Local Government and Communities Committee

Planning (Scotland) Bill

Submission from Grangemouth, incl. Skinflats, Community Council

We welcome the opportunities for community engagement and the development of Local Place Plans as a means of achieving public engagement.

We do however have reservations on how successful this approach will be, unless it is accompanied by resources in terms of access to training, planning expertise, and increased financial support for Community Councils, who would at the outset seem the most likely community body to fulfil the role envisaged.

It is also concerning to note that should an application that has not been identified within the scope of National Planning Framework, Local Development Plan or Local Place Plan be granted planning permission there will be no right of appeal for the community body representing the location within which the application has been granted. In our opinion this omission will seriously undermine attempts to engage members of the public in the process of developing Local Place Plans.

From what we have seen so far of the criteria applying to the creation of an LPP it seems like a very top down process, again we see this as a disincentive to public engagement.

LPPs need to reflect the communities aspirations for improvement and not just be a rubber stamping of the NPF and Local Development Plans. It should also have teeth in some form within the planning decision process before the public are likely to engage in the creation of an LPP.

As representatives of a community that is surrounded by major industry in various forms with the prospect of more to come if aspirations identified within the current NPF come to fruition the prospect of Simplified Development Zones causes concern. Our experience with the Grangemouth investment zone and the deemed planning permissions that go with it have created a number of surprises for the community due to the generic descriptions used to define what form of development will be permitted within the zone.

Therefore we would wish to see more clarity when defining what form of development will be permitted within these zones and include consultation with the community.

The requirement within the Bill that only councillors trained on planning matters can participate in planning decisions is interesting but we wonder how that will be achieved in terms of:

Councillors willing to undertake a training regime and presumably assessment

Political balance of council committees (we acknowledge that planning should be non-political)
The need to constantly revisit this requirement due to the electoral cycle

The delegation to planning officers of a wider range of developments from councillors may alleviate some of the above concerns. However, more decisions being made by council officers (who the public are likely to regard as unaccountable) will create a further disconnect from the public and more distrust of the planning system.