

Ariane Burgess MSP
Convenor
Local Government Housing and Planning Committee

By email: localgov.committee@parliament.scot

6 February 2026

Dear Ms Burgess,

Flood Risk Maps and Guidance

Thank you for your letter of 8th January sent on behalf of the Local Government Housing and Planning Committee.

In your letter you highlighted issues that had been raised with the Committee by witnesses giving evidence as part of your annual review of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) in respect to flood risk maps and guidance. You requested “information on the flood risk assessment process, particularly on any recent changes to the process, their scale and the reasoning behind them.”

I hope the following information is helpful to you.

Flood Risk Assessment process

SEPA are required by Scottish Ministers to provide flood maps that set out future flood risk for Scotland and we have developed our maps to provide insights on the areas that are at the greatest risk of future flooding.

The [flood maps](#) provide the most comprehensive Scotland wide information on flooding, showing where flooding might be expected now and in the future. They have been designed to support the protection of Scotland’s communities and assets. They identify areas at flood risk where flooding should be considered in more detail; they are not suitable to quantify the exact flood risk at a street or individual property level. The flood maps use a combination of national and regional level assessment and are designed for strategic use to support local authorities and associated bodies with flood risk management.

Advice about how the maps should be used and understood is provided for visitors to the flood map site when searching and viewing search results. Users are also required to accept [terms and conditions](#) of use.

The flood maps are a cornerstone of the National Flood Risk Assessment (NFRA). The NFRA is a strategic tool that provides a national picture of the risk of flooding in Scotland. It sits within the wider [flood risk management planning framework](#) which provides a structured, long-term approach to reducing the likelihood and impact of flooding on people, property, the economy, and the environment. We regularly review the NFRA to provide the most accurate evidence base for managing flood risk. In December 2025 we [published an updated report](#), giving us the clearest picture yet of what lies ahead for Scottish homes and businesses – and why action to improve Scotland’s flood resilience matters. The latest NFRA has benefited from richer property data, improved climate projections, and enhanced modelling methods.

Flood risk data for all cycle 3 Potentially Vulnerable Areas (PVAs), and a national coverage flood risk grid will be published on SEPA's website in March 2026.

Our maps are underpinned by data collected from our national network of over 700 river, loch, tidal and rainfall gauging stations through which we monitor the water environment every fifteen minutes 24/7/365. Furthermore, SEPA are custodian of the Hydrometric Archive, holding records of our water environment for the last 80+ years at some stations.

The flood maps are based on our best understanding of long-term flood risk at the time of being made. We continue to enhance our evidence base and understanding as more data becomes available and as we monitor flooding events. Our maps are reviewed every six years, with the next version due in December 2031. We have made a number of important updates to the hazard maps in recent years, including:

- February 2025 – Publication of new national flood hazard maps for surface water and small watercourses.
- November 2023 – Publication of new coastal flood hazard maps for the northeast of Scotland (John o' Groats to Arbroath including Orkney Islands) and the Outer Hebrides.
- November 2020 – Publication of 18 local updates to our river (fluvial) flood hazard maps and five local updates to our coastal flood hazard maps. Publication of new national future flood maps to show the impacts of climate change for river and coastal flood sources.

Use of SEPA's maps in the planning process

The [Chief Planner's letter of October 2025](#) sets out information on the roles and responsibilities of SEPA and planning authorities in relation to the planning process and flood risk. SEPA are a statutory consultee in the planning process and along with the planning authority has a duty set out in Section 1 of the [Flood Risk Management \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) to reduce overall flood risk. We provide advice to planning authorities on Local Development Plans, and on various types of planning and plan related applications.

The planning authority should use [SEPA's Future Flood Maps](#) in the first instance together with any other local information to determine whether the site is within or near an area at flood risk. Where a proposed development site is shown to be within, or in close proximity to, a mapped flood extent or flood source, SEPA can typically request that a bespoke Flood Risk Assessment is then carried out by a suitable consultant and submitted in support of the planning application. Such assessments are site-specific and can consider local topography, drainage characteristics and flood mechanisms in greater detail than is possible within the national Flood Maps, allowing a more detailed and robust appraisal of flood risk for the individual site. However, such assessments may only serve to confirm the flood risk to the site and may result in further confirmation that development in the location is contrary to policy 22 of National Planning Framework (NPF4).

The Planning Authority is the decision maker and must consider SEPA's advice alongside other material considerations including relevant policies in NPF4 when determining a planning application. [NPF4 policy 22](#) relates to flood risk and water management. The intent of policy 22 is to strengthen resilience to flood risk by promoting avoidance as a first principle and reducing the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding.

The planning authority must weigh up SEPA's flood risk advice with all relevant material considerations, including other NPF4 policies such as quality homes and brownfield development when determining a planning application.

It may also be helpful to highlight that these subjects were also considered at the Scottish Parliament's Public Audit Committee (PAC) [session on flood resilience](#) on 29th October 2025. Alex Flucker, Chief Operating Officer, Data, Evidence, and Innovation and I gave evidence on behalf of SEPA alongside the Scottish Government, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and local authority representatives.

The session followed the Audit Scotland and Accounts Commission report, [Flooding in communities: Moving towards flood resilience](#), published in August 2025, which set out key recommendations for Scotland's approach to managing flood risk.

Public consultation on Flood Risk Management

SEPA launched a public consultation on 21st January 2026 inviting individuals, communities, businesses and stakeholders to share their experiences of flooding issues and priorities within Potentially Vulnerable Areas (PVAs), the areas identified as having the highest flood risk.

To find out more about the consultation and to take part, please visit our [Consultation Hub](#). It is open until 22nd April 2026. The feedback will help inform Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMP) covering 2028 to 2034, which will set out how Scotland reduces the impacts of flooding and builds resilience for the future.

The consultation is part of a two-stage process. A second, more detailed consultation will begin from December 2026, when further information on flood risk, objectives and proposed actions will be published in partnership with local authorities. The final Flood Risk Management Plans are due to be published in December 2027.

I trust the above information is helpful to the Committee. Please be assured of SEPA's commitment to playing our role in local planning and keeping our communities safe from the risk of flooding.

Should you have any further questions or if it would be helpful to discuss any element of this response, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours sincerely,
Nicole Paterson
Chief Executive