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## Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

**Creating a constructive interface between community planning and land use (spatial) planning**

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### **Introduction**

The Local Government Bill offers an innovative way for community planning to consider how public services are planned and delivered at local levels. In appreciating how this new function aligns with the main aspirations of the Programme for Government, community planning has to be considered in relation to the wider programme of local government modernisation and public service reform. These are intended to articulate a new domain within which to integrate service delivery and spatial practices at different scales in Northern Ireland. The transfer of spatial planning functions and new powers are to be introduced as part of local government reorganisation to promote greater collaborative working, the creation of shared spaces and services and to deliver significant social change. Here reference is made to the strategic political objectives of building a stronger and shared society in Northern Ireland (Programme for Government, 2012). While two distinct activities, community planning and spatial (land use) planning have certain similarities – creating and promoting strategic visions for development, service provision and social change – there is need for a greater understanding of their relationships. This paper draws on a synthesis of research evidence and policy documentation from community planning models elsewhere to inform how a constructive interface between spatial (land use) planning and community planning could be created in the new governance landscape to ensure the processes are complementary and symbiotic.

## Definitions and themes

At the outset it would be helpful to disentangle the different understandings of planning which currently have currency in governance arrangements across the devolved UK. These suggest the need for caution in debating the spirit and purpose of community planning in relation to land use planning. First, *land use planning* is commonly understood as the statutory arrangements for the regulation and forward management of land and property development in the broader public interest. This is the responsibility of local government working within strategic policy guidance set by central government, except in Northern Ireland where centralised arrangements prevail.

Land use planning reflects local civil, political and administrative experience. Land use planning tends to be what most people recognise as planning – it is highly contested and politicised. In general, land use planning tends to be site specific with a focus on individual development schemes although each decision has to take account of wider material and policy considerations. The concept of *strategic planning* is important as a maturation of land use planning. Strategic planning involves the territorial management of land use and development in the public interest. This has taken various forms – the emphasis on regional planning, for example, promotes a more comprehensive perspective on land and property development and infrastructure provision.

Drawing on an established European tradition, *spatial planning* also goes further than land use planning to embrace sector planning, regeneration and local service delivery. It promotes connectivity across geographies and seeks to integrate health, welfare, education as well as economic and environmental agendas that involve a spatial dimension. Therefore, spatial planning can be considered an integrative tool to shape land (use) and (the social use of) space. In more recent times *community planning* has been devised to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their area through identifying long-term objectives for achieving sustainable development. Its origins may be traced to regeneration initiatives, allied to local community partnership working and integrated delivery. There is a powerful democratic thread to community planning.

The significance of these definitions is important – they are not static or passive activities but they exhibit a dynamic and changing morphology with respect to their individual processes and in terms of their relationships with one another. For Northern Ireland the relationship between land use planning and community planning is all important as these are bound up with the Review of Public Administration. In this paper, we argue that there is a case for more assertive longer term and strategic thinking about land use, spatial development and service delivery planning for the future in Northern Ireland. The recent articulations in the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Local Government Bill 2013 propose a fresh interface between spatial (land use) planning powers and new community planning powers for reformed local government in Northern Ireland. There is an associated need to critically reflect and deliberate on how these two planning enterprises could contribute beneficially to a situation of integrating service delivery and spatial development across differentiated scales.

## Research Methodology and Framework

The evidence informing this paper has been gathered through a combination of:

- Individual and collective academic research and review of existing scholarly literature relating to land use planning reform and local government moderation;
- Analyses of policy documents, strategies and reports, on community planning in Scotland and on community strategies and collaborative working in Wales;
- Engagement with land use planning reform and community planning implementation;
- Observation of meetings and other events on local government reform and community planning.

## **Community Planning in Northern Ireland**

The emerging legislation (Local Government Bill, 2013) will place a statutory duty on all new local authorities ('Distinct Council') to facilitate a process of community planning to prepare 'community plans' for promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of their area through identifying long-term objectives for achieving sustainable development. Like Wales and Scotland, this new integrative model of collaborative working appears to mainstream the principles of sustainable development into the core operations of local governance (Williams, 2002).

The community planning provisions are a new apparatus for co-operative models of partnership working in local governance to inform the design and implementation of quality local services. It offers a conduit in which to consider the ethics and operation of a new civic culture by modernising the state and the machinery of government (through the Review of Public Administration), embarking upon a course of democratic renewal and civic renaissance (through Local Government reorganisation and planning reform), and offering opportunities for developing social learning (through community action and community-based learning to influence decision-making and service delivery).

Community planning in Northern Ireland offers the chance to explore the potential realisation of more efficient management of public services and land use. While other jurisdictions have been exploring ways of integrating community planning and spatial planning, Northern Ireland can be considered an important laboratory to test how a constructive interface between community planning and spatial (land use) planning might be operationalised, given that it is the first jurisdiction in the UK to propose a statutory link between the two functions contained within the Local Government Bill (2013), and the accompanying amendments to the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The challenges for community planning in Northern Ireland relate to its contexts (Review of Planning Administration, new local authorities, its processes and its relations with other responsibilities).

## **Learning from elsewhere: Scotland**

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 provides the legislative framework for community planning and defines the roles and broad objectives of new institutional forms, the Community Planning Partnerships. These bring together the key players involved in a defined local area, and are responsible for devising integrated programmes of local service delivery. Integrated working is not optional; there is a duty under the Act for certain public bodies to participate in the process, such as the National Health Service Boards; the Police; and the Fire Service; and includes the different parts of the Scottish Enterprise, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise Networks, which are concerned with promoting economic development, and social and economic development respectively (Community Planning Task Force, 2003). This illustrates the breadth and complexity of the interests, which is then layered by very different professional and cultural norms and values, and a variety of responsibilities, duties, relationships, and established practices.

Community planning in Scotland is predicated on two key principles. First, it is intended to provide the over-arching policy and priority framework in a given jurisdiction. Importantly, there is an emphasis on the co-ordination of existing and emerging initiatives and partnerships. This process of wiring-up and rationalising involves the building up of local capacity through a strategic framework, and where appropriate, relieving institutional and project congestion. This is thus intended to promote horizontal integration. Second, community planning has a vertical dimension since it is also intended to improve the connections between national priorities and those arrangements at regional, local and neighbourhood levels of governance. This clearly draws attention to the different scales involved in the processes, institutions, and policy priorities with which community planning is concerned, and to the perennial question with identifying the appropriate infrastructure and arrangements to address what is perceived as the community interest.

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Community planning is described as ‘a process through which a council and its public sector partners, in consultation with the voluntary and private sector, and the community, can agree a strategic vision for the area and the action which each of the partners will take in pursuit of that vision’ (Community Planning Task Force, 2003, p.2). This is not intended to be a top-down approach, or constrained by the objectives of any individual partner, since the aims of community planning are to promote community engagement with respect to public services. The emphasis on responding to local need, and to be informed by the various processes – and outcomes – of local community involvement techniques, points to the likely differentiation in practice, even though community planning as a whole is subject to centralised and prescriptive review procedures (Audit Scotland, 2006b). Moreover, the regeneration strand of community planning practice in Scotland which promotes social inclusion where appropriate further differentiates the operationalisation of community planning.

The emphasis in Scotland on improved public involvement in community planning and local governance is critical (Cowell, 2004). Yet, an important question turns on devising appropriate approaches to involve local communities in defining wellbeing and accommodating (competing) priorities in a way that is sensitive to scale and locality and individual communities of place, identify and interest. As shown by the Audit Scotland (2006), different models of delivery prevail. In Aberdeen, community planning is delivered through Challenge Forums around substantive issues, the functional decentralisation of services, and the designation of natural neighbourhoods to facilitate preparation of Neighbourhood Community Action Plans by Local Community Planning Partnerships. In Stirling, community councils play a very central role in the community planning process. This suggests that established forms of civil engagement are beginning to be integrated into the process.

Considerations of scale and strategy are fundamental in informing the overall design. In the Glasgow and Clyde Valley metropolitan region, for example, there is a clear hierarchy of community planning arrangements which set the strategic context, and actively facilitate integration with the statutory land use planning system. At the metropolitan scale, the Clyde Valley Community Planning Partnership brings together Glasgow and its neighbouring local authority areas to establish a community planning agenda for the Glasgow City Region as a whole. Within that, the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership takes responsibility for the city’s community plan, as do the other authorities for their respective areas. Within the city, Local Community Planning Partnerships will then assume responsibility for defined areas. This would suggest that as a modern form of local governance, community planning is seeking to secure integration of service delivery and of individual projects, and is, in certain circumstances, seeking to achieve strategic spatial integration.

## **Learning from elsewhere: Wales**

The provenance of community planning in Wales can be traced back to the 1995 Labour opposition manifesto for local government (Welsh government, 2006; Williams, 2009). This set in motion a growing ambition to create greater coherence and cohesion amongst the range of sectoral stakeholders that are involved in shaping service delivery for local communities. The Community Planning concept in Wales was initiated by the Local Government Act 2000. The ambition was to transform the governance architecture in local authorities to enhance the quality of life of local communities and achieve sustainable development through strengthening community leadership role of local government and policy coordination to deliver quality services (Lambert, 2006; Owen, et al. 2007).

While community planning describes the process of working collaboratively to coordinate service provision in Wales, the output from this process is the production of a shared vision known as a ‘Community Strategy.’ Therefore, community strategies would be viewed as the mechanism for developing the leadership role of local government to capture collaborative gain, previously described as ‘best value’.

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Since its inception in 2000, the community planning approach in Wales has been revised alongside the wider public sector reform agenda. Significant changes to the community planning approach emerged following the publication of *Making the Connections - Delivering Beyond Boundaries: Transforming Public Services in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006) in November 2006, which was a response to the Beecham report published earlier that year. The Welsh Government initiated a new approach to public services based on collaboration rather than competition. The focus of this new way of working recognised that effective public services must be delivered through a range of collaborative initiatives between public service providers working across geographical and sectoral boundaries.

There was a need for more consistency in performance. This formed the basis for the introduction of Local Services Boards and Local Services Agreements. The Local Service Boards were not to be new, separate organisations, but to grow out of existing leadership structures in each local authority. In a way, they were a means of agreeing joint action by the relevant bodies operating in the delivery of the community strategies. The Local Service Agreement (an 'outcome-focused' set of targets) reflects local and national cross-sector contributions to improve quality of life and provides the focus for a number of collaborative projects to be taken forward by the Board and its partners. These will be developed in collaboration with the Welsh Government – achieving vertical alignment. The Local Service Boards and the Local Services Agreements represent new approaches to local leadership to enhance service delivery and improve performance management.

The alignment between spatial planning and community planning in Wales can be articulated as follows:

- “the Wales Spatial Plan (WSP) sets the agenda for the long-term strategic development of an area;
- Community Strategies identify longer term strategic priorities necessary to improve and sustain local quality of life and wellbeing; and
- Local Service Boards are the focus for joining up critical services to meet the needs of citizens.”

(Welsh Assembly Government, 2007; 14)

The successfulness of building greater alignment between spatial planning and community planning across different spatial scales demands a robust spirit of cooperation, which should be reflected across all levels of public services. In the Welsh context, there is a strong ambition to sustain efficient communication channels and operations between local and central government in developing shared outcomes. The current context is very dynamic and further transformation of the governance arrangements in Wales is underway. Given the current financial crisis, the regional partnerships structure and policy teams supporting the WSP ceased to exist after the 2011 elections. The strategic spatial dimensions are now being influenced by the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan (WIIP) for growth and jobs and forthcoming proposals from the city regions report, which was commissioned by the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, in 2012, to explore the role of cities in driving economic growth.

At local government level, there has been exploration of new approaches to partnership working, building on the community planning experience, which represent a move towards a model of Single Integrated Plans (SIPs). These aim to integrate planning across public services and amalgamate individual partners' strategies or action plans into a strategic collective vision (bringing together existing thematic community planning partnerships) to deliver shared outcomes. This new approach uses a Results Based Accountability (RBA) methodology to monitor performance, which focuses on *population accountability* and *performance accountability*. This represents a significant step forward in measuring the impact of partnership working, the partnerships collective activity and distinguishing clearer lines of accountability. The population and performance monitoring will contain *report cards* mechanisms to capture performance across the partnerships.



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The Local Service Boards still play a crucial role in providing strategic management of collaborative and partnership activity, and is the conduit for submitting SIPs, which contains how local partners intend to improve outcomes for citizens, to the Welsh Government for comment and feedback. Therefore, it appears that Local Service Boards should focus more forcefully on early intervention and prevention, in order to break cycles of dependency and poor outcomes.

## **Land use planning *and* community planning**

What of the relationship of land use planning and community planning – and what are the lessons for Northern Ireland? Notwithstanding important differences between land use planning and community planning, there are some core similarities in their broad principles and processes. For example, both activities are statutory responsibilities; discharged at local levels of governance; concerned with promoting strategic visions for development and devising appropriate agendas for delivery; involve other stakeholders; and rest on promoting active community engagement (Scottish Executive, 2004). Critically, in the context of this paper, both land use planning and community planning represent particular facets of local and regional governance where a cross-cutting and integrative approach is held to be necessary. Yet, both accommodate a diversity of stakeholders and a plurality of communities of place, interest and identity. This hints at the practical challenges or realities of achieving integration and community participation and differentiation in practice.

Notwithstanding these institutional and procedural similarities, there are important differences in the two sets of activities. On the one hand, the statutory planning system provides the regulatory framework for the physical use and development of the land resource in the public interest. In addition to a concern with environmental quality, this has to take account of how different land uses are connected. It therefore has a 'spatial' dimension which asserts a strategic, outward looking and integrating perspective on land use and development (Lloyd and Peel, 2005). On the other hand, community planning is an explicit attempt to enhance public services and to make them responsive to, and organised around, the needs of communities. Here, there is a focus on defined localities.

In Scotland and Wales, the debate continues around the nature of community planning's relationship with land use planning. In Scotland, a core script (Scottish Executive, 2004) asserted the complementary and symbiotic nature of the two processes. In Wales, the shift toward Single Integrated Plans complements and supports Local Development Plans. In essence, the community planning process serves to integrate and co-ordinate existing plans and procedures and to provide the over-arching framework at the local authority level. In practice, the land use planning function is responsible for delivering those elements of the community plan which impact on land use and development. The development plan is thus the spatial articulation of the community planning vision. Yet, ultimately, the implementation of development plans is predicated on political, market and investment decisions over time. The research evidence to date suggests that there has been a pragmatic and constructive approach to accommodate the evolving statutory duties at the local level. Each activity delivers necessary aspects of a shared planning approach to address the immediate and longer term needs of communities in a sustainable way, whilst remaining sensitive to the wider context of discontinuous change.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

How the new hierarchical framework of a modernised planning system will mesh with the evolving trajectory of community planning remains a considerable challenge to securing a modern and integrated local governance. In parallel with the concerted attempts to accommodate the arrival of community planning, the reform agenda with respect to the details of the land use planning system demands structural, organisational, procedural and cultural change. Both planning enterprises require a robust understanding of

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the relationship between people and place. The challenge for communities to make their neighbourhoods liveable and sustainable has to be balanced with how this aligns with the strategic priorities in Northern Ireland. Local government, who will be the new steward for place-shaping powers, will have the civic responsibility to act as the fulcrum on which to balance local need with strategic priorities to create sustainable places with better public services. Community Planning importantly provides a mechanism for “policy coordination, public service improvement, democratic renewal and an enhanced community leadership role for local government” (Lambert, 2006: 245) that complements and supports spatial/land use development. The potential for harnessing a symbiotic relationship between community planning and spatial planning is intrinsic to their ability to shape the relationship between *people* and *place* (Figure 1).

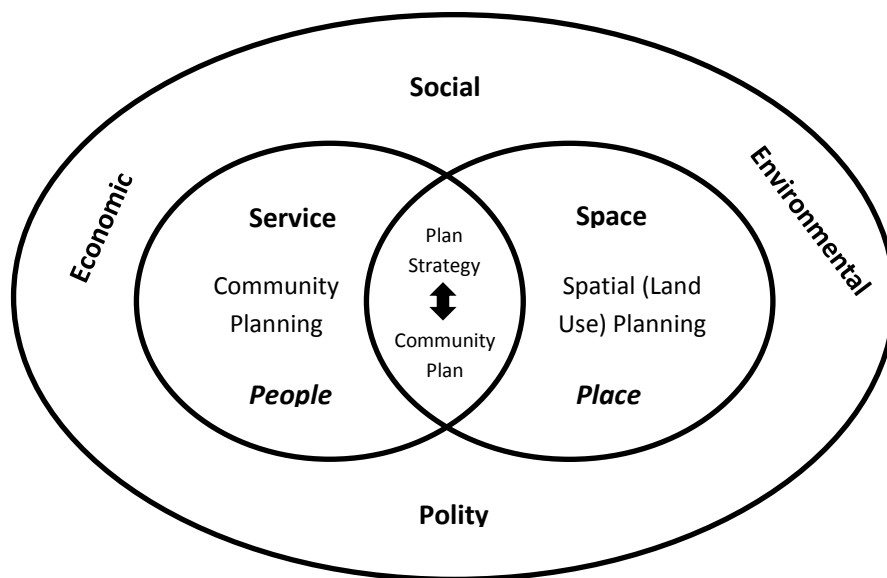


Figure 1 - The interface between community planning and spatial planning

The recent community planning guidance for Councils (DoE NI, 2013) promotes the integration of community planning, spatial planning and regeneration to recouple these functions at the new spatial scale of local government. The significance of this realignment will be to afford councils the ability to align land use/physical development with quality public services to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being. Like Scotland, the idea is have regeneration mainstreamed into the local authority, alongside community planning and spatial planning, as tools to manage change in a much more co-ordinated way than was previously undertaken through inter-departmental operationalisation. This offers a significant departure from the previous model of splintered institutional operations, which has been subject to criticism for delivering a very fragmented approach to shaping place. The ambition through the current period of reform is to enable the new councils to take a more strategic, local authority-led approach that involves citizens in place-shaping to deliver sustainable change.

The learning from other jurisdictions indicates the need to align functions around a holistic approach to people and place. Northern Ireland is at a unique moment in history, given the reform of public administration, to develop a ‘spatial fix’ to address the barriers that exist in linking the conduit for service delivery (Community Planning) with spatial management (Spatial Planning). A recommendation is to introduce a Strategic Statement of Intent for each new Council as a regional reporting mechanism. This would support the performance improvement dimension of the Local Government Bill (Part 12 – clauses 87-105) to monitor the symbiotic exercises of community planning and spatial planning, and complement the Partnership Panel proposed in the Bill, between local and central government, which could act as the conduit to discuss and disseminate best practice.

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## ***Strategic Statement of Intent (Regional Reports)***

Integration has become an important policy objective within the modernisation debates and rationalisation practices associated with the modern public arena. The emphasis on securing relatively greater integration in governance may be justified in a number of ways. First, it is presented as a means of addressing existing institutional and administrative inefficiencies and deficits in the provision of local services. Second, integrated working and service delivery through joined-up local governance is held to facilitate further opportunities for efficiency gains. In Scotland, for example, there is an established tradition of joint working for the purposes of planning, and this has yielded important insights into the benefits of creating integrated arrangements in terms of strategic and local land use planning and development. Third, integrated working and policy delivery may enable relatively greater civil engagement and participation in public affairs. This can create greater legitimacy and confidence in local and regional governance processes and outcomes. Here, then the case for integration rests on both technocratic and democratic considerations.

Evidence suggests that the complexity of community planning structures can be a barrier to effective joint working (Audit Scotland, 2006). This point supports the argument for clear structures, but particularly the need to develop a new strategic approach to align community planning and spatial planning in the new council architecture, to improve integration, inter-organisational and inter-agency working, while at the same time be transparent and demonstrate accountability to the citizen. The ability to nurture strategic thinking for organisational learning will become a core element of council operations. This will involve the capability to explore synthesis, be creative, to view problems and interventions more holistically, rather than compartmentalised and linear.

Here there is an argument that at the implementation of the Review of Public Administration the new Councils need to create some critical space to establish their strategic agendas. The regional report device offers some potential. Regional reports were introduced in Scotland in 1975 at a time of local government reorganisation. There is a parallel here as 12 new regional authorities were put in place. The intention was that each new regional authority prepared within 12 months a regional report that asserted a strategic framework for agenda setting, resource allocation and decision making. In effect, the regional reports articulated the ways in which land use planning (development plans) and other interventions (which would now include community planning in the Northern Ireland context) addressed the inherited problems of the region, set out the prevailing and new policies and articulated the actions for the local authority (Lloyd, 1997). Strategic Statements of Intent, as a regional reporting mechanism, would therefore help explore the relationship between community planning and land use planning in each new local authority in Northern Ireland, which would assist in framing future performance management and be part of the remit for the Partnership Panel in the new governance landscape.



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