

Places, People and Planning

Workshop Report: 9th February 2017

Introduction

The workshop was convened to discuss the Scottish Government consultation on planning reform: [Places, people and planning](#). Following a presentation by the Deputy Chief Planner Helen Wood, participants were invited to discuss all four themes of the consultation; the key points raised in discussion are recorded below. The strategic points are as follows:

- The need for spatial unity between development plans, community plans and the National Planning Framework.
- The social benefits of land use planning to be clearly understood and articulated.
- Concerns over potential centralisation of the planning process, and risks to the historic environment associated with deregulation, with loss of policy and guidance.
- The need to retain access to specialist skills and services.
- Welcoming of the emphasis on local participation in the plan making process, with emphasis of the need to support and build capacity within communities to make this work.

Making Plans for the Future

Question 1 – the proposal to introduce a statutory link between the development plan and community planning was thought to be good in principle, however there remains a need for clear direction and the relationships between the two processes better understood. There was support for the recognition in the consultation document that there are a wide range of interests involved in planning, and that local authorities must recognise the value of the development plan in realising their corporate objectives. It was commented that there are cultural differences between community and spatial planning; and also a suggestion that the impact of community plans needs to be assessed on a spatial basis. Health and wellbeing are key outcomes for community planning. Overall, there is a need for stronger linkages between local development plans, community plans and the National Planning Framework, collectively offering stronger spatial unity to land use planning, shifting from a focus solely on economic development. Planning needs to contribute to wider social benefits and support the place-making agenda.

Question 2 – Stakeholders questioned how regional priorities would be co-ordinated if strategic development plans are to be replaced. There was some concern expressed that overall the proposals represent a centralisation of the planning process.

Question 4 – the proposed move towards a ten year planning cycle was generally welcomed, with a preference for having the ability to review between plan cycles. There

was, however, concern expressed over the proposed removal of supplementary planning guidance within this context of a lengthened review cycle. Landscape Capacity Studies were given as an example of such guidance. There remains a strong need for policy at local level.

Question 5 – Adding an early gatecheck into the process was thought to be quite ambitious – its success will depend upon the detail of how it is done. Much will depend on effective communications.

People Make the System Work

Question 9 – The proposed Local Place Plans represent a radical change which could potentially reduce ‘NIMBYism’ and improve perceptions of the planning system. These will be challenging to implement and will require additional investment. Capacity building will be necessary to raise awareness, develop methods of engagement and to ensure that the range of likely diverse voices in communities are heard. Visualisation techniques may be particularly useful in supporting communities to participate. The way in which such plans are perceived (in terms of their credibility) will determine the extent to which people will participate in their development.

Question 10 – Stakeholders welcomed the use of the Place Standard Tool and Design-led Charrettes, highlighting that there could be stronger heritage and wider environmental components in these methodologies. Village Design Statements are another relevant tool in this context and Local design panels could also be used more to support community groups.

Question 11 - Early school education on planning and place-making is important.

Question 14 – Stakeholders felt that enforcement powers must be strengthened.

Building More Homes and Delivering Infrastructure

C: Participants did query that ‘myopic focus on homes’ in a consultation on the future of the Scottish planning system. The focus should be on creating better places. In relation to infrastructure, it was commented that there is a lack of information on what is needed/the deficit in infrastructure provision; assessment of the ‘thresholds of communities’; and also assessment of the extent to which infrastructure providers are actually delivering on commitments. There was a strong call for incentivising development of small brownfield sites, for higher density development, and for new development to be Scottish in character.

Question 24 – It was recognised that plans are just one of many factors determining housing development and that land banking is a strategic issue that should be researched further to inform policy development. There was a desire for capturing land value uplift for public purposes.

Question 20 – Varying views were put forward on the greater use of zoning to support housing delivery – ranging from ‘simplified planning zones have failed in the past’, to

comment around how these might be used to deliver high quality development ('the conservation areas of tomorrow'). Further detail is needed on proposed implementation which may fall, in part, to local authorities. If inadequately resourced, Simplified Planning Zones could represent a major threat to Scotland's historic environment. In general deregulation is viewed as a threat to Scotland's historic environment since it places environmentally sensitive (including undesignated archaeological) sites at risk.

Question 22 – putting regional priorities within the National Planning Framework may risk that framework become overloaded and unpopular, as has happened in England.

Question 23 – Varying views were put forward in relation to restricting the ability to modify Section 75 planning obligations; it was commented that S75 agreements were a positive change; also that landowners should bear cost of infrastructure (S75) requirement – not developers.

Stronger Leadership and Smarter Resourcing

D: There was endorsement of the sentiment at paragraph 4.1 – that planning should 're-establish itself as a visionary profession rather than the micro-management of the built environment'. Although recognition within this that enforcement, which may be considered micro-management, is a critical activity. There is currently no obligation on elected members to take heed of the advice of planning officials – it was commented that stronger leadership will require a shift in culture.

Question 26: There was support for stronger leadership, training of councillors and skill sharing. It was recognised that leadership applies throughout the system including the community council level.

Question 27: Retention of local authority resources including access to specialist skills and expertise is fundamental. There is a particular need for training in 'softer' skills such as leadership and facilitation, especially given the proposal for a more 'front loaded' system with more meaningful public involvement.

Question 30: Participants strongly welcomed a stronger focus on outcomes and evaluating how places have changed. This would include skills development around monitoring and evaluation of impact 'on the ground'.

Question 31: There was general agreement that Scotland's land use planning system is under-resourced. There are new proposals in the consultation which will also require additional resourcing, such as the local place plans and investment in digital solutions. There should be recognition that wider disciplines contribute to the planning process and that others feeding in should be accommodated in a more towards full cost recovery. In relation to the proposal for fast tracked applications, community engagement could be a prerequisite.

Question 34: There was support for development of digital solutions; a comment that three-dimensional visualisation is good idea but can be open to manipulation by developers. Physical models still have a place. Also an observation that there is a need for an e-planning Code of Practice.

Acknowledgements and Participants

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Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers
in Scotland
Archaeology Scotland
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Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
Cockburn Association
Friends of Glasgow West
Historic Environment Scotland
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Landscape Institute Scotland
National Trust for Scotland
PAS
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Scotland's Gardens & Landscape Heritage
Scottish Civic Trust
Sir Frank Mears Associates
Taylor Architecture & Urbanism
War Memorials Trust