Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS) is an independent organisation, working across Scotland to help people shape their local environment and improve the way people engage with the planning system. As an independent organisation, impartiality is our most important guiding principle – one that we will not compromise. We deliver all our services with an impartial and professional approach.

PAS has built up a wealth of experience and tapped into the local knowledge of communities all around Scotland and their experiences of the planning system. PAS has worked with a wide variety of stakeholders in the planning system, including seldom heard groups - helping individuals and communities understand the extent to which they can influence decisions about their local environment.

Our services are delivered by a volunteer network of more than 300 planning professionals. We also work with legal experts, communications specialists, community artists and others. They offer not only their time but also their professional skills in order to enable people to engage proactively with the planning system.

PAS achieved Investing In Volunteers accreditation in 2008 and again in 2011, recognising our professional approach to working with volunteers. Volunteering is at the heart of what we do and our volunteers add a unique value to our services: something widely appreciated by our clients and partners.

PAS is a charitable organisation, operating on social enterprise principles.

Introduction
1. There are several key themes which Planning Aid for Scotland would like to address in response to this consultation.

2. The over-arching theme connecting all of these is PAS’s interest in achieving a system of public service delivery whereby people and community groups have the skills, knowledge and opportunities to participate in and comment on relevant matters which will impact both on their everyday lives and on matters of national importance.

Appropriate and meaningful public engagement in the land-use planning system
3. The land-use planning system impacts on all of us and Planning Aid for Scotland believes that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in decisions relating to current and future uses of land.

4. A key aim of the 2009 planning reform was the achievement of a more inclusive system through better public engagement. The current planning system does contain a high level of opportunity at a statutory level for public involvement, especially compared to other areas of public life. Examples include participation in the development plan preparation process, attending pre application consultation events on “major” planning proposals, commenting on planning applications, and being part of a community council (the only type of community group with a statutory role in the planning system).

5. However, PAS believes that there is still potential for more and better public engagement.

6. At development plan consultation level, the level at which it is hardest to achieve a high level of public involvement, PAS has recently led a programme of pre Main Issues Report consultation in partnership with the local authority and targeting specific groups. PAS believes this is an approach which should be promoted.

7. PAS will this year be piloting Charetteplus, a new project aimed at demonstrating a more efficient version of the charette model. This will involve PAS working in collaboration with a local authority to run this new type of charette within the context of a local development plan preparation process. A key aspect of Charetteplus is that it will link land-use planning and community planning matters (see below) within the charette; and also to demonstrate that more detailed information of what a community envisages for the local area can be achieved using this method. A genuine community vision involves more than focusing on just land-use planning issues and this is what Charetteplus aims to achieve.

Role of Community Councils

8. Community councils are the only type of community group democratically elected and therefore occupy an important place in Scotland’s local democracy. Community councils have a statutory role in the land-use planning system and are one of the key audiences which PAS has engaged in terms of providing advice and training.

9. Current community council coverage of Scotland is patchy and there are rarely elections for community council office-bearers. The role of community councils and the opportunities to be involved in matters relating to the forthcoming Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill clearly needs to be better publicised. There is also general agreement that community councils vary hugely in their make
up and how they operate. This may be to do with lack of awareness of opportunities to be involved and the lack of resources currently dedicated to community councils.

10. PAS further believes that it would be worth considering extending (or replacing) the current statutory duty for community councils to comment on planning applications with a duty for them to be involved with Development Plan preparation (and potentially the Community Plan also) - articulating a vision for their area. The importance of community councils being involved in the Development Plan preparation process is a point which PAS has been emphasising for a long time through its advice, training and education services.

11. Depending on what arises out of the consultation on the proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill (CERB), the role of community councils, and other community groups, in matters such as asset transfer will need to be considered.

**Engaging with Young People**

12. Young people will be the inheritors of land use planning decisions made today, and for this reason PAS believes that it is imperative that every effort is made to involve young people in planning consultations. PAS’s education programme aimed at young people seeks to instil at an early stage an awareness of the planning system and relegated environmental matters and of planning issues that will impact on young people in the hope that this will lead to active citizenship as adults.

**Engaging with other Seldom Heard Groups**

13. There are other groups for which extra efforts need to be made to achieve effective engagement with the planning system - young people, elderly people - and indeed, anyone who would not normally engage with the planning system.

14. PAS has undertaken a significant amount of work with Gypsy/Travellers including an 18-month research project which has been followed up by a dedicated training programme called Reach Out. This aims to improve Gypsy/Travellers’ engagement with the planning system, and equally to up-skill local authority in this regard.

15. PAS recently gave oral evidence on this matter to the Equal Opportunities Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

16. PAS’s Charetteplus pilot project will have a strong focus on engaging with seldom heard groups and reaching those who would not normally engage with planning and local authority service delivery.

**Relationship between Planning and Community Planning**

17. The cross-cutting nature of land-use planning means that it impacts on many areas of public service delivery. PAS stated in its consultation response to the
proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill (CERB) that a matter which needs to be addressed is whether the relationship between land-use planning and community planning could be managed more efficiently.

18. Matters falling within the remit of community planning, particularly in relation to service delivery and environmental matters, can also have spatial aspects which will inter-relate with the land-use planning system. For example, currently local development plans and community plans are not generally prepared with co-ordinated timescales although both may raise matters which impinge on each other. Preparing both documents along the same time-table would be less likely to lead to consultation fatigue amongst members of the public and so potentially lead to better outcomes. There would also be the opportunity to align objectives more strongly between both plans, assess inter-connections, and ultimately lead to those engaging feeling that they were participating in the creation of a genuine community vision for their local area in terms of both service delivery and future use of land.

19. As the statutory approach to planning can only address matters material to planning (ie the use and development of land), arrangements will have to be made to better align land-use planning with Community Planning - and this will include many of the services which Community Planning and regeneration seek to co-ordinate.

CONTACTS
Planning Aid for Scotland would be pleased to respond to any queries with regard to this evidence and is always willing to consider a joint venture with the promoters of the call for evidence to take forward further research or training on any aspect of the subject which relates to the core business of PAS.

Petra Biberbach
Chief Executive