Most Vulnerable Uses" whereas uses with far higher occupancy, higher property values and slower evacuation procedures like offices and nightclubs are classified as "Least Vulnerable Uses". In Highland's experience, those living year-round in remote rural areas are better attuned to natural environmental risks than their urban counterparts.

It would be useful if NPF4 could clarify the status of natural flood risk management measures. Currently, Highland planning policy (at SNH's request) requires natural measures to be considered for all flood management proposals and if applicable then their non-inclusion justified. Current SEPA and other national practice is to see natural flood risk management measures as a desirable add-on to physical, engineered works but not as a replacement for such works.

Flooding caused or worsened by inadequate and/or poorly installed/maintained surface water drainage infrastructure should be addressed by NPF4. There are many "legacy" issues caused by combined surface and foul water sewer networks that require a funded solution. Similarly, a national, statutory policy on surface water drainage area vesting/adoption would assist in resolving existing and future flood risk issues. Current practice on this issue by Scottish Water, local authorities and developers is partial and disjointed and is therefore very likely to be a contributory cause of future flooding that could be mitigated. National policy or other legislative insistence on a financial developer bond to ensure proper construction and maintenance of surface water drainage infrastructure would be a major step forward. Similarly, a national policy to prompt developers (and SEPA) to take a strategic rather than application-specific approach to surface water drainage infrastructure provision and maintenance would be productive.

Highland has been hindered in progressing flood prevention / alleviation schemes by landownership issues and therefore national and/or LDP policies that establish a presumption in favour of such development and justify LDP land allocations that safeguard land for flood prevention / alleviation schemes would be productive. The certainty and depiction of such an LDP allocation / safeguard boundary should be similar to that of a transport scheme – i.e. may need to be a corridor at draft scheme stage but could be firmed up as the scheme progresses through its statutory stages.

Finally, we think it is important for NPF4 to provide a requirement to integrate the best-available climate information into decision making so that there is a nationally consistent approach for nature-based solutions, especially with regards the potential for sea level rise and flooding which in the medium to long terms is going to make many areas unviable. Developers should also be required to assess climate risk and design for the long-term resilience of a site.

Does the likely national policy approach for this policy area raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

No, if the comments outlined in response B above are addressed.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.

Any Other Comments?

No.

Highland's Response to the Issues to Consider?

1. What guidance is needed to ensure that local development plans take a proactive approach to avoiding and reducing flood risk?

Simplification and clarification of existing national guidance (in SPP and from SEPA) (see detailed response in Section B above).

2. What policies are needed to ensure that proper consideration is given to flood risk when considering proposals for new buildings and infrastructure?

Simplification and clarification of existing national guidance (in SPP and from SEPA) (see detailed response in Section B above).

3. How can NPF4 best complement existing environmental legislation, strategies and guidance, including that from other national bodies?

Simplification and clarification of existing national guidance (in SPP and from SEPA) (see detailed response in Section B above).

4. Is there a need to safeguard land that is required for current or future flood management?

Yes (see detailed response in Section B above).

5. How can we ensure that new developments are resilient to increased flooding due to climate change?

National policy should not promote future "retro-fitting" of new (current) developments. Flood avoidance not resilience / adaptation measures should be the principle for greenfield, new build developments. Current Highland and SEPA informal practice is to allow some types of development in potential flood risk areas if finished floor levels and evacuation routes are raised to an acceptable level above Ordnance Datum. This type of local discretion and variation shouldn't be formalised in national policy but should still be available to local practitioners. There may be a case for national guidance (if not policy) on housing and other development layouts that are more resilient to overland flow paths of flood water. Many applications do little or nothing to predict the overland flow path of out of watercourse flood water and therefore most layouts are not adjusted to be resilient to such flows. Similarly, national policy could incorporate recent Highland (and SEPA) policy and practice of seeking a specified (6 metre in Highland's case) development setback from all watercourses.

SPP Policy Title:	Green Belts
NPF4 Objective:	To direct planned growth to the most appropriate, sustainable locations whilst protecting and enhancing the character, landscape setting and identity of settlements and providing access to countryside recreation.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We currently do not have any green belt within Highland, and we do not want NPF4 to make them mandatory around all cities or other major settlements. We believe our current approach of green networks; green spaces and the Hinterland achieves the same aim. However, we support the broadened function of green belts (greenspaces within Highland) to cover other matters such as flood plain safeguarding and carbon sequestration.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>Agree with the approach set out as it appears well aligned with the aims of the planning system more generally.</p> <p>However, it is unclear what the specific objective of a green belt is, why a green belt may be necessary, or what it will achieve, particularly given the objective (as defined above) could easily be met by other policies.</p> <p>It would be useful if NPF4 could set out a clear strategic role function of the green belt, as well as the level(s) of protection that are to be afforded to it. This will not provide a greater focus to what is to be protected, and why, which will in turn ease any public misconceptions and controversy.</p>
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?
There are currently no formal green belt designations in Highland and there no plans to introduce any as part of the IMFLDP review. As noted above there may be some benefit in a more strategic approach towards green belt designations which could be a good opportunity for the Highlands in terms of aiding climate change mitigation.
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?
Yes, we do not have a green belt policy at present and have no plans to introduce them. However, we do have LDP policies to prevent urban sprawl and protect green spaces around our key towns and City and plan to retain these.
Any Other Comments?
None.
Issues to Consider:
<p>Is the existing policy approach to green belts fit for purpose? What aspects need to change?</p> <p>The existing approach is discretionary and there are currently no formal green belt designations in Highland and there no plans to introduce any as part of the IMFLDP review. A clear strategic function of green belt land should be provided as this will better inform whether a green belt is necessary. The spatial form of the green belt appears to be somewhat arbitrary.</p> <p>What should the role of the green belts be in terms of ensuring that spatial strategies can help climate change mitigation – e.g. water management and storage/floodplain capacity/carbon sequestration?</p> <p>Mitigating climate change it a complex matter requiring a range of different measures. Widening the role of the green belts to include protection for key green and blue features could enable them to become a useful tool to aid climate change mitigation. Especially as some of these areas may not have any statutory protection. The spatial form of the green belt could therefore include areas important for water management and storage/floodplain capacity/carbon sequestration.</p> <p>How prescriptive should NPF4 be in identifying issues for planning authorities to consider when designating green belts in local development plans and determining planning applications?</p> <p>Should the scope/role/function of the green belt be clarified or expanded as outlined in the above point then detailed guidance will be required to outline the aims and role of any formal green belt, the factors to be taken into account in</p>

designating green belts and the level of protection to be offered by the green belt.

Should NPF4 / regional spatial strategies have a role in identifying green belts? Or should this be left to local development plans?

If green belts are to continue then NPF4 should have some role in identifying them. As green belts are generally most relevant to primarily urban areas/authorities, particularly those in the central belt, it would be preferred if NPF4s role is in prescribing the issues and spatial form of green belts and leaving their designation to local development plans (or regional spatial strategies where relevant).

However, if green belts are to become a key tool in meeting climate change mitigation targets there may be benefit to them forming part of a national spatial framework with input from local planning authorities on their extent.

SPP Policy Title:	Historic Environment
NPF4 Objective:	To support the understanding, protection and importance of the historic environment so that the cultural, social, environmental and economic value of our heritage continues to contribute to Scotland's well-being.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We are content if all existing national policies on this topic are transferred over into NPF4. However, the protection of the historic environment should be strengthened (the currently proposed objective wording should have the "to support" phrase at the beginning deleted). NPF4 should include promotion and safeguarding of the historic environment and application of the precautionary principle.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>The information note concludes that the existing policy works well, and we would concur with this view. It would, however, be helpful to include the application of a precautionary principle where the impacts of a proposed development on nationally significant heritage assets are uncertain, but there is sound evidence that significant irreversible damage could occur (wording in line with current the SPP regarding the Natural Environment). This is an important principle, especially when seeking to protect scheduled monuments, listed buildings and battlefields. This addition would also help address the lack of clarity within the current policy (referred to in Scottish Government's policy information note, last bullet point) with regard to battlefields and archaeology.</p> <p>The use of the wording 'To support' at the start of the proposed Key Objective of NPF4 is felt to be unnecessary and weakens what is otherwise a well worded and suitable objective. It also lacks any reference to the promotion of the historic environment, which is key to it being a successful driver of and contributor to, for example, the tourist economy. The objective should be 'To understand, protect, enhance and promote the historic environment so that the cultural, social, environmental and economic value of our heritage continues to contribute to Scotland's well-being.' This approach uses similar wording to the proposed key objective for the natural environment, with which there are many parallels. It should also be noted that unless we protect and understand the historic environment in the first place, we will not be able to realise the contribution the historic environment makes to Scotland's well-being. The current wording of the proposed key objective is felt to be a little ambiguous and could be stronger/clearer.</p> <p>It would also be useful to apply the precautionary principal where the impacts on a nationally designated historic environment asset (i.e. scheduled monument, battlefield, listed building) is uncertain but there is sound evidence indicating that significant irreversible damage could occur, with similar wording to that used in the current natural environment SPP wording.</p> <p>We have some concern regarding the status of the Planning Advice Notes and would stress that PAN2-2011 Planning and Archaeology contains important technical detail and should not be revoked or removed as part of this process.</p>

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?
SPP (2014) addresses planning for World Heritage Sites very much in the context of the historic 'built' environment. This is perhaps understandable given the types of World Heritage Site that are identified currently in Scotland. However, a bid for the 'natural' Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland to be given World Heritage Site status is being actively progressed at the current time and there is prospect that it may well achieve that within the next few years. It would therefore be helpful if NPF4's national planning policies were future-proofed and therefore provided relevant high-level policy for such a site. We have also raised this point with regard to the Natural Environment policy topic.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?
Yes, similar to existing HwLDP policy in that different weightings can be applied depending on the significance of the asset. More detail would also be required which separates different types of asset which have specific management requirements, are covered by different legislation, or are dealt with by other national bodies, i.e. scheduled

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monuments are dealt with differently from conservation areas, and listed buildings differently from battlefields.

Any Other Comments?

None.

SPP Policy Title:	Infrastructure
NPF4 Objective:	To promote the alignment of development and infrastructure at the local, regional and national level by identifying infrastructure capacity, need and what is required to support its delivery.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We agree that new development should have adequate infrastructure provision (including blue and green infrastructure) but NPF4 should qualify that this aim requires adequate public and private funding. NPF4 can assist by promoting better spatial coordination of investment at national, regional and local level with an elevated role for the LDP Delivery Programme as a coordination tool. The solution is better targeting of investment across all funders in a place-based way, whilst considering the outcomes from the National Transport Strategy.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>An Infrastructure First approach needs to be adequately funded to ensure the successful delivery of the sites allocated in the Plan. The principle is based on a functioning plan-led system: the Plan sets out what will be delivered, asset managers can concentrate investment in areas of known future pressure, and investment can be recovered by developments as they progress. However, forward funding of this infrastructure needs to be supported in a way that makes it possible for already under-resourced local authorities to be able to deliver, for example, an interest-free Infrastructure First loan fund. There is a risk to local authorities forward-funding such infrastructure that if the development market slows and income from developer contributions/ infrastructure levy slows or stops altogether, the local authority is exposed to servicing debt until the market recovers. There is also the risk that a development is argued to be unviable due to the level of contributions required to fund the infrastructure already delivered by the local authority; if this occurs there will be a shortfall in the level of income recovered and in such instances who should pay this shortfall?</p> <p>It is positive that the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 sets out the need to consider the need for cultural venues and facilities in the Plan and therefore recognises the need for mixed use development; this cuts across several policy themes but must be emphasised as a major element in ensuring mixed use walkable neighbourhoods.</p> <p>The role of the infrastructure levy is welcomed, however it is not clear how this sits alongside developer contributions, or if the two can co-exist. There is also a risk that using an infrastructure levy is not an effective way to address a locally significant issue. For example, at present there is quite an effective approach to coordinating Council services to identify transport requirements; our IMFLDP2 is seeking to set this out in greater detail so that a strategy for investing in transport infrastructure can be delivered, so that interventions can be identified, costed and the proportionate costs sought from developers through developer contributions. If this were replaced by a generic levy, it risks ambiguity on what money being sought from developers is for, and also risks the money secured not funding improvements required for that particular development. In a case where there were transport projects identified to be secured by S75 agreement, and an infrastructure levy, what impact does this have on viability of development? In the case of assessing viability, what is the cost that is 'surrendered' and who then covers this necessary infrastructure cost?</p> <p>Key priorities for this policy, as well as addressing the issues raised above, should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting out clear and consistent methods to measure infrastructure capacities and thresholds for expansion (including cross reference to other guidance e.g. STAG). • A clear policy on viability, and what to do in a situation where an infrastructure need is confirmed but where developer requirements render a development unviable. • How to re-align transport infrastructure investment and delivery to the aspirations set out in NTS2 (at present road construction dominates transport contributions and onsite infrastructure delivery costs in Highland). • How to avoid mono-culture suburban housing development, particularly looking at how to ensure local convenience retail, employment, health education and social care facilities, and education are all part of walkable mixed-use communities. There could be potential for setting thresholds above which developments should have to deliver certain facilities- this could also further explore the impact of out-of-town retail and dominance of car-based living.

Furthermore, in order to achieve the Scottish Government target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2045 this Policy Topic must require greater integration of park & ride schemes, active travel, Electric Vehicle (EV) charging provision and public transport infrastructure as part of any major infrastructure project.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

Over recent years we have developed our approach to the LDP delivery programme and have costed infrastructure requirements, including Education, Community Facilities, Affordable Housing, Transport & Active Travel, green infrastructure and service infrastructure and used these costing to determine developer contributions requirements for each allocation. We believe this approach might be more effective than an Infrastructure Levy.

The Highland region has seen considerable and welcome tourism growth over recent years. Whilst this has brought many benefits it has also highlighted many infrastructural and servicing constraints. We are continuing to strengthen the regional image and bolster the 'Highland brand' which we believe will continue to attract a strong interest for our wider economy including tourism. The challenge for us and this Policy Topic is to ensure the continual growth results in a sustainable and net-zero tourism industry, served by adequate and improved infrastructure.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.

Any Other Comments?

There is little mention of public understanding of the issue. Whenever we talk about urban expansions there is a standard, typically negative reaction about school, road, GP and hospital pressures. It would be helpful if there was an accessible national online tool to help visualise what planned infrastructure investments exist in an area and how much a developer is contributing to them.

SPP Policy Title:	Natural Environment
NPF4 Objective:	To protect, enhance and promote access to our natural environment; whilst supporting their sustainable use and securing positive effects for biodiversity when considering new development. This includes identifying and affording protection to international, national and locally designated areas and sites in development plans and development management, including having regard to the desirability of preserving peatland.

Highland Council Headline Response:
The draft objective for this policy area is potentially misleading in just referring to access to the natural environment. Access should be mentioned after “sustainable use”. We welcome reference to securing positive effects on the natural environment. This section should cross refer to that on climate change and health / wellbeing.

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?

We agree with the suggested approach and especially welcome the commitment to secure positive effects for biodiversity. The policy should highlight the many synergies and key role the natural environment plays in relation to other policy areas including green infrastructure, tourism, climate change, historic environment, placemaking, sustainability and peatland, as well as a key role in improving the health and well-being of the people of Scotland, one of the 6 high level outcomes the NPF4 needs to address.

Proposed Key Objective: Whilst we support the general aims and direction of the proposed key objective, we would recommend moving the reference to promoting access to the second part of the first sentence. Supporting and promoting access to the natural environment will also help facilitate improving health and well-being of people living in Scotland, and it is suggested that reference to this high-level outcome could also be made within the key objective.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

The natural environment is one of our greatest assets and it is integral to the success of the Highland economy. The move to securing improvements in biodiversity when considering new development demonstrates that Scottish Government have acknowledged the current fragile and, in many cases, deteriorating condition of biodiversity across Scotland. This position is shared by Highland Council (following the declaration of a climate change and ecological emergency). The national position should further enable us to put proactive measures in place to secure improvements for biodiversity, and this represents a significant shift, and a significant opportunity.

In order to secure positive effects for biodiversity, it is important that the baseline is first understood. Each development site is different and has its own set of conditions and issues; it is rarely the case that we, as a planning authority, have a good understanding of the existing ecology or biodiversity of each individual development site. We also do not have a team of planning ecologists that could assess applications in a similar way as is done for trees or archaeology. It would therefore be incumbent upon the developer to demonstrate both the current baseline of the development site *and* how the development will improve biodiversity. This a) places an increased burden upon developers (who would almost certainly need to engage the services of a commercial ecologist) and b) requires the planning authority to have a specialist resource to assess each mitigation strategy and to confirm that it will result in improvements to biodiversity. It is the case that we currently have no capacity within our ecology team to devote to assessing planning applications (even once a new ecologist is appointed our capacity will still be very limited), and it is likely that there will be some reluctance on the part of developers to undertake the assessments required.

There is, however, an opportunity for the Planning Authorities to not only secure positive effects for biodiversity, but to circumnavigate the potentially difficult issue of establishing the ecological baseline in each individual case. A developer contribution £s figure could be set per hectare of developed ground, regardless of quality of habitat or whether the development is on a brown or green field site. The monies raised would be held in a central pot by the Authority for Local Authority projects, communities, conservation charities etc to bid into for habitat restoration/creation. This idea is currently being looked at by The Highland Council and whilst a ‘biodiversity developer contribution’ should not replace the need for ecological planning advice, it would allow the limited resource the Environment Team has to concentrate on major applications that offer the most significant biodiversity gains.

The policy approach has also raised a further issue in that there are very few planning conditions being attached to applications that affect biodiversity as a matter of course. There are many opportunities being missed to not only secure no net loss for biodiversity, but also to ensure developments enhance and improve opportunities for biodiversity. This is mainly as a consequence of a lack of ecological planning advice within the Highland Council's service, but regardless there are a number of standard conditions that could be attached if a number of criteria are met. This requires further consideration and discussion.

SPP (2014) addresses planning for World Heritage Sites very much in the context of the historic 'built' environment. This is perhaps understandable given the types of World Heritage Site that are identified currently in Scotland. However, a bid for the 'natural' Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland to be given World Heritage Site status is being actively progressed at the current time and there is prospect that it may well achieve that within the next few years. It would therefore be helpful if NPF4's national planning policies were future-proofed and therefore provided relevant high-level policy for such a site. We have also raised this point with regard to the Historic Environment policy topic.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

Yes. Similar to existing HwLDP policy in that different weightings can be applied depending on the type of asset (i.e. landscape or nature designation) and the significance of the asset (local, regional, national, international). More detail would also be required which separates different types of asset which have specific management requirements, are covered by different legislation, or are dealt with by other national bodies.

Any Other Comments?

None.

Issues to Consider:

How can NPF4 best support the role of the development plan for identifying international, national and locally designated areas and sites i.e. is guidance needed on the issues to be considered when identifying locally designated sites?

Yes, further guidance on locally designated sites would be helpful.

How can we ensure that the introduction of national policy criteria in NPF4 recognises and reflects the distinct role of national parks?

We would consider that the paragraph in the existing SPP beginning "Development that affects a National Park..." successfully deals with this issue and covers this concern.

What policy criteria should be included in NPF4 to ensure guidance is applied to development management most effectively?

The current SPP wording covers these areas effectively.

How can NPF4 help secure positive effects for biodiversity from new development most effectively?

NPF4 must, as an important starting point, ensure that planning authorities can protect and preserve what is currently there in the first instance so we can add to what we already have. It is important that securing positive effects for biodiversity does not become conflated with other requirements, such as compensatory planting. Compensatory planting secures no net loss (although in reality there is a net loss over the short to medium term as the positive effect to biodiversity and carbon sequestration is significantly greater than that of young trees and saplings) rather than improves the existing resource. As stated above, securing positive effects implies that each development site will be able to define the biodiversity baseline from which positive effects will be measured. In practice, this may prove difficult to apply in every case. The option of securing positive effects through developer contributions would, however, enable this to be done effectively in most cases, regardless of the biodiversity baseline of each individual development site.

How can NPF4 best complement existing environmental legislation, strategies and guidance, including that from other national bodies.

The legislation, strategies and guidance are all generally fit for purpose, but the issues often arise on a case-by-case

basis due to a lack of expertise on how to apply what can be very specific and complex set of requirements on the ground. NPF4 should highlight the importance of environmental legislation, and also the importance of local planning authorities having access to specialist advice, especially around complex issues related to ecology and biodiversity.

The policies needed to understand and limit the impact of development on soils and protect them from damage, including erosion or compaction?

Agree that this is a very important area that is currently not given sufficient prominence or consideration. With regard to site compaction within development, areas that are to be retained as open ground should be avoided by construction traffic and not used for the site compound. Where this is unavoidable it should be an expectation that site restoration should be undertaken at the developer's expense.

How planning can best support increased woodland creation and expansion and the desirability of preserving peatland, in response to climate change targets?

The adopted Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy has removed peatland from woodland creation schemes. Increased woodland creation and expansion is perhaps best supported through Forest and Woodland Strategies (which are now a requirement of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019). There is also an opportunity either as part of the new NPF or as local policy to require larger developments to include dedicated areas for new planting, and for structural planting in advance of development, as part of the masterplanning process.

How do we balance; the need to protect our natural environment assets with other policy ambitions (e.g. Delivering Renewable Energy) and pressures arising from tourism, rural housing affordability or other development types?

It is vital that the starting position is that the existing resource is protected and preserved. Our natural environment is one of the key drivers for tourism and is a major reason why many people chose to live and work in the Highlands. By not caring for or protecting the natural environment, even in the face of competing pressures, we are degrading the value of the Highlands as a place to live, work and to do business. The natural environment must be front and centre in all decision making and not destroyed, harmed or damaged unless there are overwhelming reasons of national importance to do so. Where development is permitted, there must be a workable, easily understandable and effective mechanism to secure *and deliver* positive effects for biodiversity.

SPP Policy Title:	Preserving Peatland
NPF4 Objective:	To have regard to the desirability of preserving peatland so that climate change benefits of reducing emissions and other benefits including to air and water quality, biodiversity and habitat creation and flood alleviation are realised.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We support the preservation and restoration of peatland because of the range of benefits for the Climate and Ecological Emergency. The Carbon Calculator measure should be broadened to assess impacts of all major developments. NPF4 should clarify the balance in assessing climatically and/or ecologically beneficial proposals (e.g. renewable energy, biodiversity or forestry) on peatland.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
<p>This is an important policy topic area for Highland as we appreciate that we probably have the largest amounts of peatland resource in the country. We are supportive of the objective for protecting this nationally (and arguably internationally) important resource, for both its carbon sink and habitat and species values.</p> <p>The Highland Council is part of the Peatland Partnership, which is advancing proposals for the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland to be inscribed on the list of World Heritage Sites.</p> <p>The well-established Carbon Calculator is an important tool for assessing the impacts of major developments e.g. windfarms on peatlands, but this measure should be broadened to assess impacts of a range of development types/scales (including housing) and this could necessitate the Calculator being updated and to ensure that assessment can be effective and proportionate.</p> <p>Peatland restoration is also seen as important under the Climate and Ecological Emergency and beneficial proposals (e.g. renewable energy, biodiversity or forestry) should be considered in the balance (e.g. if proposals nevertheless impacted on peatland) with NPF4 needing to assist with balancing thresholds and give greater consideration to the protection of peatland from inappropriate development and the quantification of impacts when they are unavoidable</p> <p>In some parts of the Highlands it is almost inevitable that development will impact peatlands; for example, the opportunities for settlement growth may be limited and there may be an over-riding need to accommodate some development in peatland in the interests of other placemaking considerations. In such cases it can offer the opportunity to secure and expand peatland restoration proposals where development on peatland can, on balance, be considered acceptable with such measures secured.</p>	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
None identified.	
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?	
No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.	
Any Other Comments?	
None.	

SPP Policy Title:	Placemaking
NPF4 Objective:	To deliver sustainable, well-designed places and homes that meet the needs of people living in Scotland including, in particular, the housing needs for older people and disabled people. This will be done through a design-led approach which demonstrates the six qualities of successful places.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We call for a robust national policy on placemaking and design embedded within NPF4, so that it can be used as an effective measure to improve development. We support the retention of the six qualities of successful places and the principle of place before movement. We request greater clarity on the scope of the word “design”. We request that NPF4 allows continued scope for LPA variation in design guidance.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
<p>SPP (2014) established placemaking as an overarching subject across planning which is considered relevant to every aspect of the planning system. Moreover, the six qualities of placemaking effectively impact on every aspect of the rural environment and built development beyond the remit of the planning function.</p> <p>Corollary, we contend that Placemaking should be a key priority within the NPF4 and should be placed at the forefront of the new NPF (incorporating SPP) document.</p> <p>In doing so, it can then be utilised as a key test/driver to guide where to locate national developments and deliver infrastructure for the future. Thus delivering on the national ambition to develop a much more integrated approach to the delivery of sustainable places, assisting in combating climate change and addressing the Government ambitious housing delivery targets, including specialist accommodation for independent living.</p> <p>Nevertheless, a standalone approach of placemaking in NPF4 is considered unlikely to succeed and instead greater integration between Planning, Building Standards, Road Construction Consents process, education and healthcare providers will be required and should also be enshrined in NPF4.</p>	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
<p>A revised and enhanced national Placemaking policy offers a real opportunity to address the Climate Change emergency policy direction, which would also harmonise comfortably with the Highland Council’s own Climate & Ecological Emergency declaration. This enhanced policy could establish Placemaking at the centre of future sustainable growth and result in a significant opportunity for developments across the whole of the Highland region.</p> <p>To succeed with this ambition, a comprehensively worded national policy and framework structure would be required to be established. This approach must address and establish the following subject areas into the overall Placemaking policy:</p> <p>Active Travel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Travel policies should recognise the health benefits it can have on physical and mental wellbeing; • Segregated cycle, road and foot ways, rather than a mix of shared arrangements; • Establishing maximum travel distance for accessibility of public transport nodes, shops and services, avoiding ‘recommended’ distance as currently outlined in PAN75; and • Setting national criteria for inclusion of cycle parking within new developments. <p>Green & Blue Infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affording greater statutory protection to safeguarding mature landscaping; • Setting minimum percentage rate for open spaces within new residential developments; • Ensuring national guidance on protection of watercourses and wetland areas within new developments; • Improved alignment with the Building Standards regime on water conservation requirements, whilst setting a higher standard than currently exists; and • Creation of a national minimum space standard for allotments, community gardens, community woodlands, community orchards or community food growing spaces within residential developments. <p>Built Design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Policy on the adoption of ‘living’ or ‘green roof’ systems within new developments (minimum 	

percentage area);

- Setting higher minimum density levels for residential developments in order to preserve land take;
- Require internal layouts of all properties to make better use of southern aspect solar gains (principal rooms located to the south, whilst the more utilitarian spaces are sited to the north);
- Greater consideration for standardised house design/layouts for long-term independent living in new build sites; and
- A more thoroughly thought out micro-renewable energy generation/energy efficiency policy, which is consistent across and between the Planning and the Building Standards regimes.

The use of the resource hierarchy as a framework for development to make the most efficient use of all resources – materials (and buildings), land, water and energy, should be an integral part of placemaking. There is scope across much of the natural resources for energy, e.g. green space, water courses, wind and waste heat networks. These can all be used as potential local energy sources that can be matched to heat loads and buildings.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

A decision on the requirement for a specific Highland Placemaking Policy can only be determined when the national policy approach and framework has been published in the draft NPF document. Therefore at this stage it is too early to say with certainty if Highland would need to establish a more specific detailed policy.

Nevertheless, as the Council is currently developing a Placemaking Audit which has been created to reflect the local Highland context, it would be considered a loss to see this fall as a result of a more 'broad brush' national approach.

Furthermore, as Highland Council considers Placemaking so intrinsic in the entire development process and taking into account the work that has been ongoing in the alignment of the planning process with the Road Construction Consent approach at a local level, it would be a significant loss if this is lost as part of a national policy approach.

Consequently, at this juncture it is considered likely that the Council would maintain a local Placemaking Policy.

Any Other Comments?

None.

SPP Policy Title:	Sustainability
NPF4 Objective:	To ensure that the planning system supports the Scottish Government’s purpose of focussing on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth which is achieved with a view to achieving net-zero emissions by 2045.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We seek a strengthened objective for this topic to achieve the net zero carbon target and the retention of the core principle at national level of sustainable development. However, we think there should be a greater relative weighting for climate change impacts compared to socio-economic and non-climate change environmental effects – e.g. visual impacts	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>Whilst the Scottish Government target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2045, Highland in May 2019 declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency which requires us to be a net zero carbon region by 2025 and this has already started to redefined everything we do.</p> <p>Therefore, Scottish Government’s suggested NPF4 Objective for the Sustainability Policy Topic is supported, but it is suggested that the wording is a bit weak and should be strengthened e.g. “in a manner that contributes to and will be measured against the aim of achieving net-zero emissions by 2045”, or similar.</p> <p>The long-term viability and use of any resources (including the removal of or lowering the need for travel by motor vehicle) needs to be fully explored and the re-use and repurposing of buildings, managing natural and local materials is essential.</p>

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?
No, as the Highland Council emerging vision is already more stringent than the proposed Scottish Government Policy.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?
No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.

Any Other Comments?
With increasing expectation that the planning system has a key role to play in driving transformation of our energy systems (electricity and heat), addressing climate change and achieving development that is sustainable – not all of which are matters that planners are used to dealing with and quizzing developers on – it would be of considerable benefit if NPF4 could specify certain specific matters as being, in principle, material planning considerations in the consideration of proposals for development. That would provide some consistency and comfort in seeking these things through planning. There would also be benefit in building up a national resource of case study examples, for example of low carbon energy systems in use in developments; ideally these would be examples from the Scottish or wider UK context and accompanied by sufficient detail of the context in which these succeeded – for example in terms of scale, type of delivery partners, funding mechanisms – plus any learning points. These would help to broaden understanding and illustrate the art of the possible.

Issues to consider:
Should the presumption in favour of sustainable development remain a component of the NPF given the move to 10 year development plan preparation and the new statutory role of national planning policy?
Would there be any harm in it remaining? We believe that the fundamental principle of sustainable development should be at the core of NPF4.

The merits of maintaining an overarching policy on sustainability and whether it needs to be changed as a result of the climate emergency?

There would be merit in maintaining an overarching policy on sustainability – acting as a reminder of the existence of social, economic and environmental drivers and of the need sometimes to find an appropriate trade-off or balance in instances where they are not wholly compatible with each other. Might the climate emergency help steer where the balance should lie i.e. a balance that favours addressing the climate emergency?

How should any sustainability policy be presented in NPF4 to ensure it can be easily and consistently interpreted and applied?

See below.

Does ‘sustainability’ remain an appropriate catch-all outcome for increasingly significant policy drivers such as climate change, inclusive growth and human wellbeing?

Yes, but sufficient detail is also required – specific aims and guiding principles which will help in assessing and balancing the issues.

Should NPF be more strongly/clearly allied to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and, if so, are there particular goals which should be given particular attention through spatial or thematic policies?

Yes. However, it is likely that existing and emerging policies/themes for NPF4 will already fit well with most or all of those UN SDGs that are relevant to land use planning (i.e. 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17). However, through the preparation of NPF4, Scottish Government should ensure that they are all covered. It may be sufficient for NPF4 to be mapped across to the UN SDGs e.g. “This NPF4 policy aligns with and helps to deliver UN SDG Number #”. This could assist with the ongoing monitoring of progress and contribution towards achieving the UN SDGs; however, it will be imperative that NPF4 monitoring is complete i.e. reports not only the positive messages but also any key negative ones.

How do we ensure we increase opportunities for community engagement, including community-led local place plans, so that people’s views are heard and can influence policy development?

Is this concerned that Local Place Plans may not follow sustainable development/ sustainability principles?

SPP Policy Title:	Transport
NPF4 Objective:	To ensure that new development supports delivery of the vision and priorities set out in the National Transport Strategy.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We support National Transport Strategy (NTS2) outcomes and aims but we want more specific, measurable transport policies in NPF4 that set out how LDPs and planning applications can achieve these outcomes and aims. However, developer mitigation transport solutions should be context-specific – modal shift solutions may be very different in remote rural locations. We support the integration of transport and land use planning and strategies. We believe that the resilience of remoter communities should be safeguarded where they depend upon lifeline transport connections.	

Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?
<p>The approach aims to reinforce the vision and strategy set out in NTS2 which is welcomed and the integration of transport and land-use planning and strategies would be welcome. However, there are significant failings/shortcomings in current planning practice that must be addressed if real change for transport is to be realised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decarbonisation of transport is absolutely critical in order to meet Scotland's 2045 net zero ambition, as such there is a need to reduce the overall number of vehicles on our roads, use shared assets like electric car club vehicles where mid to long-distance travel is absolutely essential, and for all other journeys ensure that active travel is the most viable option. Park & Ride should be integrated with the cycle infrastructure to encourage use of bikes/e-bikes. • A more specific policy test is required to consider how sustainable a site or development proposal is. At present SPP sets a framework for assessing how sustainable a proposal is, using terms like “significant travel-generating use” and “local facilities”. Because such terms are not well-defined it is easy to argue a proposal is sustainable without much emphasis on what facilities are in walking and cycling distance, and how safe, direct and convenient these routes are, when compared specifically with driving. A much more specific, criteria-based assessment should form part of national policy. • Transport for New Homes released a report in 2018 criticising the approach of housing targets in England which has led to new developments creating “car-based living” where easy-to-develop greenfield sites near trunk roads were used for major suburban expansions to meet housing targets. The trend in urban parts of Highland is similar, where connections to trunk roads and ‘local distributor networks’ are the dominant solution to delivering volume housing. A new policy approach could be developed to support the delivery of NTS2 that centres on requiring developers to demonstrate exactly how people will move around, to what destinations and using what sustainable modes, and how this will avoid the pitfalls of recent English practice. There could also be a requirement on developments above a certain threshold to deliver certain facilities, such as, for development of more than ~400 homes a local shop to be provided. A similar approach to infrastructure could also be required, such as all new development being built to a design speed of 20 mph or less with segregated cycle infrastructure provided on all primary streets. • Consideration should be given to making a presumption against developments greater than 2km from services, such as places of work capable of accommodating the scale of development proposed, education, shops and other facilities for day to day living. The specific ambition to repopulate rural communities should be required to demonstrate such provision to avoid a contradictory policy, where new places become unsustainable. • Out of town retail is a significant factor encouraging non-commuting car-based travel and makes walkable communities much harder to realise. It is widely recognised (e.g. Schwanen et al. 2004) that the Netherlands’ restrictions on out-of-town retail has led to a different, more sustainable pattern of retail with shorter, more frequent journeys made by walking and cycling. Such an approach should be considered for Scotland, including how to repurpose or retrofit existing retail parks. • The current approach to Transport Statements/ Transport Assessments is still dominated by traffic flow predictions and mitigation required to address this, with very little detail included on the quality of active travel

infrastructure or the competitiveness of active travel or public transport against the private car. More detailed, up to date guidance on the content of these documents should be developed, with specific requirements set out in NPF4 for how they should be used in determining planning applications.

- Similar to the above point, greater recognition of the potential of travel plans should be made in national policy. There is scope to use travel plans to set monitoring frameworks for larger scale developments from their outset. Coupled with identifying measures that would require to be implemented if schemes fail to achieve sustainable travel, travel plans could make major progress in achieving the aims of NTS2. Recent work commissioned by Highland Council references such an approach and The Council would be glad to share these findings with Scottish Government on request.
- There is a risk that Electric Vehicles (EV) are perceived as a panacea to the range of transport-related problems that we face as a society. The embodied carbon in electric vehicles means they are less sustainable than active modes, they take up the same road space as other cars so do not tackle congestion, and they fail to support physical activity and therefore contribute to public health problems. EV may be part of a range of measures that can help reduce transport emissions in some rural areas but in urban areas, walking, cycling and public transport should be explicitly recognised and prioritised.
- There needs to be much greater recognition of the role of improved public transport as the solution to moving around, particularly urban areas. There is plentiful evidence showing continued decline in bus patronage in Scotland, including Highland, yet it remains the more ubiquitous, permeable choice for sustainable transport. National planning policy should reflect these issues.
- The Road Construction Consent (RCC) process is directly linked to the Development Management process but can impact on measures to deliver safe, convenient and direct active travel provision. Issues such as the priority placed in ensuring road dimensions are sized to accommodate the largest vehicle (bin lorry with a once per week frequency) mean that roads in new developments can be the defining and often dominating features. Since the RCC process comes after planning it can reverse or adversely impact on measures identified at Planning stage. Designing Streets is now 10 years old and should be embedded into thinking on design of new development. Future national policy should consider how the planning and RCC processes interact and how effective these interactions are for delivering Designing Streets or NTS2 ambitions.

Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?

No, and the major issue with the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 is promoting the idea of increasing populations in rural areas and more specifically the lack of guidance of how to do this sustainably. Rural areas typically will be significantly less sustainable from a transport perspective and there is a risk of a major contradiction in national policy between the aims in NTS and those in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?

If national policy (transport and/or developer contributions) can address the need for a major shift towards mitigating transport impacts through active travel and public transport, including how new development should fund this shift, then national policy may adequately provide the framework. A Local Transport Strategy to focus investment will still be required.

Any Other Comments?

There should be specific recognition in national policy that the approach to 'predict and provide' in all transport related planning work should be removed, and instead solution-focused methods used (decide and provide). The Chartered Institute of Highways and Transport have elaborated on this issue, but it has yet to translate into planning policies.

The policy should protect, reinforce and improve Lifeline Connections, including within Highlands:

- Routes to ferries for island communities.
- Routes to remote/rural/fragile communities where the closure of the connection results in loss of connection or a very long alternative/diversion route.

NPF4 CALL FOR IDEAS RESPONSE

In Highland, examples could include the Corran Crossing and Strome ferry.

SPP Policy Title:	Vacant and Derelict Land (VDL)
NPF4 Objective:	To prioritise the use of vacant and derelict land so that viable development takes place on appropriate sites ahead of greenfield land as part of priorities to deliver inclusive growth and sustainable places and responding to the climate emergency.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We agree with the principle of brownfield ahead of greenfield development sites but the funding gap between these two types of development sites needs to be closed. In many cases central and local government needs to provide financial incentives to the private sector to develop brownfield ahead of greenfield. There is a major opportunity in the public sector being funded to lead on strategic projects on brownfield sites where multiple transport, climate change, sustainability benefits accrue. This policy should be linked with the NPF4 Policy on Land Assembly and Compulsory Purchase as the redevelopment of numerous brownfield sites are delayed or restricted due to multiple landowners.	
Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
The NPF4 Objective is to prioritise use of VDL over virgin greenfield sites – within the constraint of ‘viable development’ – ensuring this takes place on appropriate sites. There is a need to define better the appropriateness of sites. In the recent past the majority of developments around the southern edges of Inverness have been on greenfield sites with limited or no existing services. This form of development has led to a car dependency for residents due to lack of available nearby and frequent public transport links. A future where brownfield and VDL sites were preferred may make the greenfield sites less attractive. However, the redevelopment and reuse of VDL sites alone in Highland cannot meet the housing demand and the policy should respect that a high proportion of development will still take place on greenfield sites.	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
No.	
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?	
No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.	
Any Other Comments?	
Consideration and advice could be provided to the short-term enhancement/use of VDL sites (including tree planting and other forms of greening) and/or appropriate short term uses (car parking etc).	
Issues to consider:	
What more can NPF4 do to support and encourage appropriate opportunities for the redevelopment of vacant and derelict land?	
Many VDL sites – due to their former usage - will be well connected to the services that redevelopment may require. This can range from utilities (water, sewerage, electricity and gas networks) to public transport (rail/bus). This should make them attractive in offering lower service provision costs and no major requirements for the provision of additional public transport to support the behaviour change required to address the Climate Emergency.	
There is a need to draw a distinction perhaps between Rural and Urban VDL, especially where large rural sites are concerned – such as extensive former industrial or military sites. What should the approach be to those – should they be promoted for large-scale development that might not be sustainable in other terms? With much VDL (in terms at least of the number of sites) being located within or nearby to urban areas, they offer locations that may be more attractive for redevelopment.	
Remediation of previously contaminated sites or parts of sites is often one of the biggest obstacles to redevelopment – being often very costly when compared to similar development on greenfield sites.	
Can more be done to ensure that the re-use or re-development of brownfield land is considered before new	

development takes place on greenfield sites?

Yes. In considering what policy provisions NPF4 should contain on this, it would be appropriate to consider firstly how brownfield might be considered ahead of greenfield within the preparation of Local Development Plans; could that be something akin to the 'urban capacity studies' undertaken in England, for example? Secondly consideration should be given to how – and in what circumstances – a prospective developer could: (a) be encouraged/ incentivised to choose brownfield; and (b) if they are choosing a greenfield site (and this may relate to greenfield windfall sites specifically), be required to demonstrate convincingly that they have considered brownfield sites and explain why the development cannot be delivered on such site(s).

Are there circumstances where it would be appropriate for developers to be asked to provide evidence that development on brownfield land is not viable?

As above - where a VDL or partial VDL site is of sufficient scale, in a suitable location and can offer the service provision required.

SPP Policy Title:	Land Assembly and Compulsory Purchase
NPF4 Objective:	To promote a proactive, infrastructure first approach to land assembly, including the use of compulsory purchase powers where appropriate, and to underline that doing so can support the delivery of planning/placemaking objectives.
Highland Council Headline Response:	
We support the principle of a stronger national policy aimed at enabling and unlocking strategic development in line with other NPF4 objectives on housing provision, infrastructure and community facilities. This would be particularly useful to assist the delivery of sites where the public sector can lead and coordinate investment in schools, roads, healthcare etc and in doing so deliver added value and public benefit. This approach will require central government funding and we call on Scottish Government to say where and when such funding will be available.	
Do we agree with the suggested approach for this policy area at a national level? Could it be improved or strengthened further?	
Agree that a strong and clear policy on Land Assembly and Compulsory Purchase is a prerequisite of an effective planning system in the delivery of important national and locally strategic developments and regeneration schemes, especially in the delivery of infrastructure projects and major urban regeneration schemes. We are also pleased to note the Scottish Government commitment to an 'Infrastructure First approach' and its integration with Placemaking. It is a given that the policy must respect the rights of landowners, whilst allowing the delivery of the project within a realistic timeframe and budget.	
Does this national policy approach raise significant impacts/concerns/issues/opportunities for the Highlands?	
No.	
At a local level do we think we will need a separate Highland specific policy to achieve the optimum output? If so why?	
No, on the proviso that our other comments/suggestions made in this response are addressed and reflected in the final policy outcome.	
Any Other Comments?	
None.	