

My Interventions in the debate on the Remaining Stages for the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): Can the Minister remind the House how the Government will stop developers gaming a local plan and getting permissions that are not within the local plan under some silly rule?

Lucy Frazer, Minister of State: This Bill and the proposals that we are bringing forward through the revised NPPF will do exactly that. At the moment, in 60% of areas, building is through speculative development, not where communities want it. We want to streamline the local plan process, get those plans in place, where communities want it, and then we can start and continue to build.

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Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): Does the hon. Member not understand that the whole point about more local determination is that the local community ultimately has to say, "This is all we can manage and we cannot be overridden"?

Clive Betts MP (Lab): Yes, I understand that, and that should be taken into account, as it can be at the local plan stage. The problem is that, if every local community decides that it does not want house building, we end up with not enough houses being built nationally. That is the simple reality of life. What I am saying is, yes, have the argument at the local plan stage, but all too often now, local plans get bogged down not with where the houses should be built or with the quality of the housing and the infrastructure, but with arguments over housing numbers, with developers and councils employing lawyers and consultants to argue with each other. That is what happens. If we can get agreement between the council and the Government and that is then accepted as the target for the way forward, that is a suitable way to do it, rather than the current endless debate and argument about numbers and calculations.

I want to mention one other amendment, on environmental outcomes. One of the biggest arguments at local level is often on the environmental impact of development. There is great concern among local communities about the environmental impact and the fact that, when developers commission an environmental report, it is commissioned by the developer and paid for by the developer. Communities are often suspicious that the report produces what the developer wants to hear, rather than what the actual environmental impact is for those communities. My amendment 105 is simple: in future, the developer should pay, but the local authority should commission. In that way, we make it absolutely clear that environmental outcome reports on individual developments are completely independent, and that local communities can trust them. That seems to be a sensible suggestion. I hope that the Minister will

accept it and move it forward.