

Kevin Murray Associates  
University of Glasgow

# **Review of the Strategic Development Plans in Scotland**

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Report prepared by:  
Kevin Murray Associates  
127 Fergus Drive  
Glasgow  
G20 6BY

University of Glasgow  
Urban Studies  
Bute Gardens  
Glasgow  
G12 8RS

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author.

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Local Government and Communities Directorate  
Building Standards Division  
Denholm House  
Almondvale Business Park  
Livingston  
EH54 6GA

Tel: 01506 600 400  
Fax: 01506 600 401  
e-mail: [buildingstandards@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:buildingstandards@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)  
web: [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

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BSD, Local Government and Communities Directorate, Denholm House, Almondvale  
Business Park, Livingston, EH54 6GA

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**Brownfield site:** A site which has previously been developed or used for some purpose which has ceased. (Planning Aid for Scotland, 2013, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 2).

**Circular:** A document produced by the Scottish Government containing guidance on the policy implications of legislative or procedural change. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 2).

**Development Plan:** A generic term for the Structure and/or Local Plan, or Strategic Development Plan and/or Local Development Plan, which apply to a planning authority area. Any planning application should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 3).

**Local Development Plans (LDP):** Part of the Development Plan – a statutory document required to be prepared (as of 2009), after full public consultation, by all planning authorities in Scotland to replace existing Local Plans. The LDP is the basis for making planning decisions in a given area. It must contain a spatial strategy and a vision statement, planning policies and maps. In the four city-regions, the LDP will be supplemented with a Strategic Development Plan; elsewhere the Development Plan will comprise only the Local Development Plan. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 4).

**Greenfield Site:** Land which has not been developed, in either urban or rural areas. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 3).

**Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (HNDA):** A method for building the evidence base for determining the housing needs and demands in region. Housing need covers households that lack adequate or suitable housing, and housing demand covers the quantity, type and quality of house that households are able to buy or rent in a region.

**Infrastructure:** Utility services (roads, sewers, and supplies of gas, water, electricity) or social/community services (schools, community halls, health centres etc.) which are needed to allow a development to take place. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 4).

**National Planning Framework (NPF):** The Scottish Government's strategy for the long-term development of Scotland's towns, cities and countryside. It sets out a vision for Scotland's development for the next 20 to 25 years and designates developments of national importance. Development Plans must have regard to the content of the NPF. (Planning Aid Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 5).

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP): A document stating Scottish Government policy on nationally important land use and other planning matters. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 7).

Strategic Development Plans (SDP) – SDPs apply to the 4 city-regions (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and their surrounding areas) and cover several local authority areas. SDPs are required to be prepared jointly by planning authorities acting as Strategic Development Planning Authorities (SDPAs) as of 2009 to replace existing structure plans. SDPs will set parameters for Local Development Plans; contain Vision Statements and Spatial Strategies; and will consider how land use proposals for neighbouring areas will impact on the SDP area. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 8).

Structure Plan: A statutory document prepared after full public consultation containing strategic policies which can cover several local authority areas. As of 2009 all planning authorities are required to replace these with Strategic Development Plans in the four city regions; elsewhere Local Development Plans only are required. (Planning Aid for Scotland, *Glossary of Common Planning Terms in Scotland*, 8).

Supplementary Guidance: guidance under Section 22 of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 that runs in association with an approved and adopted development plan and which has been through consultation.

## **Scotland's city regions in perspective**

The four city regions of Scotland account for some 80% of its population. They are characterised by the relationships between the core cities and their surrounding towns. This is determined by their interdependent housing and labour markets, shared higher order services for health and education, and water catchments and environmental resources. This underpins the competitiveness of the city and their regions reflecting in the patterns of economic activity, movement and quality of life and environmental conditions.

It is recognised that there is great diversity in Scotland's city regions, visible in their geography, history and local culture. Differences are also visible in their character, with Edinburgh the historic capital and administrative centre, Glasgow the industrial engine, Dundee and Perth transforming cities of culture and heritage, and Aberdeen the oil and energy capital of Britain, if not Europe.

Although this diversity requires each city region to find its own solutions to its problems, there is a shared role as the key drivers of economic growth in Scotland, the backbone of its competitiveness. In terms of social issues, it needs to be recognised that the major social needs are also concentrated in the major cities, reflected in such indicators as unemployment, affordability of housing, health standards, educational standards or crime. Similarly, environmental sustainability is driven by the demands of urban living and patterns of development. Such factors as waste generation, energy consumption, and land consumption depend largely on the way our city regions are managed. Therefore the future of Scotland depends on meeting these common opportunities and challenges, which can only be effectively achieved by a strategic approach to development planning.

In this context the relationship of the core of the city regions to their developed and rural hinterlands is critical. Over half of the population that is dependent on their services, or serves the cities in terms of labour supply, lies outside their administrative boundaries. There is therefore an overwhelming interdependence between the core cities and their adjoining council areas. Their current conditions and future prospects are interlocked. This relationship is not just about economic and social interdependency, but also impacts on the quality of life and environment in rural areas around each city region.

The great cities of Scotland, and their regions, therefore require planning above the local level, working together to solve 'local' problems or in the case of infrastructure, cooperating with national agencies and business. On all levels, strategic planning is of key importance to link power and resources especially in terms of transport and housing delivery.

Without this cooperation and shared strategic vision between authorities and agencies, there would be a disconnect between the power to plan effectively and the responsibility to deliver these plans. What is required is collaborative action if the challenges to the future of cities are to be overcome. These challenges include the need to promote their competitiveness whilst ensuring social cohesion/equity, the need to secure integration between and across the layers of government, and the need to take a longer term perspective in decisions engaging all the communities of interest.

At its heart, strategic development planning is concerned with the interdependence of communities, whether neighbourhoods or nationally. If there is to be sufficient focus on economic, social and transport problems of Scotland's core cities, strategic development planning needs to recognise that 'real' communities of interest lie cross-boundary. Without it there is no clear view of the relative role of each city-region. Without it, there can be no confidence about future infrastructure networks or development upon which economic investment relies, and it will inevitably under-perform.

Scotland has a longer tradition of strategic thinking than any other part of the UK or arguably Europe. This has been possible over the last sixty years or so in Scotland by reviewing and applying the lessons learnt and responding to new demands and circumstances. Administrative arrangements for strategic planning in Scotland have more recently been promoted through joint working between councils, strengthened recently by a new national planning framework. There is a need to ensure that the system continues to be refreshed and updated, in order to be able to meet the aspirations of Scotland and its local communities for greater and sustained well-being.

This review is a contribution to that strategic tradition of learning and responding.

## Executive Summary

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to find out if the new system of Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) is fit for purpose. These plans cover Scotland's four main city-regions, focused around Aberdeen, Dundee-Perth, Edinburgh and Glasgow. This new system was introduced in 2006 and has been operational since 2009, when the relevant Regulations came into force and detailed guidance was issued by the Scottish Government.

In 2013, the Scottish Government therefore commissioned Kevin Murray Associates working with the University of Glasgow to undertake a short review of the **process** by which Strategic Development Plans are devised and the **content** on which they are focused.

This report seeks to understand what has been happening recently in Scotland, how well it works, and how it might be improved. Much of the researchers' time has been spent on talking to people closely involved in making the new Scottish planning system work at a strategic level; listening to, and seeking to understand their experiences, and from this close-hand knowledge, gain a better appreciation of the pressures and constraints within the current system, and how they might be resolved or eased.

These direct conversations through workshops held in each of the four SDP areas, and through telephone and face-to-face interviews with those with the closest knowledge, were preceded by our own textual analysis of each of the SDPs already approved or in preparation, and by an online questionnaire allowing all those with direct experience of the SDP process to make their views on the issues known. In all we received around 500 contributions from people involved in strategic planning across Scotland.

The research explores a range of themes and draws out findings that act as a basis for improvement. As far as the **process** is concerned, the research aims have been:

- By engaging with a selection of stakeholders, to establish whether engagement with stakeholders has been effective and where it has clearly resulted in the aims of planning policy and advice being met;
- To establish whether or not the governance arrangements (including for example, the way in which the SDPAs are governed, the involvement of members, liaison with constituent authorities, resources, SDPA and plan boundaries etc.) have worked well;
- With particular emphasis on the key areas of housing and transport, and taking into account the relevant Scottish Government policy and guidance, to consider what evidence base has been used to inform each plan;
- To consider the extent to which the decision-making processes within each SDPA have, where necessary, supported the making of strategic decisions in the interests of the city-region; and
- To examine how the deliverability of the plans has been considered during the preparation process.



As far as the **content** is concerned, the research aims have been:

- To examine whether the plans are spatial and place-based;
- Looking at the topics that plans are expected to cover, to consider whether the plans have provided too much or too little detail, illustrated by examples;
- To examine whether the plans are providing/will provide the appropriate level of guidance for Local Development Plans, especially where cross-boundary infrastructure issues have been identified;
- To review the funding/contribution mechanisms relating to cross-boundary strategic infrastructure which have been considered by each of the 4 SDPAs and how these have fed into the relevant SDP;
- While recognising that each plan is responding to a different context, to consider the extent to which the content of each plan is generally consistent and if not, the main ways in which it differs and why; and
- To consider whether the length and style of the plans and the way in which they have been communicated graphically has been effective in meeting the aims of planning policy and advice.

Chapter 2 provides the context and approach to the research, including the different methods and levels of participation.

Chapters 3,4 and 5 provide a description and analysis of the governance, content and delivery related aspects respectively. This includes evidence from the various stakeholder viewpoints expressed in the different parts of the research, alongside our own interpretation of this.

Chapter 6 comprises reflections upon many of the key themes arising from the research, including both content and process aspects. Then a set of findings on how to improve the system are made. These are summarised below, with the lead/priority finding annotated in bold for each theme.

### **Overview theme 1: Collaborative leadership & governance**

The success or otherwise of the SDP teams depends on effective partnership working across administrative, sectoral and often political boundaries. The evidence suggests that because of this broad scope, the nature of the cross sectoral, multi agency working is pivotal in creating strategic visions and action plans that can be effective.

It is clear that consistent, coherent and sustained leadership is required, both politically and professionally, to deliver the necessary strategic planning. Planners, politicians, agencies and communities are still learning how to operate the new SDP system as it beds in. The function, purpose and relevance of SDPs needs to be communicated more clearly to these various audiences to improve both awareness and effectiveness.

In this respect the system is working, but not as well as it might particularly where there is scope for more effective collaborative leadership.

We have found that:

**1.1 There is a need to build greater capacity, awareness and more effective behaviours in strategic planning through annual training of political and professional leaders. Events such as the annual Development Planning National Forum, an annual conveners meeting and Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) meetings contribute to this.**

**(all SDPAs with Scottish Government, HOPS, RTPI)**

1.2 There is a need to invest further in effective partnership approaches, and in the trust that underpins them, by aligning vision, strategy and delivery mechanisms.

**(all SDPAs and agency partners)**

## **Overview theme 2: Effective engagement and scrutiny**

The research evidence suggests that appropriate engagement builds awareness, comprehension, and even ownership, of the vision and emerging strategy of an SDP. Indeed, communities and even agencies that have only limited appreciation of the SDP are more likely to challenge it and cause delay. This highlights the value of cross-sectoral and community engagement around the objectives and themes of the SDP. It is clear from many community and individual responses that there is scope for greater engagement with the wider community, with professionals outside direct SDP production, and with politicians beyond those with formal SDPA roles.

We have found that:

**2.1 There is a need for more targeted engagement with the wider community at different levels to build awareness and knowledge of the SDP role, purpose and implications**

**(all SDPAs, Scottish Government – with RTPI, Planning Aid Scotland)**

2.2 The use of a variety of mechanisms to enhance engagement, appropriate to local circumstances, including the potential use of a representative forum or sounding board, should be supported.

**(SDPA teams)**

2.3 Outreach promotion of the SDP function and relevance to politicians beyond those directly involved is required, to deepen understanding. In this context, previous activity such as the leaflet and video produced on strategic planning by Architecture and Design Scotland and the SDPAs with the Scottish Government serves as an example of this type of outreach.

**(SDPA teams, Scottish Government)**

2.4 As the normal default position, the Scottish Government should hold hearings as part of SDP examinations. The issues would continue to be determined by the reporter but there would be a greater presumption towards holding such hearings. A body of opinion (Annex E) from a range of stakeholders suggested that public examinations could form a standard part of the process. This came from written submissions, questionnaire feedback and two of the workshop events. However, we understand that the level of resource required for this would be higher, and appear counter to a more streamlined planning system. Despite these points to the contrary we have some sympathy with the stakeholders. A public element to the examination would be an important opportunity to raise concerns and build confidence in the strategic planning system.

**(Scottish Government)**

### **Overview theme 3 Housing and community building**

Housing, and the building or extension of communities, is a major theme of most SDPs, and one that drew some criticism from review participants across the spectrum, notably from communities themselves. The criticisms related to the general approach to the calculation of numbers, and to the spatial articulation or lack of it.

The process of assessing need seems to be bedding down and will be enhanced by additional guidance and tools that have been developed by the Scottish Government. The bigger challenge is to ensure that the plans do not simply distribute housing numbers between areas but help create sustainable and well balanced communities that are integrated more effectively with infrastructure and other investment, including green networks.

That requires a more integrative approach that looks beyond housing per se, to the concept of building communities and creating positive places. The various elements, including transport and infrastructure, need to be viewed and aligned within this wider framework. The evidence gathered through the interviews and workshops indicate that this is a positive emerging trend that is to be encouraged.

We have found that:

**3.1 There is a benefit in nurturing the positive emerging trend for a ‘placemaking approach’ to areas of major change, that seeks to explore and articulate the creation of positive communities by exploring spatial implications of infrastructure, development and green networks at a framework level, ideally as a special inset of the plan. These are to provide a framework for masterplans at the next level with LDPs.**

**(SDPAs, supported by Scottish Government, A&DS and others)**

3.2 As an important input into the placemaking approach, the housing needs and demand assessment (HNDA) process be reviewed, so as to streamline where possible and contextualise the tool for a placemaking approach, while retaining an agreed system all can support. Key concerns reported were:

- the high level of staff time and other resources required for the HNDA process
- the level of technical proficiency required
- concern that the output value was not high enough to warrant the level of input
- concern that the General Register Office for Scotland statistics used did not provide an accurate enough picture (stakeholders reported that this either led to gross over or under supply rather than the correct level).

Additional Scottish Government guidance has mitigated some initial concerns, and further guidance is expected shortly which may address some of these additional concerns. Staff at one SDPA raised the point that wholesale change at this stage could undo a lot of the learning and resources that have already been put into this system.

**(Scottish Government, with SDPAs)**

3.3 Further investigation is required to determine if the plans should provide a focus to ensure that infrastructure required is provided alongside, or in advance of, the proposed development. Such focus would be gained through the strategic plan creating an integrative pathway for the delivery of infrastructure – giving a greater degree of certainty to either developers or those responsible for delivering infrastructure.

**(SDPAs, RTPs and infrastructure partners)**

**Overview theme 4 Transport & infrastructure role**

The allocation and co-ordination of future transport and infrastructure, including green infrastructure, was identified as one of the most significant roles of SDPs. However, from the review of the SDPs and evidence from different sources, there is not yet optimal alignment of strategy, integration, nor adequate connection to mechanisms for funding or delivery. Some of the issues are passed on the LDP level, like waste. Other dimensions of the mismatch appear to arise from different time horizons, and different levels of commitment from respective partner bodies. This needs to be resolved at a Scottish-wide level, as it affects matters like economic performance and development potential, and congestion, carbon emissions all at a macro scale.

Similar issues can arise with energy, water and flooding, but so far have not been as pronounced as with transport and waste. Nevertheless, all these matters need to be better co-ordinated by taking a 'Team Scotland' approach that prioritises integration, and avoids seeing each aspect of infrastructure as an isolated or 'separate' system.

We have found that:

**4.1 There is a benefit in working in close partnership to create a fully integrated land use and transport approach to each SDP. This would mean that the SDP provides a Joint Development and Transport Strategy, for the medium to long term, that addresses both strategy and phased delivery through investment over time. Currently barriers that prevent this close alignment are cultural and**

**institutional, timeframes (cf. chapter 3, Timescales p35) and plan boundaries that are not aligned (see 4.2).**

**(Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, SDPAs, RTPs)**

4.2 Closer alignment of the SDPA boundary areas and the RTP boundary areas could aid closer strategy and project working, with a view to producing co-ordinated investment programmes that align land use and transport

**(Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, SDPAs, RTPs)**

4.3 Inclusion and agreement should be established within the joint Development and Transport Strategy as a prerequisite for evaluating and supporting funding bids.

**(Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, SDPAs, local government)**

4.4 Further investigation should determine if a review is required of the Transport Scotland guidance on Development Planning and Management (DPMTAG) to align with recently updated and emerging policy and ensure that SDPAs, key stakeholders and partners are aware of and use the approach set out to provide appropriate and proportionate transport appraisals to support SDPs.

**(Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, SDPAs)**

## **Overview theme 5 The influence on delivery**

A recurring comment about the new SDPs, from different user sources, was that as they have become more strategic and succinct, as intended, they appear to have become more detached from obvious modes of delivery. Much now rests on the subsequent LDP level and on the private sector, as well on a myriad of partner public agencies.

More could be done to connect to, enable and co-ordinate delivery, particularly on matters addressing greater levels of change. There appears to be scope for identifying strategic urban transformation projects that have a strong focus on delivery, such as the Dundee Waterfront. These types of projects can bring benefits in operational terms and strategic impact.

We have found that:

**5.1 There is a benefit in aligning and integrating the relevant SDP strategy and project components within the work of the respective Community Planning Partnerships and Single Outcome Agreement.**

**(Scottish Government, SDPAs, CPPs, local authorities)**

5.2 Further investigation is required to determine if better delivery outcomes can be achieved through use of the strategy themes and component projects within the SDP as a basis for funding and delivering key strategic infrastructure.

**(Scottish Government, SDPAs, CPP, Transport Scotland)**

5.3 There is a need to augment existing monitoring with an annual public statement (moving up to annual from every two years) of SDP Action Programme progress, highlighting triggers and delay factors by organisation.

**(SDPAs)**

5.4 Each SDPA should clearly identify a small number of headline strategic urban transformation projects that can have strategic impact across the area over time. These would be identified priorities that have a broader knock-on effect in the wider area.

**(SDPAs)**

5.5 Consideration should be given to extending the various SDP specialist topic groups to include more representative and third sector bodies, (such as universities or professional bodies) to enhance knowledge and research input into the overall process.

**(Each SDPA as appropriate)**

## **Overview theme 6 Resourcing and skills**

The various SDP teams have managed a significant workload, using small teams, augmented with specialists from local authorities, agency partners and consultancies. Most of these teams are small in comparison to the value and complexity of the challenges they address.

With respect to the overall cadre of strategic planners in Scotland, there is now a much-diminished cohort (under 20 from 2,200 professionals, less than 1%), particularly when compared to the high watermark of the regional structure plan era (over 200 from under 1,500 professionals, over 10%).

Without the necessary resourcing, we expect that SDPAs will find it difficult to produce plans that will be properly fit for purpose. Currently this is not the case, but as even more strategic professionals retire, there is a clear need to grow and support the skills, knowledge base and strategic culture at a national level to serve future planning requirements, not only of city-regions, but for the prosperity of Scotland as a whole.

We have therefore found that:

**6.1 To boost the existing skilled cohort, the Scottish Government should consider scope to provide an extra level of resource, either through a pool of skilled practitioners in graphics and GIS, or for HNDA through funding for specialist consultants (as has been provided in the past) that can be drawn down**

**as required, or as a financial share (equivalent to the constituent local authorities' share) or some combination of the two.**

**(Scottish Government)**

6.2 To aid consistency of investment and skills levels, the Scottish Government should set an indicative budget benchmark for strategic planning in each city region, equivalent either to a per capita cost, some proportion of gross planning fees, or some proportion of overall investment in the respective built environment.

**(Scottish Government)**

6.3 There is a benefit in moving to an approach whereby all SDPA teams are part of a shared national resource, whose time and expertise can be traded across the four SDPAs to balance peaks and troughs

**(Scottish Government, SDPAs)**

6.4 There should be an explicit programme to develop strategic planning skills, to grow awareness and competence across Scotland. This would include philosophy, techniques and creative partnering and be applicable to key agencies and community players as well as planners.

**(Scottish Government, RTPI, Improvement Service)**

In terms of immediate next steps, we propose

1. adoption of a relaunch approach to strategic planning, possibly including a link to NPF role;
2. promotion and explanation of themes at appropriate training and conference events; and
3. implementation of our findings.