

Guidance for Planning Authorities on Key Agency Engagement in Draft Proposed Plans

August 2026



Purpose

The Key Agencies recognise our duty to cooperate with planning authorities as part of the Plan Preparation process. The purpose of this guidance is to promote ways of working that help Key Agencies use our resources as effectively as possible to provide timely and high value input to proposed plan consultations. Ultimately this supports the effective and smooth delivery of the adopted local development plan. In line with the Scottish Government's Local Development Planning Guidance, the Key Agencies support a collaborative place-based, people-centred and delivery focussed approach to plan preparation.

This guidance applies to draft proposed plan consultations. We previously published [Guidance on our engagement with the site appraisal process](#) in March 2025.

Maximising value from the key agencies

There are two main components which, collectively, enable Key Agencies to add most value at the draft proposed plan stage:



1. Resource Planning

Effective engagement from the Key Agencies relies on being able to plan for demands on our resources. This is especially important given the number of plans progressing at the same time and the potential scale of consultations. To achieve this, Key Agencies need to be able to:

- Receive advance notice of proposed consultations to enable effective resource planning;
- Have sufficient time to review draft proposed plan consultations effectively; and,
- Focus resources on providing input to one main consultation of a draft proposed plan.

To support this the Key Agencies request that planning authorities:

- i. **Give advance notice of consultations.** The notice could usefully include the approximate date the planning authority proposes to consult us, a summary of the scope and nature of the consultation and any software requirements (for example spatial data format). To assist with this a template prior notification form can be found in Appendix One. Where there are particular issues relating to a Key Agency interest a meeting with the Agency to discuss the best way to consult us may also be helpful prior to submission. Development Plan Schemes and the Scottish Government's tracking information help Key Agencies to forward plan to some extent, but advance notice of consultations allows us to plan resources if timescales have changed as well as providing information on draft consultations.
- ii. **Provide a minimum consultation period of six weeks (or other agreed timescale) for any draft proposed plan consultations that involve site reviews.** The effective review of place briefs, masterplans and proposed allocations can require significant Key Agency resources. Allowing sufficient time enables Agencies to upload sites onto their GIS systems, undertake all required internal consultations with different specialists (where appropriate) and to collate all the advice in a clear and useful format for the consultation response.
- iii. **Undertake one main draft proposed plan consultation.** Consultations are generally best timed once you have a well-developed version of the draft proposed plan but there is still time for the Agencies to undertake a meaningful review. This also allows time for planning authorities to take on board any feedback prior to committee approvals for the final Proposed Plan. Supplementary consultations may be of value on specific areas relating to the Agencies remit where they are focussed and there is sufficient advance notice and time to review. Where Agencies have previously commented on sites, please clearly outline the outcome/actions of the previous comments e.g. site deleted, additional mitigation identified etc. as this helps speed up further Key Agency review.

Multiple consultations on various iterations of the draft plan place a significant draw on limited resources and, in doing so, hinder the ability of Agencies to focus on the most relevant and important issues to support delivery. We are, however, happy to engage in discussions on individual sites, where helpful, to resolve matters prior to the formal proposed plan consultation.

2. Quality and format of information

Providing clear, concise and relevant information helps the Key Agencies respond effectively. This should include all the key information in relation to sites so that the nature and scale of the proposed use(s) are clearly understood and supporting information, including assessments/appraisals where relevant, clearly explain how Key Agency areas of interest have been considered.

To enable Agencies to review proposed allocations in a timely and effective way we request that draft plans are easy to navigate with a clear structure, formatting and headings including:

- i. **A clear overview of the draft spatial strategy** to provide the strategic context for masterplans, place briefs, site allocations and associated infrastructure.
- ii. **Clear details for each of the proposed masterplans, place briefs and allocations** including:
 - a. the existing/proposed use(s);
 - b. the scale and, where possible, proposed siting of key aspects of the development within the site boundary;
 - c. clear site referencing that's consistent with the GIS shapefile references;
 - d. identification of sites that have been carried forward from the previous plan and sites that already have planning permission.
 - e. Spatial data should be sent as shapefiles as most agencies do not have access to ArcGIS Pro and are therefore unable to use geodatabase files.
- iii. **Relevant supporting information in the form of appraisals and assessments** that demonstrate how potential constraints have been addressed and how infrastructure requirements are to be met through the Delivery Programme to ensure the deliverability of the site. This should include the site assessment findings. This is in line with the Scottish Government's Local Development Planning Guidance (para 155) which states that where constraints exist, sites can still be regarded as deliverable providing that the Delivery Programme sets out how constraints will be removed and the timeframe expected for this.
- iv. **Drafts of local policies** clearly highlighting any policies where feedback from the relevant Agency would be helpful. Local policies should accord with the Scottish Government's Local Development Planning Guidance (Para 165) and not replicate or conflict with NPF4 policies. In exceptional circumstances where you consider it necessary for a draft local policy to vary from NPF4 policy, a clear and robust justification should be provided.

Commitment from the Key Agencies

We recognise our key role and responsibilities in providing timely and valuable advice to development plan teams and commit to:

- Providing clear input to draft proposed plans, based on the best available information and within agreed timeframes;
- Clearly outlining our position on an allocation or policy, including any changes we consider are needed to avoid a representation at the formal proposed plan consultation stage; and,
- Clearly framing our input around the policy framework and spatial principles of NPF4.

Appendix One: Prior Notice of Consultation form

The form below can be used to notify Key Agencies of upcoming consultations relating to the draft proposed plan as requested in paragraph 1(i).

Planning authority	
Expected date of submission	
Key planning authority contact(s)	
Scope/ nature of consultation e.g. spatial strategy, masterplans, place briefs and allocations, local policies	
Likely critical or key issues	
Proposed software/ spatial data formats	
Relationship with other key deadlines in the DPS	
Other comments/ information for the key agency to note	