



Reaction to Localism Bill: industry representative bodies

Huw Morris, PlanningResource, 15 December 2010

Read reaction from the RTPI, Town and Country Planning Association, British Property Federation, Home Builders Federation, Friends of the Earth, National House Building Council, CABE, The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment and Royal Institute of British Architects.

[Reaction from planning consultants](#)
[Reaction from planning lawyers](#)

RTPI president Ann Skippers said: "We have waited a long time for the bill but there is still great uncertainty about key planning reforms, the issue of financial incentives and no implementation plan, all of which are likely to have an unwanted impact in stalling much needed economic recovery because no one knows how the planning system will work.

"The key area of neighbourhood planning in particular remains unclear, with huge questions remaining over how communities will be supported to achieve effective plans. We will need to spend more time studying these proposals in detail and will be providing further views."

[Detailed RTPI reaction to the Localism Bill](#)

Town and Country Planning Association chief executive Kate Henderson said:

"Collaborative neighbourhood planning, so that more people can be involved in the process of shaping the places in which they live and work, is an opportunity to be grasped. However the TCPA recognises that implementing such an ideal to be a meaningful choice will require communities to have intellectual as well as financial support.

"A revised planning system, truly fit for purpose, must offer a strong mechanism for planning for large areas where strategic issues are too big in scale or timeframe to be resolved within a single local authority planning area; for example a new train line, climate change adaptation measures such as a strategic response to flooding, or large scale housing growth.

"The duty to cooperate to encourage and enable local authorities and public bodies to come together on issues that cross local government boundaries, offers the potential for a strategic planning framework in large areas where collaborative strategies are needed.

"However, co-operation once embarked upon will need to be monitored and mechanisms for mediation between partners will also have to be made available if necessary."

British Property Federation chief executive Liz Peace said: "One of the keys to getting the balance right will depend on whether the government can successfully complement the new emphasis on neighbourhoods with greater incentives to local authorities to back development. The introduction of a presumption in favour of sustainable development should

be helpful as long as it is not so hedged around with caveats and exemptions as to be totally meaningless.

"It is also crucial that the government presses ahead with plans to allow local authorities to retain business rates generated in their areas so that they are directly rewarded for backing new commercial development. The New Homes Bonus that will reward authorities for providing new housing can help, too, but this has to be backed up with a clear obligation on local authorities to define and meet the housing needs of their communities.

"Getting the level of neighbourhood involvement envisaged in the Bill will be very difficult.

"Questions remain about, who will contribute to and work up the proposed neighbourhood plans, what status they will have, how such plans will relate to wider local authority plans and how neighbourhoods will be defined. For example, will businesses also have their voice heard?"

Home Builders Federation executive chairman Stewart Baseley said: "The localism proposals provide a real chance for people to develop their communities for the better and house builders will work with them to build the homes communities and families want. More homes will mean more money for local facilities and services and will enable young people to live in the communities where they grew up.

"The government and councils need to join us in educating communities of the severity of the housing crisis and the benefits of new homes."

Friends of the Earth planning campaigner Anna Watson said: "If localism is to thrive more must be done to allow people to participate fairly in the planning process - these government plans could create a postcode lottery, two-tier planning system, where cash-strapped communities struggle to make their voices heard.

"And these proposed planning reforms are far too flimsy to ensure the UK builds the strong, low-carbon and wildlife-rich future that the government has promised. If ministers are serious about being the greenest government ever they must ensure councils favour developments that help slash UK emissions and create new green jobs - and strongly encourage them to reject schemes that damage our environment."

NHBC chief executive Imtiaz Farookhi said: "We are suffering a chronic undersupply of housing across the UK, and one of the tests of this bill's success is whether it leads to more homes being built in areas where they are most needed, and whether the system allows the current shortfall to be addressed at a rate which meets the demands both of local communities and the country as a whole.

"Latest NHBC statistics reveal current volumes of new homes starts while steady, remain at historically low levels."

CABE chief executive Richard Simmons said: "Despite all the headlines about neighbourhood planning, local plans will still be fundamentally important. It's crucial they are fit for purpose and CABE's work with local authorities found that many struggle to tell the story of a place. Councils will need plenty of support to create effective plans.

"CABE welcomes the presumption in favour of sustainable development. In particular, the decision to retain the central definition from the Planning Act 2008 of 'mitigating and adapting to climate change and achieving good design'. This could ensure that design quality remains a central focus of the planning system.

"We also welcome the opportunity this bill creates for all schemes to undergo independent

examination. Tools like design review and Building for Life allow for a process which focuses on quality and works in the public interest, which is what every community wants."

The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment chief executive Hank Dittmar said: "We are thoroughly supportive of the principles of community engagement and localism in planning and development, giving local people control over the decisions that affect their communities. The Prince's Foundation has long been an exponent of localism and community involvement through our enquiry by design methodology.

"And whilst the new plans will undoubtedly be a challenge for the communities, developers and local authorities used to an adversarial system, it is a challenge we look forward to helping them meet."

Royal Institute of British Architects president Ruth Reed said: "The Localism Bill will spark a profound shift in the way England is governed and presents real challenges for all those involved in designing and planning new development. Localism could be a powerful means of engaging local communities more positively in the development process, but this will be uncharted territory and it will require a real commitment from councils and professions, including architects, to make it work across the country.

"To genuinely empower local people and give real teeth to localism, it will be essential that local communities are provided with the tools and support that are necessary to deliver. While we see architects playing a key role in the neighbourhood planning process and would urge our members to get involved, the onus will be on local government to ensure that the new system is properly resourced and that communities have access to the right expertise. Given the local government budget cuts announced yesterday, we are very concerned that this might not happen."