

Media News

Petitioners demand that Parliament listens on Planning

Executive bulldozes community rights in planning tug-of-war

18 January 2006

A COALITION of 36 Scottish environmental organisations and 1,150 Scottish community councils will today hand a petition to Parliament demanding a rethink on the draft Planning Bill. The action has been prompted by the fear that the new National Planning Framework (NPF), included in the draft Bill, could allow Scotland to become a dumping ground for large-scale and potentially damaging developments in the UK.

While we have consistently supported the idea of a NPF, the idea of agreeing the principle of such controversial "infrastructure developments" - which could include facilities like nuclear waste storage facilities, wind farms and power plants - in a document to which no individual, community or local authority could object is extremely worrying and a cause for real concern.

The requirements for the NPF do not include any statutory provision for public consultation, nor do they provide any form of examination in public for such development proposals. Instead, there is a requirement for the document to be scrutinised by Parliament for a period of 40 days.

Astonishingly, this gives MSPs less time to consider a document that will deliver the principle of consent to nationally important developments than most local authorities allow for individual planning applications for buildings such as a conservatory or garage.

Furthermore, despite widespread support for a limited Third Party Right of Appeal (TPRA), which, we believe, would help ensure genuine participation and not just consultation, the Bill rejects this. A limited TPRA cannot address all the shortcomings of the planning system, but it could help ensure that the package of measures proposed by the Executive are more likely to work.

More than 5,000 people have signed the petition - more than the total number of consultation responses submitted to the Executive in response to all their consultation exercises on planning since 2001.

We ask the Parliament to take action to rigorously scrutinise the Bill, and take action to ensure that these voices are listened to and not ignored.

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Notes for Editors

1. Scottish Environment Link will be staging a Tug-of-War photo opportunity outside the

Scottish Environment LINK is a Scottish charity under Scottish Charity No SC000296 and a Scottish company limited by guarantee and without share capital under Company No SC250899.

Registered office: 2 Grosvenor House, Shore Road, Perth PH2 8BD
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Scottish Parliament on Wednesday January 18th at 1300 hrs to publicise the submission of the petition. A number of MSPs will be present.

2. Scottish Environment Link comprises 36 member bodies representing over 500,000 members in Scotland. Further information about LINK is available from www.scotlink.org. The LINK Planning Task Force published a Planning Manifesto in April 2005 setting out the core issues the new planning bill should address.

3. Concerns over the absence of a limited Third Party Right of Appeal and the proposals for the National Planning Framework resulted in Scottish Environment LINK and the Association of Scottish Community Councils jointly lodging an e-petition with the Scottish Parliament. This petition attracted more than 5,000 signatures and will be presented to the petitions committee today (18 January) when LINK, the ASCC and the Portobello Campaign Against the Superstore present background evidence on the concerns which gave rise to the petition in the first place. Further details available from www.everyonecan.org

4. The Association of Scottish Community Councils has approximately 650 Community Councils as full members and is in regular contact with all 1,150 Community Councils from across Scotland on a regular basis. Further details are available on the ASCC website <http://www.ascc.org.uk/index.html>

5. The text of the petition reads as follows:

We, the undersigned, call upon the Scottish Parliament to seek to secure real rights for all in the planning system by ensuring that the forthcoming Planning Bill will:

" Establish real and effective rights for people to have their views taken into account on planning decisions and conditions, through the introduction of a limited third party right of appeal in the planning system, rather than just more opportunities to express opinions; and

" Ensure that all strategic planning decisions taken by Government at the national level, including the National Planning Framework, will be open to challenge and public inquiry.

6. The white paper "Modernising the Planning System" was published on the 29 June, analysis of the responses received was published yesterday (Monday) with 62% of people indicating they supported Third Party Rights of Appeal despite the fact that the White Paper did not seek views on the subject. During the original consultation which was specifically on widening the rights of appeal in the planning process 86% of respondents supported a limited third party right of appeal.

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