

# LEAD PRACTICE PILOT PROJECTS GATECHECK

*to establish whether technical evidence is sufficiently sound  
to prepare a deliverable spatial strategy*



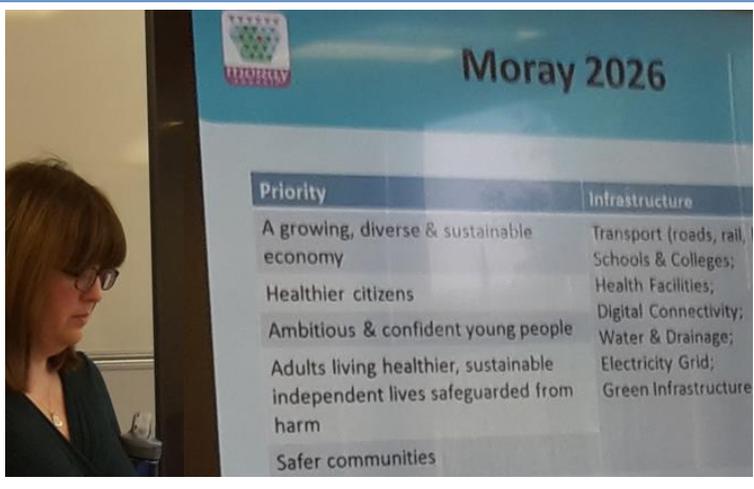
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***“The Evidence Report and the Delivery Programme have the potential to be powerful tools in meeting our aspirations for a world class planning service in Scotland.”***

Jim Grant,  
Head of Development Services,  
Moray Council



## OVERVIEW

Moray Council has piloted the method in tandem with current legislative requirements for preparing a plan as an initial step to consider how the process, as proposed by the Planning Bill, might work in practice.

The proposal for a gatecheck was identified in the planning review consultation as a means of providing reassurance early enough in the plan making process to take remedial action.

Under current legislation, an examination takes place towards the end of plan preparation prior to adoption. The gatecheck proposal seeks to frontload a collaborative process to ensure early discussion and agreement about plan outcomes.

The pilot work has considered the role of stakeholders and reflected on the scope and content of the Evidence Report to ensure that the evidence base is clearly set out and used as the basis to inform the subsequent preparation of the plan.

Consideration has also been given to how the Evidence Report might be transparently presented to enable appropriate scrutiny by an ‘appointed person’, as set out in the Planning Bill, to determine whether the evidence base was sufficient.

As currently proposed, the Bill provides for an ‘appointed person’ to assess the evidence report and notify Ministers as to whether it is sufficient. If not then the appointed person is to prepare an assessment report to include recommendations for improving the evidence report. The revised evidence report would then have to be resubmitted to Ministers and the process repeated.

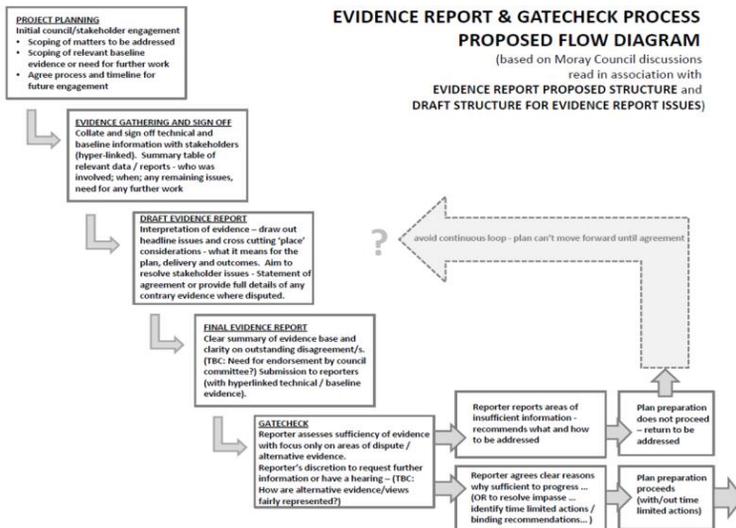
## Key Learning Points

- The Gatecheck is positively perceived as a means to agree baseline evidence prior to moving to plan preparation.
- Benefits include: a more transparent approach that is simpler to engage with; a focus on delivering positive outcomes; encouraging buy-in and stakeholder scrutiny; clarity about agreement or areas of dispute; simplification of the examination process.
- Community and spatial planning can be linked through collective understanding of outcomes and how they can be influenced over an agreed engagement timeline.
- The process offers an incentive to engage early and reach agreement and / or clarity on disputed issues that focuses on things that matter.
- The pilot has supported work, still evolving, that seeks to clarify the process and wider stakeholder involvement.

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**“Participating in the pilot Gatecheck has provided the opportunity to explore and outline the range of evidence which should be gathered at an early stage of preparing a Local Development Plan. It has also offered the opportunity to support the Planning Bill’s aspirations to re-position the planning system and for better alignment between spatial planning and community planning.”**

Jim Grant,  
Head of Development Services,  
Moray Council

## Progress

A focus group including representatives from PAD, with some informal input from DPEA, supported Moray Council to consider the structure of the process and format of the evidence report. The study was also supported by input from other stakeholders within Moray. The study focussed on the proposed future process and not on the substance of the current evidence or development plan approach as this remains to be assessed in the current legislative context.

A staged process is indicated as a basis for further discussion:

Project Planning initiates engagement; scopes matters to address and relevant baseline evidence; agrees process.  
Evidence Gathering signs off baseline information; summarises relevant data; identifies remaining issues.  
Draft Evidence Report interprets evidence and what it means for the plan, delivery and outcomes; signs off issues.  
Final Evidence Report summarises the evidence base and provides clarity on outstanding disagreement/s.  
Gatecheck assesses evidence focussing on areas of dispute and either:  
 A) reports areas of insufficient information, recommending what / how to be addressed (plan prep does not proceed), or  
 B) agrees clear reasons to progress to plan preparation (or, to resolve impasse, identifies actions / recommendations).

A proposed Evidence Report structure is based on report headings that include: *Outcomes; Stakeholder Involvement; Infrastructure; Housing Land; Employment Land; Environment; Other Policy Considerations; Local / National Departures.*

Extracted summary reports would cover: *technical evidence; summary evidence and implications for spatial strategy, plan preparation and delivery; summary stakeholder consultation; statement of agreement / summary of disputed matters.*

## Summary Considerations

- This ‘work in progress’ is intended to assist and inform the discussion to support the lead practice programme.
- Work evolved in response to stakeholder input and testing.
- Feedback indicates that the process helps to crystallise work that would normally be prepared at this stage.
- The process sets a basis to consider a consistent approach regarding implications for spatial policy and plan delivery.
- The language and content should be understandable in layman’s terms helping to ‘tell a story’ - what is the evidence, how has it been prepared, who was involved, how / when agreed?
- A sample template to report on each ‘chapter’ heading in the Evidence Report has been developed as part of this work.

*The lead practice work aims to test planning review proposals in practice, share learning and inform future guidance beyond the Bill.*