Dear Convener

Planning (Scotland) Bill - Scottish Water engagement with communities

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Local Government and Communities Committee on 14th March as part of Stage One consideration of the Planning (Scotland) Bill. I am happy to provide more information about Scottish Water and community engagement, as requested by the committee.

Firstly, I would like to reiterate that Scottish Water welcomes the Planning (Scotland) Bill and has actively engaged throughout the planning review. It is important to note that Scottish Water’s primary focus in relation to this bill is as a consultee to the planning system and as an infrastructure provider. As such, we consider early engagement as key to ensuring community views are taken into account at the earliest stage possible.

In addition to our role as a consultee and infrastructure provider, Scottish Water can also be engaged in the planning process in terms of our own assets. Scottish Water invests over £500million per year to maintain, upgrade and improve our existing assets. One of our key focuses in the delivery of our capital programme is how we engage with communities in a positive manner. Our engagement with communities takes place within a broader context of the delivery of a capital project, although in some cases a planning application may be involved together with liaising with statutory consultees.

We are very mindful that, despite our need to invest in our assets, communities still need to go about their day to day business despite the disruption that our work may cause. Overall, we have found that customers generally accept that our work will have a benefit in improving standards and the quality of our service. As such, there is greater focus on how we deliver the work to minimise disruption and inconvenience.

Our on-going work in Haymarket, Edinburgh is a good example of where we have worked with a local community which had already experienced significant previous disruption due to tram works. Although the community recognised that there was a need for Scottish Water to invest to minimise the risk of sewer flooding, they were concerned about on-going and prolonged disruption from further road work. It was agreed with the community that we would defer the necessary work for 2 years so that local businesses and residents could have an uninterrupted period of time to recover from disruptive road works before facing further disruption.

In Strathpeffer, we recently completed a project which involved a 3-week long road closure and required a significant diversion of approximately 15 miles on rural roads. This had an impact on the school drop off, which had to be accommodated...
elsewhere, and the bus route and also impacted on important tourism and hotelier businesses in the area. Successful engagement with the community helped accommodate the community’s needs whilst also enabling our work to progress.

We regularly work with communities to minimise disruption by looking to time our work around important community needs – avoiding the tourist season and important community events, for instance. Where possible, we look to work with communities to put in place mitigating measures or to address their concerns and to help them to continue their day to day operations whilst our work is on-going.

In summary, Scottish Water looks to engage positively with communities to take account of their needs and concerns as part of our own projects and this engagement would take place within the broader context of the delivery of our capital work, although in some cases there may be planning requirements. Within the context of the Planning (Scotland) Bill, Scottish Water has a role as a consultee to the planning system and as an infrastructure provider and, as such, we would support early, collaborative engagement to ensure that community views are taken into account at the earliest possible stage of the planning process.

Yours sincerely

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Scottish Water