



Handing housing back to Communities

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Author:

Olivier R i b e r t

Position:

Managing Director



Findings of *DEMOS*

In order to solve the building crisis, a new report from cross-party think tank *Demos* calls on the Government to support local authorities and help them do more to tackle the UK's housing crisis, by encouraging community-led developments and pushing for greater transparency in decision-making.

The report, "*Community Builders*", finds that many Councils, particularly those in rural areas, are "dragging their heels" on approving new planning applications. This includes some Councils where a third of all proposals for large developments are being rejected in the face of significant population growth.

Rather than arguing for Whitehall to step in to drive projects forward, the report argues that it is only through empowering communities to be more involved in housing projects that sufficient homes will be built.

Developed following extensive qualitative and quantitative analysis, including focus groups with residents throughout the country, "*Community Builders*" shows that

concern for collective, community goods, such as local aesthetics, green spaces and community facilities are the primary drivers of opposition to development. Many participants in the research focus groups cited a lack of trust in the planning process and a scepticism over whether local people would benefit from the availability of new housing, as their motivating factors in resisting new projects.

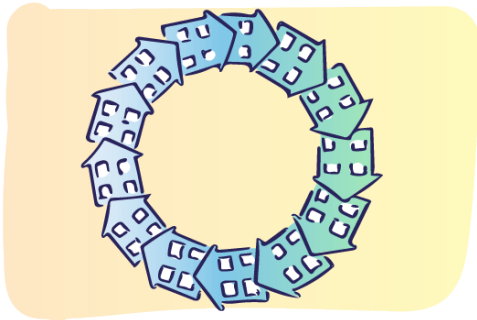
Empowering the locals

By contrast, the report finds that when sufficiently democratic, transparent and inclusive in their structure, projects driven by community-led building schemes can help local residents to feel greater ownership over developments.

The report found that the legitimacy of these groups in the eyes of residents and Councils have meant that community-led projects are more likely to gain planning permission. However, they are also slower to be approved, suggesting that the sector could benefit from more professional expertise and greater understanding of their benefits amongst council officers.



Overall, urban districts were found to approve the highest proportion of planning applications, and more quickly than their rural counterparts. However, local hostilities towards housebuilding are stopping many much-needed developments from even reaching application stage. Of the modest number reaching councils, almost 20% of applications are being rejected nationally, in the face of one of the most acute housing shortages in our history.



DEMOS Recommendations

To encourage greater local support for housebuilding, across both metropolitan and rural districts, "Community Builders" recommends that:

- Local authorities should be supported to create hyper-local housing waiting lists, to ensure people in need in the immediate vicinity are prioritised for housing
- Community-led groups should have formal, democratic decision-making structures that enable the wider community to participate through community-shared schemes
- Those groups that have gained support among local residents should become more involved in the planning process, as their visible participation, such as being formally named as the applicant for planning permission, can help to generate active support among

residents

- The Government should ensure that all community-led schemes are exempted from the extension of Right to Buy.
- Councils should ensure they have formal policies in place that encourage planning decisions to be made in consideration of the wider benefits of community-led schemes.

Commenting on the report, its author, *Charlie Cadywould*, said: "*The shortage of affordable housing is one of the biggest problems we face. It's good to see that the Chancellor is committed to building more homes, with the doubling of the housing budget. However, money is just one side of the equation. We also have to find a place to build all these new homes. At the moment the Government's will to get building is rarely matched by local residents who will be most directly impacted by new developments. By engaging local residents, by being democratic and acting as a credible, representative voice, community-led groups can ensure new developments match the needs and desires of local residents, and in doing so turn concern for the community into active support for more local housing.*"

Analysing local planning data between 2010 and 2015

Local authorities in the North of England are granting a much higher proportion of planning applications for large housing developments than those in the South (89% in the North East compared to 75% in the South East) where the housing market is suffering most from a shortage of supply.

Northern councils are also more likely to meet the 13-week target for making decisions (68%), compared to those in the South West and East (59%).



Metropolitan districts are approving a far higher percentage of residential applications (90%) than shire districts (78%), although London boroughs (81%) were found to be performing relatively poorly.

Olivier R I B E R T
Managing Director