Local Government and Communities Committee  
Planning (Scotland) Bill  
Submission from the British Medical Association Scotland

Introduction

The British Medical Association (BMA) is a registered trade union and professional association representing doctors from all branches of medicine. The BMA has a total membership of around 168,000 representing around two-thirds of all practising doctors in the UK. In Scotland, the BMA represents around 16,000 members.

Provision of healthcare facilities

BMA Scotland would like to make comments on the provision/expansion of healthcare facilities, both in general practice and the wider NHS, as a consequence of residential development. This is an issue that has concerned us for some time. In particular, there has been considerable impact on GP practices where large volumes of patients have been added on to existing practice lists because there is no mechanism that supports the creation of new practices in small but growing communities. The lack of formal involvement of NHS boards in planning for this influx means that practices end up having to absorb the additional patients without any investment/resource.

It is expected that planning authorities will engage with health providers as part of the process of identifying areas of growth, so that issues of capacity and any requirement for developer contributions towards healthcare facilities are considered in advance of a planning application – at the development plan or master planning stage. However, this expectation is not currently enforced and there are many examples where new developments have had significant impact on the provision of healthcare.

Whilst we welcome recognition of medical facilities within the definition of infrastructure, we believe that there needs to be more done to address this issue. We would like to see a legal requirement placed on planners so that they must ensure adequate availability of both primary and secondary care services for any new developments.

Provision of play spaces

Investing in play and recreation spaces can lead to multiple benefits including improved educational attainment and a healthier society.

BMA Scotland is pleased to see ‘facilities and other spaces for recreation’ included in the definition of infrastructure. We believe that housing developments should be required to include adequate provision of play and informal recreation spaces. Outdoor play impacts significantly on the lives of children and young people and could help remove some of the barriers to accessing physical activity. Ensuring quality play opportunities in all new housing developments would allow children and
young people in Scotland to increase their physical activity and improve their health and wellbeing.

**Obesity and planning**

While there is limited evidence on the relationship between the density of fast-food outlets and their impact on diet and health outcomes, such outlets have been found to be particularly concentrated around schools. The availability of unhealthy products in school environments is associated with poor dietary behaviour and we would urge the committee to consider if this Bill could include provision to direct planning policy to prevent further increases in the density of fast-food outlets near schools.

BMA Scotland