

NPF 4 Position Statement Roundtable Event Report

Post Covid Recovery

Friday 29th January 2021, 10 – 11.30am

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Background

RTPI Scotland has been commissioned by Scottish Government to arrange a series of roundtables to provide feedback on the NPF4 Position Statement. A cross-cutting section of built environment professions were invited to the event from across the country. For this report a group discussion was had around the following question:

“What new opportunities should NPF4 plan for to respond to post Covid recovery?”

Key thematic areas discussed were:

- Infrastructure Investment
- Green recovery
- Inclusive recovery
- Community engagement
- Implementation
- Data & monitoring

Infrastructure Investment

Infrastructure investment was a main focus of the group in discussing post-covid recovery in terms of both governance and prioritisation. In regards to governance the need for NPF4 to move infrastructure away from deal making based on traditional economic metrics towards a holistic vision for a place was discussed. The need to define, embed and operationalise the infrastructure first principle in the NPF4 was seen as an important step in framing infrastructure investment. There was a discussion on how national developments will be identified, brought forward and monitored. Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) and Regional Economic Partnerships were highlighted as an important mechanism to deliver sub regional infrastructure priorities allowing for potentially a broader, more corporate approach. Concerns were expressed that RSSs will require resourcing going forward. There was also discussion about the role of other strategies and investment plans including the Infrastructure Investment Plan and the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2. The need to undertake proportionate transport appraisals was discussed with an enhanced role for LDP transport assessments proposed focusing on neighbourhoods. The opportunity to utilise funding from the Infrastructure Levy, set out in provisions in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, was briefly discussed. The Future Generations Act in Wales was discussed as an innovative approach to decision making, ensuring that the lives of future generations won't be harmed by decision making.

Connectivity, especially digital connectivity following a change of working patterns during the pandemic, was discussed in both an urban and a rural context. It was proposed that digital connectivity could be a national development. Other types of infrastructure discussed included transport, renewable energy, tourist infrastructure, business hubs, natural infrastructure and enhanced use of nature-based solutions.

Green Recovery

There was a strong steer from the group that NPF4 needs to support a green recovery, especially in light of the climate emergency. A discussion was had about whether the NPF4 could identify nationally important green economic regions. In terms of supporting

renewable energy ambitions a discussion was had over how well integrated energy policy will be with the NPF4, with cross service alignment seen as key to delivering outcomes by delegates. A discussion was had about the capacity across the public and private sectors to deliver renewable capacity. It was discussed whether training and higher education opportunities should be aligned with strategic growth of green sectors. The need to include the reuse of vacant and derelict land in a green recovery was discussed although some delegates felt this would need to address the viability of some highly constrained sites and not prejudice appropriately located development on greenfield. It was questioned how the NPF4 can support emerging technologies such as hydrogen and help provide policy support to widespread retrofitting of existing buildings.

Inclusive Recovery

Another key theme of the session was how inclusive post-Covid recovery can be achieved. It was noted by the group that Covid had exposed existing inequalities in society in terms of varying community resilience to the economic and social shock brought about by the pandemic. It was also recognised by the group that economic impact of Covid has differed greatly across sectors and places, with the acute decline of town centres highlighted. Some delegates promoted a pan-Scotland approach to regional redistribution to tackle inequality supported by an understanding of the level of infrastructure necessary to do so. Concern was expressed that decision making driven by typical economic development metrics may reinforce patterns in investment within the central belt. Concerns were also expressed by the group that planning be seen as a barrier to economic development and that widespread deregulation be seen as route out of the crisis, at the cost of placemaking and quality outcomes. Rebalancing regional and local economies was seen as important outcome from NPF4 by the group. The need for NPF4 to prioritise regeneration initiatives through policy frameworks and national developments was proposed. The use of the inclusive growth diagnostic tool to support decision making was discussed but also the need to understand barriers to regional economic growth such as depopulation and high land values.

Community Engagement

There was a discussion over the role of community engagement in supporting post-Covid recovery, especially Local Place Plans (LPPs). In particular, the framing of LPPs around 20 minute neighbourhoods was supported by the group as the simple messaging could be easily promoted. It was highlighted that in England most local authorities have specialists handling neighbourhood plans. There was a brief discussion over whether a small increase in permitted development rights might remove some minor householder applications from planners to allow more capacity to undertake fuller community engagement and support the production of LPPs. It was discussed whether developer obligations could be used to provide resource for LPPs. The need to tie in LPPs across public service including especially LOIPS and community planning was mentioned. The wider need to get public buy-in with NPF4 was discussed especially the involvement of younger persons. Some delegates advocated for a PR campaign, including social media, to run alongside the publication of the NPF4 - similar to public health campaigns.

Implementation

Delegates generally felt the need for various stakeholders to cost, fund and take a delivery lead on infrastructure need clarified. Alongside this some delegates expressed the need to encourage culture change so as to establish genuine delivery partnerships. There was concern that the Position Statement had presented LDPs as the main delivery vehicle but that NPF4 should also have a clear role in delivery, especially when dealing with windfall sites that have not been allocated in the LDP. Accordingly the detailed wording in the NPF4 needs to be carefully considered. Some delegates felt that the language used in the Position Statement was not precise. The need for the NPF4 to be seen as a corporate document across all agencies and stakeholders was discussed as vital to delivering its intentions. Alignment with other national documents, such as



housing 2040, was also recognised as an important component of implementation. It was discussed whether NPF4 could develop a range of projects and programs to support the delivery. Use of the Place Principle was discussed as a means of building a network of synchronistic place-based action and delivery. The need for the Place Principle to be understood and upheld by councillors and government reporters through appeals was raised. Financing was raised by delegates as key means of delivering intentions of the plan.

Data & Monitoring

A strong analytic foundation supporting the NPF4 was seen as an important element in driving a compelling policy narrative for the plan. There was a general consensus from the group that there were opportunities within the Scottish Governments Digital Planning Strategy to justify and provide clear evidence as to what happens where. There was a short discussion over HNDAs and whether this data could be presented in a more real time manner. The opportunity to incorporate the impending publication of census data was raised. The need to move towards digital integration across planning, economy and place at national, regional and local level was identified as key action by the group. The role of data in measuring planning outcomes was discussed. The need for the NPF4 to give focus and definition on outcomes to allow key stakeholders to build them into action plans was put forth. Once outcomes are agreed upon, delegates felt that it was important to define an analytical framework then choose data to monitor and measure this over time. There was a brief discussion over the lack of monitoring undertaken for the NPF3. A range of indicators to monitor were discussed including crime rates, educational attainment, employment, income, health indicators and carbon footprints. The need to resource monitoring from the outset was stressed by delegates. The role for the improvement coordinator was also discussed in terms of monitoring the NPF4.