

Dumfries and Galloway Local Economic Forum

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14 April 2008

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Dear Sir/Madam

NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 2

I write to you on behalf of Dumfries and Galloway Local Economic Forum and in response to the National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2) discussion draft which was published on 8 January 2008.

Dumfries and Galloway Local Economic Forum is a key strategic body in Dumfries and Galloway representing the interests of the private sector particularly in relation to its partnership arrangements with the public sector agencies involved in economic development.

At the March 2008 meeting, the Forum discussed the National Planning Framework 2 discussion draft and received an update from the consultation event held at the Crichton's Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries on 14 March 2008.

The Forum were disappointed to note the very limited number of clear direct references to Dumfries and Galloway and that no projects from the South of Scotland were currently contained within the 9 national projects identified in NPF2.

The Local Economic Forum very much endorses the views expressed at the consultation event at the Easterbrook Hall, in particular the following key areas:

Stranraer and Loch Ryan

The Forum strongly supports the proposal that the ports at Loch Ryan, including development and upgrading of the A75 and A77 strategic transport routes and rail connections, should be included as a national development. This inclusion would help to link Stranraer, which is identified as an international gateway into Scotland, with Gretna, which should also be identified as an international gateway.

Stranraer is Scotland's key international gateway to Ireland and Northern Ireland and is currently the second busiest freight route in the UK but is starting to lose out to Holyhead due to connectivity issues. There is potential for the ports at Loch Ryan to grow, particularly with the improvements being made to the infrastructure in Ireland. It is important for Scotland as a whole that Loch Ryan maintains a competitive advantage over other Irish Sea ports including Heysham, Holyhead and Fishguard.

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The A75 is identified in the draft NPF2 as a strategic transport route but the majority is single lane with few overtaking opportunities. The A75 is the only Scottish trunk road to feature in the prestigious ESSN 14 programme as part of the Ireland-UK-Benelux upgrading programme. Improvements to the road network and other associated infrastructure are critical to the continuing success of Loch Ryan as an international gateway. If improvements are not made then Dumfries and Galloway and Scotland will be left behind. Designation as a national development would signal the national significance of the A75 (Euroroute E18) as a strategic transport route and recognise the importance of improved road infrastructure.

In an all Scotland context, the role of the A77 in providing a strategic link between Loch Ryan and Rosyth should also be fully realised. The NPF2 highlights the potential for Scotland to be a landbridge and for Irish freight to move through Scotland to avoid congestion on routes in England's East Coast ports and indicates that this matter is being pursued by the British – Irish Council.

Designation as a national development would consolidate Loch Ryan's current status as Scotland's key international gateway and recognise the importance to it of improved road, rail and port infrastructure. It would enhance the national strategic drive for closer economic/cultural/tourism links between Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 289 of the NPF2 states that, waterfront plans for Stranraer may have to be adjusted following the Stena Line decision to abandon its plans to relocate its ferry services to Cairnryan. Stena Line has confirmed that they have not abandoned plans but are looking at options. Therefore, work to regenerate Stranraer waterfront is currently progressing and it is hoped that NPF2 will provide support for this project and amend the current reference to include the most up to date position.

Dumfries

NPF2 states that strengthening the role of Dumfries as the main regional centre will benefit the whole of the south west. This is a view shared by the Local Economic Forum and therefore we would strongly advocate that Dumfries should be promoted in NPF2 as a major growth area.

The local partners, through the Regional Economic Strategy (strategic objective "*to establish Dumfries as a regional capital recognised as a high growth centre*"), have already identified Dumfries as the regional capital with a number of strategic regeneration, transport, infrastructure and sustainable urban expansion projects including:

- Dumfries Town Centre Regeneration – Strategy and Action Plan;
- Crichton University Campus / Business Park;
- A75/Southern Bypass;
- Strategic Flood Risk Management of River Nith; and
- Marchfield Sustainable Urban Expansion Area.

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The partners are keen to ensure a joint-up approach and for these projects to be recognised as an ambitious, comprehensive approach to developing a sustainable community consistent with the Government's emerging approach on sustainable communities.

The South of Scotland has the potential to make a significant contribution to Scotland's sustainable economic development as it is close to markets in England, Ireland and the Central Belt of Scotland.

Dumfries and Galloway is the third largest Council area in Scotland. Dumfries is the largest settlement in the South of Scotland and has a unique potential to accommodate a Sustainable Community Project of national importance.

We propose that Dumfries should be put forward as a national project for a sustainable community.

M74

Acknowledgement of the role of Dumfries and Galloway as Scotland's western gateway and the opportunities for the South-West arising from links to Ireland and Cumbria is welcomed. Improvement of the M74 corridor could open up significant economic and recreation opportunities related to this important gateway route. The Gretna-Lockerbie-Annan area is described as being subject to major regeneration initiatives and the opportunity offered by the ceasing of power production and decommissioning of Chapelcross is noted.

These opportunities are not currently recognised in Map 19 – Strategy. On the basis of the initiatives currently ongoing, the M74 strategic transport route also needs to be recognised as a key economic development corridor and it is proposed that Gretna should be identified as an international gateway.

Digital Connectivity

The importance of strengthening the knowledge economy is highlighted in the South of Scotland section. However, for this to happen, encouragement of developments that support advances towards enhanced digital connectivity, beyond the current basic ADSL service provision is needed.

Enhanced, open, access networks should be encouraged in rural towns and communities to stimulate market competition in digital connectivity services and leverage the public sector investment in the South of Scotland Broadband Pathfinder programme.

Rural towns and communities are dis-advantaged economically by the inferior / inequitable provision through market forces alone, of current broadband technology. Planning should seek to facilitate new market models for deployment of advanced access networks in rural towns and communities, particularly to leverage the public sector investments already made through the Pathfinder programme.

The global data centre industry is presently exposed to carbon penalty costs and therefore seeking to move to second generation, purpose built, carbon neutral facilities. The combination of

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proximity to renewable energy sources, international data connection fibre routes and stable political environment make the South of Scotland a strong contender to attract a significant share of this near term inward investment opportunity.

There is an identified market opportunity to attract second generation, international data centre operations to the South of Scotland, along the M74 and A1 corridors, to take advantage of the co-location of abundant renewable energy sources and main national and international data fibre connection routes.

Designation would set the planning environment context to encourage both of these economic development opportunities.

General

In the general economy section of NPF2 it is recognised that the economy of Dumfries and Galloway is based on livestock farming, forestry, tourism, manufacturing and food processing with a growing strength in the renewable energy sector. Exports are increasing and over 600 jobs have been created at the Crichton Business Park. 27% of Scotland's sawn timber comes from the region. Average earnings remain well below the national average.

Despite this the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on rural policy highlights that rural policy has largely focused on the Highlands and Islands. Similar efforts could be made to address the challenges of the South of Scotland, which according to many observers suffers from a public spending bias in favour of the Highlands and Islands and the central belt.

The importance of strengthening Dumfries and Galloway's primary industry economic base also needs to be included and emphasised. Processing plants to add value to timber and agricultural products need to be encouraged and supported. The range of services and facilities currently available to tourists also needs to be highlighted and improvements supported. An upgraded A75 will help on all these fronts.

There needs to be recognition in the NPF2 that Dumfries and Galloway does struggle economically and needs further help.

I hope that this submission is helpful and trust these views will be taken on board as part of the consultation.

Yours faithfully



Mike Keggans
Chair
Local Economic Forum