

Community Right to Build - Response from Colton Parish Council, Lake District National Park, Cumbria

Tuesday 24th August 2010

Dear NALC,

First, thank you for the opportunity to express our comments on this new proposal from government. However, we would like to record our dismay at the extremely short time-scale for this consultation - only 10 days, and during August when many people are on holiday - for such an important potential policy change influencing local communities.

That said, here are our views on this proposal, in as far as we can collate them at this time:

1. We are broadly supportive of the need for opportunities for greater involvement of local people in the planning and building control process to support thriving local communities. However, we can give only a cautious welcome to this planned 'Community Right to Build' policy without further detail.
2. We agree that there might be rare occasions where 'normal' planning guidelines could be set aside where housing need is concerned; for example, where dogmatic regulations present a significant barrier to the wishes of an overwhelming majority of a local community.
3. Overall, we acknowledge that planning authorities have knowledge, experience and a strategic awareness that cannot, and should not, be over-riden by local communities as a matter of course, however well intentioned, and that, in turn, local people have an awareness and local knowledge that should be fed into any planning decisions. In short, we feel that there should be more productive partnerships between communities and principal authorities such as District Councils and, in our case, National Parks Authorities, on these matters.
4. We are concerned about the details of the processes envisaged, for example:
 - i) How would this policy operate within the local democratic process? We would be unhappy if any significant power or authority was handed to unelected and unaccountable groups. We would want to know what controls would be put in place to ensure that, for example, organised groups of developers did not persuade or induce communities to pursue any unwise course of action.
 - ii) Affordable homes need to stay affordable in perpetuity. We would like to know what controls will be put in place to ensure that these new builds do not end up sold on the open market. This would defeat the object of the exercise, particularly in areas like National Parks where soaring house prices and second home-ownership compound the problem of affordable housing for local people.
 - iii) Development that helps to create the vibrant and thriving local communities that we all want to see needs to be carefully balanced within environmentally sensitive areas like National Parks. We would like to know more detail about how this new policy would fit within the strategic development frameworks of National Park Authorities.
5. To summarise, we are in agreement that accountable representatives of communities, taking due regard of any sizeable majority view, should have more influence on planning decisions but we need more detailed information before expressing our degree of commitment to this particular planned policy.

Yours sincerely,

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