



# Strategic Development in Scotland

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# STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT IN SCOTLAND

By Graeme Purves

## Introduction

Strategic physical planning and strategic economic development are largely devolved matters that are guided by Scottish Government strategy and its annual Programme for Government. This paper provides a review of strategic development in Scotland since the 1940s, with a focus on land use planning, particularly Scotland's National Planning Framework and its role in the designation of national developments to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure projects of national importance. It highlights relevant issues emerging from the current debate over Scotland's Planning Bill and draws attention to a report on indicators of territorial development which may help to inform the Commission's work in that area. It suggests that the British – Irish Council might have a useful role to play in facilitating collaboration between the administrations of Britain and Ireland on a common spatial framework and outlines recent developments in Scotland's distinctive land reform agenda. It identifies strengthening regional agency, improving connectivity and the quality of place, and land reform and resettlement as key elements of the agenda for Scotland's strategic development in the medium to long term.

As this is a think piece, technical exposition is in places supplemented by first person comment and reflection drawing on personal experience.

## Background

Scotland has a strong tradition of strategic planning at the regional level stretching back for some 70 years. In the 1940s, Scotland's wartime administration initiated the preparation of three major regional plans covering the most populous parts of the country to guide post-war reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> The regional planning tradition established at that time has persisted through successive reforms of local government under Governments of different political complexions, with a particularly strong strand of continuity in Glasgow and the Clyde Valley.<sup>2</sup> However, this distinctive aspect of Scottish planning has recently come under threat from the provisions of the Scottish Government's Planning (Scotland) Bill.

Responsibility for the implementation of the Scottish Government's economic development strategy rests with two publicly funded agencies, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. While the predecessor of Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Development Agency, once played a key role in areas such as land renewal and urban regeneration, from the 1990s the focus of the enterprise agencies began to move away from land and place-based issues towards support targeted on the knowledge economy business sectors seen as key to Scotland's future, though Highlands and Islands Enterprise retains an important community development remit. There is a history of collaboration between local authorities and the enterprise agencies on matters of common interest. In Glasgow and the Clyde Valley in the late 1990s, they agreed a common economic development perspective and worked together on the identification and safeguarding of sites for strategic inward investment.<sup>3, 4</sup> More recently, they worked together to promote strategic collaboration between Edinburgh

and Glasgow before cities policy adopted a wider but less spatial perspective with the establishment in 2011 of the Scottish Cities Alliance.

### **Scotland's National Planning Framework**

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is a strategy for Scotland's long-term development. It sets out a collective vision for Scotland in 25 to 30 years and where things need to happen if that vision is to be realised. Essentially, the exercise is about building consensus around a direction of travel. The Scottish Government has sought to make its preparation participative and inclusive, with extensive stakeholder engagement undertaken in accordance with a statutory Participation Statement.

Following the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the then Scottish Executive undertook a review of Scotland's strategic planning system to ensure that it was fit for purpose. One of the key conclusions of that review was that there was a need for a national spatial strategy. Scotland's decision to prepare a National Planning Framework at that time can be seen as a dimension of nation building. Many of the European countries that embarked most enthusiastically on national spatial planning in the first decade of this Century had recently gained independence or a greater degree of political autonomy. Other examples are Estonia, Slovenia and Wales.

The European Union's evolving territorial agenda was an important influence on the NPF. A key document in that context was the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)<sup>5</sup> published in 1999, a document which grew out of a continental European tradition of territorial planning. It sought to promote what it described as balanced polycentric development. That concept is somewhat problematic in a country like Scotland, where topography and coastal geography such important determinants of settlement pattern, though Central Scotland has been compared to polycentric regions like the Ruhrgebiet and the Randstad. A concept that proved more generally useful in a Scottish context was territorial cohesion, and successive iterations of the NPF have emphasised the importance of enabling each part of Scotland to play to its distinctive strengths.

NPF1 was published in 2004, NPF2 was approved by the Scottish Parliament in 2009 and NPF3, *Ambition: Opportunity: Place*, in 2014.<sup>6</sup> The spatial strategy set out in successive Frameworks has sought to support cities and their regions; identify key routes and corridors; promote international gateways; support rural diversification; identify areas for co-ordinated action; and set out priorities for investment in infrastructure.

The NPF relies heavily on mapping to convey its messages and the key elements of the strategy are distilled into a Strategy Map. Another key map identifies the suite of proposed national developments.

### **Influences and Approach**

Scotland embarked on the preparation of a top-level spatial strategy slightly later than Wales, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and so was able to learn from what was already happening in neighbouring territories. However, the model which was probably most influential was Estonia's National Spatial Plan, *Estonia 2010*.<sup>7</sup> It was a slim and concise document and the spatial strategy it set out was captured in a number of clear and simple maps. It was prepared by a team led by Estonia's then Chief Planner, Jüri Lass, who was very proud of his rigorous training in the Soviet planning system. The most important piece of advice I got from Jüri was to maintain a bird's eye view and avoid being sucked into detail. It is important that national spatial strategies should be top level, big picture documents. They are not concerned with detail. I found Jüri Lass's advice extremely valuable in resisting calls from stakeholders to include more detail.

However, the level at which a national spatial strategy is pitched will depend on the particular characteristics of the planning system. For example, in the Republic of Ireland, there was no strong tradition of regional spatial planning, so it was appropriate for Ireland's National Spatial Strategy to include maps indicating how planning should be taken forward at the regional level. In Scotland, which already had a well-established and effective framework for regional planning, we were careful to avoid intruding on matters that we saw as properly the preserve of strategic development plans.

### **First Framework**

Scotland's first National Planning Framework was published in 2004. The strap-line employed to try to encapsulate the NPF's aspirations for Scotland's places and spaces was "Quality & Connectivity".<sup>8</sup> That reflected the influence of Richard Florida's thinking about the factors influencing locational choices in set out in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2003)<sup>9</sup>, which had been espoused enthusiastically by Scotland's enterprise agencies.

Drawing on work undertaken by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NPF1 identified a number of key economic development zones in the Central Belt, the North-East of Scotland and Inverness, as well as fragile areas in the remoter rural areas and island archipelagos.

The first National Planning Framework (NPF1) was generally very well received. It was welcomed by local authorities, the business community and the planning profession and won recognition as an example of good practice in spatial planning throughout the United Kingdom and internationally. It helped to raise the profile of spatial issues and contributed to a renewed interest in long-term strategic thinking generally. The strategic role of the Framework was generally accepted and the priorities it identified were reflected in the development plans prepared by local authorities.

Also, preparation of the Framework led to closer links between different arms and agencies of government, with policy-makers in the fields of planning, economic development, transport and energy working to a common spatial agenda.

### **Second Framework**

In March 2005, the Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee concluded that the National Planning Framework needed to be strengthened to enable better direction, co-ordination and prioritisation of project and programme spend.

In June 2005, the White Paper, *Modernising the Planning System*, signalled the intention to enhance the role and status of the National Planning Framework to make it a more powerful instrument for securing delivery of national policies and programmes.<sup>10</sup> It indicated that it would be used to identify developments of national strategic importance and that its preparation would involve extensive consultation and be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny.

The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 put the National Planning Framework on a statutory footing. It required Ministers to prepare a Participation Statement setting out when and with whom consultation would take place, the likely form of that consultation and the steps to be taken to involve the public. However, the statutory underpinning of the NPF was deliberately kept light-touch. The provisions in Part 1 of the Act run to about two pages of A4.

### **National Developments**

Like the first Framework, NPF2 focused strongly on priorities for the improvement of infrastructure to support Scotland's long-term development.<sup>11</sup> For transport infrastructure, it looked beyond the current delivery programme, drawing upon Scotland's National Transport Strategy and the outcome

of the first Strategic Transport Projects Review. It considered the infrastructure required to harness Scotland's strategic energy resources in a way that helps to move us towards a low carbon economy. It addressed strategic priorities for investment in waste management facilities and water and drainage capacity.

The 2006 Planning Act made provision for the Framework to be used to designate certain projects as national developments. The essential test in deciding whether a development is a national development is whether it is of strategic importance to Scotland's development. Major strategic transport, energy, water and drainage and waste management infrastructure project may fall within this category of development. Designation in the Framework is the mechanism for establishing the need for such developments. Any subsequent public inquiry will therefore focus on matters such as siting, design and the mitigation of environmental effects rather than the question of need.

Scotland is one of the few countries that has sought to use its national spatial strategy to establish the need for specific development projects. Klaus Kunsmann, one of Europe's leading academic thinkers on spatial planning sees the value of spatial strategies as lying in their power of discourse, their role being to help build consensus around a particular direction of travel.<sup>12</sup> That is easier to achieve where the strategy confines itself to general issues of principle, things like sustainable development and transition to a low carbon economy. It is much more difficult where the strategy is being used to identify specific major infrastructure projects. Such projects are often contentious, tending to divide or even polarise public opinion. That was certainly true of the proposed coal-fired power station at Hunterston in Ayrshire, which was the subject of a legal challenge. However, having only one very controversial project in a set of 14 national developments was probably not a bad outcome.

Scotland's experience with national developments probably merits independent review. The second and third National Planning Frameworks each identified 14 national developments, and it would probably be a mistake for a country the size of Scotland to attempt to identify many more if the designation is genuinely to reflect key national infrastructure priorities. Some have already been delivered. While it is arguable that the majority of these could have been delivered successfully without the benefit of designation, the NPF provided a coherent strategic context for their prioritisation. Some national developments, such as the power station at Hunterston, have fallen by the wayside. Others have evolved to reflect changing economic and policy contexts.

Perhaps, unexpectedly, one of the areas in which national development designation has proved most successful is that of environmental infrastructure. The national development that has achieved most widespread public recognition and support has been the Central Scotland Green Network, which has its origins in concepts first articulated in Scotland's post-War plans for regional reconstruction. The Central Scotland Green Network was included in the Proposed National Planning Framework, which was considered by the Scottish Parliament in January and February of 2009, but it was not at that stage proposed as a national development, because its delivery did not depend on successfully negotiating a consent process.

It was already clear by that time that there was a broad constituency of support for the concept and a great deal of work had been done to develop it by the local authorities, agencies and organisations involved. Nevertheless, the process of consideration by Parliament demonstrated that there was also strong cross-party political support for the Central Scotland Green Network. Parliament recommended to the Scottish Government that the important role it could play in furthering key policy agendas should be reflected in its designation as a national development. Scottish Ministers responded positively to that recommendation and in June 2009 the Central Scotland Green Network was included as one of the national developments designated in NPF2.

The popularity of the Central Scotland Green Network was influential in the decision to designate a National Long Distance Cycling and Walking Network as a national development in NPF3.

### **Consultation and Public Engagement**

While some commentators described the level of public engagement on NPF2 as impressive, environmental organisations argued that more should have been done to engage with local communities, particularly on controversial national developments. The Scottish Parliament expressed sympathy for that view while at the same time calling for the Framework to be more flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. There is clearly tension between these two aspirations.

In response to the concerns which had been expressed, innovative approaches to community engagement, including sessions in which participants set out their visions for Scotland on blank maps, were introduced in the consultation process for NPF3.

During the consultation process, the Scottish Government received strong representations that the Draft National Planning Framework did not accurately reflect development challenges and opportunities in the North-East of Scotland and Ayrshire. The NPF team undertook further targeted engagement with stakeholders in these areas before submitting the Proposed National Planning Framework to the Scottish Parliament.

The stance which some environmental groups took on behalf of communities sometimes came close to challenging the role of Government in setting a national agenda. And sometimes environmental rhetoric was used to clothe a fairly atavistic and uncompromising local nimbyism. Indeed, this led some to question whether our civic society remains robust enough to sustain strategic planning. I am fairly optimistic on that score, but I believe that governments and strategic planners have to be prepared robustly to assert the interests of the community of the nation – what was referred to in Medieval Scotland as the Common Weal.

### **Scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament**

Scotland's planning legislation requires Ministers to have regard to the views of the Scottish Parliament in preparing or revising the Framework. However, Parliament does not approve the Framework and its final content is a matter for Scottish Ministers.

The second and third Frameworks were considered by committees of the Scottish Parliament, with the process culminating in a Parliamentary debate. The Committees and the debates in Parliament have focused strongly on the processes of stakeholder engagement and Parliamentary consideration. A number of their recommendations called for further elaboration of the consultation and engagement process.

The Scottish Government has shown itself willing to take on board the views of the Scottish Parliament and amend the NPF strategy accordingly. In addition to the Central Scotland Green Network, a High-Speed Rail Link to London was added to the list of national developments identified in NPF2. This reflected strong cross-party support, no doubt motivated by the desire to send a clear policy message to the UK Government.

### **Action Programme and Delivery**

The published NPF is accompanied by a high-level Action Programme identifying key elements of the spatial strategy; key milestones in their implementation; lead partners; and other delivery bodies. Reviews of the Action Programme provides a means of assessing progress on key elements of the strategy, including national developments.

Close partnership working between central government, local government and agencies is essential, and if that partnership is to bear fruit, there has to be an ongoing commitment to delivery. The priorities for the improvement of transport infrastructure identified in the second National Planning Framework came out of the 2004 Strategic Transport Projects Review. One of these was the need to reduce journey times between Aberdeen, Inverness and the Central Belt. The recent Burness Paull report on the development of Scotland's principal cities by Brian Evans, John Lord and Mark Robertson has been pointedly critical of the lack of progress in reducing the 2½ hour journey time between Aberdeen and the Central Belt in the intervening period.<sup>13</sup> When government identifies strategic priorities and makes clear commitments, it is important that authorities and agencies work together to deliver on them. Lesson 13 of the UK2070 think piece *'National' Spatial Strategies in an Age of Inequality: Insights from the United Kingdom, Ireland and France* is that "plans need to be delivered on."<sup>14</sup>

### **Environmental Assessment**

European legislation has required Government strategies, plans, programmes and projects to be subject to rigorous environmental assessment. The second and third National Planning Frameworks were subject to a full strategic environmental assessment (SEA) to ensure that the issues of environmental sustainability were explicitly addressed.

The Scottish Government has found it most cost effective to undertake SEA in house, rather than to commission external consultants. An SEA Specialist was incorporated as a key member of the NPF team. That made it much easier to integrate environmental assessment with the process of preparing the strategy, which is how things are supposed to work. Also, with challenges to the SEA process becoming the favoured line of attack for those opposing aspects of plans or strategies, having expert knowledge of the process within the team has proved invaluable.

### **Collaboration with Other Administrations**

The framework for cross-border co-operation provided by the EU has been important in facilitating collaboration on spatial planning between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is anomalous, but perhaps a consequence of the ad hoc and asymmetric way in which powers have been devolved in the UK, that there is no equivalent framework to support collaboration on matters of common interest between its various administrations. Liaison between administrations on planning matters takes place on a Britain and Ireland basis through the Five Administrations meetings of the Heads of Planning and the British Irish Council Working Group on Collaborative Spatial Planning. The Five Administrations meetings are primarily concerned with sharing experience on practice and process and do not have a strong spatial focus.

NPF1 identified opportunities to strengthen knowledge economy links around energy and offshore expertise on the East Coast corridor between Aberdeen and Newcastle. The Regional Strategy for the North East of England recognised the economic influence of the Edinburgh City Region on the North East of England and included a commitment to improving accessibility and efficiency of movement along the East Coast corridor. Several meetings were held between officials in Scotland and the North East of England with a view to developing a strategic agenda for the East Coast corridor, but with the abolition of the English regions these links were severed. Following the UK General Election in May 2010, discussions took place between DCLG and Scottish Government officials with a view to agreeing a memorandum of understanding on co-operation between planning authorities on either side of the Scotland – England Border, but these came to nothing.

The British-Irish Council was established as part of the multi-party agreement reached in Belfast in 1998. Its membership comprises representatives from the Irish Government; UK Government; Scottish Government; Northern Ireland Executive; Welsh Government; Isle of Man Government; Government of Jersey and Government of Guernsey.

At its Summit in Cardiff in February 2009, the British Irish Council agreed to ask the Northern Ireland Executive to lead a work sector to examine the benefits that could be gained from collaboration on Collaborative Spatial Planning. This work sector brings together officials from each of the Member Administrations who are responsible for national, island and regional development strategies. The group meets biannually to exchange information and perspectives on current spatial planning challenges. The Working Group may have a useful role to play in the development of a framework for cross-border collaboration on spatial planning between the administrations of Britain and Ireland. That approach is likely to be more successful than any attempt to command the process centrally from Whitehall.

### **The International Dimension**

Within the context of the European Union, preparation of the National Planning Framework has afforded opportunities for the Scottish Government to become involved in collaborations and exchanges of spatial planning expertise with other European States. From 2005, Scottish Government officials contributed to the INTERREG IIC programme GRIDS project, which supported the exchange of spatial planning expertise between the Celtic and Baltic countries. In 2008 they hosted a visit to Scotland by Estonian strategic planners.

Between 2011 and 2013, the Scottish Government was the lead partner in an ESPON research project on Key Indicators for Territorial Cohesion and Spatial Planning (KITCASP). The other partners were Ireland, Latvia, Iceland and the Basque Country. Janis Bruneniekas, an expert on indicators of territorial development from Latvia's Regional Development Agency, participated in the initial public engagement on NPF3. The final product of the KITCASP project was a report which identified a core set of indicators of territorial development of practical use to policy-makers engaged in preparing spatial strategies at national and sub-national levels, and which are of relevance to the work on indicators the UK2070 Commission is undertaking.<sup>15</sup>

It is to be hoped that the preparation of any future spatial framework for the UK will afford opportunities for exchanges of this kind.

### **Review of the Scottish Planning System**

In 2015, the Scottish Government appointed an independent panel to undertake a review of the Scottish planning system. The panel's recommendation that strategic development plans should be replaced by an enhanced National Planning Framework may have been unduly influenced by the atypically poor performance of the strategic planning regime in South East Scotland.<sup>16</sup> In the Clyde Valley and North-East Scotland regional strategic planning has had a good track record and, after initial resistance to a territorial framework which divided Fife, it bedded down very successfully in the Tayplan area under effective leadership.

In response to the findings of the panel, Scottish Ministers indicated their intention to remove the statutory requirement to prepare strategic development plans, thus according the National Planning Framework a more dominant role in strategic planning. That intention was taken forward in the Planning (Scotland) Bill currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament. However, in October 2018, a Stage 2 amendment to the Bill deleted the provisions which would have removed the



requirement to prepare strategic development plans. The Scottish Parliament's Local Government's Local Government and Communities Committee has not been persuaded that removing the current provisions for strategic development plans would lead to simplification, to streamlining, to cost savings or to more effective planning at a regional scale. It considers that the current statutory framework for regional planning should not be repealed unless a more robust mechanism is provided than that proposed in the Bill.

Other amendments to the Bill extend the time the Scottish Parliament has to consider the National Planning Framework; introduce a requirement that the NPF be approved by the Scottish Parliament; provide for the NPF to set targets for the use of land in different parts of Scotland for housing; require the NPF to consider the potential for rural resettlement; and provide for land value capture within Masterplan Consent Areas.

The Scottish Government is currently considering how best to proceed.

### **Regional Agency**

The reluctance of the Scottish Parliament to accede to the Scottish Government's intention to dispense with strategic development plans reflects its appreciation of the importance of regional agency.<sup>17</sup> As Mark Boyle, Aileen Jones, Olivier Sykes and Ian Wray argue in their UK2070 think piece, *'National' Spatial Strategies in an Age of Inequality: Insights from the United Kingdom, Ireland and France*:

“...national spatial planning must concern itself with both spatially sensitive national investment strategies and further devolution of resources and decision-making powers to localities. Top down directive solutions to regional inequalities will perform less well than local solutions, devised and enacted by local institutions, and in particular democratically elected local institutions. Planning and devolution are essential bedfellows.”<sup>18</sup>

The Scottish Government has shown greater awareness of the importance of regional agency and institutional infrastructure in the measures it has taken to develop Scotland's enterprise agencies. In 2009, NPF2 highlighted the need for the South of Scotland 'to develop an indigenous institutional framework as vigorous and successful as that of the Highlands and Islands. In October 2018, The South of Scotland Enterprise Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament. This will create a new non-departmental public body called South of Scotland Enterprise, which will operate in the local authority areas of the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.

### **Spatial Planning and Cities Policy**

The Scottish Cities Alliance was established in 2011 as a partnership between the Scottish Government and Scotland's seven cities. It is supported by the £7 million Cities Investment Fund. In Scotland, City Region Deals are agreed between the Scottish Government, the UK Government and local authorities with the aim of furthering the long-term development of regional economies. There is a clear need to ensure that strategic planning priorities inform funding decisions, but the approach the Scottish Government has taken in the Planning (Scotland) Bill suggests a preference for mediating its relationships with local authorities on development matters through City Region Deals alone, untrammelled by the discipline of spatial strategy. The Burness Paull Report states that city region deals are welcome but fall far short of English and European counterparts. It argues that the Agenda for Scotland's Cities is inadequately supported by spatial and economic analysis.<sup>19</sup>

At present, Scotland's City Region Deals aren't integrated adequately with the strategic planning process. Strategic planning and city region deal-making need to be brought together, and the process

of City Region deal-making needs to be much more transparent and open to scrutiny if it is to avoid becoming a vehicle for pork-barrelling.

### **Land Reform**

Transformations in the economic and social fortunes of estates in the Highlands and Islands which have adopted the community ownership model has fuelled demands for further land reform and in 2017 the Scottish Government established a Scottish Land Commission to take this agenda forward. The Commission is committed to examining Scotland's current pattern of land ownership, management and use and is currently undertaking reviews of the scale and concentration of land ownership and the potential of mechanisms of land value capture.

Community Land Scotland is a charity which provides a collective voice for community landowners across Scotland. Over the last couple of years it has been promoting the concept of rural resettlement with the objective of "attracting new populations and potentially re-peopling currently empty places, while also renewing the richness and bio-diversity of their places",<sup>20</sup> thus bringing the potentially conflicting community regeneration and rewilding agendas together. In autumn 2018, it successfully promoted an amendment to the Planning (Scotland) Bill which will require the NPF to consider the potential for rural resettlement.

### **Conclusions**

The Scottish Parliament's resistance to the loss of strategic development plans and the Scottish Government's intention to establish an enterprise agency for the South of Scotland are positive signs of an appreciation of the importance of regional agency and institutional infrastructure. The recent Burness Paul report on Scotland's three largest cities affirms the continuing importance of improving connectivity and creating places of quality, aims which will require public sector leadership. Scotland's distinctive land reform agenda will be a key driver of renewal in rural areas, and potentially urban areas as well.

I therefore see key elements in the agenda for Scotland's strategic development in the medium to long term as being:

- *building a strong institutional infrastructure and capacity at regional level;*
- *a continuing commitment to improving connectivity and the quality of place; and*
- *reforming and diversifying land ownership and planned resettlement in economically and socially fragile rural areas.*

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