



## Position Statement: The Localism Bill & Planning Reform

The Localism Bill contains a number of proposals to give local authorities new freedoms and flexibility. It is a long and complex piece of legislation. The focus of the bill is on new arrangements for strategic planning, and new neighbourhood plans.

Whilst there are some things in the Bill that have been long campaigned for by conservation organisations, such as abolishing the Infrastructure Planning Commission and returning decisions on major infrastructure to an elected person, the Secretary of State. There are areas of conservation concern for BCT.

New 'Neighbourhood Development Orders' have been proposed that define specific developments or types of development which will have automatic planning permission without the need for any application to the local authority. More complex cases will be assessed by self-selected community groups who will have the powers to grant outline permission.

No real definition of sustainable development has been provided and no reference to the importance of balancing any decisions with the needs of the environment.

There have been parliamentary discussions about the incorporation of a definition for sustainable development known as clause 6. However, the Government has expressed reservations about its' inclusion, stating that:

1. the Localism Bill is about structural aspects of planning. Sustainable development should be addressed through policy, not the legislation; and
2. a statutory definition of sustainable development would not provide communities with the flexibility to shape it in a way that is best for them, encapsulate new technological developments or encompass the complexity and dynamism of the idea of sustainable development.

The Bill emphasises the need for economic growth throughout but has not defined long term conservation and environmental objectives. BCT believe that the Government must live up to its commitment to rebalance the planning system in favour of true sustainable development. If the suggestions for clause 6 are taken on board and well implemented, the proposals to engage local people in planning could have some benefits. However, there must be adequate checks to ensure that localism does not become parochialism, and that the planning system delivers for the environment, biodiversity and bats.

For the Government to do this, sustainable development must be embedded at the very core of the planning system, within its structure, forming part of the overarching framework that influences all functions, policies and objectives. This framework must set minimum standards, whilst also empowering and enabling local communities.

To reinforce the role of the planning system in delivering true integration of economic, social and environmental priorities at all levels we have five key requests for the Localism Bill and Planning Reform. It should:

1. Identify that the purpose of planning is to achieve sustainable development delivered within environmental limits, including a statutory definition of sustainable development. To achieve this, the Localism Bill should be amended to include the new clause 6
2. Provide a statutory basis for the national planning policy framework, that clearly outlines obligations to the environment
3. Introduce new and effective arrangements for strategic planning across local authority boundaries, which deliver for the environment nationally as outlined within the Lawton Review
4. Ensure that sustainable development, delivered within environmental limits, remains the purpose of neighbourhood planning.
5. Neighbourhood plans should provide a fair and transparent approach to community participation and local decision-making, and protect and enhance local environments, whether protected by statutory designations or not

You can read the Bill and its explanatory notes in full, and follow its progress through parliament, on <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/localism.html>

Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) briefings on this subject can be downloaded from the WCL website: [www.wcl.org.uk/landuseplanning.asp](http://www.wcl.org.uk/landuseplanning.asp).