Written submission from James Gordon Stewart

Land Reform Bill 2015

Statement of personal independence on this matter:

I am not a landowner apart from my residential property. I am not related to a landowner. I am not a tenant of a landowner, nor do I live in an area likely to be affected directly by this legislation.

Section 47: Sustainable Development Conditions:

I am concerned that the proposed legislation as regards ‘Community right to buy’ is predicated on ‘Sustainable Development’ but that the proposed legislation does not adequately define what is intended by this phrase.

1. ‘Sustainable’ :

When I hear these words I disaggregate them into ‘sustainable’, having the meaning that the project in steady-state (ie following any initial project or set-up cost) is capable of meeting its goals, its costs and its obligations from its own generated resources without being dependent on either the state or on grant-making bodies.

There appears to be no requirement for a costed, audited business case to be presented as part of a Section 45 Application for Consent. It seems to me that a Community Body could therefore justify proceeding under a Section 45 Application and potentially at some later time that Community Body could become a burden on the taxpayer when it is no longer sustainable.

As a taxpayer I think it is important that ministers incorporate a high standard of proof that the proposed Community Body will be sustainable: there should be a minimum standard for ‘community equity funding’ (ie investment of free funds committed by the community) and there should be a maximum burden of loan or mortgage interest in any P&L projections

2. ‘Development’ :

When I hear the word ‘development’ in conjunction with ‘sustainable’ I assume that something new will happen. There might be regeneration of land, buildings, housing stock. There might be new employment opportunity through new enterprise.

The proposed legislation does not define what ‘development’ means and what is the minimum acceptable impact of such development in order for a Section 45 Application for Consent to succeed.

I suggest that creation of new sustainable industry and tourism opportunity must be a priority as these will bring employment, income, reduced state dependence, population stability, and thereby economic regeneration to the community.