

## **Barker Review of Land Use Planning**

Having read the terms of reference for the Review and the issues to be addressed, I respectfully submit the representations set out below. Apologies for missing the 28<sup>th</sup> March deadline.

Significant improvement could be found in efficiency and in speed by giving the fullest consideration to the way in which the planning function is administered by local planning authorities. I hope this submission will be found helpful.

I have over forty years experience in town planning, including twenty as a chief planning officer. In addition I was involved in construction, as a municipal engineer, for eight years. I was active in the R.T.P.I. nationally for twenty five years and have served on the Executive Board of the Construction Industry Council. Since 1986, I have been associated, as a special professor, with planning education at the University of Nottingham.

Too many now coming into contact with the planning system find dissatisfaction with the service provided by local planning authorities. As a planning consultant has recently pointed out, pre-application advice cannot be relied upon, phone calls and e-mails are often ignored and an ultimatum either to withdraw or see an application refused is commonly encountered. 'Pre-decision negotiations to add value to a proposal are a thing of the past'. (Stephen Bate, the Robert Doughty Consultancy, Journal of the East Midlands R.T.P.I., April, 2006).

I urge that consideration be given to the following:

1. In any search for improvement, not least the central purpose of encouraging economic growth on the one hand and the protection and enhancement of the environment on the other, too little attention is paid to the means of delivery and the quality of public administration.
2. Within all local planning authorities, a properly qualified chief officer, a corporate director, should control the operation of the planning function. He or she should hold a post statutorily protected and therefore be better able to speak and advise without fear or favour. Any such arrangement would need stronger safeguards for the employer and for the ultimate protection of democratic accountability in the public service. It should not be difficult to combine protection with an obligatory and demanding code of professional conduct.
3. The ability to negotiate is a vital skill in town planning and comes, for the most part, through experience; it is empowered by seniority in an organisation. It is this skill which leads to an efficient and expeditious conduct of business, thereby making an effective contribution to the speed of the system, to economic growth and to the protection of the environment.

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4. Anyone, particularly those contemplating large schemes involving substantial investment, difficult design issues and, perhaps, land acquisition problems, should be able to negotiate where necessary with an experienced person whose word on behalf of the authority can be relied upon and whose negotiation skills can be trusted by elected members.
5. My comments are concerned with service within the local planning authority. I cannot, with the same confidence, submit ideas in respect of regional policy formulation but I suspect the same principle, if applied, would lead to improvement. There seems little hope of elected regional authorities being established in England. The present means of providing a public service are attenuated, but they could become more direct if government offices in the regions were to take initial responsibility for advising the Secretary of State on strategic policy, with strong planning teams and leadership established within them, the assemblies being consulted throughout. Such teams could have a continuing involvement in major developments affecting regional policy.

I would not wish to claim confidentiality for this submission.

**JOHN DEAN**

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