



## Grant Shapps: Think outside of 'identikit Legoland homes'

**Published** 9 March 2011

Housing Minister Grant Shapps has today called on architects and housebuilders to "think outside the identikit Legoland box" and make sure their new developments reflect the identity of the local area.

The minister has written to the Design Council - which recently merged activities on housing design with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment - encouraging them to help developers to work with local communities to bring forward creative and innovative designs that respond to local character and identity.

He has asked the Design Council to work with communities to help them consider how they could use new neighbourhood plans to best support those developers whose designs and use of materials are more sensitive to the aesthetic of the local area without adding to the regulatory burden on the industry.

The Localism Bill currently before Parliament includes radical reforms to England's planning laws, enabling communities to come together to draw up neighbourhood plans to decide what their area should look like. If people vote in favour of these plans in local referendums, councils would have to adopt them.

In his letter to the Design Council, Mr Shapps argues that England's suburbs have been dominated by "identikit" homes that could be anywhere in the country and that instead, developers could look to take the character of the local neighbourhood more into account in their designs.

He points to examples of housing developments up and down the country that have used local materials and taken local views into account - giving the area a unique identity while at the same time providing the homes local people need. And by giving these new properties a local flavour, the developers have helped support jobs in the area - and in some cases created new tourist attractions.

Housing Minister Grant Shapps said:

"We all recognise the bog standard, identikit Legoland homes that typify some new developments - all looking exactly the same on streets that could be anywhere in the country. Whilst we are seeing good examples emerging, too often new developments are dominated by the same, identikit designs that bear no resemblance to the character of the local area.

"I want more developers to think outside these Legoland designs and consider how the expertise, knowledge and materials that are locally available could be best used to reflect the identity of their surrounding neighbourhood.

"But power also rests in the hands of the residents. Neighbourhood plans, designed and voted on by communities themselves, could offer vital support to those architects and developers who are more sensitive to the look and feel of the place in which they are building."

Planning and Decentralisation Minister Greg Clark said:

"Banal, identikit housing schemes have given development a bad name. Experience here and overseas shows that when local people have the chance to influence the function and appearance of developments, opposition can be turned into enthusiasm and buildings are constructed that we can be proud of.

"Neighbourhood planning will give people the chance to exercise meaningful choice over the look and feel of the places where they live - from the location of new homes, shops and offices, to the choice of materials used. That way, developers who work with local people are likely to benefit from a smoother process for obtaining planning permission."

Exemplar developments that have been built to reflect local character and in some cases have used local materials include:

**Abbes Roding, Essex:** A recently completed Hastoe Housing Association development provides six affordable rural homes for local people. It is the culmination of over five years of partnership work, from recording local housing need, to finding a suitable site and consulting with the community about the layout and design before a planning application was made. The project was fully supported by the Parish Council. The homes help local families, who would otherwise be priced out of the area and forced to move away, to stay in the place where they have strong roots. Through continued and positive community consultation, the homes achieved a design that complements the village character through the use of brick, render and clay plain tiles where colours were chosen by the Parish Council.

**Rostron Brow, Stockport:** Developed by architects TADW for the Northern Counties Housing Association, the development forms part of a ten year plan to improve the Hillgate Conservation Area. In building the homes, the developers reused existing brick, stone and slate as well as existing redundant timber beams and stone features. In redeveloping the area, the priority was a reconstruction of the area - everything from window details, shop fronts and building facades have been designed to replicate in detail areas from historic photographs and original sections of the area

**The Russells, Broadway, Worcestershire:** Built on the site of a former furniture factory, this is a mixed use development of 77 homes. The neighbourhood also includes a supermarket and a museum. Once the planning application was submitted, a long consultation process was held

involving local residents and English Heritage, giving the opportunity to make changes to the design. The result is a housing development that fits in with the surrounding 16th century Broadway village buildings, built using locally-sourced Cotswold sandstone.

**Chapelfield, Orford, Suffolk:** A housebuilder with planning permission to build six new homes was encouraged by a local estate agent to employ an architect living in Orford village to design them. The architect used his knowledge of the local area and local building forms to produce plans for the development which fit into the overall village design.

**Port Sunlight, Wirral, Merseyside:** Port Sunlight became a conservation area in 1977 and nearly every building in the village is Grade II listed - making it one of the principal tourist attractions in the area. Each cottage is built using traditional Cheshire red brick. The Port Sunlight Village Trust was established in April 1999 to preserve and maintain the character, landscape and buildings within the area.

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