



# Hampshire County Council

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<i>Date</i>	14 <sup>th</sup> September 2006	<i>E-mail</i>	stuart.jarvis@hants.gov.uk

Dear Sirs

### Kate Barker Team – Interim Report

I am writing to let you know that HCC will be submitting a response to the Interim Report. However this is due to be considered by the County Council's Cabinet meeting on 25 September 2006. In the meantime, I understand that you are seeking submission in advance of this date. I therefore enclose, as an interim response, officer comments which will be considered by Members on 25<sup>th</sup> September.

You will appreciate that at this stage these are officer recommendations and that the County Council can only finalise its response after consideration by the elected Members. I will advise you of the final response following the Cabinet meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

Yours faithfully

Stuart Jarvis  
Deputy Director of Environment

Enc.



Certificate No FS 21845



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*Director of Environment*  
**Alison Quant BSc MSc MRTPI**



## Extract From Hampshire County Council Report to Cabinet 25 September 2006

### 4. **Proposed Response**

- 4.1 Kate Barker has invited responses to the interim report, particularly where they can assist her in drawing up the final report and making recommendations for further improvements to the planning system. The proposed responses set out below are in key areas in which Hampshire County Council has particular experience, either historically or in the context of day-to-day operations in relation, for example, to sub-regional planning and major schemes, and it can thus speak with some authority. The proposed response does not seek to comprehensively cover the whole scope of the review or the interim report. District Councils and others will no doubt be responding in relation to matters of direct concern to them, such as local planning and development control.

#### **A National Policy Framework**

- 4.2 The interim report examines a number of examples where timescales have been lengthy, the absence of a national policy framework, a lack of clarity of direction from Central Government and over-complex advice. Kate Barker notes that there appears to be substantial complexity in the system and that this can be exacerbated by the range of Central Government interests. There are six main Government departments with an interest in planning and the report notes that it is not always clear that the roles are coordinated effectively. The Dibden Bay proposal is included as an example where timescales were lengthy. It has been suggested to Kate Barker that the absence of a National Ports Policy was a contributing factor. In the County Council's experience Public Inquiries often spend considerable time debating what Government policy might be. The absence of a National Spatial Strategy to inform Regional Spatial Strategies and to inform infrastructure decisions at a strategic level causes confusion and wastes resources.

#### **Target Times for Government Decision Making**

- 4.3 The interim report lists examples of major transport schemes which well illustrate the lengthy timescales (between 27 and 65 months) from submission of an application to decision. All the schemes quoted are examples where Central Government was the determining authority and in no case did the Secretary of State make a decision in less than six months after receipt of the Inquiry Inspector's report. A further example is the South Hampshire Rapid Transit scheme, where it took the Secretary of State almost twice as long (26 months) to make up his mind on the Inspector's recommendation than the whole of the process from application through Inquiry to the Inspector reporting (14 months). Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are subject to target times for making decisions on planning applications and there is a case to be made for Secretaries of State to be subject to a similar regime, which would help address the concerns about delays raised in the Interim Report.

## **Delivery of Economic Objectives**

- 4.4 Kate Barker has examined ways in which the planning system can better deliver economic objectives. Related to this is the supply of land for employment purposes through development plan and development control mechanisms.
- 4.5 An addition to Planning Policy Guidance 3 (PPG3) introduced in 2004 requires LPAs to consider favourably planning applications for other uses on employment land where there is no realistic prospect of it being taken up for employment uses. This has been interpreted as relating to short term prospects, with the result that much land which was previously used for business premises or is allocated for that purpose in Local Plans has been granted planning permission for residential development, especially in urban areas. Many of these sites are likely to be more attractive to small and medium-sized businesses than large greenfield employment land allocations. In Hampshire 70% of the workforce is employed by organisations employing fewer than 200 people and it is these businesses that are most likely to be affected by reductions in the number of small and medium-sized sites available.
- 4.6 Planning allocations and development control are not the only factors that determine whether land comes forward for development. In Hampshire there are examples of allocated employment sites remaining undeveloped for many years. The reasons for this may be complex but include attractiveness to the market and site-specific constraints. It is also likely, however, that some owners are holding out in the hope that either the allocation could be changed to residential following the addition to PPG3 or that employment land values would rise in the short term.
- 4.7 The interim report examines ways in which the efficiency and speed of the system can be improved. Providing incentives for LPAs is one possibility. A recent consultation by Government proposes the introduction of a "housing and planning delivery grant" to provide an incentive for LPAs to respond more positively to local housing pressures. If such an incentive were to be linked to the delivery of employment floorspace, a more balanced approach would be encouraged, rather than the provision of additional housing at all costs.

## **Certainty for Developers**

- 4.8 Planning permission for significant schemes is usually granted subject to a legal agreement on contributions by the developer towards transport and other infrastructure. This can add to the length of time between application and the start of development. As there is no fixed rate for such contributions, experience in Hampshire indicates that timescales are extended by the negotiation procedures necessary to reach agreement. In considering how the proposed Planning-gain Supplement process should work, Government should take into account the advantages of a "tariff" system so that developers are aware of precisely what will be required before making an application.

## **A Democratic, Locally Accountable and Transparent System**

- 4.9 The efficiency of the system must also be linked to the quality of decisions. As Kate Barker recognises, planning decisions are of the best quality when they balance all the relevant factors, economic considerations being just one.
- 4.10 There is a continuing case to be made for LPAs being the most appropriate forum for making decisions on proposals for the development of land. LPAs are accountable to their electorates, the advice given to them is open to public scrutiny and their meetings are held in public. They are best placed to balance economic, social and environmental factors in reaching decisions.

## **A Flexible System**

- 4.11 Notwithstanding the need to maintain a system that is democratic, locally accountable and transparent, there is room for improvement. The development control system could be modified so that the procedures employed reflect the scale and impact of the proposed developments. There is evidence that professional planning staff and administrative resources are being used unnecessarily to process planning applications that have little consequence. This has the effect of bringing the system into disrepute, with needless bureaucracy adding little or no value and use of expertise and resources that would be better employed on more important work, bearing in mind the national shortage of professional planners and the demands of the new Local Development Documents system.
- 4.12 The Government has published a Householder Development Consents Review which advocates the employment of a more flexible 'risk' based approach to development control. This would not only involve modification to the 'permitted development' regime, but advocates other more streamlined models for determining planning applications. The approach need not stop at householder applications and could apply to other minor developments, including some for minerals and waste.

