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Carey SJ (Sandra)

From: DAVID MIDDLETON [clanlands@btinternet.com]
Sent: 22 June 2007 23:48
To: Planning and Sustainable Development
Subject: LCRG Response: STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON PLANNING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - CONSULTATION PAPER

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To Sandra Carey
 Scottish Executive
 Planning Division
 Victoria Quay
 Edinburgh
 EH6 6QQ

Dear Sandra,

I enclose a response from LCRG to the Executive Consultation on the draft statutory guidance on Planning and Sustainable Development.

The LCRG (Local Communities Reference Group) is a group of people, based in cities, towns and small communities across Scotland with wide and varied experience of planning issues as they affect local communities. It meets informally and communicates by email to raise and discuss planning issues which arise in their local communities, in order to share knowledge and experience and consider the common and wider implications of the issues raised.

The paper attached as a submission in respect of the draft statutory guidance on Planning and Sustainable Development is discursive rather than a direct comment on the draft. It does not suggest changes to specific paragraphs, but does identify a need to consider the often neglected element of social sustainability within the wider issue of sustainable development. It emphasises the holistic approach necessary to achieve effective sustainable development, and in particular promotes a bottom up, rather than top down approach to local sustainability.

Finally, it identifies the key resource provided by local communities which possess the knowledge and skills necessary to promote social sustainable solutions as well as helping to achieve economic and environmental sustainability. The mechanism for this, as identified by the group, is the enhancement of the role of suitably resourced and democratically controlled community councils which would extend their status as statutory consultees in planning matters to include a promotional and advisory role in regard to social sustainability.

We would request that the concepts identified in this paper inform the final version of the Guidance.

I should be grateful if you would include this email as part of the submission by the Group.

David Middleton
 for LCRG

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04/07/2007

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LCRG Local Communities Reference Group.

Response to Consultation on Draft Statutory Guidance on Planning and Sustainable Development

Encouraging and Supporting Social Sustainability

Introduction

In the absence of a formal definition of social sustainability the following is offered:

Social Sustainability is the capacity of a community and individuals and families within it to prosper and develop, utilising, but not exhausting, their own human, material and environmental resources.

This definition incorporates the concept enshrined in EU and UK and Scottish legislation that the present generation should not jeopardise the welfare of future generations by the misuse or depletion of the natural resources and historic environment. It also informs the EU injunction, enacted in Scottish Planning Policies to promote mixed, vibrant and sustainable communities.

It provides a framework for considering proposals that will have a significant social impact within the context of the long-term health and welfare of the community.

This paper adopts this definition to set out basic principles for encouraging social sustainability and to suggest some pre-conditions for achieving it, within the broader context of sustainable development.

Social Sustainability and Planning

There can be tensions between the three elements of sustainability, *environmental, economic and social*, which the planning system is required to resolve. It is not suggested that there are inherent conflicts between these elements, but their resolution is a necessary process to achieve the best possible outcomes for communities.

These tensions were eloquently described by the Harris clergyman with a concern for the spiritual health of his parishioners confronted by a proposal to turn a large part of their land into a super-quarry:

"Torn between their love for the land and their need for jobs, they face a cruel dilemma. Capitalism offers to help them in characteristic fashion: it will relieve unemployment provided the people surrender guardianship of the land, thus violating their deepest instincts"

Although the decision making power is held by local authorities on behalf of the electorate, UK planning legislation represents an intention to entrust development rights to the community, rather than the owner of the land or property. In the present day, the planning process is commonly characterised by the developer proposing and the community resisting, a process that often leads to conflict. In resolving these conflicts the inbuilt bias of the system is to favour the developer, and when this happens, communities and individuals within them can feel powerless and ultimately defeated.

Given the increased distance of communities from local legislators and the trend for commercial organisations to become larger and separated from their local roots, communities can be further disadvantaged by their perceived and actual control of their environment. The influences of globalisation serve to accelerate these effects and make communities more susceptible to distant decision making.

Sustainability in a Scottish Context

Scotland, with its industrial past, the closure of traditional industries and their replacement by international corporations which have in turn moved to low cost manufacturing bases abroad, demonstrates the economic forces which can have devastating effects on the sustainability of communities which formerly relied upon them. The loss of local employment, and downstream services have been common experiences of post-industrial Scotland. Globalised markets often have their first effects at a very local level.

The response of local and national government to the adverse effects of these economic forces has to date, largely relied on intervention using centrally managed projects and grant aid. While first aid approaches are necessary, the result of central intervention if sustained can be negative in that it reinforces dependency and does not result in enduring benefits for the community.

An alternative strategy is to empower the community to develop its own appraisal of the problems, find its own solutions, and manage the resulting outcomes. This type of approach is not unknown in Scotland, but it is not adopted routinely and tends to be under-resourced.

Exemplars of an Alternative Approach

In Scandinavia, community based initiatives designed to tackle problems of economic decline have included the development of co-operative approaches using the indigenous resources of the community. This invariably starts with an enabling process which helps the community to identify its own needs and its own human and natural resources. A further stage examines the initiatives which will be needed to respond to unmet community needs

Activities and enterprises resulting from this appraisal commonly need seed-corn funding such as grants to encourage local employment initiatives Ultimately any

project designed to meet a current need or deficit, requires to become self supporting.

Examples from Sweden include the development of community run elderly home care and child care projects in the remote rural area of Jampland, in the north of the country. These local services provided employment, initially mainly for women and the child care facilities enabled mothers to become economically active and led to the development of new enterprises. Families seeking a better environment returned to the area, the local school was reopened and additional businesses were started, further growing economic activity and engendering a new interest in the cultural and historic heritage of the district.

In Scotland, the Laggan community, initially energised to take over the failing post-office and general store, demonstrated the benefits of community led action by reclaiming ownership of former forestry commission land and developing holiday and leisure facilities. This initiative halted depopulation and brought substantial economic benefits to a community that earlier had appeared to be in terminal decline.

More recently, the Carnegie Commission has reported the benefits of local community led regeneration, citing Gigha as an example of homegrown entrepreneurial skill which has transformed a failing island into a thriving and vital community. The Islanders have made themselves energy efficient, re-opened its school, and attracted nearly fifty new jobs to the island.

What has been described so far are effective local responses to economic decline caused by forces beyond the control of the community. In the Scandinavian case, the removal of added value activities related to timber felling to distant factories precipitated the decline, while in Laggan, remote management of the forests favoured the award of contracts to large operators rather than the use of local labour. As in Gigha, the opportunity given to develop local initiatives after years of benign but ultimately ineffective paternalism provided the catalyst for harnessing the talents of the residents to achieve true social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The challenge of Social Sustainability in Urban Environments

Different problems are experienced and different solutions are required in urban areas, but the general approach to social sustainability is the same, the empowerment of local people to respond to local problems. As our urban environments tend to have more obvious social divisions than many rural communities, the Sustainable Cities report promoted the avoidance of monocultures as a pre-requisite for sustainability. Noting that the poorer echelons of society tend to experience the worst environmental problems, and were least resourced to solve them, the Aalborg Charter envisaged a more equal distribution of resources.

Ideally every local community would represent a microcosm of society as a whole. This is an ideal, rather than a requirement, which current planning policy promotes. While not immediately achievable, it is an objective that should inform local planning decisions.

To avoid social division and ensure that local communities have the capacity to find their own solutions to problems, there needs to be concerted action through the planning system to ensure that areas are mixed, balanced, and as a result sustainable. Brown field development solely for housing does not encourage this. Opportunities should be taken during the regeneration or redevelopment of established areas, especially those designed in less enlightened times, to implement principles of local sustainability.

While the post-war years produced some of the worst examples of urban development, it is interesting to note that some of the most successful, human scale, urban townscapes were designed when local authorities were smaller and more directly accountable.

As proposed by Aalborg: *“We wish to learn from initial experiences of sustainable lifestyles so that we can work towards improving the quality of citizens lifestyles rather than simply maximizing consumption. When seeking to attract or create jobs, we will assess the effects in terms of sustainability in order to attract long term jobs and long-life products.”*

Local groups, for instance, community councils and amenity groups are often characterized as being self-interested and parochial. Yet the collective wisdom and cultural inheritance of an area is often contained in these voices of the local community. This is enhanced when such groups are truly representative by being democratically accountable. The Aalborg Charter envisaged local communities as having the knowledge and creative ability to develop sustainable ways of living and proposed that local communities should be given the right of self-government, according to the principles of subsidiarity. This would entail the delegation of decision-making to the smallest appropriate level of government. Properly resourced and democratically elected community councils would be well placed to fulfill this role for many localised planning matters.

Social Sustainability and the Planning System

Current planning policies that encourage mixed, sustainable local communities need to be translated into effective action. Existing communities that have become mono-cultural in age, occupation, or tenure type need sensitive policies to reverse this trend. Present practices can reinforce rather than break down social division, for instance when a developer pays a cash sum to the local authority in exchange for his Section 75 obligation to provide affordable accommodation on a particular housing site.

Planners can assist in encouraging social sustainability by promoting imaginative design. Families have a need for “defensible space”, safe communal play areas,

and traffic free environments. Facilities for older people will benefit from being part of a vibrant local community where design encourages contact with younger people. Siting nurseries next to facilities for elderly people have benefited both age groups. Opening care home cafeteria facilities to locals has helped to break down isolation and barriers to integration. All these experience can be translated into good practice guidance for spatial planning.

Scottish planning legislation provides a framework for resolving the issues, which have been identified in this paper, but cannot describe the processes, needed to achieve the desired outcomes. A wider understanding of these issues can be promoted by using the standard scientific approach of examining the outcomes of research. In the case of local initiatives, this would be achieved by describing innovative community projects and identifying the common factors that enabled them to be successful.

The design of environmentally friendly housing and community facilities should be an added value outcome to this approach, as shown in the Gigha example. Here a greater degree of self-sufficiency and self-determination promoted an effective combination of economic, social and environmental sustainability, demonstrating their inter-relationship and powerful effects when implemented holistically.

The approaches described are the exact opposite of top-down planning solutions that are more common today.

While many of these examples are of communities themselves taking initiatives, there is a place for a more structured approach to achieve the desired outcomes.

It is suggested that the empowerment of community councils to have a specific sustainability remit within their current status as statutory consultees in planning matters would help to kick-start the kind of initiatives described above in more communities across Scotland. To do this effectively, they would have to be suitably trained and effectively resourced.

While the resourcing of community councils is outwith the scope of statutory guidance on sustainable development, the setting of tasks for them is not, and this would be a powerful influence on the proposed reorganisation of community councils now being proposed by the Executive.

Summary and Conclusions

What is demonstrated by the above is that a carefully balanced initiatives are needed to encourage social sustainability. While rural and urban areas may need different approaches, the principles of working with communities to achieve sustainability are the same. In both cases this needs to start with an appreciation of the community's perception of the issues which affect its everyday life.

The process of working with these perceptions, validating the results, and finding solutions to problems is in itself empowering for community members. They will then be more confident in their ability to assess the impacts of proposed developments on the social life and sustainability of their community, and enabled to positively influence the outcome. Local, human-scale democratically accountable and suitably resourced local organisations are a prerequisite for the development and maintenance of socially sustainable local communities.

There need to be closer linkages between communities and workplaces so that living, working and recreation can be integrated more closely and thus encourage vibrant economically-successful communities.

The wider benefits of the approach proposed is a population more attuned to social need and the benefits of co-operative working, attributes which will be a resource to the wider society in achieving economic, environmental and social sustainability.

DNM 24/04/07

Notes and References:

Definitions of Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” Bruntland Report 1987

The following is regarded as complementary:

Sustainable development means improving the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. UN Environmental Programme et al, 1991.

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives produced a practical local interpretation of sustainable development which states:

“Sustainable Development is development that delivers basic environmental, social and economic services to all residents of a community without threatening the viability of the natural, built and social systems upon which the delivery of these services depends”

Extract from “Targetted Summary of the European Cities Report”

“Sustainable development is a much broader concept than environmental protection. It implies a concern for future generations and for the long term health and integrity of the environment. It embraces concern the quality of life (not just income growth), for equity between people in the present (including the prevention of poverty) for intergenerational equity (People in the future deserve an environment which is at least as good as the one we currently enjoy, if not better) and for the social health and ethical dimensions of human welfare. It also implies that further development should only take place as long as it is within the carrying capacity of natural and human systems. Clearly, addressing the sustainable development agenda provides new challenges for urban policy integration within holistic frameworks.”

Source: EU Experts Group on Sustainable Development, Sustainable Cities Report

See also: *Social Equity for Urban Sustainability* (para 1.7) and *Local Self Government as a Pre-condition* (Para 1.12.), The Aalborg Charter, 27th May 1994

