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## **CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

**This is a list of consultation questions as they appear in the consultation draft NPF4 and accompanying impact assessments. (This list comprises 11 pages.)**

## Part 1 - A National Spatial Strategy for Scotland 2045

### Sustainable places

Our future net zero places will be more resilient to the impacts of climate change and support recovery of our natural environment.

#### **Q 1: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS APPROACH WILL DELIVER OUR FUTURE NET ZERO PLACES WHICH WILL BE MORE RESILIENT TO THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUPPORT RECOVERY OF OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT?**

We welcome the recognition of the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis throughout NPF4. However, in practice, we are concerned that NPF4 will not contribute sufficiently to the delivery of Scotland's future net zero places.

A fundamental weakness within the document, but in particular within the Handbook, is the **lack of a clearly articulated policy hierarchy**, leaving it to planners to decide whether the climate, the economy or someone's scenic view is more important, for example:

- Policy 2(c) (Climate emergency) states that where development proposals that generate 'significant emissions' are in the public interest, they may go ahead. There is no definition of 'public interest', leaving it open to planners to decide what exactly might be more important than addressing the climate emergency and nature crisis.
- Policy 19 (Green energy) uses guarded language when describing onshore windfarms. Outwith certain protected and wild areas, such developments should be supported unless their impact is 'unacceptable.' What 'unacceptable' means and to whom is not, however, defined.

A second, fundamental weakness within the document, both within the Spatial Strategy and the Handbook, is, despite recognition of the fact that rural and island places hold many of the assets to address the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis, there is a **lack of understanding of how best to safeguard and deploy rural and island assets to achieve net zero and a just transition**. Some of the net zero policies are at odds with goals to repopulate and revitalise rural areas (for example a focus on reducing unsustainable travel can work against rural developments) which can hinder a just transition. Also, proposals for community-led rural developments seem to have disproportionately more planning-related hurdles to overcome than a volume house building project on a greenfield site despite the fact it is recognised that well-designed small scale developments and land-based micro enterprises offer opportunities for climate change mitigation and protecting biodiversity.

**We suggest there should be a clearly articulated policy hierarchy to inform local development plans and decisions around proposals. Of primary importance for the planning system is recognising and supporting the role of thriving, sustainable and empowered local communities to deliver net zero.**

## Liveable places

Our future places, homes and neighbourhoods will be better, healthier and more vibrant places to live.

### **Q 2: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS APPROACH WILL DELIVER OUR FUTURE PLACES, HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS WHICH WILL BE BETTER, HEALTHIER AND MORE VIBRANT PLACES TO LIVE?**

This section **lacks reference to the statutory requirement for NPF4 to increase the population of rural areas (and implicitly within this, to consider the extent to which populations will be balanced and sustainable into the future)**. Many rural areas are lacking services and infrastructure so need more investment to make them attractive, vibrant and sustainable places to live. This approach does not deliver this, focussing on providing homes near existing infrastructure instead of providing appropriate infrastructure and development to support repopulation and revitalisation of rural areas.

**The emphasis on 20 Minute Neighbourhoods is wholly inappropriate** as a method for securing economic, social and environmental outcomes in rural and island areas as has been [evidenced by Scottish practitioners](#). For rural and island areas there is an additional need, instead, to support living well locally initiatives and futureproofed transport and digital systems.

**The inclusion of the statement “We hope to empower more people to shape their places” is valuable but not followed up across the document with concrete action** to realise this ambition.

A lot has been said about the failures of planning legislation (the Town and Country Planning Act) to provide a strong basis for community participation in planning processes. The idea that communities can create Local Place Plans (LPPs) and these feed into Local Development Plans has been met with scepticism considering that authorities do not need to take LPPs into account. Furthermore, communities have no right to appeal planning decisions that are not in line with their LPP or with the Local Development Plan.

NPF4 cannot directly address the failures within the 2019 planning legislation but it provides an opportunity to simplify and streamline the planning system. Instead, it has introduced a raft of new concepts and new requirements for inclusion in Development Plans and in proposals for development. These concepts and requirements are not clearly defined or stated.

Complexity in the planning system will favour those with time, money and recourse to expensive legal support. They can clog the already stretched planning system with appeals and special pleadings but ultimately it is their fees and contributions which keep the system financed.

**We suggest instead of the 20 minute neighbourhood method, NPF4 promotes a tailored ‘living well locally’ method for rural and island places.**

**We also suggest that communities are recognised as key stakeholders in the planning process, that they are given resources to produce Local Place Plans and a**

**right to appeal planning decisions, particularly major developments or developments that do not conform with Local Development Plans.**

## Productive places

Our future places will attract new investment, build business confidence, stimulate entrepreneurship and facilitate future ways of working – improving economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

**Q 3: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS APPROACH WILL DELIVER OUR FUTURE PLACES WHICH WILL ATTRACT NEW INVESTMENT, BUILD BUSINESS CONFIDENCE, STIMULATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FACILITATE FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING – IMPROVING ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL WELLBEING?**

The positioning of NPF4 as a vehicle to promote a wellbeing economy is welcome.

Other economy-related approaches such as **community wealth building, the blue economy and the circular economy all sound really good but are not clearly articulated across NPF4**. Without training, planners are likely to struggle with how to interpret these approaches when faced with a Local Development Plan or a development proposal. This is not an argument to remove them from NPF4. Instead, it is a note that greater clarity and guidance is required.

Within NPF4 there is broad support for the sectors and industries perceived to be most important to the rural/island economy including food and drink, land-based industries, aquaculture and heritage.

**NPF4 is weak on critical areas of the rural and island economy including the construction industry, food production (other than top end Food & Drink), community land ownership and small scale land management such as crofting, and, with exception of Policy 16, it is weak on supporting micro entities including micro enterprises, social enterprises and community enterprises.** Micro enterprises of 0-9 employees makes up 39% of employment in remote rural areas and 27% in accessible areas compared to 11% in cities.

Critical to the economy and wellbeing of rural and island places is digital connectivity and while Policy 23 states that Local Development Plans should support the delivery of digital infrastructure, particularly in areas with gaps in connectivity and barriers to digital access, it has been noted by authorities such as Highland Council that **stronger planning policy support is needed for innovative digital solutions in remote/rural areas**. National Development 6 within NPF4, for example, which is the only National Development on digital connectivity, focuses specifically on investment in the digital *fibre* network when this network is not going to meet the current and future needs of significant numbers of rural and island residents.

**We suggest NPF4 is reviewed in order that micro scale enterprise and community-led developments are explicitly supported across all relevant policies. While this commitment is suggested under the section on the Northern Revitalisation Area and Policy 16, it does not follow through in most other policies of the Handbook.**

## Distinctive places

Our future places will be distinctive, safe and pleasant, easy to move around, welcoming, nature-positive and resource efficient.

### **Q 4: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS APPROACH WILL DELIVER OUR FUTURE PLACES WHICH WILL BE DISTINCTIVE, SAFE AND PLEASANT, EASY TO MOVE AROUND, WELCOMING, NATURE-POSITIVE AND RESOURCE EFFICIENT?**

This section appears to mop up a wide range of concepts, from equalities to biodiversity, that have not been addressed in the previous three sections. It therefore appears to lack coherence.

While it is positive NPF4 recognises the distinctive nature of different places, as with previous sections, there is no follow-through between the statements made e.g. “our strategy is to value, enhance, conserve and celebrate our best places and to build better places for future generations”, and how exactly these will be translated into practice at the coalface of the planning system.

We wish to draw your attention to the opening statement of a letter written on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022 by the Scottish Parliament’s Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee Convener and addressed to the Convener of the Local Government, Planning and Housing Committee. This letter was informed by rural and island stakeholders and states:

*“The Committee considers that the **NPF4 needs to offer more of a vision for rural communities**. What does the plan envisage these communities to be? Will they have young people? Will they have attracted people from outside the community, and, if so, where from?”*

The Committee’s response highlights **the lack, within NPF4, of a clear approach to defining and capturing rurality in Scotland**. From ‘urban fringe’ to ‘intermediate’ and ‘fragile’, planners can add layers of categories to rural and island places, over and above the Urban Rural Classification System. These categories are frequently subjective, having no discernible evidence base yet they have enormous impact on decisions around development proposals. **We suggest much greater clarity is needed around how the planning system captures the distinctive characteristics of rural and island areas, from accessible to remote.**

### **Q 5: DO YOU AGREE THAT THE SPATIAL STRATEGY WILL DELIVER FUTURE PLACES THAT OVERALL ARE SUSTAINABLE, LIVEABLE, PRODUCTIVE AND DISTINCTIVE?**

No. See responses to questions 1 to 4.

We also wish to emphasise that the 'food & drink sector', though intrinsically valuable, is not about food production, the latter being critical to our sustainability as a country. NPF4 should be clearer on how we use Scotland's land to achieve food security and energy security.

## Spatial principles

### **Q 6: DO YOU AGREE THAT THESE SPATIAL PRINCIPLES WILL ENABLE THE RIGHT CHOICES TO BE MADE ABOUT WHERE DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE LOCATED?**

It is not clear how these principles will be translated into a practical framework to inform development decisions. We assume they are all to be considered of equal importance. If this is so, it is worth pointing out **that there are tensions between some principles, for example between Compact Growth and Balanced Development.**

There is **nothing within the principles about advancing equality and eliminating discrimination**, despite this being a statutory requirement for NPF4 to contribute to this.

The explanatory paragraphs for some **principles appear to reinforce a perspective of rural and island Scotland as a vast landscape devoid of community, industry and potential.** For example the emphasis in Compact Growth is on safeguarding land "to provide the services, and resources we will need in the future, including carbon storage, flood risk management, green infrastructure and biodiversity." Where are the communities, the food and energy production, the micro enterprise and raw materials within this picture? Similarly, the Urban and Rural Synergy principle, which purports to be about rural and urban communities working together, then proposes improving green infrastructure as being the key aim, in order "to bring nature into our towns and cities."

The Local Living principle, with its focus on 20 minute neighbourhoods risks **exacerbating the centralisation of services and reinforcing existing structural and institutional barriers to addressing poverty and inequality in rural and island communities.** While 20 minute neighbourhoods are appropriate in urban areas, a better spatial principle for rural areas would be to focus on efficient delivery of infrastructure and services to populations, particularly those areas identified for growth or repopulation, instead of focussing development around existing infrastructure.

Finally, across the whole document, there is **very little about the Place Principle** which should be core to spatial planning.

**We suggest the explanatory paragraphs for these principles should be reviewed to ensure there are no tensions across the list and to embed the place principle where appropriate.**

## Spatial Strategy Action Areas

### Q 7: DO YOU AGREE THAT THESE SPATIAL STRATEGY ACTION AREAS PROVIDE A STRONG BASIS TO TAKE FORWARD REGIONAL PRIORITY ACTIONS?

With some further development and consultation, the Spatial Strategy action areas could potentially be a helpful tool for regions pulling together their Local Development Plans. In their current draft, however, two issues are noted:

**1. The areas they cover are large and geographically diverse and the priorities are narrow and proscriptive within these areas:**

As well as the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, the so-termed Central urban transformation area, for example, covers vast rural and island areas across multiple local authorities. Its listed priorities are:

- *pioneer low-carbon, resilient urban living;*
- *reinvent and future-proof city centres;*
- *accelerate urban greening;*
- *rediscover urban coasts and waterfronts;*
- *reuse land and buildings;*
- *invest in net zero housing solutions;*
- *grow a wellbeing economy;*
- *reimagine development on the urban fringe;*
- *improve urban accessibility.*

Only three of these priorities, the growth of a wellbeing economy, investment in net zero housing and reimagining development on the urban fringe (if you think of Arran and the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park as the 'urban fringe') are relevant to the circa 90% of the action area which has a rural/island geography.

**2. The priorities for each action area are narrow and proscriptive across the action areas.**

The Spatial Strategy appears to 'zone' different types of development in different parts of Scotland where, in fact, every part of Scotland could and should plan for such development. Examples of such priorities include nature networks, active and shared transport networks, repopulation of rural settlements and support for a wellbeing economy.

**We suggest it should be made more explicit how priorities within an established hierarchy (including those dealt with under the 'universal' policies 1 to 6) can be delivered across all action areas. We also suggest a spatial planning approach that promotes developments as a matrix of potential different activities within all areas rather than a zoning of activities across the country.**

**We suggest that each action area includes an action to *Create a balanced and sustainable rural population.***

**We suggest that food and energy production and food and energy security is considered specifically across all areas of the Spatial Strategy.**

## North and west coastal innovation

### **Q 8: DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

It is positive that the area is recognised for its contribution to biodiversity and renewable energy generation. It is also positive that each island's varying character is acknowledged as is the importance of the National Islands Plan as a lever for change.

Critical omissions in terms of opportunities are community land/asset ownership, crofting, shortening supply chains with regards to food and materials, circular economies, the cultural and economic contribution of the Gaelic language and the prevalence of micro enterprise (social, community and private) which act as delivery mechanisms for all aspects of social, environmental and economic outcomes in rural and island communities.

**Challenges are namechecked but only superficially. This confers very limited understanding of the root cause of problems and how planning can contribute to solutions.** For example the section that talks about difficulties recruiting and retaining a local workforce, links this to "*the importance of building skills to support future investment*" but fails to make the obvious point that housing, digital connectivity, transport and other factors in rural and island areas contribute to problems with workforce retention.

With respect to repopulation, we agree with Community Land Scotland's assessment that the spatial strategy is based on misunderstanding that rural repopulation cannot happen hand-in-hand with nature conservation or net zero targets. This is fundamentally wrong. **Community-led and owned development must be the centre of a Just Transition.** As Community Land Scotland's 2020 research on Communities and Climate Change has shown, community bodies are skilled at delivering high quality nature conservation projects. There is a growing body of international research which demonstrates significant causal effects between community land ownership and land conservation outcomes.

**We suggest these sections are re-drafted to ensure there is an intervention logic between the opportunities/challenges and the role planning can play in building more sustainable etc. communities.**

### **Q 9: WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THESE STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

Overall:

1. Action 1 (Creating carbon neutral coastal and island communities) should encompass Action 4 (Strengthening resilience and decarbonising connectivity) – it is almost like we are scrabbling to find a fourth action point. **Suggest that Action 4 is**



**focused instead on an area to *Create a balanced and sustainable rural population as this is an area that requires much greater clarity.***

2. While there are acknowledged distinct differences between coastal mainland communities and island communities, it is important that where similarities exist these are also acknowledged. For example, statements like “the additional costs of island homebuilding” should be expanded to include remote mainland.
3. Action 1 – 20 minute neighbourhoods are not the right delivery method for living well locally in this spatial strategy area. Positive that ‘local housing solutions’ are promoted but there is no follow through to policy 9 on quality homes. Furthermore Action 1 focuses development on narrow corridors e.g. Tobermory to Oban that might not be supported by the local population.
4. Action point 2 (support blue and wellbeing economies) – Few people, including planners, actually know what a blue or wellbeing economy looks like. There is a disproportionate emphasis on tourism developments across the area, compared to other namechecked sectors. There is also critical omission in regard to support for the circular economy and creating denser local supply chains of food and materials.
5. Action 3 (protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure) – It is positive that local assets have been identified and included in this document.
6. Action point 4 (as currently drafted) – there needs to be shift to support different options for broadband, not just fibre. Also should look to strengthen local energy networks and systems rather than just focus on mainland connections, important though this latter is.

## Northern revitalisation

### **Q 10: DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

While we welcome the reference to population decline and the acceleration of housing prices as future risks for the area, **there is a need for a more cohesive planning system intervention logic** evidenced for example by the statement below:

*“The area has a strong economy with growing income and low unemployment overall, but there remain pockets of deprivation both in urban areas and in more remote areas where there is a need for low skilled and low paid jobs.”*

The increase in house prices is solely attributed to the pandemic, implying people are moving to live and work in these areas, whereas actually there has been a major shift in housing use towards second homes and short term holiday accommodation over several years.

### **Q 11: WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THESE STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

We welcome the fact that the narrative under the strategic actions for the Northern area is aligned with the rural and island economy in particular the emphasis it puts on micro, social and community enterprise and on community-led local development initiatives.

We would suggest that Action 5 (Strengthen networks of resilient communities) is renamed to **Create a balanced and sustainable rural population.**

We would suggest under Action 6 (Stimulate green prosperity) that the exclusive focus on protecting 'higher quality' agricultural land is unhelpful in reducing food miles. We suggest this definition needs to be revisited as a lot of land in the Northern area that is used to produce food may fall outwith this category.

We are concerned, under Action 7 (Nuture nature-based solutions) with the statement:

*"The area can act as a strategic carbon and ecological 'mitigation bank' that can make a major contribution to our national climate change commitments."*

This statement reflects a growing trend in allocating vast tracts of land for carbon capture in order to offset emissions elsewhere. While we do not disagree with making land available for forestry, peat restoration, native woodlands etc. we do disagree with the Northern area being seen as Scotland's carbon sink – this role must be shared across the country. We also disagree with the current approach of selling land off as large privately owned estates to high industry emitters. Community-led land management should be the preferred approach, securing as it does better outcomes for people and environment:

Under Action 8 (Strengthening resilience and decarbonising connectivity) it is important to note that the very positive reference to making use of emerging broadband technologies is not supported through the National Developments. In terms of energy, we need to see support for local networks of distribution, not just policies that aim to increase generation capacity. Again, the focus on developing areas that already have infrastructure ignores the fact that many of our areas that need revitalising / repopulating are under-serviced. This strategy (focussing housing & dev where services are) only exacerbates this problem. We need to implement effective provision of services into remote/rural areas to support appropriate development in them which will then encourage repopulation and the growth of sustainable, resilient communities.

The narrative on transport focuses on road and air. While there is a statement around the 'continued modal shift to rail' there is no explanation of how this will be achieved.

## North east transition

### **Q 12: DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

As with the previous two areas we would like to see strong and specific references to community ownership and small/micro enterprise as drivers of opportunity.

### **Q 13: WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THESE STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

We would suggest including a specific action on Create a balanced and sustainable rural population.

Action 9. Transition to net zero needs to be improved. The draft states:

“Local people will need to be involved in deciding how potentially significant industrial and business activity can be accommodated alongside regenerating a vibrant, redesigned city centre in the coming years.”

Community empowerment means more than "being involved in decisions". We suggest meaningfully opportunities for community wealth building through community empowerment are prioritised for this action area, given its importance to the net zero transition and history of poverty here.

Of critical importance is improving rail connections in this area. One of our members has supplied a diagram which we forward as a separate submission.

## Central urban transformation

### **Q 14: DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

As referenced in our response to Question 7 in this consultation, this area is very diverse in terms of the rural/urban continuum and this diversity has not been captured or served well.

The focus of the narrative is on how the rural areas may serve the urban areas (as ‘opportunities for outdoor recreation’) rather than seeing each category for its intrinsic challenges and opportunities. Clearly the urban/rural links need to be acknowledged but not at the expense of one category over the other. To note that the North east transition section, which covers Aberdeen alongside the Shire and Moray, has achieved a more balanced strategic narrative.

Furthermore, the narrative in Central Urban appears to dwell on the differences between Glasgow and Edinburgh and on the challenges apparent in this area rather than where planning can play a positive role in addressing these challenges.

### **Q 15: WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THESE STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

There is a need to offer rural communities in this area with a positive and tailored vision.

Under Action 20, the statement “While predominantly urban, this part of Scotland benefits from a rich and diverse rural area...” is incorrect from a landmass and urban/rural classification system perspective. Action 20 then proceeds to place all rural places in this area (including the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, rural Clackmannanshire and the Isle of Arran) into the bracket of an ‘urban fringe’.

We strongly recommend that there is a specific action under this spatial area focusing on Create a balanced and sustainable rural population. We also strongly suggest that any reference to 20 Minute Neighbourhoods is not applied to areas outwith dense urban settlements. Finally we strongly recommend that references to community-led local

development are strengthened across all actions, rather than just mentioned in passing under Action 19 (Growing a wellbeing economy).

## Southern sustainability

### **Q 16: DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

There is very little of substance in this area in terms of a vision and the role planning can play in achieving that vision. Even the word 'sustain' is not as action-orientated as the words 'innovate', 'revitalise', 'transition' and 'transform' which characterise the other four areas.

While sustain is not a negative word and certainly, within the current climate emergency context, it is a necessary and intrinsically desirable approach, our members have expressed concern that it also signals a presumption against innovative and much-needed developments in their area including, small scale renewables and capitalising on the UNESCO status of Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere.

Furthermore the statement "The area's economy depends on low wage and public sector employment and this presents challenges for building a wellbeing economy" is not correct. It's not clear how this economic base will provide specific challenges for wellbeing economics; rather, an economic system with a strong community wealth element would address the limitations of the low wage and public sectors.

### **Q 17: WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THESE STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR THIS ACTION AREA?**

We recommend a specific action to Create a balanced and sustainable rural population without which Action 22 (creating a low-carbon network of towns) will likely exacerbate issues around the centralisation of rural services. The reference to 20 Minute neighbourhoods is not appropriate.

Action 23 fails to focus on the importance of small and micro enterprise and social and community enterprise in delivering sustainable development. Instead the local economic strategy appears to be about creating growth corridors and investment sites in the hope that will generate the right kind of jobs. Action 23 does not support community wealth building.

Action 24, it is surprising there is no mention of the Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere.

Action 25, it is surprising that despite all available evidence, we still need to 'build the case for improvements to public transport routes.'

## National Spatial Strategy

### **Q 18: WHAT ARE YOUR OVERALL VIEWS ON THIS PROPOSED NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY?**

It requires greater clarity on principles and priorities and further consultation to grasp the challenges and opportunities of each area, in particular for rural and island places.

## Part 2 - National developments

**Q 19: DO YOU THINK THAT ANY OF THE CLASSES OF DEVELOPMENT DESCRIBED IN THE STATEMENTS OF NEED SHOULD BE CHANGED OR ADDITIONAL CLASSES ADDED IN ORDER TO DELIVER THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DESCRIBED?**

**Q 20: IS THE LEVEL OF INFORMATION IN THE STATEMENTS OF NEED ENOUGH FOR COMMUNITIES, APPLICANTS AND PLANNING AUTHORITIES TO CLEARLY DECIDE WHEN A PROPOSAL SHOULD BE HANDLED AS A NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**

**Q 21: DO YOU THINK THERE ARE OTHER DEVELOPMENTS, NOT ALREADY CONSIDERED IN SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS, THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STATUS?**

We are not responding to this section.

## Part 3 - National Planning Policy

### Sustainable Places

We want our places to help us tackle the climate and nature crises and ensure Scotland adapts to thrive within the planet's sustainable limits.

#### **Q 22: DO YOU AGREE THAT ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE RECOVERY SHOULD BE THE PRIMARY GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ALL OUR PLANS AND PLANNING DECISIONS?**

**Yes we do agree with this position. However we feel this is not well articulated within each of the policies as evidenced by our responses below.**

### Policy 1: Plan-led approach to sustainable development

#### **Q 23: DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS POLICY APPROACH?**

The reference to the 'long-term public interest' was welcome in the legislation and is welcome here. However, this policy is not about a plan-led approach, rather it is about an outcomes-based approach. **The plan-based aspect only appears to apply to the creation of development plans and not decision making on individual applications.**

We would expect to see a statement of process regarding how the long-term public interest is curated (including through meaningful public consultation) and safeguarded (through applying a plan-based approach in a transparent way to development proposals).

An opportunity was missed to enshrine such a process in legislation. Nevertheless, we would expect NPF4 to address some of contradictions between planning policies and the principle of a plan-led approach.

In line with colleagues in Planning Democracy, we recommend that:

- Communities must be resourced to produce Local Place Plans which, in turn, must shape Local Development Plans. Community Councils should play a critical role in developing Local Place Plans alongside community anchor organisations.
- Major development proposals that do not comply with a Local Development Plan should have a strong presumption against approval,
- All proposals should demonstrate how they fit in with adopted Local Place Plan aspirations.

## Policy 2: Climate emergency

### **Q 24: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL ENSURE THE PLANNING SYSTEM TAKES ACCOUNT OF THE NEED TO ADDRESS THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY?**

We agree the policy will ensure the planning system ‘takes account of’ the need to address the climate emergency but that does not mean decisions will necessarily put sufficient weight on this issue. **Stronger language and greater clarity of concepts is required for example:**

Policy 2(a) – we suggest changing the wording from ‘significant weight should be given’ to ‘significant weight must be given’ which reflects the statutory obligation on NPF4 to help address the climate emergency.

Policy 2(c) states that where development proposals that generate ‘significant emissions’ are in the public interest, they may go ahead. We need a definition of ‘public interest’ to guide planners in their decision making.

Off-site off-setting may be allowed but we suggest it should be explicit that this is a last resort, not a default position.

Furthermore, explicit mention should be made of transport developments within Policy 2.

## Policy 3: Nature crisis

### **Q 25: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL ENSURE THAT THE PLANNING SYSTEM TAKES ACCOUNT OF THE NEED TO ADDRESS THE NATURE CRISIS?**

Again, we agree with the aim of this policy, but we feel **greater strength and clarity in language is required**. For example:

In policy 3(a) and (b), we suggest both development plans and development proposals should meaningfully contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity. Currently only proposals need to ‘meaningfully contribute’ while development plans need to just ‘facilitate’ biodiversity enhancement, thereby potentially missing opportunities to have a longer term vision and influence in shaping proposals.

There should be stronger links made between NPF4 and regional plans such as management plans for National Scenic Areas and SSSIs.

**We would challenge the exemption of Aquaculture from policy 3(d) and 3(e).** Aquaculture should not be exempt from the requirement to preserve and enhance biodiversity.



#### Policy 4: Human rights and equality

**Q 26: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY EFFECTIVELY ADDRESSES THE NEED FOR PLANNING TO RESPECT, PROTECT AND FULFIL HUMAN RIGHTS, SEEK TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTE EQUALITY?**

Human rights cannot be promoted through a single stand-alone policy.

**In order to make policy 4 meaningful, NPF4 must first address its own failures to promote equality across the whole draft, including for example, to meet the housing needs of older and disabled people.**

Furthermore, achieving equality within and through the planning system requires communities to have the same rights and opportunities as developers, exercised through Community Councils. This includes the right to appeal the planning decisions that are guided by the policies within NPF4. Providing communities with a right to appeal will also help deliver Policy 1.

NPF4 must also strengthen explicit support to community-led local development as a vehicle for addressing inequality and promoting human rights through including, across relevant policies in particular Policy 5, a presumption in favour of such development.

#### Policy 5: Community wealth building

**Q 27: DO YOU AGREE THAT PLANNING POLICY SHOULD SUPPORT COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING, AND DOES THIS POLICY DELIVER THIS?**

Policy 5 offers an opportunity for NPF4 to make a strong and clear statement about the importance of community-led local development in ensuring an effective planning system and in creating or safeguarding community wealth.

Community wealth building is, however, a very new concept and relatively difficult to capture in a couple of small paragraphs. It is suggested that planners have the opportunity to explore the concept of community wealth being as part of a wellbeing economy within their professional development.

In terms of the drafting of NPF4, it is important the wording is correct. **Community wealth building is far more likely to be delivered through planners supporting community-led approaches, community land ownership and micro enterprise than it is through ensuring, as policy 5(b) states, that “proposals for development within the categories of national developments and major developments should contribute to community wealth building objectives.”**

A more proactive wording is therefore suggested as below:

a) *Development plans should address **community wealth building** priorities by reflecting a ~~people-centred approach to local economic development~~ supporting a community-led approach to local economic development through the production of local place plans. Spatial strategies should support community wealth building; address economic disadvantage and inequality; and provide added social value.*

b) *Proposals for development within the categories of national developments and major developments should **contribute to community wealth building objectives***

*(c) A presumption in favour of community-led local development should be applied.*

#### Policy 6: Design, quality and place

**Q 28: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL ENABLE THE PLANNING SYSTEM TO PROMOTE DESIGN, QUALITY AND PLACE?**

No comment

#### Policy 7: Local living

**Q 29: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY SUFFICIENTLY ADDRESSES THE NEED TO SUPPORT LOCAL LIVING?**

20 Minute Neighbourhoods as a preferred planning method. 20 Minute Neighbourhoods require a certain level of population density to achieve outcomes and are therefore wholly inappropriate for rural and island community planning.

**We would suggest any reference to 20 Minute Neighbourhoods in relation to rural and island places is removed with a specific, 'living well locally' method introduced instead.**

Planning must explicitly support the facilities, including housing types, shared centres and homes, that underpin a thriving local care sector. This is particularly critical for island communities.

## Policy 8: Infrastructure First

### **Q 30: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY ENSURES THAT WE MAKE BEST USE OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND TAKE AN INFRASTRUCTURE-FIRST APPROACH TO PLANNING?**

We suggest that current housing and existing buildings should be recognised as part of infrastructure in line with the Infrastructure Commission recommendations.

Furthermore and as previously stated, in rural and island communities infrastructure and services (including digital connectivity, roads, schools, healthcare and public transport) have had insufficient investment and in many cases have actually been stripped back in recent years. This has a negative impact on these communities' abilities to live well locally. Focusing development only on places with sufficient infrastructure will result in further decline in rural and island areas instead of strengthening them.

## Policy 9: Quality homes

### **Q 31: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY MEETS THE AIMS OF SUPPORTING THE DELIVERY OF HIGH QUALITY, SUSTAINABLE HOMES THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES?**

We support a plan-led approach to housing needs but **we call for active promotion of public/community-led partnerships rather than the current developer-led approach which is not working, especially in rural and island areas.**

Rural and island areas offer opportunities to create affordable housing developments which encompass local food production, shared working space, renewable energy generation, community heat and mutuality. There was an expectation that Policy 9 would:

1. Re-focus development towards brownfield sites and reusing existing buildings, taking account of the whole life carbon footprint of buildings and infrastructure, not just the 'operational' carbon associated with heat, power and transport. (These are recommendations also of Scotland's Climate Assembly).
2. Re-balance the house building market towards small scale developers and communities who deliver mixed type affordable stock. Mechanisms to achieve this include making land available within Local Development Plans specifically for affordable housing and introducing a presumption in favour of community led housing in remote or deprived areas where market incentives are low.

On point 1, **Policy 9 may be strengthened by linking it more explicitly to Policy 30: Vacant and Derelict Land.** This could be included as a redraft of 9(b):

*2 (b) A deliverable housing land pipeline should be established for the Housing Land Requirement in line with Policy 30 on vacant and derelict land.*

On point 2, Policy 9(c) states that in rural or island areas authorities are "encouraged to set out tailored approaches to housing which reflect locally specific market circumstances."

**Policy 9(c) directive needs to be strengthened and the word 'encouraged' replaced**

**with the word 'should' -**

*In rural and island areas, authorities ~~are encouraged to~~ **should** set out tailored approaches to housing **in line with Policy 31** which reflect locally specific market circumstances and delivery approaches.*

In 9 (e) **we suggest there is an additional clause in the statement which requests developers to identify how they are contributing to community wealth building objectives.** There also needs to be a process involving communities in scrutinising the community benefit statement specifically.

We welcome the policy support for homes in rural places outside of local plan designation under 9 i) 4th bullet point: "the proposal is consistent with policy on rural places; "

We support the Law Society of Scotland's assessment that **there is insufficient content within the draft NPF4 as to the housing needs of older and disabled people**, an obligation on Scottish Ministers to monitor and report on. This is particularly surprising given the demographic trends apparent in Scotland, in particular in rural and island communities. We suggest policy 9 should set out clearly the needs in terms of housing, both quality and quantity, and how these needs will be met at local level.

**Section 9(g) which covers Gypsy/Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites is written in a way that amounts to discrimination**, putting in place ambiguous and arguably insurmountable criteria for the establishment of permanent or temporary sites. The word "judgement" is not used in planning and does not appear under any section of the draft NPF4 other than 9(g) which notes that "judgements should focus on the acceptability of the development being proposed."

## Policy 10: Sustainable transport

### **Q 32: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL REDUCE THE NEED TO TRAVEL UNSUSTAINABLY, DECARBONISE OUR TRANSPORT SYSTEM AND PROMOTE ACTIVE TRAVEL CHOICES?**

While we welcome and agree with the aims and overall approach of this policy it is critical that it provides planners with flexibility to apply a place-based approach in rural and island areas. There is potential for Policy 10 to conflict with the statutory outcome of NPF4 to increase the population of rural and island areas and the statutory outcome to improve inequality and address discrimination.

For this reason, we would like to see specific mention of Policy 31 within Policy 10, for example:

Policy 10 (b) *The spatial strategy should reflect the sustainable travel hierarchy and transport investment hierarchy by making best use of existing infrastructure and services ~~and also help to~~. **It should help to deliver 20 minute neighbourhoods in urban areas and to deliver on Policy 31 in rural and island areas.***

Policy 10 (c) must also take cognisance of the cumulative impact of certain developments on generating increasing numbers of person trips for example, developments that support tourism such as the North Coast 500. There is a risk that planners will be running to catch up on these types of multi-faceted developments.

#### Policy 11: Heat and cooling

##### **Q 33: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP US ACHIEVE ZERO EMISSIONS FROM HEATING AND COOLING OUR BUILDINGS AND ADAPT TO CHANGING TEMPERATURES?**

We would expect this polict to link to the Scottish Government's Heat in Buildings Strategy.

#### Policy 12: Blue and green infrastructure, play and sport

##### **Q 34: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP TO MAKE OUR PLACES GREENER, HEALTHIER, AND MORE RESILIENT TO CLIMATE CHANGE BY SUPPORTING AND ENHANCING BLUE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROVIDING GOOD QUALITY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY AND SPORT?**

Rural and island communities, especially those in the Central Urban strategy area, report an ongoing erosion of play opportunities, of greenspaces and of sports facilities due to volume housebuilding and other major developments. **While we welcome the focus of Policy 12, we feel it offers limited protection to existing facilities and a weak lever to create new facilities.**

We have significant concern, for example, that the responsibility for identifying new, enhanced provision or improved access to play opportunities for children lies with the local development plan with no expectation placed on major development proposals to be proactive about this.

We also note that many of the directives are open to interpretation. For example 12(c) states that "*Development proposals that result in fragmentation or net loss of existing blue and green infrastructure should not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the overall integrity of the network of blue and green infrastructure will be maintained*" without any guidance on how you assess 'net loss' and what 'overall integrity' might mean.

**We would also like to see specific provisions on infratsructure, not just for children, but also for the general public and in particular older and disabled people.** to enable them live independently and access opportunities. This includes infrastructure such as benches, railings and public toilets.

### Policy 13: Sustainable flood risk and water management

#### **Q 35: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP TO ENSURE PLACES ARE RESILIENT TO FUTURE FLOOD RISK AND MAKE EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF WATER RESOURCES?**

Similar to Policy 12, **there are several directives where we feel more detail is required to avoid loopholes.** This includes clarity on what will qualify as 'essential infrastructure' and how 'essential' is to be defined.

In part 13(b), we are unclear what 'water compatible uses' refers to. Also in 13(b) we question whether 'redevelopment of an existing building or site' includes substantial alterations to existing buildings i.e. converting a smaller building into a block of flats? If such a redeveloped site has an existing flood protection scheme in place, how will it be established that the existing scheme is sufficiently effective or if it requires modification/upgrading?

Scottish Environment LINK also suggest that the final **NPF4 incorporates green roofs as a drainage solution.** For example, by following the lead of Switzerland and mandating green roofs for developments of a certain size. Green roofs not only slow the flow of water to the sewerage system, but they also insulate buildings, reducing the heating and cooling required throughout the year. In addition, if designed correctly they can provide biodiversity benefits. If we combine this with the French approach of 30% of new commercial and industrial buildings to have solar panels, then it could make a huge difference to water management, energy use, and biodiversity. We feel this proposal would have particular resonance in rural and island areas.

### Policies 14 and 15: Health, wellbeing and safety

#### **Q 36: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL ENSURE PLACES SUPPORT HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SAFETY, AND STRENGTHEN THE RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES.**

While we welcome policy 14 and policy 15, we note policy 14 deals with such broad and complex matters as air quality, noise and adverse health effects. The inclusion under section 14(e) of a very specific directive on community food growing is positive as community food growing has demonstrable positive impact on mental and physical wellbeing even if it does not contribute significantly to food production and food security.

**We suggest that there should be a separate policy on food growing/production which puts responsibility for this activity to be considered within local development plans and that this new policy is linked to Policy 14 and other, related policies.**

### Policy 16: Land and premises for business and employment

#### **Q 37: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY ENSURES PLACES SUPPORT NEW AND EXPANDED BUSINESSES AND INVESTMENT, STIMULATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PROMOTE ALTERNATIVE**

## WAYS OF WORKING IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A GREEN RECOVERY AND BUILD A WELLBEING ECONOMY?

We particularly welcome 16(c) which states specifically that proposals for home-working, live-work units and micro-businesses should be supported.

We suggest adding to 16(c) community and social businesses as these are sometimes not regarded under the banner of a 'micro-business', i.e.

*Development proposals for home-working, live-work units and, micro-businesses, community-owned and social enterprise businesses*

*should be supported where it can be demonstrated that the scale and nature of the proposed business will be compatible with the surrounding area and there will be no unacceptable impacts on neighbouring uses.*

There needs to be more explicit pull-through between this policy and Policy 30 on vacant and derelict land.

### Policy 17: Sustainable tourism

#### **Q 38: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP TO INSPIRE PEOPLE TO VISIT SCOTLAND, AND SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WHICH BENEFITS LOCAL PEOPLE AND IS CONSISTENT WITH OUR NET-ZERO AND NATURE COMMITMENTS?**

We are broadly supportive of this policy which goes some way towards recognising that tourism and local communities do not sit in isolation. **Small amendments to the text will deliver quick wins on multiple policy levels**, for example in 17(a) and 17(b)–

*(a) Local development plans should support the resilience of the tourism sector, including by identifying proposals for tourism development which reflect sector and community driven tourism strategies.*

*(b) Development proposals for new or extended tourist facilities or accommodation, including caravan and camping sites, should be supported in locations that can contribute to the viability, sustainability and diversity of the local economy and community.*

**Certain concepts, including what constitutes a 'tourism facility' require a sharper definition.**

In addition, **we would support the further development of Short Term Let Control Area Orders and similar mechanisms that can be used by communities to manage their tourism accommodation offering** in a way that benefits the sector, the tourists and the local population and environment.

## Policy 18: Culture and creativity

### **Q 39: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY SUPPORTS OUR PLACES TO REFLECT AND FACILITATE ENJOYMENT OF, AND INVESTMENT IN, OUR COLLECTIVE CULTURE AND CREATIVITY?**

**We would like to see a statement linking culture and creativity to community wealth building.**

**We would like to see Policy 18(a) amended to include access to culture:**

*Local development plans should recognise and support opportunities for jobs and investment in the creative sector, culture, heritage and the arts as well as opportunities to improve public access to cultural and creative offerings.*

We would like to see Policy 18(b) amended to include heritage and history as well as public art:

*Development proposals should seek to make provision for public art, local heritage and history where they involve a significant change to, or the creation of new, public open spaces.*

In 18(d) we would question who is defining the loss of a venue/arts space as not of significant cultural value?

Lastly, Policy 18 and NPF4 should actively make provisions to promote local languages and linked culture including the Gaelic language and culture.

## Policy 19: Green energy

### **Q 40: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL ENSURE OUR PLACES SUPPORT CONTINUED EXPANSION OF LOW CARBON AND NET-ZERO ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES AS A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO NET-ZERO EMISSIONS BY 2045?**

Policy 19(a) must be reworded to include consideration of community wellbeing and community wealth. The emphasis on LDPs ensuring that an “area’s full potential for electricity and heat from renewable sources is achieved” without the caveat that this must benefit the local community opens up the possibility of exploitation by external developers.

*a) Local development plans should seek to ensure that an area’s full potential for electricity and heat from renewable sources is achieved. Opportunities for new development, extensions and repowering of existing renewable energy developments should be supported where they contribute to local community wealth.*



Policy 19(a) exclusively focuses on local production rather local use through district heating systems or other networks. We would suggest adding a second paragraph:

*Local development plans should also seek to ensure that an **area's full potential for local use of electricity generated**, for example through district heating systems, micro-grids and similar networks or technology, is achieved.*

Policy 19(c) and (e) use guarded language when describing onshore windfarms. Outwith certain protected and wild areas, such developments should be supported unless their impact is 'unacceptable.' **The concept of 'unacceptable' requires further clarification.**

Further alignment between Policy 19 and Policy 5 on community wealth building is required. We agree with the revised wording for 19(k) proposed by Community Land Scotland:

*k) Specific considerations will vary relative to the scale of the proposal and area characteristics but development proposals for renewable energy developments must take into account:*

- *net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities, and opportunities to build community wealth through socially just use of land.*

## Policy 20: Zero waste

**Q 41: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP OUR PLACES TO BE MORE RESOURCE EFFICIENT, AND TO BE SUPPORTED BY SERVICES AND FACILITIES THAT HELP TO ACHIEVE A CIRCULAR ECONOMY?**

We are concerned that this policy is very ambiguous and therefore will not achieve the desired outcome of 'zero waste'. It is not, for example, clear what a 'decarbonisation strategy' is and how it should be evidenced.

Furthermore, there is a need to provide **specific guidance on what type of infrastructure should be considered within Local Development Plans** as necessary to support a circular economy. Zero waste is ONE aspect of circular economies. The "circular" part needs to be addressed beyond the focus on transporting waste away and recycling, or dumping it/recovering energy.

There is a need to recognise that circular economies work best on a hyperlocal level. This means ensuring that waste management facilities are situated as close to the community using them as practicable. The Small Isles, for example, would prefer to see their food waste processed and used locally than transported to Fort William. This is a view echoed by residents of Fort William.

Specific type of waste such as marine litter require specific local infrastructure for management, such as marine litter collection points, and this should be explicitly considered within the policy.

Managing waste is one aspect of a circular economy but there is also another aspect, specifically shortening supply chains with respect to food, raw materials, energy etc. production, consumption and repurposing/reuse.

There are relevant policies on energy production but none on food production. **We strongly recommend that the policy Handbook includes a specific policy on Food Production which links to local authority food strategies.**

## Policy 21: Aquaculture

### **Q 42: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL SUPPORT INVESTMENT IN AQUACULTURE AND MINIMISE ITS POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT?**

No and furthermore ,we do not believe there is a justification for excluding fish farms from the biodiversity obligations under Policy 3.

As our colleagues in the Coastal Communities Network will likely highlight, aquaculture is an anomaly in NPF4, which primarily concerns terrestrial development. Terrestrial planning does not need to deal with the sea's ability to spread the impact of developments over large distances, leading to wide-ranging cumulative effects.

NPF4 has to recognise this in the drafting of Policy 21.

NPF4 should also subdivide finfish farming into different types - at present it means only open net farming. When the environment is changing so quickly it is unwise to adopt a planning policy statement that supports all kinds of finfish farming through to 2045. Scottish Ministers should take this opportunity to join the leaders of Canada, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Argentina, Australia (Tasmania) and the USA (Washington State), in making changes to the methods used to farm fish. These countries are being much more careful about the types of farming they will support, and they are providing reasons for farm operators to transition away from harmful open net methods.

NPF4 must also define 'offshore'. The salmon farming industry argues that this definition should include sites close to the shore, in high current flow locations, where pollution from much larger farms can be more widely dispersed.

It is critical within this Policy that an enabling environment is introduced for small scale, low environmental impact aquaculture projects such as seaweed and shellfish farming. Early consultation is required to regulate seaweed farming and protect this industry from exploitation from large scale, extractive developers.

### Policy 22: Minerals

**Q 43: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES AND MINIMISE THE IMPACTS OF EXTRACTION OF MINERALS ON COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT?**

No comment

### Policy 23: Digital infrastructure

**Q 44: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY ENSURES ALL OF OUR PLACES WILL BE DIGITALLY CONNECTED?**

We welcome the enabling language around ensuring all available technologies and approaches are supported to improve digital connectivity and futureproof infrastructure.

It is important that Policy 23 pulls through to the National Development 6: Digital Fibre Network and ensures the Development promotes non-fibre installations where fibre is not possible.

### Policies 24 to 27: Distinctive places

**Q 45: DO YOU AGREE THAT THESE POLICIES WILL ENSURE SCOTLAND'S PLACES WILL SUPPORT LOW CARBON URBAN LIVING?**

Under Policy 25 there is a need to look at the infrastructure for online retail distribution as this is critical to the evolving sector.

### Policy 28: Historic assets and places

**Q 46: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, AND SUPPORT THE RE-USE OF REDUNDANT OR NEGLECTED HISTORIC BUILDINGS?**

No comment

### Policy 29: Urban edges and the green belt

**Q 47: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL INCREASE THE DENSITY OF OUR SETTLEMENTS, RESTORE NATURE AND PROMOTE LOCAL LIVING BY LIMITING URBAN EXPANSION AND USING THE LAND AROUND OUR TOWNS AND CITIES WISELY?**

It is critical that the term 'green belt' is specifically defined and that any tensions between Policy 29 and Policy 31, both of which could conceivably cover the same land, are addressed.

### Policy 30: Vacant and derelict land

**Q 48: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP TO PROACTIVELY ENABLE THE REUSE OF VACANT AND DERELICT LAND AND BUILDINGS?**

We support this policy but note there needs to be more explicit pull-through between Policy 30 and Policy 16.

### Policy 31: Rural places

**Q 49: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL ENSURE THAT RURAL PLACES CAN BE VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE?**

We do not agree. Like the responses put forward by Community Land Scotland and others, it is necessary this policy effectively delivers the rural repopulation outcome required under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as modified through the 2019 Planning Act. Though this outcome is about increasing the rural and island population, it is also necessary that this increase is demographically balanced and sustainable.

There are tensions between the repopulation/repeopling outcome and the environmental/local living outcomes. NPF4 should address these tensions and provide planners with meaningful guidance on how to make decisions.

**To this end, we propose that each action area of the Spatial Strategy includes and action to *Create a Balanced and Sustainable Rural Population*.**

Policy 31(a) requests of planners to identify, in local development plans, "accessible, intermediate and remote areas across the mainland and islands." What these categories mean is not defined and they are not aligned with the Scottish Government's Urban Rural Classification System. **We suggest removing the requirement for planners to identify "accessible, intermediate and remote areas."**

Other parts of Policy 31 introduce further rural and island area concepts, such as "areas under pressure or in decline", "fragile" areas, and "previously inhabited areas". These

areas will all be difficult to define, implement, and monitor. The invention of new, un-defined rural area policy concepts is both unhelpful and likely to conflict with the policy goals. **Instead of directing the planning system to create a raft of new rural and island categories, a better approach would be to emphasise the place principle and incentivise community-led approaches**, so that communities can work with planning authorities to create locally appropriate development proposals.

This would align with our proposed wording for Policy 5 on Community Wealth Building.

Policy 31(b) states that “Development proposals that support the resettlement of previously inhabited areas should be supported where the proposal is consistent with climate change mitigation targets” is welcome but requires further clarifications:

- **‘previously inhabited areas’ is not defined** so it is not clear how this will be applied, and consequently will be difficult to implement.
- **‘consistent with climate change mitigation’** needs clarification to ensure that recognition of contemporary best practice in nature conservation informs this policy, specifically the fact that **addressing climate change and biodiversity loss through the management of land requires a cooperative balance of natural and human use of that land.**

Policy 31(c) - we would agree with these bullet points but would ask that the final two bullets are amended as follows:

- *housing; or provide affordable housing on a small site that ~~may not normally be used for housing~~ is not within the local development plan but where it can be shown that there is an ~~significant~~ unmet local need for affordable housing and local community support for this site being used;*
- *contribute towards sustainable ~~settlements and 20 minute neighbourhoods~~ communities, the improvement of sustainable transport options, or propose small-scale rural settlement patterns such as those supported by Rural Housing Scotland, the Communities Housing Trust and South of Scotland Community Housing. .*

There is potential conceptual overlap between “good quality land” (Policy 31 d), “prime agricultural land” and “land of a cultural/local significance” (Policy 31 h) which needs to be addressed and qualified. While we are supportive of the planning systems approach to protecting land for food production, it is important to note that the designation of some land as ‘prime’ excludes significant areas which might fall slightly short of ‘prime’ yet be “good quality” and have significant capacity to contribute to food security.

There needs to be explicit consideration and support for woodland crofts in Policy 31 linked to Policy 34.

There is a notable absence of any alignment between Policy 31 and Policy 10. Vibrant rural places cannot be uncoupled from transport.

There is also a need to fully align Policy 31 with Policy 29 on Urban Edges and the Green Belt as the land dealt with under each policy could conceivably be the same.

### Policy 32: Natural places

#### **Q 50: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL PROTECT AND RESTORE NATURAL PLACES?**

We support the submission of Community Land Scotland below:

Policy 32 does not reflect contemporary nature conservation best practice and its implementation has the potential to have significant negative impacts on rural dwellers, including for the individual and community rights for access to housing and for the sustainable development of their local areas.

Contemporary best practice thinking in nature conservation understands conservation as a cooperative balance of natural and human use, not an imposed artificial concept of wildness. There is emerging good practice on this work, such as in Loch Lomond National Park, and a robust system of other nature conservation designations. There is no need for additional planning weight to be given to wild land areas in the NPF4.

32 (i) in its entirety should be deleted.

### Policy 33: Peat and carbon rich soils

#### **Q 51: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY PROTECTS CARBON RICH SOILS AND SUPPORTS THE PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF PEATLANDS?**

There is strong support amongst our members for banning both fracking and peat extraction. We question the exemption on peat extraction to 'support an industry of national importance to Scotland.' This provision is too unspecific and leaves loopholes in the application of this policy.

### Policy 34: Trees, woodland and forestry

#### **Q 52: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL EXPAND WOODLAND COVER AND PROTECT EXISTING WOODLAND?**

There needs to be explicit consideration of support for woodland crofts within this policy linked to Policy 31.

### Policy 35: Coasts

#### **Q 53: DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP OUR COASTAL AREAS ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF COASTAL COMMUNITIES?**

There should be stronger links within this policy with a revised and updated National Marine Plan. The option of marine national parks should be supported.

## Part 4 – Delivery

### Delivering our spatial strategy

#### **Q 54: DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSED PRIORITIES FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE SPATIAL STRATEGY?**

No comment

#### **Q 55: DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS ON THE DELIVERY OF THE SPATIAL STRATEGY?**

Firstly it is critical that NPF4 includes consideration of Community Councils and their role in the planning system as well as the resourcing of the planning system itself. Specialist roles within planning teams or the wider Council, for example Repopulation Officers, should be considered.

The draft policies appear to require a number of additional assessments to be undertaken as part of assessing planning applications. This is potentially fairly burdensome, with burdens resting on planning authorities and/or development itself. The extent to which additional content in the consideration of planning applications is expected is unclear.

Complexity in the planning system will favour those with time, money and recourse to expensive legal support. They can clog the already stretched planning system with appeals and special pleadings but ultimately it is their fees and contributions which keep the system financed.

What we need is a simplified planning system which is able to deal with small scale and community applications quickly and efficiently. This means that creativity is not stifled, and time is not wasted as costs of materials inevitably rise. It also means that the positive potential of planning is accessible to all.