

## **Introduction**

1. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe, with over 23,000 members who serve in the public service and as advisors in the private sector. It is a charity with the purpose to develop the art and science of town planning for the benefit of the public as a whole. As well as promoting spatial planning, RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, training and development.
2. The RTPI very much welcomes the focus of this Inquiry as we believe that the localism agenda both provides challenging opportunities for spatial planning and raises real issues, which are covered below, on the relationship between strategic policy making and decision taking and local policy, action and responsibility.
3. We have noted the terms of reference of the Inquiry and the topics in which the Committee is particularly interested. In this evidence we deal with those aspects of localism that relate specifically to spatial planning and investment. Following an initial statement of the RTPI's views on localism and planning and a general introduction covering the nature of localism, we address the first three of the Committee's specific questions:
  - the extent to which decentralisation leads to more effective public service delivery; and what the limits are, or should be, of localism;
  - the lessons for decentralisation from Total Place, and the potential to build on the work done under that initiative, particularly through place-based budgeting;
  - the role of local government in a decentralised model of local public service delivery and the extent to which localism can, and should, extend to other local agents;
4. The RTPI is well aware that, ultimately, the driving force behind the ability of this country to deliver the economic, social and environmental policies that it needs and our ability to plan for their delivery lies with key government policy related to the deficit to an even greater degree than those related to localism. As the May 2010 Coalition agreement stated:

*We need immediate action to tackle the deficit in a fair and responsible way, ensure that taxpayers' money is spent responsibly, and get the public finances back on track. We recognise that deficit reduction, and continuing to ensure economic recovery, is the most urgent issue facing Britain.*

The comments the RTPI makes in this evidence should be read within this context.

## The RTPI's Position

5. The Minister for Decentralisation, Rt. Hon. Greg Clark MP, told the 2010 RTPI Planning Convention that:

*the Prime Minister has made decentralisation not just a theme of his government, but the theme ....*

The concept of localism, by other names is not new to planning. Indeed, it can be said to have been at the heart of planning since planning became a statutory function. The statement below can be seen to embody key aspects of localism:

*It is not merely landowners in the area who are affected or even business interests. Too often in the past the objections of a noisy minority have been allowed to drown the voices of other people vitally affected. These too must have their say, and when they have had it, the provisional plan may need a good deal of alteration, but it will be all the better for that since it will reflect actual needs democratically expressed. In the past, plans have been too much the plans of officials and not the plans of individuals, but I hope we are going to stop that.<sup>1</sup>*

6. Interestingly, the statement was made over 60 years ago - by Rt. Hon. Lewis Silkin MP in introducing the Town and Country Planning Bill into the Commons in 1947.
7. This focus on local communities being given a real opportunity to influence to future of their areas has continued in planning guidance and in practice. In 1968, the Government commissioned Arthur Skeffington MP to hold an inquiry into participation in planning. This report<sup>2</sup> found that:

*Planning is a prime example of the need for this participation, for it affects everybody. People should be able to say what kind of community they want and how it should develop: and should be able to do so in a way that is positive and first-hand. It matters to us all that we should now that we can influence the shape of our community so that the towns and villages in which we live, work, learn and relax may reflect our best aspirations.*

8. Current guidance, in the form of Planning Policy Statement (PPS1) Delivering Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup>, states that:

*Plans should be drawn up with community involvement and present a shared vision and strategy of how the area should develop to achieve more sustainable patterns of development.*

9. Planners have often been at the forefront of developing techniques for involving local communities in decision making on planning. A key part of this work is Planning Aid. Planning Aid is a service run by the RTPI that relies on professional members of the RTPI giving their time and expertise on a voluntary basis to work with communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay for such advice. In many ways, Planning Aid epitomises the desirable attributes of the 'Big Society', which it pre-dated it by some 35 years<sup>4</sup> The 2009/10 annual review of Planning Aid England shows that for every one

### footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rt. Hon. Lewis Silkin MP, House of Commons, 3rd Reading of Town and Country Planning Bill, 1947

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Housing & Local Government et al (1969) *People and Planning*, HMSO

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/planningpolicystatement1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Planning Aid was started by the Town and Country Planning Association in 1975

hour of time spent by a paid Planning Aid Advisor, an additional five hours was added through voluntary time spent by planning professionals.

10. It is against this background of a proven track record of community involvement in planning and an active role in supporting communities that the RTPi welcomes the principles behind localism. Before the 2010 election, the RTPi had already committed itself to:

*work with government and Planning Aid England to lead moves to develop a new relationship between communities, elected representatives and planning practitioners built on trust, mutual acknowledgement of skills and knowledge and a rigorously professional approach.*

11. The importance of planning in the localist agenda is demonstrated very clearly by the fact that it is the Minister for Decentralisation who is the Minister also responsible for planning. This puts planning at the heart of Government moves on decentralisation.

## What is Localism?

12. Before examining specific aspects of localism in relation to spatial planning it is worth setting a context by looking at the origins of localism in relation to planning.
13. Localism<sup>5</sup> as a concept and a reality is nothing new. Indeed an article in 1975 suggested that a history of localism in 17<sup>th</sup> Century England was exported with the first British settlers in Massachusetts to form the basis of U.S. governance<sup>6</sup>.
14. Nor is it new to thinking related to governance<sup>7</sup> and to the roles of planning and delivery. For example, Prof. Janice Morphet was bringing it to the attention of planners in 2004<sup>8</sup>. She related localism to actions that were being taken by the then – Labour – administration including Local Area Agreements and to a reaction against centrally imposed but locally delivered targets – a theme to which this evidence will return.
15. The emergence of the concept of localism into the more recent political arena comes from two different strands of thinking. The first is the attack on centralisation. In 2003, Greg Clark, now the Government's Minister for Decentralisation but then at the Conservative Party policy unit wrote a report<sup>9</sup> attacking what the report called 'Labour's Command State'. This confirmed that thinking about localism was shared between political parties but seeking to take Conservative thinking further:

### footnotes

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting discussion on the overall meaning of localism see the *Transition Culture* website <http://transitionculture.org/2010/07/30/localism-or-localisation-defining-our-terms/>

<sup>6</sup> Breen, T. H. (1975) 'Persistent Localism: English Social Change and the Shaping of New England Institutions', *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan.), pp. 3-28 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1922592?seq=5>

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Goetz, Edward G. and Clarke, Susan E (1993) *The new localism: Comparative urban politics in a global era*, Sage Publications; and Stoker, G. (2007) *New Localism, Participation and Networked Community Governance*. University of Manchester, UK / Institute for Political and Economic Governance

<sup>8</sup> Morphet, J. (2004) 'The New Localism' *Town and Country Planning*, 73 (10). 291-3.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, Greg and Mather, James (eds.) (2003) *Total Politics – Labour's Command State*, Conservative Policy Unit, ISBN: 0-9544917-3-4 <http://www.conservatives.com/pdf/totalpolitics0903.pdf>

*We're not the only ones to point to the problems of the centralised state. It's easy enough to bandy around the rhetoric of decentralising reforms – even the Government say they're committed to a 'new localism.' But until such an abstract concept is turned into something more meaningful, it will never amount to anything more than fine words.*

16. The second strand of thinking is an approach to devolve power exemplified by a speech given in the same year to the "Demos" group by Alan Milburn MP, entitled *Localism: The need for a new settlement*.
17. Two years later, Rt. Hon. David Miliband MP who was then Minister for Local Government, put this latter stream of thought into a sound bite when he spoke to the NCVO annual conference<sup>10</sup> about:  
*the reform of local government - the double devolution of power from the central government to local government, and from local government to citizens and communities.*
18. The rhetoric of double devolution has been adopted by the Coalition Government<sup>11</sup> to explain the concept of localism. But so too has the branch of thinking that looks more at dismantling the centre and less at empowering the local.
19. Perhaps the most direct influence on thinking specifically on localism and planning was David Cameron's 'favourite think-tank'<sup>12</sup>, the Policy Exchange and, in particular, a 2006 report *Better Homes, Greener Cities*<sup>13</sup>. This recommended, *inter alia*, that:  
*The planning system should be localised, with local authorities being placed in charge of densities, brown vs. green field ratios, design codes and Green Belt designation. .... The planning system should be made more flexible, with greater freedom to change between planning designations and an extension of permitted development rights. and that*  
  
*Receipts from existing taxes associated with new development, such as Council Tax and business rates, should be hypothecated to the local authority.*<sup>14</sup>
20. The other side of the localist coin is a rejection of a centralised state – almost from nanny-state to nano-state. The attack on centralisation is exemplified by a typically robust report in 2004 by Simon Jenkins for the Policy Exchange and Localis<sup>15</sup>. Simon Jenkins' view of the centralist state may well ring true with those who were working in planning at the start of the century:

#### footnotes

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/feb/21/localgovernment.politics1>

<sup>11</sup> Bob Neill MP at Councillors' Planning Summer School, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2010

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/the-intellectual-heart-of-camerons-conservatism-897549.html>

<sup>13</sup> See also, for example, Evans, A W. and Hartwich, O M (2007) *The best laid plans: How planning prevents economic growth*, the Policy Exchange

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/pub\\_52\\_-\\_full\\_publication.pdf](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/pub_52_-_full_publication.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Evans, A and Hartwich, O. M. (2006) *Better Homes, Greener Cities*, Policy Exchange & Localis  
[http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Better\\_Homes\\_Greener\\_Cities.pdf](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Better_Homes_Greener_Cities.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Jenkins, Simon (2004) *Big Bang Localism*, Policy Exchange Ltd, November  
[http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/assets/big\\_bang\\_localism.pdf](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/assets/big_bang_localism.pdf)

*After Mr Blair's second victory in 2001, the main agencies of centralism, the Treasury, Cabinet Office and Audit Commission, went near berserk. Public administration was overwhelmed with targetry and inspection. Consultants devised ever more fantastic schemes to fast-track, ring-fence and "silo" policy. One official described Downing Street as like Earl Haig's headquarters in the Great War, mechanically shovelling tens of thousands of inspectors over the top to gain six yards of improved service delivery. The period was one of "chaotic centralism".*

21. A reference to academic work on localism appeared in the Conservative Party's pre-election Green Paper, *Open Source Planning*<sup>16</sup>. This document forms the basis for the great majority of the changes to the planning system and to planning practice which have been made (see below) and which are to be embedded in the forthcoming Decentralisation and Localism Bill. This Green Paper stated that:

*Recent academic research has found collaborative democracy – the idea that citizens should be actively involved in making the kind of decisions hitherto reserved for bureaucrats and elected representatives – to be a highly successful concept.*
22. One of the recurring themes in Government statements about localism reflected in the statement above is that it is a natural human urge to work co-operatively to achieve goals. For example, Bob Neill, MP, the Communities and Local Government Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, told the Planning Summer School in September 2010 that localism is "going with the grain of human nature".
23. This interest in human nature – and the academic research referred to in *Open Source Planning* - comes from a school of thinking that is one of the drivers behind localism. It derives from Richard H Thaler, Professor of Behavioural Science and Economics at the University of Chicago and an adviser to the Conservative Party. In 2008 he wrote a book with fellow Chicago University Professor, Cass R. Sunstein, called *Nudge*<sup>17</sup> which encapsulated his thinking. It puts forward an approach that it terms 'libertarian paternalism' which is achieved through designing and putting into place an 'architecture of choice'. One of the basic premises of this book is that:

*In many domains, including environmental protection ...., we [argue] that better governance requires less in the way of government coercion and constraint, and more in the way of freedom to choose. If incentives and nudges replace requirements and bans, government will be both smaller and more modest.*

## **Localism and spatial planning**

24. As far as planning is concerned, the anti-centralist aspect of localism has been far more apparent thus far. The first four months of the Coalition Government's administration have been characterised more by the dismantling of central apparatus rather than by building up the capacities at local level. The antipathy to a directive system has been very apparent. The mood was set by, amongst others, the Policy Exchange which stated that:

### **footnotes**

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2010/02/New\\_homes\\_and\\_jobs\\_through\\_Open\\_Source\\_Planning.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/02/New_homes_and_jobs_through_Open_Source_Planning.aspx)

<sup>17</sup> Thaler, Richard H, and Sunstein, Cass R (2009) *Nudge*, Penguin Books

*... we have had a Soviet style centrally planned system of housing provision imposed on us because it suits various interests. And we know from our experience with the Soviet Union how successful a centrally planned economy can be in providing what consumers want!*<sup>18</sup>

25. The use of strong language to re-inforce this antipathy to key aspects of the pre-Coalition planning system has carried over from opposition to Government. Rt. Hon. Greg Clark MP stated on the day that Regional Spatial Strategies were revoked:
- Today is another significant step in the Coalition Government's drive to transfer powers from remote bureaucracies to local communities. Regional edicts, which allowed communities no say, injected poison into the planning system which stymied development.*<sup>19</sup>
26. In trying to map the demise of parts of the system, there is both the danger that that such a map omits key aspects of a plethora of statements since the end of May and the real possibility that further initiatives will have been taken while the Committee is conducting this Inquiry. However, the following list shows the extent to which a dismantling of aspects of the planning system has already taken place some five months into the tenure of the current administration:
- The Audit Commission
  - Circular 01/06 on Gypsies
  - Circular 04/07 on Travelling Show People
  - Commission for Rural Communities
  - Comprehensive Area Assessment
  - 'Garden Grabbing'
  - Housing Density Standard
  - Government Offices for the Regions
  - Housing & Planning Delivery Grant
  - Housing Targets
  - Infrastructure Planning Commission
  - National Housing and Planning Advice Unit
  - Sustainable Development Commission
  - Regional Development Agencies
  - Regional Leaders' Boards
  - Regional Partnership Boards
  - Regional Spatial Strategies
  - Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution
27. The list of initiatives that the Government has put into place to fill some of the voids left by the actions listed above is a shorter list than the foregoing one. For the purposes of this evidence, it is worth dividing these new initiatives into those that might be seen as a replacement for the 'top down' system that existed before and those that might be seen as the start of the creation of an 'architecture of choice' for local communities.

#### **footnotes**

<sup>18</sup> Evans, A and Hartwich, O. M. (2006) *Better Homes, Greener Cities*, Policy Exchange and Localis  
<sup>19</sup> DCLG Press Release: 6<sup>th</sup> July 2010

28. Those initiatives that fall within the first category include: a proposed 'duty to co-operate' and joint planning as well as the Regional Growth Fund, Local Enterprise Partnerships; and a proposed White Paper on Local and Regional Growth.
29. Those initiatives that can be seen to accord with the stream of thinking on localism that seeks to create local choice and allow for local responsibility include: Local Housing Trusts/Community Right to Build; and 'incentives' – notably the New Homes Bonus and Business Growth Bonus with the additional more recent announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister that Tax Increment Financing (TIF) schemes were to be trialled.
30. The RTPI has set out its thinking on the initiatives, and their possible effects of spatial planning, in its evidence to this Select Committee's parallel inquiry into *The Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies* and would be happy to expand these comments in the context of localism should the Committee find this useful.

## **The extent to which decentralisation leads to more effective public service delivery; and what the limits are, or should be, of localism**

### **Public service delivery**

31. Given that, as has been shown above, local decision making and community involvement has been at the heart of planning for over 60 years, the new localism agenda *per se* may not have a major impact on the delivery of a planning service. However, the RTPI is more concerned that a number of individual Government initiatives taken in the name of localism may have a more direct effect on .
32. As stated above, the RTPI has examined some of these initiatives in its evidence to the Select Committee's parallel inquiry into *The Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies*.

### **The limits to localism**

33. One of the ways in which the Government's localist 'architecture of choice' may be tested is how it deals with the tension between the perceived need for central policy, direction and, perhaps, decision making on certain issues and the commitment to subsidiarity.
34. This tension was expressed in a study which the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) commissioned from the Tavistock Institute in 2006. This study concluded:

*The shape of local governance in 2015 hinges on how the government answers the following question: are the risks it would incur in introducing a genuinely devolved form of governance (in terms of a likely variability in performance of more empowered local agencies) greater than the risk that a less devolved, more uniform approach simply could not respond to diverse needs of local communities in ten years time?*<sup>20</sup>

### **footnotes**

<sup>20</sup> The Tavistock Institute, SOLON Consultants, Local Government Information Unit (2006) *All Our Futures, The challenges for local governance in 2015*, April, ODPM

35. The same dilemma has been brought up-to-date in the report of the Government's Foresight Project on *Land Use Futures* under the heading of *The need for an overarching perspective*:
- Some local decisions relating to development are heavily controlled, and are guided by planning policy that requires important issues such as the effect on the natural environment to be factored in. However, it can be unclear which issues take priority, whether the cumulative effect of such decisions is recognised, and how strategically important or unique the effect of a given change in that location may be.*<sup>21</sup>
36. All this is not to say that the Government does not recognise the need for some form of strategic planning. First, the Coalition Government has announced a series of initiatives at the national level. These include a commitment in the Coalition Agreement, published on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010<sup>22</sup>, that:
- We will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities.*
37. The Government also stated in the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 Budget Report<sup>23</sup> that:
- In the autumn, the Government will publish a national infrastructure plan that will set out goals for UK infrastructure. This will include priority public and private sector investments and proposals for delivering and supporting investment on a cross-sector basis.*<sup>24</sup>
38. At the next 'level down', the Government have accepted the need for some form – or forms – of planning to replace the revoked RSSs, with the Minister for Decentralisation stating that:
- There is, of course, a space for democratic decision making that is larger than the local, but smaller than the national. It's just nothing like the model imposed upon us by the previous administration.*<sup>25</sup>
39. The dilemmas inherent in a directive versus a choice-based approach is best illustrated through three current examples.
40. The first relates to the need for national infrastructure to support development. On his first hearing with the Transport Select Committee, one of its members asked Rt. Hon. Philip Hammond MP, the Secretary of State for Transport whether:
- ... the government's commitment to HS2 does not quite sit that well with the government's commitment to giving local communities a veto over major infrastructure projects?*

#### footnotes (cont.)

- <sup>21</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/143822.pdf>  
Government Office for Science (2010) *Land Use Futures: Making the most of land in the 21st century*, Government Office for Science
- <sup>22</sup> [http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Land%20Use/luf\\_report/8507-BIS-Land\\_Use\\_Futures-WEB.pdf](http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Land%20Use/luf_report/8507-BIS-Land_Use_Futures-WEB.pdf)  
HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: our programme for government*
- <sup>23</sup> [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg\\_coalition.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf)  
HM Treasury (2010) *Budget 2010*, HM Stationery Office, Para 1.83
- <sup>24</sup> [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget\\_complete.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget_complete.pdf)  
Infrastructure UK was first announced in the previous administration's 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009 Pre-Budget Report
- <sup>25</sup> Rt. Hon. Greg Clark MP, 2010 LGA Conference

41. The Secretary of State replied that:  
*No local community can ever have a veto over major infrastructure projects. Clearly, one of the functions of government is to balance the national benefits that come from a major infrastructure investment with the local disbenefits and actually that is a very, very difficult thing to do. It is very easy to look at the clear business case for a piece of infrastructure investment and much more difficult to explain to people – small numbers of people sometimes – who are very directly and very adversely affected why it is right that their interests must be sacrificed to the wider, national interests....*<sup>26</sup>  
 It would appear to the RTPI that this statement does indicate one of the potential limits to localism.
42. The second example is open land protection. The Coalition Agreement states:  
*We will maintain the Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and other environmental protections, ....*  
 It is not known how, in practical terms, a localist agenda which offers local choice will enable this Government commitment to be achieved.
43. The third example is the 'Community Right to Build'. The Decentralisation Minister has recently announced that small scale local housing developments can by-pass the planning system if 75% of those voting in a referendum support the scheme.
44. In its evidence on *The Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies*, the RTPI has already stated its view that communities may find the existing planning system a surer method of ensuring that acceptable, high quality small scale housing development is delivered for communities. In the context of localism, however, this initiative raises further questions. Will, for example, those proposing such a development be required to demonstrate an 'acceptable' level of public information, consultation and involvement before a referendum is held? Is there the need for safeguards and for the ability to revisit the design of the scheme if, hypothetically, the 25 per cent of those voting against the scheme are those most affected by, for example, additional traffic or loss of privacy?
45. More widely, the RTPI is concerned whether there are practical limits to community involvement and responsibility and that there will not be the real investment in time, capacity building, developing community structures and providing advice, that the localism agenda requires if it is to be successful. In 2006, a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>27</sup> found that:  
*Community participation tends to be dominated by a small group of insiders who are disproportionately involved in a large number of governance activities. .... The already well connected get better connected. ...*

## footnotes

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmtran/uc359/uc35901.htm>

<sup>27</sup> For example, Paul Skidmore, Kirsten Bound and Hannah Lownsborough (2006) *Do policies to promote community participation in governance build social capital?* JRF, November  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1802-community-network-governance.pdf>

46. A recent report from a rural grouping of non-governmental organisations<sup>28</sup>, including the RTPI, focussed on the need for capacity building recommending that:  
*To deliver the 'Big Society', localism and empowered communities, the Government needs to start by building local delivery capacity.*
47. The Rowntree Foundation report suggested that it is not only capacity building that is required but a change in the structures and networks of participation:  
*The alternative [to the current system] is to try to find the points where stronger and more effective connections can be made between formal participation by a small group of insiders and the more informal, everyday social networks in which a much bigger group of citizens spend a significant part of their lives.*
48. These are only two examples of the sorts of changes required if localism is to work.

### **The lessons for decentralisation from Total Place, and the potential to build on the work done under that initiative, particularly through place-based budgeting**

49. Place-based budgeting follows on directly from the previous administration's initiative on Total Place and has been endorsed by the Secretary of State<sup>29</sup>. The Local Government Association 2010 report on Place-based budgets<sup>30</sup> points out that: *It offers new opportunities to integrate commissioning and maximise the synergy between spatial planning and other policies intended to drive economic growth.*
50. The RTPI recognises the potential of this approach and sees the need both for further work to be undertaken on the opportunities that this presents for spatial planning and to work with others, notably the Local Government Group to disseminate advice on this directed at planners. The RTPI will be scrutinising the draft Bill to ensure that any statutory embodiment of this approach is linked to the spatial planning system.

#### **footnotes**

<sup>28</sup> The Rural Coalition (2010) *The Rural Challenge: Achieving sustainable rural communities for the 21st century*, the Rural Coalition

<http://www.cpre.org.uk/library/4331>

<sup>29</sup> "We're also already working together on 'place based area budgets'. I love the idea. I hate the name. I want something that actually means something. Let's call them what they are: community budgets."

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/lgaoffer>

<sup>30</sup> Local Government Association (2010) *Place-based budgets: the future governance of local public services*, June

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/12294113>

## The role of local government in a decentralised model of local public service delivery, and the extent to which localism can and should extend to other local agents

### The role of local government

51. It is useful to address the role of local authorities in planning under a new localist system. Thinking on this is continuing with, for example, the Policy Exchange continuing to extend the debate with a new report on housing<sup>31</sup>. This recommends doing away with planning controls on planning entirely and substituting it for a system of local ballots on housing proposals coupled with incentives for individual households voting for schemes. In some ways this is a logical extension of the current moves towards a system of choice and incentive but it moves far beyond the 'double devolution' of that is one of the characteristics of localism.
52. The RTPI sees the danger that the essential role of local government and of locally elected politicians may not be identified in a system that could be seen to by-pass local government. The Rural Alliance report cited above states that:  
*If the 'Big Society' is to be successful in generating new community initiatives, local government will need to provide an enabling context.*  
Whilst, in his speech in 2006, David Miliband set out the role of local authorities in a way that is directly relevant to planning:  
*I am convinced that we need local authorities whose first task is to map need, second to set goals, third to benchmark best practice, and fourth to seek best value from a range of providers, public, private and voluntary.*<sup>32</sup>
53. The RTPI would certainly support the need for enabling, the need to identify need and set overall goals, the need to build capacity in local communities and would add, drawing partly on the experience of planning covered at the beginning of this evidence and of Planning Aid in particular, the need to develop new relationships between professionals and communities and politicians.

### Other agencies

54. In this evidence, the RTPI wishes to address one aspect of the need to extend localism to other agencies. We feel that as well as other public sector agencies, there is the need to examine whether the business models and approaches of the private sector may need to evolve to address a localist system. For example, the 2007 Callcutt Review of the house building industry<sup>33</sup> addressed the size of the firms in the house building industry and sought ways of allowing greater entry into house building. It stated that:

*It is essential for the health and growth of the house building sector that small and medium house builders should continue to have sufficient opportunities to prosper and grow. We therefore recommend that the Guidance accompanying PPS3*

### footnotes

<sup>31</sup> Morton, Alex and Evans, Natalie (2010) *Making Housing Affordable. A New Vision for Housing Policy*, Policy Exchange, August

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/PX\\_Housing\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/PX_Housing_WEB.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/feb/21/localgovernment.politics1>

[http://www.callcuttreview.co.uk/downloads/callcuttreview\\_221107.pdf](http://www.callcuttreview.co.uk/downloads/callcuttreview_221107.pdf)

*should be amended to stipulate that at least 10% of the 5-year supply of housing land should consist of small sites (for 10-15 units or smaller) ....*

55. An approach to planning and decision making based on the concept of localism may well require business to adopt a more decentralised approach to the ways that it plans and delivers its services.
56. The RTPI would be pleased to add to and elucidate any of the points made in this evidence, either in writing or in oral evidence to the Select Committee.

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