Local Government and Communities Committee  

Planning (Scotland) Bill  

Submission from Daniel Lamont  

I am very pleased that the Scottish Government is reviewing the current planning system.

In summary, I wish to see 1) the introduction of an Equal Right of Appeal into the planning system to guard against development NOT in the public interest and 2) the rescinding of a “presumption in favour of sustainable economic development”, in order to secure a faithful planning system for the benefit of future generations.

At the moment, as a result of the financial constraints on local councils in recent years, town planning has been developer led rather than city led. Indeed the whole system favours the developer and not the public interest.

The current system gives the developer alone the right of appeal. There is no provision for local communities, community groups and similar bodies to have the freedom to appeal. This imbalance must be corrected and ALL parties must be permitted to appeal against a planning proposal.

Currently there is a “presumption in favour of sustainable economic development” - which is nowhere properly defined. This presumption needs to be scrapped since it loads the approval process in one direction only and does not permit other considerations to be taken into account.

There needs to be a presumption in favour of the public interest as a whole – and this is usually very different from those of the developer whose sole object to make money. Cities, of which my home city of Edinburgh is a prime example, need to have developments which are in the wider public and community interest, which provide good development, following best practice which is both ecologically sustainable and provides for public needs.

There needs to be a recognition of the common good, that is the needs of local residents, the local tax payers and the securing of the future and an investment in that future. The selling-off of public assets provides a short-term solution and merely provides for private profit. All too often the claims that developments will provide jobs are not met and such jobs as generated tend to be minimum wage short-term contract ones which do not benefit the city as a whole. It is essential for the healthy and prosperous future development of our cities and towns that a well-provided public realm is secured.

I maintain that the cases of the Royal High School and the India Buildings in Edinburgh reveal a widespread failure of public agencies to uphold the Principles of Public Life. They strengthen further the case for the Development guided by the public interest should benefit all.
We need the introduction of an Equal Right of Appeal, and even more importantly the rescinding of a “presumption in favour of sustainable economic development”, in order to secure a faithful planning system for the benefit of future generations.

This would go some way to overcoming the public’s serious lack of trust and confidence in the current process, encouraging higher standards, enhancing scrutiny and strengthening the plan led system. At the moment, the wider public interest is largely ignored.

Yours faithfully,

Daniel R. Lamont