
**LIS RESPONSE TO INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF PLANNING: CALL FOR WRITTEN EVIDENCE
CONTRIBUTED TO PLANNING REVIEW TEAM – 30.11.2015**

LIS Response

Introduction

The Landscape Institute in Scotland is part of the UK's chartered institute for landscape architects. This incorporates designers, managers and scientists who are concerned with conserving and enhancing both urban and rural environments.

The LI's Scottish Branch (LIS) represents the professional membership within Scotland and is concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Scotland for the public and private benefit. The LI accepts change has to be managed in urban and rural settings and sees value in managing that change through Development Planning. At the same time commitment to the principles of sustainable development is important while improving the design quality in urban and rural contexts and protecting our physical and natural environment.

Our members provide professional landscape expertise and advice to local authorities, statutory consultees and developers on site selection, siting, design, landscape and visual impact assessment, construction and research into the built effects of development proposals. Members work in the public, private and voluntary sectors. LIS welcomes the opportunity to respond on behalf of members to the Independent Review of Planning and the Call for Written Evidence.

With reference to the 6 key focus areas outlined for the Planning Review, LIS have the following comments to offer the Review Panel;

Development Planning

DP's should be a **corporate activity**, are **core to local planning** processes and should remain a fundamental principle of the Scottish planning system.

The current system is fit for purpose if **plans are kept up to date** and it is notable that the schedule of updated plans is now much improved. However, there is a **need for each DP to link or express more effectively and realistically, the infrastructure needs and planned intentions** which have been identified from the NPF and the relevant Local Plan. This is especially important with the emphasis for intended housing provision targets and how land allocated to housing will be serviced adequately for both transport and other utilities.

The **relationship between the NPF and DP** needs to be more positive in terms of complementarity ie. both need to respect the requirements and needs of the other with improved 2-way communication prior to plans being drafted. The NPF needs to be clearer in early drafts in some instances about National Developments for instance, by bringing the affected local authorities along in the process of intention with less apparent top down declaration of National Development proposals and requirements.

EXAMPLE: The redevelopment of Cockenzie Power Station and Coal Handling Depot sites was proposed as a National Development in the NPF, then developed by Scottish Enterprise as a redevelopment plan for land between Prestonpans and Cockenzie settlements. This appeared to be seemingly imposed upon local communities with little effective early local consultation with either the local council or those adjacent settlements and communities. This resulted in large scale local opposition and poor PR effects for the planning system as a whole at both national and local authority levels as well as Scottish Enterprise as a development agency.

LIS less convinced of the role of Main Issues Reports considering the preparation resources required with increasing Local Authority budget constraints and within a tighter Development Plan updating programme.

There needs to be a clearer and more focused **role for regional plans** such as SES Plan, there appears to be little understanding or reference publicly to these plans and what or who they are prepared for and by whom? Could they be more focused on infrastructure needs and priorities?

Housing Delivery

It is now critical that the Scottish Governments SPP Placemaking Agenda (ref SPP paras 36-47) and especially **Creating Places Policy take centre stage in guiding** decisions on quality urban and open space design for settlement growth as a result of the intended new housing provision targets.

Future housing provision is experiencing largescale allocations and sites being identified and approved especially around cities and larger urban areas as well as considerable planned housing expansion of some smaller towns in rural areas. For this scale of increased housing provision in a relatively short time, it is important that **sound urban design, open space and green infrastructure** provision, together with **balanced community** development planning is achieved **to ensure social and environmental cohesion of enlarged settlements** and residential areas within them. Local Authority Plans as well as Developer led masterplans for successful new housing areas would benefit from more involvement of existing communities in consultations on location, extent, design and layout.

Suggest consideration of the following:

- Establish a **National Task Force to extend the 'charette' approach** to whole settlement planning. Charettes and Planning for Real previously, have been successful processes for involving local people in planning for the future built and unbuilt fabric of their own settlements. The results of these exercises can then feed into development plan reviews and planning decisions that result in improved Placemaking with greater community involvement and overall 'buy in'.
- Extend and resource the **statutory role of Community Councils especially in rural areas** so that they more meaningful consultations on planning decisions that affect their own communities and settlements. There is a perception that some CC consultations on planning applications currently are no more than lip service in the planning process
- Require each **local authority to undertake a landscape and urban capacity study for housing provision** across their whole council area which could provide SPG to support the

Development Plan. **Urban Capacity studies are already suggested in the SPP (ref para 48)** within settlement boundaries. LIS recommend these capacity studies should take a wider contextual view of settlements and may identify other areas in addition that may be suitable for housing in the rural context. These studies could inform more strategic thinking where housing development pressure is extreme or the risk of settlement coalescence is evident and community identity and individual character is perceived or in danger of being lost or overcome.

Planning for Infrastructure

LIS believes that **Green Infrastructure Planning is key** to effective Infrastructure Planning, as GI is the basic resource upon which the latter can be effectively delivered with sustainable environmental quality in mind for people and communities.

The Green Infrastructure of any local authority area provides the **strategic network, connectivity and hierarchy of open space** of all scales along with the **added health and welfare benefits** that landscape and environmental quality provides. The GI network can provide the framework and tapestry for all infrastructure but will also assist in the important provision of social and physical cohesion of communities. A sound balance between built and unbuilt elements will assist in providing wider urban and rural environmental quality.

LIS understands that these are the **founding intentions of the SPP's Placemaking and Creating Places Policies** and would like to see these promoted more coherently through the Action Plans flowing from the application of the Creating Places Policy and connecting to the SPP and NPF.

Development Management

It is evident both in public and private sectors, that **bureaucratic and timing requirements in DM processes** can be frustrated by limitations in available staff resources and inhouse expertise. This can result in timely and/or **appropriate decision making by local authorities being compromised** and increased resource implications for developer applicants. Repeat applications in some development sectors are not uncommon and often budgeted for by applicants which can undermine planning policy intentions.

We believe that there is scope to **strengthen development plans** to streamline decision making **through more use of SPG's** to support the local plan intentions (eg. see above landscape capacity studies for housing) to guide more clearly and effectively the DM recommendations to committees on planning applications.

It could be beneficial for councils to **share DM expertise** but only if such shared teams are **sized and skilled correctly** so that the current situation is not further compounded by stretched resources both geographically and fiscally.

Pre-application consultations are a critical and effective use of resources for both applicant and relevant authority. However, there are issues around agency availability for sites that are not located in designated areas (eg SNH being available to comment on landscape and visual effects of a potential proposal on sites outside NSA's for instance).

Planning Enforcement concerns revolve around the perception that the PE Officers have little clout for protecting the environment through Enforcement Notices. The current system requires signing off by a senior planner which can be stalled by hesitancy due to resource limitations and in the Procurator Fiscal Office who may have more urgent business. This situation urgently needs reviewing as the status quo is not best placed to serve the planning system effectively in environmental protection matters.

There is a need to reconsider the currently limited **role of key agencies** who have the skills and knowledge (SNH, SEPA, HES) for development management cases to assist Local Authorities, especially with regard to land and sites out with designated areas.

Leadership, Resourcing and Skills

Awareness that inhouse landscape architect posts in local authority planning departments continue to decline. Across Scotland, **over 60% of councils now have no qualified landscape architect** in any department. Due to budget constraints, any post falling vacant frequently reassigned to another role or department. The result is:

- Council planning departments often have no landscape architecture or landscape planning skills inhouse and
- Cannot afford call-in advice
- Limited available resources from agencies except on designated areas (as discussed previously), so depending on limited planning officer specialist landscape knowledge and skills.
- Council landscape architect (where present) not necessarily in planning or development management departments but in based in a countryside team.

Increasing concern for the **limited inhouse landscape design and landscape planning skills** is not in the interests of effective planning, appropriate spatial design and sustainable environmental quality. With development pressure increasing especially for housing and likely to continue for some time, we recommend that **resources for posts/postsharing/inhouse training** need to be considered if the principles of the SPP and Placemaking Policy in particular are to be followed and upheld.

Particularly beneficial if **elected members**, especially those serving Planning and Economic Development Committees were required to **undertake basic training** (through OU module?) **in the principles of good urban design**, place-making and landscape and infrastructure planning to further their understanding of the implications of planning application committee decisions and Planning Officer recommendations.

The Scottish Planning System and Community Planning clearly should be integrated.

Community Engagement

Community engagement could be improved, as suggested earlier for housing provision, are just as appropriate for other areas of development planning:

- Establish a **National Task Force to extend the 'charette' approach to whole settlement planning**. Charettes and earlier 'Planning for Real' exercises previously have been successful processes for involving local people in planning for the future built and unbuilt fabric of their own settlements. The results of these approaches could then feed into Vision Statements for development plan reviews and planning decisions for improved Placemaking with greater community involvement and overall 'buy in'.
- Extend and resource the **statutory role of Community Councils** especially in rural areas for more meaningful consultation on planning decisions affecting their communities and settlements. Perception that some CC consultations are currently no more than lip service to the planning process.

In conclusion from LIS's perspective the key issues for the Planning Review are;

- Improved provision of **Planning as a Corporate Function**
- Better articulation of the **Placemaking Agenda** and application of the **Creating Places Policy** at local authority level.
- Improved **community involvement** in meaningful planning consultations (and what about Equal Rights of Appeal issue?)
- Improvement of **skills available** on open space issues/landscape design in Planning Departments possibly through shared LA teams