

# Balfour thinks the planning changes are one step too far

## Covid-19 planning changes go too far

Changes to aspects of the planning system due to the Covid-19 outbreak could undermine the integrity of the planning system. These are the concerns for Jeremy Balfour Conservative MSP for Lothian.

Mr Balfour says that the temporary suspension of the requirement for pre-application consultation on major and national developments is a particular worry.

A letter issued by John McNairney, Chief Planner, and Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, outlines a number of provisions included in the Coronavirus (Scotland) Bill.

These include extension of planning permissions, removing the requirement to make certain documents available for public inspection and giving local authorities the power to exclude the public from their meetings on health grounds.

The practical requirements relating to Neighbour Notification, an important part of any planning application are also being discussed with Heads of Planning.

Mr Balfour said: "One of the core values of the Scottish Planning service is that decisions should be made in a transparent and fair way that engender public confidence in the system.

"The public have a critical role to play in that system. Many local residents take a proactive part in planning matters to

ensure issues that have an impact on their community are communicated to the planning authority.

“It’s all very well for the Chief Planner and Minister to say there is an expectation that documentation will be made available online but if the public are not made aware of this then it is pointless. I am extremely concerned the provisions set out by the Scottish Government go too far, removing the need for consultation and engagement and enabling the introduction of a planning system, albeit temporarily, that is not transparent or democratically accountable.”