



Independent Review of Planning
Area 2-H (South)
Planning & Architecture Division,
The Scottish Government
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ

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Review of the Scottish Planning System

We are pleased to share Living Streets Scotland's views on the future of the Scottish Planning System. A planning system that supports walking is critical to achieving a range of strategic policy aims from increasing levels of physical activity, reduced air pollution to creating economically vibrant town centres. The historic decline in walking is partly a result of poor planning choices. We believe the downward trend in walking can only be reversed through a focus on greater integration with city regional transport infrastructure planning and local master plans focused on environmental outcomes. In this context, our consultation response discusses:

1. **Why Scotland should plan for walking?**
2. **Whether the Scottish Planning System creates good walking environments?**
3. **Development planning**
4. **Delivering housing in the right places**
5. **Planning for transport infrastructure**
6. **Streamlining Development Management**
7. **Leadership, resources and skills**
8. **Community engagement**

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Living Streets Scotland Consultation Response

The Review of the Scottish Planning System

December 2015

Living Streets Scotland

Living Streets Scotland is part of the UK charity for everyday walking, which has worked on these issues since 1929 when we were first founded as the Pedestrians' Association. We want to see a Scotland where all generations benefit from streets fit for walking. Our priorities are: tackling the decline in walking; making walking the natural choice for short journeys and helping everyone enjoy the benefits of walking more often. The schools' walking project we deliver on behalf of the Scottish Government instils good habits that can last a lifetime. Our community street audits identify changes, both big and small, that can remove barriers to walking. Our expertise helps to put walking at the heart of public policy at a local and national and local level, including working in partnership with Paths for All to realise the ambitions of the Scottish Government's National Walking Strategy.

Why should we plan for walking?

Walking is the simplest form of transport accessible to almost everyone for short local journeys up to a range of about two miles or forty minutes. It is zero carbon and also delivers a wide range of health benefits, allowing physical activity to be integrated into everyday routines. It is also the most popular recreational activity, allowing people to not only exercise but socialise and appreciate their local environment. High levels of walking are also critical to a sense of place and essential to the vibrancy of Scotland's town centres. These benefits are recognised by the Scottish Government at a strategic level in policies for physical activity and the National Walking Strategy.

Does the Scottish Planning System create good walking environments?

We strongly support the extensive suite of strategic level policies that aim to create towns and settlements that have good walking environments these include:

1. [Scottish Planning Policy \(2014\)](#) aims to promote development “*that considers place and the needs of people before the movement of motor vehicles.*”¹
2. [Creating Places - A policy statement on architecture and place for Scotland \(2013\)](#) supports “*the delivery of places that prioritise pedestrians and encourage activity and healthy lifestyles*”
3. [Designing Streets a Policy Statement for Scotland \(2010\)](#) which marks “*a change in the emphasis of guidance on street design towards place-making and away from a system focused upon the dominance of motor vehicles.*”
4. [The Town Centre First Principle](#) and [Town Centre Action Plan](#)

It is argued that supporting high levels of walking is a key indicator of the success of the planning system. Beyond a few notable exceptions, delivery of these policies is often poor. This can be seen in any Scottish town where new developments are difficult to walk or cycle around and traffic reduces environmental quality. This results in a range of negative outcomes including low levels of physical activity, high transport costs aligned with long commutes, unnecessary car journeys, congestion and serious challenges in meeting emissions reduction targets. This situation points to a fundamental failure in the planning system at a delivery level. It is vital that the results of this review bridges the gap between the Scottish Governments laudable policy ambitions and delivering tangible outcomes for communities.

Development planning

Planners mostly operate in a reactive regulatory role where the objective is mitigation rather than creating conditions for great places. Planning departments have little or no resources or

¹ SPP June 2014, p.14, section 46.

means to incentivise good development. Instead they rely on developers bringing forward sound designs and master plans and planning gain (section 75 agreements) to deliver essential transport infrastructure and regeneration projects.

When dealing with transport issues planners must consider the views of more technical staff such as roads engineers, who are often conventional in their approach and cynical about place making. We believe Designing Streets principles are not often implemented because traditional approaches to traffic management are justified on tenuous technical arguments around safety. Planners seem ill placed to challenge this approach and need more scope to ensure good policies are implemented in practice. Our experience shows that where planners have the skills and confidence and political backing they can create great places, but this happens all too rarely.

Recommendation 1

To deliver change Scotland needs to move planners from a regulation and mitigation role to one where they can genuinely champion and deliver better places. Planners need to have more confidence that they will be backed politically and through the appeals process. New skills and knowledge around place making are needed. The focus must move from managing a process to outcomes – including well connected accessible places fit for walking.

1. Delivering housing in the right places

Housing developments in Scotland continue to be delivered on sites and at densities not conducive to walking and cycling. These places invariably have poor connections to public transport and few services within walking distance. Many developments, aside from regeneration and gap site projects, are of such a low a density that local services won't be viable. The results are highly car dependant households with poor health prospects, long commutes and high levels of emissions. The planning system has largely failed to encourage developers to provide more sustainable alternatives – e.g. good family housing near city and town centres where short walking or cycling commutes are realistic. Land use and transport planning decisions needs to be taken more seriously or Scotland will continue to deliver housing, employment sites and services in the wrong places. This leaves existing infrastructure

either overstretched or in need of costly upgrade. Better connected brown field sites remain unexploited, especially in the Glasgow conurbation. Where infrastructure is delivered it is often too late, after unsustainable transport patterns have formed. The failure to address housing alongside transport needs must be addressed at a city region level.

Recommendation 2

City Region Planning Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships should be merged with a central focus on ensuring housing sites and other forms of development support sustainable forms of travel. More generally the focus should be on leading infrastructure provision and investment decisions and establishing new public transport services to support development.

2. Planning for transport infrastructure

More honesty is needed on who pays for the infrastructure needed to support new development, especially in a time of austerity. Clearly, it is best to avoid sites that need expensive transport infrastructure. Meanwhile, local authorities can no longer finance large transport infrastructure projects, especially at a regional scale. Passing costs on in the form of higher mortgages or debt for social landlords isn't a reliable or sustainable way to support new infrastructure. The only logical alternative is funding collected from landowners who benefit when new transport infrastructure uplifts the value of their assets. Using planning conditions and agreements, offers a fragmented and piecemeal approach resulting in conflicts, delays and uncertainties. Planning gain is only really suitable for very local improvements e.g. crossings adjacent to a development. There is a pressing need for a new means of collecting a fair contribution to future infrastructure costs (e.g. land value taxation) to underpin the delivery of new housing sites (see recommendation 2). The piecemeal, planning gain system should be replaced, with a funding mechanism which supports long term and strategic regional infrastructure investment.

Recommendation 3

The value of existing and future investment in transport infrastructure must be captured and recycled via the planning system. This should provide support for a range of strategic

infrastructures improvements needed to create sustainable housing sites, including cycling and walking.

3. Streamlining Development Management

Whilst, planning policy contains a transport hierarchy which prioritises sustainable modes, such as cycling and walking this isn't reflected in development management decisions. This needs codified to strongly encourage developers to choose well connected brownfield sites supporting mixed uses. A simple approach would be 'A, B, C' or 'Gold, Silver, Bronze' approach focused on time or distance to key local services and local sustainable transport connections. Large or strategic developments should only be allowed on gold sites or sites where investment is planned (and funded through the regional infrastructure funds) to achieve the required level. This process should be reinforced by prioritising access to the regional infrastructure fund.

Local plans could also be replaced by local development manuals, containing supplementary policies where local issues aren't addressed at a national or regional level. Beyond this the focus should be on approved master planning with a focus on place making, deemed consent for developments demonstrating compliance with the master plan. Providing good walking and cycling provision in line with Designing Streets principles should be an essential part of the master planning process.

Recommendation 3

Robust accessibility standards should come into force, to direct development to sustainable sites. Local plans need to be replaced by supplementary policies and a collection of detailed publicly led master plans focused on areas of greatest development pressure.

4. Leadership, resources and skills

Planners need more tools and support to deliver great places. These tools will include:

1. Reaffirming planning and planners role in creating the vision for city regions, operating on a proactive basis to deliver environmental outcomes;
2. Robust transport and land use planning powers to focus development on accessible and sustainable locations at a city region level;
3. Access to resources via a regional infrastructure fund collected from rising land values which can be used to direct or incentivise development;
4. Better design skills to work with communities to create master plans in areas of development pressure;
5. Greater confidence that their work will not be undone at appeal, especially when championing policies aimed at sustainability

5. Resources

It is simply not possible to deliver plans and decisions which are of high quality, quickly and cheaply. The costs of planning decisions should be seen in the context of the wider costs and benefits of developments – many of which will last decades, perhaps centuries. That said some efficiency can be achieved by:

1. Using regional transport planning to better direct development opportunities, thus reducing the number of contentious green field sites and speculative applications that must be considered;
2. Creating city region plans backed up with resources to fund infrastructure aimed at reducing uncertainty;
3. Replacing local plans with development manuals where extra detail or differentiation is needed from national policies;

4. A stronger focus on master planning (within the community planning process) focused on areas of development pressures and to deliver more meaningful community engagement.

6. Community engagement

Developer led engagement is fraught with challenges and breeds cynicism. A more honest debate is required in terms of what development is required, where it should be located and how infrastructure improvements are paid for. This could start with:

- Focused debates at a regional level over infrastructure investment and key sites for major housing etc.
- A stronger focus on agreeing place based master plans in areas of development pressure. This needs to be part of, and not separate to, the community planning process. Key conversations over accessibility and support for walking and cycling need to be part of this process.
- Constraining developers rights to challenge decisions where the evidence has already persuaded both planners and local politicians (double lock) that development are unsuitable. This would mean appeals would only occur where a planners recommendation are rejected by committee. Limited community rights of appeal, under specific circumstances also require detailed consideration.

Conclusion

The review needs to recognise that existing planning policies at a national level are well conceived in terms of delivering sustainable travel patterns but are seldom delivered in practice, as demonstrated by new developments with poor accessibility where walking isn't encouraged. To change the status quo Living Streets Scotland believes regional level transport infrastructure planning needs reinvigoration, aligned with place-based master planning at a local level.

Further information

Living Streets Scotland is happy to provide further information or clarification regarding our views and how the planning system can be improved to support walking.

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