



**Your Ref:**

**Our Ref:** PW/12/16  
(Please quote at all times)

Mr A Kerr  
Director of Plans and Policy  
Department for Infrastructure – Planning  
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Belfast Planning Service  
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**Tel:** 028 90 502097

**Date:** 06 December 2016

Dear Angus

**Re: Support for community engagement in the planning process on major projects**

Members of Belfast City Council wish there to be investigation into the availability of independent and impartial support for community organisations and residents so that they can effectively engage in major physical regeneration and key capital projects in Belfast. I understand that such support was previously provided by DoE but was withdrawn.

It is important that the public have the opportunity to effectively engage in the planning process, particularly in relation to significant developments and proposals that affect wider communities. The planning process can be daunting for some and has its own complexities and unique subtleties. In other parts of the UK, communities are able to tap into expert, independent planning advice to support their participation in the planning process.

I believe that Government is best placed to provide or sponsor such support because of the need for Councils (as local planning authorities) to remain impartial in the planning process and not favour one stakeholder above another. These issues raised by our members are not unique to Belfast; investigation of appropriate and independent expert support for communities will be of relevance to all communities across Northern Ireland, with potential to benefit the constituents of all eleven Councils.

I would be grateful if you would explore this matter further with a view to addressing our members' concerns.

Yours sincerely

**PHIL WILLIAMS**  
Director of Planning & Place



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