

# NPF 4 Position Statement Roundtable Event Report

## Net Zero Carbon Targets

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021, 10am – 11.30am, online

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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:

*“Are the proposals in the position statement going to help to play a radical, game changing role in achieving a net-zero Scotland by 2045?”*

Key thematic areas discussed were:

- Policy direction
- Renewable energy & low carbon heating
- Low carbon placemaking
- Transport
- Landscape approaches
- Delivery and monitoring

### Policy direction

The general feeling of the group was that the Position Statement was going in the right direction of travel. However a significant proportion of the group felt that the language used was not strong enough to bring about the radical change needed. The journey to net-zero will require many difficult decisions to be made, but the strength of policy will help decision makers smooth delivery through the consenting process and reduce lengthy legal disputes. This includes strengthening the principle of low carbon development so that applications can focus more instead on the details of specific projects, not the principle. In general consensus in the group was that tinkering with existing policies would not bring around the change necessary to meet the scale of the challenge. Highlighting good practice alone was not considered sufficient to increasing adaptive capacity, and it was proposed that NPF4 should be significantly more instructive to local authorities and elected members. This would help give stakeholders the confidence necessary to deliver the carbon net-zero commitment. Whilst acknowledging that the purpose of this high level statement is not to provide detail, the provision of further detail was considered key in moving policy into action through investment confidence.

### Renewable energy & low carbon heating

Whilst there was general support for the delivery of renewable energy technologies in the Position Statement, representatives of renewable energy industries expressed concerns over the choice of wording that renewable energy developments need be ‘appropriately located’. It was stated that this might restrict development and thereby fail to meet the scale of renewable energy capacity necessary. The need to deliver renewable consents swiftly, at a reasonable cost, was highlighted across a range of renewable energy infrastructure, beyond wind turbines to include grid connectivity and reinforcement. The

significant length of time and cost to deliver nationally important grid connections like the Beaulieu-Denny line was discussed. Whilst the principle of renewables needs to receive a strong policy backing, some flexibility was requested to allow for new technologies and scientific understanding to come through. Whilst the use of brownfield land for renewables was recognised as a positive approach, it was questioned whether there would be enough suitable brownfield land to deliver the necessary scale of renewables to meet demand. A concern was raised between intentions set out in the Position Statement of protecting peatlands as important sources of carbon storage and development of onshore wind in such areas. Good practice in terms of peat management plans was discussed as a means to deliver onshore wind and restore peatland areas.

The low carbon heat sector was another area of discussion, with a representative of the industry welcoming parts of the Position Statement which encourages connections to district heating and recognising the opportunity to deliver new heat networks in former coalmining areas. It was questioned however if the language used was strong enough to encourage growth in this sector. A certain amount of flexibility was also desired in policy to embrace future potential technological innovations. Concerns were expressed that the private sector, especially volume housebuilders, had been slow to embrace low carbon heat technologies. The need for significant upskilling in the private sector and regulatory strength to encourage and mandate connections to heat networks was identified as a key action. The delays in publishing the NPF4 were discussed as a problem for the renewable energy sector with not enough existing consents in the system to meet intended targets.

### Low carbon placemaking

Many elements of placemaking were discussed as a means to achieve net-zero carbon targets. A discussion was had on the importance of increasing density of settlements and supporting compact living. There was general praise for the inclusion of 20 minute neighbourhoods in the Position Statement with benefits noted such as improved green infrastructure provision and reducing the need for people to travel unsustainably to reach daily services. Problems of delivering dense neighbourhoods in rural and peri-urban locations was highlighted, with particular reference to resistance encountered from elected members. Training elected members on the consequence of urban form was suggested as a means to avoid conflict with proposals for denser neighbourhoods. Covid-19 was cited as a barrier to delivering denser neighbourhoods going forward with a high demand for private garden space and fear over increased disease transmission with compact living. The need to learn from successful places in denser cities which are well served by services and transport options was discussed. The reuse of vacant and derelict land and existing buildings was discussed with the need for strong policy guidance in this area welcomed by delegates. In particular, the need to reuse vacant and derelict land should be considered from a climate and social justice perspective. Enhancing delivery of green infrastructure to improve air quality, access to food growing space and supporting water management was discussed. Increasing the use of the Building with Nature accreditation scheme was also raised.

### Transport

Connecting land use planning and transport was discussed as a key element of achieving net-zero targets. The need for NPF4 to align with the recently published National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) and the Strategic Transport Project Review 2 was raised by delegates. Frontloading the transport investment hierarchy from the NTS2 into the planning process was proposed by embedding it at the development planning stage and thereby improving the transparency of decision making. A range of interventions were discussed including the creation of strategic active travel networks. There was a clear delineation between rural and urban transport solutions. Electric vehicle infrastructure and shared asset transport were both identified as essential solutions for decarbonising transport in rural locations. In peri-urban locations the delivery of transport hubs alongside new development was discussed with Perth West highlighted as an

example of good practice. Concerns over the viability of public transport from a public finance perspective due to Covid were made. The impact of electrification of vehicles on infrastructure was raised as an important consideration. Network reinforcement will be needed but opportunities lie in grid balancing services provided by modern dynamic systems in electric vehicles.

### **Landscape approaches**

There was a brief discussion on the role of landscapes in delivering net-zero carbon targets. In discussions on the section within the Position Statement which deals with protecting and restoring the natural environment, more specificity was requested and broader reference to nature-based solutions beyond simply planting trees. Within the NPF4 a right tree in the right place framework was suggested to balance the need to replant trees with maintaining and restoring peatland. It was suggested by some attendees that the NPF4 could be supported by a national conversation on landscapes, identifying landscape scale interventions, including coastal environments, across local authority boundaries and setting the scene for Regional Land Use Partnerships. This approach was suggested to be particularly beneficial for setting out the relationship NPF4 will have with large parts of rural Scotland.

### **Delivery & monitoring**

Many discussions centred around the funding and delivery of aspirations set out in the Position Statement. In particular a recurring theme was how the NPF4 will align with other sectoral policies and private sector investment cycles. An example of a complex matrix of policy and private sector investment was put forth regarding the electrification of heating. This included the need to coordinate the policy direction of NPF4 with a variety of distribution network operators, emerging Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies – all working to different timescales, with complex interdependencies. A skills shortage in energy planners was identified. The importance of elected member training was raised. The role of planning in shaping the market was discussed, with delegates in general agreement that the public sector needs to be more proactive over areas such as land assembly and infrastructure delivery. There was also reference made to the importance of culture change and how this could be encouraged within the NPF4. Finally there was a discussion as to how successful delivery could be measured. Forms of reporting such as new heat networks created, reduction in gas use or proportion of energy from renewables were all suggested.