

# Consultation Response

## Democracy Matters – Scottish Government Consultation

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### Questions

#### **Question 1 – How could your community use these types of powers to achieve its ambitions, now and into the future?**

RTPI Scotland recognises and supports the need for communities to have greater influence in the local decision-making process. The need to improve public trust in the planning system and deliver a more collaborative, less conflict driven system was one of the key goals of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and is a key ambition of the RTPI.

The powers set out in the consultation paper would enhance communities' abilities to achieve their aspirations, and complement the recent planning reforms in Scotland which seek to improve equitable community involvement in the planning system, through such mechanisms and policies as:

- Local Place Plans
- Local Development Plans, for which the Scottish Government has recently published draft guidance on effective community engagement practices
- Community Wealth Building policy
- The cross-cutting outcome of NPF4 for a Fair and Inclusive Planning System

#### **Question 2 – What other powers should be added, and are there some which should be retained by existing decision-makers?**

RTPI Scotland actively supports and encourages the further integration of communities into the policy- and decision-making process. However, it is also important to recognise the important role of existing decision-makers, including professional planners, in supporting communities to achieve their aspirations by exercising their duties under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, including their negotiating the use and development of land in the long-term public interest.

RTPI Scotland believes that community decision-making bodies with the powers described in the consultation paper, have the potential to positively contribute to the delivery of the planning objectives set out in the Act and NPF4. However, it is essential to recognise the important role of the planning system and planners in supporting communities in realising their aspirations in accordance with the Place Principle. The Place Principle was formally adopted by the Scottish Government and COSLA to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries. This includes improving coordination between stakeholders and enhancing collaboration and communication across and between local authority departments, key agencies, the private sector, and communities. If successfully implemented, the Place Principle has the potential to improve the lives of people, support inclusive growth and create more successful places. The Place Principle, therefore, has an important role to play in ensuring that new community decision-making bodies are inclusive, effective, and impactful, and planners have a critical role to play in implementing the Place Principle through their day-to-day duties.

The planning profession is incredibly committed to supporting community engagement and empowerment in the planning system and one mechanism through which this can be achieved in the planning system is through the Local Development Plan (LDP) process and community-led Local Place Plans (LPPs). In this regard, the Scottish

Government has published draft guidance on effective community engagement in local development planning to support Local Planning Authorities in maximising community engagement in the LDP process. However, if LPAs are to achieve the objectives set out in this guidance, it is imperative that they are adequately resourced with the necessary skills, training and staff to enable them to enhance their interaction with community groups and expand community influence in line with the ambitions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and NPF4.

**Question 3 – When thinking about who might be part of new decision-making bodies, what are the best ways to ensure they truly reflect their communities and enhance equality?**

RTPI Scotland broadly supports the method of representation proposed for the decision-making bodies and we recognise that there is a tendency for community groups and engagement events to be over represented by certain voices and viewpoints.

Deliberative selection methods to encourage the inclusion of diverse, often unheard, voices have the potential to improve inclusive community engagement in decision-making. Additionally, we believe the incorporation of elected members will bring a range of valuable skills and knowledge into the new community decision-making bodies. This is of particular importance when it comes to any community powers that may interact with the planning system.

In the above regard, the Scottish Government is proposing to introduce mandatory training for elected members in the planning system. We believe that elected members who sit on any future community decision-making bodies, should also be required to undergo this training to ensure that community bodies are fully aware of the long-term spatial implications of their decision-making.

**Question 4 – Thinking about your own community, what groups would you like to see represented through other selection methods, and what should these methods be?**

The RTPI would encourage community decision-making bodies to comprise a diverse range of the community to achieve equitable and inclusive representation by a wide variety of backgrounds, skillsets and knowledge. We would also encourage some form of representation or defined interaction with planning professionals to ensure community decision-making achieves positive planning and spatial outcomes.

As stated in our response to the previous question, elected members represented on community bodies should be required to undertake the Scottish Government's mandatory training for elected members on the planning system.

**Question 5 - What would the role of local elected representatives be, and what would incentivise other people to take on/be part of decision-making?**

Elected representatives have a crucial role in the execution of decision-making within Scottish local authorities. The purpose of elected members is to represent the interests of their constituents throughout the decision-making process, including by sitting on Planning Committees and local review bodies, and carrying out the associated planning functions that these roles require.

Adequately trained and informed elected representatives have the potential to serve as an effective means through which community concerns can be adequately integrated into local policy- and decision-making practices, including those related to planning. Consequently, and as previously stated, we believe it is imperative that elected representatives who sit on community bodies must, as a minimum, have undertaken the

mandatory training on the planning system that has been proposed by the Scottish Government.

**Question 6 – What do you think are the best ways to ensure new decision-making bodies are accountable to their community?**

We would encourage new community decision-making bodies to adopt the same high standards of integrity and professionalism as are expected of employees and elected members within local authorities and in other public bodies.

Community decision-making bodies should adopt a clear and accessible terms of reference from the outset to establish their purpose, aims, roles, responsibilities, and limitations from the outset. Open and transparent lines of communication and dialogue through a variety of mediums (including local in-person and online events, social media, and web-based platforms) will also be critical to ensure that new decision-making bodies are held accountable to their communities.

**Question 7 – Are community events a good way to involve local people in scrutinising progress and setting future direction?**

RTPI Scotland encourages and supports the implementation of public engagement through community events. The Place Standard Tool, jointly designed by NHS Health Scotland, the Scottish Government and Architecture and Design Scotland, is a staple of contemporary community-led planning in Scotland and relies heavily on community events (<https://www.ourplace.scot/tool>).

A notable aspect of the Place Standard Tool is the measure of 'Influence and Sense of Control', which is heavily influenced by community participation within the decision-making process.

Authorities in Scotland have used the Place Standard Tool at community engagement events to create an integrated understanding of the way in which communities perceive and experience a space and any deficiencies that need to be addressed. The benefit of the tool is that it can also be utilised by non-governmental organisations such as community councils, developers, community improvement partnerships, and members of the public.

It is, however, recognised that community events are difficult to attract a wide demographic of participants, possibly leading to an over-representation of certain voices that may not accurately reflect the beliefs, aspirations and experiences of the wider community.

We would encourage community events to be organised in different locations and formats (both in-person, online and hybrid) to help ensure an adequate representation of community voices. We would also encourage a wider range of engagement methods to ensure a broad range of opinions are captured – including quick online surveys, polls and videos – to ensure that people who are otherwise time poor or unable to attend in-person events (for whatever reason) have an opportunity to engage in the process. We would also encourage engagement and collaboration with local schools, charities, and other community organisations which can act as critical anchors through which to access and engage with the community in a way that caters to their specific needs.

**Question 8 – What other mechanisms would help achieve high levels of community participation in local decision-making processes?**

In accordance with 'Mission 4' of the Scottish Government's Digital Strategy for Planning, RTPI Scotland encourages the integration of digital technology into the future of community engagement in the planning process. It is a shared view that the integration

of a digital approach to community planning could bring about enhanced community participation that has the potential to achieve increased levels of representation.

The Scottish Government's [digital strategy](#) has had a 5 year goal since 2021 to create the digital tools to maximise digital participation, collaboration, and engagement with local places. RTPI Scotland has collaborated with the Scottish Government on many aspects of the digital strategy. Our [December issue of the Scottish Planner magazine](#) features a number of articles which demonstrate the potentials of digital engagement, including the use of the Place Standard Tool, which have already been utilised to improve community participation.

**Question 9 – What else should this process include to provide new community decision-making bodies with a strong locally agreed mandate?**

No Comment

**Question 10 – Are there ways to ensure new bodies are still wanted – for example by making them time-bound and subject to renewal ballots?**

No Comment

**Question 11 – How do you think community decision-making bodies should be resourced?**

RTPI Scotland is aware that planning and community decision-making are intimately linked due to the spatial impact of planning on communities. As previously stated, local authorities (including elected members and local planning officers) will have an important role to play to ensure community decision-making bodies are adequately supported to maximise their positive impact on the ground. However, the ability of local authorities to support these new bodies will be dictated (and potentially hampered) by current resourcing constraints.

The establishment of community decision-making bodies should be accompanied by resourcing strategies setting out clearly their monetary needs and support requirements over a set period of time.

**Question 12 – Are these the right set of standards to provide reassurance that new community decision-making bodies will be effective and treat everyone with dignity and respect?**

No comment

**Question 13 – How could a charter be designed to best ensure a positive relationship between community decision-makers and their partners in national and local government and the wider public sector?**

We believe any charter must recognise both the importance of community views and aspirations and the value of trained public body officers (including local authority planning officers) in achieving positive outcomes in the public interest. We do not believe there should be a hierarchy of importance, but rather a shared understanding of the value that each interest can provide towards achieving high-quality and equitable planning decisions.

**Question 14 – What types of support might communities need to build capacity, and how could this change the role of councils and public sector organisations?**

RTPI Scotland recognises that communities will need support to build capacity and achieve their aspirations. One example of this is through the community production of Local Place Plans (LPPs), which provide communities with an important mechanism to actively plan for their future. RTPI Scotland has long-held the view that the ability of local planning authorities to support communities in preparing LPPs will be hindered by their limited resources and budgets, which have decreased by 28.6 percent since 2010-11, leaving it as the most reduced and lowest funded local authority department on the national scale (see [RTPI Scotland's 2023 Resourcing Update](#)). We have previously called upon the Scottish Government to provide dedicated resources to support LPPs in the form of a national grant scheme for communities. Without the necessary resources in place for communities to make the most of this valuable mechanism, we could witness uneven and inequitable uptake and implementation of LPPs across Scotland.

Whilst we acknowledge that community engagement and partnership approaches with public bodies have the potential to be ambitious and far-reaching, they must be accompanied by appropriate resourcing strategies to ensure they can achieve maximum impact.

**Question 15 – Are there specific additional powers and resources which would help public sector organisations to work effectively in partnership with new community decision-making bodies?**

As mentioned, we believe that local authority planners have an important support role to play to assist community decision-making bodies in achieving their aspirations. However, adequate resourcing of LPAs is necessary to ensure that effective operational co-operation and partnership is achieved.

**Question 16 – Thank you for considering these questions. When sending us your views, please also tell us about anything else you think is important for us to know at this stage.**

RTPI Scotland provided a response to the previous [Democracy Matters consultation in November 2018](#).

In this consultation we stressed the resource intensive nature of community engagement processes. This is particularly concerning in light of the large budget cuts experienced by local authority planning departments in recent years (see RTPI Scotland's 2023 resourcing update). The Planning (Scotland) Act imposed an array of new and unfunded duties on local planning authorities all of which have resource implications, including LPPs.

RTPI Scotland strongly supports a balanced, front-loaded, community orientated planning system that can equitably incorporate the views of elected members, planning officers, local communities and businesses. However, this can only be achieved through the production and implementation of an effective resourcing strategy.