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CPALC EDITORIALS

Neighbourhood planning the democratic oppression of the majority by a minority?

DETAILS CATEGORY: CPALC
 EDITORIAL CREATED ON 20 MARCH
 2013 WRITTEN BY HERBERT SMITH

Neighbourhood planning has the CPALC team evenly split between whether it's a good or bad. We all agree on one thing, it's potentially very undemocratic. Indeed I'll go further and say it's a recipe for democratic tyranny.

The referendum sections of the legislation have no democratic safety net. All that is required is that 50% or more of those voting are in favour. This is not a good idea.

Those of us who live in small communities, villages and parishes know that there is always a small but very determined minority who wish to promote their very narrow and limited planning views on everyone.

The recent much vaunted Eden Valley referendum has

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made great play on percentages but with no reference to real numbers and therein lies the problem if there is no mandatory threshold.

According to DCLG there was a turnout of 34% for the referendum with 90% in favour. Higher DCLG boasts than the recent elections for police commissioners. It must be remembered that Eden was pilot so I suspect a great deal of expense and effort was lavished on getting the right result.

In time a more worrying scenario may emerge which is far from democratic. In a community of 200 electors, if turnout for the referendum is 10% 20 people vote, only 11 have to be in favour to force the plan on the other 189 electors.

Nor is it a level playing field, funding is available to those producing the plan, nothing seems to be available to those who oppose.

Get involved and if nothing else vote is of course the correct response. Unfortunately in the real world with, apathy, disillusionment, time pressures and a failure to communicate that as we all know is not going to happen in the majority of cases.

The failure to include a safety net mandate is worrying but it would of course set a precedent for say Scotland and the E.U. So it was never going to happen.

Given the potential cost of a neighbourhood plan to a community of between £25,000 to £35,000 the situation will hopefully rarely arise.

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