# NPF4 Position Statement Roundtable Event Report

## 20 Minute Neighbourhoods

**Wednesday 27th January 2021, 2pm – 3.30pm, online**

### Background

RTPI Scotland was 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 would an effective policy framework to support localism and the 20 minute neighbourhood concept look like? How can planning make it happen? What are the challenges and opportunities?*

Key thematic areas discussed at the roundtable were:

- Definition
- Operationalising principle
- Digital Planning and data

### Definition

A considerable discussion was had on how to clearly define a 20 minute neighbourhood within the NPF4. A clear definition it was suggested would ensure that all stakeholders, including Elected Members, could have a clear understanding of the concept to support decision making and delivery. It was highlighted that other organisations have attempted to do so, such as Sustrans, but that the existing definitions may reflect organisational priorities and therefore a novel definition may need drafted that reflects a broader range of considerations. The degree of detail that such a definition would contain was discussed, some felt that it would be fine at principle/parameter level but too much detail may be too prescriptive and potentially restrict development. Some felt that concerning too much over walking journey times may not be helpful with delivery. It was suggested that when considering services these should relate to services that are used daily. In any event a definition needs to be considered thoroughly to avoid any unintended consequences. It was proposed that a graphical definition may be a more effective way of communicating the definition to avoid becoming cumbersome with detail.

Some attendees felt that setting out a clear vision was more important than a definition. A vision could apply a degree of specificity but allow flexibility for application depending on the type of place (such as urban/peri-urban and rural). It was noted that many areas are imperfect but can be improved, with clear ambition driven by a vision. The content of such an ambition could include broad terms such as inequalities - in terms of access to cars and services - transport, stewardship, greenspace and grey space. The need to tie the ambitions in clearly with outcomes set out in the NPF4, to strengthen its implementation was recognised. It was noted that if the NPF4 sets out clearly defined parameters, further detail could be set out in Local Development Plans. A 20 minute neighbourhood principle could look similar to other principles being set out at in NPF4 such as the Town Centre First Principle or Infrastructure First Principle.

A range of placemaking considerations were discussed including issues such as:

- Improvements to active travel infrastructure
- Increases in density that provides a critical mass to support services
- Public realm improvements including through the use of enhanced design codes
- Improved quality and access to local greenspaces
- Provision of locally accessible health and social care, although with recognition made to the complexity of doing so
- Enhancing social cohesion

## Operationalising the principle

In terms of policy it was stated that strong, clear and robust wording would be needed in the NPF4 to ensure that planning authorities and elected members would have the confidence to refuse proposals and have their decisions upheld at appeal. Discussion was also had over the importance of looking at 20 minute neighbourhoods with a retrofit lens, with a suggestion that existing areas found to be deficient in services could trigger a policy response which could be either services driven and/or linked to new housing. It was questioned whether 20 minute neighbourhoods could be delivered in a similar manner to the town centre first principle but with more procedural transparency. Consideration was also made to how the pre-application process could be harnessed to deliver 20 minute neighbourhoods, with a suggestion that a criteria framework could be submitted by developers to show how the proposals meet envisioned outcomes. Regional Spatial Strategies were also suggested as an important vehicle to deliver a range of emerging policies. Discussion was had over whether future performance assessment frameworks could measure progress on new policy initiatives. An important area of consideration raised by delegates was ensuring that funding streams could be secured from both private and public sectors. A proposal was put forth that public funding should only flow to projects and sectoral policies that adhere to the principle.

Collaborative delivery across public and private sectors was a key theme from the discussion. In particular, the involvement of Community Planning, health and education services was recognised as important by the group. Community involvement was also discussed extensively. Local Place Plans were identified as an important opportunity to communicate the aims of 20 minute neighbourhoods, plan priorities for change and discuss overarching strategic considerations. The need to include a diverse range of ages was highlighted as well as considering both geographic communities and communities of interest. There was also a discussion stressing the importance of effective resourcing for such engagement processes and securing funding for on-going maintenance of any resulting interventions.

## Digital planning and data

The role of data, urban analytics and on-going changes to the digital planning service was recognised by the group as a key factor in implementing 20 minute neighbourhoods. The Place Standard Tool was suggested as having a useful role to play in highlighting missing and desired services in areas. It was agreed that decision makers need easy access to up-to-date, open and place-based data. An important role for the Scottish Governments Digital planning strategy was suggested to identify any existing gaps in data necessary for 20 minute neighbourhoods and to support the other outcomes of the NPF4. Existing place based data sources were discussed including https://www.usp.scot/ and the work being done at the Edinburgh Futures Institutes' on the Data, People, Places project. There was mention of developing tools to assist decision makers by using GIS and 20 minutes isochrones to see if sets of minimum criteria are met. Finally the need to have a set of metrics to audit the effectiveness of any such scheme was covered, with a proposal for a framework that would consider things like carbon footprint, happiness and well-being.