



Select Committee: National Planning Policy Framework

Date: 17th October

Time: 4:20pm

Location: The Grimond Room, Portcullis House

Attendance: John Slaughter, Director of External Affairs, Home Builders Federation; Ian Fletcher, Policy Director, British Property Federation; Sir Simon Jenkins, Chairman, and Ben Cowell, Assistant Director of External Policy, National Trust; Councillor Gary Porter, Local Government Association; Mike Holmes, Planning Officers Society, and Stuart Hylton, Head of Strategic Planning and Transport, Berkshire Authority's Joint Strategic Planning Unit.

Jenkins: National Trust (apparently) up against some "very powerful and rich people"

The Chairman of the National Trust, the Guardian writer Sir Simon Jenkins, has said that he does not regard the Government's National Planning Policy Framework as a "magic bullet" that would resolve the housing crisis in the UK.

Speaking in front of the CLG Select Committee's inquiry to examine whether the NPPF forms an adequate, clear and comprehensive framework of national planning policy, Sir Simon said that he sees "no evidence that the NPPF will increase the pace of development".

"There is a view that the system needs reform, speeding up and localising. Our view is that this document does not deliver these things. To be frank, most of the Ministers involved thought it did. Most people reading this document will not see that, and I don't think this is about economic growth. It is about housing supply for a particular group of developers who want a different sort of land.

The link between the availability of land with planning permission attached and either the state of the housing market or economic growth in general is simply not proven."

Sir Simon added that "anyone who thinks this is going to be a simpler planning system doesn't know planning". He told MPs that there was a "massive" amount of brownfield land already available for building on. Sir Simon, a former editor of the Times, said there was "no shortage" of land available for development across many parts of England and suggested that any relaxation of the planning rules would not necessarily result in more homes being built.

The National Trust was up against "some very powerful and rich people" in the planning debate, suggesting that intense lobbying had taken place.

Warning that the Government will face a similar level of hostility as it did over the proposed NHS reforms, Ben Cowell argued that there needed to be more debate and discussion over the NPPF. The consultation period was short and had taken place over the summer, he noted, saying that the current draft of the presumption in favour of sustainable development was “undefined” and that it could lead to “poor quality” housing.

All witnesses were speaking on the day that the Department of Communities and Local Government ended consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework. Ian Fletcher, of the British Property Federation, said that the frustration built in to the current planning system was that “it takes one or two members of the community to stop a development which has been agreed by the wider community”.

Turning to the creation of the NPPF, Fletcher said that there had been no influence from property developers: “The NPPF was put together by a group of practitioners from different sides, and their draft is pretty close to the Government’s draft so any support given by property developers was nothing to do with this.”

John Slaughter, from the Home Builders Federation, told MPs that “the planning system has not delivered sufficient land for housing development because otherwise we would not have the housing crisis that we do”.

Slaughter was keen to stress too that the consultation process had been carried out in a normal way; “We had a Green Paper before the election about this, but there has been nothing other than a normal discussion process.”

As the session drew to a close it was released that more than 200,000 people have signed the National Trust petition calling on the Government to rethink its planning reforms, the organisation said. According to the Daily Telegraph, which is running a ‘Hands off our Land’ campaign against the NPPF, the precise number of signatures reached was 209,879 as of this morning.

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