Main issues raised:

The group discussed whether measures to simplify the development plans were required and that more engagement and early engagement was required with people around planning decisions in their local area. It was recognised that the plan to move local development plans from 5 to 10 year cycles could allow more flexibility for engagement with local people on developments, keeping development plans up to date and meeting national priorities.

Many felt that engagement needed to be meaningful and people needed to feel that their views were listened to and taken account of.

Some noted that engagement and consultation should be throughout the planning process and not just at the start, so that communities could challenge bad planning decisions or breaches.

Some felt that an appeals process was required for communities to challenge bad planning decisions or where developers try to bring forward developments which were not part of the original plan. Some called for third part right of appeal, or equal right of appeal. One suggestion that developers right to appeal in some situations could be removed.

Some highlighted the requirement to link national planning policy and the Community Empowerment Act. Some recognised that a more proactive approach to involving communities in local planning decisions was required.

There was some uncertainty around how Local Place Plans would work, for example, what would happen if there were multiple place plans in a local area and how all communities would be consulted.

Some also felt that the quality of housing was sometimes an issue and that housing should be designed to meet the requirements of local people and not have a negative impact on their wellbeing. It was also felt that planning should have a role in the type of homes required, for example, housing suitable for elderly people or 3 and 4 bedroom homes for large families.

It was questioned whether there was a presumption that the planning system was responsible for holding up development and the building of housing, rather than considering whether other issues had been taken into consideration, such as the reluctance of developers to build speculatively, the availability of mortgages and the inability to get infrastructure in place.

On infrastructure, many highlighted that the schools and surgeries in local areas being at full capacity and blocked roads, emphasised that homes have to be built in
the right areas where there is demand and requirement and the appropriate infrastructure in place.

It was raised that simplified development zones could make it easier for developments to be brought forward, however it was highlighted that these should not allow deviation from development plans.

Some felt that planning departments were at capacity. Some also welcomed an increase in planning fees if services were improved and resources increased.

**Issues for Dialogue**

1) Information on what’s happening in the local area and meaningful engagement

- How people find out they have an opportunity to contribute their views to local planning at an early stage?
- Ensuring that engagement is meaningful and people’s views are actually listened to?
- What are the barriers to people being able to contribute to decisions on local planning?

2) Appeals system

- Are the right checks and balances in place in the proposals?
- Should there be third party or equal rights of appeal?
- Should the rights of developers be curtailed?

3) Resources

- Is the planning system adequately resourced? For example, how easy is it to speak to developers face to face?
- At what level should the fees be set?
Local Government and Communities Committee

Motherwell Community engagement event on the Planning (Scotland) Bill

Discussion between Committee member Graham Simpson and Community Councils and Community Groups

GLO Centre, Motherwell - Monday 5th February 2018

Key issues/areas of concern

- Third party rights / equal right to appeal

Consensus within group that current appeals process is unfair & undemocratic – leaves communities without any legal rights & favours developers. Developers are equipped with the knowledge and resources to pursue appeals. Views expressed that equal appeal rights should be embedded in the Bill in order to challenge bad development.

- Simplified development zones

Concern was expressed across the group at this aspect of the Bill. Thought that this could be dangerous and allow developers to do whatever they want. There should be required criteria set otherwise this could be viewed as a step backwards that is worse than current legislation.

- Communication and access to information

This was the main issue across the group discussion. Much of it related to the lack of time, resources and funding that communities have access to in order to get up to speed with planning applications. Hours of effort and funds can be committed with little or no impact. Lots of people want to engage but lack of time and knowledge to do so. Suggestion made that there should be a ‘go-to’ person / locality link officer that people can approach for information/to express opinions. It’s not that people don’t care, it needs to be easier for them to be heard & to engage. People should be educated & informed before being asked for views. These views should be part of the decision making process – it was felt that local people currently have no right to influence. Access to information from planning offices was felt to be a major barrier – there was a view that developers can access information that local residents can’t.