

Call for Evidence

Response Document



Implementation of NPF4

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

7th March 2025

Introduction to CIEEM

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), as the leading membership organisation supporting professional ecologists and environmental managers in the United Kingdom and Ireland, welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation.

CIEEM was established in 1991 and has over 8,000 members drawn from local authorities, government agencies, industry, environmental consultancy, teaching/research, and voluntary environmental organisations. The Chartered Institute has led the way in defining and raising the standards of ecological and environmental management practice with regard to biodiversity protection and enhancement. It promotes knowledge sharing through events and publications, skills development through its comprehensive training and development programme and best practice through the dissemination of technical guidance for the profession and related disciplines.

CIEEM is a member of:

- Scottish Environment Link
- Wildlife and Countryside Link
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Wales Environment Link
- Environmental Policy Forum
- IUCN – The World Conservation Union
- Professional Associations Research Network
- Society for the Environment
- United Nations Decade on Biodiversity 2011-2020 Network
- Greener UK
- Irish Forum on Natural Capital (working group member)
- National Biodiversity Forum (Ireland)
- The Environmental Science Association of Ireland

CIEEM has approximately 760 members in Scotland who are drawn from across the private consultancy sector, NGOs, government and SNCOs, local authorities, academia and industry. They are practising ecologists and environmental managers, many of whom regularly provide input to and advice on land management for the benefit of protected species and biodiversity in general.

This response was coordinated by Members of our [Scotland Policy Group](#).

1. Your views on implementation of NPF4

Please note that we have contributed to and support the Scottish Environment LINK response, but outline in more detail our particular concerns here in relation to lack of clear guidance and concerns around ecological capacity and expertise within Local Authorities.

Our response is based on the experience of our members who are involved with the planning process, as Local Authority ecologists, members of statutory bodies, ecological consultants, ecological clerks of works and assessors, who are bound by a strongly held Code of Professional Conduct, which brings an ethical dimension to their work. Our approach as a professional body is evidence-based. CIEEM responded to a previous Committee Call for Evidence on NPF4¹ as well as NPF4 consultations². We welcome the Committee's Call for Evidence and would be happy to provide further information and speak to Committee members.

Policy 3 Implementation Concerns

Lack of clear guidance

We are concerned about the implementation of Policy 3, particularly 3b, in part due to the lack of clear guidance on metrics and interim measures. In the absence of clear guidance on how to evidence Biodiversity Enhancements in a tangible, measurable/demonstrable, and consistent way across Scotland, inefficiency and confusion is arising from each LPA creating their own position.

Our members have observed inconsistent approaches among Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), with some requesting a qualitative approach, others requesting the use of specific metrics or toolkits with a 10% gain, and still others requesting a metric approach but not specifying which metric to use or a target.

We have also been made aware that some Local Authorities are directing developers to the Developing with Nature Guidance³ for EIA/large scale infrastructure projects, for which the guidance wasn't intended.

These inconsistencies create ambiguity for developers, who are left uncertain about what constitutes "significant" enhancements. We believe this situation needs to be addressed to ensure a more uniform and clear approach across all LPAs.

Suggested improvements and next steps

- Provide interim guidance before metric release: this should define what constitutes "significant" enhancements when using metrics/toolkits, and provide showcase examples of how to evidence a qualitative approach.
- Address irreplaceable habitats and designated sites in biodiversity planning guidance: this should clarify treatment of blanket bog and ancient woodland in particular, and any compensation requirements. We note that irreplaceable habitats are excluded from 10% gain calculations in England.

¹ <https://cieem.net/resource/npf4-committee-call-for-evidence/>

² <https://cieem.net/resource/national-planning-framework-4-consultation-response/>

³ <https://www.nature.scot/doc/developing-nature-guidance>

- Guidance should address how a further 10% compensation on top of the 1:10 ratio for priority peatland be applied as per NatureScot guidance; specifically, whether this refers to 10% area or 10% biodiversity units. If the latter, how to achieve this while a biodiversity metric for Scotland is in development.
- We need to ensure that there is an effective mechanism for long-term monitoring and evaluation, alongside a set approach for enforcement. A strong government position and legal enforcement on biodiversity enhancement measures in Planning Applications is required otherwise LPAs will continue to struggle to implement and enforce biodiversity enhancement measures in Local Development Plans. Without clear high-level support to truly address the biodiversity crisis it will continue to prove difficult to stop challenges from developers.
- A standardised, strategic approach for offsetting must be developed, providing clear guidance on how this applies after the mitigation hierarchy, establishing consistent regulations, and ensuring effective enforcement of offsite delivery.
- Call for coordination of a National Nature Network while Local Planning Authorities develop local nature networks to ensure ecological coherence across Scotland. A National Nature Network is crucial for connecting local nature networks across boundaries and linking ecological processes across landscapes. This network could use protected areas as core sites, guiding habitat restoration and creation to connect these areas. Implementing this requires coordinated spatial planning across planning and land use sectors.

Lack of capacity for implementation and enforcement

We appreciate the Scottish Government's consultation on planning system resources, acknowledging the need for adequate funding, upskilling, and recruitment in the planning profession. However, it is clear that lack of capacity, particularly within LPAs, continues to undermine implementation of NPF4.

CIEEM conducted a [survey of LPAs](#)⁴ in Scotland which shows two-thirds of respondents view lack of enforcement staff as a high or very high risk to implementing NPF4 and Positive Effects for Biodiversity. Insufficient planning enforcement officer capacity undermines effective post-consent enforcement of planning conditions to the standard expected, including measures identified via the mitigation hierarchy, as well as biodiversity enhancement measures. Furthermore, specialist availability varies across planning authorities, with limited capacity for tree, landscape, and biodiversity officers. In the survey 22% of respondents said they have no current ecological resource or expertise available.

Suggested improvements

- Workforce planning to build skills and capacity, brought about by adequate funding: this should involve consultation with LPAs to evaluate the shortage of ecologists and environmental planners, skilled tree, landscape, biodiversity, and enforcement officers, as

⁴ <https://cieem.net/survey-of-scottish-local-planning-authority-capacity-highlights-risk-to-delivery-of-npf4>

this affects an LPA's ability to implement NPF4. This is necessary for the setting of clear targets and actions to address these gaps. This will build on the surveys conducted by CIEEM⁵ and RTPI⁶.

- Ensure that planners and elected officials have a minimum of ecological knowledge to ensure their decision making takes proper account of NPF4 and to allow them to recognise when a decision is outside of their competence and additional expert support is required.
- Match the importance of developing a metric for Scotland with appropriate resourcing as a matter of urgency; this is a significant undertaking for the two-person team tasked with this work at NatureScot.
- Develop a mechanism for ensuring a long term commitment to biodiversity enhancements in management plans, alongside ensuring sufficient resources and skills are available within LPAs to enforce this. This will require continuous monitoring and adaptive management.
- An approach must be developed for offsetting, to ensure a standardised approach and regulation and enforcement of offsite delivery. Establishing a register for offsite enhancements, or a similar approach will be required to allow scrutiny.
- In advance of the metric being launched a skills gap analysis will need to be undertaken across the different sectors to identify and deliver on training needs. This analysis will need to consider what upskilling planners, environment planners, and other Local Authority staff, will need in terms of ecological knowledge and metric training.
- Looking further ahead, we also need to consider what is required to train the next generation⁷, for example, provision of and support for vocational botanical qualifications.

⁵ <https://cieem.net/survey-of-scottish-local-planning-authority-capacity-highlights-risk-to-delivery-of-npf4>

⁶ <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research-rtpi/2023/december/resourcing-the-planning-service-rtpi-scotland-research-briefing/>

⁷ <https://cieem.net/cieem-and-lantra-publish-report-on-vocational-pathways-into-nature-based-green-jobs/>