

SUBMISSION FROM STUART DUNCAN

I am writing to you as I am deeply concerned at the lack of public participation within the National Planning Framework (NPF) process and I believe that the Scottish Government has failed to meet its obligations in this regard.

The ability of communities to participate in planning matters is a crucial element in building safer and stronger communities. In fact, one of the key aims of the strategy for Scotland's spatial development makes this very point. Despite this stated aim there has been little, if any, genuine attempt to reach individuals who are not already involved in the planning process.

Before I attended one of the NPF meetings in spring 2008 I had never previously attended a public meeting and I have to admit I left the meeting feeling extremely disappointed and disheartened. Having taken time at my own cost (unlike virtually all of the other participants who were paid to be there) I am not encouraged to attend any future government events (and haven't done so) as I feel that the meeting was simply a showcase for the planning team to strengthen their recommendations and was not an opportunity for genuine debate. Furthermore it is my understanding that the vast majority of attendees at the NPF consultation meetings have been those with vested interests such as industry, representatives of councils and lobby groups. The meeting I attended could hardly be described as representative of Scottish society and in fact the communities most likely to be affected by NPF proposals didn't appear to be represented at all.

With the above in mind, I would like to bring to your attention a quote from a government publication (PAN 81 on Community Engagement 2007) which states that 'many people believe that there are barriers to engagement in the planning system including: lack of awareness of available opportunities; inaccessibility of documents; complex procedures and practices; lack of expertise; consultation fatigue; belief that views are not taken into account and distrust of local government. We need to change all of this. We now have a golden opportunity to create a planning system which Scotland can be proud of- modern, efficient and above all with communities at its heart.' I can assure you from personal experience that the government has failed miserably in relation to the NPF process.

I urge you to read the Critique of the National Planning Framework (NPF) Consultation Process report which examined the way the consultation was conducted and concluded that the NPF team had failed to address the key barriers to community engagement.

Aside from the failures in the consultation process I feel that the NPF report lacks flair and vision as virtually all the key national developments were already in the planning pipeline. It also fails to adequately tackle the implications of the Climate Change Bill which commits Scotland to an 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 and actually in many ways increases Scotland's dependence on fossil fuels in an ever more volatile market for the foreseeable future through airport expansion and additional road bridges for example. Yet despite this clear contradiction there was little or no discussion on the matter at the meeting I attended. Whilst Scotland has the potential to become a world leader in renewable energy and the NPF to some extent addresses this, renewables are extremely unlikely to power cars, buses, trains or aircraft anytime in the foreseeable future. Given that transport is the fastest growing contributor to greenhouse gas emissions greater emphasis should be placed upon initiatives that reduce consumption

by improving public transport and encouraging walking and cycling (which have the added bonus of tackling the obesity time-bomb). Otherwise we will continue to place the energy needs of Scotland in the hands of other nations in increasingly uncertain times.

In conclusion, I ask you to afford the NPF report the highest level of scrutiny and to read the Critique of the National Planning Framework (NPF) Consultation Process report. The NPF commits our country to a significant plan of action for the next twenty years, and will have a major impact on current and future generations. As things currently stand only a tiny minority of the population has had any input into this document. It is my view that the consultation process has failed the country.

Stuart Duncan