

Localism Bill

Briefing Note –Recess Roundup

18th February

Overview

At this half way stage they have considered 89 clauses and seven schedules. They are therefore a bit behind schedule.

Former Local Government Minister Nick Raynsford, former Deputy Mayor of Lewisham Heidi Alexander and Shadow CLG Minister Jack Dromey have all brought considerable expertise to the debate for the Opposition side thus far whilst Gavin Barwell, David Ward and Stephen Gilbert have done the exact same for the Government – with the latter two tabling an amendment seeking to enshrine local enterprise partnerships into the Bill.

Planning

Part 5, Chapter 1 [Clause 89](#) is the first of the clauses on planning; more specifically it deals with the highly contentious decision to abolish regional spatial strategies. During the debate on this schedule, Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation, signalled that he would be willing to consider amendments to clause 90 on the duty on local authorities to co-operate on sustainable development across council boundaries, which is a part of the government's substitute for the removal of the regional spatial strategies. Indeed, Mr Clark heeded the calls from across the planning and development sectors for the duty to be strengthened to help fill the void left by the abolition of regional-level planning. The Minister commented: *"I accept the thrust of much of what has been said about the duty to co-operate, so I undertake to return during the Bill's passage with a set of government amendments with the objective of achieving as much consensus as possible."*

With the Coalition Government enjoying a built in majority on the committee, substantial amendments to the Bill were never likely. After approximately 24 hours of debate on the Bill, the committee has yet to make a single amendment. The Government has tabled 30 of its own amendments, which will almost certainly be made. Perhaps vindicating observations from the Opposition that the Bill appeared rushed and poorly written, the first 8 are drafting amendments, with the most important one making it clear that local authorities can only deal with their own neighbourhood development orders, not other authorities – a somewhat glaring omission.

The two Lib Dem MPs, David Ward and Stephen Gilbert, have initiated several amendments to the Bill with a 'third party right of appeal', which they said was deliberately kept out of the Localism Bill by the Government. The right would be limited to local councillors, parish councils and neighbourhood forums and would only be when the application went against the council's planning policies. As it is a new clause, it will be debated and voted upon after nearly all the existing clauses have been considered, i.e. very near or on the last day of the committee on 10th March.