

CEPOG

Support Team

Barker Review of Land Use Planning
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Chair: Jim Harte

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Date: 15th September 2006

Dear Sir/Madam,

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

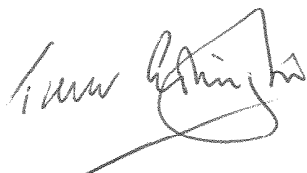
Interim Report Analysis

At its meeting on 1st September 2006, the West Midlands Chief Engineers and Planning Officers Group (CEPOG) agreed the contents of the attached report as an interim response to the above consultation exercise. I would be grateful if you could take these comments into account when preparing your final recommendations.

CEPOG reports to the West Midlands Planning and Transportation Sub-Committee; this comprises senior elected members from the seven local authorities and the passenger transport authority and considers strategic planning and transport matters as they impact on the metropolitan area as a whole. The sub-committee next meets on Friday 22nd September and will consider a copy of the enclosed paper. I will inform you immediately afterwards as to the outcome of this meeting.

I trust that these observations are of assistance and look forward to considering your final recommendations. If you have any further queries please contact Andy Donnelly on (0121) 214 7338 in the first instance

Yours sincerely,



Trevor Errington
Leader, CEPOG Support Team

WEST MIDLANDS PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION SUB-COMMITTEE

22nd September 2006

REPORT OF CEPOG

**PROPOSED RESPONSE TO THE INTERIM BARKER REPORT OF LAND USE
PLANNING**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT.

- 1.1. To advise Sub-Committee of the contents of the above and propose a response accordingly.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS.

- 2.1. It is recommended that:

- (i) Planning and Transportation Sub-Committee endorse the comments in the report as a formal response to the Interim Barker Report of Land Use Planning.

3. BACKGROUND.

- 3.1. In December 2005, the Chancellor and Deputy Prime Minister commissioned an independent review of the land use planning system in England by Kate Barker. In summary, the terms of reference were to consider how, *'in the context of globalisation, and building on the reforms previously put in place, planning policy and procedures can better deliver economic growth and prosperity alongside other sustainable development goals.'* Particular issues to be addressed include:

- ways of improving the efficiency and speed of the planning system;
- ways of improving the system to increase its flexibility;
- the relationship between planning and productivity; and
- the relationship between economic and other sustainable development goals in the delivery of sustainable communities.

- 3.2. It is made clear that reform will not be suggested for its own sake and that as the new plan-making process is bedding down, the focus of the Final Report will not be on this part of the system.

- 3.3. An Interim Report was published in July 2006, containing preliminary analysis and identifying areas that will be considered in more detail. Comments are invited by 19th September 2006. The full Interim Report (approximately 200 pages) can be viewed on the Treasury and Department for Communities and Local Government websites.

- 3.4. In the light of the above deadline, a holding CEPOG response has been sent on the basis that it is subject to Member approval.

- 4.15. Monitoring suggests that there is currently some 740 hectares of employment land available in the WMMA with annual completions averaging approximately 78 hectares per annum over the past decade. There is also around 600,000 square metres of office development in the pipeline.
- 4.16. Analysis suggests that land supply is sufficient in the WMMA and that there is no clear evidence to suggest that supply side blockages have hampered economic development. It is acknowledged, however, that the market is very competitive and global in nature. In response to this a further two high quality Regional Investment Sites are due to come on stream shortly at i54 Wobaston Road (north of Wolverhampton) and Blythe Valley Business Park Phase 2, Solihull to enhance the 'offer' to businesses and capture investment which may otherwise be lost.
- 4.17. These sites have been released from the Green Belt to ensure that the 'offer' to business is competitive. Any release of Green Belt, however, for whatever purpose must be considered, amongst other things, in terms of its potential impact on the regeneration of brownfield sites elsewhere.
- 4.18. The Interim Report suggests that there is no incentive for local authorities to adopt a pro-growth policy stance. In the WMMA (and the Borough of Telford and Wrekin), the principles underpinning the City Region sustainable growth agenda are supported. A strategy is being prepared to facilitate both population and economic growth in return for greater devolution of powers and control over budgets.

Enterprise and Competition

- 4.19. The Interim Report acknowledges that the 'town centres first approach' has proved successful in directing development back to town and city centres and cites Walsall as a centre that has benefited as a result. It does, however, suggest that such an approach has been detrimental to competition and efficiency and may have led to a lack of investment in smaller centres thus compounding social exclusion.
- 4.20. This analysis is refuted; major retailers may have an influence in preventing access to the market as is illustrated by the current investigation into the convenience goods sector by the Competition Commission. Moreover, it is considered that previous more flexible planning policies enabled operators to locate in out of centre locations to the detriment of local communities with legitimate needs. The planning system is proactive in identifying local centres and encouraging appropriate access to goods and services to foster social inclusion.

Planning and Innovation

- 4.21. Innovation is an important catalyst for productivity growth; it can be defined broadly as identifying new products, techniques and markets. The Interim Report suggests that planning can influence innovation by supporting 'cluster developments' through making land available and providing supporting infrastructure.
- 4.22. The previous reference to High Technology Corridors (paragraph 4.12) is relevant again in this context and a number of 'clusters' have been identified

in the West Midlands RES. It is also relevant that the vast majority of Major Scheme investment programmed in the WMMA's Local Transport Plan (2006) is closely linked to Regeneration Zones and High Technology Corridors, which were initially identified in the RES and subsequently reflected in the RSS.

- 4.23. The Interim Report also suggests that a skilled labour pool is an essential prerequisite for cluster development. Discouraging selective out-migration, usually of higher skilled people, from urban areas is at the very core of the West Midlands RSS.

Planning and Efficiency

- 4.24. The Interim Report does not present any analysis to illustrate that the number of planning applications refused is excessive or unreasonable and concedes that there may be good reason for refusing certain proposals. In fact, the Report notes that the situation is improving in terms of time taken to determine planning applications but that businesses still have concerns regarding delays and the number of conditions attached.
- 4.25. During the first quarter of 2006, the percentage of applications determined within eight weeks within the West Midlands Region stood at 81% compared to 76% for the corresponding period in 2005. Furthermore, Solihull and Wolverhampton are amongst the best performing Metropolitan Authorities in the country.
- 4.26. These improved results can, in part, be attributed to the receipt of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) by local authorities that are meeting Government targets. In some authorities this money has been spent on recruitment and retention of staff and training which has helped to improve performance.
- 4.27. The *Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (PDG)* consultation paper has recently been published for consultation. This advocates that future PDG payments to local authorities are linked to delivering new housing. If this is adopted as policy, there is a possibility that local authorities will focus on determining residential planning applications at the expense of those for other types of development.
- 4.28. The improving figures for determining planning applications are even more encouraging when considering the number of planning applications that are determined on previously developed land. Most planning authorities within the major urban area have to deal with difficult sites, where issues of contamination and remediation can make negotiation difficult and affect the time taken to determine planning applications.
- 4.29. In order to reduce the time taken to determine applications for major development proposals a number of issues need to be addressed. Initially planners need to have the skills necessary to enable them to deal with major projects. Project management skills are therefore very important. Identifying strategic issues, negotiation and liaison skills, along with other detailed knowledge requirements are all necessary requirements for the job.
- 4.30. In addition to improving the skills of planners, developers should be submitting better quality applications that include the appropriate levels and type of information required to determine the application.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. There are no direct financial implications emanating from this report.

6. CONTACT

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Keywords: Employment Economy Barker
Report title: Proposed response to interim barker report of land use planning
Date: 25th August 2006
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Author: CST/PAG
Keywords: Employment Economy Barker

making' has in attracting further investment and encouraging people to live in urban areas and contribute to their economic revival. A high quality natural environment is also a key part of any successful regeneration strategy.

- 6.9. *Concerning incentives to encourage growth, the WMMA (and Telford and Wrekin Borough Council), are currently preparing a City Region Development Plan which seeks to grow the economy and population in a sustainable manner. It is understood that local authorities have incentives by means of more devolved powers and greater control of budgets in return for delivering economic growth.*

Planning Enterprise and Competition

- 6.10. **Competition is deemed to be important in that it can help deliver greater choice, higher quality and lower cost goods which will benefit consumers.**
- 6.11. **In terms of promoting competition and enterprise, the Interim Report suggests that the planning system is skewed in favour of large developers / operators with the resources to deal effectively with the system.**
- 6.12. **Concern is expressed as to whether restrictions on land and property supply increase the cost of entry for firms seeking access to a market. Mention is also made of landowners attaching 'hope value' to employment sites on the basis that higher value land uses may come forward.**
- 6.13. **Criticism is also levelled at the planning system in that it artificially restricts the size of developments, particularly retail, beyond their most efficient size.**
- 6.14. **The town centres first policy, as heralded through PPG6 and PPS6 is also scrutinised and it is acknowledged that it has been successful in revitalising town centres. Nevertheless, it is questioned whether, in the light of growing incomes, there is always a zero sum game between town centre vitality and development beyond the centre. It is also suggested that the town centres first principle contributes towards congestion and can lead to social exclusion by preventing development in other locations.**
- 6.15. *Although the decline in manufacturing industry releases land for other uses, the planning system has a key role in identifying and safeguarding an adequate portfolio of employment land to meet future needs. The Black Country Study, for example, which has led to the formulation of the Phase 1 RSS Revision has made a careful assessment of existing employment land and has identified how much needs to be retained to ensure employment growth can keep pace with new housing development.*
- 6.16. *The level of retail development needed is established through detailed modelling based on a number of socio-economic and demographic assumptions; it is by no means a perfect science. In the West Midlands RSS a network of 25 town and city centres is identified based on serving their requisite catchments.*

locations. Out-of-centre developments are typically even more dominated by a few main operators than traditional town centres.

Planning and Innovation

- 6.24. **Innovation is an important catalyst for productivity growth; it can be defined broadly as identifying new products, techniques and markets. Innovation is to some extent dependent on expenditure in research and development and is closely linked to the ‘clustering’ of similar companies and their specialist suppliers. Universities and specialist research centres often have a key role to play also.**
- 6.25. **It is noted that the planning system cannot create clusters, but can assist by ensuring that sufficient land is available, providing adequate housing to support local labour markets and adopting pro-growth and concentration rather than dispersal policies.**
- 6.26. *The West Midlands RES seeks to promote a number of clusters and this is reflected in the West Midlands RSS whereby three high technology corridors are identified cross local authority boundaries and enter the Shire Counties. The aim of this policy is to diversify the Region’s economy by encouraging cluster developments closely linked to critical research and development capabilities and advanced technologies. By setting this framework at the strategic level it acts as a market signal and give businesses an element of certainty when making locational decisions.*
- 6.27. *It is conceded that merely identifying and marketing land as being suitable for a certain type of development does not guarantee that it will be forthcoming; demand from high technology companies is by no means as strong in the WMMA as it is in Oxford and Cambridge. Cluster development relies on having an appropriate skills base, infrastructure and the supporting educational and research institutions.*
- 6.28. *Regional monitoring measures the success of this policy approach by establishing the proportion of high technology developments within each corridor. To date this target is not considered to be on track as completions of this nature are low. To some extent this can be accounted for by the fact that the approach is in its infancy and that extant planning permissions for other uses are working their way through the system. It does, however, point towards a potential dilemma for local authorities in that if high technology developments do not come forward in the short term, they will be under increasing pressure to release land for other uses which, whilst creating jobs do not fit closely with the High Technology Corridor Strategy.*
- 6.29. *Elsewhere WMMA development plans seek to promote or pockets of complementary activity such as the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham and the Artists’ Quarter in Wolverhampton.*
- 6.30. *Looking at the bigger picture, the West Midlands RSS seeks to foster an Urban Renaissance whereby more jobs and homes remain in the major urban areas than in the recent past and that selective out migration, often of higher socio-economic groups, is stemmed. A development pattern of concentration rather than dispersal is proposed which, as the Interim Report suggests is conducive to ‘cluster’ development. WMMA’s commitment to this approach is reiterated through its desire to attain City Region status.*

the impact that it may have on existing rents and that there is insufficient capacity within the property industry to meet demands.

- 6.40. *Forecasts are also made as to employment land requirements over a plan period and these are regularly reviewed.*
- 6.41. *In terms of height restrictions, Birmingham, for example, is keen to promote tall buildings in the city centre with the city's tallest building Beetham Tower recently being completed with similar proposals in the pipeline.*
- 6.42. *Safeguarding important views is a key aspect of urban design policy. It is not considered that this has a serious impact on occupation costs but rather has economic benefits in that it improves the attractiveness and image of an area thus attracting further investment.*