Local Government and Communities Committee

Planning (Scotland) Bill

Submission from Michael Dolan

I've been a bit reluctant to comment on the above, as I'd 'had my chance' and commented previously, on the 'Places, People and Planning' document last July.

I feel that any consultation is most fruitful, if as wide as possible, a number of different voices are heard.

Having said that.......I would make the following few (additional) brief comments:

1. Do you think the Bill, taken as a whole, will produce a planning system for Scotland that balances the need to secure the appropriate development with the views of communities and protection of the built and natural environment?

Overall the proposals seem, to me, to represent a courageous & imaginative approach to resolving the perennial dilemma of securing appropriate development, whilst incorporating the views of communities and safeguarding the environment.

2. To what extent will the proposals in the Bill result in higher levels of new house building? If not, what changes could be made to help further increase house building?

3. Do the proposals in Bill create a sufficiently robust structure to maintain planning at a regional level following the ending of Strategic Development Plans and, if not, what needs to be done to improve regional planning?

4. Will the changes in the Bill to the content and process for producing Local Development Plans achieve the aims of creating plans that are focussed on delivery, complement other local authority priorities and meet the needs of developers and communities? If not, what other changes would you like to see introduced?

The general move towards more prescriptive Local Development Plans is welcome; dovetailing with wider public sector infrastructure provision; contributing to inter alia, tackling the well documented housing shortage. The concurrent removal of the production of Strategic Development Plans, would give a greater focus to corporate local authority working. Any required 'regional dimension', would be provided by central government scrutiny.

6. Does the Bill provide more effective avenues for community involvement in the development of plans and decisions that affect their area? Will the proposed Local Place Plans enable communities to influence local development plans and does the Bill ensure adequate financial and technical support for community bodies wishing to develop local place plans? If not, what more needs to be done?
I'd previously commented that I think a move towards any Community-led Plans, could be fraught with danger. Notwithstanding, the fact that 'the public' just like to see things 'get done'; any parallel tier of Community-led Plan Preparation, throws up all sorts of concerns regarding document status, precedent, parity and timescale. Concerns which would be exacerbated in 'the social media age', where views can be so speedily articulated.

9. Do you support the requirement for local government councillors to be trained in planning matters prior to becoming involved in planning decision making? If not, why not?

I don't have a particularly strong enthusiasm on the need for Elected Member training on Development Management matters. I know that there is the argument, that particularly issues have become more technical, but I've always thought the great value of Elected Members, is bringing a distinctive level of (impartial) objectivity to the determination of planning applications. The fact that you can always expect the unexpected 'keeps people on their toes'. In any instance, there are ever increasing technical aids available, to assist with the consideration of planning applications, prior to presenting them to Committee.

10. Will the proposals in the Bill aimed at monitoring and improving the performance of planning authorities help drive performance improvements?

I would caution against the creation of an ever increasing 'target culture' for monitoring performance. I think it could lead to disillusion with both plan preparation and the determination of planning applications, amongst the public, amenity groups, business and planning officers alike, taking the creativity & resourcefulness out of planning. A lot of good work seems to have been done in increasing enthusiasm for planning, this could very quickly be lost.

I hope these comments are of value.

Michael Dolan