

**DTAS Response**  
**Infrastructure Investment Plan Strategy Consultation**  
**April 2026**

**Introduction**

Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Infrastructure Strategy 2027–2037.

DTAS represents a national network of development trusts and community-owned enterprises operating across urban, rural and island Scotland. Our members collectively own and steward an extensive portfolio of economic, social and natural assets, delivering essential services, local economic development, climate action, cultural activity and place-based regeneration.

**Core Recommendation**

The Strategy should explicitly recognise community-owned and community-led infrastructure as a core component of Scotland's infrastructure system and embed them as strategic partners in planning, delivery and investment.

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**Response to Consultation**

**Role of the Infrastructure Strategy**

**1. Do you agree with the scope and role of the Infrastructure Strategy?**

DTAS agrees that a long-term, place-based infrastructure strategy is needed. However, the scope does not adequately recognise the contribution and scale of community-owned infrastructure. Although we accept that this Strategy is intended to provide a framework for Scottish public infrastructure governed by Scottish Government, a huge amount of impact is delivered by community and place-based enterprises, often funded by Scottish Government, and this requires equal recognition.

Development trusts and community enterprises own and manage a substantial and growing portfolio of assets, from renewable energy and community hubs to housing, land and natural capital, yet this is not reflected strongly enough in the Strategy's definitions or language.

To fully reflect Scotland's infrastructure landscape, the Strategy and Needs Assessment should explicitly include community-led and community-owned enterprises as core infrastructure partners alongside the public and private sectors.

Although we understand that this document does not include a pipeline of infrastructure projects, if it is to inform capital allocations, and therefore priorities, community enterprises require equal recognition.

We also recommend that the distinct needs of island infrastructure is recognised and not lost within rural. The specific infrastructure issues faced by islands regarding issues like

being on single phase grid infrastructure and not 3-phase grid infrastructure and power as a universal basic requirement.

**2. Do you think the proposed framework, linking the 30-year Needs Assessment, 10-year Infrastructure Strategy, Spending Reviews and annual Budgets will support improved strategic planning and delivery? Are there any further improvements you want to suggest?**

Yes, we agree that it will support improved strategic planning and delivery, but the 30-year Needs Assessment and Strategy do not identify community organisations as key stakeholders, despite their pivotal role in repurposing assets and land, addressing local service gaps and delivering long-term stewardship.

Within the Needs Assessment executive summary, the third sector is not explicitly mentioned as a key stakeholder and should be included. Within the Strategy document, “private third sector” is included, but there is only limited recognition of community-owned assets under social infrastructure. There needs to be consistency and equal importance across the documents.

**Additions should include:**

**Economic**

- Community-owned energy
- Community-led housing

**Natural**

- Community landowners

For the framework to work effectively, community-owned enterprises must be formally included in the needs assessment, strategic planning and delivery pipeline, ensuring local capacity and solutions shape national investment.

The rolling programme is welcome, as this will enable new and innovative projects to enter the pipeline.

**Infrastructure Governance Principles**

**3. Do any elements of the infrastructure lifecycle need to be strengthened to promote more effective infrastructure planning and delivery?**

Yes. Early stages of the lifecycle, identifying need, assessing options and repurposing assets, should explicitly include community organisations. Development trusts often hold the strongest understanding of local priorities and can identify viable reuse options for underused public assets.

The lifecycle should also recognise community ownership as a mainstream, and often optimal, route for managing assets long term, offering resilience, accountability and preventative value.

Under collaboration, the Strategy refers to investigating and sharing assets with other public bodies, but it should also explicitly mention community enterprises. This would allow

communities not only to be consulted on the needs of assets in question, but also potentially to work with public bodies or proceed with ownership themselves.

This aligns with other government policies such as:

- Asset transfer
- Community right to buy
- Community Wealth Building
- Public service reform

With regard to impact assessment, there is scope to strengthen this area by explicitly linking to community action plans or similar plans developed by local communities. This would provide a more joined-up approach to grassroots priorities, while recognising and emphasising the role of communities in shaping outcomes.

#### **4. In what areas could changes to governance or planning processes across the public sector improve the impact of the investment hierarchy?**

Governance should require public bodies to explore:

- Community-led reuse
- Shared use
- Ownership options

This aligns directly with the hierarchy's emphasis on maintaining and repurposing assets first.

To be effective, regional and local governance structures must include community-led organisations, ensuring decisions reflect real local opportunities and support Community Wealth Building.

We would ask that governance arrangements align with the Democracy Matters work being undertaken by Scottish Government as part of the Public Sector Reform agenda.

It is difficult to be precise in this area, as local authorities all work in differing ways, but regional partnerships and Community Planning Partnerships do not currently have adequate community representation.

Our vision would be that the hierarchy links into local community anchor networks. This aligns with the local governance review work and Community Wealth Building priorities.

**Decision-making should be made at the most local basis possible.**

#### **Infrastructure Themes and Enablers**

**5. Do you agree that enabling net zero and environmental sustainability, driving economic growth, and building resilient places continue to be the right outcomes to guide infrastructure investment over the next decade?**

Yes to enabling net zero, environmental sustainability and building resilient places however we would recommend that driving economic growth is potentially incompatible with achieving the other goals. We would suggest driving a Wellbeing Economy or Community Wealth Building or Inclusive and Sustainable Local and National Economies.

To fully achieve them, community-led organisations must be recognised as central to delivery.

**6. Are the three proposed enablers, public assets, place-making and private investment, sufficient to deliver the Strategy's outcomes? Are there other enablers we should consider instead/additionally?**

While the three enablers are important, they do not fully reflect the role that community-led enterprises already play in Scotland's economic and place-based infrastructure.

Community-owned enterprises are often the organisations:

- Repurposing public assets
- Creating local economic activity
- Driving regeneration within their communities

They are not separate from these enablers; they are often the mechanism through which much of this work is delivered.

Across Scotland, community-led projects collectively deliver substantial economic, social and environmental impact whilst also leveraging in private investment (community/shared owned renewables and assets using community shares/bonds as a funding mechanism). The multiplier effect of this activity is significant.

At the same time, where communities are taking on public assets, there is a danger of creating savings for the public sector while shifting pressures and liabilities to communities without adequate investment.

**We recommend broadening the enablers so public and community owned assets, community-led place making and unlocking investment at a local level is more prevalent.**

This would better reflect existing delivery capacity and strengthen alignment with the Strategy's place-based ambition.

Private investment is extremely important ~~but~~ and there is also potential to unlock capital within communities through:

- Community shares and bonds (a form of private investment that is sourced often more locally to the project than forms of private investment)
- Public sector pensions, municipal bonds
- Reinvestment of community benefit fund and creation of a [Scottish Community Wealth Fund](#)

## **7. What mechanisms or approaches should the Infrastructure Strategy adopt to ensure that critical cross-cutting priorities, such as housing delivery, regional economic development, and natural infrastructure are systematically embedded in investment planning and decision making?**

To ensure cross-cutting priorities are genuinely embedded, the Strategy needs to move beyond high-level alignment and recognise the role of locally rooted delivery models, particularly community-led organisations.

We would encourage the Strategy to align with Community Wealth Building and connect more strongly with work already underway in communities.

### **People and Places**

Community organisations are often directly involved in:

- Delivering housing solutions
- Repurposing buildings
- Ensuring infrastructure investment reflects local realities

Mechanisms within the Strategy should explicitly enable community bodies to participate in planning and delivery at local and regional level, including stronger links to Regional Partnerships and Regional Spatial Strategies.

DTAS could offer support in this area.

### **Economy and Wellbeing**

Investment decisions should recognise the long-term:

- Economic value
- Social value
- Cultural value
- Environmental value

Impact that is created by community-led projects, rather than focusing solely on short-term financial returns or the ease of larger investments.

Smaller-scale community-led investment can deliver significant local impact and should not be overlooked.

### **Investment and Delivery**

Funding and delivery mechanisms must be accessible to community organisations, including:

- Flexible funding models
- Blended finance approaches
- Democratic finance models

Community enterprises often unlock additional value from public investment by reinvesting surpluses locally and sustaining long-term impact.

**8. Are there any findings from the Scottish Future's Trust (SFT) Needs Assessment (perhaps from drivers of change, cross-cutting themes or enablers) that we should more fully integrate into this 10-year Infrastructure Strategy?**

Yes, particularly the findings on:

- Demographic change
- Public service reform

These reinforce the need for local, community-led infrastructure solutions, particularly in communities experiencing depopulation or declining public services. Rural and Island perspective are particularly relevant here.

Energy transition should not just recognise communities through supply chain development, but go further to actively promote, support and invest in community-owned energy.

Attracting patient, long-term investment is also a key enabler and should be more fully integrated. Existing models, such as community shares, could align more closely with public and private investment.

The Strategy should explicitly identify community-led ownership and stewardship as a response to the long-term drivers identified by SFT.

**Place Based Approach**

**9. Do you support the proposal that infrastructure investment is more directly driven by the priorities of places across Scotland?**

Yes.

A genuine place-based approach must include community leadership and ownership alongside public sector collaboration.

Development trusts are local community anchors and long-term stewards of place and should be recognised as essential partners in place-based infrastructure planning.

Without this, place-based policy risks remaining overly top-down and disconnected from local realities.

The consultation rightly recognises the importance of balancing broad distribution of investment with efficiencies and coordination. This principle should be applied to community-led investment.

For example:

**Five homes delivered by a community in a rural area may have as much impact as a much larger development elsewhere.**

The Strategy should support investment models that recognise this, including coordinated investment across multiple communities to achieve economies of scale.

This Strategy presents an opportunity to strengthen community-led delivery across Scotland.

**10. Are the proposed principles, national spatial priorities and place partnerships, the right ones to guide a place-based approach? Are there other principles we should consider?**

They provide a helpful and joined-up approach with NPF4.

However, there could be further development of this through recognising community ownership as a specific priority. Although it could be argued that community ownership is reflected within other priorities, making it explicit would align strongly with spatial equity, rural sustainability and land reform objectives.

With increasing pressure on communities to take on assets across the country, it would be a strong and empowering statement to include this within the priorities and support it through investment.

**11. Do you agree with the Scottish Government's proposal to empower communities to play a more active role in infrastructure decision making? What mechanisms would best support meaningful community involvement and help to maximise local social benefits?**

DTAS strongly supports a greater role for communities in infrastructure decision-making and investment planning.

To maximise social, economic, environmental and cultural benefit, the Strategy should:

- Recognise community-led organisations as strategic delivery partners
- Build on the principles emerging through Democracy Matters
- Use Community Action Plans, Local Place Plans and other community-generated evidence to inform priorities
- Give equal status to community ownership, stewardship and shared ownership models

These approaches would strengthen place-based investment, maximise local social value and support wider ambitions around Community Wealth Building, democratic renewal and a just transition.

DTAS and the Scottish Community Alliance offer support in this area.

**12. Do you believe the current landscape of local and regional partnerships (e.g. Community Planning Partnerships, Regional Economic Partnerships, Regional Adaptation Partnerships) provides an effective framework for delivering place-based infrastructure investment? Please explain your answer, including any suggestions for improvement of existing structures.**

Work underway through Scottish Government Democracy Matters, and the work of DTAS, Scottish Community Alliance and others to improve decision-making structures, should be more explicitly connected to this agenda. These developments provide a solution to current problems.

The current structures provide a foundation, but they are not sufficient and therefore we do not fully agree with the framework.

### **Regional**

If Regional Economic Partnerships are to be a key part of this work, we would ask that third sector representation is increased.

### **Local**

Community Planning Partnerships vary significantly in effectiveness and community connection across all 32 areas.

If they are to be part of delivery, clear guidance is needed on how communities are represented and involved.

### **Community**

We welcome recognition of Development Trusts and strongly recommend that they are part of these partnerships.

Community action plans and equivalent locally generated evidence should play a stronger role in informing investment priorities.

DTAS would welcome the opportunity to work alongside Scottish Futures Trust to shape this area.

### **Enabling Private Infrastructure**

#### **13. Are there additional sectors or opportunities that should be considered for strategic investment to support economic growth and maximise opportunities for longer-term growth?**

Yes.

Community-led and community-owned sectors should be recognised as strategic investment opportunities in their own right.

These include:

- Community energy
- Community housing
- Local service hubs
- Land and natural capital management
- Digital hubs
- Repurposing public assets into community ownership

Investment routes should:

- Protect community interest

- Ensure long-term value remains local
- Support blended-finance approaches

Community shares and democratic finance models should also be recognised.

There is also a missed opportunity to strengthen links with Community Wealth Building.

The Scottish Communities Coalition on Energy would welcome further discussion in this area.

#### **14. To make the most of the strategic opportunities in renewables, housing, and natural capital, what will the economy need from our infrastructure to grow and thrive up to 2037?**

Scotland's economy will only maximise these opportunities if infrastructure investment takes a genuinely place-based approach that empowers communities as partners in development, not simply as recipients of investment or managers of assets passed down without adequate support. All infrastructure is going to have to be adapted to a significantly changing climate as well in the run up to 2037 and this adaptation and resilience needs to be built in now.

This requires investment in infrastructure that enables:

- Community-owned energy and natural capital projects
- Affordable housing
- Transport
- Digital connectivity
- Community hubs

It also requires mechanisms that allow communities to invest, benefit and reinvest locally.

If genuinely place-based, this Strategy can shift from infrastructure being done *to* communities, to infrastructure being shaped *with* communities.

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## **Conclusion**

DTAS welcomes the ambition of the Infrastructure Strategy and supports its focus on place, resilience and long-term investment.

However, for the Strategy to achieve its stated ambitions, it must move beyond seeing communities solely as consultees, consumers or service users, and recognise community enterprises as infrastructure partners, delivery actors and long-term stewards of assets and place.

Three practical examples illustrate this:

### **Community Energy**

Community-owned energy demonstrates how communities can contribute to net zero, local economic resilience and long-term infrastructure stewardship.

### **Community Housing and Rural Delivery**

Community-led housing demonstrates how smaller-scale projects can collectively deliver strategic impact, while addressing rural sustainability and demographic challenges.

### **Community Ownership of Assets**

Community ownership of public assets and community hubs shows how local stewardship can support regeneration, service delivery and preventative investment.

Recognising and investing in these models would strengthen the Strategy, improve delivery and better reflect how infrastructure outcomes are already being achieved across Scotland.

**DTAS welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with SFT and Scottish Government on this strategy.**