

Finland International NPF4 Event

1 September 2020

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This event was organised as part of a wider engagement programme undertaken by RTPI Scotland and commissioned by the Scottish Government for the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The three international events aimed to identify relevant planning practice across the world, which could help to shape the new NPF.

Context

The Finland International NPF4 event looked at the country's strategy to achieve their ambitious carbon neutral by 2035 target, with a presentation from Timo Turunen.

Presentation and Discussion

- Scotland and Finland's national challenges closely link to each other e.g. the importance of planning, population, climate change. Both countries therefore have similar goals, in particular striving to achieve carbon neutrality in ambitious time frames.
- Finland aims to be carbon neutral by 2035 and soon afterwards, carbon negative. Scientists and the climate change panel have shown that predicted scenarios and challenges (ageing population, digitalisation, climate change, and urbanisation) are moving expectantly and that in the long run, pioneering can bring more/larger business opportunities and positive economic impacts.
- In order to do this, Finland has had to implement fundamental systematic change - both production and consumption systems have had to be altered, i.e. within land use, energy and industry.
- Politicians are aware of planning's importance in achieving the carbon neutral target by 2035 and therefore have delegated a lot of responsibility to the profession. Given this, there is reform taking place on legislation such as the Planning Act and National Land Use Guidelines, so that these requirements can be met. Alongside this, citizens of the country trust in the planning system and understand the importance of climate change mitigation. Timo suggested that NPF4 should strive to attain strong political and community backing.
- The spatial structure of Finland will influence how the 2035 carbon neutral target is achieved. There is an emphasis on polycentric growth, making the most of the different assets available in each region whilst improving the sustainable connectivity between cities and their energy efficiency such as by using a high speed rail network and promoting wind power.
- It is considered that Finland is partially polycentric at the moment. It is a much larger country than Scotland with around 20 'city' regions. Timo felt that this may mean that taking a polycentric approach will perhaps be easier to implement in Scotland than it is in Finland due to the smaller scale of Scotland. Municipals and communities play an

important role, often having their own ambitious goals for example, the city of Espoo is aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030.

- Compact settlement structures are also being formed in Finland, promoting more sustainable modes of transport and developing the infrastructure to take these forward. For example, encouraging the development of sub-centres and community hubs complete with employment opportunities closer to home and developing supplementary construction in appropriate locations. It was felt that NPF4 could implement a similar strategy in the form of 20-minute neighbourhoods, looking to Finland for ideas on how to implement this.
- The Finnish strategy also aims to conserve and strengthen the carbon sinks, through preservation of biodiversity and ecological connections. On a national scale, Finland is required to take care of spaces used for recreation and continue to improve their green space network. It is also required to utilise its existing resources and infrastructure for development including transport links and networks as well as community structures. In Scotland, similar aims are being voiced in different local authorities. Aberdeen City Council has included policy on its green space network in its Local Development Plan, highlighting the purpose of it and how planning will help protect and enhance it. Glasgow & Clyde Valley (GCV) are also working on improving their green network by creating multi-use greenspaces and utilising vacant and derelict land to do so.
- These solutions are key not only to mitigating climate change, but also for citizen's daily lives, business and the economy. Timo highlighted how the solutions and level of intervention will differ in different places, driven by the needs of the area. NPF4 could therefore use a place-based approach to mitigating climate change, giving local authorities some power as to how they contribute to the national climate change goals.
- Timo pointed out that a 'situation room' was key to driving these changes forward. This idea takes inspiration from Joe Ravetz and is when sectors, regions and municipalities but also different countries come together to identify synergies and strategies to take these shared challenges forward.

Learning for NPF4

- NPF4 should strive to attain strong political and community backing.
- NPF4 could implement a similar strategy in the form of 20-minute neighbourhoods, looking to Finland for ideas on how to implement this.
- A networking and experimental culture is necessary to identify common challenges and learn from each other.
- Continuous monitoring, evaluation and stress testing is also important for continued success. NPF4 could adhere to a similar monitoring and evaluation process in order to be future proof.
- NPF4 should encourage a polycentric approach.
- Conservation and strengthening of carbon sinks should be made a priority in NPF4.

Read more

- [Espoo carbon neutral by 2030 target](#)
- [Aberdeen City Council green space network](#)
- [Glasgow & Clyde Valley green space network](#)
- [Synergies and 'situation room' model](#)