Local Government and Communities Committee

Planning (Scotland) Bill

Submission from Ann Glen

Having been involved with Local Government in Scotland for over thirty years, I am concerned about aspects of the proposed planning legislation. Having seen Local Plans, produced by experienced planners and then given lengthy consideration at consultations with local communities, only to be overturned by Ministers in the 'national interest', trust in planning has been seriously compromised.

1. At present, planning arrangements favour developers giving them an automatic right of appeal. This is manifestly unfair when a refusal of permission is based on a breach of the local development plan. Developers have the resources to keep appealing, but communities do not have this possibility. Communities should be given equal rights of appeal in any new legislation, and thus become an effective part of the decision making processes in planning.

2. It is iniquitous that developers may publish notices relating to controversial planning applications at peak holiday times when local people are from home and when communities are distracted. This is a time when such plans are likely to be submitted. Longer response times should be mandatory to allow community views to be gathered and expressed.

3. There should be no interference from Ministers with decisions being reached by a completely independent 'praesidium', accessible to the public and to campaign groups without the need for the latter to incur huge expense.

4. It should be remembered that developers are in business to make profits, and they will move on. Meanwhile communities have to endure bad planning outcomes that adversely affect their lives and ruin the environment. They have to live with the consequences, but they should be seen to a far greater extent as the custodians of places and environment.

5. There are good reasons why 'green belt' has been delineated and protected around urban areas. Urban sprawl and the ensuing destruction of the environment have to be resisted not only for the healthfulness of human populations but also in the interests of biodiversity, of landscape evolution and of our heritage. Any new planning legislation must seek to strengthen the protection of our green belts - these are of crucial significance if Scotland's poor health status is to be transformed by enabling easier access to countryside for exercise and relaxation.

Yours sincerely

Ann Glen