

**Planning
Aid Scotland**

Planning: The Secret Job That Shapes Every Place

An Introduction to Planning for Young People

August 2026

 Information Sheet

What is a Planner?



A planner thinks about:



Our
homes



Where we
learn & work



Our parks &
playgrounds



How
we travel



Our
planet

A planner brings all these things together so you can enjoy the place you live in.

People often call planners '**town planners**'. However, planners do not only think about towns and cities. They also think about smaller villages and remote places. In Scotland, many people live on islands or in rural areas, and planners need to think about those places too!



Every place is different. A planner thinks about what is best for each area.

People living in towns and cities face different opportunities and challenges to people living on a small island. Planners learn about these differences and think about several options. They make different decisions in each place to benefit the communities that live there.



What is a place?

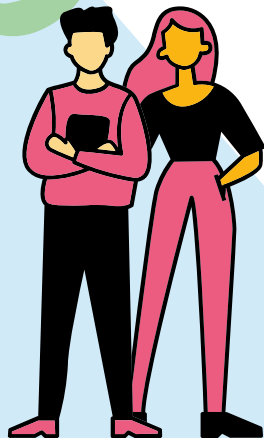
We have mentioned the word **place** a few times. It can be a difficult word to describe and can have a different meaning for different people. A place is where a range of things come together, like:



Places are also shaped by:

- How they look
 - The weather and climate
 - The landscape and water sources
 - How people feel when they are there
 - How people move around
 - The language people speak
 - The culture of the people who live there
 - How people look after and use the space
- All these things influence what a place is like.





What do you think?

You have a right to be included

Your street, neighbourhood, school, community hall or park may feel like a good place to you. But there may also be parts of your neighbourhood where you feel less happy or safe. You might have ideas about how those places could be improved or what you would like to see there.

Planners need to talk to people about what works and what does not work in the places they live and work. This helps them bring the right people together and come up with ideas to make those places better.

Everyone has the right to take part in conversations about their place. As a child or young person, you have the right to be heard and included! After all, it is for your future.

Why do we need planners?

Before the 19th century, most villages and towns were **not planned**. People settled in places that worked well for survival. These were places where people could find:

- Good land to grow food and graze animals
- Fresh water for drinking
- Natural landscapes such as hills and valleys to feel safe
- Good connections to other places using rivers and the sea



The **industrial revolution** introduced new technology such as electricity and trains. People were able to move around more and did not need to rely so much on farming. Many people moved to towns and cities where more jobs were available.



Soon too many people were living together in dirty conditions. Homes and polluting industries were located close together. Air quality was often poor, and many homes had no clean water or proper toilets. **People's health worsened.**



In the early 20th century, people began to realise that these conditions were harmful. In Scotland, one important figure was **Patrick Geddes**. He started thinking about:

- Where people work, live and spend their free time
- How they interact with each other
- How nature and the environment help people stay healthy



After World War 2, many places in the UK had been bombed and needed to be rebuilt. **The government introduced laws** about how neighbourhoods and places should be planned, so that people could live in clean, organised and healthy places.



Councils began hiring people with backgrounds in social sciences, history and architecture to do this work. **They became the first planners.**



These planners were asked to create **long-term plans** for cities and regions, looking ahead 5 to 20 years. Their plans set out where buildings should go, what they should be used for and what they should look like.



In some cases, New Towns were built with a focus on more **green spaces**. However, many of the New Towns also prioritised cars rather than public transport. Since then, our understanding of climate change has grown. Planners have learned that it is **better to rely less on cars**.

What do planners do?

Planners make important decisions about how land is used now and in the future.



Some of the things they think about include:

- Where to build new homes
- Where to place renewable energy such as wind turbines and solar panels
- How to prevent flooding
- Providing green space for health and wellbeing
- Making it easier for people to walk and cycle
- Re-using land that has been built on before, known as brownfield sites
- Supporting new businesses to set up
- Helping people make changes to their homes
- Improving roads and public transport
- Supporting town centres and high streets

Big challenges

Planners also need to think about big challenges like **climate change** and **sustainability**. This means making sure that the decisions they make today do not cause problems for the people who will live in these places in the future.

Planners need to support people living in rural areas and in cities.



The challenges and opportunities in rural areas and islands are different to cities. In **cities**, planners think a lot about how to expand cities to provide enough homes without harming nature too much.



As people keep moving away from **rural places**, it becomes harder to live in those places.

Planners think about how smaller places can be supported with enough jobs and homes.

Planners cannot do all of this alone.

They work with many other professionals, including experts in:



Architecture



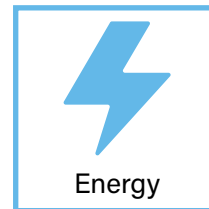
Transport
& roads



Heritage



Nature & the
environment



Energy



Economy

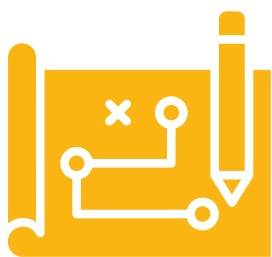
There are many different kinds of planners!

Most work for a council, other government bodies, or a private company. **Developers** are companies or people who want to build something new. They come up with ideas for what to build and what it should look like. **Council planners** then look at those ideas and decide whether they would be good for local people and the environment.

Planners can focus on specific topics, such as heritage, nature, public transport, energy, talking to communities or waterways. There really are many different paths a planner can take.

How does planning work?

In Scotland, planning works in three stages. Each stage influences the next.



Stage 1: Planning for the future

Planners create long-term plans that set out how places should develop over the coming years.

These plans must be sustainable, meaning they need to work well for people living there now and for people who will live there in the future.

In Scotland, there are two key plans.

1. First, the Scottish Government produces the **National Planning Framework**. This covers all of Scotland and applies to every piece of land in the country.
2. Second, your council produces a **Local Development Plan**. This shows what different places might be used for in the future – for example, where homes, roads, industry, green spaces etc. could go – and which areas should be protected.

Both plans are updated every ten years.

Planners must give everyone the chance to have their say on what they would like to see in their area. That includes you!



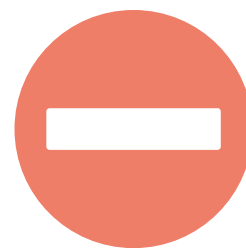
Stage 2: Planning applications

If someone wants to build something, they must apply for **planning permission**.

- They send their plans and information to the council.
- A planner then looks carefully at those plans.
- The planner asks neighbours and other professionals for their opinion and then decides whether the project should go ahead.
- Planners balance the needs of the person who wants to build with the needs of the wider community and environment.

For larger projects, it is often elected councillors who make the final decision, since they are chosen by local people to represent them.

Some smaller building work does not need planning permission at all. This is called **permitted development**.



Stage 3: Enforcement

Sometimes people build without getting planning permission first.

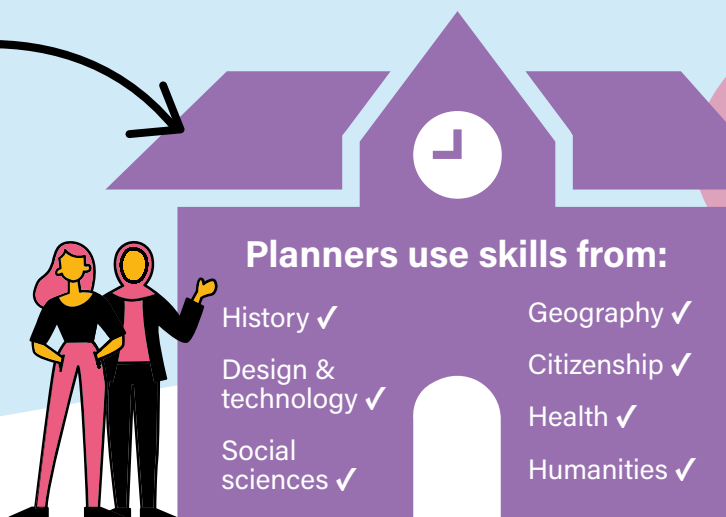
Some planners work in enforcement. They go out and check that buildings and developments have been built according to the rules.

If something has been built **without permission**, they contact the landowner and may ask them to apply for permission.

If what has been built is not acceptable, the planner can ask for it to be removed.

How to become a planner

The subjects you study at school are more relevant to planning than you might think!



There are several routes into planning...

University

Many people study town planning or spatial planning at university straight after school. Others first study subjects like geography, history, politics, environmental studies or social sciences, and then go on to do a planning qualification afterwards.

[More on studying at university here.](#)



Apprenticeships

Some employers now offer planning apprenticeships, where you work and study at the same time. This is a great way to learn on the job while also building your knowledge and understanding.

[More on apprenticeships here.](#)



Sometimes people simply become passionate about the place they live in and want to make a difference. They can end up working in planning without having planned it at all!

The **Royal Town Planning Institute** is the organisation that represents planners across the UK. They have [more information on their website](#) about the different ways you can get into planning.



RTPI
Royal Town
Planning Institute

In short

- Planning shapes the places we all live in, now and in the future. It is an exciting job that is about people as much as it is about buildings.
- Planners listen to communities, work with experts, and make careful decisions to make sure our neighbourhoods, villages, towns and islands are good places to live.
- Your voice matters in this process. Whether it is a park, a path, a new school or a wind farm, you have the right to share your views on what happens in your area.
- If you enjoy thinking about people, places and how the world fits together, planning might just be the career for you. It is a chance to make a real difference, in communities across Scotland and beyond.

Want to learn more?

To learn more about planning visit the [Royal Town Planning Institute](#) website.

You can also get in touch with us at [Planning Aid Scotland](#). We might be able to come to your school to chat about planning.





i Visit [our website](#) for information sheets on other planning topics



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