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# DELIVERING PLANNING REFORM

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THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT HAS A CENTRAL, OVERARCHING PURPOSE – TO FOCUS THE GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES ON CREATING A MORE SUCCESSFUL COUNTRY, WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL OF SCOTLAND TO FLOURISH, THROUGH INCREASING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH. THIS OVERARCHING PURPOSE HAS BECOME EVEN MORE IMPORTANT AS THE PROBLEMS IN THE WIDER GLOBAL ECONOMY POSE MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR SCOTLAND.

Sustainable economic growth means building a dynamic and growing economy but, at the same time, safeguarding our environment for future generations and ensuring our communities can enjoy a better quality of life. A reformed planning system is essential to increasing sustainable economic growth in Scotland.

The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 introduced important legal changes to planning in Scotland, but legislation on its own cannot deliver the improvements that are needed. Over the last few months the Scottish Government and its agencies have been working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the development industry to look at how they can significantly increase co-operation and speed up the pace of reform. The Planning Summit reflects the outcomes of this work and is the next stage in that journey and sets out what each party will do and how they will work together to make further improvements to planning.

The main benefits from this new way of working to improve the efficiency of the planning system will be :

- ▶ Up to date development plans that provide investors and communities alike with greater certainty.
- ▶ More proportionate demands made of developers by the public sector to focus resources on matters of greatest significance.
- ▶ Improved planning applications that help to speed up response times from the public sector.
- ▶ Simpler and more transparent processes, including streamlined statutory consultation processes by Scottish Government agencies that focus on matters of genuine national interest.
- ▶ Greater understanding and cooperation across the public and private sector.
- ▶ The right partnerships in place to deliver better developments in the right places – and to deliver these more efficiently.

These changes will be taken forward while retaining the fundamental purpose of the planning system - to secure through democratic means development and change that is consistent with the long term public and community interest. Development plans should support the delivery of single outcome agreements between the Scottish Government and local authorities to provide sustained improvements in economic development, housing, schools, health improvement and environmental quality.

## STATEMENT OF SHARED OBJECTIVES AND JOINT ACTIONS

This document sets out our shared determination to speed up reform of the planning system.

The planning system is critical to increasing the rate of sustainable economic growth. It should be one of the main creative driving forces behind the delivery of better places in Scotland – helping the public sector, development industry and communities work together to make good development happen in the right place.

The foundations of a new system were laid in the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. To support this, a major programme of secondary legislation will be laid before the Scottish Parliament over the next few months. But legislation alone will not deliver reform.

What is required is more fundamental. Those of us in the public sector will work together in a different way and work more effectively with the development sector. We will each take responsibility for making sure that all organisations and staff are aligned to that common aim. Further, we will give the direction and support necessary to deliver it in practice.

We will also collaborate in the development of improved services. The aim is to clarify roles and responsibilities, to avoid duplication and overlap, to ensure that requirements for information and analysis are proportionate, and to approach issues collaboratively. We will, individually and collectively, identify and tackle inefficiencies head-on so that we can free up resources to invest back into improving the service.

The private sector also needs to play its part in helping deliver this reform agenda by engaging meaningfully in development plan preparation and submitting high quality applications informed by community views.

This document does not list all of these individual responsibilities or plans for action, but does demonstrate a concerted and determined joint effort to deliver a fundamental change in the way we work. This won't happen overnight, but it will happen. The key to sustained and real change will lie in part in the development of a new generation of development plans – plans that are robust, address community needs and can be delivered in practice, giving much greater certainty in the delivery of new development on the ground. As these plans develop, the joint actions contained in the statement will help us to put a sharper focus and increased pace behind the change. These actions will be refined as we continue to look to secure ongoing improvements in the way the planning system operates and planning services are delivered.

## JOINT ACTIONS

Our joint actions will speed up the reforms and result in a planning system where: policies are proportionate, practical and informed by early and wide engagement; advice is clear and consistent; processes are effective and efficient; and skills are developed and performance improved.

### **Proportionate and Practical Planning Policies**

The Scottish Government will rationalise the Scottish Planning Policy series into three parts:-

- ▶ aspirations and core principles;
- ▶ expectations for the key elements of the planning system; and
- ▶ a clear statement of Scottish Government planning policy relating to development and natural and built heritage.

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The first two parts are published on 28 October 2008 and the third part will be published early in 2009.

Every five years, planning authorities will produce development plans as the key strategic document that focuses on land use and infrastructure, provides a sound basis for future development and helps deliver on single outcome agreements. Issues of detail will be addressed through supplementary planning guidance or the development management process.

Agencies will support planning authorities in the new approach to development plans by providing map-based advice on potential constraints. Once the development plan is agreed by the planning authority, agencies will support its implementation.

While work to take forward development plans continues across the country, two specific projects will be initiated to examine more closely the value of a partnership approach to development plans and to promote examples of good practice to share. SESPlan will work with SEPA, SNH, Scottish Water, and Transport Scotland as active partners, to promote the new strategic development planning process. The aim is to demonstrate the benefits of a partnership approach to the preparation of new-style, short, map-based plans. The findings and lessons learnt on effective joint working will be shared. Highland Council will similarly investigate the preparation of a local development plan using the same approach.

The Scottish Government will work with Local Government to raise awareness of the contribution planning reform can make to sustainable economic growth, the legal framework within which planning will operate and the central contribution that culture change can make. Agencies, the private sector and the RTPi will participate actively in this programme of work. The audience for this will include planning

schools, front line staff and elected members involved in planning policy decision-making.

### **Clear and Consistent Planning Advice**

The Scottish Government will scale back the amount of planning advice and, instead, focus future advice on key principles, allowing local solutions to be developed. The Scottish Government will continue to play an active role in disseminating good practice.

Existing biannual meetings between the Scottish Government and Heads of Planning will be replaced with annual meetings with Heads of Planning and Planning Convenors in local and national park authorities.

The Scottish Government will do more to effectively communicate good practice. For development planning and development management, the Scottish Government will provide opportunities where issues with the new system can be discussed and solutions identified and communicated widely. Planning authorities, agencies and the private sector will be expected to actively participate, sharing experience, advice and good practice. The aim is to resolve issues of procedure and process locally.

### **Effective and Efficient Planning Processes**

The Scottish Government will formally launch the electronic planning system in spring 2009. Some planning authorities are already introducing this system at the local level.

The Scottish Government will issue a revised Notification Direction and Circular in early 2009 to reduce the number of cases that require to be notified to Scottish Ministers. This will signal a more proportionate involvement in planning cases by the Scottish Government.



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North Ayrshire, and Perth and Kinross Councils will lead and deliver a business change project in development management to be completed by end June 2009. The first stage will look at current practice in a range of recent cases to help identify the scope for improved ways of working in practice, including more effective approaches from public sector partners.

Planning authorities will produce a development plan scheme by end March 2009 and a new scheme of delegation by end June 2009.

Agencies will work together and with planning authorities to review roles and responsibilities. The aim will be to remove duplication and provide greater clarity on where agencies should be consulted. A key outcome will be more proportionate consultation with agencies, particularly on local developments. The new arrangements will be in place prior to the introduction of the new development management system.

The agencies will ensure that the level of information they require of the development sector is clear and proportionate. This will include identifying the scope for a more joined-up approach between the agencies on guidance and advice for the development sector.

The Planning Divisions of the Scottish Government and the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals will produce an annual statement on performance, identifying the scope for service improvements. The first of these statements will be published in spring 2009.

Planning authorities will establish local forums to consider the quality of their planning service.

By end March 2009, authorities will identify areas for service improvement and how best they be tackled. This process will be repeated on an annual basis.

Agencies will by end November 2008, have produced a plan for service improvement with clear milestones. Agencies will produce annual reports on performance and service improvement, starting in summer 2009.

The private sector will improve the quality of applications, reducing the need for repeat consultations with agencies over missing or inadequate information and enabling faster decision making by planning authorities.

The Scottish Government, local authorities, the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman and the Standards Commissioner will, by end March 2009, agree an action plan for a more effective approach to complaints handling in planning.

By end 2008, the Scottish Government will consider with planning authorities, agencies and the development industry the scope for introducing a non-statutory method of giving a provisional view on whether or not a major development is likely to receive planning permission. The aim is to give developers, in particular inward investors, a degree of confidence before they commit to potentially lengthy and expensive technical appraisals in support of a planning application.



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### **Developing Skills and Improving Performance**

The Scottish Government will establish a new internal unit to support the Strategic Environmental Assessment of development plans.

Planning authorities will ensure that the planning service is given sufficient priority and resource, including identifying whether measures are required to recruit and retain staff. In addition, authorities will consider the scope for new ways of delivering planning services.

By end April 2009, Agencies will assist planning authorities to further develop staff skills in order that they place proportionate reliance on agency input.

Agencies will identify those areas where the development sector is consistently failing to provide essential information and engage with the sector to resolve this.

By end March 2009, agencies will have named agency liaison officers for key development sectors.

The Scottish Government will agree, with the private sector, a firm programme to better explain the importance of development economics in planning. This will allow local authorities to better understand the financial aspects of development and help them in the effective negotiation of planning agreements.

By spring 2009, the Scottish Government will have in place a programme of measures to support improved place making.

The private sector will work with the Scottish Government, planning authorities and agencies to prepare a series of model agreements covering residential, commercial, business and retail development and mineral working, and also a template for local schemes of developer contributions.

By April 2009, the Scottish Government will consider, with planning authorities, agencies, the development industry and the Royal Town Planning Institute the options for a scheme of staff development to allow staff at different stages in their career to work in different public and private sectors organisations. Consideration will also be given to the options for promoting planning as a career, including the opportunities for mid-career entry to the profession.

### **MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM**

The publication of this statement does not signify the end of this programme of work. The actions and commitments will be kept under review by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, the President of COSLA and Chairs/Chief Executives of the Agencies.

Progress will be reported to the First Minister's Council of Economic Advisers and other relevant bodies.

We will continue to identify new opportunities and new areas to explore to enable the planning system to create better quality places and contribute more effectively to Scotland's long term prosperity.



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