

# Draft National Planning Framework 4

Corra Foundation response

March 2022

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Corra Foundation welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft National Planning Framework (NPF4). The overarching themes and principles of the NPF4 are welcome, including the framework's focus on addressing climate change, improving health and wellbeing and supporting community empowerment. The NPF4 is ambitious and illustrates positive aspirations for Scotland's communities. However, whilst broad in its aspirations the NPF4 fails to provide the depth needed to understand how plans will be developed and delivered.

The following response draws on learning from Corra's People in Place programme, including evidence gathered through the [Getting Alongside Communities and Participatory Scotland initiatives](#). The points below provide a snapshot of the key points this paper aims to highlight:

- An emphasis on early and genuine engagement with communities will be central to realising the vision of the NPF4. This means listening and understanding local priorities, such as community involvement in Local Place Plans. A positive example of this early engagement is demonstrated in Carbrain where the local council has welcomed calls from the community to be involved in plans to build a new school and community centre.
- The NPF4 needs to acknowledge the importance of community anchor organisations, as well as long term staff working alongside a community to support consistent and meaningful engagement. Community Coordinators working as part of the Getting Alongside Communities often play a key role in enabling inclusive involvement and building connections between local authorities and local people.
- It is important to understand how the NPF4 aligns with existing policies. In Scotland we have a strong foundation of community empowerment legislation and policy initiatives such as, 20-minute neighbourhoods, Community Wealth Building and the Place Principle. For the NPF4 to be delivered, clarity is needed on where it's positioned within this complex landscape. It is also essential that the NPF4 reflects the ambitions of the upcoming Scottish Human Rights Legislation. Whilst the NPF4 does make some references to human rights it is a significant omission that the draft document does not make this link.
- The NPF4 has the opportunity to embed the changes in behaviour, culture and processes that underpinned the most effective collaborative responses to the

pandemic and ensure that organisations and public bodies do not revert to pre-pandemic ways of working.

## Participation and Planning

Corra is concerned the breadth of the draft NPF4 hinders its accessibility and the potential for meaningful engagement, which is essential if the vision for the NPF4 is to be achieved. A combination of complex bureaucratic systems, a lack of resources and consultation fatigue can prevent genuine community involvement. It is important that the NPF4 creates opportunities for people to have their say on the issues that matter to them. Corra calls for a greater focus on participation in the next iteration of the planning framework. This would align the NPF4 more explicitly with the plan to develop comprehensive Human Rights legislation in Scotland – participation being at the heart of a Human Rights Based Approach.

*“There are too many examples of planning processes being delivered in in-authentic ways, where planners have already decided how things will go and the people have no real say in the changes and developments within their own communities” Community Co-ordinator, Corra Foundation*

Learning from communities highlights the barriers between policy, practice and implementation. Community Co-ordinators continue to highlight the challenges in creating opportunities for local people to have their say in planning processes. For the NPF4 to be fully realised it requires a shift in how partners, such as services and local authorities, work together and how they engage and involve communities. Insights also suggest a culture of participation is needed across local authority teams so that opportunities for community empowerment are not simply the aspirations of one directorate but a shared vision that invites the views of the community and local services within it to be heard.

Corra is developing an approach alongside some Scottish places aimed at encouraging, deepening and widening opportunities to participate locally, called [Participatory Scotland](#). It involves putting in place the support and resources to encourage participation in the first place. We believe that with this approach – resourcing the structures to support participation - people develop their skills in terms of knowing what assets and benefits a community has and are much more able to identify the gaps and requirements of a local place.

Care should be taken through planning processes to actively engage local people and seek out those anchor organisations and backbone community groups who can provide a way to build a relationship with communities. This also includes staff such as Corra’s Community Co-ordinators, and others in similar long-term roles, that are working alongside a place to broker connections and enable meaningful involvement where local priorities are heard. Too often the ‘consultation’ process is a passive thing, where communities have either no

way of knowing how to make their views heard, or no confidence that these will be listened to in a meaningful way.

Using the Place Principle in practice, the NPF4 should provide clear and accessible mechanisms for communities to be actively involved in the whole process of development and planning that affects them. Often local knowledge and insight can lead to important changes to an idea or plan that can increase its effectiveness, and the knock-on effect of this is that money is spent in ways that increase a communities' capacity rather than adding to a sense of isolation and disregard that some feel. Start early, listen deeply and provide honest but constructive feedback. These processes should be dynamic rather than one off and understand that people are often the experts in their own areas.

### **Participation and planning in action: Carbrain**

In Carbrain, the local community are proactively identifying opportunities to influence and support local plans to build a new school, community hub and housing. The proposals are in the early stages and community groups are working closely with North Lanarkshire Council to ensure local people are involved from the outset. This includes engaging local people in the different design and planning stages and creating opportunities for their views to be heard before criteria and blueprints are established. Reflections from the Community Co-ordinator highlight that this is working well as the local council have a positive relationship with the community and have welcomed the calls for greater involvement from local people on what matters to them.

### **Liveable places**

The NPF4 outlines important aspirations for community empowerment, including improving access to sustainable housing, amenities, and culture. Further detail on how this will be delivered is needed. Many communities highlight issues with poor quality housing and lack of public transport. Planning processes need to consider the infrastructure of a place, for instance ensuring housing developments are fully connected to transport, shops and green spaces. Putting people at the heart of this process helps them to feel part of a place rather than simply living there.

### **Participation and planning in action: Cumnock**

Through a community consultation Cumnock Action Plan (CAP) identified key areas local people would like to improve, including improving the Wood Road Park to be more accessible to the community. Cumnock Action Plan worked with East Ayrshire Woodlands Trust to support the development of the park which saw 1000 new trees planted, new signage and maintenance of paths to make the park accessible to wheelchair users and prams. As well as this, with the help of local children and young people a 'fairy trail' was created to support the park to be an inclusive family space. This highlights the ways community ideas can be brought to life when given the space and resource.

## The importance of spaces

*"Any institution that is generous with its space and enables community organisations to use their wonderful spaces and make it theirs, are hardwiring confidence, hope and a new security and resilience into the place."* Dame Julia Unwin<sup>1</sup>

One of the key issues for communities Corra works alongside is a lack of accessible, affordable space in which to meet, interact, hold activities. High rents and rates make empty units in town centres inaccessible for local enterprise retail use and community groups. Corra's 2020 [response to the Town Centre Expert Review Group](#) indicated the potential for empty retail units and vacant buildings to be repurposed as community led spaces or home to local enterprises. This is a key aim of Participatory Scotland, that works to bring people together, using 'neighbourhood shops' and maker spaces, to test out ideas and develop projects to support better local places.

Derelict land and vacant properties create problems in communities, and it can be challenging for local people to progress changes in this area. Evidence from communities indicates examples of empty spaces being left to deteriorate, with little to no maintenance. These spaces can be concern for residents if they feel unsafe or become a focus for crime in the area. Establishing ownership is also a challenge for communities, and it can take years for ownership of vacant buildings to be ascertained. Land can go unused for decades within communities but gaining permission to simply access the space for informal activity can be complex, time consuming and often communities are met with barriers that block their access all together.

In addition to supporting Community Wealth Building, anchor institutions have a key role to play in supporting 20-minute neighbourhoods by opening up access to the public estate – such as schools, colleges and health facilities – to increase community use and move away from a single service focus.

### **Community Space: Fernhill**

*"Space is vital for community activity, without access to space people can't come together and when people can't come together, they can't build and strengthen their bonds. A community without strong relationships and bonds within its population ceases to be a community and becomes more of a geographic residential area."* Community Co-ordinator

The lack of accessible space has been a persistent challenge for the community of Fernhill. In 2021 one local group in Fernhill used a derelict space to create a "build your own playground" area for local families over several days, brought in play sand to create an inland beach and ran a variety of other activities across the community. Not only did this provide social opportunities it created a space for parents to discuss their thoughts and dreams for their local community.

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<sup>1</sup> [Event items - University Events - Newcastle University \(ncl.ac.uk\)](#)

If this group, and other community groups, could be supported to identify what they see as assets, and given a voice in the processes around how these are accessed and used it could support significant improvement in community involvement and participation in Fernhill.

### **Community Space: Dunterlie**

Dunterlie Centre User Group (Dunterlie Action) have been involved in positive conversations around local community plans with East Renfrewshire Council's CLD and Environments team. They have supported consultation processes and have made strong contributions to planning conversations. Dunterlie Action are now a constituted group and are taking action to support more local people to access Dunterlie Resource Centre, a valuable community space. Dunterlie Action have also been approached to represent the community about other local developments, including the potential to redesignate a local greenspace for housing, however the group have highlighted the need for wider engagement with local people on this issue.

### **Poverty, inequality and human rights**

When planning fails to consider people there is a risk it will overlook their day-to-day needs, such as the extent they can walk, wheel or cycle safely to local amenities, how easy and affordable it is to access transport links, culture, leisure and local services such as GP surgeries. For communities experiencing high levels of poverty, the infrastructure of a town can perpetuate challenges and isolation. In Corra's recent response to the [Scottish Government's draft national plan to end the need for food banks](#) evidence highlighted the ways limited access to affordable shops and poor public transport connections can be a major challenge for people experiencing poverty. Without local supermarkets close by families are immediately restricted in what, how and where they buy their food. Some of the communities Corra works alongside support meal delivery services to elderly and disabled people in response to the issues they face accessing food.

All nine of the communities Corra works alongside saw increased levels of food insecurity during the pandemic. Funding of £164,917 from the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund supported local initiatives working to ensure families had access to food, digital devices and fuel vouchers in the early stages of the pandemic. However, systemic issues which pre-date the pandemic have not been addressed and the cost-of-living crisis and soaring fuel costs will further exacerbate the inequality experienced throughout communities in Scotland.

During the pandemic, communities and voluntary sector organisations took the lead in responding to local challenges. As part of this response, collaboration was accelerated, and funding was distributed at pace. This was an approach centred on trust and viewing community groups as equal partners. There is some frustration amongst communities that public bodies are now snapping back to pre-pandemic ways of working, which could undermine the agility and hard work communities demonstrated. There is a sense from communities and public bodies that 'this is a moment in time' where change can be

achieved. The NPF4 has the opportunity to embed the changes in behaviour, culture and processes that underpinned the most effective collaborative responses to the pandemic and ensure that organisations do not revert to pre-pandemic ways of working.

It is essential that the NPF4 aligns with Scotland's human rights trajectory. Human rights offer an important challenge to inequality and require everyone to have the opportunity to take part in civic and cultural life. It is important to harness the expertise that lies within communities. There is a growing focus on listening to lived expertise within recent policy developments, this should also be central to the NPF4 as route to deepening understanding of communities, the challenges they face and their aspirations for change. This also means proactively creating the space, resource and the inclusive infrastructure that enables the less heard voices to be included in planning processes so that diverse perspectives shape decisions.

### **The NPF4 and the enabling policy landscape**

Scotland's enabling policy landscape has been regularly, and rightly, referred to in relation to the NPF4 and more widely. It is encouraging to see existing policies - including 20-Minute Neighbourhoods, Community Wealth Building, and the Place Principle - referenced in the NPF consultation. It is, however, vital that the NPF4 connects with, enhances and enables delivery of existing policy and does not add further complexity to the existing landscape where, [often for reasonable reasons](#), implementation has lagged behind ambition.

Corra's work alongside communities at both neighbourhood, town and city scale has highlighted that a very different approach will be needed to deliver on 20-minute neighbourhoods. The communities Corra works alongside saw the public estate shut down at the start of the pandemic and in many places it remains closed (or re-purposed) with access to town centre, commercial space and public services requiring travel out with the local area.

Through the development of Participatory Scotland Corra has started - using a process of co-design with local people, community organisations and councils – to explore the concept of [universal basic infrastructure](#) and how spaces which support peer-to-peer participation, individual enterprises, and collaborative businesses can be established and resourced in communities.

Embedding this social infrastructure - in the same way as schools, GP surgeries and playparks are considered - when planning new developments or re-imagining existing communities as 20-minute neighbourhoods can play a significant part in creating the radical change that is needed to deliver on communities' and the NPF4 ambitions.

## About Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

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