

City, Town, Commercial and Local Centres

Draft NPF4 recognises the importance of our cities and towns and their centres. It reflects on the challenges they are facing as a result of long term change and the pandemic. The planning system should be helping our cities, towns and centres to adapt to be vibrant, attractive places for people to live, work and visit. Based on place-based working development should be directed to the most sustainable locations to provide communities with access to the goods and services they need.

Planning policies should:

- Support sustainable futures for city, town and local centres and identify a network of centres which reflects the 20 minute neighbourhood and town centres vision.
- Support development proposals that improve the vitality and viability of city, town and local centres.
- Support proposals for retail development which will generate significant footfall in town centres.
- Resist proposals for retail development which will generate significant footfall, in edge of town centre or commercial centres unless they are explicitly supported by the development plan.
- Resist proposals for retail development, which will generate significant footfall, in out-of-town locations.
- Give consideration to the design and location of shops, ensuring that new, retail developments are of an appropriate scale and have an acceptable impact on the character and amenity of the area, to benefit the place as a whole.
- Not support development proposals which contribute to the number and clustering of some non-retail uses, such as: hot food takeaways (including permanently sited vans) and betting offices and high interest money lending premises if their development would undermine the character and amenity of centres and the health and well-being of communities.
- Be flexible and realistic in applying the sequential test in accordance with the principles of 20 minute neighbourhoods and proposals which would alleviate a lack of convenience foods, particularly in disadvantaged or remote areas.
- In islands and rural areas, support shops ancillary to other uses, such as farm shops, craft shops and filling station shops.
- Only support developments which generate significant footfall in out-of-town locations if a town-centre first assessment shows that there are no suitable

town centre, edge of centre or commercial centre options, that the scale of development is appropriate, will have no adverse impacts on existing town centres, and it will not generate significant levels of additional journeys by private car.

- Support and encourage proposals for town centre living, whilst ensuring suitable residential amenity can be achieved.
- Support proposals for the conversion or reuse of a vacant building for residential use if the previous use is no longer viable and a suitable level of residential amenity can be achieved. If the proposal is for the reuse of a ground floor premises it should only be supported where the development will retain an attractive and appropriate frontage, not adversely affect the vitality and viability of the centre and will not result in a concentration of dead frontages.

Responses to the Position Statement

There was recognition of the need to revitalise our town and city centres to create attractive and vibrant places. There was support for the 'town centre first' policy and for repurposing vacant buildings, as part of an integrated approach to minimise the need for travel. Links were made to the 20 minute neighbourhood concept and some respondents cited the report 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' and wished to see its recommendations reflected in NPF4.

Policy changes

The proposals in Draft NPF 4 build on existing policies and expand them to take account of the report of the Town Centre Action Plan Review Group, 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres'. The town centre first policy is retained, emphasised and expanded in a way which supports the 20 minute neighbourhood concept. Draft NPF4 sets out clear policy that proposals for retail development, which will generate significant footfall, in out-of-town locations should not be supported.

Draft NPF4 contains policy on neighbourhood shopping, and confirms that consideration should be given to where a retail proposal will alleviate a lack of convenience goods/fresh healthier food and drink provision, especially in disadvantaged or remoter areas.

Draft NPF4 contains a new policy to actively encourage and support opportunities for town centre living. The policy confirms planning authorities should seek to provide a proportion of their housing land requirements in city and town centres and be proactive in identifying opportunities. In particular it encourages the repurposing of vacant town centre buildings to provide more residential units, where appropriate to support low carbon living, with access to services nearby.

Draft NPF4 contains a new policy specifically for island and rural areas to indicate support for shops ancillary to other uses, such as farm shops, craft shops and filling station shops, to support access to shops in island and rural communities.