



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 21 May 2024

Session 6



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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
16th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con)

*Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Andy Kinnaird (Scottish Government)

Ivan McKee (Minister for Public Finance)

Fiona Simpson (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Euan Donald

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 21 May 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:35]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Ariane Burgess): Good morning, and welcome to the 16th meeting in 2024 of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. I remind all members and witnesses to ensure that their devices are in silent mode.

We have received apologies from Stephanie Callaghan.

The first item on our agenda is a decision on whether to take items 3, 4 and 5 in private. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members indicated agreement.

National Planning Framework 4 (Annual Review)

09:35

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is an evidence session with the Minister for Public Finance on the committee's annual review of the fourth national planning framework. From the Scottish Government, the minister is joined by Fiona Simpson, who is the chief planner and director of planning, architecture and regeneration, and Andy Kinnaird, who is the head of transforming planning in the planning, architecture and regeneration division. I welcome the minister to his first meeting in his new role. We look forward to working with you.

Before we move to questions, I remind members and those participating in today's evidence session that there are active legal proceedings concerning the interpretation of NPF4 policies and the interaction between those policies and existing local plans. The Parliament's standing order rules state:

"A member may not in the proceedings of the Parliament refer to any matter in relation to which legal proceedings are active except to the extent permitted by the Presiding Officer."

Although we do not wish discussion and debate to be unduly restricted, I ask members and witnesses to avoid making reference to the specific matters that are currently before the courts.

I invite the minister to make a short opening statement.

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Thank you very much, convener, and good morning, committee.

It is good to be back, if on the other side of the table. I welcome the opportunity to give evidence to the committee on national planning framework 4, and I look forward to discussing it with you.

As you know, I have only very recently taken on responsibility for planning. However, as Minister for Public Finance, I understand the significant contribution that planning can make to the key priorities of the new First Minister, and I am very much looking forward to my new role. Planning can be challenging, but that is also what makes it so interesting and so important to us all.

National planning framework 4 is now the cornerstone of our new planning system. It sets out a clear and ambitious future for all stakeholders to work collectively to deliver. It gives clear support for good-quality development in the right locations when that is needed. It is more than a high-level vision; the plan is backed up by national planning policies and national

developments. We are committed to making NPF4 work in practice. It is not just a plan or an aspiration but a firm commitment to delivering positive change.

NPF4 has been in place for a little over a year, and it is helpful that the committee is now taking stock of where we have got to. A lot has happened over the past year. In the autumn, we published the second iteration of a delivery programme for NPF4, which includes a wide range of actions that we have already delivered and continue to take forward as the Government and in partnership with others.

This is the first national planning framework to have statutory development plan status. That makes it very influential in the planning process, but it is designed to work with local development plans, which ensure that local circumstances are taken into account.

Planning authorities are now beginning to prepare new local development plans, which will be instrumental in taking forward NPF4 in different parts of the country in a way that responds to their unique challenges and opportunities.

Planning authorities and developers have been working hard to take NPF4 forward, and it is good to hear that communities are also very interested in it. However, implementation will take time, and we are working together to understand how the policies should be applied in practice. The planning profession recognises the scale of the challenges and opportunities that are in front of us.

Throughout the past year, we have worked closely with stakeholders to identify areas in which there has been debate about how the policies should be applied in practice. That includes policies on housing, rural housing and flooding.

Climate change and biodiversity have been an important focus for guidance and good practice. There will always be different and, often, opposing views on development proposals as well as planning policies. Policies might appear to pull in different directions, but planning is all about taking into account all relevant considerations and weighing them up to make sound decisions.

A number of those giving evidence have indicated that it is still early days for NPF4. There is no doubt that it has been a significant change to the operation of the planning system in Scotland, and, of course, development timescales mean that it takes considerable time to see the impact of planning policies on the ground. However, it is clear that change is happening, and those changes will help to ensure that our long-term spatial vision is realised.

This committee played an important role in shaping NPF4—you put a lot of work into it, and

your approach was open, positive and inclusive—and, of course, the Parliament as a whole was responsible for approving it.

Over the past year, NPF4 has helped to promote a more positive approach to planning, with planners proactively planning our places rather than just acting as reactive regulators. I hope that that positivity and can-do attitude will continue over the coming year, as we put in place further tools and work together to deliver economic growth and support a just transition to net zero.

The Convener: Thanks very much for that. I have a couple of questions, which I will package together. As we all understand, it is early days for NPF4, but it would be interesting to hear any particular highlights from the 14 months since we adopted it that you would like to outline to the committee. You mentioned a few things in your opening statement, but will you pick out some aspects that would be good for us to be aware of? Also, what is the Scottish Government planning to do over the next 12 months to support the delivery of NPF4 policy priorities? Those opening questions will set the scene for the session.

Ivan McKee: I would like to mention the recognition that NPF4 has gained. It won the planning to address climate change award at the United Kingdom-level planning awards last summer, and the UK Climate Change Committee stated in its 2023 report “Progress in adapting to climate change” that NPF4 is a significant step forward in delivering adaptation. It has also won a number of other awards at UK level. We are delighted about that. It is recognised in many ways as being groundbreaking in its approach.

Clearly, as we recognise, it is early days for NPF4, but it has been very well accepted by the planning community. As we know, significant work is happening to line up local development plans with the approach in NPF4. Obviously, we will not go into the details of the recent court case, but that has helped to clarify some aspects of that. The fact that we have won that case, pending appeal, gives us confidence that NPF4 is pointing in the right direction in terms of what it needs to deliver.

On the issues that need to be focused on, the team has a thorough and impressive delivery plan that it is working through, which is rated using the red, amber and green system. That has been very effective in giving an overview of which aspects require focus. Clearly, quite a bit of work is happening on local development plans. There are a number of areas—for example, the masterplan consent areas, further work on compulsory purchase orders and work on the infrastructure levy—that are in the pipeline and are being considered.

As the planning community and, indeed, local communities become more familiar with NPF4, we expect there to be more community-level engagement, which would be very encouraging.

The Convener: I notice that a consultation on masterplan consent areas is happening at the moment. Perhaps this is a bit too detailed for you, but how will that work with NPF4? Obviously, you will get a result from and some feedback on the consultation process, but how will that work with or support NPF4 delivery?

Ivan McKee: Yes, you are right: one of the current consultations is on the procedures for masterplan consent areas. The concept is that you identify an area where some of the work has already been done, to enable the planning process to be a bit easier and a bit faster to implement in that area. It is about identifying where those areas would be, working with local authorities and local communities and ensuring that, particularly in rural areas, you have fewer hurdles, if you like, because you have done a lot of the groundwork previously to understand what is permissible.

If you want more detail, Andy Kinnaird can provide the specifics.

09:45

Andy Kinnaird (Scottish Government): The consultation itself is largely about the procedural aspects of how a planning authority would take forward a masterplan consent area. As for the thrust of what they are about, they are much more a delivery tool to help authorities that are working with industry partners—where appropriate—to deliver on what they consider to be priority developments for their area. That could involve a lot of different things. It might entail delivering housing or delivering industry. Rural homes is another area where we see opportunities for masterplan consent areas, particularly as a tool to support town centre regeneration projects. They can be used as a tool to support the delivery of a local development plan, potentially for allocated sites, or for policies in the LDP. Masterplan consent areas are flexible enough that, if new priorities emerge outwith the development plan cycle, sites can still be brought forward to grant what are, in effect, up-front planning and other consents.

The Convener: How does the masterplan consent area work with the LDP? How do they fit together?

Andy Kinnaird: The masterplan consent area can work with, or not necessarily with, the LDP. For example, if the LDP identifies a particular development that is desired for a site, the masterplan consent area can be used to de-risk some of the process. That means that the

planning authority takes the work forward to examine the detail of the proposed development and grants consents with the appropriate conditions. That helps to incentivise investors, knowing that the risk has gone out of the system.

The Convener: Thank you for going into that detail. Willie Coffey has a number of questions.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Good morning, minister and colleagues.

Ivan, on the updated delivery programme, which you referred to in your opening remarks, we all know that it is very early days, but plenty of documents and working groups have been established—which is an inevitable requirement as we deliver a huge programme such as this. Will you say a wee bit more about how the Government plans to monitor outcomes and impact, and so on? We are always very interested in the positive benefits that programmes such as NPF4 can deliver. Could you shift our thinking a little more towards how we will report on the outcomes and benefits that we see from NPF4?

Ivan McKee: Sure. You are right that the delivery plan has quite a bit of detail in it as to how the various aspects are taken forward. A number of working groups are working with that, and the consultations that we have talked about are part of that. As for the monitoring period, as I said in my introductory remarks and as you have recognised, it is probably too early to see things being delivered.

You had an evidence session with Craig McLaren, the national planning improvement champion, and he is leading work on a monitoring framework to help us to understand how NPF4 is delivering, how different planning authorities are working with the plan and their level of effectiveness in the delivery process. I had a good session separately with Craig yesterday. That is the overarching piece of work for monitoring, which will come through the process fairly soon.

Stakeholders have a big role here, too, so we are meeting Heads of Planning Scotland regularly, as well as other bodies that have an interest in the planning regime, in working together and in helping to understand how we effectively monitor the deliverables from NPF4.

Willie Coffey: In the spirit of NPF4, is there a place for communities to articulate and express what they think?

Ivan McKee: Absolutely.

Willie Coffey: Can they express what they think the successes have been, and will we see that kind of stuff coming through to the committee, so that it is not just agencies and organisations that are telling us that the framework is working well but communities themselves?

Ivan McKee: That is an important part of it—that work is included. Communities have the opportunity to put forward their local plans for their local area, for those to be fed into planning consideration through the local development plans at planning authority level or even just to allow local people to express what they think their local area should look like, and for that be considered in the planning process. That is a key part of NPF4, both through engagement for monitoring and evaluation and through the broader work on how communities input into local plans.

Willie Coffey: It is year 1, so we hope that, wherever we can, we will be able to see a semblance of this stuff coming through. The committee will take a keen interest in the matter every year, as you have said, and I am particularly keen to hear what communities around Scotland think about how successful the programme has been.

Convener, I think that you have a supplementary question. Would you like to ask it now?

The Convener: Yes. The convener is asking permission to ask a supplementary question. [*Laughter.*]

I thank Willie Coffey for mentioning the desire of communities to feed back. Have you picked up on the work of Planning Democracy? I know that Andy Kinnaird was at the event that it held. It has proposed a citizen science type of monitoring of NPF4 and, specifically, the biodiversity aspect. Have you thought about setting up some way in which that organisation could participate in that?

Ivan McKee: I engaged with that organisation when I was on the back benches, so I am familiar with what it does. Planning Democracy has done some thorough work on specific projects, and I know that officials have met or will meet it, as a stakeholder, to talk about some of the issues. That plays into the broader NPF4 policy on the importance of biodiversity and tackling climate change as a central approach to planning. Perhaps Andy Kinnaird will provide a bit more detail on that.

Andy Kinnaird: We had a really interesting session with Planning Democracy in the Parliament that evening. We have looked through the report that was produced following feedback from people in communities, specifically on the biodiversity policy, and we have reached out to Planning Democracy to offer it a discussion so that we can go through the report in a bit more detail. We are certainly very interested in hearing how local people can feed back their views on what is happening on the ground and how that might be able to influence future policy and decision making.

The Convener: It is great to hear that you are taking that work forward.

Willie Coffey: We heard concerns about the administrative burden relating to some of the climate and biodiversity requirements. Does the Government accept that? What can we do to mitigate that burden?

Ivan McKee: There is always a balance to strike. The value of NPF4 is that it covers many different areas—32 policy areas or whatever it is—so it has to be overarching and consider all those factors, but the issue of proportionality is hugely important.

Planning authorities are seized by the issue. The level of information that they seek from applicants is very much driven by proportionality considerations. There will be fewer requirements for householders and small local developments than there will be for major housing or infrastructure developments. There is a recognition in the system that we need to get that balance right. As we do our work, it is important that the guidance that is produced takes that into account, too.

A lot of this is about dealing with different cases as they come forward, building up a body of evidence over time and recognising that proportionality should be leveraged in such a way that we do not create barriers for local communities that want to take forward their plans.

Willie Coffey: We also heard concerns from planning authorities about the interpretation of policy 5 on soils and policy 22 on flooding, which you mentioned. The concern is that very strict interpretation might prevent the deployment of innovative mitigation measures that communities seek. Is the Government aware of those concerns, even at this early stage? Could the Government further engage on that issue?

Ivan McKee: Absolutely. On policy 22 on flooding, I am aware of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's input in specific cases and its general approach. The Government is engaging on the issue to ensure that things are in the right place. We want to ensure that our approach is proportionate in delivering what NPF4 is meant to deliver, as I said in response to your previous question, while not preventing innovation or development that should take place. We are working through that as part of the bedding-in process. Perhaps Andy Kinnaird will comment on that.

Andy Kinnaird: We have engaged with various stakeholders on some small sticking points on a few NPF4 policies. We have been engaging with Heads of Planning Scotland and SEPA on policy 22 on flood risk and have had a few conversations around the handling of that, most recently just a

couple of weeks ago. We are trying to get down to the respective roles of SEPA, as the Government agency that is consulted entirely on flood risk matters, and planning authorities, as the decision makers that have to reflect the much broader scale of interests and policies that help them to reach their decisions.

We have now had several discussions with HOPS and SEPA. SEPA is working on some guidance about its role and how it handles that, which we will see about getting out there soon. We are looking at that alongside the way that planning authorities reach their decisions, as well as the role that the minister has in relation to the notification and potential call-in arrangements for cases in which flood risk comes into play. We are planning to have a follow-up session in the coming weeks that will involve industry interests, to work things through as best we can.

Willie Coffey: I will follow up on that with a question for the minister, Andy Kinnaird or Fiona Simpson. I have a local constituency issue in which residents are facing the erosion of riverbanks that adjoin their property. Will the new arrangements and the new thinking assist local people to better deal with that? Up until now, they have been unable to deal with it or to gain permissions from whatever bodies are in place to help to protect their properties from erosion due to the effects of climate change. I hope that the arrangements in the new framework will allow local residents to take action where previously they were unable to do so. Is that the feeling that you get, minister?

Ivan McKee: I do not want to go into specifics on individual cases, but it is fair to say that that is the intention. I mentioned the UK Climate Change Committee's comments about NPF4 and the contribution that it makes to support and adaptation. As Andy Kinnaird has said, there are on-going discussions with the statutory bodies on fleshing out the guidance, the process that sits behind that in relation to specific applications finding their way through the system and the various ways that those can be considered at different levels in the system. That is certainly the intention. We recognise that there is work to be done as that beds in to make sure that it delivers the desired result.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I want to ask you about the reuse of brownfield sites and the support available for that. According to the last numbers that I saw, the amount of vacant land across Scotland fell by a quarter between 2016 and 2022. Do you have any more information on the amount of land that has been recovered and reused? As I have said, the last numbers that I have go up to 2022, but there are still over 9,000 hectares of derelict land in

Scotland. I know that NPF4 is only a year old, but does it contain any incentives to encourage developers to continue to use brownfield sites?

Ivan McKee: Thanks for that data point. That is something that we need to do more work on. I have been working with officials on that, and I recognise the need for more data at all levels to understand what is in the system at various points. I know that, in your previous evidence session, Tony Cain and others referred to how much land was available, how much had been approved through the planning system, how much was being built on and how much was brownfield. There is a need for more of that in the work that is happening, and the guidelines on housing land audits will help make sure that everybody is working to the same set of definitions when pulling that data together.

10:00

NPF4 recognises that brownfield sites are preferable; indeed, it is one of the clear directions within it. Every such site will have its own specific challenges, depending on where it is and the history of the site—it might need to be decontaminated or the costs of development could be prohibitive—but the direction of travel is to bring as many as possible back into use. The stats that you have quoted indicate that that is happening to some extent, but more needs to be done.

I recognise the issue in my constituency, where a considerable amount of former housing land and other brownfield sites can be brought back into play. NPF4 provides the overarching policy; it is for local development plans and local planning authorities to figure out what bits of those sites should be brought back into use to suit their circumstances, and what processes would be required for that.

To summarise, then, I think that we need better data. NPF4 prioritises the use of brownfield sites. Some progress has been made on that, but it is down to local planning authorities and communities to bring forward what they think is needed to suit local circumstances.

Gordon MacDonald: In my constituency and in constituencies in and around Edinburgh, there has been an awful lot of development on good-quality arable land. Having a policy of brownfield first is great, but is there anything in planning that can halt the building of housing on good-quality arable land when brownfield sites are available—and sometimes pretty close to the arable land that is being built on?

Ivan McKee: This policy is highlighted in NPF4. We might go on to talk about this in a bit more detail—I hope that I am doing the details of this

justice—but the process for allocating housing land has changed under NPF4. Before, it was all about having to hit a number, which encouraged people to bring forward other land that was not in the plan, and that has changed to a process in which other land will be released if you are using the land that is already in the plan—if that makes sense.

That is quite an important distinction, and it should drive developers and others to make use of the land that is in the plan. Clearly, a lot of that will be brownfield land, based on local development plans. The recent court case has reinforced that policy, although as I have said, the window for the appeal process is still open and we will see what transpires.

When we join all of that up, we can see that we are in a much better place than we were. We have a firm direction of travel as well as local flexibility that allows for local circumstances to be taken into account.

Andy, do you have anything to add?

Andy Kinnaird: I have nothing to add.

Gordon MacDonald: I have another question about vacant and derelict land. It has been suggested that more than half of that land can be developed over the next 10 years, but as we know, some of it has previously been used for manufacturing, for instance, and will need an awful lot of remedial work. Previously, we have had the vacant and derelict land fund, and we now have the low-carbon vacant and derelict land investment programme. What incentives are available to support developers in reusing brownfield sites?

Ivan McKee: You are right that significant amounts of money are available through those funds. Fiona Simpson will have the latest position on where we are with that.

Fiona Simpson (Scottish Government): There have been significant budget reductions for the vacant and derelict land fund, and regeneration capital grants have reduced as a result. With the planning, infrastructure and place advisory group, we are looking at alternative approaches to supporting how we unlock brownfield land; indeed, we will be exploring that at the next meeting. Clyde Gateway Developments is a member of the group, and we will be looking to it to share its experience.

Gordon MacDonald: I have one other question about local place plans. In previous evidence sessions, we have heard that only a handful of plans have been registered. In my constituency, some communities have the professional expertise to bring them forward, while others do not. Are

there any plans to support communities in developing such plans?

Ivan McKee: I will ask officials to comment on that specific issue, but it is important to recognise that NPF4 is clear that the local place plans do not need to be all-singing, all-dancing documents; they can just be a statement of what the local community thinks is important to include in its local place. That can be fed in at different stages in the process, so there is quite a bit of flexibility to make the process more accessible. However, I absolutely recognise that different communities will have different levels of volunteer expertise available to put plans together, and that support with that is required.

Andy Kinnaird: We do not have specific numbers for how many local place plans are being prepared at the moment, but I gather that quite a lot are being prepared around the country just now. When we initially brought forward the provisions in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, with the detail in the following regulations, we were clear that we did not want to overengineer the process and that it should not be a complex business to produce a local place plan. I appreciate that some that have been prepared so far with a bit of professional support are very well put together and are quite detailed, but a local place plan could be much shorter—it could be just a couple of sheets containing a map and some priority commitments. At its heart, the local place plan is a statement from the community of what it wants to happen in its area, so it can be something far simpler.

Gordon MacDonald: Okay—thanks very much.

The Convener: It is great to get clarity on that simplicity and to hear that a plan could be just a couple of A4 sheets of paper and a map.

We will go back to the issue of brownfields, as members have a couple of supplementary questions on that, but, before we do so, I want to go back to Ivan McKee's point about data gathering. In relation to housing, I have picked up in conversation with planning authorities that it might be good to track the number of consents given, whether the housing is moving forward and, if not, why it has stalled.

Could the Scottish Government consider some way in which planning authorities could track that and have a feedback mechanism that allows developers to say why they have not got on site and that kind of thing? Apparently, that is happening across the country, and we really need the housing to happen. If consent is being given, which is already a challenging process, but we are not getting the development that is needed, that might be another issue for the Government to pick up in its data tracking.

Ivan McKee: Absolutely, and it should follow the process all the way through. I think that it was Tony Cain who identified that issue, and I have been having conversations with officials about how we take that forward. The housing land audit guidance is important, because I understand that, at the moment, everybody does that in a different way, which makes adding it all up at Scotland level difficult. The first stage is to get everybody on the same page and then, exactly as you have said, we need to be able to identify what is happening at different stages of the process.

One data point that I have—and this is not from official stats; it has been pulled together from approximate data and is slightly historical, as it is from 2018-19—is that land that has been identified as being suitable for housing could accommodate approximately 390,000 units. That is a significant number, given that we are doing only 20,000-odd completions per year. That is how much is in the pipeline at the early stage. We now need to identify how much of that has gone through the planning process and then, as you have said, exactly where that is sitting and why it has not been taken forward to the development stage.

There will be a mixture of reasons for that. However, drilling down into the issue is absolutely critical to understanding how the planning process is supporting provision and where the bottlenecks are, if there are any, or whether the bottlenecks are elsewhere in the housing provision landscape and are to do with investment, skills, the attitude of developers, local issues or whatever it happens to be.

The Convener: It is great that you are across that.

Miles Briggs has a supplementary on brownfields, and then I will go to Mark Griffin.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I have a wider question about the pipeline. That was one of our biggest concerns when we looked at NPF4, and we were reassured that it would not be a problem. However, developers are telling us that it is very much a problem. NPF4 has obviously removed the ability to support unallocated housing sites. Where is the Government on that? To get the balance right, could the Government consider having national interim planning guidance on some sites that have not been brought forward?

Ivan McKee: I will bring in Andy Kinnaird in a minute, but I will first make a couple of points. In policy 16(f), there are exceptions that allow unallocated land to be brought into the process for local proposals, or depending on the size—I think that it is fewer than 50 units in the case of social housing. There is also a provision, which gets to the heart of the case that we have been talking about, for land to be brought into use when the

existing land that is allocated has been developed. There are ways of working through this that will prevent a bottleneck in the provision of land.

Andy Kinnaird might want to give a bit more detail.

Andy Kinnaird: We have to be careful, because this lies at the heart of the legal challenge, so I will try not to get too far into any detail.

We have been considering very carefully the recent court result and thinking about what we do next. We are looking at our messaging with regard to what happens next, after the legal proceedings are over, to get something out there. I think that we would have done that, irrespective of which way the court judgment went, but you can expect to see more from us soon.

Miles Briggs: Thanks.

Ivan McKee: The data point is really important, because the data sheds light on where the hold-up in the process is and helps us understand a bit better all the different perspectives that people are putting into the mix at the moment.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I will carry on with the theme of data and research on existing brownfield sites. As part of that exercise, will you be looking at the age profile of that brownfield land? There is a contention that there is brownfield land that has been designated as effective land supply, but it has been in plans for generations and there is a reason why it has not come forward. Should we just say that, once we get past a certain cut-off date, it is not effective land supply and that we should look for other sites to fill that gap? I am interested to know whether the research will look at the age profile of that land.

Ivan McKee: The age profile of brownfield land, as well as the age profile of land that has been approved for development but which has not been developed, is an important part of this. We absolutely need to understand that and have as much detail as we can get on the age profile by local authority area.

Anecdotally, I know that some brownfield sites can lie around for a long time and then come into use for various reasons, either because funding becomes available for remediation, or because technology moves on, or whatever. I frequently drive past the meat market site in Glasgow, which has now—thankfully—been developed after many years of lying vacant. Age is a factor, but just because land is old, that does not necessarily mean that there is no scope for it to be developed.

Gordon MacDonald: I have a quick question about the delay in land coming into use. Is there

any evidence of land banking by local authorities or developers?

Ivan McKee: We do not have the data, so the key is to get it. As we get the housing land audit guidance in place and get data back from planning authorities, we will be able to see where the land is sitting and for how long it has been sitting. That will give us a better perspective, so that we can understand what is in the pipeline, how long it has been there and perhaps what the reasons are for that.

Gordon MacDonald: Thanks.

Miles Briggs: I have a couple of questions on different topics. The first is about 20-minute neighbourhoods. The committee has heard a number of concerns with regard to the centralisation of services and the commercial pressures on developers in realising those neighbourhoods. Is there anything that the Scottish Government can do to unlock such developments?

Ivan McKee: Will you explain what concerns you mean?

Miles Briggs: My question is about the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods and the services for people within them. That also brings me on to my second question, which is about the infrastructure-first approach, so that people have services on their doorstep. For most developments, that is planned through a phased delivery, but it relates to services such as schools and general practitioner surgeries.

The committee has heard quite a lot, too, about leisure and retail facilities that are sometimes promised but not realised. NPF4 does not seem to have delivered some of that community infrastructure at this stage.

10:15

Ivan McKee: There are a number of different things in there. It is early days. We will share that work; the monitoring framework will help to evaluate what is being delivered. In the NPF4, there is a requirement for an infrastructure-first policy and for 20-minute neighbourhoods. Those concepts are embedded in the planning document. Planners will consider the framework in relation to local development plans and planning approvals.

There is a range of things to consider when you get into infrastructure. With a brownfield site, you might be in an environment where there are local communities with local services in close proximity; with a greenfield site, it could be something that is brand new.

Local authorities would develop public service provision plans for schools and so on in relation to

their assessment of need. I have had conversations with Glasgow City Council with regard to some communities on that point. Locally, we are working through what schools are available, how many more places they need, based on new housing development, and whether that means that there is a need to expand schools or that there is sufficient capacity already because rolls are falling elsewhere. The local provision is tied up with local capital budgets.

Private sector provision includes GPs, who have the scope to set up their practices where they want to, but also retail and leisure facilities and so on. It will come down to the commercial viability of a lot of that. We are not in a position to mandate people to set up shops in certain areas, but the provision of facilities is included in the planning assumptions in NPF4 in relation to infrastructure first and 20-minute neighbourhoods.

I do not know whether you want to go into more detail on that, Andy.

Andy Kinnaird: That sums up the importance of the plan-led system that we have. It can give certainty about the direction of travel as to where new development will happen, which feeds right through the infrastructure-first approach. Knowing where we will develop allows infrastructure providers and other service providers to see where the opportunity is to move in with their investments. The next round of local development plans will be crucial in helping to support that move to infrastructure first.

Miles Briggs: Most of us can see where new development has resulted in some of the new schools that are needed, but I do not think that we have seen that for GP services. I look at my area here in Edinburgh. Six or seven years ago, I asked questions about what investment was needed in our GP surgeries, and £60 million was the figure that was put forward at that point. New GP practices have not been built, but huge numbers of new houses have been, which are then absorbed into the current GP practices. It feels as though the situation is at breaking point in many communities, which are, quite rightly, campaigning for new practices. There is a recruitment side to the matter as well.

In relation to the pressures that our national health service is facing—especially around accident and emergency departments, when people go there instead of to their GP—and to whether a disconnect exists between new-build housing and the lack of development of additional GP capacity, where was the Government specifically looking? I understand that the issue sits in the different departments of health and planning, but there seems to be a specific issue in that a lot of additional homes are being built.

Ivan McKee: The planning system does not—and cannot—fix all those issues. You rightly identified that different parts of Government are responsible for the provision of different services. I do not think that we can get too much into that, because it is outside the scope of what we are talking about this morning.

Although I recognise the point that you are making, NPF4 has a focus on 20-minute neighbourhoods and infrastructure first, which are important in determining whether planning applications get taken forward. You rightly identified that, if challenges exist in other aspects of public service provision, be that in health or education, local authorities are tasked with the provision of adequate services in those areas.

Miles Briggs: In your opening statement, you touched on the infrastructure levy, which the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 legislated for. If you intend to proceed with that, what is the timescale for its introduction?

Ivan McKee: I will hand over to Andy Kinnaird to go through the detail. I received a submission on that from officials in the past few days. We are looking at what the scope of that could be, and we are about to take views on a number of questions to do with how it should be levied, the extent of it, what it could be used for and a number of other factors. That is imminent.

Andy Kinnaird: We are days away from issuing a discussion paper to get conversations going over the summer about the ins and outs of how an infrastructure levy could be made to work. Over the next few months, we will engage heavily on the levy with a view to working up draft regulations and a further consultation paper that will come out next year. There is a sunset clause on the levy provisions, which will expire in July 2026, so we know that we need to move forward on that.

Miles Briggs: Thank you.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Good morning, minister, and welcome to your role.

As we have heard, there is a housing emergency. I was lucky enough to speak to 31 out of 32 councils, and one of the issues that each council brought up was the pressures on housing. Since then, five councils have declared housing emergencies, so it is good that the Scottish Government has declared a housing emergency.

Are you satisfied that the approach to housing that is set out in NPF4 will deliver the homes that Scotland needs? What more can be done to the planning system to deliver those homes?

Ivan McKee: Those are very fair questions. One of the overarching principles of NPF4 is the requirement to deliver those homes, so it is very focused on that, as you would expect it to be.

There are a number of other factors involved in that. We have talked about the different policies on climate change and biodiversity, the infrastructure-first approach and 20-minute neighbourhoods, which are all part of the mix, but it is central to NPF4 that we have a planning system in place that is able to support the delivery of those houses to deal with the situation as it stands across the country.

Although we all agree that the solution to that will involve building more houses across all tenures where they are needed across the country, the local plans are critically important. They will ensure that local communities in planning authority areas have an input on where those houses should be built, which is a key consideration. The framework is absolutely focused on taking that forward.

However, it is clear that planning is only part of the solution, because a number of factors, including commercial aspects and skills, impact on housing provision. I know that the Minister for Housing is very focused on progressing the work in that area, and I am working with him on what needs to be done to help to address some of those challenges.

Pam Gosal: Now that a housing emergency has been declared and we have NPF4 in place, is there anything that you think needs to change in relation to the planning system, as someone who is newly in post?

Ivan McKee: The issue of the provision of data, which we keep coming back to, is important. We need to understand what land is where in the system and why it is not moving through the system. We need to know whether that is because of a planning issue or whether there are other reasons that mean that land in relation to which planning permission has been granted is not moving through to be available for housing stock. I think that that is probably the key area. We need to understand the planning provision data and to ensure that, as the policies in NPF4 are rolled out, they are able to support rather than militate against housing development, where that is appropriate.

We have touched on some of the issues. As more guidance comes through and more engagement takes place with bodies that are involved in the planning process, we will get more clarity, which will enable us to address some of those issues and to flesh out in a bit more detail what the policies mean for delivery.

The Convener: Gordon MacDonald has a supplementary question.

Gordon MacDonald: I am looking for a bit of clarification. Obviously, the housing emergency that has been declared is predominantly because

of the lack of affordable housing. However, in 2022-23, we built the highest number of affordable homes since the year 2000, so I am keen to understand what is within the gift of the Scottish Government.

The housing allowance for private renters has been frozen, and the cost of buy-to-let mortgages has gone through the roof, which has pushed up private rents. In addition, payments have tripled for home owners who have renewed their mortgages.

First, bearing in mind that any housing emergency is about supply and demand, how much of that is within the remit of the Scottish Government?

Secondly, is there still a requirement for private housing developers to provide 25 per cent of affordable homes?

Ivan McKee: Yes—the 25 per cent provision is in place, and you are right to reflect on the record, notwithstanding the fact that there are challenges in housing stock provision. If we look at the record of the Scottish Government, compared with other parts of the UK, considerably more houses have been provided per head of population in Scotland over the past number of years.

The answer to your question about levers—be they macroeconomic levers around interest rates, the ultimate provision of capital investment, or borrowing powers to address the challenges of affordable housing stock, in particular—is that they are controlled by the UK Government, because those issues are reserved.

The Convener: That question covered a broader area than our NPF4 theme, but I appreciate your answering it.

Miles Briggs: Obviously, your portfolio sits between local government and planning. Yesterday, I was at a Perth and Kinross Council meeting to discuss some of its housing issues, specifically around empty homes. In Edinburgh, my council has more than 3,000 empty properties. Where are you trying to connect those two issues to provide the homes that we need?

Gordon MacDonald and I have raised that issue consistently with the council, which always says that it does not have the money to bring the properties back into use. In some cases, the council has not audited the properties to find out what works need to take place.

Given the housing emergency that the Government has declared, getting every home possible back into use seems like an important starting point.

Ivan McKee: That is absolutely true. As I said, my colleague, the housing minister, is working on a range of measures to address that, and the

empty homes issue is part of that solution. You said that the number of empty houses is 3,000; I do not know the number right across the whole country.

Miles Briggs: It is 47,000.

Ivan McKee: Thanks for that. That issue is being addressed, and the work on compulsory purchase orders—as well as looking at compulsory sales orders—is part of the mix to give councils the tools and capability to do that.

There are also funding issues. I do not want to talk for the housing minister, because he will be looking at that, but it is about understanding where best to focus investment. I suggest that a combination of new build and bringing houses back into use is required.

The Convener: You mentioned the CPO review and looking at compulsory sales orders. Can you give us a timeline on that?

Ivan McKee: Yes—a group is meeting on that issue, which Roseanna Cunningham is co-chairing with Fiona Simpson. I will hand over to Fiona, and she can give you an update on where her group has got to.

Fiona Simpson: It is quite early days for the work on compulsory purchase orders reform. We have had our first meeting. The group members are, largely, practitioners from the public and private sectors, because it is a technical area. We have started work on that. We intend to engage with wider stakeholders as that work progresses. The next meeting is next week. We have started to scope some of the issues around the process and how it can be made fairer and faster.

We expect there to be an interface between compulsory purchase orders and ideas around compulsory sales orders, and the group might be able to consider whether the CPO could be an alternative approach to compulsory sales orders. However, as I said, it is early days.

10:30

The Convener: On the back of Pam Gosal's question on the housing emergency and NPF4, I want to take us down a tributary on rural housing, so bear with me.

I will ask about a couple of issues that have been raised with me. The first is that the language around rural groupings and clusters has been removed from NPF4. That has been raised as a concern, because it means that those are not identified in NPF4 and, therefore, it is harder for rural housing to be taken forward. Has that come across?

The second issue is about infill sites. I have spoken with an architect in a design and build

company that used to work with infill sites and extension sites. In one particular planning authority, those no longer seem to be an avenue. As a result, three houses will not now be built. You will be aware that, in a rural community, one or two houses can be quite critical.

Ivan McKee: I absolutely recognise that. You are right that in a small community, those numbers can be hugely important. I will hand over to Andy Kinnaird in a minute to go through some of the detail on that.

Clearly, rural revitalisation is one of the overarching principles in NPF4. We have already talked about the proportionality and flexibility in local areas having either local development plans or local community plans that recognise local factors and are able to support accordingly. That is understood within the framework, but, as it beds in, if such issues are raised, they need to be considered and addressed. I listened with interest to the witnesses that you had from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, who talked about the applicability of NPF4 locally. Andy, do you want to go into some of the details?

Andy Kinnaird: I will make a couple of points. NPF4 is intentionally very supportive of rural housing. The policy intent of policy 17 includes encouraging, promoting and facilitating

“the delivery of more high quality, affordable and sustainable rural homes”.

We had some early engagement through HOPS around the understanding and interpretation of the policy, to reinforce the point that it is intended to be very supportive and positive.

It might be worth mentioning that this is one of the areas where we talked about the potential to use masterplan consent areas in the clustering that you mentioned, as an opportunity to allow for build-out to come as and when need is recognised. That is one of the routes that we could use to support rural housing in the future.

The Convener: Do you think that those glitches are around the need for guidance on the intention? It seems that our local authority has moved away from that and is potentially thwarting rural revitalisation.

Ivan McKee: Without knowing the specifics of the case—there might be other factors involved—I refer back to what Andy Kinnaird said, which was that rural revitalisation is one of the overarching principles in the document. That is clearly a hugely important policy direction, in line with policy 17.

If we are finding ourselves in a situation where we are taking a step back from what happened before, it is important to flush that out through the engagement work with stakeholders in the planning community, to help us to understand

whether we require more clarification or guidance on specific local issues. However, it is good that those issues have been raised, because they allow us to dig through and address whether the process is working as intended.

The Convener: Another issue on rural housing that was raised is what happens if all your area is peat. How do you tackle that? That is maybe something else to gather data on.

Ivan McKee: Yes. Clearly, there are hugely important imperatives around the climate impact of peat. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar gave statistics about how much peat it has—it is an awful lot. That is clearly a factor, but that is where the value of the local development plans comes into play—they can take those factors into account and understand how they work in a local context.

The Convener: Great, thank you. I will bring Pam Gosal back in.

Pam Gosal: Minister, we heard in your opening statement how important planning is to the First Minister’s future plans. We have also heard in evidence to the committee that the inadequate resourcing of planning departments remains a barrier to the delivery of NPF4.

Could you outline the proposed changes to funding that are set out in the “Investing in Planning” consultation document? Could you also explain how those changes will tackle the resourcing issues?

Ivan McKee: On the resourcing issue, planning is delivered by local authorities and there is no ring fencing, so they make the decision on the amount of resource that they allocate to the planning process.

There has been a reduction in resources allocated at that level, as you rightly identify. Work is on-going to understand what we should do with fees in the future. There have recently been increases in fees, and work is on-going to understand how that should be taken forward, and whether fees bring more money into the system to support planning authorities to have sufficient resource in place.

There are a number of other aspects, too. There are challenges with regard to the number of planners coming through the system. One could name 50 different professions across the economy where workforce numbers are a challenge, so that is not unique to planning, but it is something that we are seriously addressing.

Last week, I was at an event at the University of Glasgow that involved a combination of academics who do the training, planning authorities and industry partners all putting their heads together around the table to figure out how we can improve the flow of planners into the system. The

Government is contributing to that work through the bursaries and other support that we are putting in place to support graduate planning roles as part of the education piece.

I met the national improvement champion for planning yesterday to understand how we can use technology to make the process more effective and efficient, so that we can get more applications through the system, and increase the number of planners who are making use of the technology that is becoming available.

There are a number of different strands of work happening to increase the capacity in the system, but we absolutely recognise that that is a challenge.

Pam Gosal: I will come back on the planning profession side, but first I want to probe something that was brought up at our meeting the week before last. You talked about the fees system. Homes for Scotland brought that up and said that there is no use charging higher fees if people are not getting an adequate service. Last week, we heard that the fee system is ring fenced. Are you looking at that?

Ivan McKee: The point is that the fee system is not ring fenced.

You are right with regard to the message that I get from developers, and certainly from industry partners. As an aside, I note that part of the challenge is that we are a victim of our own success, to some extent, across the whole economy, in that the significant expansion of renewables capacity and the planned further exponential expansion means that there is a much greater requirement for planners. There is a whole sector—the energy sector—now looking to hire planners, and they are coming from local authorities or private sector employers, so there is a further requirement to increase the number of planners going into the system.

The point about fees is that they are not ring fenced, so the money goes into a local authority's general pot and local authorities make their own decisions as to what they spend those funds on. That link is not clear—it is not about the fees going into hiring more planners. It is up to the local authority what it does with that money.

Pam Gosal: I think that it was in relation to that, minister. The witnesses last week talked about the fact that, to bring more planners on, the fees are needed. Maybe local authorities are ring fencing the money for something else. It would be interesting to probe that a little bit more, which I will do.

It is good to hear you say that there is a lot of work being done. We need to have new entrants coming in, and we need to encourage people to go

into the planning profession. We have heard over the past few weeks that there is an inadequacy in that regard.

It does not help when—as stakeholders have told us—there are cuts to the college budgets, which is obviously having a negative effect on skills delivery. What is the Scottish Government looking at doing to encourage new entrants into planning?

Also, are you content that the work that you are doing will deliver the workforce that is much needed, both now and in the future? We are talking about renewables and we are talking about a lot of climate change. We need those transferable skills as well. What is your view on that?

Ivan McKee: First, we need to recognise that this is not just a Scottish issue; it is an issue across the whole UK. The workshop last week was interesting because it covered a wide range of different things and it was good to have different people with different perspectives coming to the table. One thing that came out of the workshop was the question, how do you get young people in school interested in planning? How do you make that an exciting career option for young people so that they grow up and say, “I want to be a planner”? We need to address that and highlight the fact that in that role, you are dealing with issues that are hugely important to individuals, to communities and to society. It is a varied career dealing with a range of different policy aspects and it will be a fulfilling career as a consequence of that.

As well as making it more attractive for people to come into the process, we also need to look at how to make provision for people with experience in adjacent sectors to move into planning mid-career; they might find that an interesting career transition later in life.

On the education side, you are right about the capacity that is there. That is an issue. Some of the education providers, including the University of Glasgow, are looking at what they can do to help put in provision to help train more planners.

Pam Gosal: Thank you, minister. I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is working alongside you, so that there is that crossover, because it is not just about planning; it is about education as well.

Ivan McKee: Absolutely.

The Convener: Before I bring in Mark Griffin, I have a couple of questions on those two areas. In terms of the resourcing of local authorities, obviously there is the local authority planning department, but there are also the statutory consultees, who seem to be quite underresourced.

Again, talking to planning departments, it seems that it can be quite a long time before a statutory consultee will get back to them. That is maybe going beyond the planning department—you would be starting to talk about NatureScot or SEPA—but I think that we need to recognise that planning is part of a bigger ecosystem and that lots of different bodies feed into it. How do we support the process there? I know that there are some thoughts around streamlining some of the processes, but how do we help the statutory bodies to contribute more swiftly?

Ivan McKee: You are right to raise that. I do not have data on that with me today. I can certainly commit to go and look at that more thoroughly to understand exactly what the challenges are and how addressable they are. I am pretty sure that that will be in the scope of the work that the national improvement champion for planning is taking forward to understand that whole system. You are right; we need to get the whole thing joined up and everyone working together.

There are clearly requirements or targets in terms of how long it should take for things to go through the process and for various bodies to come back on their piece of that. I would commit to do more work on drilling down a bit more into that and understanding where the bottlenecks are.

The Convener: When Craig McLaren was with us, I raised the point that people, including architects and developers, are putting through planning applications but then not hearing back in any way, shape or form, either in a timely manner or at all. He talked about the whole thing as being about customer care. We need a better communication system there. To use an analogy, when I am on the train commuting from here to home and we are stopped, I like it if the conductor actually tells us why we are stopped. It takes away the anxiety of wondering why we are stopped and how long for. If we could get that communication piece into the system, it could help quite a bit.

Ivan McKee: That is absolutely true, and that is a basic principle with regard to customer service. In the public as well as in the private sector, it is very important to tell customers what is going on. It makes people feel much more comfortable and understanding of the situation. The work that the national planning improvement champion is taking forward in the framework for evaluation of how different local authority planning departments are performing is a key part of that. That is not only with regard to what they are delivering, but how they engage with customers—that is a big part of that work.

10:45

The Convener: We have talked about new entrants and bringing more people in to planning, as well as training people who are already in the system, but a concern has come up in our evidence sessions about retaining people in the public sector, because it can be a much more attractive offer to work for a private company. What can we do about that?

Ivan McKee: The situation is more complicated than that because there are shortages in the private sector as well and the different sectors are looking over their shoulders at each other, because they are worried about the others stealing their people. The fact that we had everybody in the room together at the event last week highlighted the need for people to work more closely together on some of that stuff.

If planners in different parts of the process are duplicating work, there might be an opportunity to get an understanding of that across the whole system in order to streamline the process. By comparing notes, people might be able to take us to a more effective place. That is one part of the solution, but there are clearly a number of other legs to that.

The Convener: It is good to hear that you are across that.

Mark Griffin: What is the Government's assessment of the effect that the Miller Homes Mossend ruling will have on the number of developments that are being brought forward and approved?

Ivan McKee: The first thing to say is that the case is still potentially live, because the appeal period has not yet timed out, so we must bear that in mind. It is still early days and, as a Government, we will assess the possible implications of that ruling. It is fair to say that there will be applications that were not progressed or that were on hold as a consequence of the court case, so it may be that some of those will now start to move. I will provide some clarity with regard to how NPF4 and that approach are being taken forward in practice.

We would like to think that the ruling will ensure that the provision of land that is in the local development plans is taken forward, but it is probably too early to say and we need to get our heads around exactly what the implications are. Andy, do you want to provide more detail on that?

Andy Kinnaird: Yes—maybe a little more. The minister's predecessor, along with the Minister for Housing, hosted a round-table session with the housing sector—industry and public authorities—last November. Since then, we have been working up a series of actions to support what planning can do to play its part in housing delivery. We will

be looking to get that back together soon to follow up some of those actions. Beyond that, I reiterate the point that I made earlier that, once we get to the end of the process of this legal case, we will be able to say a bit more about what will happen next.

Mark Griffin: Are you in a position to say whether there are any plans, through the assessment of that decision, to review policy 16(f) of NPF4, even as an interim measure, given that the data that the pipeline has been assessed against is out of date? Until the new local development plans and the research that backs them up come into force, are there plans to review policy 16(f) in the interim—if there are any early signs that the ruling is choking off development?

Ivan McKee: I think that the ruling reinforced the application of the policy. I do not think that we have any plans to review it, but watching the data and getting better data to watch are hugely important parts of what we need to do across a whole range of what is in the pipeline. Andy, do you want to comment further on that?

Andy Kinnaird: I think that what you ask is just part of our consideration of the legal judgment and about what we do next. I do not think that we are in a position yet to say what that is going to be.

Mark Griffin: I have another question about the ruling. The court considered, with regard to the exceptional housing land release policy, whether there was still a target in the planning system. I think that the court decided that the minimum all-tenure housing land requirement—MATHLR—figures were a target. The Government contention has always been that MATHLR figures are a minimum—that is in the name—and that authorities should go beyond them. Given the decision of the court, does the Government plan to review guidance around MATHLR figures to give planning authorities not just the confidence but the incentive to go past them, especially given the declaration of a housing emergency?

Ivan McKee: As has been said, the MATHLR figures are based on an assessment that is increased by 25 to 30 per cent to give the final numbers, and those are then seen as a minimum for delivery. The expectation is that local authorities are delivering in excess of what is in the MATHLR figures.

Andy Kinnaird: It has certainly been our expectation that they would deliver in excess of the MATHLR figures. That is just starting to work its way through the new round of local development plans at the moment, but that is our policy position.

Mark Griffin: Is the court's decision to treat MATHLR figures as a target rather than a floor

having any bearing on Government's thinking on using those figures going forward?

Ivan McKee: That will be part of the consideration that we give it in the round, but I do not see anything else.

Andy Kinnaird: The MATHLR is the target, as is required by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. Although that is the established target, it is, as I said, our repeated policy position that we would expect it to be exceeded.

Mark Griffin: I will move on to a different subject. The level 4 budget figures for planning state that the planning budget line has fallen by just over 40 per cent, because

“Capital investment in digitally transforming planning services has been reduced.”

What impact will that budget reduction have on what we hope to see in the digital transformation of the planning system?

Ivan McKee: There are a couple of points about that. That is the budget that the Government is spending on the work that it is taking forward; it is not the budget for planners and planning resource in local authorities. As I said, we had that conversation, and that is not ring-fenced.

There is a focus on the digital delivery plan, which that budget contributes to. The work there is to take forward the new payment service as a first stage, and then further digital work on the back of that. There is a plan for what gets rolled out as part of that service.

We also have the national planning improvement champion in place. It is quite a tight team, but it is very focused on bringing other partners together. It is not a big organisation. It is very much about engaging with stakeholders and identifying opportunities for improvement, which I think is the most effective way to improve planning. The point is that there are clear steps in place to deliver on digital and on the improvement work across the whole system.

Mark Griffin: My final question is on the Scottish Government's proposed new national outcome on housing. I think that a consultation closes tomorrow on the review of criteria for amending NPF4. How will the proposed new national outcome on housing and the declaration of a housing emergency by the Parliament and the Government feed into that consultation on the review of NPF4?

Ivan McKee: We welcome the fact that the outcome on housing is in place. We have talked about the role of NPF4, with its primary consideration of how we enable the building of more houses. Andy, do we have anything more specific to say about that? We are in the process

and I do not think that that changes what is in NPF4 or its intent; it just gives it more focus. We have the national performance framework objective and we continue the work to embed and roll out the processes relating to local development plans and all the other elements that we have talked about.

Mark Griffin: Is it not the case that a consultation on the criteria for amending NPF4 closes tomorrow? My question was about how, given the new national outcome and the declaration of a housing emergency, other Government directorates are feeding that relatively new information into a consultation that closes tomorrow.

Andy Kinnaird: The consultation that closes tomorrow is largely about procedure. It is about what the processes would be for amendments to NPF4 or local development plans, although there is an extra point about the point at which amendments made to the national planning framework would trigger a full review of the framework. As I said, the consultation is largely about procedure rather than about what the content of amendments to NPF4 might look like.

Mark Griffin: Thank you.

The Convener: I am curious about how the existing national outcomes, and potentially new ones, relate to NPF4. Minister, I had conversations with your predecessor on the gender-sensitive planning work that is being done in Scotland. Are you across that work? It seems to me that it could help us with the new national outcomes and feed through all those aspects.

Ivan McKee: Do my officials want to say anything about that?

Fiona Simpson: A lot of the work on gender-sensitive planning is already under our belts. The Scottish Government has held really positive internal events, and the women's development network has looked at the issue. We held a practitioner session that was attended by more than 100 people, and we have had good conversations in the Parliament about gender-sensitive planning.

There are lots of opportunities for Scotland to show quite strong leadership in that area. We are working with Dr May East, who is an expert in the area, and Councillor Holly Bruce from Glasgow City Council, who has shown real leadership on the subject, to plan an international event in the autumn, which will allow us to compare experiences from different countries and cities. That is a really positive part of the policy.

The Convener: Are you seeing the connections to the national outcomes through that work?

Fiona Simpson: Yes. It is definitely about thinking about the bigger picture and planning's contribution to wider society.

The Convener: Brilliant.

Willie Coffey has a supplementary question on the budget.

Willie Coffey: My question is about the level 4 budget that was discussed a minute or so ago. That budget proposal is in two parts. The capital allocation cut comes principally from the UK Government's block grant cut, but the same table shows that there is a 39 per cent increase in the Scottish Government's planning resource budget, from about £4.7 million up to about £6.6 million, so there are two sides to the story. Minister, will you confirm that that is accurate?

Ivan McKee: It certainly is—I would not doubt your figures, Mr Coffey. I appreciate your raising that point for the committee's attention. I do not know whether my officials are across the detail on those figures.

Fiona Simpson: We can provide further clarification on how the figures have played out in the budget, if that would be helpful.

Willie Coffey: Thank you very much.

The Convener: That concludes our questions. It has been a very useful session, minister. It was great to hear that you were paying attention to our previous sessions, as you pulled out a lot of things from those conversations. A highlight for me was the work that you set out at the beginning on data sets and getting information. We are planning to hold these events annually, so there will be at least one more such meeting. Our last one will probably be next year, before we move to 2026. It will be interesting to see, at that point, what you have gathered in those data sets. By then, the planning fees consultation and the work on masterplan consent areas will be all done, so it will be interesting to see how those things start to come into play with NPF4. You have welcomed and taken on board the other issues that we have raised, which is very much appreciated. It was good to see you today. Thanks so much for coming.

Ivan McKee: Thank you very much.

The Convener: As that was the final public item on our agenda, I close the public part of our meeting.

10:59

Meeting continued in private until 11:57.

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