Local Government and Communities Committee

Planning (Scotland) Bill

Submission by Joan Higginson

It is important that the new planning Bill protects the community in a much more effective way and is more open and transparent in creating a system that is, inclusive and fair, to ensure local communities and their local and built environments are better protected.

The Planning system is deeply flawed on many levels and discriminates against local communities. The top down approach is weighted in favour of the developer which is unfair and unjust. It gives no protection to the local communities who feel vexed and let down by a system that allows bad practice as they watch their local towns and villages being targeted by developers, who show little regard for their needs.

The planning process shows a lack of care and unwillingness to engage local communities at a deep level and encourages bad practice and creates division in an already unfair system. Over the last 18 years I have watched the green belt disappear, watch towns and villages become coalesced and beautiful countryside and wild landscapes disappear because of profit and the lack of care for the people who live, work and play within their communities. Planning is done to people with no redress, so Equal Rights of Appeal is required urgently to begin the process of balancing need above greed.

There is no equity for the community. The only redress that communities have, is to go to court under judicial review which does nothing in respect of good practice. It is expensive and in effect, the court system doesn’t sit well in relation to Planning Law. Basically, it causes stress and bad feelings and creates the atmosphere of mistrust that we see in the planning system.

When the planning system was changed in 2006 the same tired arguments where used against communities. The Scottish Executive must address the lack of trust in local democracy and not centralise a system that already fails on many levels. Equal Right of Appeal is used in other countries e.g. Ireland. The old fable that E.R.A will slow down the planning system is proven to be inaccurate and only suits the needs of big business and developers.

By ignoring Equal Right of Appeal for communities it shows that the Scottish Executive are not bold or honest in their approach, or willing to create a fair system that would encourage and enable communities to be more actively engaged in the planning system. Communities deserve to have equality and equity within the planning system. They must be given the opportunity to be involved from an early stage in planning the future of their communities. This old fashioned and unfair
system of allowing development at any cost, without regard for the needs of the local people is outdated and immoral.

Local Councils require more support in addressing planning issues. With financial assistance to enable them to build more council/social housing.

Community Councils budgets must be increased to assist in community engagement in relation to planning and local development plans.

Educating councillors in planning is good however, should include community councillor. However, planning should be included in the school curriculum as it shapes our communities on many levels.

Joan Higginson