Scotland’s Second National Planning Framework (NPF2)

Report by Ian L Young, Director, Strategic Services Division

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to alert Members to the fact that the Scottish Executive has started the process of replacing the National Planning Framework for Scotland (NPF).

2 Report Summary

2.1 The first NPF was published by the Scottish Executive in 2004 and provided guidance for the spatial development of Scotland to the year 2025. It was non-statutory.

2.2 The new Planning Act will place the second Framework (NPF2) on a statutory footing. The intention is that NPF2 will have a greater focus on implementation than its predecessor, and be more closely aligned to investment programmes. There will be an opportunity, in the autumn of 2007, for Midlothian to comment in greater detail on the Consultation Draft of NPF2. The Executive’s target is to publish NPF2 in the autumn of 2008.

2.3 This report highlights some high-level strategic infrastructural issues affecting Midlothian, extracted from the Structure Plan Action Plan. These issues need to be addressed in NPF2, as failure to do so could jeopardise both the planned growth set out in the approved Structure Plan and the further growth likely to emerge through the new Strategic Development Plan.

3 Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

    a) notes the timetable for the first review of the National Planning Framework for Scotland; and

    b) agrees to forward this report to the Scottish Executive as an initial Midlothian response to NPF2.

Ian L Young
Director

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4 Report Implications and Management

4.1 Resource Implications: There are no immediate resource issues raised by this report.

4.2 Risk Implications: It is important that all Councils engage with the Scottish Executive during consultation on NPF2. Not to do so runs the risk that the need for some key infrastructural projects affecting Midlothian will not be incorporated in NPF2.

4.3 Policy Implications: The new Planning Act requires that Councils take NPF2, once approved, into account in reviewing their development plans.

4.4 Consultation: This is programmed to take place during autumn 2007.

4.5 Equalities: This report raises no equalities issues.

4.6 Sustainability: NPF2 will be subject to Sustainable Environmental Assessment.
5 Background

5.1 The first non-statutory National Planning Framework (NPF) was published by the Scottish Executive in April 2004 as guidance for the spatial development of Scotland to 2025. No draft had been issued for consultation, though a report on the document was submitted to Cabinet on 3 August 2004.

5.2 In 2005, the White Paper, Modernising the Planning System, signalled the intention to enhance the role and status of the NPF to make it a more powerful instrument for securing the delivery of national policies and programmes. This indicated that it would be used to identify developments of national strategic importance, and that its preparation would involve extensive consultation and be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny.

5.3 The Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 has now put the NPF on a statutory footing. The second Framework (NPF2) is to be published in 2008, providing a strategy for Scotland’s spatial development in the period to 2030.

5.4 NPF2 is intended to place more emphasis on implementation than its predecessor, with close links to the Scottish Executive’s Infrastructure Investment Plan and to the investment programmes of public agencies and infrastructure providers. For transport infrastructure, it will look beyond the current delivery programme, drawing upon the National Transport Strategy and the outcome of the Strategic Transport Projects Review. It will set out strategic priorities for investment in water and drainage capacity, and waste management facilities. It will reflect the Scottish Executive’s policy commitments on climate change, sustainable development and regeneration.

5.5 The Planning Act makes provision for the NPF to be used to identify certain projects as “national developments”. The essential test in deciding whether a project is a national development will be whether it is of strategic importance to Scotland’s spatial development. Major strategic transport, energy, water and drainage and waste management infrastructure may fall within this category. The Executive intends that identification in the NPF should be the mechanism for establishing the need for such developments. The Act also requires planning authorities to take the NPF into account in preparing their development plans.

5.6 The Executive’s programme for NPF2 is as follows:-

- Draft for consultation Autumn 2007
- Revised Draft Early 2008
- Parliamentary scrutiny Spring 2008
- Publication Autumn 2008

6 Proposed Response

6.1 It is understood that each of the six Councils responsible for preparing the new Edinburgh & South East Scotland Strategic Development Plan will be making a separate submission to the Executive on NPF2. It will also be recommended to the Interim Strategic Development Plan Committee, on 25 June 2007, that it submit a joint response on NPF2.
6.2 The Lothian Structure Plan 2015, as approved by Scottish Ministers in June 2004, recognises that Edinburgh and its hinterland is a key driver for the overall Scottish economy, with the wealth created within the capital and surrounding towns being spread throughout the Central Belt. For example, there is a massive labour supply/demand mismatch forecast (over 75,000) for Edinburgh by 2015, with increased in-commuting expected to take up the anticipated jobs.

6.3 The Draft West Edinburgh Planning Framework, published in November 2006, similarly acknowledges that the area has become one of the most important economic development zones in Scotland, with capacity to provide a further 20-30,000 jobs.

6.4 The approved Structure Plan is predicated on an appropriate level of investment in infrastructure being secured, without which the growth and economic wealth creation of the Edinburgh City Region would be put at risk. This investment is needed not just to underpin business development but also to facilitate the accompanying forecast housing expansion, and these pressures affect all parts of the City Region.

6.5 Given the pivotal strategic role that the Edinburgh City Region is forecast to play in terms of growing the overall Scottish economy, it is essential therefore that due weight is given in NPF2 to the investment needed to sustain and deliver this. Failure to do so could lose the competitive edge that the Region has over other UK and European investment locations.

7 Infrastructural Issues for Midlothian

7.1 The Edinburgh and the Lothians Structure Plan 2015 was accompanied by an Action Plan that listed for each local authority the key infrastructural issues to be addressed to allow planned development to proceed. The Action Plan was updated in 2004, and again in 2006.

7.2 Schedule 2 of the Action Plan lists the following strategic transport investment proposals for Midlothian:-

- Re-opening of Penicuik Rail Link
- Waverley Rail Route to Gorebridge and Borders
- South East Wedge Public Transport
- A720 Sheriffhall Junction Grade Separation
- A68 Dalkeith Northern Bypass
- A701 Straiton to Milton Bridge Improvements
- Orbital Rapid Transit (City Bypass)
- Park & Ride (Straiton, Sheriffhall, Lothianburn)

7.3 Schedule 3 of the Action Plan lists additional investment requirements which include the following strategic items:-

- Gourlaw/Rosebery Filters – Water Supply Rationalisation
- Eastern Interceptor Sewer Upgrade/Expansion
7.4 In addition to requirements listed in the Action Plan, the following is considered to be of strategic importance to Midlothian:

- Energy from Waste Project for Lothian and Borders

7.5 It is not suggested that all of the transport schemes listed above are of national significance. However, the Waverley Rail Route and improvements associated with the A720 Edinburgh City Bypass including Sheriffhall Junction are considered to come into that category, given their critical importance to connectivity and accessibility. It is considered that these should be given explicit support within the emerging NPF2.

7.6 In addition, NPF2 should acknowledge the importance for the Edinburgh City Region of proper investment in water and drainage capacity. This should not be underestimated, as a lack of investment in these key areas can derail planned development growth with significant consequences. For example, Midlothian experienced a recent moratorium of 2/3 years on all development in communities in the A7/A68 corridor because of an unforeseen lack of water supply. This is only now being overcome through a £7million Scottish Water investment in a reservoir at Rosebery, together with investment in local holding tanks by private consortia.

7.7 The reason for highlighting this is that there are potential drainage constraints relating to the Eastern Interceptor Sewer which feeds to Seafield which, if confirmed, could result in a similar lengthy moratorium on all new developments in Midlothian, East Lothian and south-east Edinburgh. The Executive must ensure that NPF2 provides the mechanism to align Scottish Water investment priorities with the delivery of developments of national strategic importance. If the Edinburgh City Region is endorsed in NPF2 as a key area of planned growth, then infrastructural investment must reflect this.

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