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We need to learn more about how to do Localism well and effectively!

In support of Lord Lexden's Direct Planning (Pilot) Bill, House of Lords, Private Members Bill, 1st reading: 3 June 2015

In November 2011 the Localism Act introduced significant changes to our place planning system in England. Since then, Neighbourhood Planning, one prominent element of the Localism Act, triggered a not inconsiderable amount of innovation in the governance of plan-making (who is managing the process), planning and place-making policies (what sorts of policies are made) and the role of local networks and collaboration in policy and place-making (how we make policies to shape places).

The Localism Act brought this about through a new, lower tier of planning policy making, Neighbourhood Planning and new Community Rights such as designating 'Assets of Community Value', 'Neighbourhood Development Orders' and 'Community Right to Build Orders'.

Since then, over 1600 communities in England, covering areas home to over 8 million people, have taken the initiative and started producing Neighbourhood Plans. These Neighbourhood Plans, once completed, will eventually be put up for local referendums. As of this week, 100 communities have done so. And, of significance, all proposed plans have received resounding levels of support by the majority of those residents and businesses (in business areas) that chose to take part in a neighbourhood referendum.

Introducing direct democracy into our planning system is a powerful shift in the way planning policy is made and understood in England.

If this process innovation of putting lower tier plans to referendum will eventually change how we enable a greater consensus on local, regional (in London only these days) and national planning policy, is yet to be seen. It is however difficult to argue why we, the electorate, are invited to vote on lower tier place policies and not on higher ones. This is perhaps a topic for another day though.

The fact that adopted planning policies do too often not deliver their intended outcomes is at the core of why the Localism Bill and Neighbourhood Planning came into being.

However, for Localism and Neighbourhood Planning to fulfil its potential and deliver on its main attraction for local people, that is to shape better places and the anticipated growth, I argue it is critical to reflect not just on process innovations. It is time to move our attention towards the effectiveness of the planning and design policies e.g. their clarity, detail and legal teeth when it comes to delivering on what local people worked on and indeed voted for.

For that reason and in light of understanding Localism as something that we collectively need to learn, practise, deliver and perhaps even protect long term, I am in full support of the Direct Planning Bill Pilot. At the heart of the Direct Planning (Pilot) Bill stand three key ambitions:

- to enable better collaborative plan-making by providing financial support to communities that like to use the format of Design Charrettes,
- to secure the actual delivery of higher design quality and better places through Design Codes, and
- to ensure sustained financial support for Neighbourhood Planning by accessing mainstream Local Authority budgets.

In my mind Design Codes are the tool and Design Charrettes are the essential process to deliver Localism collaboratively and effectively.

Have a look at the Direct Planning Bill (Pilot), 1st Reading, 3rd June 2015 here:
<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/directplanningpilot.html>

How can you support and help improve this Direct Planning (Pilot) Bill?

In July, a group of interested UK practitioners and organisations met to agree ways and means of promoting the Pilot Bill in its early days, however if you would like to support the Bill and the above three key ambitions we need to continue to build awareness and visibility in Parliament. Please DO help:

- Talk about it in your local and digital networks - do use the hashtag #directplanningbill
- Hold events
- Write to your MP and the mayor
- Tell local councillors or planning officials about it
- Send us an email with suggestions for improvements and in support.

Key links: [http://www.createstreets.com/blog/4585309664/The-Direct-Planning-\(Pilot\)-Bill/9800984](http://www.createstreets.com/blog/4585309664/The-Direct-Planning-(Pilot)-Bill/9800984)

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