

# The Localism Bill - impacts on planning

(all texts are from 'A plain English guide to the Localism Bill' - [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1818597.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1818597.pdf))

*“Reform to make the planning system clearer, more democratic and more effective”*

“The planning system helps decide who can build what, where and how. It makes sure that buildings and structures that the country needs (including homes, offices, schools, hospitals, roads, train lines, power stations, water pipes, reservoirs and more) get built in the right place and to the right standards. A good planning system is essential for the economy, environment and society”.

“There are, however, some significant flaws in the planning system as it stands. Planning does not give members of the public enough influence over decisions that make a big difference to their lives. Too often, power is exercised by people who are not directly affected by the decisions they are making. This means, understandably, that people often resent what they see as decisions and plans being forced on them. The result is a confrontational system where many applications end up being fought over.”

The Localism Bill contains proposals to make the planning system clearer, more democratic, and more effective.

## **Abolition of regional strategies**

“Regional strategies” were first required by law in 2004. These strategies set out where new development needs to take place in each part of the country. They include housing targets for different areas, set by central government. Local communities had relatively limited opportunities to influence the strategies. The Government thinks that this centrally-driven approach to development is bureaucratic and undemocratic. “

## **Neighbourhood planning**

“The Bill will introduce a new right for communities to draw up a “neighbourhood development plan.” Neighbourhood planning will allow people to come together through a local parish council or neighbourhood forum and say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go – and what they should look like. These neighbourhood development plans could be very simple, or go into considerable detail where people want. Local communities would also be able to grant full or outline planning permission in areas where they most want to see new homes and businesses, making it easier and quicker for development to go ahead.

Provided a neighbourhood development plan is in line with national planning policy, with the strategic vision for the wider area set by the local authority, and with other legal requirements, local people will be able to vote on it in a referendum. If the plan is approved by a majority, then the local authority will bring it into force.

Local planning authorities will be required to provide technical advice and support as neighbourhoods draw up their plans. The Government will also fund sources of help and advice for communities. This will help people take advantage of the opportunity to exercise influence over decisions that make a big difference to their lives.

### **Community right to build**

The Bill will give groups of local people the ability to bring forward small developments. These might include new homes, businesses and shops. The benefits of the development, for example, profits made from letting the homes, will stay within the community.

### **Requirement to consult communities before submitting very large planning applications**

To further strengthen the role of local communities in planning, the Bill will introduce a new requirement for developers to consult local communities before submitting planning applications for very large developments. This will give local people a chance to comment when there is still genuine scope to make changes to proposals.

### **Strengthening enforcement rules**

For people to have a real sense that the planning system is working for them, they need to know that the rules they draw up will be respected. The Localism Bill will strengthen planning authorities' powers to tackle abuses of the planning system, such as making deliberately misleading planning applications.

### **Reforming the community infrastructure levy**

The Localism Bill proposes changes to the community infrastructure levy to make it more flexible. It will allow the money raised to be spent on maintaining infrastructure, as well as building new infrastructure. It will give local authorities greater freedom in setting the rate that developers should pay in different areas. It will give the Government the power to require that some of the money raised goes directly to the neighbourhoods where development takes place. This will help ensure that the people who say "yes" to new development feel the benefit of that decision.

### **Reform the way local plans are made**

The Localism Bill will limit the discretion of planning inspectors to insert their own wording into local plans. It will also ensure that rather than focusing on reporting plans' progress to central government, authorities focus on reporting progress to local communities.

### **Duty to cooperate**

Not all planning decisions can, or should, be made at a neighbourhood or local level. In many cases there are very strong reasons for neighbouring local authorities, or groups of authorities, to work together on planning issues in the interests of all their local residents. This might include working together on environmental issues (like flooding), public transport networks (such as trams), or major new retail parks.

In the past, "regional strategies formed an unaccountable bureaucratic layer on top of local government". Instead, the Government thinks that local authorities and other public bodies should work together on planning issues in ways that reflect genuine shared interests and opportunities to make common cause. The duty will require local authorities and other public bodies to work together on planning issues.

### **Nationally significant infrastructure projects**

"Some planning decisions are so important to our overall economy and society that they can only be taken at a national level. These include decisions on nationally significant infrastructure projects such as major train lines and power stations. Currently, these decisions lie in the hands of an unelected public body, called the Infrastructure Planning Commission. It is not directly accountable to the public. The Government thinks that these important decisions should be taken by Government Ministers, who are democratically accountable to the public."