LINK Consultation Response

NPF4 Interim Position Statement Consultation

19 February 2021

Scottish Environment LINK

Summary – a promising start but much more to do

Scottish Environment LINK members welcome many of the positive signals in Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) Position Statement. However, we believe that these positive signals should be accompanied by clear measures to ensure that the Planning system can both enable sustainable development and prevent those which are not consistent with the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan and the aspirations of the Biodiversity Strategy - Statement of Intent 2020. We are conscious that this is the final national, strategic planning document to take us through to 2045; the target year for our current net-zero target, and to enable Scotland to achieve the halting and reversal of biodiversity loss that will be required by the new suite of global and national biodiversity targets.

The final document will require much greater ambition than is proposed in the Position Statement to even come close to realising the speed and scale of change that is needed in our planning system to achieve our net-zero and nature targets. We need a binding framework to address these challenges and cannot rely on piecemeal amendments to business as usual.

The fundamental building blocks required

For the National Planning Framework to meet the scale of the challenge, it will need to:

- **Improve the way developments are assessed –** ensure that every development is assessed against the twin national objectives of reducing greenhouse gases and protecting and enhancing biodiversity. All major developments must show how they will help to combat climate change.
- **Incorporate ecosystems and biodiversity values into planning** – ensure that nature is considered in every aspect of planning. This is required under Target 15.9 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Support the Climate Change Plan and forthcoming Biodiversity Strategy -** require all development applications to demonstrate how they are consistent with plans to achieve net-zero by 2045 and are in line with Scotland's aims for biodiversity.
- **Extend protections** - ensure the planning system supports a commitment to protect 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030.
- **Commit to the creation of a Scottish Nature Network** that will increase natural resilience, improve connections for wildlife and provide public amenity.
- **Proactively plan for an expansion in renewable energy that works alongside nature -** enable the growth of renewable energy generation in harmony with nature by identifying and addressing its impacts on our natural world.
- **Align terrestrial with marine planning -** to manage carbon and address ocean recovery.
- **Meaningfully engage communities**- give people reason to get involved in planning by giving greater status to community aspirations expressed through Local Place Plans. Create the expectation through strong policy intentions that development plans are adhered to and not departed from.
- **Integrate** Planning with Regional Spatial Strategies and Regional Land Use Frameworks.

Previous National Planning Frameworks have touched on some of these aspirations, such as a Nature Network or better land management through the national Land Use Strategy, but have not driven delivery. We must now move to effective action.

National Developments – turning rhetoric into reality

The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is expected to include several National Developments – major interventions intended to deliver public benefits. These developments must be assessed and selected using transparent, robust criteria. One approach is the Finance for Biodiversity/Vivid Economics methodology[1] for assessing green recovery solutions, including that they are timely, transitional, create jobs, and stimulate long-term and low-carbon transformation. Scottish Environment LINK requests that further information is provided on the process that Scottish Government will take in selecting and adopting National Developments in NPF4.

Detailed Comments

1. A Plan for Net-Zero Emissions

The NPF4 should require all development applications to demonstrate that they are consistent with plans for decarbonisation to meet the Scottish Government's targets for net-zero by 2045, and expect assessments of the climate impacts of all major developments. NPF4 should also recognise the equal importance of biodiversity loss and climate change through detailed and transformative policies to ensure that restoration of biodiversity is an essential part of efforts to tackle climate change.

1.1 Buildings and materials

LINK members welcome the proposal of strengthening the support for retaining and reusing existing buildings and materials. Our existing stock of buildings are an important store of carbon. **Sensitive and creative reuse of our existing stock of buildings reduces our environmental footprint** and maintains our local environments, reducing the need for greenfield developments. This is a vital part of building a circular economy. For further comment on housing and land use policy, as well as the importance of reducing the need for greenfield development, see section 2.2.

1.2. Nature-Based Solutions and carbon sequestration

In the past couple of years, the First Minister has echoed the importance of addressing the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. In April 2019, she announced a climate emergency, and confirmed in a letter to LINK that the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis were of equal importance in shaping the Scottish Government's way forward. Indeed, a fundamental element of addressing climate change includes the restoration of biodiversity and implementing nature-based solutions on land and at sea as much as possible.

LINK members welcome the commitment in the Position Statement to promote nature-based solutions, including woodland creation and peatland protection and restoration (in particular the

commitment to phasing out the use of horticultural peat). However, the Position Statement does not go far enough or include enough detail to deliver the transformative change needed for Scotland to reach its ambitious emission reduction targets of net-zero by 2045. NPF4 must accompany the First Minister's promising recognition of the equal importance of biodiversity loss and climate change through detailed and transformative policies which ensure that restoration of biodiversity is an essential part of Scotland's approach to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.

In order to maximise the benefits that can be realised through restoring peatlands, LINK members recommend NPF4 includes policy to:

- Prohibit the granting of any new mineral extraction licences for peat extraction for horticultural use.
- Support the repeal of all existing peat extraction licences by 2023.
- Support the restoration of existing extraction sites, where bare peat is re-vegetated and water tables are raised to protect the remaining carbon store. Where possible, peat forming function should be restored to facilitate future carbon sequestration.

Additionally, LINK members welcome the commitment in the NPF4 Position Statement to strengthen policy on woodland and trees as a part of nature-based solutions to climate change (see also section 4.4.). This shows increasing understanding of, and government support for, the need to tackle the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change together.

However, in order to enable an effective strategy and nationwide cooperation on woodland protection, the government's policies on woodland protection should:

- **Include a commitment to the adoption of a Scottish Nature Network**. Adoption of a Nature Network in Scotland would help to identify the areas that would see the greatest benefits from tree planting. It has the potential to be a valuable tool in planning for nature based solutions overall (for more information on Nature Networks, see section 2.3).
- **Protect ancient woodland and veteran trees specifically,** as well as protecting other woodland that is of amenity and high nature conservation value. Policies aimed at the protection of mature trees and native woodland are absent in the Position Statement.

Further, to maximise the benefits that can be realised through protection and restoration of native and ancient woodlands alongside sustainably managed forests, LINK members recommend:

- Strengthened policies to protect against the irreparable loss of ancient woodland and veteran trees. This should follow the example of the policy and definition of ancient woodland and veteran trees given in England's National Planning Policy Framework.
- Planning authorities integrate statutory forest and woodland strategies with Regional Land Use Frameworks developed across Scotland as per the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019, with the aim of better integrating forestry with other land uses.

Finally, Scotland's landscapes are formed by nature and bring together both vital natural processes, public appreciation, enjoyment and sustainable uses. Our most valued landscapes currently have a variety of planning designations that protect them from adverse development, including National Scenic Areas, National Parks, Gardens & Designed Landscapes, and wild land. We would wish to see these protections retained and developed in the new National Planning Framework.

1.3. Renewable energy technology

The NPF4 must plan positively for sustainability**.** It should enable the expansion of renewable energy generation within a spatial framework, by mapping areas of development opportunity and managing potential conflicts regarding land use and impacts of energy systems on Scotland's environment.

LINK members welcome recognition of the need for a spatial framework that pro-actively steers developers towards land most likely to be suitable for development and away from land that is to be safeguarded – such as National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Wild Land Areas, healthy peatlands, native and ancient woodlands.

The Scottish Government's plan to move away from fossil fuels towards renewables in order to meet Scotland's emission reduction targets means there needs to be an even greater emphasis on the role of planning policy in enabling this transition. The UKCCC has suggested that renewable electricity generation must quadruple to meet the new climate targets. NPF4 must enable a rapid scaling up of renewable electricity generation in Scotland over the next decade.

For the planning system to support the national objective of delivering net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, NPF4 must include:

- A focus on **reducing energy use**, while safeguarding social, economic, and environmental outcomes.
- A national priority to **significantly increase renewable energy** generation in Scotland and contain measures that reduce the time taken to deploy a mix of renewables across Scotland. An updated process would need to **balance efficiency and speed with upholding democratic processes, environmental protection legislation and opportunity for public scrutiny**.
- Recognition of the potential for conflicting considerations in renewable developments. This includes **assessing potentially damaging environmental impacts to protect our most sensitive landscapes and ecosystems** from inappropriate development by carrying out Environmental Impact Assessments, and retaining Wild Land Areas should as part of a spatial framework for allocating renewable energy development.
- A **favourable planning regime for the roll out of renewable heating** and heat networks at scale across Scotland, which should be considered a national development.
- **Conditions favourable to community energy projects**, in order to meet the Scottish Government's target of achieving 2GW of community and locally owned energy by 2030. This must be accompanied by resources and guidance for local planning authorities.
- Confirmation that large **biomass plants should not be considered or included as renewable generation.**
- **Consideration of materials and supply chains.** The use of secondary raw materials in construction of renewables should be a policy objective, as should design and instalment that enables the retention of materials in high value uses – i.e., easy maintenance, disassembly and, further use of components / materials. Maximising benefits to Scottish communities through supply-chain opportunities should also be part of policy.

The NPF4 should require all development applications to demonstrate that they are consistent with plans for decarbonisation to meet the Scottish Government's targets for net-zero by 2045 and expect assessments of the climate impacts of all major developments NPF4 should also recognise the equal importance of biodiversity loss and climate change through detailed and transformative policies to ensure that restoration of biodiversity is an essential part of efforts to tackle climate change.

2. A Plan for Resilient Communities

2.1. Place-based solutions & community engagement

Research has found that the majority of the public think they have no influence on the planning system, and that less than half of Scots think the planning system has protected or enhanced their local natural or historic environment. The NPF4 is an opportunity to turn around these perceptions and engage people more with the way Scotland's physical environment is changing. The NPF4 must go build a stronger focus on place-based actions and consolidate the Local Place Plan provisions in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 can better community engagement.

To achieve stronger community engagement in planning, LINK members recommend that:

- **NPF4 references the Local Place Plan provisions of the 2019 Act** and sets a policy direction for giving them status within relevant Local Development Plans, and in subsequent decision making.
- NPF4 recommends developers **respond to the ambitions expressed in Local Place Plans.**
- NPF4 recommends **greater resources be made available to help communities** develop their plans.

How we plan for and protect our environment and nature has the potential to contribute to reducing health inequalities in Scotland. LINK members welcome the recognition of this role of planning in the Position Statement, and the framework's ambition to support a fairer, more inclusive and equalities-based approach to planning in the future. **Nature is our 'natural health service'** and studies suggest that increasing access to local nature and greenspace in urban areas can contribute to increasing well-being, community cohesion and reducing health inequalities.[1] **A Scottish Nature Network** would help to identify the areas that would see the greatest benefit from tree planting, and other nature based solutions, addressing both greensapce inequalities and resilience to climate change (see section. 2.3.). Therefore, for NPF4 to truly deliver on the goal of reducing inequalities and increasing access to nature, a commitment to the adaptation of a Scottish Nature Network must be a part of the framework.

A more **circular economy** offers significant potential resilience by keeping products and materials in use - making use of and building new enterprises based on secondary raw materials; this includes repairing and refurbishing products, and reprocessing materials. All such enterprises offer jobs and are based on local resources and networks. As such, planning policy should pay attention to resources

[1] CRESH: Centre for Research on Environment, Society and Health (2019). Green Spaces and Health. Available at: https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/green-health

and material flows such that communities can benefit from opportunities that arise. For further details regarding LINK members' recommended policies on circular economy, see section 3.2.

The goal of **'20-minute neighbourhoods'** is welcomed, as this would have huge benefits for air quality, local economies, and wellbeing, in addition to helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport. Research on 20-minute neighbourhoods has identified a number of key characteristics, many of which relate to the availability of local services. NPF4 will need to help ensure the phasing out of out-of-town retail parks and large isolated residential developments, as they are completely dependent on private car use.

Strategic and ambitious investment in **green active travel** (routes, facilities and infrastructure) is an essential part of a green recovery and achieving net zero. A large-scale shift away from private car transport in our towns and cities is required, diverting space away from the car and instead to the bicycle, bus, tram etc. New housing developments should be required to include creation of safe, segregated active travel routes into city and town centres and to local services.

Finally, to deliver on its commitment to a resilient community and wellbeing, NPF4 must support the implementation of a **human right to a healthy environment**. The human right to a healthy environment includes both procedural and substantive elements. Scotland is obliged to implement the procedural right to a healthy environment, which embodies the right to information, the right to participate, and the right to easy and cost-effective remedies, through the UK's ratification of the Aarhus Convention. Successful implementation of a human right to a healthy environment is a key tool for improving and encouraging public participation in environmental decision-making, so that local needs and wellbeing determine the planning system.

2.2 Housing and housing land

LINK members welcome the move away from the current focus on maintaining a five year supply of effective housing land, and the commitment to vacant and derelict land adaptation as well as re-use of disused properties in the Position Statement. Housing and housing land policies in the NPF4 must be aligned with Scotland's emission reduction targets and follow the principles of **a circular economy**. As such, the main focus should not be on new development, but on revamping existing housing stock and other existing buildings, bringing empty homes back into use, using vacant and derelict sites and brownfield sites of low ecological value. Brownfield sites with high ecological value should not be used for housing.

To maximise the benefits of housing to best support the quality of life, health and wellbeing of all, NPF4 should:

- **Consider incentivising building "on sites that have already been deemed suitable for housing" by introducing a presumption against the renewal of planning permissions for housing developments**, or, in the case of larger sites, a requirement for a phasing agreement whereby planning permission would be revoked if the permitted housing is not delivered.

- Consider introducing **a regular national housing quality audit,** to determine the quality of the housing stock and new housing settlements in terms of climate, biodiversity, adaptability, amenity and other outcomes.
- Continue to support **policies and research on land value capture** to help deliver well-planned sustainable communities in places people want to live and at prices they can afford to pay.
- Adopt the recommendations described in the recent report 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' (Feb 2021) of formalising the position and priority for towns and town centres in the planning process within NPF4 (along with the 20-minute neighbourhood where appropriate) and consider stopping current aspects of policy which cause harm to town centres and related ambitions for tackling climate change and other environmental and wellbeing issues.

2.3 Natural infrastructure and green space

LINK members welcome the commitment to ensuring well-designed, high-quality and long-term maintenance of natural infrastructure development, which recognises the role of natural infrastructure in tackling the ongoing climate and biodiversity crisis.

However, to be able to deliver on these policies, the NPF4 must go further and commit to transformative change in how we plan in order to protect, restore and enhance nature. This transformative change must be led by a commitment to the adoption **of a Scottish Nature Network**.

Adopting a Scottish Nature Network as a national development will enable delivery of green and blue infrastructure, and restoration of nature and the ecosystem services that underpin societal wellbeing. **Scotland's nature needs a long-term, overarching investment plan that is able to coordinate the achievement of shared objectives across the planning and land use sector, particularly in terms of taking action on climate and nature crisis at local, regional and national scales. A high-level outcome of NPF4 is to achieve positive effects for biodiversity, an outcome that a Nature Network could directly support the delivery of.** A piecemeal approach to the delivery of green and blue infrastructure and the protection and development of natural habitats does not allow Scotland to efficiently tackle the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

A Nature Network means having bigger, better, and more joined up sites for nature; the need for this functional ecological connectivity is identified in Scotland's Biodiversity Routemap.[2] Simply put, a Nature Network is a national vision to create a rich network of natural habitats across Scotland and a commitment to deliver that.

Promoting an overarching ambition for restoring and reconnecting nature and a spatial vision of where and what could be achieved, Nature Networks would give us all a common purpose and show where best to target collective action and investment. The network identifies existing good quality natural habitat and the locations where opportunity exists to improve connectivity between these habitats by restoring and expanding its extent. The objective is to achieve a strategic network of natural and/or

[2] https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-biodiversity-route-map-2020/

semi-natural habitats that help to protect, enhance and restore nature, which in turn provide multiple benefits for people and climate.
This would include the identification of suitable areas for nature-based solutions such as tree planting, peatland restoration, flood risk management, coastal management and natural flood management measures, outcomes that both the Land Use Strategy and NPF4 and planning are focused on achieving and benefitting from.

In addition to supporting the creation of a resilient ecosystem, the development and implementation of Nature Networks can also help deliver shared ambitions across Scottish Government programmes. A Nature Network interlinks with Scottish Government's proposed planning policies on land use (see section 4.1.), green belts (see section. 4.2), and housing (see section 2.2). The adoption of a Scottish Nature Networks also builds on the recognition that natural infrastructure should be a part of Scottish infrastructure planning, which LINK members have supported. As such, the adoption of a Scottish Nature Network provides the opportunity to introduce an overarching strategy in our planning system to how we protect, develop and use our green and blue infrastructure, including sustainable use of our freshwater.

Since the publication of NPF3, which included a comment to develop and deliver a National Ecological Network for Scotland, government agencies and NGOs have been developing the Nature Networks concept and our understanding of the potential benefits such a network would bring. In 2019, the Landscape Scale Working Group of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (with membership from agencies, NGOs and local authorities) produced a paper to set out their shared thinking on a Nature Network, Nature for the Nation: Scotland's National Ecological Network, which should be considered as part of this response.

3. A Plan for a Wellbeing Economy

3.1. Marine Policy and Aquaculture

Marine Policy

LINK members consider it essential that the role **Scotland's marine environment** can play in tackling both the climate and nature crises is recognised within the NPF4. Scotland's marine environment is approximately six times larger than its land mass, and there is great potential for **marine nature-based solutions**, such as carbon sequestration (i.e. blue carbon habitats), coastal realignment, and ecosystem enhancement, to contribute towards tackling the twin crises. Many marine nature-based solutions can be achieved through effective protection of marine ecosystems (such as no take zones), active habitat restoration (e.g. seagrass beds and oyster reefs), and coastal realignment (e.g. salt marsh expansion).

Unlike terrestrial habitats, which can be restored through active habitat management, there are few opportunities for active restoration in the marine environment - the few examples being explored in Scotland are seagrass and oyster bed habitat restoration and coastal realignment. The most effective method for restoring and enhancing the health of the marine environment is to remove human

pressure(s) and allow the ecosystem to recover. Therefore, it is essential that as a minimum **Scotland's network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** is completed with management measures in place that protect or aid the recovery of the MPA features. In addition to the completion of the existing MPA network, LINK members are also calling for at least 30% of Scotland's marine environment to be highly protected, of which a third (i.e. at least 10%) designated as fully protected, from destructive and extractive activities by 2030.

LINK members welcome the recognition that terrestrial and marine planning need to align to ensure effective management of Scotland's environment, in particular coastal environments. It is also essential to recognise the role **river catchment area management** can have on the health of the marine environment, particularly with regard to pollution, waste (including plastics), and nutrient enrichment. It is essential that conservation action in the marine environment includes land management and terrestrial activity and, where required, activities on land are managed to support marine conservation objectives.

The National Marine Plan (NMP) is considered by LINK members to be the critical tool for guiding the sustainable use of Scotland's seas, managing potentially conflicting human activities and pressures, and protecting and enhancing Scotland's marine environment. The NMP aspires to place the marine environment at the 'heart of the planning process to promote ecosystem health, resilience to human enforced change and the ability to support sustainable development and use' but implementation has not fulfilled this aim. If implemented correctly, the NMP and subsequent Regional Marine Plans (RMPs) could contribute greatly to tackling the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.

However, LINK members consider it important that the forthcoming statutory review of the NMP and subsequent revision reflects the urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises, particularly with regard to oil and gas extraction and climate change. LINK also considers the integration of additional data on natural capital stocks (in particular blue carbon habitats) and the ecosystem services that flow from these stocks, would better equip decision-makers faced with conflicts and ensure sustainable objectives are achieved through spatial marine planning.

A key component of delivering effective spatial management of Scotland's marine environment is the development and adoption of the proposed 11 **Regional Marine Plans (RMPs)**. Delegating marine plan development and objective setting to a regional level has the potential to improve the management of marine activities and the environment by incorporating regional-scale factors that may not be captured at a national scale. This is essential for creating a tailor-made management plan to address the specific pressures of the region, and also to integrate other management plans, such as the Local Development Plan.

It is LINK's view that the development and implementation of RMPs should be made a priority to ensure Scotland's marine planning system is fit-for-purpose at both regional and national levels, and contributes towards achieving Scotland's net-zero targets and reversing biodiversity decline.

Aquaculture

LINK members consider that any future growth of the aquaculture sector must not be to the detriment of the marine environment and that all future salmon farms must be appropriately located, taking into

account their impact on the surrounding seafloor and surrounding wildlife (including migratory and long-ranging species, e.g. salmon and marine mammal species).

LINK considers that, to achieve a Scottish aquaculture sector that truly balances production with environmental quality, **a review of all salmon farms** (old and new) must be performed to address existing environmental impacts and identify poorly located farms. Where a poorly located farm has been identified, mitigation plans must be put in place to remove the impact, or the farm should be relocated to a suitable location or closed.

LINK considers it essential that all aquaculture, including salmon farming, is integrated into **Regional Marine Plans (RMPs)** to ensure development is spatially managed and the application of an ecosystems approach - consideration of the environment, conservation objectives, and other marine users within a specified area. This approach will enable the environmental capacity for aquaculture development to be identified for each region and, therefore, inform national growth targets.

The integration of aquaculture into RMPs will allow for priority marine features (in particular those that fall outside the MPA network) to inform the future development of aquaculture within the region, and enable the identification of areas deemed unsuitable for development, which should be designated aquaculture free-zones.

Overall, LINK considers the integration of aquaculture into RMPs will allow for the cumulative impact of multiple farms within the region to be considered alongside conservation objectives (e.g. MPAs) and other marine users. This will be essential when assessing the impact maritime activities have on marine natural capital and ecosystem services.

LINK members look forward to Marine Scotland's forthcoming consultation on the wild fish and sea lice interaction framework (led by the Technical Working Group), which will provide insight into the connectivity between sites and inform the location of future developments. Additionally, LINK look forward to the Scottish Government's response to the Salmon Interactions Working Group's recommendations, which included:

Recommendation 2.4
As a priority, the consenting of new developments should be managed within an adaptive spatial planning model which is risk based, of suitable resolution, underpinned by best available scientific evidence, and takes into account the cumulative effect of management practices of existing developments and impacts on wild salmonid fish.

LINK members are increasingly concerned over the continuation of proposals for **open-cage salmon farms** within Scotland's MPA network, in particular within MPAs that have designated features that are at risk from salmon farming (e.g. fragile and sensitive benthic habitats such as maerl, seagrass, and flameshell beds).

The MPA network was established to 'meet national objectives and help deliver an ecologically coherent MPA network in the North East Atlantic, contributing to the protection and enhancement of

[Scotland's marine area]' (Marine (Scotland) Act 2010), yet salmon farms continue to operate within the MPA network and there are applications for more. In order to conserve and improve the health of Scotland's marine environment, it is imperative that new farm proposals within MPAs are prohibited.

LINK considers that open-cage salmon farms should be discouraged and ultimately prohibited from operating in low-energy, inshore sites, due to the increased risk to benthic habitats from waste released from the farm, and support SEPA's and the industry's interest in developing in high-energy sites (subject to appropriate risk assessments and controls to prevent the escape of farmed salmon). **A spatial management approach** that identifies suitable and unsuitable sites for open-cage salmon farms based on benthic habitat (in particular priority marine features) and ocean current data will contribute towards developing an environmentally sustainable industry. For areas that have been identified as unsuitable for open-cage salmon farms, permits could be issued if the applicant proposes the use of novel technology that minimises/removes its environmental impact, such as waste capture technology and semi-closed systems that provide a barrier between the farmed fish and the surrounding environment.

3.2. A circular economy

LINK members welcome the policies targeted at improving well-being across Scottish cities, towns and rural communities, and the recognition that this needs to be done through prompting a broader circular economy agenda, including the use of vacant spaces and existing buildings. **A circular economy** is crucial in seeking to tackle the twin crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss, and also offers jobs and economic opportunities.

To begin delivering the benefits of a circular economy LINK members recommend NPF4 includes:

- **A presumption in favour of enhancing, repurposing or maintaining existing buildings and infrastructure** to make continued use of existing assets; rather than new-build. This will also contribute to meeting climate change targets.
- A priority for infrastructure that **delivers a transformative circular system for key materials**, such as reprocessing or remanufacturing. We need to carry out an infrastructure stocktake combined with an analysis of material flows to inform decisions about what infrastructure is required.

To fully utilise the potential of the planning system to play an important role in the transition to a circular economy, especially for the construction sector which is the largest user of resources in Scotland and generates the most waste, NPF4's commitment to a circular economy must include a circular approach to the built environment. As well as making the most of existing assets, Scottish Planning Policy should include the adoption of a **'whole life approach'** to developments where any new developments are designed and assessed for full and proper maintenance so that their life is extended and components can be reused; and embodied carbon is reduced through the use of secondary or renewable raw materials. Waste from demolition and building must be separated by material and reused where possible.

As far as we are aware, very little has been said about the capacity of Scottish infrastructure for the activities needed to reduce resource use and support a circular economy beyond recycling. **Repair and reuse**, being higher up the waste hierarchy, should be given greater priority. We would like to draw your attention to the Green Alliance report 'Building a Circular Economy: How a new approach to infrastructure can put an end to waste'. The report describes the infrastructure required under three scenarios (business as usual, high recycling, and transformation to a circular economy) for three common, high impact material streams from household waste: plastic, textiles and electrical equipment in England.

Additional reprocessing capacity should be a national development. Currently much of the material we collect is exported for recycling. The forthcoming Deposit Return Scheme, planned improvements to household recycling, reform to extended producer responsibility for packaging, and upcoming obligations on separate collection of material, will all potentially contribute to better quality materials to recycle. To retain the value of these materials in Scotland, we need additional reprocessing capacity.

In connection to applications for **EfW facilities**, whilst we agree that any such facilities should be required to make use of the heat produced, our view is that Scottish Government should carefully consider whether further EfW facilities have a place in a net zero and circular economy. There are other ways to manage residual waste, such as MRBT,[3] which offer flexibility and are compatible with circular and net-zero ambitions.

For more information on LINK members' proposed policies on increasing well-being across Scotland by increasing local engagement with planning see section 2.1. For more information on LINK members' proposed policies on the use of vacant spaces, existing buildings and prioritisation of waste prevention, see section 2.2.

3.3. Fossil fuel extraction

LINK members welcome the Position Statement's commitment to updating current policies on fossil fuel extraction to reflect our climate change objectives and wider energy policy. Any update to Scotland's policies on fossil fuel extraction must reflect the fact that any fossil fuel energy generation developments granted during the period of NPF4 would still be operating by 2045, the date by which Scotland must reach net-zero emissions, thereby locking us into a high carbon future and compromising our ability to meet the targets.

Additionally, for the planning system to support Scotland's climate change objective of delivering net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, LINK members recommend NPF4 includes:

- **A ban on all new fossil fuel developments**, extending to all new coal, oil or gas energy developments, including projects below 50MW for which approval is currently granted by local planning authorities. This should extend to developments proposing to manufacture fossil hydrogen and to fossil fuel generation with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).

[3] https://zerowasteeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/zero_waste_europe_policy_briefing_MRBT_en.pdf

- Clarification of **the Scottish Government's position of no support for onshore unconventional oil and gas extraction (including "fracking")**, having committed to doing so in Parliament. Additionally, the present moratorium is limited to unconventional oil and gas extraction – NPF4 should go further and include **a presumption against conventional onshore oil and gas extraction as well.**

LINK members also welcome the confirmation in the NPF4 Position Statement that the Scottish Government does not support applications for planning permission for new commercial peat extraction for horticultural purposes**.** For further information LINK members desired policy on peat protection and restoration, see section 1.2.

4. A Plan for Better, Greener Places

4.1 Relationship with the Land Use Strategy & land use

LINK welcomes the proposed policy of aligning NPF4 with the Land Use Strategy and identifying opportunities to align emerging Regional Spatial Strategies with future Regional Land Use Partnerships and Frameworks. Faced with twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, in addition to the challenges of Brexit, Scotland needs to get the very best out of its land.

NPF4 must also include that such an alignment should take place by making clear how the **10 Principles of Sustainable Land Use**, found in the Land Use Strategy, influence planning decisions on the ground. The principles recognise the role of land in underpinning Scotland's social and economic prosperity, supporting climate mitigation and adaptation, and promoting sustainable development. These Principles are as relevant in urban environments as in rural settings and NPF4 must go beyond what is included in the Position Statement and outline how the Principles influence planning decisions on the ground.

To facilitate an alignment with the Land Use strategy, LINK members recommend that:

- **A timetable for review is built into NPF4,** running alongside the LUS review timetable, to allow for Regional Spatial Strategies and Regional Land Use Frameworks to be integrated into and better inform wider planning policy and decisions.
- Advice, examples, and case studies are developed, **communicating the interdependencies between land use decisions in rural and urban areas**, with a particular focus on the peri-urban interface, the influence that rural land use decisions can have on urban areas and vice versa.
- Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Plans are **required to support ongoing delivery and strengthening of the Nature Network**; and require direct reference to the shared objectives of both planning and the Land Use Strategy and forthcoming Regional Land Use Frameworks, due in 2023.

Further, for the alignment of NPF4 and the Land Use Strategy to be a fruitful exercise, the Third Land Use Strategy, which is being produced this year, must be significantly improved. Whilst LINK members

applaud many of the statements in the Land Use Strategy, the Draft Land Use Strategy fails to grasp the concept's full potential and to use it effectively as a mechanism to help harmonise policy related to land. In particular, it has been regarded too much as a mechanism of relevance only to the environmental agenda, not to the wider responsibilities of government. Treated as such, it has not gained the traction that it was intended to exert across a broad swathe of public policies. For LINK members full response to the Third Land Use Strategy, as well as recommendations please see our Draft Land Use Strategy Consultation Response.

4.2. Green Belt policy

LINK members welcome the Position Statement's commitment to stronger policies to limit greenfield development and that the new Spatial Strategy will recognise the potential for Green Belts to form part of "multifunctional green networks". Strengthening the presumption against inappropriate development on designated Green Belts will help to realise the health and climate benefits of growth within existing urban areas. The commitment to improving clarity on acceptable uses within Green Belts is welcomed and is urgently needed. Acceptable uses must be compatible with the existing aims of Green Belt - directing planned growth to the most appropriate location, protecting and enhancing landscape and protecting and giving access to open space within and around towns and cities - as well as realising its potential as natural infrastructure, including as part of the Scottish Nature Network. NPF4 should be more detailed and transformative in its plans for a strengthened and effective Green Belt policy.

Planning needs to ensure that our **most sensitive landscapes and ecosystems** are protected from inappropriate and damaging development, are valued for their importance in underpinning our societal needs and wellbeing, and that greenspaces are easily accessible from our towns and cities. NPF4 must reflect how **Scotland's Green Belts are a precious resource of national importance**, protecting and enhancing the landscape setting of the towns and cities they surround, providing vital benefits to the quality of life and well-being of society, and often including important designations for the protection of landscapes, nature conservation, informal outdoor recreation and cultural heritage. NPF4 needs to recognise how Scotland's Green Belts provide crucial benefits to people's **mental and physical health**, should be guided by and support the realisation of the **human right to a healthy environment** (see section 2.1). Covid-19 has made evident the unequal access to nature across our society, further underlining the importance of planning policies which seek to increase access to nature and good quality greenspace for all.

To enhance the intrinsic value of Green Belts for Scotland's nature and society, NPF4 should include them in a **Nature Network in Scotland.** A Nature Network is crucial in recognising Green Belts' role as a part of multifunctional natural infrastructure (see section 2.3. for LINK's Nature Network proposal). NPF4 needs to strengthen the protection of Green Belts across Scotland.

4.3. Biodiversity & the use and management of natural assets

LINK members welcome the proposed policy in the Position Statement of strengthening the links between development proposals and wider sustainable land use objectives, as well as the recognition

that our natural environment and biodiversity play crucial roles in providing services and benefits for our economy, well-being and health, and climate resilience. LINK members also welcome the commitment to securing positive effects for biodiversity from new development. However, LINK members believe that stronger policies need to be put in place for the NPF4 to deliver on its high-level outcome of securing **positive effects for biodiversity**. The adoption of a **Scottish Nature Network** (see section 2.3) is an important part of ensuring positive effects for biodiversity.

For NPF4 to deliver **positive outcomes for biodiversity** and successfully contribute to Scotland's achievement of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal target 15.9** of integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts, transformational change is needed.

To realise positive effects for biodiversity through NPF4, LINK members recommend that:

- **Any new requirement to deliver positive effects for biodiversity must be guided by a set of principles to ensure intended outcomes**. Some LINK members are working up detailed principles and are keen to offer their input into the development of any new policy requirement. There needs to be clarity on the types of metrics, if any, will be used to ensure positive effects for biodiversity.

For LINK members' views and recommendations on the issue of peat, please see section 1.2.

4.4. Woodland, wild land, and landscapes

LINK members welcome the commitment in the Position Statement to strengthen **policy on woodland**. Woodland and trees contribute significantly to biodiversity, storing and sequestering carbon to meet Scotland's emission reduction targets, as well as people and communities' wellbeing (see section 1.2.) They are places where people can experience nature and wild landscapes and these experiences support mental health and wellbeing. They also are places that can support the restoration and recovery of nature if we protect them. It is important that NPF4 also includes specific provisions for ancient woodland and veteran trees which are irreplaceable. Once these are gone, they are lost forever.

Currently ancient woodland makes up around 1% of Scotland's land area, yet recent research that the Woodland Trust has commissioned from Forest Research shows that the average carbon stocks in Scotland's ancient woodlands are 30% higher than the average for all woodland types. These habitats continue to be degraded by inappropriate development, overgrazing and invasive non-native species, and in some cases, a lack of management that would help to increase structural diversity. If these woodlands and the biodiversity they host are to thrive and adapt, the factors contributing to their degradation must be addressed urgently. The NPF4 is the best opportunity to address the issue of inappropriate development that keeps chipping away at our ancient woods. Doing so can also ensure ancient woodlands continue to sequester significant amounts of carbon and be part of the solution to tackling climate change. There is also evidence that large, old trees fix significantly larger levels of carbon compared to smaller trees.

To realise the benefits of protecting and restoring existing trees and ancient woodland, NPF4 must:

- **Include specific provisions to increase protection for ancient woodland and veteran trees,** recognising that these are irreplaceable, make a significant contribution to biodiversity, carbon sequestration and a support for people's health and wellbeing.

For more information on LINK members' proposed policies on woodland and trees see section 1.2.

Further, LINK members believe that **policies on wild land** in NPF3 and SPP2 need to be retained. Members are concerned policies relating to the protection of wild land are absent from the Position Statement. NPF4 offers an opportunity to recognise the role of Scotland's Wild Land Areas as part of a national Nature Network (see section 2.3.), as part of a spatial framework for allocating renewable energy development and their role as an integral part in sustaining and revitalising rural and remote rural communities in Scotland. In addition, the qualified level of protection for Wild Land Areas could extend to the spectacular nature found along Scotland's coasts and waters that help to define our national landscape whose national value was showcased in Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters 2020.

To realise the benefits of protecting and restoring Scotland's most scenic landscapes, LINK members recommend that:

- NPF4 continues to recognise the **national importance of wild land and Wild Land Areas**, with the Wild Land Areas map retained as a spatial framework complementing a national Nature Network and as assets that can support rural community regeneration.
- NPF4 strengthens the existing provision within Scottish Planning Policy which expects Local Authorities to 'identify and safeguard' areas of wild land in their local development plans.
- NPF4 continues to recognise the role of all landscapes, including our wildest landscapes, and wild land, as well as battlefields, Gardens and Designed landscapes, National Scenic Areas, Conservation Areas, and Special Landscape Areas, in **contributing to the quality of life, health and wellbeing of present and future generations.**
- Development plans for National Parks should emphasise the first statutory objective of National Parks, and planning decisions should be consistent with the priority weighting of the first objective. Within development plans for National Parks, there should be a development category for ecological restoration as in this respect planning can help National Parks to fulfil their primary objective.

4.5. Blue economy and coastal communities

LINK members welcome the policy in the Position statement aimed at realising the potential of the blue economy and coastal communities, including through enhanced infrastructure. LINK members believe a crucial part of enhancing the blue economy and coastal communities would be through the development and implementation of Nature Networks. For more information Nature Networks, see section 2.3. The flourishing of the blue economy and coastal communities is also dependent on good housing policies, for which please see section 2.2.

Circular economy opportunities also exist for coastal communities, providing jobs and adding resilience to local economies. Local mapping of bioresources can be the first steps to realizing ventures based on local unused resources such as the waste from seafood processing.

This response is supported by the following LINK member organisations:

The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group
The Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management
Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland
Friends of the Earth Scotland
Froglife
John Muir Trust
Keep Scotland Beautiful
Natural Trust for Scotland
North East Mountain Trust
Planning Democracy
Ramblers Scotland
RSPB Scotland
Scottish Wild Land Group
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Woodland Trust Scotland

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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