

SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Introduction

Scottish Chambers of Commerce (SCC) welcomes the opportunity to input into the Local Government and Communities Committee's consideration of National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2).

SCC have welcomed the concept of the National Planning Framework and responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on NPF2 in April 2008. In welcoming the general principles of the Discussion Draft, SCC made additional recommendations for inclusion in the list of National Developments. These recommendations encompassed a greater focus on electricity generation, and aspects of road, rail and air transport within the National Development list.

A number of these recommendations have been reflected in the Proposed National Planning Framework 2 published by the Government in December 2008, but SCC believe that NPF2 would benefit from further refinement and the Scottish Parliament has a key role to play in this regard.

SCC's View

SCC believes that the primary role of Government should be to focus its efforts on growing our economy at all levels. The planning role of the Scottish Government and of Local Government are key tools to assist in achieving this overarching objective and SCC has long argued that the Scottish planning system should facilitate development which will assist us in attaining improved levels of economic growth.

From a business perspective, Scotland needs a planning system that is responsive to the needs of businesses large and small, that will provide rapid and consistent decisions on development and that will frame a coherent national strategy aimed at supporting businesses and allowing enterprise to thrive within our country.

NPF2 will be a vitally important document as we build a modern and outward looking Scottish economy, equipped to take full advantage of the business opportunities of a 21st century global marketplace. In particular the designation of key National Developments will guide the decision making processes of Government for many years to come and should help to deliver the certainty and consistency that businesses seek for our planning system.

In a world where energy is becoming an increasingly important commodity and is an essential component of our economic wellbeing, SCC had argued that a wider range of energy related projects, particularly in the area of electricity generation, should be included in the list of National Developments. Whilst we are pleased that this argument has in part been accepted by the Scottish Government in the revised NPF2 proposals, we do not agree that the document should be prescriptive in the definition of the sources of electricity generation. The omission of nuclear power from the list of national developments removes a tried and tested source of electricity which has contributed in large measure to the balanced energy mix currently enjoyed by Scotland, and we feel that this cannot be justified on practical grounds. Scotland's energy future must not be

determined by narrow politics, but instead be guided by the practicalities of an evolving energy market, with no energy source ruled in and none ruled out. In a volatile energy market, a broad and balanced portfolio of energy sources must form the basis of national planning policy.

In the area of transport, SCC welcomes the fact that enhancements to the accessibility of all of Scotland's airports have now been identified as a National Development. The draft NPF2 had restricted this to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports, but the importance of Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness and Prestwick Airports both regionally and nationally must not be underestimated. Each of these facilities supports significant numbers of jobs and nationally important industries within our economy and all have a vitally important role to play in the future development of our economy and the ability of our businesses to compete internationally.

Similarly SCC supports the inclusion of port facilities at Loch Ryan in the list of National Developments. Ferry traffic between the south west of Scotland and Northern Ireland accounts for more passenger journeys than all but the three largest Scottish airports and in addition represents a key freight route linking Scotland not just with Northern Ireland but with the Republic of Ireland as well.

The development of an efficient and effective transport system is an essential part of doing business and growing our economy. This means not only external transport links but also internal ones. The publication of the Strategic Transport Projects Review provides a useful guide to the way ahead but this must be reflected to a greater degree in the list of National Developments within NPF2. As a starting point, the Government should be prioritising key road links between all of our cities.

SCC believe that one of the key national transport projects undertaken in the United Kingdom in the early part of this century should be the development of a High Speed Rail network linking Scotland with London and other key English cities. Such a development is projected to boost Scotland's economy by a significant amount and could help refocus our reliance on short haul domestic air transport within the UK for business travel. This is an initiative that Scotland should be leading and this must be reflected in our list of National Developments.

Conclusion

NPF2 has been significantly enhanced over the course of 2008, but it could be improved still further following the input of the Scottish Parliament in the early part of 2009. We have a golden opportunity to shape Scotland's future direction of development for many years to come and help boost the fortunes of individual businesses and our economy as a whole. This is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

About Scottish Chambers of Commerce

Chambers of Commerce comprise the world's largest business support organisation. In the UK, membership is voluntary and the Scottish Chambers, along with the British Chambers of Commerce, are prominent members of the worldwide movement of Chambers.

Membership is open to any firm or company irrespective of size. The current membership ranges from the country's largest companies to the smallest retail and professional operations. The present membership ranked by market capitalisation, includes 23 of the top 25 companies, and 38 of the top 50 companies in Scotland. Together Scotland's Chambers provide well over half the private-sector jobs in Scotland and provide an unequalled geographical and sectoral representation throughout Scotland.

The Scottish Chambers of Commerce is the umbrella organisation of the local Chambers of Commerce. Its prime functions are to promote and protect the interests of local Chambers and their member companies throughout the length and breadth of Scotland. It helps promote co-operation between the local Chambers in the provision of services and represents the common interests of Chambers at a national and international level. The President of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce is Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal.

Scottish Chambers policy is determined by a Council on which all Chambers have equal representation, and is executed under their direction. Policy groups, formed from a wide cross section of member Chambers, are used to develop policy initiatives. The national body represents the interests of members to the Scottish, UK and European Parliaments, opposition parties, the Scottish Executive and other Government officials, Enterprise bodies, COSLA and other public bodies, and works with other private-sector business support bodies in Scotland on areas of mutual interest.

Scottish Chambers of Commerce
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