

A consultation on the future of the Scottish Planning System Response from Paths for All

KEY QUESTIONS

A: Do you agree that our proposed package of reforms will improve development planning? Please explain your answer.

We generally welcome the proposals, including the recognition of the value of regional planning and the positive outcomes that this can deliver for communities.

Our work supports the delivery of the Scottish Government's Active Scotland Outcomes Framework, National Walking Strategy and the Long-term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland, community and workplace health walking, path network development and active travel policy development.

Active Travel is about improving quality of life and quality of place. Our vision is for walking and cycling to be the natural choice for short journeys, creating a healthier, socially inclusive, economically vibrant, environmentally friendly Scotland.

We consider that the proposed reforms have the potential to improve development planning in Scotland and support the National Walking Strategy:

Let's Get Scotland Walking - The National Walking Strategy (NWS) and Planning

The National Walking Strategy sits within the context of the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework which describes the key outcomes desired for sport and physical activity in Scotland over the next ten years, National Planning Framework 3 and the Long-term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland 2030.

The National Walking Strategy makes the links between active travel, health and environment. It has three strategic aims:

- Create a culture of walking
- Better walking environments throughout Scotland
- Ensure easy, convenient independent mobility for all

The NWS Action Plan outlines some key game-changers. One of these is the role that planning can play in promoting multi-use development where people live in walkable proximity to employment and retail and through supporting the Town Centre First principle.

Planning is highlighted further in a strategic theme of the Action Plan which is to:

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“achieve better quality walking environments with attractive, well designed and managed built and natural spaces and places for everyone”.

Specific actions where planners can contribute are also contained in the action plan. They include:

- Prioritise and support good quality walking environments, including green infrastructure, through planning and development (land use,
- Ensure all households in Scotland’s urban areas are no more than 5 minutes’ walk from promoted, publicly accessible and attractive greenspace, parks or local path networks
- Ensure all future planning policies / developments prioritise walking
- Ensure designs for public and private developments deliver secure connectivity within communities for pedestrians
- Develop the capacity of locally based organisations, including community planning partnerships, to identify the scope for large and small improvements to the walking environment
- Ensure all local authorities, national park authorities and other land managers adopt the Path Grading System across Scotland
- The National Planning Framework, Scottish Planning Policy, development plans and development management processes should mainstream infrastructure and the right environments to encourage walking.
- Promote the Place Standard as a means of encouraging developments to mainstream walking in their design

A duty to promote walking and active travel

The proposed changes to the planning system offer an opportunity to mainstream walking in everyday life. We consider that current policies often say the right things but do not always, in practice, deliver on walking.

One option is for a specific mention of walking and active travel in the proposed legislation to give more weight to their promotion and ensure less scope for policies to be “watered down”. This could entail a duty to promote walking and active travel being placed on authorities. (see **Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013**)

Other issues

There is a need to clarify how the cooperation needed to deliver important infrastructure and development at the regional level will happen without Strategic Development Plans.

We agree that development plans should take account of wider community planning but the necessary skills and resources will need to be in place to successfully deliver the new style plans.

There will be a need to clarify the links between Community Plans and spatial planning.

We understand that the policy review will come later and we will also be pleased to participate in that.

We strongly support 1.7. The link between the development plan and community planning should ensure that local aspirations for active travel, healthy lifestyles and quality of place are

expressed through spatial planning. Core Paths Plans and wider path networks must be integrated into this process.

We agree with the aspiration that the National Planning Framework brings together wider Scottish Government policies. However, we suggest that the net is cast wider and that you include Transport Scotland's Long-term Vision for Active Travel, the National Walking Strategy, the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland and the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework.

There are clear links to be made with the review of the National Transport Strategy, the work of the Active Travel Task Force and the review of National Planning Framework.

KEY QUESTION

B: Do you agree that our proposed package of reforms will increase community involvement in planning? Please explain your answer.

We support the intention that a wider range of people – including young people - should be encouraged and inspired to get involved in planning. We agree the system should be more front loaded – encouraging early involvement.

The proposals appear to increase the opportunity for communities to engage in planning. Whether it does increase community involvement, will depend on how this is promoted and implemented and the capacity of communities to engage

We would support local place plans but would like clarification if these will be part of Community Planning Partnerships or separate.

Planners will need be in a position, with the right tools, to provide communities with the information they need about context and constraints such as the impacts of climate change. This will be essential to ensure that community plans are deliverable.

There will need to be a clear commitment to community development, empowerment and engagement if all communities are to be able to participate in the planning system. We would suggest that the use of the Place Standard is standard in all community consultation

KEY QUESTION

C: Will these proposals help to deliver more homes and the infrastructure we need? Please explain your answer.

We support the intention in 3.2 that health and improved quality of life is supported by well designed, functional places. Whilst we recognise the need to deliver more homes, if the homes do not allow for easy access to opportunities for walking and active travel to and from work, school, amenities etc there is a danger that we are creating increased future costs to our health system, reducing our community safety and increasing our emissions. This concern also applies to 3.4. It's not just about the numbers, it's about creating quality, sustainable, pleasant places for people to live.

We support 3.12 and the need for quality homes in the right location, with the appropriate infrastructure. This infrastructure must include the provision of walking and cycling opportunities. Indeed, we believe that one option is for a specific mention of walking and active travel in the proposed legislation to give more weight to their promotion and ensure less scope

for policies to be “watered down”. This could entail a duty to promote walking and active travel being places on authorities.

We understand the need for clarity on legislation and policy with regard to land acquisition, but are wary that this does not confuse the need for effective legislation to allow compulsory purchase of land to create effective safe, off-road, usable and accessible routes. There is a clear link between this work and the work of the new Active Travel Task Force that has been convened by the Transport Minister.

The infrastructure first approach is a welcome proposal. In particular we support the recognition in 3.29 that infrastructure is critical to the functioning of quality places and that people need choices about how they move around. This means priority given to walking and cycling, reduced priority for private cars. This could be extended to encompass other land-use and community planning strategic issues.

We welcome that 3.47 recognises the need for land use and transport planning to be integrated to ensure that their impact on connectedness, accessibility, and active travel are brought together and used to improve quality of place. We strongly agree that there is a clear link between this and the work of the Active Travel Task Force. However, reinforcing the need for walking as a quality of life issue, not just a transport issue is important in meeting the ‘place’ aspirations of the new arrangements.

We also welcome 3.48 - the recognition of the role of green infrastructure in supporting quality of life and sustaining the environment. As is noted in the consultation, the links between planning, place, environmental quality and health are very clear. We very much support the Place Standard approach to planning future development and regeneration and the implementation of Creating Places, Scotland’s Policy for Architecture and Place.

We are not clear how the Government will ensure that local authorities work together to decide where national housing needs will be met in the absence of Strategic Development Plans.

We would support introducing powers for a new local levy to raise additional finance for infrastructure in addition to Section 75 obligations. Enhanced infrastructure for walking and active travel should be prioritised.

We welcome innovative infrastructure planning (3.49) to deliver low carbon solutions, new digital technologies and the facilities that communities need. Whilst much emphasis is placed on new technologies, it is widely recognised that prioritising walking and active travel / sustainable travel is key to this.

KEY QUESTION

D: Do you agree the measures set out here will improve the way that the planning service is resourced? Please explain your answer.

Under developing skills to deliver outcomes (4.4) we would add: work with the profession to improve and broaden skills relating to walking, cycling and active travel.

We may have concerns over removal of the need for planning consent from a wider range of developments. Some tighter controls may be needed over some development currently covered by permitted development rights – e.g. hill tracks.

NEXT STEPS

Better planning of our built environments – including making them more walkable and suitable for active travel will reduce inequalities – particularly health inequalities.

April 2017

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