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GREEN ISSUES

• COMMUNICATIONS •

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FACSIMILE MESSAGE

TO: Barker Review

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RE: Green Issues Communications submission

Urgent

For Review

Please Comment

Please Reply

Green Issues Communications Ltd

Response to The Barker Review of Land Based Planning

Introduction

Green Issues Communications Ltd is a consultancy specialising in community consultation and participation in the planning process. We employ a methodology designed to engage communities in meaningful and transparent ways. We seek to deploy a range of techniques designed to encourage the broadest range of views, creating the greatest influence on development projects.

We recognise the significant emphasis placed on community participation contained in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Our clients include many of the United Kingdom's largest house builders, commercial developers and local authorities.

Background

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 was notable for many reasons. In particular the Act placed significant emphasis on public consultation and participation in the planning process. The Act encourages individuals and groups to influence proposals for development before being submitted in the form of a planning application. Local authorities are required to publish following consultation a Statement of Community Involvement. This sets out, in part, how communities should be consulted on major development projects (10 units or more). It also describes how potential applicants should engage with their communities.

The political context

There are few issues that create greater public interest in relation to local government responsibility than planning. It could be argued that the one issue that can unite or divide a community, increase interest in local politics and revitalise public interest in the community is the submission of a controversial planning application. Green Issues has witnessed substantial

campaigns for and against schemes with door to door letter writing, petitions in local pubs and the ubiquitous public meetings.

The capacity of small numbers of individuals to 'wage war' against a scheme that they see as against their interests is enormous. The ease of access through the internet of technical information, the ability to print leaflets and organise opposition has created a much more democratic process in the sense that professionals no longer have the upper hand in terms of arguing one position or another.

The difficulty is that very small numbers of unrepresentative members of the community can delay or stop schemes often with ease and also those members of the community tend, although not always, to be affluent and influential.

It seems likely that the ability of small groups to delay or stop schemes will only increase making so much of the good intentions of the Planning Act in tatters.

Faster delivery of planning consents

Our central view is that government was absolutely right to put public consultation at the heart of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act.

It is now vital that this process is made as accessible as possible. An improved Planning process needs the following:

- Public confidence
- Transparency
- Programmes of consultation all stages that proactively engages those least likely to be naturally engaged in addition to those who will
- A partnership between planning authorities and developers to ensure that this process occurs

Partnership

For us partnership between local authorities and developers is important to ensure resources are best used from both. It also recognises that in many areas the developer may be best placed to deliver the most credible consultation programmes. It is ironic that in some areas the body least trusted to carry out credible consultation is the local authority. It is said in some quarters 'would you vote for your landlord' – many residents in local authority housing are asked to regularly. Similarly, would you want to be consulted by a body who may be your landlord and certainly a body that takes increasing amounts in tax. Our point is simply that the local authority may not be the most appropriate vehicle to manage a consultation process.

Delivery

We believe that velocity can be applied to the planning process provided the following is understood:

- Planning is no longer a technical exercise controlled by planning experts in local government and the private sector
- It is now increasingly an intuitive process governed by effective lobby campaigns from groups equipped to be as credible as the experts
- Consultation programmes should be delivered by bodies most credible and able to do so
- Consultation programmes should be early, robust and focussed on out reach into parts of the community that rarely vote let alone set up campaign groups

Conclusions

We are very optimistic that the current planning process can deliver greater supply providing those who administer the process recognise that the planning is becoming an increasingly non technical and intuitive process.

Early and robust consultation must involve the hardest to reach groups and that local authorities may not always be best placed to deliver consultation.