

TONY MICHAEL RESPONSE (VIA E-MAIL)

There is one significant subject where greater public access to information would be of benefit; namely, allowing the public to be made aware of emerging development proposals at the creative design stage (the "Pre-Application" stage).

This would allow the public (individuals, local groups and civic societies etc) to put forward their views to local planning authorities and developers, so that the newly emerging schemes could be shaped by their designers to take account of the public's views.

Currently, the public's first knowledge of a proposal is when there is statutory consultation following receipt of a planning application, giving the public only some three weeks to respond.

Very often, this response takes the form of "objections", partly because the scheme has been produced without any public input, and partly because the proposal comes as a "shock" so to speak, and the public reacts negatively. If it was a requirement that planning authorities had to make public the pre-planning application discussions with developers, then this would help to empower the public, and more schemes would be seen as being "ours", rather than as now, "theirs".

The current Localism Bill, and the proposals for the NPPF both refer to the desirability of pre-application publication, but only for very large schemes: this welcome approach, I would suggest, should extend to all significant developments, where the public would expect to be "in the picture" from the start.

It has been said by some developers that there are confidentiality issues that preclude prior discussion of developments; yet some other developers already voluntarily make their intentions public, and draw in local people to the evolution of their schemes. They do this, partly because they are more enlightened, but also because they recognise that their schemes will be better, and gain planning permission more quickly, with less public objection. Also, as a practising town planner and architect, I know from personal experience that the claims about confidentiality are mostly fear of the unknown, and an excuse by backwoodsmen.

If the relevant legislation were to require publication of pre-application discussions by local planning authorities, then this I feel would not only give information to the public, it would also provide an important source of information to the scheme designers at an early stage, help to create better schemes, speed up the planning process, and cut down on the last ditch objections that often derail projects, resulting in much delay and abortive work.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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