

## Notes

### Localism Bill Committee

*Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2011*

#### **Overview**

Witnesses before the Committee included Ministers Greg Clark, Bob Neill and Andrew Stunnell and representatives from the CBI, BCC, TCPA and RTPI. There was broad support for the Bill was broad, but with several key caveats. The business community focused on the potential impact the Bill would have on the fragile economy and the role the evolving planning system would have in economic growth. Whilst the RTPI called for the strengthening of the provisions in the Bill on the duty to co-operate, the TCPA thought neighbourhood planning should be at the heart of the Bill to “*reconnect communities with planning*”.

#### **Third Sitting (9.30am) [\(View Footage Here\)](#) [\(Read Hansard Here\)](#)**

Gareth Elliott, Senior Policy Advisor at the British Chamber of Commerce.  
Jessica Baully, Head of Infrastructure, Confederation of British Industry.  
Roger Culcheth, Federation of Small Businesses.

Gareth Elliott raised concerns over how the duty to co-operate would be enforced once the Bill is passed. He feared that once politics got involved local authorities would choose not to co-operate. The BCC wanted to see businesses play a key role in the development of neighbourhood plans and for there to be a legal duty to consult businesses. A further cause for concern was the threshold set for consultation and of businesses that “*want to put up hanging baskets having to consult the whole community*”.

Jessica Baully said that the CBI’s original response to the Localism Bill “*was not good*”. Any changes to the planning process and system created uncertainty, particularly for major infrastructure projects, that will play a part in fuelling economic growth.

Following on from a question from Jack Dromey, Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government, in regard to the Bill’s proposals for the neighbourhood plans and what they may mean in terms of impeding development, Baully responded that business is in favour of local consultation and supports the principles of devolving power to the local and neighbourhood level. What was key, however, was that developers are looking for certainty that their planning applications will not be blocked, as there are already provisions in the existing planning system’s pre-application phase for local consultation.

All witnesses agreed that the third party right of appeal should not be included in the Bill, as to do so would add an “*extra layer of uncertainty*” to the planning system. The front-loading of the planning system, where all consultation is carried out early, should be encouraged to ensure that once the application is submitted, opportunities to block the application have been minimised.

**Fourth Sitting (12.30pm) ([View Footage Here](#)) ([Read Hansard Here](#))**

Stephen Tapper, President of Planning Officers Society.  
Trudi Elliott, Chief Executive Royal Town Planning Institute.  
Dr Hugh Ellis, Chief Planner, Town and Country Planning Institute.

Further evidence was given by:

Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation.  
Andrew Stunell, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.  
Bob Neil Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.

Stephen Tapper highlighted that limited resources are a significant issue in terms of community consultation. Consultation is a very expensive process and can take around 12 to 18 months. Developers often have to use staff from the councils and employer master planners, urban designers, traffic consultants etc. Developers were, he added, spending “£130,000 to £150,000 for a community of about 10,000.” A solution, he proposed, was to have a ‘community planning statement’ produced every year, through which local councils would draw up programmes of work that is properly funded.

Henry Smith, Conservative MP for Crawley, asked specifically whether greater community involvement, with regard to house building numbers, would increase the level of housing supply? Dr Hugh Ellis, Chief Planner TCPA, said that the New Homes Bonus could have an impact but the issue around housing growth is “*about education and culture change*”. Stephen Tapper added that communities are particularly supportive of housing growth when they see that infrastructure is coming with it.

Dr Ellis expressed considerable concern over neighbourhood forums in urban areas, where planning suffers from a lack of legitimacy. There was a real risk that communities would splinter, with gated communities having their own neighbourhood forum and estates being voiceless. The nightmare scenario was a few people standing together as a neighbourhood forum and taking considerable power. As the Bill currently stands these forums are likely to cause significant conflict and delay in the planning process.

Questions directed to the Ministers were primarily concerned with whether or not there was enough scrutiny or consultation prior to the presentation of the Bill. Alison Seabeck said that there are “genuine concerns” about the poor drafting of the Bill, which could cause further delays in the planning system. She added that it ought to have had full pre-legislative scrutiny, and pilots for some of the new initiatives should be undertaken, prior to bringing them into the Bill.

***Ends***