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ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

20 Minute Neighbourhoods





Elected Members Briefing Series

The Improvement Service (IS) has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep pace with key issues affecting local government.

Some briefing notes will be directly produced by IS staff but we will also make available material from as wide a range of public bodies, commentators and observers of public services as possible.

We will use the IS website and elected member e-bulletin to publicise and provide access to the briefing notes. All briefing notes in the series can be accessed at www.improvementservice.org.uk/products-and-services/skills-and-development/elected-members-development/elected-member-guidance-and-briefings

About this briefing note

This briefing note sets out the key concepts and features for 20 minute neighbourhoods, and points to other issues to consider in delivering their ambition.



What is a 20 minute neighbourhood?

The principle of 20 minute neighbourhoods is a place-based approach to reduce inequality and meet net zero carbon emission targets. With a focus on giving people connected and walkable places to live, it supports a lifestyle where it is easier for everyone to choose to live, work and play more locally. Where people can access their essential daily needs within a walkable distance from their home and communities are supported to thrive. This includes access to shopping, recreation and leisure activities, schools and local services such as GP practices. People work more from home, in local hubs or in local businesses and access to work and services beyond their neighbourhood is through public transport connections. Housing is affordable with a mix of size and sectors to enable intergenerational communities and ageing in place.

The places where we live, work and play shape our daily living choices and, as such, impact on our opportunity to be healthy, support inclusive economies and reduce carbon emissions. The impact of these conditions are also known as the Social Determinants of Health and much of their availability in each place sits within the remit of local government. The 20 minute neighbourhood ambition is to actively work towards all places becoming more connected and people living more locally in order to support everybody's choices to enable wellbeing for our people and our planet. While many of our established areas have some of these features, there are still too many where the lack of them is an underlying cause of inequalities such as health, access to fair work and poverty.



What's motivating 20 minute neighbourhoods?

The 20 minute neighbourhood focus on the benefits of living locally is being adopted across the world. Developed in different ways in places like Melbourne, Portland and Paris. In Scotland, place based approaches that promote working in partnership, and with communities, to create places that improve the underlying causes of inequality stem from the Christie Commission. The Place Principle builds on this, highlighting the need to focus more on working together on place to address Scotland's inequalities. The benefits of living more locally that sit behind the 20 minute neighbourhood are therefore not new, however the climate crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have put focus on the urgency to accelerate change in our places.

The Programme for Government 2020-21 commits to work with local government to take forward the Scottish Government's ambition for 20 minute neighbourhoods. An ambition to radically rethink the places we live in, our homes and our communities. To "ensure our communities can become vibrant hubs for the people who live there – to work, shop, learn, keep active and socialise". This ambition is reflected throughout the programme for government in commitments to support local economies and community wealth building, promoting lifelong health and wellbeing and reviewing the Town Centre Action Plan.

The new spatial plan for Scotland to 2050, the [fourth National Planning Framework \(NPF4\)](#), is under preparation. The recent Position Statement on the plan sets out Scottish Governments current thinking on the content. It promotes 20 minute neighbourhoods as a key opportunity and clarifies a desire to guide change in both existing and new places. Importantly, it confirms an ambition to explore how the emphasis on living locally could work in different parts of Scotland, from remote rural communities to cities and towns, taking into account the needs of everyone in society so that equality is built in from the start.

What are the key features of a 20 minute neighbourhood?

While the concept being progressed across the world has local variations, the diagram below taken from Melbourne illustrates what the key features of a 20 minute neighbourhood include.



As with all place-based approaches the 20 minute neighbourhood requires ways of working that take account of the varied social, economic and physical characteristics in every place to enable each of these features to co-exist in every place. How these features apply to Scotland is the ambition now being explored.

In Scotland, there is a set of [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) that sit behind the questions posed in the Place Standard. They align with delivering our National Outcomes, closely match the living local features being developed worldwide and offer a strong starting point for the features behind Scotland's 20 minute neighbourhood ambitions.



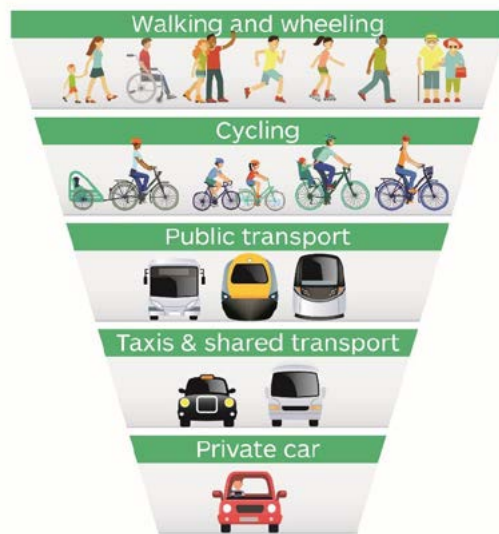
How important is the 20 minutes aspect? Melbourne builds on research that shows that the maximum time people are willing to walk to meet their daily needs locally is 20 minutes. This represents an 800 metre walk to a destination and back again. Or 10 minutes walk out and 10 minutes back to home. However, the context of different needs in our communities as well as varying neighbourhoods means we need to consider places individually. The roles of cities, town centres, urban suburbs and rural areas will be different. This means the focus should be on integrating the key features to allow people to live locally rather than fixating on the 20 minutes.

For example, rural communities will still need to access their nearest settlement, but their daily needs should then be met within that settlement area. By delivering services and jobs closer to communities the need to travel should be reduced. In new developments, places should be created where housing, jobs and services sit together.

There are key issues such as with the current reliance on car usage, especially during the pandemic where people have been discouraged in using public transport. By creating neighbourhoods that support people's daily needs and supporting walkability, public transport and active travel it can create more options for people to travel without the car. 20 minute neighbourhoods are therefore about giving people more choice. One third of Scotland's households do not own a car and this increases to half the households in deprived areas. This is why it is important to introduce more choice to address the inequality in how we access services, amenities and work. Aims around active travel and public transport align with Scotland's National Transport Strategy Hierarchy while building neighbourhoods with the critical mass to support public transport enables the Strategies Bus Circle of Growth by increasing patronage that leads to reduced fares and increased frequency.

The Sustainable Travel Hierarchy

Prioritising Sustainable Transport



Bus Circle of Growth



Other benefits of achieving these key features include:

- Reduced household transport costs compared to car-dependent communities reducing poverty.
- Fairer access to work for households not owning a car
- Improved quality of life - time saved not commuting can go towards other family or community activities.
- Reduced expenditure on transport infrastructure through increased walking and cycling.
- Reduced healthcare and environmental expenditure (healthier population, lower congestion and air pollution).
- Tackling Vacant and Derelict sites or land and bringing these into productive usage even on a temporary basis.
- Physical and mental health benefits from higher levels of active travel such as walking, cycling and wheeling
- A healthier population enabling a more productive work force.
- Greater mix of house types can better accommodate our ageing population to age in place.
- Greater sense of community, increased social interaction and community cohesion
- Greater investment and support for local economies and independent businesses
- Increased actual and perceived safety through passive surveillance
- Reduced land use required for roads and car parking which can be used for other purposes such as green infrastructure, play and community spaces, food growing etc.



How do we enable Scotland's 20 minute neighbourhoods?

To support the ambition, Councils and their partners will need to collaborate with those who influence the key 20 minute features in a place. Establishing new ways of working across national and local, and sectoral and disciplinary boundaries. Within Councils it will need a proactive, joined up approach to achieve policy alignment across a number of areas. Planning, housing, regeneration and transport especially need to work together to shape the infrastructure needed but it also covers public health, community planning and fair work.

As with all place based approaches, this collaboration is needed to ensure we consider the impacts of interventions to address one aspect of a place – social, economic or physical – on another aspect of the same place. We will need to work together to maximise the positive impact of our short and long term interventions and avoid unintended consequences that negatively impact peoples opportunity for wellbeing. Working with communities to gain this insight is crucial and tools like the Place Standard Tool directly link to the key features of a 20 minute neighbourhood.

To achieve the 20 minute neighbourhood ambition will mean maximising the impacts of policy and implementation decisions on achieving each of the features for local living and, importantly, considering consequences for our varied population groups.

The Improvement Service is working collaboratively to support Councils as they consider the contribution of policy and projects at a local, council-wide and regional scale to delivering the 20 minute neighbourhood ambition. These assessments use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes as well as our National Outcomes as the key features of the 20 minute ambition, include our different population groups and then consider the impact of a policy or project on each to provide recommendations on delivery of the ambition.

An example is [work with City of Edinburgh Council](#) on different options for spatial planning policy in their Local Development Plan. Assessing the impact on wellbeing of their traditional scenario supporting low density, predominantly family housing areas with limited mix use. And then impact of a more 20 minute neighbourhood scenario supported by higher density, mixed use development that targets access to green space, a range of affordable house types, public transport and active travel.

Issues to consider in achieving the key features of a 20 minute neighbourhood:

- Community Wealth Building has a key role in supporting local services and amenities to establish and prosper. The actions of anchor organisations, including

home working hubs, can create the critical mass to support local business, promoting local working, use of physical assets and procurement.

- Town Centre Action will continue to require a focus as the impact of online retail has grown during Covid-19 offers a new role for our town centres as hubs for 20 minute neighbourhoods. This will be especially relevant in town centres within deprived or rural areas.
- Enabling access to the daily needs that feature in a 20 minute neighbourhood will require ensuring the right mix of land uses in each area. This means moving away from a predominance of single use areas.
- A range of affordable housing types supports a diverse population mix. This addresses the housing shortage, improves the affordability and availability of housing, and allows for more resilient, multi-generational communities that support our ageing population to age in place.
- Walkability is a key part of this idea and alongside this good access to public transport and infrastructure for active travel. Achieving well designed, higher density places supports the critical mass needed to grow public transport services and allows for car clubs and bike share schemes.
- Providing the infrastructure to support more walking and cycling including widening pavements, introducing bike lanes, reallocating road or parking spaces. From climate change perspective this is also important if we can reduce the extent of commuting and 'dormitory' settlements.
- The range of good quality of greenspace and access to nature needs to meet our varying population requirements in each place.



What does good practice look like in this area?

Paris

In Paris the Mayor, Anne Hidalgo, [in her re-election campaign has put emphasis on the '15 minute city'](#). This aims to transform the city into a collection of neighbourhoods, reducing pollution and stress. By creating socially and economically mixed districts it aims to improve the overall quality of life for residents and visitors.

Melbourne

As highlighted above, Melbourne's [Plan Melbourne 2017-2050](#) includes 20 minute neighbourhoods. They have launched three pilot programmes which focus on established neighbourhoods and published a [report](#) in August 2019 which details the key findings and recommendations. Melbourne has also conducted [research projects in greenfield areas](#) including the economic benefits, these test the principle of 20 minute neighbourhoods.

This work builds on their successful city centre transformation which has seen the residential population increase dramatically, a more walkable city centre, improved climate through street trees and parks and better connections through their laneways project.

Barcelona

Barcelona's Superblock initiative is an even smaller radius at 15 minutes. They are made up of nine blocks where traffic is restricted to the outside allowing space in the streets for pedestrians and cyclists. The aim was to reduce pollution and noise levels and create more space for citizens to meet and do activities. This has long-term health benefits and a [recent study](#) shows that almost 700 premature deaths could be prevented annually with the Barcelona Superblocks.



What does this mean for elected members?

Elected members have a vital role to play in promoting and encouraging councils to adopt the 20 minute neighbourhood approach. You are likely to know the key issues in your local communities and how these relate to the 20 min neighbourhoods.

Questions you can ask locally include:

- What daily services do you feel should be closer or easier to access?
- What benefit would a 20 minute neighbourhood have for your local residents?
- Is your council incorporating a 20 minute neighbourhood approach?
- Is your council already working to move towards the behavioural change needed to meet net zero targets and create healthier places?
- How does the council work with partner institutions to support 20 minute neighbourhoods?
- Are there good examples of aspects of the 20 minute neighbourhood such as Community Wealth Building, mixed use, active travel etc. in your area?
- Are the council's interactions with the physical, social and economic environments in every place being considered for impact on delivering the 20 minute neighbourhood ambition?



Further support and contacts

The Improvement Service's [Strategic Framework 2020-22](#) prioritises supporting Local Government to work with their partners and communities to deliver place-based approaches. Specifically highlighting support to deliver on Scottish Government's 20 minute neighbourhood ambition. The [Planning for Place Programme](#) provides this specific support. If you would like any more information or support around implementing the 20 minute neighbourhoods approach you can contact the Programme Manager, Irene Beautyman.

Irene Beautyman

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LGUI recently published a [briefing on 20 minute neighbourhoods](#).

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