

17 March 2006



By Email To: [barker.review@hm-treasury.gov.uk](mailto:barker.review@hm-treasury.gov.uk)

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Dear sir/madam

### THE BARKER REVIEW OF LAND USE PLANNING

REPRESENTATION BY THE HORTICULTURAL TRADES ASSOCIATION,  
HORTICULTURE HOUSE, 19 HIGH STREET, THEALE, READING, BERKSHIRE,  
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Please find below the response of the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) to the consultation on the Barker Review. The HTA represents the UK garden industry which includes garden centre, nursery and landscape businesses.

1. The Relationship Between Sustainable Development and Economic, Environmental and Social Goals

The HTA does not under-estimate the importance of sustainability. But it considers that it is misjudged and ill conceived to give sustainability the role of underpinning planning. This may adversely affect the economy. In turn, the ability of future generations to meet their needs will be adversely affected, thus negating the aim behind sustainable development. A capitalist economy requires checks and balances in the interests of society and the environment. But if its ability to function properly is seriously impeded, there will be adverse social and environmental effects of as great or greater order than may arise from inadequate attention to sustainability. To quote Adam Smith: *"I do not owe my dinner to the benevolence of the butcher, the baker and the brewer, but to their self-interest"*. Social and environmental goals cannot be achieved if the economy does not flourish. Sustainability should not underpin planning. It should be considered together with other elements.

2. What is the Impact of Planning on Encouraging or Impeding Business Investment in Light of Recent Reforms to English Planning System? Ever-Increasing Transparency and Providing Greater Certainty? What Further Reforms are Desirable?

There is anecdotal evidence that the emerging planning system will implode under its own weight. The HTA is aware that this is a concern expressed (sometimes privately for obvious reasons) by members of the planning profession, encompassing local government officers, consultants, members of the Bar, and Planning Inspectors. The “existing” (as opposed to the “new”) system was not perfect: no system ever is. But it was reaching maturity and stability, and had been in place long enough for lay persons who interface with planning to understand and be familiar with it and derive a reasonable degree of certainty from it. Abandoning this system when it is just coming to maturity and is widely understood is a deeply unsustainable action, the more so at a time of shortages in planning personnel, particularly in local authorities and at the Planning Inspectorate. The new system provides far less certainty for businesses, because it is not site based, at least not until some way into the process. It is not readily understood how the early stages of the new process will translate eventually into clear policies which the lay person can understand as applying to particular pieces of land. As importantly, it is bringing the planning system, not ever the subject of a great deal of public admiration, into disrepute. For instance, the Long Term Vision set out in the community strategy of one District is:

*“for a District that has a mix of people of all ages who live in supportive communities, where people can get about without being dependant on the car, where people can live in safety, free from crime and fear of crime, where the rural character and beauty of the area is looked after, where people enjoy a good standard of living and have secure, well-paid and fulfilling jobs and can afford a home that suits their needs”.*

Another community strategy aims to reduce the number of people smoking, and the number of under-age and single mother pregnancies. It is obvious to all that the contribution the planning system can make to achieving such *visions* is very limited.

3. Are the New Arrangements for Stakeholder Engagement Succeeding in Engaging Those Representing Economic Interests, Including SMEs? What are the Barriers to That Engagement and How Might They Be Addressed?

Those groups mentioned above and in particular SMEs which are so vital to the country’s economy will not engage in a plan-making process which sets out *visions* such as that set out above. They will be alienated and feel the process is not worth engaging in.

4. Economic Development Can Help Achieve the Regeneration and Renaissance of ... Rural Areas. Are there Ways in which Planning Could Strengthen Economic Performance?

The HTA continues to be concerned that while the Government encourages diversification of the rural economy, in practice it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain planning permissions which have that effect. The emphasis of

planning is that development should be in settlements. But it is often an intrinsic part of the nature of businesses and operations that do and can further diversify the rural economy that they are located in the countryside itself, and require that location to function and flourish.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. Briercliffe', written in a cursive style.

**Tim Briercliffe**  
Director of Business Development  
The Horticultural Trades Association