



GREENEST PLANNING EVER COALITION

Localism Bill Briefing

House of Commons, Committee Stage

January 2011

SUMMARY AND KEY ASKS

The principles of sustainable development must be at the heart of local decision-making so that local authorities and communities can work together to achieve it. We, therefore, recommend:

- **Local Authorities exercise the general power with the objective of achieving sustainable development**
- **A definition of sustainable development be included in the Localism Bill**
- **Clarification of the status of the Sustainable Development Strategy 2005**

Achieving Sustainable Development at the Local Level

The UK is facing unprecedented challenges for the 21st Century - economic recovery, climate change and biodiversity loss, increased urbanisation and the need for greater social equity. The need for us to strive to achieve sustainable development and effectively address these issues has never been more pressing. However, with a new Government comes a change in the landscape, a new era of accountability at the local level but the loss of key national mechanisms that helped to monitor, encourage and provide an impetus for action towards achieving sustainable development.

We believe that achieving sustainable development must be at the heart of local decision making. We support the key theme of the Localism Bill to empower local communities and enable them to shape the places where they live and work. However, we are concerned that the short term measures to drive reduction of the economic deficit and the abolition of important government advisors, such as the Sustainable Development Commission, will lead the UK into decisions which are unsustainable in the long term. Whilst the baseline is shifting, we must remember to think about how the actions we take now will impact upon future generations.

A Positive Duty on Local Authorities

While the UK's 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy "*Securing the Future*"¹ has been internationally acclaimed and much progress has been made in developing sustainable

¹ The 2005 UK Sustainable Development Strategy can be accessed via:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/publications/uk-strategy/>

development indicators - the fact remains that sustainable development has not been embedded systematically or institutionally across Government or public bodies. As such, there is no unifying or framing statutory duty across all the different levels of Government to achieve sustainable development.

We believe that a general statutory duty on all local authorities to achieve sustainable development could lead to clearer responsibilities and improved delivery of our sustainable development goals. Local authorities should be responsible for promoting a clear understanding of and commitment to achieving sustainable development, so that individuals within their areas can work together to achieve it.

A Definition of Sustainable Development

The Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development - “*Our Common Future*” (commonly referred to as the “Brundtland Report”) - defined sustainable development as²:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

This remains the most commonly used definition of sustainable development and is the definition referred to in the Sustainable Development Strategy. Research commissioned recently by WWF-UK and the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (FDSD)³ confirms only one definition of sustainable development in UK legislation⁴.

In practice however, there remains confusion about the action required to achieve sustainable development and often organisations and authorities focus on one pillar (economy, environment and society), rather than integration of all three. A statutory definition of sustainable development will help to provide greater certainty in local decision-making and identify the common goal which we should all be working towards. The definition can then be supported and expanded through other strategic documents, such as the Sustainable Development Strategy, the National Planning Policy Framework and guidance on the duty to cooperate.

The Greenest Planning Ever coalition⁵ recommends the amendments below be made in order to achieve the above aims:

Amendment 1

Page 2, Line 16 into clause 2, insert new sub-clause (2) and renumber existing sub-clauses:

“An authority shall exercise the general power with the objective of achieving sustainable development”

Amendment 2

² World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

³ See http://www.wwf.org.uk/research_centre/research_centre_results.cfm?uNewsID=4545

⁴ Section 1 of the International Development Act 2002 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/1>

⁵ <http://www.wcl.org.uk/planningreform.asp>

Page 3, Line 9 insert a new definition for Clause 2:

“sustainable development” means development that meets the social, economic and environmental needs of the present (or society as a whole) without compromising wellbeing and the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, including:

(a) the application of the following principles:

- (i) living within environmental limits;**
- (ii) ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;**
- (iii) achieving a sustainable economy;**
- (iv) promoting good governance;**
- (v) using sound science responsibly, and**

(b) further refinement of the definition through any guidance, strategies or frameworks that may be adopted in the United Kingdom from time to time for the purpose of establishing principles or criteria for practical application.”

Notes:

This briefing is supported by the following organisations:

- **Butterfly Conservation**
- **Bat Conservation Trust**
- **Campaign for Better Transport**
- **Campaign to Protect Rural England**
- **Friends of the Earth**
- **Open Spaces Society**
- **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds**
- **Town and Country Planning Association**
- **Woodland Trust**
- **WWF-UK**

These organisations are all members of the Greenest Planning Ever coalition, which is a campaign of the Wildlife and Countryside Link⁶ and partners. The Greenest Planning Ever coalition has come together to ensure that the natural environment is at the heart of planning reform.

For further information, please contact **Fiona Llewellyn** at **Link** on **0207 820 8600** or email [**fiona@wcl.org.uk**](mailto:fiona@wcl.org.uk).

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⁶ Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is a coalition of the UK's major environmental organisations working together for the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. Link is a registered charity number (No. 1107460) and a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (No.3889519).