

Localism Bill Report Stage



HOME BUILDERS FEDERATION BRIEFING

MAY 2011

The Home Builders Federation represents the £20billion house building industry in England and Wales. Our members deliver 80% of the new homes built each year.

In 2010, fewer homes were built than in any peacetime year since 1923

WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A HOUSING CRISIS:

- In 2010, England saw the lowest peacetime house building rate since 1923 – just 103,000 completions.
- Affordability has plummeted – in the last 40 years the average house price to salary ratio has almost doubled; the price of the average home purchased is now almost 5x the average annual salary of the buyer.
- First time buyer numbers are at record lows. The average age of unassisted first-time buyers is soaring, and close to a fifth of women and a third of men aged between 20 and 34 are still living at home.
- Social Housing Waiting Lists have almost doubled in the last 13 years to 1.75 million households; around 5 million people are waiting for a home.

LOCALISM BILL - GENERAL

In this environment and taking into account the Government's commitment to building more homes, the Localism Bill must be pro growth and pro development, removing unnecessary barriers to house building and bureaucratic red tape. Localism must not create inequality and a lack of transparency, it must result in a greater certainty that the houses that this country so desperately needs can be built in an economically viable way in the most sustainable locations.

The government are proposing to introduce a general presumption in favour of sustainable development. This presumption is a keystone to ensuring that communities and local authorities while benefiting from more powers also recognise their responsibilities to ensure that development to meet their needs comes forward in a structured and timely way.

The need for locally informed and development-specific decision-making means this presumption should most appropriately be a part of the National Planning Policy Framework to promote positive and innovative planning.

LOCALISM BILL - SPECIFICS

Part 4 Chapter 1

It should be recognised that the planning system already enables public engagement, consultation and empowerment. It is vital that any proposals to increase these powers consider possible unintended consequences – for example, on the speed and efficiency of the planning process and the wider public need.

Above the increased community empowerment and consultation created through Part 5, we are concerned that Part 4 Chapter 1 creates the requirement for a local referendum if demanded by a very small minority - just 5% - of the voting population. This could cut across agreed proposals resulting from the enhanced Part 5 procedures.

Part 4 Chapter 4

The Government has attached great importance to the listing of community assets, allowing local communities to have the ability to take control of those facilities and services that the community itself values. However, we believe that where a decision has been made through the planning process this decision should not be subject to further review through the community assets procedure. This would potentially introduce unnecessary uncertainty and delay to the development process. Thus any land or building with the benefit of an extant planning permission should be excluded from the community assets listing process.

Part 5

Any changes to the planning system must be fit for purpose for use by communities and neighbourhoods. New processes for neighbourhood plans, neighbourhood development orders and the community right to build must be easy to understand and simple to implement and allow for business involvement. Development plans must ensure that policy requirements are viable for developments within the area covered.

The Duty to Co-operate within the Bill is fundamental to a functioning planning system – we were previously concerned that this duty for neighbouring authorities and communities to work together needed considerably strengthening if issues of larger than local impact are to be adequately incorporated into development plans. To that end, we welcome the new amendment tabled by the Government addressing this issue as a positive and significant step in the right direction.

John Slaughter
Director of External Affairs

Home Builders Federation (HBF)
1st Floor Byron House
7-9 St James's Street
London
SW1A 1EE

T: 0207 960 1600
F: 0207 960 1601
E: info@hbf.co.uk
W: www.hbf.co.uk