



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
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Via email only

4 March 2022

Dear Ariane,

Scottish Government's draft fourth National Planning Framework

Thank you for inviting the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee to collaborate in scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4). I am now pleased to present our conclusions, set out in more detail in the Annexe. These are based on responses to the joint call for written views on NPF4, led by your Committee and evidence we took at two meetings in February. We took evidence mainly on the following, although some more general points inevitably arose and some of these are also highlighted in the annexe—

- Energy, and in particular renewables and heat in buildings and homes;
- Transport and active travel;
- The environment and biodiversity; and
- Waste management and the circular economy.

I hope the information and views we set out below help inform your report to the Scottish Government on the parliamentary consideration of NPF4.

We are grateful for the wealth of detailed comment stakeholders have provided, all of it available on the Scottish Parliament website. We would encourage the Scottish Government to make fullest use of this valuable resource as it finalises NPF4.

The NZET Committee accepts that much hard work has gone into the draft, which witnesses have described as a comprehensive document. Its ambition to place the climate and nature crises at the heart of planning decisions has been widely welcomed. We also accept that the purpose of a spatial planning system is to get the

right balance between sometimes competing interests, and that this will inevitably be reflected in the overall architecture and language of a national planning framework.

Our overall view, however, is that NPF4 needs to be bolder. Key themes from our scrutiny were that—

- NPF4 appears to set out the climate emergency, the nature crisis, and sustainable development as first considerations in a hierarchy of spatial planning interests. We welcome this. However, stakeholders have told us there is a need for clarity on what this means in practice and we draw this to the attention of the lead committee;
- Stakeholders told us that the draft does not always cohere either internally or with key Scottish Government policies. Although it is comprehensive and detailed in places, it sometimes lacks detail or precision where it is most needed. Examples given included achieving electrified heat in buildings at scale and onshore infrastructure for offshore wind energy: two critical areas in relation to net zero goals;
- A key theme of evidence both on NPF4 and in our concurrent inquiry into [“the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland”](#) is the critical role the local government sector has to play in delivering a net zero Scotland. But stakeholders have been unanimous in their concern that the sector may struggle to fulfil that role with the resources currently at its disposal;
- In particular, we are concerned by evidence of a depletion of resources and specialist skills within council planning departments, and in other areas (for instance council environmental departments). The RTPI presented evidence showing a 32% reduction in staff in planning departments in local authorities since 2009 and demonstrating the need for planning for succession within the industry based on demographics and potential loss of skill through retirement. There are long-term factors at play here, but new demands put in place by NPF4 will bring these into sharper focus. We were told that RTPI Scotland and Skills Development Scotland have done valuable work in this area. Now is the time to action any solutions they have proposed that can be realised in the short term. Otherwise there is a risk of NPF4 being more of a wish-list than a blueprint for truly transformational change that is urgently needed;
- The Committee received consistent messages on the importance of data collection, measurement and monitoring. NPF4 contains several references to requirements to “mitigate”, “reduce”, “enhance”, “protect”, “conserve”, etc, but with little guidance on how any of this this is to be measured. We would like to see more clarification and practical advice either in NPF4 itself or in accompanying guidance;
- Finally, we pass on to frustration many stakeholders feel at a planning system that enables delay, churn and repetition. A witness gave the example of an application taking so long that by the time a decision is reached, the relevant turbine technology is obsolete¹. We can do better than this. NPF4 cannot untie all the knots in the planning system but, at the very least, it should not make it any more complex than it already is. We expect the lead committee may have heard

¹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 35

similar frustrations and hope it is able to give this issue more detailed consideration, both in this scrutiny and in any future work on planning.

This letter is copied to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport.

Once your committee's report on NPF4 is published, we would welcome his response to the main points in this letter, and the comments in bold in the annexe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dean Lockhart', written in a cursive style.

Dean Lockhart

Convener, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

ANNEXE: NZET COMMITTEE SCRUTINY OF THE DRAFT NPF4

Parliamentary consultation process on NPF4

The Committee relies on receiving a range of information from experts but several stakeholders said their submissions do not cover the whole framework or that they would have welcomed more time to respond. The causes appear to be both the timing of the laying of the document in the weeks before Christmas and the confusion caused by the Scottish Government itself continuing to consult on NPF4 once the Parliamentary process was underway. The Scottish Government is accepting consultation responses until 31 March 2022 whereas the 120-day deadline set out in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 required the Scottish Parliament to have an earlier closing date for its call for views.

We do not think the laying process for NPF4 has been well run. It has led to some confusion and some respondents felt rushed to respond. We consider that the draft of NPF4 should only have been laid in the Parliament once the Scottish Government had substantively concluded its pre-laying consultation. The Scottish Government should reflect on this in relation to future drafts of the national planning framework. It should also consider whether it might be possible in future to provide the Parliament with more than the 120 days to scrutinise the draft that is the statutory minimum.

General comments about the draft

Stakeholders posed questions about the usefulness of NPF4 as a *working document*, that will both guide planners in their decision-making and give planning stakeholders a degree of certainty as to what outcomes they can expect when they come into contact with the system. Whether the document, overall, contained the sort of language that will be needed for the step change in planning policy we will need to achieve a net zero Scotland was also raised.

Hierarchy of principles, and the place of the climate change and nature crises in planning decision-making

Part 1 of NPF4 sets out a National Spatial Strategy for Scotland. It puts meeting the 2045 net zero targets at the heart of planning policy. This is expanded in the “sustainable places” section of Part 1 which also gives prominence to supporting nature restoration and recovery. Witnesses generally welcomed the language and ambition of this part of the draft. However, we heard views that other parts of the draft contradicted the seemingly clear message about prioritisation found here. Some more specific examples of these concerns are set out further below.

Stakeholders were concerned at the lack of reference to outcomes in section 3A(3A) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and felt the document could be strengthened by a clear link between each policy and proposal, and the outcome

it contributed to². In addition, there were calls for express links to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and National Outcomes/Performance Framework³.

Examples⁴ of areas where stakeholders felt there was a risk of confusion and contradiction between the aspirational language of Part 1, and the primacy of climate change, and policies in specific areas included peatland, forestry and, perhaps especially, the historic environment, described by Elizabeth Leighton of the Climate Emergency Response Group as “odd man out”⁵ in terms of its treatment within the draft. She told us that “the thresholds that are put in place for historic assets and places seem unnecessarily restrictive.”⁶

Kirstanne Land of SSEN Transmission told us—

“From a transmission perspective, we are particularly concerned about the forestry and woodland policy, the current wording of which gives absolutely no flexibility at all and will, because of the extent of woodland coverage in our operational area, make it extremely difficult for us to deliver our critical grid investments. We think that rewording and redrafting will be required in several policies in the document in order to give much clearer direction in support of net zero targets. We want the document to be a bit clearer in support of net zero goals.”⁷

Language used in the draft

Stakeholders also said that the risk of the ambitions in Part 1 not being met was exacerbated by the permissive and sometimes vague language used in much of the document. There were views that some language may not give planners the robust protection they need to make the right decisions without legal challenge⁸. We note a wealth of suggestions in written evidence as to how specific sections of the draft could be strengthened.

Synergy with other strategies

NPF4’s coherence with other areas of Scottish Government policy (including areas currently being consulted upon) was also raised. Strategies or policies which some stakeholders perceived as raising questions of consistency or coherence with NPF4 included—

- Land Use Strategy⁹;
- Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (although Paul White of the Confederation of Passenger Transport told us he thought it was well aligned with NPF4¹⁰);

² RSPB Scotland. Written Submission.

³ National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

⁴ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 39

⁵ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 42

⁶ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 42

⁷ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 40

⁸ Law Society of Scotland. Written Submission.

⁹ National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁰ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 9

- National Transport Strategy 2¹¹;
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy¹²;
- Onshore Wind Policy Statement Refresh¹³; and
- Heat in Buildings Strategy¹⁴.

We note views in evidence that NPF4 should make express comment at appropriate points on how particular guidance it contains is to be related to existing policies and strategies. It was felt that this would add to the clarity of overall planning policies, assisting both planners and planning stakeholders. We also note that NPF4 is a long-term document that may outlive some existing strategies or policies, so some flexibility would be required if this approach were to be taken.

We invite the lead Committee to note general views about NPF4 that—

- **The hierarchy of principles needs to be clearer, and that planners need more guidance on what it means in practice to prioritise addressing climate change in their decision-making;**
- **Some language is unhelpfully vague (and in this connection the Scottish Government may wish to consider proposals stakeholders have offered); and**
- **The draft needs more robust stress-testing against existing Scottish Government policies and strategies relevant to spatial planning to make sure there is consistency and that mixed messaging is avoided.**

Part 2 – National Developments

Part 2 of the draft lists 18 “national developments”: significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver our spatial strategy. The discussion below covers (a) those listed national developments especially relevant to the NZET remit and (b) matters that stakeholders felt should be listed here but were not. In general, our witnesses welcomed Part 2 but noted that some in the list had been carried over from NPF3¹⁵. They queried what benefit it conferred being designated a national development¹⁶.

Urban Mass/Rapid Transit Networks

Stakeholders also welcomed the inclusion of Mass Transit Networks in Part 2. Suggestions for improvement included design with active travel synergy in mind¹⁷, in particular cyclist safety, and protection for existing environments in any mass transit

¹¹ Head of Planning Scotland. Written Submission.

¹² Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. Written Submission.

¹³ Community Windpower Ltd. Written Submission.

¹⁴ The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS). Written Submission.

¹⁵ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 1 February 2022*, Col 48

¹⁶ Scottish Renewables. Written Submission

¹⁷ Spokes, The Lothian Cycle Campaign. Written Submission.

developments¹⁸. There were also calls to improve the walking environment¹⁹ and emphasis on the importance of buses²⁰.

Dr Caroline Brown of Transform Scotland told us—

“A key weakness in NPF4 and STPR2 [Strategic Transport Projects Review 2] relates to how the ambitions will be delivered and the timeline. NPF4 is clear that the climate emergency is the priority and that we have to make a rapid and just transition, but we do not have any sense of the timescales for delivery or of which interventions and projects will deliver the greatest reduction in emissions over time. We need to get a sense of that first. That is a big missing part of the agenda not just in NPF4 but in STPR2.”²¹

Islands Hub for Net Zero

The National Trust for Scotland²² and RSPB Scotland²³ had concerns about the approach of large-scale energy developments in the islands. These focused on—

- The conservation and protection of the marine protected areas and World Heritage Sites in the face of development on this scale;
- The potential emissions of oil infrastructure works and how any additional oil infrastructure aligns with the Policy 1 objectives;
- Definition of “renewable hydrogen”; and
- the consequences of increased traffic of large container ships in the area.

Central Scotland Green Network

Stakeholders welcomed the inclusion of the Central Scotland Green Network as a National Development. But many stakeholders also felt National Developments should include a National Nature Network. Bruce Wilson of Scottish Environment Link told us²⁴ that, just as a national network of roads would never be developed on a local authority area basis, it made sense to have a National Nature Network. This would secure coherence and gain the most benefit from investment.

Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure

This designation was welcomed by those working in renewable electricity generation and transmission. They saw it as an element in ensuring Scotland achieves the step change it needs in relation to renewable energy by 2045. The designation does not mention specific projects and industry stakeholders told us they felt this was the right approach.²⁵ ²⁶ However, they queried the lack of detail in the draft on onshore infrastructure for offshore wind²⁷ and, as noted earlier, there were concerns that the

¹⁸ National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁹ Paths for All. Written Submission.

²⁰ Paths for All. Written Submission.

²¹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 10

²² National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

²³ RSPB Scotland. Written Submission.

²⁴ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 31

²⁵ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 54

²⁶ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 54

²⁷ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 16

ambitions for renewables set out in this part of the draft risk being contradicted by specific policies set out elsewhere.

Other questions raised in relation to this National Development included—

- How the lifecycle greenhouse gases assessments for individual projects would be undertaken and the results monitored²⁸;
- Which organisation would undertake those assessments and would it be resourced to do so? ²⁹;
- Whether levels of emissions projected would be a ground for rejecting an application? ³⁰;
- How smaller scale (less than 50MW) developments would be supported, including solar?³¹;
- How strategic and plan-led this approach was, and whether it would lead to more confusion as to competing sustainable land uses (for example renewable energy pitted against peatland or forestry)³²; and
- The omission of mention of the national grid capacity in certain areas as a justification for blocking applications³³.

We pass on to the lead Committee concerns from stakeholders that it is not always clear what benefit arises from something being listed as a National Development, and that some developments listed in this draft have been carried forward from NPF3 without much evident progress.

We ask the lead Committee to note concerns some stakeholders raised about whether there would be the right trade-off between development and conservation/ habitat preservation in relation to Islands Hub for Net Zero.

The Committee would welcome National Developments including a National Nature Network. If the Scottish Government considers this is not appropriate, it should explain why not.

We also pass on concerns from stakeholders as to whether enough detail has been provided to make the National Development on Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure as robust and workable as it could be.

Part 3 – National Planning Policy Handbook

This part of the draft sets out 35 national planning policies, a number of which are of direct or partial relevance to the NZET remit. In the limited time the Committee had, it was not possible to consider all of these in detail. Most written evidence broadly welcomed the substance of most policies within the Committee remit. Making planning for sustainable development, the climate emergency and the nature crisis

²⁸ John Muir Trust. Written Submission.

²⁹ Peter Batten. Written Submission.

³⁰ Peter Batten. Written Submission.

³¹ Community Wind Power. Written Submission

³² John Muir Trust. Written Submission.

³³ Electricity Supply Board. Written Submission.

the first three policies to be listed in this section is substantively and symbolically important, and was welcomed in evidence.

As already noted, two issues of recurring concern raised by stakeholders were—

- The interplay between the principles set out in Part 1 (in particular the principles of addressing climate change and biodiversity loss) and the policies in Part 3. There were concerns the draft left open the possibility of conflict or confusion and the dilution of the Part 1 principles; and
- Whether the language used is robust enough to give planners the protection they need to make decisions that will advance the principles set out in Part 1 and help deliver a net zero Scotland³⁴.

Policy 2 - Climate emergency

The policy states—

“Development proposals that will generate significant emissions, on their own or when combined with other proposals or when considered in combination with other proposals, allocations or consented development, should not be supported unless the applicant provides evidence that this level of emissions is the minimum that can be achieved for the development to be viable and it is also demonstrated that the proposed development is in the long-term public interest.”³⁵

Some evidence queried this exemption³⁶. They queried the standard of evidence required, whether any emissions are acceptable³⁷, monitoring of emissions within a development and what constitutes the “long-term public interest” or what are “significant” emissions³⁸.

The policy also states—

“Where significant emissions are likely (even as minimised) in relation to national decarbonisation pathways but the planning authority is minded to grant consent, emissions off-setting measures *may be* considered including nature-based solutions.”³⁹ [Emphasis added.]

We welcome the Climate change policy but note views that there needs to be more clarity on when (if ever) it is acceptable to allow a development that generates significant emissions. Key terms like “the long-term public interest” and “significant emissions” should be clarified.

³⁴ Scottish Power. Written Submission.

³⁵ Scottish Government (2021) Scotland 2045: Our Fourth National Planning Framework, page 69

³⁶ National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

³⁷ Planning Democracy. Written Submission.

³⁸ Scottish Environment LINK. Written Submission.

³⁹ Scottish Government (2021) Scotland 2045: Our Fourth National Planning Framework, page 69

We also query why off-setting measures are not considered mandatory for any development involving “significant emissions”: why is this a “may” and not a “must”?

Policy 3 - Nature crisis

Stakeholders queried whether this policy would enshrine a “net gain” approach to biodiversity⁴⁰ (ie development must have a net positive effect on nature) and, if so, how this would be measured. Bruce Wilson of Scottish Environment Link raised⁴¹ with us concerns that, without an effective baseline, or a process and skills base for measuring change, the aims underlying this policy might not be met. Questions were raised as to whether planning departments were equipped both in resource and skills to meet requirements, and whether all local authorities had sufficiently trained ecologists and environmental planners⁴².

Kirstanne Land of SSEN Transmission told⁴³ the Committee a set of standards on biodiversity and guidance around decision making in this area was required. Other evidence stressed the importance of having consistent metrics across local government areas⁴⁴.

Stronger language was requested in several areas including—

- “Facilitate” was not thought to be sufficiently directional⁴⁵;
- “Contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity” was not thought to require developers as robustly as “developments must enhance biodiversity”⁴⁶;
- Adverse effects should be avoided rather than “minimised”⁴⁷; and
- A definition of what constitutes nature positive development⁴⁸.

Several respondents questioned the exemption of fish farms from this policy area.

We pass on to the lead Committee concerns that, without robust and consistent metrics, clearer definitions, and the right skills base at local level, we may not know whether the laudable aims of policy 3: nature crisis, are being met.

Policy 7 - Local Living – 20-minute neighbourhoods and policy 10 - Sustainable Travel and Transport

It is clear that there is enthusiasm for the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods but there are some questions as to how they will be delivered, including questions as to how much the planning system can do on its own and where the role of the private

⁴⁰ Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. Written Submission.

⁴¹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 28

⁴² Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. Written Submission.

⁴³ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 37

⁴⁴ Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. Written Submission.

⁴⁵ Scottish Environment LINK. Written Submission.

⁴⁶ NatureScot. Written Submission.

⁴⁷ NatureScot. Written Submission.

⁴⁸ RTPi Scotland. Written Submission.

sector takes over⁴⁹. Some evidence queried what role local communities would have in helping create new neighbourhoods. Evidence focused on delivery and on the multitude of elements required to create a 20-minute neighbourhood⁵⁰, including how the varied needs of different groups within society can be supported. Dr Caroline Brown of Transform Scotland told the Committee—

“There is no mention of that in the document, and it is possibly missing from the general information about the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods. How might the concept affect the groups that you talked about—children, pregnant women, older people and folks on low incomes? Planners, designers and practitioners need to understand that if they are to deliver 20-minute neighbourhoods, so having it set out is important.”⁵¹

Stakeholders also agreed that it was very challenging to apply the concept in rural areas, but that aspects of the concept could still be applied, in the idea of rural “hubs”⁵².

As the success of 20-minute communities will depend heavily on public transport links, it made sense to the Committee to consider this policy alongside policy 10 on sustainable travel and transport.

David Hunter of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland talked of the risk of putting rhetoric before delivery in planning policy—

“Planning policy and transport policy as a whole can be much more assertive in trying to reduce inequalities. As I mentioned, lots of bread-and-butter things, such as the state of local pavements, should be considered. This might not be a planning issue, but you cannot get a wheelchair-accessible taxi for love or money in many parts of Scotland. Bus stops and shelters are just not good enough in lots of places.”⁵³

The Committee also heard about priorities for action to deliver sustainable travel and transport and was presented with a lot of evidence on the balance between attempting modal shift and the building of new roads⁵⁴. In particular there were calls for information on the emissions associated with building new junctions on trunk roads⁵⁵. A variety of suggestions on how to disincentivise car use were also presented. These including more funding for active and sustainable travel⁵⁶. We heard that Transport Scotland should have a strategic role in the management of that budget for local authority projects, rather than the current system where councils bid for funding⁵⁷.

⁴⁹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 6

⁵⁰ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 6

⁵¹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 19

⁵² Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere. Written Submission.

⁵³ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 9

⁵⁴ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 16

⁵⁵ Donald Baddon. Written Submission.

⁵⁶ Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. Written Submission.

⁵⁷ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 23

We welcome the inclusion of 20-minute neighbourhoods as an NPF4 policy but note that this a policy that remains somewhat at the experimental stage in Scotland, particularly in a rural context. The involvement of local communities and businesses will be crucial in getting new neighbourhoods right.

The Committee is concerned by views from stakeholders that Policy 10 on sustainable travel and transport does not focus sufficiently on the needs of people with disabilities or mobility problems or on ensuring that low-cost public transport is accessible to people on low incomes, and that the language needs to be strengthened. Not only is this a social justice measure; getting more people to use public transport instead of motor vehicles will help bring down emissions

We ask the Scottish Government to consider whether the balance of funding for active and sustainable travel and expansion of the road network is compatible with its stated policy priorities, particularly reducing the distance travelled by car by 20% by 2030.

Policy 11: Heat and cooling

Dr Niall Kerr of the University of Edinburgh told⁵⁸ the Committee Scotland’s targets for heat decarbonisation for 2030 were ambitious in comparison to other European countries, especially considering the relatively low starting point in terms of houses already using low-carbon heat. He suggested other countries were further ahead and had the expertise to take economic advantage of the development of technologies like heat pumps, electrified heat and heat networks. He said Scotland appeared far better placed in relation to areas such as storage and data.

Dr Kerr thought⁵⁹ NPF4 was too focussed on heat networks at the expense of other approaches – in particular electricity networks – for the delivery of electric heat to homes in the scaled-up way that would be required under heat decarbonisation targets.⁶⁰ Elizabeth Leighton of the Climate Emergency Response Group concurred.⁶¹

Dr Kerr also thought there was a lack of ambition in the draft in relation to the elimination of fuel poverty. He said “radical thinking”⁶² would be needed to align the twin aims of addressing fuel poverty and decarbonising heat in buildings.

Morag Watson of Scottish Renewables suggested NPF4 should facilitate good decision making when proposals were brought forward, rather than specify which technologies should be used⁶³.

On the new build heat standard, Dr Kerr voiced⁶⁴ concerns about housing receiving consent prior to 2024 but being built after 2024. He suggested—

⁵⁸ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 37

⁵⁹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 43

⁶⁰ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 43

⁶¹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 45

⁶² Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 47

⁶³ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 46

⁶⁴ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 44

“...we have to think about the implications of a policy that is introduced in 2024 but which only applies to buildings consented after that point. It might be that new developments will not be fully low-carbon for seven years after 2024, and the implications for the very ambitious 2030 target need to be considered.”⁶⁵

Elizabeth Leighton suggested⁶⁶ the Scottish Government intended to bring in regulations requiring existing properties to also use zero emissions heating systems.

On heat networks, Dr Kerr thought⁶⁷ the idea of locating demand for heat near to waste heat sources should be carefully considered as some of the largest sources of waste heat, such as waste water treatment, would not be welcome neighbours for housing developments.

The Committee notes with concern expert views about the scale of ambition needed to deliver Scotland’s heat decarbonisation strategy; views that have been echoed in our parallel inquiry into the role of local government and its partners in delivering net zero. It was clear when the policy was announced that it will be a major challenge to meet relevant targets by the 2030 target date, and it is not clear that NPF4 will make a significant difference to this.

Policy 13 – Flooding

Policy 13 on flooding requires that local development plans should strengthen community resilience to the current and future impacts of climate change which includes identifying opportunities for natural flood risk management and blue green infrastructure.

Section f) includes the requirement that development proposals should only be supported if they “minimise the area of impermeable surface”⁶⁸ and “provide adequate drainage of surface water wherever practicable by blue and green infrastructure (such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) including raingardens).”⁶⁹

Bruce Wilson of Scottish Environment LINK called⁷⁰ for the use of sustainable drainage solutions to be a requirement rather than a suggestion, noting their flood defence and biodiversity benefits, a position supported in other written evidence.

We invite the lead Committee to note views that the language in policy 13 on flooding should be strengthened to ensure more use of sustainable drainage solutions.

⁶⁵ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 44

⁶⁶ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 45

⁶⁷ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 43

⁶⁸ Scottish Government (2021) Scotland 2045: Our Fourth National Planning Framework, page 84

⁶⁹ Scottish Government (2021) Scotland 2045: Our Fourth National Planning Framework, page 84

⁷⁰ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 43

Policy 19 - Green energy

The Green Energy policy is an area where NPF4 has sought to strike a balance between the need to decarbonise energy production, protect the environment and ensure a just transition.

Stakeholders from the renewables industry told us the framework would not support the step change that is needed to scale up delivery of renewables by the amount required to achieve net zero⁷¹. As noted earlier, they called for more flexibility to use certain types of land for renewables or transmission infrastructure (such as peatland and woodland⁷²) and said conflicts between principles and policies could jeopardise achieving the 2045 target.

On the other hand, we heard calls for the protection of greenfield land⁷³, peatland⁷⁴ and forestry⁷⁵ from development.

While recognising that a balance will always need to be struck between landscape preservation and climate change, a more supportive framework is need for onshore renewables if Scottish Government energy and climate targets are to be delivered. Consents need to be delivered more quickly and deliver more long-term confidence for developers. Planning policy also needs to reflect how technology is changing, by for example allowing modern turbines to be more easily deployed.

Policy 20 - Zero waste

Zero Waste Scotland⁷⁶ suggested NPF4 was too focussed on how to deal with waste, rather than seeking to prevent it and promote a circular economy.

Iain Gulland, Chief Executive of Zero Waste Scotland⁷⁷ spoke of the need to build a circular economy approach into developments and infrastructure, particularly in relation to any new 20-minute neighbourhood. This would require new ways of thinking within local government and new partnerships.

He highlighted issues in the past with planning and energy from waste, suggesting NPF4 could be more explicit on the position of incinerators without energy recovery⁷⁸. However, he noted the ongoing review in this area and suggested the issue would have to await the outcome of that⁷⁹.

Policy 30 - Vacant and derelict land and empty buildings

Stakeholders welcomed the prioritisation of reuse of vacant and derelict land in the draft. They also welcome its emphasis on the reuse and reimagining of existing

⁷¹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 39

⁷² Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 1 February 2022, Col 39

⁷³ Planning Democracy. Written Submission.

⁷⁴ National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

⁷⁵ RPSB Scotland. Written Submission.

⁷⁶ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 33

⁷⁷ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 34

⁷⁸ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 38

⁷⁹ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report*, 8 February 2022, Col 38

spaces, particularly in reference to circular economy ideals⁸⁰, and the protection of greenfield afforded by focusing on existing brownfield spaces⁸¹.

The Committee was interested to note evidence, however, that derelict land can sometimes be a biodiversity haven and that there should be safeguards for this⁸².

We welcome the emphasis in policy 30 on reuse and repurposing of derelict land. The Committee is of the view that in order to support the drive to net zero there needs to be a greater focus and priority on the re-use of existing empty buildings rather than demolition and new build which is the higher emission option. This focus will also help in town centre regeneration and 20-minute neighbourhood developments.

Policy 32 - Natural places

Evidence on this policy broadly welcomed the objectives but, once again, questioned the delivery mechanisms and in particular how it related to Policy 19 on Green Energy. Scottish Environment Link⁸³ and the John Muir Trust⁸⁴ raised the issue of measurement, collection of good data and monitoring as vital to the success of this policy.

A number of issues in relation to planning policies on areas designated as “wild land” were raised. Respondents highlighted that this is a change from Scottish Planning Policy, and expressed views, including—

- That the protections for wild land are welcomed and “progressive”⁸⁵, and can still enable local living and small-scale energy developments in remote rural areas;
- That “wild land” designations should not be used as a blanket restriction on development and preclude appropriate resettlement (e.g. through crofts) in areas that were previously inhabited⁸⁶;
- That the approach to wild land could be strengthened and wording clarified⁸⁷; and
- That it creates difficulty in siting renewables due to needing to demonstrate that “the proposed development cannot be reasonably located outside of the wild land area” and potentially conflicts with Policy 19: Green Energy⁸⁸.

There were calls to strengthen the precautionary principle⁸⁹ to a presumption against development on nationally or internationally significant landscapes or natural heritage assets where impacts are uncertain.

⁸⁰ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 39

⁸¹ Heads of Planning Scotland. Written Submission

⁸² Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 42

⁸³ Scottish Environment LINK. Written Submission.

⁸⁴ John Muir Trust. Written Submission.

⁸⁵ John Muir Trust. Written Submission.

⁸⁶ Woodland Crofts Partnership. Written Submission.

⁸⁷ Scottish Environment Link. Written Submission.

⁸⁸ Law Society of Scotland. Written Submission.

⁸⁹ National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

It was also thought⁹⁰ the Policy should reference the ‘mitigation hierarchy’, where harm is first avoided, remaining impacts mitigated and compensation used only as a last resort.

There was also debate around whether development should be permitted on greenfield spaces at all. While some sought the protection of these spaces⁹¹, others felt a blanket presumption against any greenfield development was too restrictive⁹².

Stronger protection to local nature and brownfield sites of biodiversity significance⁹³ was also called for.

Policy 33 - Peat and carbon rich soils

There were mixed views on this policy, with some stakeholders suggesting the exemptions for development on peatland were too lenient and others suggesting they should be more flexible. NatureScot said the policy could “provide a clearer steer on balancing competing land uses with peatland restoration”⁹⁴ and that “caveats on restricting development on peatland are extensive and therefore restrict the protection afforded by the policy”⁹⁵. Others welcomed the exemptions and the opportunities these provided to meet other goals⁹⁶.

There was a call for clear definitions of peatland and soils⁹⁷.

This is another area where respondents queried whether the right specialist skills and expertise would be available within planning departments to make the right judgements on technical issues, such as appraising the costs and benefits of allowing a renewable energy development that may impact on peatland. Heads of Planning Scotland said they supported the policy but acknowledged that it is “another specialist planning area which requires precise expertise and skill sets”⁹⁸. RTPi Scotland highlighted that planners would need to have access to reliable spatial data⁹⁹.

We are aware of the Scottish Government’s commitments in the Climate Change Plan update to phase out the use of peat in horticulture. Its Position Statement¹⁰⁰ on NPF4 says the framework would help support the phasing out of horticultural peat.

⁹⁰ RSPB Scotland. Written Submission.

⁹¹ Planning Democracy. Written Submission.

⁹² Scottish Property Federation. Written Submission.

⁹³ RSPB Scotland. Written Submission.

⁹⁴ NatureScot. Written Submission.

⁹⁵ NatureScot. Written Submission.

⁹⁶ Coriolis Energy. Written Submission.

⁹⁷ Scottish Renewables. Written Submission.

⁹⁸ Heads of Planning Scotland. Written Submission.

⁹⁹ Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁰⁰ Scottish Government (2020). Scotland’s Fourth National Planning Framework Position Statement, Page 28

Questions were raised as to whether this was clear enough¹⁰¹, what the timescales for this are¹⁰², and what would happen in the meantime¹⁰³. Some said that the wording requires clarification¹⁰⁴: for instance, terms such as “reasonable alternative” and peatland’s “original environmental status”.

Peatlands is another policy area where a clearer definition of terms is needed along with guidance and robust methodology for making decisions. This is also an area where specialist skills are required.

The Committee considers that there should be a definition of what constitutes ‘an industry of national importance to Scotland’ in relation to peat extraction and that other terms within this policy should be more clearly defined. The Committee also recommends the Scottish Government should provide details of the evidence the mitigation measures in the policy are based on.

Policy 34 - Trees, woodland, and forestry

Some stakeholders welcomed the protection for ancient woodlands and considered the policy to be strengthened compared to Scottish Planning Policy¹⁰⁵.

However, this was another policy in which clear definitions of terms, such as “adverse effects” or what constitutes “additional public benefits” and strengthened wording to enhance the intended protections was called for¹⁰⁶.

In relation to situations where “additional public benefits” justify woodland removal under Policy 34c, NatureScot¹⁰⁷ noted that examples may be useful, for instance “tree removal to enhance functional peatland”. Others noted that compensatory planting should be compulsory under Policy 34c¹⁰⁸, rather than “generally...expected” and suggested that it be specified that compensatory planting be majority native species¹⁰⁹.

In 34d, the policy also specifies that development must ensure that existing woodland is protected from direct and indirect adverse impacts, in addition to the creation and integration of new woodlands. The Committee also heard of the negative impacts climate change can have on woodland in terms of the spread of disease or pests, and measures are required to mitigate this. This was a point also raised in oral evidence. Anna Beswick (Adaptation Scotland) noted that NPF4 should address the risks to the natural environment, including woodland species, from climate change. She highlighted that “unless we protect woodlands, enhance the health of woodlands and focus on reducing risks from pests and diseases, they will not be able to continue to provide the services that they currently provide, let alone

¹⁰¹ Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland. Written Submission

¹⁰² WWF Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁰³ WWF Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁰⁴ RSPB Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁰⁵ Scottish Environment Link. Written Submission.

¹⁰⁶ Woodland Trust Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁰⁷ NatureScot. Written Submission.

¹⁰⁸ National Trust for Scotland. Written Submission.

¹⁰⁹ Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere. Written Submission.

to deliver the enhancements that we need if we are to meet the net zero target. I would like to see that messaging strengthened.”¹¹⁰

Good data on existing woodland and the resourcing of planning departments were also prevalent in comments on this policy¹¹¹.

Policy 35 - Coasts

Anna Beswick of Adaptation Scotland suggested¹¹² there was a need to build in resilience for the medium term in terms of adaptation, but also a need to be thinking about the longer term. She said NPF4 did not sufficiently consider adaptation pathways and seemed based on an assumption current protections would always be there.

¹¹⁰ Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 36

¹¹¹ Woodland Trust Scotland. Written Submission.

¹¹² Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, *Official Report, 8 February 2022*, Col 35