



BEFS Workshop Report

Initial consultation on the National Planning Framework 2

held on 26th April 2007 at the offices of the RTPI, Edinburgh.

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Introduction

The workshop took place on Thursday 26th April 2007 and was attended by ten individuals and representatives of organisations with an interest in the National Planning Framework 2.

The purpose of the workshop was to provide an opportunity for discussion on the key themes identified in the 'Small Country, Big Plans' document. BEFS is grateful to Graeme Purves of the Scottish Executive Planning and Building Department for his input into the event. A summary of his presentation is contained in the report.

Presentation – Key Points

Graeme Purves, lead officer for NPF 2 gave a presentation on the background to NPF2 whilst presenting the key features and relevant issues contained within the framework, a summary of which is detailed below:-

“There should be a strengthened National Planning Framework which enables better direction, co-ordination and prioritisation of project and programme spend.”

Scottish Parliament Finance Committee, March 2005

White Paper: National Planning Framework

- Enhanced role and status
- Powerful delivery instrument
- National developments
- Extensive consultation
- Opportunity for Parliamentary Scrutiny

Planning (Scotland) Act 2006

- Duty to contribute to sustainable development
- Participation Statement
- Extended Period for Parliamentary scrutiny

Strategic Environment Assessment

- Legal Requirement
- Scoping Report
 - Content
 - Context
- Current state of environment
- Methodology for developing/testing alternatives

SEA is a key input not a determinant of policy.

Sustainability: Spatial Planning Issues

- Duty of Sustainable Development
- Contribution of framework to reducing carbon emissions
- Implications of climate change
- National Developments

Economy: Spatial Planning Issues

- Nature of Economic Growth
- Geography of growth and regeneration
- Connectivity and complementarity
- Infrastructure investment
- Operation of the housing market
- Quality of places

Initial Discussion

Clarification was sought from the floor on the Executive's definition of 'sustainability' as no definition had been given within the Planning Framework documents. Graeme Purves (GP) concluded that he was happy with the Brundtland definition of 'sustainable development' which included the natural and cultural environments. GP reported that the Executive was issuing statutory guidance on sustainable development and that this guidance would provide more meat on the bones in relation to actual definitions.

Robin Turner welcomed the European Landscape Convention definition of sustainable development which encompassed the whole breadth of environment.

Clarification was sought on the definition of the Executive's 'best value' policy. It was confirmed that best value policy was promoted within the Executive; there were now times when a decision was taken which did not always support the tenderer with the lowest figure, but allowed other factors to be part of a best value framework. The Executive's Strategic Environment Assessments will assist in the monitoring of the environmental effects of public sector strategies, plans and programmes. The prospect was welcomed that carbon might now be recognised as a form of 'currency' by the Executive and to go beyond solely monetary values.

It was confirmed by GP that national developments listed within the National Planning Framework would be selected by means of a criteria based approach rather than a scale threshold as in the Irish Republic. It has been left to the new administration within the Parliament to agree the guidance for the selection of national developments.

It was reported by GP that the National Planning Framework has implication for the broad spatial dimension with some aspects not falling under the Planning Act e.g. NPF 1 rolled out the widespread implementation of Broadband.

It was felt from the floor that there was a danger in over-simplifying the trading in carbon reduction with a need to take on board all the diverse elements of potential impact on the environment e.g. tree-planting, air-travel. It was hoped that SNH and the Forestry Commission would explore effects and issues which may arise in relation to reducing the carbon footprint and it was felt to be essential that the NPF should have the scope to address any of these potential issues.

GP was asked if and how the Executive planned to pull together existing strategies in transport, sustainability and the framework for economic development which naturally informed the NPF. It was felt that perhaps a matrix, cross referencing the common

targets and priorities embedded within the complimentary policies would enable a more coherent approach to strategy and joined up thinking – a national plan. It was felt that a co-ordinated approach to place-making in major places was required. It was essential that the priorities and strategies in the NPF related to government funding; were tied to spending plans and so were not seen as purely aspirational but also practical.

It was confirmed by GP that any change in political administration would not change the overall trajectory of the NPF but that priorities within the document may be adjusted to accommodate the political views of the time.

It was thought that government spend within NPF 1 had not gone far enough and that NPF 2 would be supported by an action plan component where priorities would feed into the Executive's infrastructure plan.

It was hoped that NPF 2 would complement the Scottish Minister's vision and key principles for the support and protection of the historic environment as set out in SHEP 1 published earlier this year.

It was felt to be important that place-making was not only about good places for people to live in but also about the need to incorporate local community values and consider the industrial heritage relevant to that place. In relation to this point it was felt that NPF2 should make more reference to the European Landscape Convention.

Starting Point for Some Participants

Participants were asked by way of introduction to discussion what their specific interest was in relation to the National Planning Framework. The following interests were given:-

- Quality of place at strategic level incorporating geography issues and patterns.
- Quality of design and affordable housing.
- The need for an audit to enable the proper recording of archaeology and proper management of what is to be kept.
- Quality of interventions that take place within the heritage sector.
- Sense of place: the proper recognition of the past in shaping the future.
Regeneration of town around existing historic assets.

Key Issues from Discussions within Break-out Groups

The following issues were raised by the Break-out Groups in relation to the following themes: Sustainability, Connectivity, Economics, Community, National Developments, and some broader themes.

Sustainability

Recognising the role of the Built Environment in sustainable development:

- 'Big Plans' document recognises the natural environment but doesn't name the built environment, or recognise how the historic and contemporary built environment can contribute to sustainable development.
- The need for clear definition of sustainability to balance the difficult tension that sometimes exists between heritage and development issues.
- Recognition that different models of sustainable development may be required to prevent 'compact cities' emerging.
- BEFS needs to shape a concept of 'sustainable place' – integrated mixtures/ supporting services.

The challenges of planning for sustainable development:

- How can the NPF2 tackle the challenges and contradictions of sustainable development e.g. high speed rail link, may promote train travel, but may also support ribbon development; nuclear power stations or bio-mass? Inevitably one perspective will be favoured by default – economic vitality or community/quality of life. How will politics come into this?
- A two-way process between the Executive and Local Authorities and Planning Departments is crucial in fostering innovation and good practice within the built environment.
- How do we balance economics and community; using good agricultural land, for instance, for house building? Developers lobby to use more land, but this is not a planning process; this shouldn't lead planning. Economic development benefits developers, but is not necessarily a benefit to communities. The pressure for growth does not necessarily lead to a 'designed solution'
- Development of housing whether in the Highlands or from Glasgow into Lanarkshire need to be design-led, not by default – led through economic forces alone.
- Dangers of consuming villages and countryside e.g. the urban ribbon development along the railway lines from London.

Diversity and sustainability:

- The need for the NPF2 to reflect the diversity and richness of Scotland's towns and regions.
- Recognition of diversity within cities.
- Recognition of diversity within regions.

Understanding the range of resources available:

- NPF 2 to highlight geography of resources – more information on the historic environment.
- Importance of developing the use of natural materials, which will support the maintenance of the historic environment.
- Understanding the value of brown-field sites – these affect our landscapes and townscapes.
- Not just about planning but also about types of land-use.
- 95% of archaeological sites aren't listed or scheduled ... but are still significant.

Challenges for carbon reduction:

- Carbon offset. Lots of trees could be planted but this is not always a good thing.

- Should there be trade-offs? For example, loss of greenbelt in one place, but gained in another.
- Climate change and low carbon or no carbon technology/approaches – both for new and for retro-fitting.
- The spatial element within NPF2 must address the threat of climate change in coastal archaeology – The SCAPE Trust and Historic Scotland have done some work on this.

Connectivity

Protecting historic transport routes:

- The need to consider historic transport routes when considering the development of strategic routes so the historic connection is not lost.
- Historic routes are hidden or large parts are lost on A1.

Consulting:

- The need to consult local people on transport issues.

Specific ideas:

- Presently we are relying on the rest of UK for links.
- Fast car lane to London.
- Fast rail links.
- The planned Borders/Waverly line, will it support communities in the Borders? Or move people out of Edinburgh into the Borders who will need more houses, spaces to park at the Station, and will change the existing places.

Community

Empowering communities to participate:

- The empowerment of local people should be seen as a national priority. This could be done through education which can foster a personal connection to the local environment leading to informed local decision-making.
- The creative use of technology and information to inform visitors to landscapes and places i.e. commentary around a landscape or historic environment - also good for economic growth.
- Recognition of participatory democracy as well as parliamentary democracy.
- Empowering communities to be involved in the planning process, and sitting Historic Environment protection within such planning e.g. regional plans; also importance of casework and the involvement of local organisations in advising on planning decisions.

National policy-making for quality place-making:

- Quality of place-making: need to consider density, services, jobs; draw tighter boundaries, avoid sprawl, to generate more sustainable, better communities. But how do you tackle this at a larger level, to make change effective at a local level?
- HE sector needs to be part of the monitoring process of a new NPF. Likewise communities need education, to support greater participation.
- The need to underpin our understanding of local and regional distinctiveness.
- The need for NPF2 to relate to the Culture Policy in the implementation of cultural change.

Place-making and good design:

- Communities need to be a certain size, or have a certain settlement density, in order to be sustainable; too small they need other communities, too large and they consume other communities.
- Using battlefields or old buildings as the focus for good design of places – as an approach to designing places.
- See heritage as a legacy; making heritage opportunities for the future.
- Quality of place-making; use of heritage, quality of life, partnerships, the economy
- 'Place-mending' as well as 'Place-making' what needs maintaining? What is detrimental?

Economy

The role of the Built Environment in supporting the economy:

- The historic environment is not usually understood as a driver for development; the contemporary built environment responds to need but is not usually a driver of it – it is support implementation.
- The role of architecture and the historic environment as an economic driver through tourism, and also through developing good places to live in to attract people with key skills to come and work there and support the economy
- Economic development such as tourism can bring mixed results; tourists with money to support the local economy; transient work-forces and poor working conditions; facilities that local people get limited use of.
- Develop technology/information related services to provide knowledge on places without the use of a guide but perhaps by downloading relevant information from a relevant web-site e.g. Google earth.

National Developments

What is a national development?

- What counts as a National Development? Large (national) nuclear power station(s) or, a nationwide approach such as a series of community heating schemes?
- Cultural Landscapes – importance of protecting battlefields and archaeological sites; likewise the benefits of landscapes and bio-diversity – how can these be seen as a national development?

Tools for understanding national development:

- An evaluation of landscapes focussing on the landscape's character, its value and significance.
- There is a need to have the right tools to make good decisions which requires better information, knowledge and recording of places and the built environment.

Examples of national developments:

- Falkirk Wheel merits itself as being considered a 'national development'.
- Renewables in a national context.
- Marine National Park – designation and protection.

Broader Comments

The crucial role of the Built Environment in NPF 2:

- Need for a higher profile or greater visibility for the contemporary and historic built environments within NPF 2.
- Where does the built environment fit – it cuts across the broad policy themes

Ongoing participation in National Planning Frameworks:

- Expand knowledge base of stakeholders and communities in order to respond at a national level.
- Feedback process on the new NPF; how will good and poor practice be recognised, and fed back to stakeholders?

Key issues for a good planning system to consider:

- Is a speedier planning system good or bad? Gets things done efficiently or fails to consult fully making bad decisions?
- Can good design quality be used as a platform to examine or cut across all four key themes in this consultation; likewise the concept of place-making.
- All four themes are needed - needs economic and social drivers.

The complexity of working on national planning issues:

- The difficulty of saying something definitive about planning. There are always pros and cons, and a range of potential outcomes or recommendations. Are we able at this point to identify the things that need to be in the NPF2?
- An NPF document is so wide that it is hard to be definitive – how can we safeguard design quality at such a large scale, and then apply successfully to local circumstances?
- Difficulty of working with both the broad brush strokes of national policy and the complexity of local detail.
- What are the non-negotiables, the central issues?

Other issues:

- SPPs (Scottish Planning Policy) and NPF – similar functions, which is the more important/powerful?
- Taxation on sale of land to fund quality design work.

Plenary Session

Sharing information on quality – what do we have, how do we assess it? Information needs to go both ways between communities and regions, on the one hand, and a national planning framework on the other.

Issues (pressures) of scale and developments of national importance – there can be choices between many small interventions and a few large; perhaps small-scale bio-mass plants or a large nuclear plant, or a whole series of archaeological sites as opposed to one larger concern. It can be easy to miss the small interventions and the role they have in sustainable development, and fail to see them as a nationwide project of national importance. A national development can be the more general development of more renewable power versus more nuclear power ... rather than a specific development; likewise agri-environment schemes – many small projects or a few big.

Strategic Environment Assessment: the SEA for NPF1 was seen to be thin. It was felt that there was a need for Strategic Environment Assessments to consider incremental developments and not just existing capacity. For instance, The SEA on NPF1 (2005) was suggesting in some cases that the impact on cultural heritage (but not just this) would be neutral or unknown, when clearly there was going to be an impact. More recent SEA should be giving more realistic assessments of environmental impacts of proposed planning policies such as road infrastructure; such changes are bound to impact on the existing cultural heritage resource.

There is now an SEA *scoping* report for the NPF 2 which will lead into a full environmental assessment that can be commented on. Both the development of this NPF2 and its accompanying SEA are long processes requiring both sufficient resources and high levels of skill. Government departments are seeking the necessary resources, and likewise NGOs will need resorting if they too are to bring their expertise into this process

One question from a participant: Is it possible for SEA to gauge the impact of different types of development? Doesn't it depend on where the development happens? E.g. with a nuclear power station; its impact will vary according to where it is sited?

Participants welcomed the opportunity to consult on the full SEA report once it is published.

Broader role and themes in NPF2:

- a *core statement* running through the document in relation to place-making and the need to preserve the past whilst making good places for the future; fundamental to the economic and social well-being of this nation.
- regarding as a *guiding light document*; needs to work with the high level principles e.g. how much energy do we need, rather than stating the specific vehicle e.g. renewable energy or nuclear power.

Importance of the built environment sector advocating within this NPF2 consultation process:

BEFS welcomed this opportunity for its members and stakeholders within the place-making community to consult with the Executive on the NPF2 and would do its best to carry the momentum experienced at this workshop until the NPF 2 was finally published. It is crucial that the sector brings its experience to the process and represents its concerns – we need to make sure the issues are raised and recognised.

Participating Organisations

ALGAO Scotland
Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland
Architecture + Design Scotland
Council for Scottish Archaeology
Institute of Field Archaeologists – Scottish Group
National Trust for Scotland
Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland
Royal Town Planning Institute