

Planning: The People's Perspective Conference 2015 Report

On the 25th April 2015 Planning Democracy's Planning: The People's Perspective Conference was held in Glasgow's Trades Hall. The conference was very well received indeed. We had extremely positive feedback from all the delegates.

I just wanted to thank you for an excellent, thought provoking, conference on Saturday. Excellent presentations and workshops and an amazing turnout.

Excellent conference - congratulations.

I really enjoyed it and thought it was a great event



The conference yesterday was very inspiring and well organised. It was good to meet some of the people involved. I will keep in touch with Planning Democracy and help where I can

So glad I didn't have a lie-in, and I was sorely tempted. Yes an excellent information and knowledge sharing event

Every aspect of the conference received good feedback, and seemed to have been appreciated from the speakers to the speed dating and workshops.

The conference was attended by a wide variety of people from all over Scotland, with someone from almost every area in Scotland, from Dumfries to Shetland, Ayr to Aberdeen. We had representatives from all the main cities including Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness. A total of 127 delegates attended. They mostly represented the community voice however we also had a number of legal and planning professionals.



Conference Resources

All of the conference resources including power point presentations, handouts and audio versions of the speeches (sorry the quality is a bit poor) can be found here <http://www.planningdemocracy.org.uk/conference/conference-2015-resources/>

Report of Proceedings

The conference included community speakers from different campaigns in Scotland telling the audience of their experiences with planning. Bill Frew outlined his experience in [Canonbie, Dumfriesshire](#) where the local landowner is pursuing the exploration of coal-bed methane extraction. While the initial application for one explorative drilling site was considered and approved by elected councillors the subsequent 18 extraction sites were later approved under delegated authority in two separate planning applications. This major application will have huge implications for Canonbie's residents and the rural landscape, it should require greater public consultation and scrutiny but has essentially flown under the planning radar because of not being given major development status.



Bill Frew



James McKenzie



Rosy Barnes

James Mackenzie from [Sustainable Shetland](#) shared his experience in campaigning against Viking Energy's proposal for a windfarm of 103 turbines at the heart of Shetland. The campaign is based upon the damage the project will do to the environment and landscape, the financial risk the project poses to Shetland's community funds and the negative human impact the project will have on the well-being of the Shetland people. The RSPB, John Muir Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage were among 2772 objectors to the scheme which was consented by Scottish Ministers. The community were denied a proper public Inquiry into the detail of both the process and the quality of the planning decision for an application that is contrary to the local development Plan, involved a conflict of interest (where the decision maker, Shetland Islands Council was also the co-developer) and was objected to by statutory consultees. The planning permission was overturned at judicial review but that decision was overturned by three judges at the Court of Session. Sustainable Shetland took the case to the Supreme Court and lost at the beginning of 2015. The toll, in excess of £200,000 has been spent by the campaign, on the health of the campaigners has been significant.

Rosy Barnes then presented the Edinburgh campaign of the [Friends of Craighouse Grounds and Woods](#) to prevent the overdevelopment of the former Napier University campus – a nineteenth century, category A listed, former asylum on a hillside setting. Rosy presented the multiple national and local planning policies that the proposed scheme appeared to contravene – the word detrimental cropping up 50+ times in the planning report – and ably expressed the residents' incredulity that planning permission was not only supported by development management but that the majority of the councillors on the planning committee also thought it acceptable. The argument in

favour of the scheme hung on the need for enabling development. The community objections were supported by their community councils, councillors, MSPs and MP but not the statutory agencies and the campaign group is now exploring the possibility of judicial review, call in by Scottish Ministers having been rejected.

Professor Geraint Ellis then gave an excellent presentation on Equal Rights of Appeal and the effects it has in providing a second consideration of the merits of planning decisions. He used the example of Ireland where the community are allowed to appeal to demonstrate how the process is used. He explained some of the arguments used against Equal Rights of Appeal such as creating disincentive for investment, slowing down the planning system and creating a NIMBYist charter, but gave some powerful counter arguments against these, such as the fact that it works in other countries without affecting their economies, the focus being on good development not efficiency and the fact that many of the arguments also apply to developers not just communities. He finished by asking could it be that Scotland leads the way on creating new options for communities?

Helen McDade from Planning Democracy then gave a powerful rousing speech calling the conference to join our Equal Rights of Appeal campaign. She said it was time for the community to not just have a voice, but for it to be heard.

Ally Tibbit presented PD's new online forum <http://www.planningdemocracy.org.uk/forums/> and explained how it can be used as an online advice and support mechanism for individuals and communities needing planning support. It is an open forum that will be moderated by Planning Democracy but will also have a private forum option for PD supporters.



After questions there was lunch. This was followed by an energising networking session or speed dating, where people were given a few minutes each to talk to each other and then move onto the next person. The session worked extremely well and gave people an opportunity to identify people they could speak to later on, who shared experiences or could provide help.

The final two sessions were workshops that lasted 50 minutes each.

These included

1. Equal Rights of Appeal Campaign *with Planning Democracy*
2. Challenging a Planning Application *with Sir Crispin Agnew QC*
3. Public Involvement in the development Plan Process *with Paul Zochowski, planner*
4. An Overview of the DPEA's work and improving public involvement *with Lindsey Nicoll Head of DPEA*
5. Planning and the law (including Aarhus) *with Frances McCartney solicitor*



Sir Crispin Agnew delivering workshop Speed dating

All were valued, Sir Crispin's workshop providing excellent advice on how to challenge applications and focused on the importance of initial objections, France McCartney's giving excellent legal advice on people's rights to participate, particularly under the Aarhus Convention and Paul Zochowski's on the development plan system and the importance of getting proactively engaged in planning. Lindsey Nicoll came along as head of the DPEA mostly to listen to people's feedback on the inquiry system but also to update people on progress towards webcasting Public Local Inquiries (that the DPEA have responded to following Planning Democracy's lobbying on this topic). Importantly Iain Thom and Andy Inch were able to provide delegates with more information about our ERA campaign and what we have done so far and how to help us take the message forward.

Outcomes of the conference

Networking and information sharing

From the feedback we received this was clearly an important achievement of the conference. Networking and meeting like minded people was mentioned a lot in conference feedback and was seen as a valuable aspect of the conference. In terms of assisting our work it will be invaluable to increasing our support networks.

Forum usage

The PD peer support forum was launched at the conference. The forum will connect well resourced and experienced communities who have engaged in planning issues with communities who require help and support to get their views represented. The network will provide much needed peer support for people responding to planning applications, taking part in planning inquiries, commenting on development plans and responding to policy consultations.

We have already had a number of delegates register with the forum and we are currently adapting and improving our systems using their feedback on how easy it is to register and use. Some have already posted informative comments and given some important information that will help others on issues such as incineration and judicial reviews.

Greater understanding of PD and ERA campaign

Some of the conference feedback suggested that people had learnt a lot from the conference about Equal Rights of Appeal. The conference provided information in several ways on ERA, including Rosy Barnes speech which contained a lot of reference to ERA and how it would assist their own situation, Geraint Ellis provided an academic perspective and our PD workshop gave a campaign perspective. The delegates pack also contained a [briefing](#) about ERA. Our post conference email also contains information on how to campaign on ERA and as a result several delegates have already signed up to be ERA champions and have contacted their local community councils and MSPs to support our campaign.

Publicity

Our conference received some publicity before and after it had happened. This is important part of our efforts to increase awareness of people's dissatisfaction with the planning system in Scotland, our ERA campaign and the need for a review of the way planning works. Here is an example of a John Muir Trust news release published about the conference. We have gained much recognition and developed alliances with other organisations and were pleased that other environmental organisations have given us credit for our work. <http://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/environment-and-development/big-business-slanted-planning-rules-must-be-overhauled?> Here is an example of how the conference also made local news <http://www.shetnews.co.uk/newsbites/10541-equal-planning-rights-demand>.

The conference was tweeted and reached over 6000 people.

Two articles were written by planning and legal experts who had attended the conference. One was a blog post written by the Building Environment Forum Scotland <http://www.befs.org.uk/news/154/49/Planning-Democracy-Conference/d,Blog> the other was by the editor of the Scottish Planning and Environmental Law magazine which is yet to be published.

Increase in support and resources for Planning Democracy

The conference resulted in a number of people signing up to support us. This included two planning professionals whose knowledge and experience will be invaluable. We have also gained a lot of community supporters and our networks will reach all parts of Scotland. We also gained a few paying supporters and received some helpful donations which will greatly enhance our work in the future.

We would like to thank the Shiehallion Foundation for helping to make this all happen.