

Response ID ANON-MX9V-CYB8-A

Submitted to **Housing Sector Plan**

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Introduction

1 What is your name?

Name (optional):

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management

2 What is your email address?

Email (optional):

amberconnett@cieem.net

3 What is your interest in the Housing Sector Plan?

Answer:

We are the leading professional body for ecologists and environmental managers who work closely with the housing sector. We aim to be an influential voice for the sector by advising governments on policy and practice in relation to management of the natural environment.

Housing Sector Plan

4 The proposed scope of the Housing Sector Plan includes the entire life cycle of homes, and covers both existing stock and new build housing. Do you agree with this scope?

Agree

If not, why?:

5 The proposed vision for the Housing Sector Plan is described in Section 2. Do you think it sets the right level of ambition for the sector?

Agree

What would you change? :

The vision sets a good level of ambition for the sector, however we would like to see more on housing being part of the natural environment, for example by including green roofs and walls, access for bats, swifts and other fauna. In addition, we would like to see more reference to creation and enhancement of local green spaces for community usage and for the benefit of pollinators and other wildlife.

We would also like to see the conservation of natural resources as another outcome of housing design.

6 Section 3 broadly sets out the context and captures the key issues faced by the housing sector in Scotland. Is there anything vital missing, or that should be changed?

Yes

If yes, what?:

This section broadly sets out the context and captures the key issues faced by the housing sector in Scotland. However, the sector is extremely complex and so it should be made more flexible, especially for small landowners working with communities for small low-cost home developments. Some sites allocated in Local Plans for housing, for example in rural Aberdeenshire, cannot be realised as large housing developers are not interested in them.

There should also be a commitment to 'building the right houses in the right place', ensuring that land purchased for housing development is appropriate and not at the expense of other land uses.

Acknowledgement of regional differences in issues surrounding housing sector provision is also needed. For example, the de-population issues in some island communities and the rise of second homes in tourist areas such as Aviemore and Skye, in addition to the lack of provision of low-cost housing in these areas. Although reference is made to transport infrastructure, public transport should be highlighted as a prominent area.

The issue of how to reward low water usage and avoid price increases should also be considered.

7 Figure 6 describes the main environmental impacts that may arise through the life cycle of housing and the supply chain. Have we got these right?

No

Please outline any other impacts that concern you which are not included:

Impacts on biodiversity are not properly considered in these sections and we would like to see more consideration of this across the different sections. Loss of

biodiversity should be included under 'habitation', along with recognition that urban gardens can be wildlife hotspots and the need to promote and maximise this fact.

There is also no consideration of the potential spread of invasive non-native species on sites where Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed etc. are present. This should be included under 'construction'.

The use of single-use plastics should be added to point 5 of 'supply chain: materials'.

8 Figure 7 summarises the main organisations that influence and are influenced by the people in the sector that we regulate. Bearing in mind that the list is not exhaustive, is anyone vital missing?

Yes

If yes, who?:

Figure 7 should include the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) and the Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning.

Housing Sector Plan

9 To help inform how we could best address compliance we want to understand what is preventing full compliance in the housing sector. (a) Thinking about the examples of non-compliance described in Section 5, are there specific barriers we could resolve as a regulator?

Yes

What are they?:

Barriers to compliance that could be solved as a regulator include:

- Reducing the scale of housing developments, as smaller developments may be easier to manage;
- Promotion of alternative technologies in terms of guidance notes to help developers think outside the box;
- Improving the awareness of environmental legislation requirements;
- Reducing fear or mistrust of the regulator, along with views that environmental legislation is an inconvenience;
- Improving knowledge on where to go to for support and advice;
- Increasing knowledge of drainage or water treatment systems, particularly older systems;
- Stronger controls with planning authorities to prevent building on floodplains; and
- Increasing input into local development plans to help identify how multiple sites earmarked for development will impact on water usage, runoff and flood risk.

10 To help inform how we could best address compliance we want to understand what is preventing full compliance in the housing sector. (b) Which part(s) of the lifecycle of homes present(s) the biggest challenges and/or opportunities in the context of environmental regulation?

Please provide your thoughts here:

The planning/design and construction parts of the lifecycle of homes present considerable challenges and opportunities in the context of environmental regulation. The planning stage offers the most opportunities to get housing designs right from the start through early engagement with the regulators and other statutory bodies.

By linking in with the Transport and Infrastructure Sector Plan, the planning stage provides opportunities to implement measures to improve culverts where they are presenting barriers to migratory fish and de-culvert where feasible and not disproportionately costly. These actions could help to achieve the objectives in the Scotland River Basin Plans. By using elements of natural flood management at this stage, sustainable drainage systems (SuDs) will also deliver measures to alleviate flooding.

In addition, it is difficult to enforce environmental provisions that were agreed as part of the development after building is complete, as planning control officers often do not have sufficient time and resources.

11 Addressing non-compliance: (a) Do you think the actions listed under 'How we are going to address non-compliance' are the right interventions to solve compliance in the sector?

Agree

If not, what actions do you think need to be taken? :

The actions are comprehensive and well-thought out with the intention to develop internal systems to deal with the compliance challenges, raise awareness, use tried and tested methods of enforcement and provide more clarity for developers on other regulatory requirements.

Having dedicated relationship managers allocated to larger housing developers is a good idea as it provides one-to-one support and guidance which builds trust. The plan looks at innovative and new approaches and processes to improve and streamline regulatory procedure, as well as having the traditional penalties in place.

To ensure that these measures are effective, the cost and penalties of non-conformance need to be sufficient to ensure compliance.

Joint inspection practices with planners should also be considered to best use Environmental Protection Officers' resources. Many areas also need monitoring and enforcement during the early stages.

12 Addressing non-compliance: (b) Are there specific areas of non-compliance that are likely to respond better to the use of our enforcement measures than others?

Yes

If yes, what are they? :

Specific areas of non-compliance that are likely to respond better to the use of your enforcement measures than others are those in the construction phase. Companies who cause repeated pollution incidents without intending to improve their performance may respond better to enforcement measures.

13 The aspirations identified under Water, Materials, Energy and Land are our initial thoughts for how we could help the sector to go further. Do you think we have identified the right aspirations?

Agree

What changes do you suggest? :

The aspirations identified under Water, Materials, Energy and Land are good initial thoughts. We agree that we need to go further than just mitigating the impacts of development by identifying opportunities to deliver overall net environmental gain. However, this sentence needs an addition: 'Where possible we should avoid building homes on land that would better utilised for a different purpose, for example, crop production or forestry, and ensure that the land that we do use, is used in the most efficient way.' It should also include land that provides valuable ecosystem services, not just commercial outputs.

The commitment to identify opportunities of environmental net gain must also include 'biodiversity net gain' which will include the enhancement of natural capital and ecosystem services, and the restoration of biodiversity. Although the metrics are still to be determined, CIEEM (with the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, and the Construction Industry Research and Information Association) has produced principles on biodiversity net gain for development and will shortly be publishing guidance on delivering biodiversity net gain.

Lease arrangements and developer stakeholding later in the life cycle of housing development should also be considered to incentivise greater consideration of these during the construction phase.

The construction industry is in an ideal position for circular economy growth and there are great opportunities for the sector to embrace circular economy principles at all stages of the housing life cycle. The aspirations for this area demonstrate a good balance of incentives, new ways of thinking, voluntary initiatives, partnership working and advice.

14 Do you think the potential actions listed in the table under 'What actions are we going to take?' will help us achieve the plans outcomes?

Agree

What changes do you suggest? :

We believe the potential actions listed in the table will help SEPA to achieve the plan's outcomes. Greater input to site selection, planning and design using innovative solutions would also be welcomed.

Adequate resourcing is also needed to implement actions.

15 Do you agree with our proposed approach to outcomes and the outcomes identified in Section 6?

Agree

If not, why? :

We agree with the proposed approach to outcomes, however 'sustainable places and communities' should specifically reference ecosystem services and enhancement of biodiversity.

It makes sense to align with the Scottish Government's National Outcomes – SEPA's housing sector plan will contribute to achieving these. This level of aspiration will, however, require sustained reinforcement of the new ways of thinking to bring about behavioural change and the desired results.

16 Do you have any other comments or thoughts on the draft plan?

Yes

Please provide your thoughts here:

Overall, this is an ambitious but well-thought out plan, which seeks to link in and integrate with other sector plans and the National Planning Framework. We welcome an innovative, consistent and coordinated approach to regulation through partnership working with responsible and compliant businesses and penalising those who persistently fail to comply.

There is no mention of the time-scale over which this plan will be implemented. This should be included, along with measurable targets. This plan will also need to be adequately resourced to developing guidance and awareness-raising through roadshows.

'How others regulate' (page 15) should include the role of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in the process. This section should also include more information about how others regulate the environmental impacts of housing developments. Also, it should be recognised that some local authorities assess the area of development against data held by Local Record Centres (LRCs) to determine if there are any records of protected species. Similarly, at the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) stage, some ecological consultants also use these resources.