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Local Government and Communities Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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Dear Sir

Local Government and Communities Committee: Call for Views on the Planning (Scotland) Bill

Please find below our response to the Call for Views:

1. Do you think the Bill, taken as a whole, will produce a planning system for Scotland that balances the need to secure the appropriate development with the views of communities and protection of the built and natural environment?

No. It is unfair to local communities and to communities of interest and does not achieve an appropriate balance. The Bill moves planning regulation further away from providing adequate landscape and environmental protection. Despite strong public support for protection of mapped wild land from inappropriate and damaging large-scale infrastructure, the Bill as it stands gives Ministers a relatively free hand in making final planning decisions on industrial-scale developments, rather than clarifying the detail of how public concerns about their landscape will be properly reflected.

6. Does the Bill provide more effective avenues for community involvement in the development of plans and decisions that affect their area? Will the proposed Local Place Plans enable communities to influence local development plans and does the Bill ensure adequate financial and technical support for community bodies wishing to develop local place plans? If not, what more needs to be done?

There needs to be an equal right of appeal for communities. The Bill seems to increase the centralisation of control over planning. "Local Place Plans" (LPP) will have little official status and would be easily overridden by Ministerial decisions.

7. Will the proposed changes to enforcement (such as increased level of fines and recovery of expenses) promote better compliance with planning control and, if not, how these could provisions be improved?

The proposed changes may promote better compliance with planning control, but only if enforcement is appropriately resourced at local authority level in order to ensure that rapid follow up action is taken.

9. Do you support the requirement for local government councillors to be trained in planning matters prior to becoming involved in planning decision making? If not, why not?

Yes.

12. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Bill?

We are disappointed that bill as published falls well short of meeting public demand for a fairer planning system which adequately recognises environmental and social concerns, as well as economic aims.

Yours sincerely

David Gibson
CEO, Mountaineering Scotland