

Create Streets

contact@createstreets.com

www.createstreets.com

Why ResPublica supports the Direct Planning Bill

By Duncan Sim

With the Direct Planning (Pilot) Bill set for its Second Reading in the House of Lords tomorrow, ResPublica are keen to nail our organisational colours to the mast. We strongly support this Bill: its provisions, its aims, and its underlying philosophy.

Our July 2015 report, *A Community Right to Beauty: Giving communities the power to shape, enhance and create beautiful places, buildings and spaces* set out a series of policy recommendations, building on Neighbourhood Planning, to further support communities to shape and improve their local neighbourhoods. The challenge to put this thinking into practice remains significant.

It is for this reason that we believe initiatives such as Lord Lexden's Bill should be welcomed. Promoting the use of charrette processes for example is a practical way to convert the idea that local people are the most appropriate group to decide about the future of their area, and as such should be empowered to influence those decisions, into public policy. Analogously, we called in our report for Citizens' Juries to be formed where there is widespread local concern or disagreement over a particular development, and for increased use of competitions and local votes to allow communities to choose their preferred design and developer.

The central point is that these innovations represent positive tools which will enable people to improve their area, rather than instruments which can be used to block necessary development. As I argued earlier this week in an article for *Conservative Home*, this Bill offers an opportunity to turn a planning system which is currently responsive primarily to negative input from local people (in the form of appeals) into one which starts from positive local contributions.

By making it easier for communities to get involved in shaping their area – and increasing the chance that their feed-in will produce tangible results – the Bill's provisions may also open up participation in the planning process to a

wider cross-section of society. ResPublica's own research has found that access to beautiful spaces is easiest for those households earning over £45,000 per year. By offering people the chance to create spaces they find beautiful in their area through the use of direct planning, this social divide can be narrowed or even closed.

Moreover, the Bill's underpinning premise – that increasing communities' influence in decisions affecting their local built environment will actually encourage new development – is a theme running through ResPublica's work in this area. As we noted in our report *Devo Home*, "A major inhibitor to house building is not central or local government (in)action but the fact that as a nation we stop development. This cannot just be ascribed to nimbysism; it is also a legitimate reaction to the often negative impact of new developments on communities, infrastructure and places".

As long as local people remain excluded from discussions over the future of their area, this trend will continue. Increased community influence must be an integral part of any reform to the planning system – yet much of the Government's proposed agenda does exactly the opposite. This Bill is therefore invaluable in its timing as well as its content.

The Author

Duncan Sim is a Senior Policy and Projects Officer at ResPublica, the independent public policy think tank. He tweets @duncanasim.