

# Perspective paper

## Planning and community regeneration

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A wide range of professions and organisations are working to help regenerate Scotland's most deprived communities. Individually, and working in partnership with others, their aim is to ensure that the people living in these communities are given opportunities to develop skills, confidence and resources to take advantage of the opportunities open to them – a process that the Scottish Executive calls “closing the opportunity gap.”

As well as bringing their own skills, knowledge and experience to the task, each organisation has its own perspectives about what's important, and the best ways to make things happen.

[The Scottish Centre for Regeneration](#) is publishing this series of Perspectives papers so that these views can be shared, as well as highlighting the contribution that different professions make to the community regeneration process. The papers

are also part of our aim to promote joint working between professionals involved in community regeneration.

Each Perspective has been produced in collaboration with an appropriate key agency or professional body. That does not mean that the SCR endorses the professional views expressed here.

More information about community regeneration can be found in our [FAQs: community regeneration](#)

This Perspective looks at the contribution of planning professionals to community regeneration. It is published jointly with the [Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland](#).



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**What is 'Planning'?**

Planning involves the management of change in our physical environment. It deals with the competing uses for space and the making of places that are valued and have identity. Where there are conflicting perspectives, planning seeks to take into account the widest range of concerns affecting an area and to resolve any issues which may arise. Planning, from Local Plans to the [National Planning Framework for Scotland](#), plays an important role in creating the context in which the government's objectives for community regeneration can be achieved. Ensuring the supply of development land, which does not compromise our environment, along with the necessary infrastructure, is essential to the health of our economy. The creation of a positive sense of place, urban and rural, is central to achieving the dynamic economy and culture that underpins the sustainability of communities.

**History**

Planning or, as it is also known in a more restricted sense, 'town planning', is essentially a post Victorian profession that grew out of a confident belief that people should live in more pleasant surroundings than the industrial slums. In the first half of the 20th Century it successfully developed the notion of the garden city. After the Second World War, a new start to renewal of our industrial cities became necessary and the greater mobility of the population brought the need to restrain sprawling development. Much inner city and town centre development was achieved in this period but public confidence in planning declined as many physical designs turned out to be poor. By the 1980's, politicians began to view planning as unnecessary regulation and a damaging constraint on the market and residents complained that planning processes were undemocratic.

As the spatial planning discipline, which is at the core of the statutory Town and Country Planning system, is primarily concerned with the physical change in our communities, there are a number of

differences with the typical processes of community planning and regeneration. These can cause some tensions and misunderstandings. Planning for physical change provides a framework for how buildings, infrastructure and environment will affect the lives of everyone over the long term and often wider than the immediate community. The timescales for results may be much longer than those of programmes aimed at supporting public services and the activities of community groups. The role of planners is therefore often different on the one hand and limited in relation to the aspirations of community regeneration on the other.

Now, however, there is a new appreciation that planning is vital to the creation of sustainable communities and a new framework of legislation is being put in place. Much of the current thinking on planning and its relationship to community building and sustainable development reflects the visionary perspective of [Patrick Geddes](#), sometimes referred to as 'the father of town planning'. His integrated approach to planning and development was summed up in his three S's: Sympathy (for all people and for the natural world); Synthesis (of the different parts of a system); and Synergy (the combined, cooperative actions of people working together to make their place a better place).

**Who are 'planners'?****People**

Corporate membership of the [Royal Town Planning Institute](#) (RTPI) is the best indicator that a planner has achieved an accredited training and is bound by a recognised code of conduct with a commitment to continuing professional development. The majority of planners working on regeneration in Scotland will be members of the RTPI which has its own office and network in [Scotland](#) and currently 1,900 members. Some planners may have a previous professional background in a discipline such as architecture or surveying.

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The [Royal Town Planning Institute](#), the body chartered to represent professional planners, has been at the centre of the re-thinking of the role of planning. The RTPI's '[New Vision for Planning](#)' is built around the core ideas of planning that is:

- spatial - dealing with the unique needs and characteristics of places at all scales of community interest from local to national
- sustainable - looking at the short, medium and long term issues
- integrative - in terms of the knowledge, objectives and actions involved
- inclusive - recognising the wide range of people involved in and affected by planning
- value-driven - concerned with identifying, understanding and mediating conflicting sets of values
- action-oriented - creating places that work well now and in the future.

### Roles - What do planners do?

Planners have a number of roles:

- Forward planning: drawing up plans which set the framework for future development in an area.
- Development management: assessing or submitting planning applications and being involved in any subsequent appeals.
- Planning advice: drawing up guidance on planning issues.
- Conservation and design: working to achieve high quality in the natural and built environment.
- Consultation: supporting people and organisations to become involved in the planning process.

Planners work in a wide range of settings in Scotland:

- In the [Scottish Executive Development Department \(Planning and Building\)](#) where they are responsible for the development and monitoring of national planning policy and legislation and for the production of guidance and advice for local authorities and other statutory bodies.
- In the [Scottish Executive Inquiry Reporters Unit \(SEIRU\)](#) with responsibility for undertaking planning inquiries and for determining planning appeals.
- In the statutory planning departments of local authorities and national park authorities where they are responsible for preparing statutory structure plans and local plans and other planning policy documents and for advising the authority on their response to planning applications.
- In other local authority departments, such as Housing or Leisure, where they will advise on the planning implications of initiatives the Council may wish to make.
- For major bodies such as airports, power companies and other industries where they will seek to balance commercial imperatives with the terms of planning guidelines.
- For major non-departmental-government bodies, such as Scottish Natural Heritage and major charities, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds where they will seek to use and extend planning law and guidelines to protect the priorities with which they are concerned.
- As independent consultants advising clients in relation to, for example, house building, development, masterplanning and environmental assessment.

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- As volunteers for [Planning Aid for Scotland](#) providing independent advice to communities in dealing with the planning system.

### Regulation and professional development

[RTPI in Scotland](#) members will have undertaken an undergraduate or postgraduate course of study at one of the UK accredited universities or by an approved distance learning course with a substantial element of supervised and certified work experience. Membership of the RTPI also brings with it a requirement to undergo a continuing professional development programme which includes the production of a personal development plan and evidence of its implementation.

The [RTPI's Code of Conduct](#) also places a strong emphasis on the consistency of professional advice as a key to maintaining the authority of that advice. Planners can experience significant conflicts of interest. For example, they can find themselves in a position where, after the advice they have offered to their local authority employer has been rejected, they may be unable to represent their employer at a public planning appeal inquiry. The Code of Conduct supports the planner in maintaining their professional judgement as well as it protects the public. In addition to controlling professional standards, the RTPI is also recognised as the authoritative representative of the planning profession to government.

The RTPI has a [Regeneration Network](#) that provides for an exchange of experience and good practice in the UK and that, potentially, provides a useful resource to other regeneration partners.

### What is the policy framework for planning?

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive is substantially reforming the [planning system](#) to meet its wider objectives for sustainable development, economic regeneration and social justice. The Executive has

also established [Architecture + Design Scotland](#) as a non-departmental public body with a [role](#) to act as the national champion for good architecture, design and planning in the built environment.

The law covering most aspects of planning in Scotland is the [Planning etc.\(Scotland\) Act 2006](#). This will update the [Town and Country Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#) and other primary legislation affecting planning. Royal Assent of the 2006 Act means that it has been approved by the Scottish Parliament, but its contents will not come into force, or update relevant sections in the 1997 Act, until they have been enacted by commencement orders.

The new Act sets out to modernise the planning system. The aims are to improve the planning system by:

- strengthening the involvement of communities;
- speeding up decisions;
- reflecting local views better; and
- allowing quicker investment decisions.

In doing this it:

- places development plans firmly at the heart of the system, to ensure that development takes place in the context of a long term and inclusive vision for the future;
- ensures that the planning system is fit for purpose, and able to respond to different types of development proposals in the most appropriate way;
- encourages greater efficiency in development plan preparation and in the determination of planning applications;
- makes it easier for people to get involved in planning, and help to shape the future of their communities: and

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- recognises planning's role in delivering sustainable communities.

The Act sets out the changes to existing primary legislation that are needed to deliver these overarching commitments. The changes to legislation form part of the wider package of modernisation set out in the White Paper [Modernising the Planning System](#), which was developed following an extensive programme of consultations and stakeholders engagements on all aspects of the planning system. The package in the White Paper will make Scotland's planning system fit for purpose, more efficient, more inclusive and more sustainable.

The Scottish Executive publishes a [Guide to the Planning System](#).

A series of Scottish Planning Policies (formerly [National Planning Policy Guidelines](#)) sets out government policy on nationally important land use and other planning matters. They cover many issues such as transport, natural heritage, land for housing, shopping and town centres. A series of [Planning Advice Notes](#) gives technical advice on how best to deal with matters such as local planning, rural housing design, and improving small towns and town centres.

Scottish Ministers have the power to make decisions on planning applications, but they only do this in certain circumstances, for example, if a council:

- does not want to follow an approved structure plan (for example, by developing in the green belt); or
- has a financial or other interest.

Appeals against refusal of planning permission, conditions attached to a planning permission, or an enforcement notice are lodged with the Scottish Ministers. The [Scottish Executive's Inquiry Reporter's Unit](#) considers the appeals. It makes most of the decisions, although the Scottish Ministers will make decisions in some major cases

### The planning contribution to community regeneration

The planner's role in community regeneration is, essentially to facilitate change in the physical environment which reflects the objectives and values of the appropriate communities of interest. It is generally a highly integrative one, as the complex issues surrounding capital investment for the long term future require a coherent view not only of local priorities but also of the regional and national dimensions of policy and of the capacity of the wider, sometimes global, marketplace to deliver what is required.

The planner seeks to ensure that all aspects of a community's needs and concerns are reflected in decision making processes, but may be required to point out inconsistencies or conflicts between local aspirations and wider planning frameworks that affect the area or region in which a community is located. Part of this is mediating between the common interest and that of the individual developer or landowner.

Planners' understanding of land acquisition (sometimes by compulsory purchase) and redistribution, their ability to manage land use in the interests of better functioning communities, especially to improve accessibility to services and transport choices, and to influence the quality of landscape or streetscape and sense of place can contribute to community regeneration.

As Community Regeneration increasingly requires greater integration of policy and action, local authority planners will have greater responsibility for monitoring and assessing the quality of public participation. Planners are particularly concerned to find ways of hearing all voices, including strong minority views, especially as the expression of dissent by just one objector can lead to a planning proposal being exposed to the full rigours of a statutory hearing and the associated delays and bureaucracy in the system.

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### What are the challenges facing planners?

Planners therefore face substantial challenges in the changing context of planning law and practice in Scotland:

- greater efforts are required to integrate the many planning and strategy development regimes in the public service which have been put in place in recent years and which are bewildering communities. In view of the cross cutting nature of the planning system, it often falls to planners to explain the complexities. In particular, clear guidance is required to integrate the [Community Planning](#) (for service delivery) and Town and Country Planning (for physical change) systems.
- planners need to regain the commitment of other public services to work through the planning system to ensure that the necessary integrated approach is taken to planning physical change in local communities.
- the challenge of change is cultural as well as one of adaptation to new systems and structures and is a challenge which needs better understanding and cooperation by all stakeholders in the planning system, alongside planners.
- the increased emphasis on participation in planning requires planners to become more skilled in enabling communities to cope with complex issues and with more inclusive approaches to consultation and engagement.
- planning can deliver more sustainable development, by reducing the need to travel through land use decisions, protecting assets and building liveable environments in particular, but cannot be regarded as a panacea for all community aspirations.
- more needs to be done to balance the short to medium growth requirements of business with longer term considerations: sustainable businesses will need sustainable infrastructures within which to develop successfully.
- environmental considerations are also becoming more complicated as the inter-actions between natural and man made systems are better understood and European directives introduce even further complexities which impact on the planning process.
- the resources of local authority planning services have been greatly stretched by the demands of a growing number of planning applications, complex procedures and heightened public interest in planning issues. With the changes under the new planning act there needs to be adequate resources provided for development planning, to earlier engagement of local communities over aspirations for their areas and to urban design.

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