

# Local Governance Review

RTPI Scotland – 30 November 2018

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## Communities more in control – good idea to begin with?

### **Q1. Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in decision-making processes that affect your local community or community of interest.**

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 behind the genesis of the Scotland (Planning) Bill 2018.

It is however essential to recognise and understand the importance, and integrity of, the decision making professional planners exercise in negotiating the use of land for the long term best public interest. This is particularly important in the context of decision making for infrastructure of strategic importance, such as waste incinerators, which can prove unpopular in the local context yet are critical for the effective functioning of society. This is core principle of civic duty planners exert has now been recognised in the Scotland (Planning) Bill 2018 with the introduction at stage 2 of a purpose for planning amendment - a statement of the central purpose of planning in upholding the long term interests of the public. There is an important role for local councillors in the planning process through planning committees making decisions on planning applications informed by recommendations of planning officers. It is therefore important to ensure that councillors are trained in planning matters and are aware of how they can engage with the local community to represent the community's views, and understand the long term spatial implications of their decision making.

It is useful to note the exemplary work which currently exists, and continues to be produced, involving communities within the planning system to shape local decision making. For example, on the Isle of Rum, a Community Trust has worked with Highland Council to prepare a community land use plan, seeking to reverse the population decline in the area. Many stakeholders, such as Scottish Natural Heritage, engaged in a collaboration coproduction process facilitated by PAS (Planning Aid Scotland). The Isle of Rum Community Land Use Plan has been adopted by the Highland Council as supplementary guidance. As a result planning decisions on the isle to recognise the implications of plan and furthermore the Trust is also now frequently consulted on new planning applications. The planning profession is incredibly committed to supporting community engagement in the planning system, with around 20% of the profession in Scotland volunteering for Planning Aid Scotland (PAS).

### **Q2. Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?**

RTPI Scotland wants a frontloaded and proactive planning system which allows for community engagement at the early stages of the planning process.

## Communities more in control – how could it work in practice?

There are a variety of existing resources to enable the public to get involved within the planning system, however it is still any area in which improvements and opportunities

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can be realised. The process by which engagement is conducted has been refined and improved markedly over recent years with the use of engagement tools and processes such as Charrettes and the Place Standard Tool. However one of the main challenges is to attract people to attend engagement events, considering the time constrained and busy lives many people live. This can lead to an unrepresentative demographic of attendees who are able to attend meetings. There is an increasing trend to capture a wider range of community views involved through the use of technologies. Edinburgh City Council, for example, have recently markedly increased their use of online consultations through a 'consultation hub' website, where the public can, quickly and efficiently submit their views on a variety of topics.

**Q3. When thinking about decision-making, 'local' could mean a large town, a village, or a neighbourhood. What does 'local' mean to you and your community?**

For planners local relates to the area which is comprised with the relative plan. Local Development Plans often comprise a whole local authority whilst Local Place Plans will cover smaller areas. For the purposes of planning applications, developments are put into one of three categories: local, major or national. The different types allow councils to treat developments in a way which is suited to their size, complexity and the issues they are likely to raise. Local developments include changes to individual houses and, for example, smaller developments for new housing and retail. Most applications for planning permission will be for local developments. The correct scale at which communities are consulted and the method by which this is done need considered together. Smaller areas may increase engagement as people may be more likely to relate to more local issues within their immediate surrounding. However the need to incorporate the views of communities during consultation of higher level, strategic documents such as the upcoming revision of the National Planning Framework, should not be overlooked.

**Q4. Are there existing forms of local level decision-making which could play a part in exercising new local powers? Are there new forms of local decision-making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?**

**The Place Standard Tool and Charrettes**

The Place Standard Tool has been jointly designed by NHS Health Scotland, the Scottish Government and Architecture & Design Scotland and allows to assess places based on 14 questions which are answered on a 1 to 7 scoring system. This tool enables discussions around a place to be structured and can outline the strengths and weaknesses of a place. This tool is now also available online and as an app which allows communities and individuals to assess a place anywhere at any time. The tool should be regarded as a conversation starter which can inform the plan making process. However in does not in itself allow communities to influence decision making.

In 2011/2012 Charrettes were in introduced by the Scottish Government and defined as "an interactive design process, in which the public and stakeholders work directly with a specialised design team to generate a community vision, masterplan and action plan". This process can take places over several weeks. Since 2011, 48 charrettes have been funded by the Scottish Government and additional funding was released for the 2016/2017 period. Moving forward, outcomes from Charrettes and Place Standards Tools should contribute towards evidence based by which Local Places Plans are drafted.

**Community Planning and Local Place Plans**

Local Place Plans will allow communities to prepare community land use plans when the Planning (Scotland) Bill receives royal assent in 2019. RTPI Scotland believes that

linking community planning with spatial planning and in particular with Local Place Plans would allow communities to access more information and therefore more control when preparing such plans.

RTPI Scotland believes that there should be alignment between community planning and spatial planning, coordinating the processes so that community plans inform local development plans and regional strategies and associated delivery programmes, and vice versa. Building on place based approaches to community planning and experience of community led plans in spatial planning, communities in all areas would be empowered to prepare community led Local Place Plans within a community planning framework. Local Place Plans would inform and be informed by reviews of Local Outcome Improvement Plans, Locality Plans and Local Development Plans and associated delivery programmes as part of the planning cycle.

The opportunity to share key engagement stages during the preparation of community and development plans so that they are seen by the public as one process was identified in RTPI research on linking community planning and spatial planning. The proposal would position community participation in spatial planning more sustainably as it would be integrated with action to involve communities in a range of plans and initiatives affecting their places including that introduced in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

## Communities more in control – what is most important to know before we go any further?

### Resource Implications

Regardless of the methodology, community engagement is a very resource intensive process. This is particularly concerning in light of the large budget cuts experienced in planning departments in recent years. Between 2009 and 2016 there has been a 23% decrease in planning staff, while over the same period their planning service budgets were cut by 32.5%. Scottish Government's Provisional Outturn and Budget Estimates show that the amount of local authority budget spent directly on development management and development planning was a mere 0.4% in 2017-18. The Planning (Scotland) Bill 2018 is likely to impose an array of new duties on LPAs. Our initial analysis of the Bill identified 88 new duties introduced resulting from stage 2 amendments. 63 of these new duties will fall on LPAs and 25 on Scottish Government. The cumulative effects of minor and major amendments could be profound in terms of resource implications. The duties have not been costed and no provision has been made for their resource requirements. This in particular, needs considered with the introduction of Local Place Plans, which will require appropriate resourcing to be produced effectively.

### RTPI Scotland other inputs

[Places, People and Planning Thinkpiece: Making Local Place Plans Work](#)

[Response to Scottish Government consultation \*Places, People and Planning\*](#)

[Briefing on Empowering Planning to deliver great places – the report of the Independent review of the Scottish planning system](#)

### The Royal Town Planning Institute

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the champion of planning and the planning profession. We work to promote the art and science of planning for the public benefit.

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**RTPI Scotland**  
Royal Town Planning Institute

We have around 2100 members in Scotland and a worldwide membership of over 25,000. RTPI Scotland's members will in large part be responsible for the successful implementation of the Bill, once enacted.

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