



Campaign to Protect
Rural England



THE
NATIONAL
TRUST



Friends of
the Earth



WOODLAND
TRUST

LOCAL DEMOCRACY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION BILL: Ensuring England's regions deliver environmentally sustainable development

Good planning, at every level, is essential for sustainable development and to deliver integrated environmental, social and economic benefits. Regional planning aims to set out a vision for what each region will look like 15 to 20 years ahead. It gives an overview of what development and infrastructure should be built where, and when, and these aspirations should sit beside policies for the protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environment. Regional plans should not be used as a mechanism for delivering economic growth, with little regard for the environmental and social constraints of the region.

The organisations listed here, which are supported by over 5 million people, have come together out of a shared concern that many of the proposals in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill pose a threat to the character and quality of the environment. We ask you to support the following amendments to the Bill to ensure that regional planning delivers sustainable development.

An integrated approach to regional strategies

During the Committee stage debate opposition peers expressed concern that the focus the Bill places on economic development would destroy our ability to protect, enhance and make the most of our environment. Baroness Andrews stated that such fears were unnecessary¹. While this reassurance is welcome, if these concerns really are to be alleviated the commitment to achieving economic growth that is within environmental limits needs to be set out much more clearly on the face of the Bill.

Clause 67 of the Bill states that regional strategies must include policies designed to contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. While we recognise that climate change is a critically important issue, we believe that it should not be used as a proxy for wider environmental concerns. To ensure that policies in the strategies address more than simply carbon emissions they should be required to include policies relating to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and landscape.

Amendment: Clause 67, on regional strategies, should be amended so that in subsection 4, after 'climate change', the phrase 'and policies that seek to protect and enhance the environment, including biodiversity, natural resources and landscape' is inserted.

Meaningful engagement in the planning process

Clause 71 requires the responsible regional authorities to prepare, and comply with, a statement setting out how they will involve interested persons in revising the regional strategy, but this gives no confidence that consultation processes will be meaningful or effective. Regional stakeholders have made a valuable input to regional spatial strategies, and the loss of a formal role for social, environmental and economic partners leaves a gap in the proposed arrangements.

We believe it is essential that, firstly, the public is given an early and effective opportunity to comment at the key stages of regional strategy preparation. Therefore consultation must take place during the discussion of issues and options for the strategy, and on the draft strategy itself. Secondly, the responsible regional authorities should be required to establish and support a stakeholder body, including social, environmental and economic stakeholders,

¹ See Lords Hansard, 9 Feb, Column GC288

whose purpose is to provide advice on the revision, implementation and monitoring of the regional strategy.

Amendments: Clause 71 should be amended so it includes the following two extra subsections:

‘(i) The public shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate timeframes to express their opinion on –

- (a) the key issues and options for the regional strategy, and
- (b) the draft regional strategy.

(j) The responsible regional authorities shall establish and support a stakeholder body which shall include social, environmental and economic partners, and whose purpose shall be to provide advice on –

- (a) the revision of the regional strategy;
- (b) the plan for implementing the regional strategy prepared under section 75(1);
- (c) the report prepared under section 75(2).’

Stronger sustainable development duty on Regional Development Agencies

The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were created over 10 years ago and since then their remit and role within the regions has steadily evolved. The Bill will give RDAs a more significant role in strategic regional planning than they have had to date.

Good planning aims to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits, and so if the RDAs are to take on this new planning role the legislation should ensure that they cannot approach it with an overriding economic focus. Consequently the purposes of the RDAs, as set out in the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, should be amended.

Amendment: Clause 79, on duties of regional development agencies, should be amended to include a new subsection. This subsection would amend section 4(1) of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, so (1)(a) reads ‘to further the sustainable economic development and the regeneration of its area’ and (1)(e) reads ‘to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in its area’.

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