

**Local Government and Communities Committee  
Planning (Scotland) Bill  
Submission from John Raven<sup>i</sup>**

A slightly redacted version of this submission is available at [http://www.parliament.scot/S5\\_Local\\_Gov/Inquiries/20180202\\_PB\\_JRaven.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Local_Gov/Inquiries/20180202_PB_JRaven.pdf) . There is also an uncorrected typo in that document: 1915 for 2015.

Although I do not have the relevant references to hand, a new cross-rail project every 10 years to 2050, together with associated developments in housing, schools, health services, shopping and infrastructure, would be required to cope with the projected population increases in London. Current central and local government authorities do not have the capability to manage such an enormous change. And what are the implications for such things as community involvement?

Similar developments will be required in other major cities across the globe.

Technically and financially all this could be done.

But the recent report to the Club of Rome<sup>ii</sup> shows that, from the point of view of the environment and the sustainability of the planet, it would be foolhardy to embark on such developments. The planet cannot support them. Radical change in the way we live is required.

What are the implications for planning? Indeed, who is set up to consider those implications?

But, in point of fact, none of these things will be done. Instead we will be confronted with unprecedented strife and unrest.

What developments re required to deal with that?

My point is that the present Scottish Government Bill entirely avoids such issues. It is altogether too narrow and short-sighted.

It's suggestion of a 10-year planning cycle is laughable.

Even if the above issues are ignored, consider the unanticipated developments we have witnessed over the *past* 10 years ... the dramatic increases in travel and tourism (and the reliance of the "economy" on such developments), the proliferation of hotels, the replacement of department stores by "on line" shopping and the associated rise in delivery vehicles and need for refuse collection, the occupation of vacated spaces by cafes (to facilitate internet usage), the dependence of "in store" bakeries on frozen dough flown in from China, the "demand" for health services, the use of mobile phones and the internet to, in some sense, monitor what is going on and influence the process, the growth of "educational" institutions to familiarise everyone from those who dig holes in the road to politicians with the endless regulations generated by bureaucrats (not just in Brussels)

The focus of “planning” needs to be on adaptability: look at the way the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh have adapted while “planned” suburban developments have collapsed. Look at post war plans and shudder and laugh.

Horrifyingly, the Scottish Government in general, and this Bill in particular, seems to be preoccupied with promoting unsustainable traditional forms of “economic” development. Yet, as I have shown in my book *The New Wealth of Nations*<sup>iii</sup>, the quality of life is primarily dependent on *public* provision. And the developments necessary to radically change the way we live to avoid the collapse of our food base, the soils, seas, and atmosphere, and our financial/economic system will make this still more true.

Yet the thoughtways and arrangements we are led into via this Bill are utterly dependent on promoting still more “economic” development.

There is no mention of the social constraints on this process – the role of “austerity” in driving the “developments” we have been subjected to over the past several years. These drive such things as selling off public property to cover short-term “losses”.

The “need for austerity” is itself driven by the highly *successful* management processes driven by the international financial community and mainly designed to result in the ownership of the world by the few<sup>iv</sup>.

To facilitate more appropriate developments it will be necessary to find ways of cancelling the austerity programme itself. Now there’s a planning objective for you! Yet, in reality, as Ann Pettifor<sup>v</sup> and others have shown, there is no “shortage of money” for worthwhile projects.

But it is not the direct effects of austerity – the destruction of the lives and livelihoods of millions of people worldwide – that are the most important.

The previously mentioned report to the Club of Rome shares the information that only 3% of the vast amounts of money created by the banks and private financial institutions over the past 10 years has gone to investment in manufacturing and services. The other 97% has been devoted to speculation. So. OK. Those who have borrowed this money created by fiat have made fortunes out of it. But consider some of the other effects. One of these has been to dramatically drive up house and land prices while their owners have done little or nothing to improve that land or those properties. This has created vast inequalities within and between communities and countries. These have in turn created enormous social unrest, including population movements and wars. These things have, in turn, had dramatic effects on *everyone’s* quality of life and contributed enormously to a national and international “race to the bottom” in which social and public provision – and especially capability for survival into the future have been dramatically eroded.

Unless steps are taken to intervene in this process, the kinds of geographically based planning programmes we are being offered here are, at best, peripheral.

The acquisition of common and public land through devious processes is rife<sup>vi</sup> but it requires extraordinary zeal and determination to expose it. There is a huge imbalance in the funding available for this process and that available to promote it. Thus people like Andy are virtually

deprived of funds while those who engage in similar activity in the commercial area are handsomely funded and rewarded. It is up to governments to redress this gross imbalance.

What I am saying is that local planning issues cannot be meaningfully considered outwith consideration of how to intervene in these wider processes.

In a sense, an appropriate response would take MSPs well beyond the terms of reference for this Bill. On the other hand, given the conflated nature of the governance process, it would certainly not be beyond the wider terms of reference of MSPs.

Much more important than the reform of the planning process in isolation is the reform of the governance process itself. Reform of the governance processes involves the invention of ways of intervening in worldwide processes which have dramatic effects at a local level.

As we have seen, what appear to be gross derelictions of duty on the part of Edinburgh City Council – the sale of public land to “developers” whose primary objective is to make money rather than to meet the needs of the citizens of Edinburgh – is driven by the need to make money to meet targets deriving from Central Government’s “austerity” programme.

Fundamental reform of the, currently overloaded and overly hierarchical, governance process is required to tackle this.

### **Some more specific issues.**

#### *Transparency*

Most discussions of transparency miss the point. The public is mostly placed in the position of being only able to react to proposed “developments” once the initial steps have been taken. Current arrangements to review “Development plans” do not bring with them the capacity to create the investment needed to envision and enact alternatives.

And what, exactly, is the point of development plans if those involved in taking them forward can, and often do, ignore them and then change what is actually provided with impunity and with no right of appeal by the community?

There must surely be much more opportunity to understand, comment on, and intervene in proposals. There is no point in commenting once a decision has been taken. **At the very least this means legislating for a Community right of appeal/ equal right of appeal.** Yet even this is not provided for in the current Bill.

But this is only a beginning. What is needed is more transparency and opportunity for proactive intervention before even the very idea has been formulated – ie *before* someone realises that it will be possible to sell off /propose to buy/lease the Royal High School site, Craiglockhart college, India buildings & associated parcels of land (including that earmarked for development of the Central Library)<sup>vii</sup>, Caltongate, the buildings around Kings Stables road, or the arches under Jeffrey St.

At this early point, moves in these directions can only be detected by appreciating the significance of such things as what appear to be chance enquiries or remarks.

There is a need to appoint and fund people who have the motivational dispositions and sensitivities needed by heretics, trouble-makers, whistleblowers, and mavericks – the sort of people who become investigative journalists – to sniff out and further investigate such things as potential shady deals. I have in mind such people as Andy Wightman and George Monbiot. People who poke their noses into things, follow trails and whiffs that beckon and lead to the exposure of such things as the exploitation of the Compulsory Housing repairs legislation, the sale and transformation India buildings and associated properties, and the rife under-pricing of bids for public contracts so as to obtain a contract the cost of which will later be vastly increased.

And there is another issue here. Huge numbers of things flow across the desks of public representatives and their staff. Who is able to monitor all this stuff *and appreciate the significance of developments that are put in hand?* And, indeed, intervene even before that.

I am not talking about pouring out more “information” into the internet. But the appointment of staff whose eyes and ears are tuned to the significance of both what is going on *and what is not going on* in the ways in which the eyes and ears of “entrepreneurs” are tuned to identifying “opportunities”.

Many developments which ought to be scotched in their tracks currently never see daylight ... there would be far too many of them. Many are treated as purely “technical” changes. Yet such changes encompass such things as those which allegedly occurred in one of the major developments in Edinburgh wherein a requirement to gain approval of “Departments A *and* B” was changed to “Department A *or* B”. It sounds simple. But the implications, known to the developer who initiated the change and (presumably) not appreciated by the officers concerned, were profound. As the saying goes, the Devil is in the detail. But who is to look out for such things? The need is for someone with appropriate inclinations who is charged with responsibility to spot them.

## BEYOND TRANSPARENCY

Beyond that, as I said in my 2015 submission, there is a need to appoint personnel possessed with such characteristics to detect opportunities which will benefit the public more than traditional developers. To take some examples: How come that for about half a century there were no proposals for alternative uses for the RHS, the land behind central library, and the land around Kings stables road? These opportunities only came to light when it became necessary to sell them off, in near secrecy, to “developers” in order to raise the money needed to deal with “austerity”.

In reality, it is vitally important to find new ways of promoting innovation in the public sector.

As I said in that same submission, it is necessary for local and governments to appoint a number of “visionary” people who have the entrepreneurial spirit of those who spot opportunities for private companies – eg to buy bus services which bring with them neglected land assets and turn them into vastly profitable companies – but this time in the public interest.

In this context it is important to note that, in the current proposals, there seems to be bland acceptance of the continuance of the dominant vision of society and the economy. While the

recent report to the Club of Rome is, in my opinion, altogether too optimistic, it does at least call for *radical* change in the way we live. So far as I can see, there is no sign of awareness of this priority in the current Bill. The Bill, despite its title, gives *more* power to developers and strongly favours conventional notions of (economic) development. It fails to educate the Scottish public.

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<sup>ii</sup> von Weizsäcker, E.U., & Wijkman, A. (2018) *Come On! Capitalism, Short-termism, Population and the Destruction of the Planet – A Report to the Club of Rome*. New York, Springer.

<sup>iii</sup> Raven, J. (1995). *The New Wealth of Nations: A New Enquiry into the Nature and Origins of the Wealth of Nations and the Societal Learning Arrangements Needed for a Sustainable Society*. Unionville, New York: Royal Fireworks Press; Edinburgh, Scotland: Competency Motivation Project. [http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/fulllist.html#new\\_wealth](http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/fulllist.html#new_wealth)

<sup>iv</sup> Raven, J. (2015) *The Banks, World Management, and Sociocybernetics: A paper prompted by events in Greece and chance encounters on Youtube*. <http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/The-Banks-and-World-Management.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Pettifor, A. (2017). *The Production of Money*. London, UK: Verso.

<sup>vi</sup> Wightman, A. (2015). *The Poor Had No Lawyers: Who Owns Scotland and How They Got it*. UK: Birlinn Ltd.; Monbiot, G. (2000). *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*. London: MacMillan.

<sup>vii</sup> As I understand it, the planning permission was initially granted for a Boutique Arts Hotel in India Buildings. This was then progressively extended to include plots of land including that previously earmarked for the development of the Central Library until it became a proposal for a 400+ bedroom hotel. The process was far from well publicised and subjected to public scrutiny. In discussions of these developments and others with which I have been peripherally involved, the role of some body, I believe the Edinburgh Development Forum, has repeatedly come up as a suspect participant (although, it seems, no one can be exactly sure what their role has been). But it seems that that their brief has been to promote economic development as conventionally conceived at whatever cost to the public and thereby recover money for the Council.