

PE1748/C

RTPI Scotland submission of 7 November 2019

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the champion of planning and the planning profession. We work to promote the art and science of planning for the public benefit. We have around 2,100 members in Scotland and a worldwide membership of over 25,000. We:

- support policy development to improve approaches to planning for the benefit of the public;
- maintain the professional standards of our members;
- support our members, and therefore the majority of the planning workforce, to have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver planning effectively;
- maintain high standards of planning education;
- develop and promote new thinking, ideas and approaches which can improve planning;
- support our membership to work with others who have a role in developing places in Scotland; and
- improve the understanding of planning and the planning system to policy makers, politicians, practitioners and the general public.

The Institute is grateful to the Committee for the invitation to comment on Petition 1748, 'Provide protection for small communities in Scottish planning policy'. Outlined below are examples of where in current Scottish Planning policy the issues raised by the Petitioner are addressed, and opportunities in the near future for influencing renewal and implementation of this policy.

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide specific provision within the National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) and the Scottish Planning Policy for small communities which provides for a pre-development community asset and infrastructure audit when an area is identified as being able to accommodate large-scale, urban growth

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) requires assessment of various categories of 'community assets and infrastructure' in relation to proposed new development in all locations and at all scales, through both the development planning and development management processes. Principally, paragraph 40 of Scottish Planning Policy says 'Planning should direct development to the right place', and that decisions should be guided by a series of policy principles, including 'optimising the use of existing resources'. Other examples of relevant paragraphs include 224 and 230, which give outline the approach that should be taken to open space, and 272 and 286, which deal with transport.

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide specific provision within the National Planning Framework 3 (NPF 3) and the Scottish Planning Policy for small communities which protects areas considered by its community to be high value scenic assets and at risk of the coalescence of communities.

Paragraphs 196 to 201 of SPP provide a framework for making landscape designations, including local designations, through the development planning process. Paragraph 197 in particular states that ‘the purpose of areas of local landscape value should be to safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally’.

‘Coalescence’ is an issue dealt with by green belt policy, which is outlined in paragraphs 49 and 50 of SPP.

Future opportunities to influence Scottish Planning Policy

The renewal of the National Planning Framework (NPF) that is currently underway will incorporate renewal of SPP, as the new look NPF will include both policy and a spatial expression of Scotland’s national developments to 2050. As a result of changes brought about by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 the new NPF will also form part of the statutory development plan. This means that planning decisions will have to be taken in line with it, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The preparation of the new NPF will be an important opportunity for all planning stakeholders – communities and professionals alike – to influence the direction of Scotland’s national planning policy.

Implementing Scottish Planning Policy

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduces several mechanisms that if well implemented should help to ensure that Scottish Planning Policy meaningfully shapes development on the ground. Of particular note are the introduction of local authority Chief Planning Officers, and Local Place Plans.

Chief Planning Officers will help to ensure that when local authorities make strategic decisions about investment and service delivery, matters of planning and place are taken into account. This should result in a more joined up approach, where decisions made outside of the planning framework do not undermine the intentions of planning policy. The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 requires Scottish Government to produce guidance on the role and qualifications of Chief Planning Officers, and the Government has confirmed that it plans to do this by the end of 2020. This guidance will be crucial for ensuring that Chief Planning Officers are well placed to promote joined up thinking in local authorities.

Local Place Plans could offer an important opportunity for communities to express their priorities for development and landscape designation. The regulatory framework for Local Place Plans is due to be complete by Q2 2021.