

Scottish Natural Heritage

Better places for people and nature





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# Better places for people and nature

## Summary

- 1 Place-making has become an increasingly important part of the Scottish Government's ambition for achieving better and more sustainable places where people want to live and work, which promote better health and enable the transition to a low-carbon economy. It also features strongly in the report of the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, especially as a part of the preventative spend agenda.
- 2 For SNH, our main interest in place-making is in the delivery and promotion of high quality environments for people and nature that incorporate well managed and accessible greenspace, paths and landscapes. Our main priorities, in partnership with others, are to:
  - promote the contribution of the natural heritage to making better places - through research, good practice and advocacy
  - engage positively with statutory planning processes and partners to help deliver better places in practice; and
  - champion the role of better places in improving health and tackling social, economic and environmental disadvantage by linking our work on landscape, greenspace and paths more closely to this agenda







3 We aim to do this by:

- providing a natural heritage perspective on national planning policy, strategic development plans and other spatial plans and guidance;
- developing and sharing good practice for use in spatial plans, masterplans, design briefs and supplementary planning guidance;
- helping to develop capacity in others to address natural heritage issues in place-making including local authorities and developers
- developing thinking and practice on green networks and the delivery of open spaces which deliver multiple benefits for people and nature; and
- supporting and sharing good practice from natural heritage projects which contribute to better places at the community level

4 Through this statement and follow-up action, we will also champion and promote the role of the natural heritage in creating better places and the contribution that these assets make to the social, economic and environmental priorities of the Scottish Government.

# SNH approach

- 1 Government policy aims to create attractive and well-designed sustainable places where people want to live and work, which promote better health and enable the transition to a low-carbon economy. Our nature and landscapes have a key contribution to make to this policy agenda. This statement sets out how SNH will help to realise this contribution through providing advice and supporting and sharing good practice. It applies to new and existing settlement across both urban and rural Scotland.
- 2 Our vision is for **the natural heritage to play its full role in developing better places for people to live, work, play and learn in**<sup>1</sup>. This will require the development of well managed and accessible landscapes, greenspace and path networks as part of all our settlements and their setting. This green infrastructure should be planned and managed to deliver a range of benefits for people and nature and be guided by effective community engagement in its planning and realisation.



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1 SNH (2001, updated 2009) Natural Heritage Futures: Settlements. (Accessed 8 June 2011)



## Place-making in policy and practice

- 3 Place-making is a term that began to be used in the 1970s by architects and planners to describe the process of creating squares, plazas, parks, streets and waterfronts that will attract people because they are pleasurable or interesting. Today, it has become a much wider overarching idea, as well as a hands-on tool for improving a neighbourhood, city or a region. At the core of the concept is a focus on people's needs and the way the components of a place (such as buildings, transport infrastructure or greenspace) come together to meet them.
- 4 Place-making has become an increasingly important part of the Scottish Government's ambition for achieving better and more sustainable places<sup>2</sup>. It is seen by Ministers as integral to the agenda to modernise the planning system and is being developed through a range of national projects including the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative, Good Places Better Health and the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN). It also features strongly in the report of the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services.<sup>3</sup>

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2 E.g. Scottish Government Designing Places (2001, updated 2010) and Designing Streets (2010) (Both accessed 8 June 2011)

3 Report on the Future Delivery of Public Services by the Commission chaired by Dr Campbell Christie. Published on 21 June 2011, Scottish Government 2011.

- 5 The current context and focus for action for it is provided by **National Outcome 10 of the National Performance Framework**.

## National Outcome 10 - We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need

*Well-designed, sustainable places, both urban and rural, support people's physical and mental wellbeing. They are places in which people want to live. They provide ease of access to the workplaces and services we need by locating these conveniently with high quality housing as part of a mixed community. Mixed communities, providing a range of services, housing types and people, promote interaction and integration - and create positive, diverse neighbourhoods. They are places designed around people, not cars, encouraging activity and social interaction by providing easy access to both amenities and green space. They improve safety by increasing the number of people who use local facilities and generating a real sense of community. And they are sustainable places - both environmentally (harnessing new technologies such as lower carbon buildings) and socially (providing a diverse mix of people and services which allows the community to flourish and grow). Scotland Performs, National Outcome 10.*







- 6 The contribution of nature and landscapes must take account of the factors in this definition and involves:
  - working with the grain of existing environmental, cultural and historic assets
  - taking into account neighbourhoods and people's needs by working at a community scale of about 300-400m or a 5 minute walk<sup>4</sup>;
  - developing a better understanding how the components of a place come together rather than delivery of any specific element;
  - increased awareness of both the physical and social fabric of places which can support strong communities, development and enterprise; and
  - working collaboratively with a range of organisations rather than in isolation.
- 7 The key drivers of change that shape settlements are leadership and policy, markets, funding (including investment decisions), design, spatial planning and regulation, community confidence and empowerment. Local authorities and developers play a critical role in this process through the planning system, but improving the natural heritage in settlements to benefit both people and nature requires a collaborative approach involving other organisations in the public and private sector and communities. The National Performance Framework and Single Outcome Agreements provide the framework to work together in this way.

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<sup>4</sup> These distances thresholds allow for everyday contact with greenspace, without having to make any special effort or journey to do so – see for example English Nature Research Report No. 153, Accessible Natural Greenspace in towns and cities – a review of appropriate size and distance criteria (1995).



# Developing the contribution of the natural heritage to place-making

- 8 There are a number of qualities inherent to successful places<sup>5</sup> e.g.
- **Distinctive** – well-designed and attractive places which reflect local materials and traditions and are very much part of the wider landscape around them;
  - **Safe, pleasant and welcoming** – places and paths for people of all abilities and backgrounds to be able to rest, relax, exercise, socialise and to experience nature
  - **Easy to move around** – environments with safe and welcoming networks of streets and paths which encourage all people to be active and support active travel.

- **Adaptable** – multi-functional places including community growing spaces for local food, water and energy supplies, providing aesthetic, spiritual, educational and recreational resources
- **Resource efficient** – reduce the amount of resources used, including reducing material flows and environmental impacts on a life cycle basis

National planning policy and advice is increasing the importance placed on nature and landscapes in delivering these qualities. It emphasises the need to plan and install this green (and blue) infrastructure early in the development of successful new places and in the retrofitting of existing places<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Designing Places and Designing Streets (Both accessed 8 June 2011)

<sup>6</sup> See Scottish Government (2011) Designing Better Places in Scotland (Accessed 7 June 2011) and Scottish Government (2011) Green Infrastructure – Design and Place-Making (Accessed 10 November 2011)





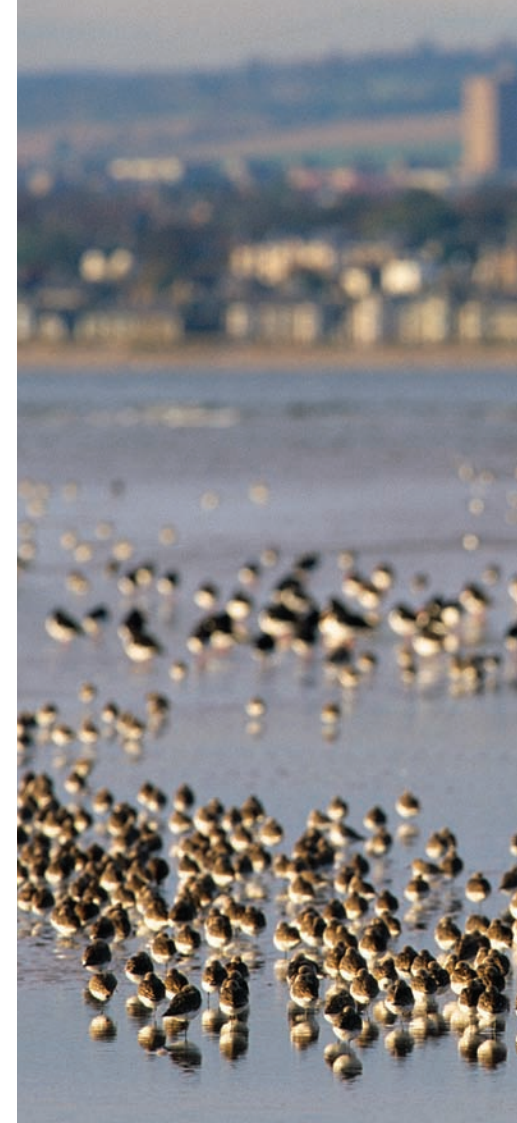
- 9 Enhancing the contribution of nature and landscapes to place-making can bring many benefits and can provide greater value for public money<sup>7</sup>. Key outcomes sought include:
- **local distinctiveness and a strong sense of place:** attractive places that inspire people and provide a sense of history (or heritage/place/identity) and opportunities for learning, leisure, relaxation and escapism
  - **increased economic growth and investment:** inward investment and job creation; land and property values; local economic regeneration; land regeneration; local management of assets for local food, water and energy supplies
  - **better health and well being:** increasing life expectancy and reducing health inequality; improving levels of physical activity and active travel; improving physical and mental health and well-being; improving opportunities for healthy eating and local food growing; achieving noise abatement, shelter and screening within communities
  - **social and community cohesion;** creating spaces for socialising, interaction and events, providing better opportunities for children to play, creating opportunities for community participation and volunteering.
  - **improved climate change adaptation:** heat amelioration, reducing flood risk; improving water quality; sustainable urban drainage; improving air quality
  - **reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases:** mainly as a potential source of local renewable energy; opportunities for all to walk, cycle, use a wheelchair or push a pram for low carbon travel on better connected streets and green networks
  - **regeneration of degraded areas:** improving quality of place; improving environmental quality and appearance

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7 BREEAM Communities for Scotland (Accessed 8 June 2011)

- **conserving wildlife and habitats:** increasing habitat area, increasing populations of some protected species and where appropriate facilitating species movement to support resilient and functioning habitats rich in native species diversity

10 Many of these outcomes can only be realised if the contribution of natural heritage is developed together with wider social aspects of place-making, including community engagement, development and enterprise. Simply improving the quality of greenspace, for example, will not deliver all of the above benefits if local people and communities cannot access it easily and safely and are not actively involved in its design, planning, and management. Current research and best practice suggests greater focus should be on delivering multiple benefits through place-making processes and to do this communities need to be equipped with a wide range of skills and resources to help to create and manage these assets.







## Our role and priorities

- 11 Our main roles are to promote the contribution that nature and landscapes can make to creating better places and to influence the work of others to ensure that nature is built into national and local action. We will do this through the provision of expert advice based on sound evidence on the natural heritage to national and local government, developers, communities and other relevant groups. Working closely with Architecture and Design Scotland, Historic Scotland and other parts of the Scottish Government, we will also look to build capacity in others to address natural heritage issues in place-making and to build links stronger between the cultural and natural heritage.
- 12 We can't get involved in every single project designed to create a better place, but we do comment on all development plans and we can make sure we input to pathfinder or pilot projects, so that any advice we give is well grounded in practical experience. We will prioritise our efforts on communities suffering social, economic and environmental degradation or disadvantage and where our contribution can make a real difference to improve people's lives.
- 13 In most cases, we are unlikely to be directly involved in the finer-scale aspects of place-making (for example on the specification of buildings and grey infrastructure), nor do we have the expertise in these areas. Nevertheless, we recognise that this finer-scale detail can be an important in determining the overall quality, design and sustainability of places. Where appropriate we will therefore work with others to ensure that these connections are considered carefully in place-making.

14 We will also be flexible in our approach to place-making. Agreeing a fixed definition, vision or approach is likely to be contested at least partly because places do not, and should not, follow a one-size-fits-all mould. Individual preferences, context, driving forces and needs are all different within and between different parts of urban and rural Scotland. We will learn-by-doing with other organisations and local communities to help to make sure that places reflect local situations, contexts and priorities.

15 Our main priorities, in partnership with others, are to:

- **promote the contribution of the natural heritage to making better places - through research, good practice and advocacy**
- **engage positively with statutory planning processes and partners to help deliver better places in practice; and**
- **champion the role of better places in improving health and tackling social, economic and environmental disadvantage by linking our work on landscape, greenspace and paths more closely to this agenda**

16 We aim to do this by:

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SNH statements on paths and places managed for people and nature<sup>8</sup> and also the role of the natural heritage in improving health and wellbeing<sup>9</sup> are also directly relevant and related action on these topics will support our work on place-making.

17 The main focus for our activity on place-making will be through our statutory engagement with the planning system and with our work in the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN), a national project identified in the National Planning Framework. More generally, we will also better align our activities to what local authorities and others are doing through Single Outcome Agreements and where possible through national initiatives such as the National Ecological Network, the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative and Climate Challenge Fund projects. The approach set out here will also inform our work with Scotland's two National parks.

18 Through this statement and follow-up action, we will also champion and promote the role of the natural heritage in creating better places and the contribution that these assets make to the social, economic and environmental priorities of the Scottish Government.

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8 For further details see SNH (2010) Paths – Linking people, places and nature and SNH (2011) Parks and Reserves – places managed for people and nature (2011)

9 SNH (2009) Developing the contribution of the natural heritage to a healthier Scotland (Accessed 28 June 2011)



## How will we know if we are successful?

19 Existing measures such as BREEAM Communities Scotland<sup>10</sup> when used well can cover the ways in which the natural heritage contributes to place-making and help to create better places. For SNH, some key measures of success in implementing this statement will be as follows.

- Increased integration of environment and greenspace objectives into all related national priority areas and related policy/strategy e.g. health
- The number of spatial planning and supplementary guidance documents we have been involved in that reflect a place-making approach
- Delivery of the CSGN, with significant improvements to the quality of place through greenspace, paths and landscapes across central Scotland.
- The development and use of measures of environmental quality for places, for example, Single Outcome Agreements and the Central Scotland Green Network
- Increased numbers of communities, local authorities, lands managers and developers that adopt Scotland's Landscape Charter
- The development of exemplar projects which demonstrate the multiple benefits for people and nature that can be derived from good place-making approaches
- Better delivery practice and improved awareness and use of local greenspace, path networks, and managed places by the public.



10 BREEAM Communities (accessed 8 June 2011) BREEAM Communities Scotland is expected to be launched in 2011

## Further information

- 20 We have produced a background & context paper which contains more information on place-making principles explored in this statement. A further paper containing illustrative examples has been developed to show what better places might look like at in practice at the various scales that place-making operates. This paper also includes a list of more detailed guidance and resources.

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**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
**Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba**

All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad