

FINANCIAL TIMES JULY 24/JULY 25 2010

Power to the local people over right to build

By Daniel Thomas,
Property Correspondent

Local communities will be given the power to build homes without needing to seek planning permission, under government proposals.

The "community right to build" programme will allow people to build homes, shops, business space and other commercial properties on green belt land if enough of the local residents are in favour. It is hoped the plan will help revitalise rural areas.

Planning policy tends to inhibit most types of development on green belt land, but the government said it wanted to remove the "red tape and bureaucracy of the current system" to allow people to build the homes they wanted.

An overwhelming majority would be needed to vote in favour of any specific development in a special local referendum.

The plans will be contained in the government's localism bill, which will underpin the proposed redistribution of power from the state to individuals. Any surplus, made from the sale or rent of homes would be recycled for the benefit of the community.

Grant Shapps, housing minister, said: "It will give residents the power to give the green light to new homes that are suitable and appropriate for their local area. And because local people are in charge, developments will only go ahead with their overwhelming support.

"I want anyone with the vision and drive to build homes in their area to be able to do so."

The Home Builders Federation was supportive of the scheme, saying it was an interesting initiative to make the planning system more flexible and less bureaucratic in responding to local needs for housing.

Others were more critical. James Moss, director at Curzon Investment Property, a property consultancy, said: "In the real world the only people with the time to attend planning meetings are those opposed to development. Giving people a say is fine but this will lead to even fewer homes being built at a time where we need to be supporting growth, not undermining it through some idealistic principle of empowerment."

Andrew Teacher, a spokesman for the British Property Federation, said it was important that there was also a clear national policy. "Grant Shapps promised to make Britain a 'nation of house builders' but without clarity over local plans and certainty over how much will get built, the economies of scale we need for a viable market do not stack up."