



## Appendix 4 f): Site Assessment Framework

### National Park Authority Board Meeting

Monday 10 November 2025

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#### **Table of Contents**

COVER NOTE .....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
METHODOLOGY: HOW WE WILL ASSESS SITES .....	4
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: SITE ASSESSMENT AND SEA CHECKLIST .....	6

## COVER NOTE

This assessment framework retains the Key Agencies Group (KAG) structure and is firmly grounded in NPF4 policy requirements. However, our assessment matrix builds on the KAG's checklist by adding criteria that reflect the National Park's rural character and by making explicit links to local strategies. These criteria include:

- a) Ownership and management checks, including common Good Land and legal restrictions (land or assets historically held by former burghs and now managed by local authorities for the benefit of the community) on how it can be used.
- b) A two-stage scoring approach (pre- and post-mitigation) to make residual effects explicit.
- c) National Park-specific biodiversity criteria aligned with the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), with a dedicated trees and woodland criterion tied to the Trees & Woodland Strategy and additional landscape checks relevant to the Park's natural qualities.

While the framework draws on all nine long-term outcomes of the NPPP, the assessment criteria focus on those most directly applicable to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and site-level environmental effects. Read more about the nine long term outcomes in the National Park Partnership Plan here: [National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029](#)

## INTRODUCTION

This Site Assessment Framework explains the methodology we will use to assess land for development as part of the new Local Development Plan. The framework is shaped by the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the Local Development Planning Guidance (2023) and the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. These require planning authorities to take a proportionate and transparent approach to site selection, with Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) integrated throughout.

This framework identifies the guiding principles for establishing potential new site allocations, consistent with national planning policy and sustainable development. The document will be used as part of the evidence base to support National Park's approach towards the inclusion or omission of sites for development in the new Local Development Plan. It is important that sites are promoted at this early stage in the process to fully inform the Proposed Plan and to ensure all reasonable options are assessed.

The framework aims to assess the suitability and deliverability of candidate sites. we take a balanced view across a number of themes. We look at the role a site can play in creating successful places and supporting community life. We also consider the capacity and resilience of the systems and services that make development possible, such as transport, utilities and community facilities. The framework also aims to assess the potential environmental effects, including how development might influence climate resilience, nature, soils, water, landscape and cultural heritage.

Sites will come from a range of sources, including current allocations, submissions through the Call for Sites, Local Place Plans and others identified by the planning authority. Each site will be assessed in the same way, using the framework and SEA checklist, with input from consultation bodies and stakeholders.

The outcomes will form part of the evidence base for the Proposed Plan. They will ensure that all reasonable options are assessed and that the plan reflects national policy priorities as well as local needs.

## METHODOLOGY: HOW WE WILL ASSESS SITES

The following sets out the structured approach that will be applied to assess candidate sites for the new Local Development Plan. The process follows four key steps:

- Identify land that should not be considered for development
- Review infrastructure capacity and identify areas of constraint
- Highlight potential development locations, including opportunities to support Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods
- Apply a detailed assessment using the Site Assessment and SEA Checklist

The detailed review in Step 4 will bring together information from Steps 1–3, alongside sites submitted through the “Call for sites” process. The “Call for sites” is an open invitation for landowners, developers, communities and other interested parties to propose sites or strategies for consideration in the new Local Development Plan. Submissions will be assessed against this methodology, but inclusion in the New Local Development Plan will depend on the outcomes of this structured process.

### **Step 1 – Exclude sites unsuitable for development**

Our first step is to rule out areas where building is simply not appropriate. This includes:

- Land protected for nature conservation, such as Special Areas of Conservation
- Ancient or long-established woodland
- Wetlands, peatland and carbon-rich soils
- Prime agricultural land where loss would be significant
- Land in high flood risk areas, as shown in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Country Parks, Regional Parks and other safeguarded green spaces
- Land reserved for science, research or economic development where housing would conflict with its role

By filtering these sites out at the start, we protect the most important natural and cultural assets and keep the focus on land that has a realistic chance of development.

## **Step 2 – Checking infrastructure and service capacity**

Sites that pass Step 1 are then checked against the services and infrastructure people rely on every day. Our assessment will look at:

- Local school capacity
- Access to health services
- Transport networks, including walking, cycling and public transport
- Water and drainage capacity

Our approach will then use a practical traffic-light system to show the level of constraint. This approach helps us check the deliverability of the developments within the timeframe of the new Local Development Plan.

- **Red** – major barriers with no clear solution
- **Amber** – some constraints but potential solutions if investment or change is made
- **Green** – no significant constraint

## **Step 3 – Identifying areas with potential**

We then review sites that remain to see how they can support sustainable living and the spatial strategy. This includes:

- Strengthening Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods in rural areas
- Links to shops, schools, transport, and green space
- Opportunities for small-scale rural growth where appropriate
- Contribution to the Housing Land Requirement (HLR) and flexibility of supply

Some rural areas may still be suitable for small-scale growth, even if they sit outside an identified 20 Minute Neighbourhood. Topic Paper 8 covers the Living Well Locally elements and expands on the concept of 20-minute neighbourhood in a rural context. This stage will assess whether new facilities are realistic to be provided.

#### **Step 4 – Detailed assessment with the Site Assessment and SEA Checklist**

This step looks at the remaining sites in terms of how they might support sustainable living. We focus on opportunities to strengthen Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods in a rural context – places where most daily needs can be met close to home. We look at how sites connect to shops, schools, paths, public transport and green space. Some rural areas may still be suitable for small-scale growth, even if they sit outside an identified 20 Minute Neighbourhood.

#### **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: SITE ASSESSMENT AND SEA CHECKLIST**

This assessment matrix will be used to assess individual sites and record effects. As mentioned, this assessment matrix builds on the Key Agencies Group (KAG) Form to reflect the National Park's rural context and local strategic priorities, while remaining consistent with the NP4 policy requirements.

Site Name:	Source of site suggestion: All landowners/interested parties identified/aware?	Current site reference	Site History/Previous planning applications, existing local plan policies and proposals, historic reference numbers:
Settlement:	GIS Site Ref: Previous ref:	Outside settlement boundary?	
OS Grid Ref:	Site Size (ha):	Is the site an allocation in the adopted Local Development Plan; sites proposed through call for ideas or any other sites with potential? No Yes ref. Yes but different boundary	Summary Description (topography, features, boundaries, neighbouring issues, access, exposure, aspect etc. Site visit/GIS observations:
Current Use e.g. is the site brownfield, vacant and derelict land, greenfield, agricultural?	Proposed Use:	Relevant policies/proposals from Local Development Plan or NPF4:	Any restrictive covenants relating to the use of the land/buildings contained within the proposed candidate site?
Is the candidate site on Common Good Land? (land or assets historically held by former burghs and now managed by local authorities for the benefit of the community)	Is there a requirement to prepare place-based development briefs or masterplans?	Insert Location Plan:	Insert Photographs if available:

<b>Topic – water</b> Related SEA topics: population and human health, material assets, climatic factors	<b>NPF4 Policy Topic</b>	<b>Scoring Pre-mitigation</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Enhancement</b>	<b>Scoring Post- mitigation</b>	<b>Comments/conclusions</b>
Could the proposal affect the condition of the water environment (Water quality, physical condition, water resources, and the migration of wild fish)? See RBMPs for further detail on water condition.	Flood risk and water management Coastal development Blue and green Infrastructure					
Could the proposal have a direct impact on the water environment (for example, result in the need for watercourse crossings or a large- scale abstraction or allow the de-culverting of a watercourse?	Flood risk and water management Coastal development Blue and green infrastructure					
Can the proposal	Infrastructure					



connect to the public foul sewer?	First
Can the proposal connect to the public water mains? If not, is there a sustainable water source that is resilient to the periods of water scarcity?	Flood risk and water management Infrastructure First
Are there wetlands or boggy areas on the site?	Flood risk and water management Infrastructure First
For large scale developments, are there any private or public water supplies within 250m of the site which may be affected?	First
<b>Flood Risk</b> Relative to the floodplain, as defined in NPF4 could the proposal be at risk of flooding (from any source) or result in additional flood	Flood Risk and Water Management Coastal Development

risk elsewhere? If flood risk is not fully understood, a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) should be undertaken. Specify which of the following flood sources are applicable: fluvial, pluvial, sewer, groundwater or coastal. Could the development of the site help alleviate any existing flooding problems in the area?

Flood risk and Water management

Topic – Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna Related SEA topics: soils, water, climatic factors To what extent will	NPF4 Policy Topic Biodiversity	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
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the proposal conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in line with the NPPP?	Natural Places
Will the proposal facilitate the creation of nature networks and improve ecological connectivity in line with the NPPP?	Natural places Biodiversity
<b>International Designations</b> (SAC/SPA, Ramsar site)	Natural places Biodiversity
Will the proposal affect any International Designations?	
<b>National Designations</b> Will the proposal affect national designations – e.g. SSSI, NNR	Natural places Biodiversity
To what extent will the proposal safeguard and enhance Scottish Biodiversity List habitats?	Natural places Biodiversity

Will the proposal protect, improve and expand forests, woodland and trees (including ancient and long-established woodland and ancient and veteran trees) in line with the Trees and Woodland Strategy?	Natural places Biodiversity
<b>Protected Species</b> — e.g. bats, otters, etc - can it be ascertained if protected species will be affected and will a site survey be required?	Natural places Biodiversity
Are there local geodiversity sites or wider geodiversity interests that could be affected by the proposal?	Soils Natural place Biodiversity
How will habitat connectivity or wildlife	Biodiversity Tackling the

corridors be affected  
by  
the proposal – will it  
result  
in habitat  
fragmentation  
or greater  
connectivity?

climate and  
nature  
crisis  
Forestry,  
trees  
and  
woodland.

<b>Topic – Climatic Factors</b> Related SEA topics – population, human health, water, biodiversity, material assets, soils, air, cultural heritage, landscape	NPF4 Policy Topic	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
To what extent will the proposal involve sediment extraction/reclamation or changes in coastal processes that could result in coastal flooding?	Climate mitigation and adaptation Coastal Development					
To what extent will the proposal promote and enable adaptation to climate change?	Climate mitigation and adaptation					
To what extent does the proposal use nature based solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation?	Climate mitigation and adaptation Infrastructure First Blue and Green					

To what extent does the proposal maintain and enhance resilience of existing and planned grey and green infrastructure?	infrastructure Climate mitigation and adaptation Infrastructure first Blue and Green infrastructure
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To what extent does the proposal have good proximity to services and good access to existing or proposed public transport and active travel network?	Climate mitigation and adaptation Infrastructure First.
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<b>Topic – Air Quality</b> Related SEA topics – climatic factors, soils, population and human health	NPF4 Policy Topic	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
Could the proposal lead to Local Air Quality Management thresholds being breached in an existing Air Quality Management Area?	Climate mitigation and adaptation					
Could the proposal lead to the designation of a new Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)?	Health and Safety					
Does the proposal introduce a new potentially significant air emission to the area (e.g. combined heat and power, an industrial process, large scale quarry)	Health and Safety					



etc.)?

Will the proposal lead to a sensitive use being located close to a site with noise/odour issues or a site regulated for emissions to air by SEPA (e.g. new housing adjacent to a large manufacturing factory)

Health and Safety

Topic – population and human health Related SEA topics – climatic factors, air, water, soils, material assets	NPF4 Policy Topic	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
Is the proposal within the	Health and Safety					

vicinity of a major  
accident  
hazard site or major  
accident hazard  
pipeline?

Will the proposal  
affect

service

infrastructure:

Education capacity -

Secondary School

Catchment Area/

Primary school

catchment

area

Health provision/GP

Capacity

To what extent will  
the  
proposal affect the  
quality  
and quantity of open  
space and  
connectivity  
and accessibility to  
open  
space or result in a  
loss of  
open space?

Design, Quality  
and place  
local living and  
20 min  
neighbourhoods  
Blue and green  
infrastructure  
Play, recreation  
and sport

To what extent will  
the

Sustainable  
Transport

proposal affect core path	Design, quality and place
links or other key access	Local living and 20 minute
networks such as cycle paths, coastal paths and rights of way?	neighbourhoods Infrastructure First
Will the proposal have the opportunity to incorporate new or enhance existing blue and/or green infrastructure providing multiple benefits such as enhanced biodiversity, management of surface water?	Blue and Green infrastructure Infrastructure First

<b>Topic – Soils</b> Related SEA topics – landscape, cultural heritage, water, biodiversity, flora and fauna, material assets.	NPF4 Policy Topic	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
Does the proposal make use of a brownfield site or contaminated and vacant and derelict land? If on brownfield, is the site naturalised?	Soils Brownfield, vacant and derelict land					
Are there any contaminated soils issues on the site and if so, will the option employ remedial actions to ensure the site is suitable for use (as defined in PAN 33)?	Soils					
Is the proposal on peat or	Soils Climate					

carbon rich soils and could the development of the site lead to a loss of peat or carbon rich soils?	mitigation and adaptation
Does the proposal result in the loss of prime agricultural land or land that is culturally or locally important for primary use as identified by the Local Development Plan?	Soils

Topic – Landscape	NPF4 Policy Topic	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
Related SEA topics – climatic factors, air, water, soils, material assets,						

biodiversity,  
population  
and human health

**National landscape  
designated sites**

Natural  
Places

To what extent will  
the Special  
Landscape Qualities  
of the National Park  
be affected?

**Non designated  
landscape  
features and key  
landscape interests**

Natural  
Places

Does the proposal  
ensure  
that development  
does  
not exceed the  
capacity of  
the landscape to  
accommodate it?  
Such as  
current settlement  
boundaries, existing  
townscape and  
character  
of surrounding area  
and  
its visual qualities?

To what extent will the proposal affect features of landscape interest, including the distinctive character of the landscape and the qualities of wild land?

Natural Places

Topic – Cultural Heritage	NPF4 Policy Topic	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
Related SEA topics – Climatic factors, air, water, soils, material assets, biodiversity, landscape						
Does the proposal protect or enhance the site or setting of:	Historic assets and places Natural Places					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Heritage Sites*</li> <li>• Scheduled</li> <li>• Monuments</li> <li>• Listed buildings</li> </ul>						

**Appendix 4 f): Associated Evidence Report Appendices: Site Assessment Framework**  
**National Park Authority Board Meeting**  
**10 November 2025**

- Inventory battlefields
- Inventory gardens and
- designed landscapes
- Conservation Areas
- Undesignated historic
- environment assets
- Streetscapes and
- settlement patterns monuments
- Local Designed Landscapes

Does the proposal promote or enable the retention, maintenance and sustainable use or reuse of historic buildings and infrastructure?

Historic assets and places  
Zero waste  
Infrastructure first  
Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings  
City, town, local and commercial



Does the proposal: Support the repair and appropriate retrofit of historic buildings? Support the transition to green energy supply in historic buildings? Include adaptation measures to make the historic environment assets and places more resilient to the effects of climate change (e.g. coastal erosion, flooding etc)?	centres Rural Development Historic assets and places Tackling the climate and nature crises Climate mitigation and adaptation Design, quality and place Infrastructure first Quality homes Flood risk and water management Rural homes
Does the proposal: Enable the historic environment to support creation of high- quality	Tourism Culture and creativity Design, quality and place Play, recreation

places and spaces?  
Promote sustainable,  
responsible tourism,  
recreation and  
cultural  
activity?

and sport  
Local Living  
and  
20 minute  
neighbourhoods

Topic – Material Assets – Deliverability/ sustainability constraints Related SEA topics – climatic factors, air, water, soils, population and human health. Will the site be delivered within the Local Development Plan timeframe? Other site servicing constraints, e.g. electricity pylons, underground gas	NPF4 Policy Topic	Scoring Pre-mitigation	Mitigation	Enhancement	Scoring Post-mitigation	Comments/conclusions
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pipelines etc.	
Site aspect – does the site make best use of solar gain? Is the site protected from prevailing winds? Is the site in an area of heat network potential or a designated Heat Network Zone (HNZ)?	Design Quality and place Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Heat and Cooling
Vehicular Access constraints or opportunities - Is the network capable of accommodating active travel, public transport, other shared modes, and private vehicle traffic generated?	Climate Mitigation and adaptation Heat and cooling
Is the site close to a range of facilities? Can	local living and 20 min neighbourhoods Sustainable transport
	local living and 20 min

these be accessed  
by  
public transport or  
active travel?

neighbourhoods  
Sustainable  
transport  
City, town, local  
and commercial  
centres

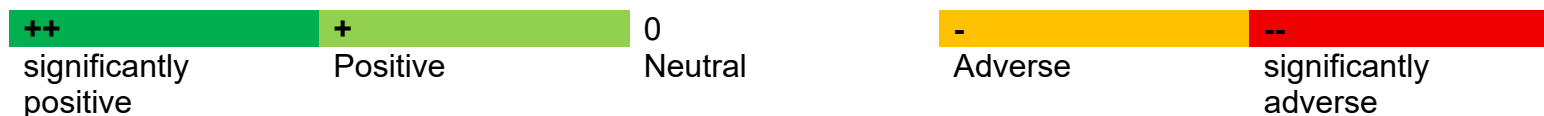
Does the proposal  
minimise demand for  
primary resources by  
reusing an existing  
building?

Zero waste

For waste  
infrastructure  
and facilities (except  
landfill and EFW)  
does  
the proposal  
complies  
with the criteria listed  
in  
NPF4 policy 12 d)?

Zero waste

Scoring – two columns have been added so that planning authorities can quickly identify environmental effects from a proposal on a site. Where adverse effects have been identified, it may then also be useful to consider any obvious mitigation measures that might reduce these adverse effects. The second scoring column then highlights what residual effects might remain following mitigation. There are many scoring techniques currently in use and an example of one option could be:



In this system, “Neutral (0)” means that the site is **unaffected** by that factor. In other words, the topic being assessed (e.g. flooding, noise, heritage) either does not apply to the site at all or applies in such a limited way that it causes no discernible effect, neither positive nor negative.