

## Empowering Planning to Deliver Great Places

### *Rapleys' Scottish town planning experts give their views on the outcome of the Scottish Planning Review.*

In September 2015, an independent panel was appointed by Scottish ministers to review the Scottish planning system. The panel was asked to look at ways to achieve a quicker, more accessible and efficient planning process. The review focused on six key themes - development planning; housing delivery; planning for infrastructure; development management; leadership, resourcing and skills; and community engagement.

The review panel provided 48 'recommendations' which they feel might achieve a quicker, more accessible and efficient planning process. In summary, the key recommendations identified in the report propose:

- Giving more focus to the National Planning Framework (NPF), including regional housing targets;
- Simplifying the development plan review process;
- Empowering communities with the introduction of "Locality Plans";
- Encouraging Simplified Planning Zones (SPZ) within town and regeneration areas;
- Establishing a national infrastructure agency;
- Streamlining complex planning controls.

By recommending a simpler approach in preparing development plans, the onus will shift onto making sure the NPF is more focussed. Removing the main issues report stage and making improved links with community planning will result in a shorter two year plan preparation process. Not a bad outcome. With strategic development plan authorities re-purposed to focus on co-ordination and delivery, this might redress the balance. Another big change would be the proposed 10 year development plan cycle, which, the report states, could have flexibility in parts; to be updated to react to circumstances, such as economic change. We think this is a fairly mixed bag of proposals.

We think the biggest eyebrow raiser is the idea for regional housing targets, set within the NPF. The possibility of empowering communities to bring forward their own "locality plans" might result in over-consultation locally. Resources will need to be in place to referee the new procedure.

A key "game changer" within the report includes the expansion of simplified planning zones to allow use on a wider scale, such as in town centre or regeneration areas. A fillip for our town centres. We also like the proposal suggesting allocated sites be afforded planning permission in principle and/or benefit from exemptions from pre-application consultation requirements and fast-tracked appeals. That might speed things up.

Proposals to streamline and minimise the use of planning obligations could help speed up delivery of development; as from Rapleys' practical experience, we are aware how this can result in significant delays and affect commercial decisions for clients. We think a very interesting recommendation within the report is the proposal for a national infrastructure agency which would have statutory powers and potentially could be a positive way to bring key stakeholders together.

The Scottish Government is now considering the recommendations put forward by the panel and will publish its response "in due course."

Rapleys can help by examining what the review proposals means for you. For our retail and town centre clients we can advise on the implications of simplified planning zones; for our residential clients we can comment on the effect of moving to a 10 year planning horizon and for all other clients we can suggest ways of challenging some of these ideas as they proceed to scrutiny during 2016-17.

**Please contact the above for further information or advice regarding this update.**

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