LSE Spatial Economics Research Centre

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Building on the Green Belt

The debate continues about what the government mean by "presumption in favour of development" and the implications for the greenbelt.

While writing about this a couple of weeks ago I said: "Some commentators are reading these changes as a green light for development. In practice unresolved tensions at the heart of the government's approach to planning, nature and economic growth mean it is difficult to say which way the balance will swing." If reporting about a leaked version of the national planning policy framework is to be believed, the balance appears to be swinging towards economic growth.

Some commentators are arguing that even this wouldn't be enough and that we need local communities to vote on specific schemes after direct negotiations with developers. The argument is that this would allow those most affected to be directly compensated thus reducing opposition to developments. This must be the case, but local votes on all schemes may swing the balance too far in the opposite direction. Why should those most affected capture *all* of the gains when these may exceed the direct costs to them? Especially as other costs are spread more widely across the community (e.g. through the need to provide new schools, roads etc). In addition local votes on all development proposals also raise considerable uncertainty for developers.

If we have neighbourhood plans that genuinely reflect local preferences, then I think there will need to be strong financial incentives that benefit households close to new development if those plans are going to allow for growth. But other mechanisms could achieve this without the move to local votes on all proposals (with the distributional and logistical problems that entails).

Posted by Prof Henry G. Overman on Monday, July 04, 2011   G+1 Recommend this on Google

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