



Reaction to Localism Bill: consultants

Huw Morris, PlanningResource, 15 December 2010

Reaction from leading consultants including GL Hearn, DTZ, and Turley Associates.

[Reaction from representative bodies](#)
[Reaction from planning lawyers](#)

Shaun Andrews, director of planning, development & regeneration at GL Hearn said: "The Bill's primary aim is to devolve greater powers to Councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions. But is it as radical as we were led to believe?"

"Yes local people will be given some power through the new neighbourhood plans, and increased power to Parish Councils, but will local communities grab the opportunity in the numbers envisaged by the coalition government? Or, as we have seen with the local development framework process, will some Local Authorities have a thread-bare, patchwork quilt of half-plans for many years to come?"

"In any event, local authorities will undoubtedly struggle with the additional coordination required with fewer resources - it will take some time for the old plans to be phased out and the new phased in. We think all this means that planning will become increasingly negotiable."

"In the meantime, and assuming the economy continues to strengthen, and public sector resources remain scarce, we consider there is a greater opportunity for the private sector to drive the delivery of infrastructure, homes and commercial development."

DTZ director of development consulting Peter Weatherhead said: "Communities still need development and, importantly, they need the right type of development, which delivers key housing, employment and services. The government's drive to empower neighbourhoods relies on dynamic, well intentioned members of the local community who are sufficiently skilled to develop neighbourhood plans and determine applications in the context of an existing local planning framework."

"However, there are serious doubts over whether local communities will possess the skills required to produce a neighbourhood plan capable of delivering the necessary development."

Turley Associates chief executive Rob Lucas said: "The bill is high on principle with neighbourhoods creating their own plans and granting development consents. It is unsurprisingly low on the detail of how this is to be achieved practically and fairly. The stated intention of this planning reform is to achieve more not less development. Whether it will or not may well turn on the willingness of communities and developers to open their minds to

new ways of working; and the attractiveness of the financial incentives soon to be on offer.

"The way in which development is to be promoted in the future will undoubtedly change. In some areas partnerships between neighbourhood, a development provider and local authority may hit the mark and work for the benefit of all. This cannot, however, be relied upon as communities are much more used to saying no and we will need to backstop mechanisms if the country is to be housed and economic development delivered alongside essential infrastructure."

Terence O' Rourke director Haydn Morris said: "There may be much to take issue with in the detail of yet another reform in the planning system, but we believe in taking a step back to look at the bigger picture to promote positive planning. With businesses and communities set to take greater charge of their own futures, the incentive is for change and growth.

"In particular, the private sector has to be the driving force in delivering the development our economy needs, with a responsibility for taking the most sustainable, practicable approach.

"Planning is perceived by many to be a barrier. We have always believed that taking the time to explain the wide ranging benefits of a good scheme should come first in planning, avoiding an obsessive review of a development's fit with policy and any complexities of procedure."

BNP Paribas Real Estate senior planner Justin Cove said: "Sadly, the Bill will continue to raise

far more questions than answers until more detailed guidance is issued. Nevertheless, it has now been released and it is up to local communities, local authorities and the development industry to respond to its challenges.

"A safe assumption is that until further guidance is issued, local government departments realise the full extent of the recent spending cuts and local communities fully embrace their new found status, inevitable delays and confusion lie ahead at a time the development industry and economy can ill afford."

Mel Clinton, director of planning and economic regeneration at Nash Partnership said: "The underlying aim of the Bill - to give local people more influence over the future of their communities - is positive as it has the potential to uncover opportunities that are often overlooked or trampled on by the standardised approaches to development that have been all too common in the past, simply by giving greater power to people who genuinely understand a place.

"However, the introduction of new procedures and measures in relation to planning and development, rather than a simpler shift in emphasis, does create risks, such as the time and resources needed to prepare new neighbourhood development plans, in a period of financial restraint and economic uncertainty, and these will need to be addressed as power is devolved. The Bill for example provides central government with powers to provide financial assistance in relation to such neighbourhood plans and this may well be required if they are to be inclusive, timely and effective"

James Fennell, managing director of Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners said: "NLP's clients now have the chance to help to create true planning partnerships between developers, communities, civic leaders and commercial interests operating in any one area - the active involvement of all these parties then providing for a balanced, enabling framework for future development at the neighbourhood level".