

Planning Permission: Appeals

Mark Menzies: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he is taking to ensure that the wishes of the local people and decisions of the local council are given priority in appeal decisions by the Planning Inspectorate. [196030]

Nick Boles: Planning is a quasi-judicial process; it is a long-standing feature of the planning system that there is a right of appeal, just as there are with other local quasi-judicial decisions such as on licensing applications, gambling applications or parking fines.

The Localism Act 2011 has strengthened the role of Local Plans and abolished the last Administration's top-down Regional Strategies. Our streamlined National Planning Policy Framework strongly encourages areas to get up-to-date Local Plans in place, and we have been actively supporting councils in doing so. Local Plans now set the framework in which decisions on particular applications are taken, whether locally or at appeal, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Once adopted a neighbourhood plan will also become part of the area's statutory development plan—an example of this Government's localist agenda. Both local and neighbourhood plans are founded on thorough community involvement and are subject to public examination and consultation. Almost 1,000 communities have applied for a neighbourhood planning area to be designated, with 850 areas now designated.

Planning inspectors will take full account of all the evidence that is before them, including representations made by local residents and other interested parties. Each representation should be considered on their merits, paying careful regard to the relevant policy and material planning considerations.

Since the National Planning Policy Framework was introduced, the number of appeals received has fallen as has the number allowed. The quality of local decisions also remains high—99% of decisions are made locally with only approximately 1% of planning applications overturned on appeal. Housing starts and housing construction are also up, as are permissions for new homes. This means there is more local decision-making, and our reforms are supporting badly-needed new homes within a locally-led planning system.