



Annual Conference 2011 | Manchester | 2 - 5 October



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**Event:** RTPI

**Present:** Bob Neill MP (BN), Gary Porter, LGA (GP) Jeremy Fieldsend, Local Dialogue (JF) Trudy Elliot  
RTPI Chief Executive (TE)

**Venue:** The Palace Hotel, Oxford Street, Manchester

**Date:** Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October

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**Overview: -**

- The Minister throughout the event remained reserved in his stance on the recent campaigns by the National Trust/CPRE and suggested he would not want to pre-empt the closure of the consultation on the NPPF. It can be inferred that whilst the Government may make minor changes and tighten the wording, the fundamentals of the NPPF will be maintained.
- A large proportion of the audience were either Councillors or representatives of a Local Authority and as such many of the questions reflected the sentiments of Local Authorities. The key theme to emerge was the timeframe for Local Plans to be implemented.

**Key points:**

- BN suggested it was good to see planning rising the ranks of the political agenda as it is vital to get a system which works for “delivering growth in the economy and the communities we all want.”
- BN reiterated the NPPF/Localism Bills intention to remove the obstacles in planning and ensuring the reformed framework provides a system which is no longer adversarial. Proposals ensure planning is not “done to you” but is inclusive through entrenching pre-application discussions. The removal of the pre-determination rule means elected representatives will be able to take a much more involved role.
- BN wanted to suggest that the planning system in England will have to provide growth and that proposed reforms are aimed at allowing the country to maintain an international competitiveness to its planning system.
- BN suggested that the NPPF is still out for consultation and that details will emerge once it has concluded. He suggested that the Government is still in “listening mode” and that it will take on board all valid and relevant feedback. He maintained his opinion and suggested that the view of Joe Harper QC was correct in that much of the recent debate has been “ill informed.”
- GP began by saying the LGA is broadly supportive of the reforms to the planning system however he wanted to have assurance from the Government that transitional arrangements will be taken in to account in order for Local Plans/Neighbourhood Plans to be in place.
- GP also suggested there was disjoin between the Government agenda and the actions of The Planning Inspectorate.

- JF wanted to highlight that where local communities are involved in the planning process and the drafting of Neighbourhood Plans, it is largely reactionary, as a controversial planning application has been brought forward. The Government needs to be able to set in place procedures which enable the “silent majority” to express their views on development and to weight different responses appropriately.
- TE wanted to encourage everyone to take the time to respond to the consultation and to put their views to the Government in order to inform the process. She wanted to suggest that it is clear “the NPPF does need a bit of work” and that if Local Plans are going to be key to the planning system then there must be a period of time for Local Authorities to get these right.
- TE also wanted to suggest that the RTPI would like to see either in this NPPF or in subsequent policy a spatial vision for England to help local communities understand the context within which they are making decisions on housing.
- TE wanted to address the title of the event by suggesting that the current economic situation means that Localism will have to provide growth within the UK and that the RTPI is supportive of the sentiment of the NPPF and the Localism Bill.

#### Q&A Session:

- BN in response to a question on whether the Government will listen to the consultation suggested that of course all of the valid feedback on the NPPF will be taken into account.
- A question was put to the panel on the potential of lacking political will to carry out the planning reform. BN wanted to reiterate that many Local Authorities he has dealt with have expressed their ambitions to work in the new system. GP suggested that the LGA has been given funding to run training for Local Authorities and there are procedures in place to train their members.
- A representative from Property Week asked whether a timeframe could be given on the drawing up of Local Plans. BN maintained his commitment to the NPPF consultation and would not be drawn on the details.
- Andrew Thompson from BNP Paribas suggested that planning is coming under criticism for not delivering housing and as such it was essential for a deadline for Local Plans to be put in place in order for there not to be any further delay. BN again reiterated that the NPPF consultation is still ongoing however appreciated the urgency of the matter.
- Asked whether he would provide his definition of sustainable development BN unsurprisingly commented that the Prime Minister “got it right” in his response letter to the National Trust but that all comments or refinement being proposed through the consultation process will inform the final definition of sustainable development.