

**Item 3(e)**

**Environment and Housing Board – report from Cllr Mike Jones  
(Chairman)**

**LGA responds to the Growth and Infrastructure Bill**

1. The LGA has responded to the Government's new Growth and Infrastructure Bill published on 18 October. We believe that further changes to the planning system will not address the key issues stalling development and will lead to delay and uncertainty. The bill represents an enormous opportunity to empower local areas to drive growth from the ground up but that opportunity will be missed unless the bill focuses on the things that can tackle the real barriers to growth. The LGA will be putting forward proposals to refocus the Bill on more issues that will make a real impact, and drive growth.
2. On 13 November, I gave oral evidence to the Growth and Infrastructure Bill Committee, supported by LGA officers. I highlighted to the Committee that the planning system was only now settling down following a number of wide ranging reforms and that the planning system is not holding up growth; highlighting that 400,000 homes are awaiting construction and 87% of applications were approved last year. I also expressed the LGA's opposition to the extension of the powers of a quango, the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), at the expense of local decision making, as proposed in the Bill.
3. I argued strongly that Clause 5 of the proposed bill which allows PINS to renegotiate the affordable housing element of section 106 agreements is completely unnecessary and counterproductive as the vast majority of councils are already renegotiating voluntarily, and that an appeal process based on viability already existed. The Environment and Housing Board, supported by officers will continue to lobby on the Bill and put forward amendments as it moves through its Parliamentary stages.

**LGA Inland Flood Risk Management Group annual event**

4. Cllr Andrew Cooper, Deputy Chair of the Environment and Housing Board chaired the Annual Event of the LGA Inland Flood Risk Management Group on 25 October. This event brought together more than 80 delegates from central government, local government and national partners, all with an interest in flood risk management.
5. Delegates were able to hear from a range of speakers including local authority colleagues from Calderdale and West Sussex who provided a timely reflection on the summer 2012 floods which affected their local areas.
6. Defra Minister Richard Benyon addressed delegates in the afternoon session and announced a new flood insurance community pathfinder grant scheme that will be launched shortly. He also provided clarification that the sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) implementation will not commence in April 2013.

**NEA Parliamentary Reception**

7. Members of the Board also attended the National Energy Action Parliamentary Reception on Tuesday 6 November at the House of Commons. One of the

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Environment and Housing Board's stated priorities is action on fuel poverty and the related issue of the impact of energy costs on councils' spending.

**EFRA Select Committee**

8. On 7 November, Cllr Keith House, Deputy Chair of the Environment and Housing Board provided oral evidence to the EFRA Select Committee's inquiry into rural communities. His contribution highlighted the barriers to rural growth, the crucial role of councils in overcoming these, the need for rural areas to be given the same opportunities as cities to negotiate their own deals to support development and the importance of moving further and fully localising business rates.
9. Cllr House's evidence also re-emphasised concerns that the Growth and Infrastructure Bill, as drafted, is a missed opportunity to empower local areas to drive economic growth. To achieve the desired impact, the Bill should focus on initiatives that can tackle the actual barriers to growth, such as access to finance, and not the planning system, which is not a barrier.

**Ash Tree Dieback**

10. The LGA has also attended and contributed to two key governmental COBR meetings relating to the Chalara Fraxinea 'Ash Tree Dieback' virus. The Government has now committed to producing an action plan to combat the spread of the disease. This will involve further monitoring of trees by owners and managers of land, and the destruction of (only) diseased trees that have been recently planted. Councils will want to consider their role in this. The LGA will be working to ensure that the views of those responsible for combating Ash tree dieback in council-owned parks, woodland and roadsides are taken into account in shaping the government's action plan.

**Royal Town Planning Institute Politicians in Planning Conference**

11. During November I also attended a number of engagements on behalf on the board, notably the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Politicians in Planning conference, where I spoke regarding the opportunities presented by the Localism Act and the National Planning Policy Framework, the importance of local plan preparation, the support the LGA can offer to councils and the vital role elected members have in ensuring the democratic legitimacy of the planning system.

**Planning guidance roundtable at the Department for Communities and Local Government**

12. Cllr Ed Turner and I attended a local authority round table discussion on planning guidance with Lord Matthew Taylor and members of his review group on 13 November. The discussion was an opportunity to discuss the Government's Review of Planning Practice Guidance, led by Lord Taylor, and the shape of planning guidance and support going forward. Local authority attendees stressed that, whilst there are a small number of priority areas where guidance is valuable, local authorities should be provided with the space and flexibility to make local decisions.

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