



Glenda Jackson MP

**Sustainable Communities Bill
18th June 2007**

Another Friday: another private members bill. But this time, a bill that met with all-party approval, unlike the infamous attempt to exclude MPs from the Freedom of Information Act.

Last Friday it was the Sustainable Communities bill which went through its Report stage and third reading in double-quick time. Now the bill will be subject to the considerations of the other Place, but having been accepted by our House, without a vote, it is likely that their Lordships will be equally supportive. As with so many other bills, this one had been a long time in coming.

Tribute was paid, from all sides, to the campaigning organisation Local Works, not only to their tenacity – approximately four years from the idea to Friday's third reading – but also to their ability to bring together in coalition organisations, as the bill's promoter, Nick Hurd, Conservative MP for Ruislip-Northwood, said "from the Women's Institute to the Campaign for Real Ale".

The bill's purpose is just what it says, if not on the tin, in the title. And one of its central planks in keeping and sustaining communities, lies in the belief that local opinion should have real influence, indeed, power, in the decision making processes that effect us all - the shops in our high streets, local businesses, housing, green spaces, recreational facilities, the list goes on and on. It is not about preserving in aspic, nor being a fully-signed up NIMBYist. But it is about listening to local voices and most importantly, hearing them.

There was much discussion relating to the rural environment. Villages featured prominently, but the point was made, by more than one London MP that the capital, indeed all urban-suburban communities comprise their fair share of 'villages'. We value them, their services, their knowledge and commitment to us.

From the very first, the bill has received huge support from Hampstead and Highgate residents, so I'm delighted to report its safe passage through the House of Commons. And it seems that the infamous private members bill, attempting to introduce an amendment to the freedom of Information acts has met with a complete thumbs-down from the House of Lords. Not a Lord or Lady would act as sponsor, so let's hope that is the end of it. Something else that will be greeted with delight in Hampstead and Highgate and by your MP.