



Colton Parish Council

Tel: 01229 861408
E-mail: coltonpc@btinternet.com
Web: www.coltonparishcouncil.org.uk

Clerk: Ms Mandy Lane
Lilac Cottage
Oxen Park
Ulverston LA12 8HG

The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
National Planning Policy Framework Consultation
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

7th October 2011

Dear Mr Pickles,

National Planning Policy Framework Consultation: Response from Colton Parish Council, Cumbria

Colton Parish Council strongly disagrees with proposals outlined in this document. In particular:

1. **The Council strongly disagrees with the proposal of a presumption in favour of development.** The existing, very effective, planning system is grounded in a sound legal framework of balanced, objective and transparent decision-making that allows developers and local community to have their say fairly and openly, and affords important protection for our countryside. This proposal threatens to undermine these fundamentally important principles. Planning decisions should be scrutinised objectively on merit according to rigorous and consistent standards, with respect to the local planning policy. To bias the system towards development is to confer a disproportionate advantage on developers whose broader, profit-focused interests are frequently at odds with local community and environmental interests. Furthermore, local communities and councils rarely have the resources of developers to counter development pressures motivated by profit – to give further encouragement to the latter seems to be in complete contradiction to the government's Localism agenda.
2. **In our view, the argument that the planning system needs to be altered to promote growth is flawed.** Figures show that over 80% of applications are currently being approved nationally. (In Colton Parish, this rises to almost 90%.)
3. **We strongly disagree with the principle that development permission should automatically be granted if no plan exists** (your paragraph 14.). This would appear to offer a development free-for-all, with no protection for the rural environment nor the wishes of the local community who may not be responsible for non-production of a plan.
4. **National Parks should be given clear and unambiguous protection.** The brief mention that 'great weight' should be given to protecting landscape, heritage and wildlife conservation is lamentably inadequate.
5. **Local Plans** already provide an effective, practical and strategic framework, are updated regularly, and are open to wide and well-publicised local community consultation, with views demonstrably taken into account. There is no need to change this system.

6. **Neighbourhood Planning:** Whilst we broadly welcome further local involvement in planning the future of communities, we have some key concerns about the proposals:
- 6.1. **Neighbourhood planning will need to be properly resourced.** Rural communities rely heavily on volunteer effort to run Parish Councils, Community Halls, Village Greens, Churches, Annual Shows and fund-raising events. It is already difficult to find people with time to spare to produce current Community Plans. To draw up a rigorous Neighbourhood Plan, which may provide the only safeguard to open development (your paragraph 14., bullet point 3), will require substantial effort as well as essential expertise. There is no mention of how this is to be funded.
- 6.2. **The proposals do not define 'neighbourhood'.** In our rural parish - 20 sq miles of scattered farms and hamlets - it is unclear what this means. Opinions on policy or development proposals may differ widely dependent on scale: residents of a hamlet may strongly resist a development on their door-step, whilst the parish as a whole might regard it as desirable.
- 6.3. **The role of Parish Councils in these proposals is not clear.** They are mentioned only twice alongside neighbourhood forums as if they are similar bodies. Yet, as the most localised tier of local government and an elected and publically-accountable body, they clearly provide the proper and obvious channel for community representation.
7. **The lack of affordable housing in our local area is a key concern, but the planning system is not the impeding factor here.** The very high proportion of second-homes, other empty homes, the sale of social housing onto the open market, unchecked house price inflation, and the low incomes of the rural population are the key causes. When 'affordable homes' are built in our vicinity, they are often still out of financial reach, whether for sale or for rent, and some therefore become occupied by people from outwith the area.
8. The proposals aim to bias the system in favour of development, **yet there is no mention of any kind of appeal system against development**, which has to be the logical extension of such a change.

If the Prime Minister is serious about his recent commitment to protecting the "magnificent countryside" and "the national treasure of the beautiful British landscape", then i) biasing the planning system to benefit developers and ii) encouraging development on greenfield sites, is not the way. Nationally, brownfield sites and empty properties should be targeted for housing and local employment.

Our existing planning system is open, fair and unbiased. The proposed changes threaten irreversible damage to our ever-diminishing countryside and its rural character.

Yours sincerely,

Colin J Barr
Chairman, Colton Parish Council, Cumbria

CC: Tim Farron MP
Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Cumbria Association of Local Councils
National Association of Local Councils
Richard Leafe, Chief Executive, Lake District National Park Authority
Alan C Scott (consultation contact), Dept for Communities and Local Government