



What you need to know about the Scottish Planning Review

The Scottish Government appointed an independent panel in September 2015 to review Scotland's planning system. The review was focused on 6 key themes:

- Development planning
- Housing delivery
- Planning for infrastructure
- Development management
- Leadership, resourcing and skills
- Community engagement

The review panel published its findings and recommendations on 31 May and the Scottish Government is now considering the findings and recommendations. The full report, *Empowering Planning to Deliver Great Places*, is available [online](#).

Aims for the planning system

The report identifies 6 high level outcomes and sets out 48 recommendations for the Scottish Government. These outcomes are summarised below.

Strong and flexible development plans

The report highlights the importance of maintaining a plan led system focused on delivery. Nationally recognised strategic planning should be carried out across city regions whilst local communities should drive local development plans.

Recommendations include simplifying the process for preparing plans, moving local development plans to a 10 year cycle and allowing flexibility to update development plans within that 10 year cycle. The report also recommends a statutory duty to align development plans with community planning.

The delivery of more high quality homes

The report suggests the need to take a more proactive approach towards housing supply but also to ensure the focus on creating good quality spaces is not compromised.

The report highlights issues with the current Housing Needs and Demand Assessment process suggesting that too much time and energy is put into generating numbers without enough focus on delivery. Questions are also raised about the quality of data being used and lack of consistency between different areas.

The report recommends that the National Planning Framework should define regional housing targets as the basis for setting housing and land requirements in local development plans. This process would initially draw on data available from HNDAs across Scotland but eventually replace the need for full HNDAs to be carried out.

Other recommendations include the establishment of a clear definition of effective housing land and the introduction of mechanisms for local authorities to assemble land and provide infrastructure upfront citing the potential role of land value tax, majority land assembly and compulsory purchase orders.

An infrastructure first approach to planning and development

Infrastructure is identified as a significant barrier to development, particularly for housing. Identified issues include lack of information and transparency around capacity and costs of providing essential infrastructure, lack of clarity around responsibility for provision of

infrastructure (public or private investment) and varying levels of engagement with different infrastructure providers.

The report also points to an overreliance on Section 75 to lever in private funding for infrastructure which may be contributing to delays in the planning process. While the report does not call for Section 75 to be abandoned, it does suggest that use should be minimized and streamlined.

Recommendations to promote an infrastructure first approach include the establishment of a national infrastructure agency with statutory powers, consultation on options for a national or regional infrastructure levy and the establishment of a development delivery infrastructure fund.

Efficient and transparent development management

An effective and efficient planning system requires a balance between consistency, to simplify the system for developers working across different local authority areas, and flexibility to allow local circumstances to be reflected. Lack of clarity can lead to insufficient or incorrect information being submitted which in turn leads to delays and unnecessary use of resources in terms of processing applications and having to actively seek additional information.

Administrative and procedural requirements are outdated and in need of review.

The report also addresses issues of decision making, engagement with communities and dealing with objections and appeals.

The report calls for improvements in pre-application discussions, exploring the scope to significantly extend permitted development rights and better use of information technology to improve accessibility and inform decisions.

Stronger leadership, smarter resourcing and sharing of skills

The issue of resourcing is a significant concern given the current economic context. The report

highlights the need to scrutinise performance and processes and explore ways to create a more efficient system. In creating a more streamlined and efficient system, there will also be an opportunity to challenge and dispel negative associations – planners should be viewed as enablers, not regulators.

As with other sectors, planning would benefit from more joined up working. For example, representation within community planning partnerships would ensure that the development plan is linked with community planning outcomes and prevent duplication elsewhere.

The report recommends a substantial increase in fees for major applications to support more investment and improve planning performance as well as scope for further discretionary charging for services such as pre-application processes.

The report also points to the need for skill development and recommends the establishment of a graduate intern programme.

Collaboration rather than conflict – inclusion and empowerment

More needs to be done to engage and empower communities through the planning process. Barriers to engagement include time, resources and lack of meaningful consultation.

The report does acknowledge positive examples of community engagement and the willingness of community councils to become more involved in the process but states that more must be done, particularly regarding the involvement of young people who currently have little or no say in the development of their communities.

Recommendations include empowering communities to bring forward their own local place plans which should form part of the development plan and the introduction of statutory rights for community councils and young people to be consulted on the development plan.

CIH Scotland position

CIH Scotland submitted written evidence to the panel and took part in an oral evidence session. In our evidence, we pointed out the importance of a well functioning and efficient planning system in the delivery of new homes. This will be of even more significance if we are to deliver the Scottish Government's new target of building 10,000 affordable home each year.

The review makes recommendations which should help to support increased delivery of new housing and we welcome the call to ensure that increased development should go hand in hand with careful planning and community input to create good quality homes and places. However, the suggestion that HNDAs should be replaced in full or in part by a National Planning Framework does raise some concerns. We acknowledge that the current system is not perfect, different methodologies lead to differences in data across Scotland and the timescales involved leave little room for revision between assessments. However, we do believe that local planning allows for better recognition of local needs and issues and that this element of local planning should not be replaced without further consideration and full consultation with the housing sector.