Local Government and Communities Committee

Planning (Scotland) Bill

Submission from Stewart Noble

Proposal for incorporation in the Bill.

I should like to propose a clause to the effect that local communities and in particular local Community Councils should have the right to determine whether certain local authority councillors should be debarred from taking decisions on local planning matters on the grounds that they are not deemed to have sufficient local knowledge and background.

I appreciate that the wording of the clause will almost certainly require alteration.

Justification.

1. I am a Helensburgh Community Councillor (and former Chairman) and I and several of my colleagues are concerned at the way in which decisions on planning matters are being taken by Argyll and Bute Council.

2. Because of the wide geographical area which Argyll and Bute Council covers, for administrative purposes the council is split into 4 local areas. Helensburgh falls within the Helensburgh and Lomond area.

3. Many matters are decided by the Local Area Committees, but major planning applications or planning applications which have attracted more than 10 objections are considered by the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee (PPSL) which may decide on a public hearing.

4. Argyll & Bute Council has a total of 37 councillors of whom 15 serve on the PPSL Committee. Of these 15 only 4 represent Helensburgh itself and another one represents a constituency within the Helensburgh and Lomond area. Consequently important planning decisions are being taken by a Committee, the vast majority of whose members come from outside the local area (however defined).

5. This seems to us to be the antithesis of the spirit of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 which, according to the Scottish Government website, "will help to empower community bodies ..... by strengthening their voices in the decisions which matter to them".

6. This also seems to us to be counter to the spirit of the Planning (Scotland) Bill. To quote from the Scottish Government's website, "The Scottish Government explains that the Bill will improve the system of development planning, giving people a greater say
in the future of their places [my emphasis] and support delivery of planned development"

In short, not only should planning decisions be taken correctly, they should also be seen to be taken correctly. This is certainly not the case in terms of community involvement in planning decisions taken by Argyll & Bute Councillors. There may also be other councils throughout Scotland where this is also true, but I am not in a position to comment.

Stewart Noble