

LOCALISM IN BRISTOL



- The Localism Bill is now an Act, but implementation not till April.
- Some Draft Regulations out.
- Snippets of guidance appear now and then.
- As yet very empty on lots of practical implementation issues.
- Most experience to date is from rural areas but....

Most relevant features – not all from the Act:

- 'Presumption in favour' of development.
- Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs)
- Neighbourhood Development Orders
- Community Right to Build
- Pre-application involvement
- New Homes Bonus (NHB) and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

1. SOME KEY POINTS (mainly NDPs)

For NDPs:

- Rural experience shows that local people **can** do such things, if not alone.
- Must be 'in conformity' with higher level plans.
- Can only suggest more development, not less.
- Some experience of this being achieved by/through communities.
- What is a 'neighbourhood'? Especially in a city like Bristol.
- A 'qualifying body' in Bristol would be a 'Neighbourhood Forum' but
- Quality and quantity of local detail adds significantly to defence against legal challenge.
- Scope unclear as yet. Unlikely to be able to dictate quantity of development but should 'be able to say where new homes and offices should be built'.
- Unclear what standards they can introduce, eg. space or energy standards.
- Local authorities (not just planners) will be 'obliged by law to help people draw up their neighbourhood plans'. Resources? Skills? (See later)
- Complex procedures (agree area, agree group, evidence, Sustainability Appraisal, examination, referendum).
- No apparent standards for wider community involvement but must report on that.
- Referendums! Costs? Management? What if the answer is 'no'? Uncertain scope: "where ... the proposals ... have significant implications for other people nearby, people from other neighbourhoods may be allowed to vote too".
- No extra status for a Neighbourhood Forum after formal adoption. So
- NDPs can be (legitimately) business-led.
- They can also be (partly) business and developer funded.

Other Points:

- Pre-application engagement only on large projects (200 houses, 10,000 sm).
- (But Bristol experience well ahead if not mandatory.)
- NHB can be considerable but as of now all goes to authority.
- Minimum of 20% of CIL may have to go to recipient community, still considerable.

A Definite Proposal: CHOOSING WHAT APPROACH TO TAKE

- Over the last year many communities have been defaulting to choosing a NDP because they think it's the only genuine option.
- Equally, some communities are doing nothing because they think a NDP is far too onerous and aren't aware of other choices.
- The Localism Act 'ingredients' are **not** the only ones; there are a good few more and others may be more appropriate.
- Worries from planners about the general resource (and skill) demands.
- Worries from planners that 'first come, first served' favours wealthier, up-together, professionalised communities rather than those in greatest need or subject to the most development.
- Worries from Councillors about their role.

- We are just about to produce a national Guide for communities and planners (and businesses and developers) to help with some of this.
- Not a guide to how to do a NDP or whatever but a guide to how a community and/or authority might make the most appropriate choice.
- *(Choices on another handout)*
- But, at present we are dealing with these queries totally ad hoc and the guide will help, but only help even more people do it ad hoc!
- We are about to run a series of evening workshops, using the Guide, for all the Parish and Town Councils in Gloucestershire.
- That is enormously more resource-effective, not least because it (a) gets them talking to each other and (b) avoids the planners (or us) having to explain it several, hundred times.
- **We think this would be useful for Bristol, initially through the NPN - Yes?**

A Less Certain Proposal: MOVING BEYOND THE AD HOC

- The above would only help communities to make better but still ad hoc choices.
- Everybody is likely to go it alone, not learn from each other, build capacity etc. (but less true with NPN in place).
- The demands on planner time would still be effectively unlimited.
- The up-together communities will still get priority, those in need will get even less.
- There could well be (as in London now) real conflicts over definitions of neighbourhoods and acceptable Neighbourhood Forums.
- Time and resource will be wasted helping each separate community in turn.

- Once again, we have an initiative just starting in Wiltshire where we will work with one of their CAPs - Community Area Partnerships (a bit like Bristol's).
- We will work with all communities (neighbourhoods) to begin with, using the Guide to plan what each separate community might do on their own, what they might do in small groups, what is best done by all together.
- We will also work to support any less up-together communities and set priorities for the distribution of planner time and resource between all of these.
- If X decide to do Design Statements they will all be trained together, and other CAPs can also send people, thus spreading the message from the start.
- Skills, resources, information etc. will all be shared.
- **Would something like this be good or possible in Bristol? Discussion!**