



Boles: streamlined system

Villagers promised more

**Isabel Oakeshott
and Robin Henry**

MINISTERS have pledged to make it easier for people to block unwanted housing developments in their area amid mounting public anger over building schemes.

Nick Boles, the planning minister, says he wants to make it "quicker and easier" for people to make their own decisions about the

location of new housing. He has also offered to meet campaigners to discuss their concerns.

The move comes after The Sunday Times highlighted a revolt over unpopular housing developments in rural beauty spots. The government is encouraging people who fear unwanted developments in their back yards to devise their own "neighbourhood plans" identifying preferred sites for

new builds. However, the process can be costly and can take up to two years.

Boles now hopes to streamline the system to give people more power. "The housing crisis makes it vital that the power to block unwanted development should only be wielded by communities that have taken responsibility for meeting their housing needs by preparing local and

armour to ward off developers

neighbourhood plans," he said.

He added: "We do want to make the process of making a neighbourhood plan easier so that more communities can take it up, and are looking at the concept of neighbourhood planning 'lite'."

The escalating dissent over house-building comes after the coalition relaxed planning laws, introducing a new "presumption in favour of sustainable development".

Councils have a duty to identify how many new homes will be needed in their area and set aside suitable land.

Residents can have their say through neighbourhood plans, and so far more than 500 communities have drawn up plans but there are complaints that the process is too expensive and can be thwarted by wealthy developers.

Winslow town council, which is in the Buckingham

constituency of John Bercow, the Commons Speaker, has spent £20,000 drawing up plans to locate more than 400 houses on a range of sites. However, locals fear it may have little effect.

Roy van de Poll, a councillor, said: "We were too late to receive government funding for our plan and now the pot's empty. We've had to draw £20,000 from our reserves and we are still in danger of being

outspent by the developers." One developer, the Gladman Group, has appealed to the planning inspectorate to reject Winslow's plan, arguing the housing areas the council has suggested are wrong.

Gladman instead proposes using land it has bought, including two sites where it has submitted applications for 411 new houses.

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