**LINK Planning Group Note**

**2 October 2017, LINK Advocacy Office, Edinburgh**

Present: Aedán Smith (RSPB, Group convenor), Charles Strang (APRS/SCNP), Tessa Jones (BSCG, CC), Bruce Wilson (SWT), Lorna Scott (NTS), Clare Symonds (PD), Sue Hamilton (PD), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG)

General updates

* APRS green belt survey is complete. There was a feature by Rob Edwards in a [Herald article](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/homenews/15540189.Green_belt_poll_targets_Murray_tennis_academy_and_Edinburgh_film_studio/) in September. More than 70 per cent of those questioned agreed that green belt land should have “stronger protection” against proposed housing estates, business parks and industrial projects.
* The NTS survey on ERA is now complete. This negates the need for LINK to do an ERA survey with DPF as discussed previously. NTS surveyed over 1000 people, with c90% in favour of ERA. NTS are considering their comms around the results. The Group agreed we explore how other Group members can help with the comms eg welcoming or publicising results.

**Action: Lorna and others to consider how Group could support comms around the survey findings.**

ScotGov discussion paper “Review of the Scottish Planning System” for the working groups

The paper was circulated by ScotGov on the Friday before this meeting so limited time to study it in detail. The Group went through the paper, discussing concerns within the paper’s 6 sections.

1. **Strategic Planning and Regional Partnership Working**
* They are centralising the NPF more, not involving communities. There is a real weakness in terms of wider civic society and community engagement. The NPF is setting priorities for LDPs. There are some potential benefits such as local authorities (eg the Ayrshires) being able to develop partnerships.
* We need to ask how they will deal with competing priorities? Does it provide a clear framework for developers and without pressures for landowning developers?
* There is no mention of Parli period eg still 90 days not 60? LINK asked for increased Parliamentary scrutiny.
* Lots of the document refers to things being covered in secondary legislation. We need to beware of this! It doesn’t seem open and transparent at all.
* Lots of references to ‘inclusive growth’ in the document. Seems to be a replacement for ‘sustainable economic growth’.
* In summary, this section is weak on scrutiny and unclear how communities can become engaged (on the plus side, there is no reference to developers interests either).
1. **Local Development Plans**
* Removing Main Issues report; there will be a draft plan instead
* Looks like supplementary planning guidance will be removed. This could be a step towards ‘deregulation’ . SPG is useful.
* Need clarity on the scope of commenting and ability to amend plans. In short, there are question marks around the LDP inclusiveness and engagement.
* On SEA, there is an expectation that the gatecheck will coincide with SEA scoping stage.
1. **Local Place Plans**

These are ScotGov’s distraction tactic! It’s not clear on how LPPs will be incorporated into the Local Dev Plan. Looks like LPPs won’t require an SEA which reinforces our concerns that they are effectively meaningless.

1. **Calculating housing figures**
* We need a more strategic approach to housing in Scotland, and more detail than simply “x number of new houses in the Highlands council area”. This document is not clear on how this will be done, for eg do the LAs provide figures which then feed into national plan?
* Paper proposes that outputs would be set out in the draft National Planning Framework and subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. But no mention of *where* is appropriate. Also concerning is that the paper goes on to say that, while there would be limited scope to depart from these figures in setting local housing land requirements, “generosity would continue to play an important role”.
* This section also states that the “development industry should contribute to this work nationally and locally, not just as consultees but also in providing supporting information.” This is worrying.
* Need to reinforce the LINK ask: we want a debate, at national and local level, about housing needs.
* In summary, the Group has concerns with this section. SG haven’t addressed previous concerns.
1. **Infrastructure levy**
* SG is proposing an enabling power in the Bill for this levy but they won’t enact it until a ‘workable solution’ is found. Noted that Commonweal is doing work on this area.
* The paper states that houses with a value below a certain threshold wouldn’t be subject to the levy. This could potentially impact on the quality of housing built eg poorer, cheaper housing from developers in order to avoid the levy.

**6. Development Management - Improving public trust and keeping decisions local**

* Propose to rebrand Simplified Planning Zones as Simplified Development Zones. We’re not clear on the assessment process for this – we want reassurance that a full assessment will still be incorporated. Obviously uncertainty too re: what will happen post-Brexit if the deterrent of a fine by the EU is not there.
* Propose to introduce an enabling power so that Ministers can make exemptions to the requirement to carry out PAC. Concerning for us!
* Logical place for ERA amendments in the Bill would be in appeals / Local Reviews.
* Need clarity on duration and expiry of permissions section (p29) as it could mean that if a LA doesn’t set a timescale, the planning permission could in theory be valid forever.

**Action: Clare and Aedan to circulate a note of key points coming from the 2 October workshop**

The Bill is due in December. We should collate LINK’s key asks into a two pager that can be like our position statement.

**Action: Aedan, Clare and Daphne to begin work on this asap.**

Equal Rights of Appeal

Positive support for ERA from Conservatives on the Local Govt & Communities Committee. After their leadership is decided in November, Labour will make a decision on ERA, hopefully supportive. Andy Wightman is on side so hoping to get cross-party support for ERA.

Discussed the Scottish Alliance for People and Places. Possible to make contact with Henry McLeish via Alex Rowley?

**Action: Aedan to liaise with Sarah Boyack on this.**

Coul Links

Area has SSSI, Ramsar and SPA designations. Parallels with the Trump development at Menie; rhetoric of boost for jobs and the economy is strong. Local golf courses are now in favour as id the local community council. EIA has just been produced and SWT will respond to this. Menie is in the process of being denotified which could be useful for our argument against this development.

DONM

Date to be late November/ early Dec to give time to further discuss advocacy around the Bill. Schedule for after Natural Capital forum which is 27-28 Nov.

**Action: Lisa to Doodle poll for meeting dates.**

Actions carried over from Advocacy Strategy meeting between Aedán, Clare, Thom and Daphne:

* Overall, there is dissatisfaction among LINK Planning group members regarding the views and proposals to be issued by government. A draft bill is expected towards the end of the year.
	+ Action: DV to draft letter to minister to express concern regarding proposals and absence of ambition
	+ Action: Aedan to identify Director/Director General to whom the planning division reports
	+ Action: Aedan/Clare to seek further detail on government timeline for publication of draft bill
	+ Action: DV to speak to Bridget Campbell to see who she advises we should brief within government
* The group considered the need for assessing whether ECCLR can be involved in the draft bill deliberations.
	+ Action: Thom to raise issues with Greens policy advisor and see whether Andy W. would agree to a meeting.
	+ Action: DV to speak to clerks
* There is a need to identify key issues and asks from SEL submission. Group agreed that having national planning framework approved/voted on by Parliament would help address issue of consistency and issues that need to be considered in this context.
* Other ideas for engagement include:
	+ MSP (Species Champions?) letter to ministers?
	+ Provide case studies illustrating our points
	+ Use local issues to raise wider issues with constituency MSPs
		- Action: Clare to provide list of issues/local groups that can write to MSPs. SEL to help support with materials/outreach
	+ Set up meetings during conference season with key MSPs/SPADs/party policy officers. Tailored approach will be required especially in terms of ERA.
		- Action: Thom & DV to create list of MSPs / actions
	+ Seek to understand whether it would be possible to mobilise LINK local members
		- Action: DV to raise with Karen
* NTS polling date will be soon available. It would be interesting to incorporate that into SEL advocacy.
	+ Action: DV to speak to Lorna
* Need to find out what SNH think of NEN inclusion in planning bill.
	+ Action: DV to check with Craig/Wildlife subgroup.
* Clare raised Planning Democracy campaign. Idea to organise demonstration around Stage 2.
* Action: DV to share PD campaign on LINK Local website. Clare to send details.