

Localism Bill Committee

Tuesday 1 March 2011

(Afternoon)

[Mr David Amess *in the Chair*]

Localism Bill

Overview

The Localism Bill introduces a new requirement for prospective developers to consult local communities before submitting planning applications for large developments. The Government has suggested that the threshold will be for developments of more than 200 units or developments providing over 10,000sqm additional floor space. It is possible this will be revised downward given that the threshold for the recovery of housing appeals by the Secretary of State is set at 150 dwellings and because of political pressure to ensure communities have a right to be consulted on all but the most minor of developments. While most major applications are already subject to extensive pre-application consultation, developers will now be required by statute to have regard to any opinions raised during this consultation when deciding whether to make any changes before submitting their planning applications.

The key passage of the session dealt with [Clause 102](#) on the duty of developers to engage in pre-application consultation. The Shadow Communities and Local Government team had put down an amendment to insert in to the Bill a requirement that developers must provide an independent examination of the economic and social impact of a proposed development.

Nick Raynsford MP (Lab, Greenwich and Woolwich) had also tabled an amendment introducing a “local design review panel” to advise on the design of a proposed development. Both amendments were defeated.

4:30pm, Session 18 (Read [Hansard here](#)) (View [session here](#))

Amendment 189

Jack Dromey (Lab, Birmingham Erdington) outlined the case for Nick Raynsford’s amendment for design review panels. With the withdrawal of funding from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), and the announcement that it will merge with the Design Council, design review panels “*would ensure that proposed developments co-ordinate well with their surroundings*”. The Government must be sure that the objective of high-quality design continues to be central to the planning process.

Mr Raynsford argued that his amendment for the introduction of design review panels, which sought to encourage developers entering pre-application discussions with a local authority to have regard to the views of these panels. Design review panels would help to improve the quality of individual buildings and leading to a greater understanding of the importance of good design in fashioning the future of our built environment.

Amendment 152

The amendment sought to legislate that developers who were carrying out pre-application consultation must provide an independent examination of the economic and social impact of the proposed development. The scope of such an examination would be agreed by the developers and the local planning authority before the consultation.

Government response:

Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation, stated early in his response that the Government would not be accepting the proposed amendments. By interposing a new independent examination it is not clear who

would carry out these examinations or at what stage of the planning process it would appear. The introduction of the amendment could entrench yet further delays in the planning system and act as a deterrent to potential developers.

Turning to Nick Raynsford's amendment, Mr Clark acknowledged the success of design review panels already in use, but stipulated that his concern was that *"one way to turn something that can be appreciated and make a positive addition to scrutiny into something that is resented and imposed on people is to make it mandatory, and a burden that people reluctantly have to deal with."*