

## **Fresh Thinking at CSPP / STP Forum on Planning for a Fairer Scotland**

(CSPP) - A range of stakeholders in the planning process met recently to discuss how planning can contribute to building a fairer Scotland.

Organised by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy and Scotland's Towns Partnership, the meeting brought together planning professionals, community council members, local councillors, third sector representatives and others to examine the potential of planning to promote greater social justice, community engagement and equality.

Specially invited to address the meeting were Craig McLaren, Director, RTPI Scotland and Ireland and Petra Biberbach, Director, Planning Aid Scotland (PAS).

The forum was opened by the CSPP's Chair, Professor Richard Kerley, who stated that the purpose of the discussion was to examine how themes of wellbeing, prosperity and equity could be advanced by different aspects of planning, including those relating to town centre and periphery development.

### **Place-making**

Attendees first heard from Craig McLaren, who suggested that while planning did not have all of the answers to these issues, it could be used in conjunction with other activities to achieve change.

Areas where the RTPI Scotland director felt planning could make a difference included: good place-making, including understanding the effects of place-making on health and wellbeing; creative use of infrastructure and market-making, including thinking about sharing the benefits of land value; linking opportunity and need, taking a more holistic approach beyond the boundaries of a regeneration area; and greater community engagement and empowerment in the planning process.

For an overall strategy to pursue a fairer Scotland, spatial planning was seen as key to improving quality of life and wellbeing.

### **Community planning**

Petra Biberbach of PAS also spoke to those present, and began by reminding everyone that planning was originally motivated by questions of public health and equity. She observed that there was a return to this view in Scotland, and said that the social aspect of planning is important for the fairer Scotland agenda.

As part of this, more "seldom heard" people should be heard in the planning process, including young people, ethnic minorities and gypsy travellers. It was also suggested that too few people know about the planning process, seeing it as only about bureaucracy and building regulations.

Other points made by the PAS director included that community and spatial planning should go hand in hand; planning stakeholders should work together; the terminology around planning should be made more accessible; and that knowledge and participation are key themes for engaging the young and economically disadvantaged, an agenda around which could be brought into schools.

### **Discussion**

Forum participants engaged in a wide ranging discussion on the issues brought up, with numerous suggestions coming forward on how planning could promote a fairer society.

Some of the points made in the diverse debate included:

- With the Community Empowerment Act, the public sector will need to have the power to ensure that spatial and community planning can go together.
- Local reactions to unpopular planning projects show that people do get involved in planning, however this can be hard to sustain.
- Engagement with the community in planning should be front-loaded, pro-active and sustained in order to be effective and reach the “seldom heard”.
- A holistic notion of place is needed to promote wellbeing, as people want places that are safe, accessible, with things to do, and without social stigma.
- There is a lot of work to be done to reach the visions of planning described, as for many people exposure to planning is as a “rules driven process” around building regulations etc.
- Declining town centres can also be a sign of market forces “working” – as such, town centres require sustained investment in diagnostics and planning for development.
- Much of the delivery in planning will come from private capital: we may need to do less, better, and to empower planners.
- The “Charrette model” (engagement of the community in planning with professional expertise via intensive four day workshops) of participation can be too one-off and used as a cover for plans which have already been decided upon elsewhere. It depends on its use in each case.
- Young people now, rightly, have the vote from 16 – and should be more involved in planning too.
- Vision is important: we can think about what we want society to be like, and see how planning can contribute to this. At the same time, with public spending cuts, hard decisions will have to be made.
- Participation and instances like community budgeting are part of a fairer Scotland agenda.

### **Next Steps**

The discussion was closed by Craig McLaren, who recognised that everyone present would like to see changes in planning, and that the planning system has great value to add to a fairer Scotland. He suggested that the focus of planning should move toward being about creating great places, with planning being only one aspect of this.

Held at Falkirk Business Hub, the meeting was the second discussion forum held by the CSPP and STP this autumn to inform and advance the debate on how best to promote a fairness agenda in Scotland which relates both to “people” and “place”. The first looked at [the contribution of towns to a fairer Scotland](#).

Supported by the Voluntary Action Fund, the planning forum will contribute to three areas of work:

- The national [Fairer Scotland](#) consultation (submission deadline, 27 November).

- A major piece of work being carried out by CSPP for Scotland's Towns Partnership, to establish how towns can contribute more effectively towards the development of a fairer Scotland. (For completion early 2016).
- Submission of evidence to the Scottish Government Review of the Scottish Planning System <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/Review-of-Planning> (Submission deadline, 1 December).

If you are interested in keeping up to date with the CSPP you can [sign up to our newsletter](#), or consider [getting involved](#) in the work of the Centre.

ENDS

Website link and photo:

[http://www.cspp.org.uk/fresh\\_thinking\\_at\\_cspp\\_stp\\_forum\\_on\\_planning\\_for\\_a\\_fairer\\_scotland](http://www.cspp.org.uk/fresh_thinking_at_cspp_stp_forum_on_planning_for_a_fairer_scotland)