

Freshford Parish Council 11 April 2016

Responses to The Planning and Housing Bill -Technical Consultation on Implementation of Planning Changes

Freshford Parish Council wishes to highlight a number of adverse aspects in these proposals as a response to the consultation. Despite the Government's stated aims for increased 'Localism', many of these proposals significantly decrease or remove the levels of input that a Parish Council can exercise on behalf of its local community, and as a result are anti-democratic.

The new 'permission in principle' concept can be a welcome step. However it is not clear how, and at what stage, statutory consultation will take place. It is stated that only limited information will be required in the application, eg land use, location and the number of houses proposed on the site. If it is the case that this approval will be granted on the basis of the site's inclusion in, say, the Local Plan, upon which some consultation has previously taken place, will that Plan have included information about the number of houses proposed, and will there be further statutory consultation at the 'permission in principle' stage. The same issue arises with the new statutory brownfield register which will include sites potentially available for housing, and in applications in respect of minor sites. If sites are to be earmarked in these earlier plans or registers, which would then be accorded 'approval in principle' status, then at the least, full statutory consultation should be required at those earlier stages.

At the second 'technical details consent' stage no consultation with the community, or others, is envisaged. The Parish Council considers this to be absolutely contrary to Localism, and a significant negation of local accountability. It is the parish council that has detailed knowledge of specific locations, and the effect that any development will have on the community as a whole, beyond just building work. Under these current proposals, whilst the parish council could be consulted on a development of say, for example, six houses as a 'principle', it would not be consulted on how those houses would be designed, their size, how they would be planned on the site, what they would look like, or the pressures that would subsequently arise on education provision, health services, traffic or other public and local services. At this stage there could also be conditions or planning obligations – again, the parish council would not be consulted.

Giving a Local Planning Authority flexibility to decide whether or not a community should be allowed to express a view on the inclusion of a site on a register, or on other aspects of the planning process, is anti-democratic. For these reasons the Parish Council strongly opposes the methodology of the two stage proposal. We would argue that there should be a requirement for full compulsory statutory consultation with parish councils in both the 'in principle' and 'technical details' parts of the process. This would mean that a Local Planning Authority would be required by statute to invite a parish council to respond at

each stage of the process. This would also apply to the setting up of statutory registers or the development of other plans, which could subsequently be used for 'in principle' decisions.

In terms of timeframe, it is crucial that parish councils have adequate time to consider planning applications, and there should be provision for the Local Planning Authority to grant extensions to the timescales laid down for responses by consultees, as currently exists. The permitted extension of up to 14 extra days after the original 21, is sometimes not enough. (Currently eight weeks are available overall). This will be especially important if full documentation is not published on the first day of the 21 day period. Parish council representatives are conscientious members of the local community, but meetings are usually held monthly and sometimes strict deadlines cannot be met; this would be important if further information became available at a later stage in the process. We would argue for additional flexibility for the Local Planning Authority.

On the proposed 'brownfield sites register' there is again little discussion about statutory consultation prior to decisions being made about the content of the register. There also needs to be better definitions of the whole concept of such sites.

In terms of Neighbourhood Plans, Freshford Parish Council already has an approved (by referendum) and adopted Plan. The Government needs to make clear how the approved status of this Plan, and its contents, fit into the structure of these new arrangements, if approved by Parliament.

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