

LOCAL PLACE PLANS. A Declaration by Scottish Communities

The following declaration came out of a meeting held between individuals from across Scotland at the Kinlochard Village Hall on Saturday 9th November 2019. Those involved in drawing it up had already considerable experience in working with their own communities to bring forward a range of different approaches to community led plans.

We agreed that addressing Climate Change and biodiversity loss are so critical to our survival that a community-led approach to Local Place Plans (LPPs) must be considered within the current context of the Climate Emergency. The Climate Emergency was declared by the First Minister in April 2019, along with a commitment to become a zero-carbon country by 2050. This places upon Scotland the requirement of a response of a scale, complexity and urgency unprecedented in our history. The Scottish Government must establish radical new ways of collaborating effectively with its citizens, to ensure the change which *must* happen, *will* happen.

Local Place Plans have potential to be truly transformative for Scotland because communities are well placed to fulfil the Scottish Government's Place Making Agenda, supporting the [Place Principle](#); while delivering on the Climate Change, Planning, Land Reform and Community Empowerment Acts.

LPPs provide holistic plans for delivering sustainable, resilient, liveable Places determined by specific local needs and context. They can enable local capacity-building and a collaborative response to the Climate Emergency, which breaks down organisational silos, brings sectors together and supports devolution of responsibilities.

Most importantly, LPPs have the power to engage and motivate whole communities because their shared vision is produced, understood and owned by all their residents. **For us, this is the true meaning of community empowerment and sustainability.**

We have genuine fears that LPPs cannot fulfil their potential because their place and function will be determined and constrained by the priorities and timescales associated with the [National Planning Framework 4](#), Scottish Planning Policies and Local Development Plans (LDP). We believe the current priorities and hierarchical structure of the current Government and the policy framework may render it impossible for resident-led LPPs to become an active and integral part of the planning system:

- The planning system time and again weighs individual or economic interests over the shared vision of a community and is seen primarily as a vehicle to deliver economic growth or housing targets.
- There are fundamental differences between the holistic way we experience and express our Places, and the fragmented way authorities break them down, i.e. into social services, economy, housing, education, environment, health, roads etc.
- The language of LPPs, which is intuitive for residents and promotes participation, can differ from formal technical policy language. The latter emphasises exclusion, rather than inclusion, of LPPs and ordinary people into the planning system.
- Government agencies and projects leading on the Place Agenda can stifle grass-roots initiatives and do not achieve the necessary levels of engagement, consensus or change.

We believe ever-declining public sector spend and resourcing exacerbate these issues. As authorities are required to work harder for less with jobs under threat, they can impose tighter controls on things they cannot manage directly, seemingly becoming more averse to risk and delegation.

The result is that across Scotland, Community Council and resident initiatives to take forward their own Place Agenda and climate action in their communities frequently find their efforts are frustrated, ignored or quashed. From our experience, if resident-led LPPs are not supported or taken seriously, the response is likely to be terminal disengagement, divisiveness and discontent.

LPPs need to stand in their own right and language and have their own status as 'community policy' determining the appropriate local response to the Climate Emergency, The Place Principle, and local economic and housing development. The development of Secondary Legislation and Local and

National Development Plans must consider the bottom-up community perspectives and allow sufficient flexibility for this. If successful, then LPPs have a place, and can work effectively, within the planning system by providing a holistic interpretation of local and national planning objectives and policy. We see this transforming adversarial inefficient processes into joined-up efficient collaboration, empowering and motivating communities, and providing a basis for pragmatic devolution and strategic national investment in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity **Unless a different approach is taken, then LPPs will have no substantive place or effect within the system.**

To ensure LPPs fulfil their purpose and potential, we propose the following **essential conditions**:

1. **LPPs must carry weight.** Towards fulfilling the National Outcomes and addressing Climate Change, should a conflict exist between local authority and LPP interpretations of NPF4 and LDPs, then the agreed community position must be granted due priority and weight as a material consideration and basis for deliberation.
2. **Existing LPPs** or the equivalent must be integral to the development of new LDPs, providing a starting point for negotiations between communities, authorities, landowners and other stakeholders with an interest in the Place.
3. **New LPPs** need mechanisms to enable them to interface with adopted LDPs and national policy, and have a meaningful influence on decision-making. Mechanisms we have seen with this potential include maps and formal guidance (e.g. such as Land Use and Development Frameworks), which could sit between LPPs and LDPs and 'bridge the gap'.
4. **Defending LPPs.** Credible legal routes for communities to question planning decisions that conflict strongly with LPPs, for example, via a right-to-appeal or the Aarhus Convention.
5. **Deliberative processes.** Duties which require authorities to engage in conversation with communities around their LPPs in planning processes and to allow reasonable time for community deliberation within their schedules.
6. **Representativeness.** Guidance which can ensure LPPs are resident-led and reflect the requisite diversity of perspectives and experiences which make up a Place, including children and young people, and are not used to further the interests of specific groups or landowners.
7. **Flexibility.** The approach taken to develop LPPs, as well as their form, content, language should not be constrained or stifled by authorities with predetermined approaches, rules and priorities. This would allow for the freedom of expression of communities and their values and include the scope to define community boundaries which work best for residents.
8. **Funding** must be responsibly delegated towards building capacity at a local level and leveraging community expertise. This is best allocated through community anchor organisations or community empowerment teams based in local authorities with knowledge of the local area and needs, rather than through a centralised Scottish Government fund. Communities receiving funding should be incentivised to work together on their LPPs to promote a joined-up approach to land use and development.

In conclusion, we are certain that unless new policy objectives and developments do not take into serious consideration the community perspective, and how we know through our lived experience how our LPPs work best, then the Scottish Government's vision of delivering on Climate Change will fail. Equally, we believe that if LPPs are given status as 'policy' in their own right and there is requisite flexibility built into the planning system to adapt to this which acknowledges communities as true and equal partners, then it will succeed by unleashing Scotland's greatest untapped resource: its People.

Signed of