

A CHANGE IN CULTURE FOR THE WORLD OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT?



Everyone's talking about it for the banks and the Scottish Government is introducing a new planning act – but what exactly does it mean for sustainable development?

THERE HAS been much talk recently in the press that a change in culture is required of our bankers if we are to avoid a repeat of the banking collapse witnessed over the last twelve to eighteen months.

The Scottish Government, in introducing the new Planning (Scotland) Act 2008, also talked a great deal about the requirement for a change in culture if the perceived benefits of the newly introduced planning system were to be realised. But what is this "culture", and if we see a change, how will we know it?

These are questions that will I am sure be of interest to all those involved in the planning system, in particular those charged with the delivery of sustainable development. We operate in a world now where the boundaries between "plan" and "delivery" are becoming ever more blurred, requiring new techniques, approaches and attitudes as well as the creative application of planning law and procedure.

Innovative concepts for the funding of delivery have started to emerge in the last year or so, and with the advent of the credit crunch leading to a severe shortage in private sector funding, the application of more creative approaches will more than ever now be required if Development Plans are to deliver in the manner they propose.

But such innovative approaches may also require a change in culture in organisations not normally directly associated with the world of planning and development, such as in the NHS, our water and utilities companies and other providers of major infrastructure. The launch recently of the £350m Scottish HUB venture to be overseen by the Scottish Futures Trust, is one such innovative approach that seeks to deliver health and community schemes

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across Scotland via public private partnerships called HUBCos. This perhaps marks a significant change in culture, and begins to pass the concept of "risk" from the private to the public sector, a sector that does not ordinarily sit comfortably with this risk.

Other such initiatives will be required, not only for major new infrastructure projects, but also for the delivery of mainstream housing, retail, employment, tourist and environmental developments if the far greater ability of the public sector to borrow from the money markets at viable rates of interest is to be taken advantage of.

But this may also require a change in culture for those advising both public and private sectors. Some argue that this will lead to the public sector becoming more and more the deliverers of development, as opposed to the guardians of the built and historic environment, as has been the prevailing culture to date.

But will it happen? And is this change in culture really possible? Only time will tell. ■

Simon Harrison is Principal of BLUE Planning & Development, Chartered Planning & Development Surveyors, providing a focussed mix of Chartered Town Planner and Chartered Surveyor skill sets aimed at assisting in the delivery of sustainable development. Simon is also current Chairman of the RICS International Planning & Development Professional Group Board.