

# NFB/HBA Consultation Response



Please accept the House Builders Association (HBA) response to the 'Technical consultation on implementation of neighbourhood planning provisions in the Neighbourhood Planning Bill'.

The HBA is the housebuilding division of the National Federation of Builders (NFB) and its membership is small and medium constructors.

## **Question 1 – Do you agree that regulations setting out the detail of the process for modifying an existing neighbourhood plan should replicate as far as possible the existing regulations for making a new plan?**

In principle yes. A consistent approach across the planning process would aid neighbourhoods as well as planners and businesses such as developers.

## **Question 2– Do you agree that a new basic condition is needed to ensure that a neighbourhood plan proposal does not adversely affect any existing plan that remains in place, in areas where neighbourhood area boundaries have changed?**

We agree with this proposal.

## **Question 3 – Do you agree that local planning authorities should review (and if necessary update) their statement of community involvement at least every five years? If not, what alternative do you propose?**

Statements of community involvement are vital in making sure the right planning approach is taken. However, a review every five years could put neighbourhoods with slow to deliver housing supply at a disadvantage.

It may be pertinent to include 'live small site assessments' and even 'site allocation opportunities' as an extension to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). With this process communities who are waiting for a review would be able to continue delivering appropriate supply.

Such a proposal would allow developers and landowners to bring forward sites, as well as empower neighbourhoods to realise supply for their existing or burgeoning communities without exacerbating their local infrastructure.

A minimum review period of five years may coincide with a five year land supply as set out in the NPPF. This may be an inadequate way to deliver responsive supply especially for communities who are new to the process of planning or who lack strong leadership.

## **Question 4 - Do you agree that local planning authorities should include their policies on providing advice or assistance to groups preparing neighbourhood plans and their policies for involving interested parties in the preliminary stages of plan-making in their statements of community of involvement within 12 months of Royal Assent to the Bill? If not, what alternative do you propose?**

As we have seen with local plan making some local authorities have been slow to deliver on their responsibilities. 12 months may be too short a timeframe, especially if not meeting them leads to volume housing being delivered through the court and appeal system.

This has been a major problem for communities, supply and local/regional housebuilders

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who have seen many more 'slow to complete' large sites being delivered. Large sites have also placed an extra burden on the local infrastructure and sent the message that all developers are equal.

SMEs typically employ within a radius of 19 miles, use the local supply chain, partner/joint venture with Housing Associations and other local groups, build homes that communities want and support self/custom build. They should be supported and not hindered by community involvement. They have always been neighbourhood planning.

## **Question 5 - Do you have any other suggestions for further strengthening neighbourhood planning?**

A 'live site submission list', potentially for small sites and infill is pertinent to making use of neighbourhood planning. A lack of infrastructure is often used as a reason to stop or stall development. With an option of small sites the appropriate supply could come forward as well as reducing the pressure on local authorities to resource their departments.

Strengthening the bond between planning and developer is imperative and this would deliver appropriate supply that communities want and need. It may also reduce the burden on planning departments receiving speculative planning application re-submissions.

It would also be helpful if the Government referred back to the Housing Standards Review which has brought building standards up to a measurable level. SMEs who build to existing regulation lead the way in delivering the best modern homes. Uplift (for example local authorities requiring up to 20% higher energy efficiency) already causes viability concerns for SMEs as they cannot offset or dispute building regulation modifications despite already building the best quality and largest homes in England.

## **Question 6 - Do you have any views about the implications of our proposed changes on people with protected characteristics as defined in the Equalities Act 2010? What evidence do you have on this matter? Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any impacts identified?**

No comment.

## **Question 7 - Do you have any views about the potential positive or negative financial implications on local planning authorities, neighbourhood planning groups, or others, of our proposed changes? What evidence do you have on this matter? Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any costs identified?**

Local planning authorities are already under resourced and so extra burdens could exacerbate delays. For SMEs this very much impacts opportunities but the same barriers exist for co-operative housing, Housing Associations, custom/selfbuild and key worker housing.

By increasing the interaction between developer, especially SME, and planning decision makers the government may be able to reduce the financial burden placed on making sure neighbourhood planning works as intended.

As mentioned a 'live site submission list' would assist neighbourhoods release opportunities as well as support local employment, the local economy and local investment. Neighbourhood planning should be able to see, calculate and understand how supply could come about. This would help negate the need for infrastructure to be included in the bill.

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The positive impact of such a scheme would extend past supply. In less urban locations it is local business which trains, employs and supports the local economy and this means local/regional housebuilders. Rural locations have suffered as employment opportunities have not caught up with demand, consequently this has impacted the ability for local people to buy or rent homes. In the West Midlands this may be less of a problem due to an already strong infrastructure but in regions such as the South West, increasing house prices and falling wages continue to impact affordability and development viability. The regional economy must be supported especially in the wake of Brexit where we need to quickly train and employ a construction workforce.

For local authorities any cross discipline collaboration will reduce financial burdens and empower neighbourhoods to deliver without always requiring large contributions. Planning gain, or planning contributions to deliver infrastructure should be part of a long term vision for change and not simply to deliver homes quickly. Large sites can and do impact the local infrastructure and in many cases deliver homes slower than other sectors and under less favourable social benefit. SMEs build for all and not just market housing, this must be recognised.

We are pleased that pre-commencement conditions will be addressed. They create delays, scupper viability and increase financial burdens on SMEs. We favour any Government approach that reduces red tape in this regard but it must be enforced properly unlike policies relating to 'affordable contributions on small sites' and 'council tax charged on inhabitable dwellings' where local authorities are ignoring advice.

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