

## Neighbourhood planning can deliver more and better development, with local support, says new Localis report

Localis, in partnership with Birmingham City Council and Land Securities, is today launching a major report that concludes that neighbourhood plans **can deliver a more positive attitude to planning** from all involved, and ultimately help drive national growth, from the bottom up, in the years ahead.

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL REPORT](#)

Neighbourhood planning offers communities radically increased powers to shape their locality.<sup>1</sup> Within a decade, the government has estimated, **over half of all English neighbourhoods will have instigated a plan.**<sup>2</sup> By the next General Election over 1,100 neighbourhoods will fall into this category, equating to around 15% of English electoral wards.

**'Power to the People: The Future of Planning in a Localist Landscape'** – produced in partnership with Birmingham City Council, Land Securities and Quod Planning – outlines a **series of case studies from across the country**, using them to illustrate recent trends in resident participation, and draw out the key lessons for future best practice.

One of the key lessons derived from these case studies is that **councils have a crucial leadership role to play**, including acting as 'honest brokers' between developer and resident interests, and providing an overarching strategic vision for delivering growth. The case studies also suggest that **early engagement leads to better outcomes**, and that councils and developers should therefore capitalise on opportunities to trigger community involvement.

The report, authored by Professor Chris Balch of Plymouth University, illustrates how residents, developers and authorities all have much to gain from **a more open system built upon co-operation**. In particular, the report scotches fears that neighbourhood planning will be hijacked by NIMBYs, leading to further delays in the delivery of much needed new housing.<sup>3</sup>

Instead, the report argues that **giving people a stake in planning their neighbourhoods** not only **fosters a greater trust** in the planning process, but can **deliver incremental development** which creates growth but does not lead to untrammelled development regardless of community views. It also suggests that by capturing the views of every element of the community including previously hard to reach groups, the new system has the potential to **change perceptions of planning for the better**, and **produce outcomes more reflective of local feeling**.

The report offers a series of **recommendations** for local and central government, as well as developers and community planners. These include:

- **Neighbourhood Planning must be sufficiently resourced** – Central government must work with local authorities to ensure the plans are funded (from either public or private source) in a way that genuinely empowers communities to shape the future of their local areas. The report also suggests that local authorities should consider allocating a specific proportion of development incentives (the Community Infrastructure Levy and New Homes Bonus) to fund neighbourhood plans.
- **Central government** must articulate the virtues of planning, and ensure that local authorities are suitably incentivised to quickly formulate their Local Plans following the instigation of the new system.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Localism Bill gives specific powers for neighbourhood groups (parish councils and newly created neighbourhood forums of 21 people and over) to instigate and create plans that are then subject to local referenda.

<sup>2</sup> See DCLG Impact Assessment, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1829678.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> In 2010 only 103,300 houses were built in England [CLG Live Table 213 House building: permanent dwellings started and completed, by tenure, England (quarterly)], the lowest number since 1923. Currently an additional 232,000 households are currently formed every year [CLG Table 401: Household projections, United Kingdom, 1961-2033].

- **Local planning authorities** should intervene to resource future community planners with the means to plan, and devolve incentives (principally the New Homes Bonus and Community Infrastructure Levy) to the lowest possible level.
- **Developers** should view the process as an opportunity for collaboration, and the creation of a more efficient, less confrontational planning system
- **Communities** must foster existing local capabilities, and attempt to bring more people into the process.

**Alex Thomson**, Chief Executive of Localis, said:

*“The Government’s neighbourhood planning proposals will put real power in the hands of local communities. This report shows that everybody has much to gain from a more open, collaborative approach to planning, and offers some timely recommendations for communities, developers and local and national government as to how this can be achieved.”*

**ENDS**

---

**For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:**

Dominic Rustecki on 07976 880698 / [dominic.rustecki@localis.org.uk](mailto:dominic.rustecki@localis.org.uk)

*Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to local government and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold a calendar of events and facilitate an ever growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK. Please visit [www.localis.org.uk](http://www.localis.org.uk) for more information.*

## Notes for Editors

1. Localis will be launching ‘Power to the People’ at the Conservative Party conference on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Speakers at the event included Rt. Hon. Greg Clark MP, Cllr Ravi Govindia (Leader, London Borough of Wandsworth) and Emma Cariaga (Development Director, Land Securities). For more details of the launch event, please visit <http://www.localis.org.uk/article/867/Power-to-the-People:-Can-neighbourhoods-be-trusted-with-planning?.htm>
2. The full recommendations from the report are as follows:

## Recommendations for Central Government

1. Central government must articulate the virtues of positive planning. If local communities previously more attuned to opposing development than helping to create it are to be encouraged, they will need to see palpable ‘buy in’ from Whitehall – in the form of public endorsement. A willingness not to intervene in local planning decisions would also be welcomed.
2. DCLG must work with local authorities to ensure the resources are in place for neighbourhood planning.
3. The Government must keep the successes and failings of neighbourhood planning continually under review, particularly given the projected increase in the number of neighbourhood plans.
4. The issues that trigger neighbourhood planning will not always necessitate, or be best resolved by, a statutory development plan. Community Right to Build, for instance, may be more viable when dealing with smaller scale developments. Likewise, supplementary planning documents or informal masterplans should be considered as useful tools for planning at the local level. All stakeholders must weigh up the costs and benefits of neighbourhood planning, and be encouraged to do so by central government.
5. Most immediately, the National Planning Policy Framework must be clear, comprehensible and guiding but not prescriptive for community planners.

## Recommendations for Local Planning Authorities

1. The LPA should seek to identify the community planners of the future. Establishing as wide a base as possible of community planners – particularly amongst the young – must be a key task. Use of existing authority multimedia platforms will help here, as well as creative use of websites likely to draw a younger audience.

2. Local authorities should be prepared to intervene (through offering the time, where possible, of officers, and lending comprehensible planning guidelines) to ensure an effective transition period at the start of the new system, and thereby maintain confidence levels in the fledgling process.
3. LPAs should provide clear information to communities on how Neighbourhood Planning works, the process, and how it fits with the strategic policies for their area. Directing such groups to bodies such as Planning Aid is a useful first step.
4. Local authorities must ensure a 'meaningful' proportion of CIL monies go to communities as per the NPPF, and scope out priorities for using this revenue amongst local residents.
5. Local authorities should consider allocating a proportion of incentive monies collected to fund future neighbourhood plans.

### **Recommendations for communities**

1. Communities should recognise that they have much to gain from adopting a pragmatic stance on planning. In some cases it should be helpful for communities to look beyond just incremental development generated by immediate needs and instead seek to future proof the neighbourhood by planning for a much longer period.
2. To ensure maximum community buy-in, opinion as to the best uses of incentive money should be widely canvassed. This process should also prove helpful in identifying potential neighbourhood planning leaders.
3. Communities should engage with development interests at an early stage in the planning process. This will provide opportunities to resource the neighbourhood plan, utilise business skill sets (and finance) to train the next generation of planners, and potentially gain access to CIL/NHB monies at a quicker rate.

### **Recommendations for development interests**

1. Developers should engage with communities as early as possible. The extra delays and costs incurred in council based wrangling often amount to the amount an additional CIL (or s106) charge would have constituted, so there is nothing to be gained by being adversarial.
2. Developers must present their case in an even handed fashion. Neighbourhood plans will need to pass a referendum, and there is little to be gained by winning one such vote on a misleading platform, if it leads to further engendering of distrust between the public and 'big business.'
3. Developers should look forward beyond consultation to delivery including ongoing partnership working such as consideration of asset endowment and the establishment of trusts or other longer term vehicles. By doing so they can demonstrate they have a long term interest in, and can become part of, the neighbourhood.
4. The involvement of small, local businesses in any proposed schemes should be actively encouraged by the private sector. Perceptions about large scale development are not universally positive, but the use of SMEs (which often possess greater links with the locality) can help secure a more sympathetic hearing from residents.
5. Developers should consider helping fund neighbourhood plans. Whilst the neighbourhood planning process must remain independent, it also needs to be resourced. Funding a plan can not only enshrine the legal framework necessary to develop, but help secure community buy-in.