



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

Planning Convention 2011 New Knowledge, New Skills Workshop Notes

Title: Bottom-up Planning: more democratic or less?

Chair: Andrew Matheson, RTPI Network Manager for PIPA, the Politicians in Planning Network

Speakers: Richard Humphreys QC and Cllr Conor McAuley, Executive Member for Regeneration & Strategic Planning, LB Newham

Number of Attendees: 56

Location: Ampthill

Date and Time: Tuesday 14th June 15.50

Name of Rapporteur: Andrew Matheson, RTPI Network Manager

Key Points Raised:

- General acceptance that the more liberal approach to pre-determination of applications within the Localism Bill is helpful and, with some preparatory care, workable
- Concern that the abolition of the Standards Board for England and the Localism Bill replacement solely with a criminal offence prosecution by the DPP might not address public concerns over probity – particularly in the light of financial considerations become material matters
- There was a divergence of views on whether the change of emphasis on financial considerations was a new central interference or sanctioning something that already happened eg with Section 106 agreements
- In London, any relaxation of central planning controls appears to be being replaced by Mayoral powers and targets
- The neighbourhood planning provisions in the Bill may be interpreted by many as denigrating to the role of Councillors in engaging with communities and representing their interests in planning and formal democratic engagement may be affected
- The Bill proposals may undermine good practice efforts with arrangements such as collaborative Development and Design Review Panels if applicants side-line such bodies in their engagement with communities

- General agreement with the RTPI that the neighbourhood planning arrangements are unnecessarily complicated – such work has been widespread over many years
- Serious concern that the referendum arrangements for Neighbourhood Plans could be both over-costly and give rise to abortive effort since, it seems, each plan must either be accepted or rejected as a whole
- The Bill provides for charges to be levied for neighbourhood plans – when the £20,000 grants run out?
- Some were alarmed at any suggestion that central targets might be re-imposed if the absence of RSS targets led local authorities collectively not rising to the challenge of increasing the levels of housing construction
- There are two separately independent arrangements for examination of the Local Development Plan and the individual Neighbourhood Plan and no apparent method for reconciling any differences between the two

Overall summary

The idea that more people should be engaged in planning processes is supported. However, there seems to be a Government belief that the new arrangements – which add new layers of complexity – can speed up planning and make people more accepting of growth. In truth the benefit may be a wider realisation that participative democracy will take as long as it will take.