

Ms Carmel Howard
Barker Review Team
4/E1,
1 Horseguard's Road,
London
SW1A 2HQ

Contact: Deborah Ganley
Direct line: 020 7934 9649
Fax: 020 7934 9950
Email: deborah.ganley@alg.gov.uk

Our reference:
Your reference:
Date: 22 March 2006

Dear Ms Howard

ALG response to the Barker Review of Land Use Planning

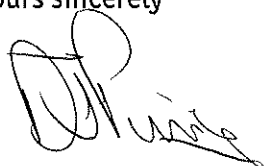
The ALG represents all 32 London boroughs, the City of London, the Metropolitan Police Authority and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. It is in an ideal position to advise on a range of issues relating to London government and other matters of concern to Londoners. It also works closely with the Local Government Association and with many private, voluntary and public sector bodies.

The ALG has reviewed the questions contained within the call for evidence and has compiled a member elected endorsed response, which is attached in **Annex 1**. There is specific concern that the current planning system is still relatively new and has yet to be implemented in its entirety. Any significant changes could hinder those boroughs still to adopt planning documents. However, it may be possible to provide further guidance and resources to boroughs to assist them to implement their plans and provides planning services that improve delivery, such as guidance on monitoring, pre application advice and integrating infrastructure needs.

The ALG organises several borough wide reference groups (such as the S106 Practitioners Network and Planning for Housing) and attends meetings organised by the Association of London Borough Planning Officers (ALBPO). Therefore, the ALG could organise wider stakeholder meetings with the above groups to assist the government to better engage with planning colleagues across London to take forward the initial discussions of issues related to land use planning. The ALG would be happy to discuss any issues raised in this response. A meeting between respective officers could be arranged if necessary.

If you have any queries please contact ALG Officer Deborah Ganley on 0207 934 9649 or deborah.ganley@alg.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



Damian Price
Transport and Planning Section Manager



Annex 1 – Specific comments to the questions identified in the Barker Review of Land Use Planning Call for Evidence

A. General Issues

1. The ALG represents all 32 London boroughs, the City of London, the Metropolitan Police Authority and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. It also works closely with the Local Government Association and with many private, voluntary and public sector bodies.
2. The ALG is pleased to be involved at the outset of the Barker Review of Land Use Planning and is well placed to provide an overview of London wide key issues and concerns that are relevant to the Barker Review of Land Use Planning. Following are generic issues that the ALG would first like to highlight:
 - Timing of production of planning documents: The current planning system is relatively new and is still undergoing changes at national, regional and local levels. Given that planning documents are required to be in accordance with each other, it is possible that some documents are being delayed, as boroughs either wait for relevant guidance from government or have to review local plans to ensure they are consistent. Therefore, the ALG would like to encourage the government to bring forward any necessary planning documents or guidance to assist boroughs to implement local development plans;
 - Planning hierarchy: There is some concern that the new planning system does not adequately identify the varying level of statutory plan making responsibilities of differing government agencies or the powers of intervention. For example Planning Policy Statement 25 introduced additional borough responsibilities on flood risk, when in the past this was carried out by the Environment Agency. It is suggested that the planning system could be reviewed and where possible streamlined to remove any unnecessary complexity;
 - Prescriptive planning: There is a recognition that the purpose of the planning system should help guide development to ensure private development adequately provides for wider social needs (such as larger family accommodation). Therefore, a flexible planning system that can take into account local, regional and national needs is important. There is some concern amongst boroughs that, as national and regional guidance becomes more detailed and prescriptive, it becomes increasingly difficult to tailor local planning documents to take into account local needs and issues;
 - Resourcing and recruitment: London boroughs are performing well against the ODPM Best Value Performance Indicator 109 (BVPI 109). targets of processing major, minor and other applications within the relevant timeframe, despite a shortage of planners in the capital. This review of the planning system needs to recognise the current pressures faced by local authority planners and draw together work that is being done across the country to identify how this issue could be tackled nationally. The ALG is

currently working on recruitment and retention issues within planning and is happy to share its findings;

- Further ALG discussion: Where possible the ALG would like to work with the Barker Review team to help identify and discuss any planning issues that may arise from the call for evidence prior to releasing any subsequent discussion paper on land use planning.

B. Specific issues in relation to the questions posed

Question 1. Is the planning system sufficiently flexible and/or responsive to the right signals to deliver the right development in the right place, given the changing economic circumstances due to globalisation, demographic change, natural resource pressures and environmental change? If not, what policy measures might help deliver this flexibility?

ALG Comments

Overview

3. The current planning system is working well to encourage development and regeneration initiatives, specifically within London. There has been and continues to be greater joined up working within national regional and local government, specifically in and around areas where there is greatest pressure for development and commercial development (ie opportunity areas are identified in the London Plan, the Thames Gateway and the Olympics area). There is also greater working to assess longer term infrastructure needs and identify a timeline to implement such upgrades, specifically in relation to transport needs. The ALG recognises that current planning has a vital role to play in managing the effects of development on the current and future generations. It would not be appropriate to introduce any significant changes that could hamper such progress.

Role of planning system

4. The key role of the planning system is to provide for wider community needs in terms of social, environmental and economic outcomes. The value of the planning system is to assess market signals and recognise the effects long term trends (i.e. shortages of family housing shortages, joining up public open space or encouraging waste reduction initiatives), as opposed to responding solely to current or popular development pressures (i.e. allowing housing in greenfield areas). The role of the planning system is not, as is sometimes portrayed, solely to assist developers to get their proposals through the planning system as easily as possible. Instead, it is to assess the many conflicting needs and pressure on land use, and to provide for future growth in the context of wider community objectives (i.e. increased affordable housing, safe public open spaces, improved public transport links etc).
5. It is important that the planning system is not solely a reactive process, but that it is able to guide development to provide for overall wider social needs. There

is general concern that on its own the market may not sufficiently provide for the general needs of society. For example, it is noted that developers are continuing to construct one and two bedroom units, when within London (historically and present day) there is a significant shortage of larger family accommodation (of three or more bedrooms). Therefore, the market does not appear to be responding to London's current housing needs.

6. The ALG recognises that London boroughs are keen to play their part to ensure the planning process delivers the improvements and developments that London needs to remain a world-class city. London boroughs, along with regional and central Government, have played and continue to play a key role in moving London forward. Clearly if the further growth of scale proposed in the London Plan is to be achieved it will require development to be responsive to local concerns. Therefore, boroughs are in a stronger position to achieve local objectives, of regional benefit to London.
7. There does not appear to be any justification for fundamental changes to the planning system. Many boroughs recognise that the current planning system requires more time to become imbedded in practice. In the following areas the planning system appears to be working well:
8. *Delivery of Housing* – Delivery of housing is one of the key planning areas for London and the boroughs are working hard to meet the housing targets in the London Plan. As per figures produced by the Greater London Authority (GLA) for the London Housing Forum Supply Sub Group (December 2005), the following indicative housing completions were:
 - 25,906 for the year 2003/04 (113% of the current London Plan target of 23,000); and
 - 28,213 for the year 2004/05 (123% of London Plan target).
9. The figures also show that by the year 2004/05, London boroughs were already well on their way to being able to reach the GLA's proposed London Plan target of 31,000 completions per year from 2007 (as proposed in the current London Plan Housing alterations). The ALG has responded to the GLA consultation on the new housing target of 31,000 and emphasised support for the higher target. This further demonstrates London boroughs' commitment to housing delivery.
10. Looking towards the new housing targets, which could come into effect from 2007, London boroughs are also granting permissions for house building which are well in excess of targets and indicate that boroughs are playing their part in facilitating future house building required for the capital:
 - Net Approvals for 2003/04 were 41,439 (197% of the guideline figure)
 - Net Approvals for 2004/05 were 51,477 (245% of the guideline figure).
11. The Mayor of London has recently raised concern over the ability of London boroughs to provide sufficient new housing, to accommodate current and future housing needs of the capital (as per the targets in the London Plan and subsequent proposed alterations). The Mayor has criticised the performance of some London Boroughs. ALG Officers have reviewed the planning refusal data produced and have contacted a number of boroughs to confirm the accuracy of

the information. In many cases, applications initially refused for housing developments, were revised and resubmitted, and often then approved, thus resulting in developments that were more appropriate to local context and the site. The ALG recognises that boroughs are achieving the increased level of housing required under the London Plan.

12. *Speed of turn around in dealing with planning applications* – It is noted that the ODPM measures local planning authority performance by the speed of turn around of planning applications (BVPI 109) The Government Office for London (GOL) recognises that the overall planning performance by boroughs for the last two quarters where figures are available (30 June 2005 to 30 September 2005) is good and in line with or exceeding overall national performance.
13. Across the country local authority performances for processing major applications have reached a plateau. The ODPM is encouraged to investigate why performance has levelled off. It is noted that there may be further initiatives that could assist boroughs continue to improve performance. Conversely, it may be that the processing timeframe can not be improved significantly without compromising the quality of assessment and decision making for major applications. If this is the case the ALG would encourage the ODPM to continue to support boroughs to maintain the current level of output.
14. *Borough partnerships working to facilitate the delivery of the planning system* – The London boroughs are involved in a number of initiatives that promote joint working. This emphasises boroughs' commitment to identifying how they can best work together to facilitate better delivery. Some of these include:
 - Boroughs are already working together through the current sub regional arrangements in London and are producing / have produced a number of co-ordinated planning documents (For example, Sub Regional Economic Development Implementation Plan, Sub Regional Economic Strategy, Sub Regional Transport Strategies);
 - Boroughs in London are working together across waste planning authority boundaries to produce Joint Waste Development Plan Documents;
 - A number of East London boroughs working together to facilitate Olympics planning applications through the Olympics Joint Planning Authorities Team;
 - Boroughs are working jointly on initiatives to improve recruitment and retention of planners within London local authorities. For example, one project led by the ALG, aims to develop greater links between boroughs and academic institutions in London to ensure that courses that are being offered meet the needs of both students and employers.
15. *General Conformity of Local Development Schemes* – The issue of general conformity between planning documents is an issue that was raised on 19th April 2004, by the then Minister for Housing and Planning, Keith Hill MP, in a written ministerial statement to the House of Commons on Unitary Development Plans (London). The aim of this statement was to clarify the situation of general conformity of borough plans with the London Plan and stated that: 'the Secretary of State would wish the Mayor and the boroughs to resolve issues of general conformity through discussion, having regard to the Secretary of

State's policy'. . The ALG believes that the current arrangements, enabling the Mayor to ensure that local borough plans are in 'general conformity' with the London Plan maintains the correct level of control between regional and the local planning bodies. There does not appear to be any need for the Mayor of London to receive additional powers to direct and approve local plans, as boroughs have managed to resolve differences over general conformity through discussion and subsequent agreement. This further emphasises that the current situation works well and there is no evidence to support any significant change.

Flexibility of the planning system

16. It is recognised that flexibility within the planning system is of benefit to boroughs as it enables policies to be tailored to local level issues and market signals. Additionally, flexible planning policies allow boroughs to make use of new technologies/improvements, as well as promote and encourage development and regeneration, where they will improve or enhance development without the need to amend planning documents. However, providing flexibility through policies and planning documents can be a difficult balancing act. Particularly when the general public and developers alike want a degree of certainty as to what is or isn't appropriate in their community, and boroughs are required to assess planning applications on their merit. However, not all new technologies may have a positive impact, in terms of development innovation and improved practices, and not all development and technology may benefit the community. Some developments may have negative impacts on the existing community. Such impacts and conflicting pressures need to be managed through the planning system.
17. Therefore, planning controls need to have a level of flexibility and market sensitivity to give the planning system the ability to appropriately consider the impacts of development on all aspects of the environment (social, built and natural). The ALG and boroughs are concerned that this flexibility may be eroded if the level of government guidance increases and prescribes the manner that boroughs should consider planning applications.
18. *Monitoring planning documents* – Concern has been raised that, historically, the emphasis on monitoring the effect of planning documents and their actual outcomes has varied across local planning authorities. Under the new planning system all local planning authorities are now required to produce annual monitoring reports (AMRs) to evaluate the effectiveness of key objectives and policies. The first of these reports was completed and lodged, in London's case, with the Government Office for London (GOL). GOL have acknowledged that since such documents have not previously been required, some boroughs may have better systems than others to easily produce the information now required. GOL have noted that they expect it will take a while for greater consistency between boroughs to develop in the annual monitoring reporting. It would be useful for government to develop further guidance to assist boroughs to improve the data collection to improve the quality of reporting.
19. Additionally it is noted that monitoring produces better results when developed in conjunction with objectives and policies. Some concern has been raised that monitoring may not always be integrated with the development of planning

documents, due to the time constraints boroughs are facing to produce planning documents under the new planning system. Therefore, further advice and guidance to assist boroughs to better integrate plan monitoring at the start of the planning document development phase would be welcomed.

20. However, it is noted that significant work within London has been done by the GLA on the London Development Database (LDD), which has superceded the London Development Monitoring System. The LDD records the progress of planning permissions within all boroughs and London boroughs are providing the necessary information in a timely manner. Concern has been raised that the level of monitoring is increasing, and while boroughs recognise the benefit of monitoring, it can be resource intensive. To assist boroughs improve their performance, it could be useful to assess if it is possible to rationalise and integrate monitoring requirements. This might enable boroughs to collect relevant information for national and regional purposes at the same time and make better use of resources

Question 2. Do you have any views on the scope of plans at the different spatial levels in England which are now emerging following the introduction of the new system in 2004? Are there further improvements to the plan-making process at the different spatial levels in England, particularly regarding the need to encourage a positive/proactive approach to planning, which was a key theme of the new plan-making system? Does the current system strike the right balance between central direction and regional and local discretion?

ALG Comments

21. The new planning system was introduced in 2004, there has only been a relatively short period for it to become embedded in practice and under the new planning system boroughs are required to implement a suite of planning documents. The information necessary to support these new planning documents has required significant resources and boroughs are working hard to produce the necessary planning documents as quickly as possible. However, since the introduction of the new planning system, a range of national and regional policy planning guidance documents have recently been (and continue to be) released by the ODPM, GOL, HM Treasury and the GLA. The ALG is concerned that planning requirements are constantly changing under the new system and boroughs are working hard to assess and incorporate new planning legislation within the developing LDF planning documents.
22. Given that the new planning system requires documents to be consistent with each other, changes in planning requirements are causing delays as boroughs review the soundness of planning documents as national and regional planning documents should be consistent with each other. Many boroughs are concerned that local plans, yet to be made operative, may require further substantial changes to ensure they are in accordance with revised national or regional guidance (for example, the current consultation on PPS3 – Housing). Emphasis is therefore placed on the importance of central Government and the Government Office for London continuing to work with the ALG, the GLA and boroughs to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach to new developments in

the planning system, which may impact on the ability of boroughs to make planning documents operative.

23. The following issues have been raised in relation to the current planning system:

- There are a number of agencies that have varying levels of statutory plan making responsibilities, which can add to the complexity of the planning system;
- As national and regional guidance becomes increasingly more prescriptive and more detailed it becomes difficult to tailor implementation to local needs and problems;
- National Planning Policy needs to be more succinct and the review of Planning Policy Statements should be undertaken more quickly and more effectively to reduce the national planning policy 'state of flux' (particularly relating to housing in recent years);
- The relationship between national planning policies and Planning Policy Statements needs to be more obvious. Some concern has been raised over the reliance on circulars and other methods to communicate national planning policies, and the 'user friendliness' of this approach for those less familiar with the planning system;
- It is suggested that the value of Regional Spatial Strategies is to provide greater planning guidance succinctly and in a 'common English' way that is easily understood by the general public on matters of strategic significance and co-ordination, such as new housing, new jobs, locations for change. Regional Spatial Strategies risk duplicating Local Development Frameworks and creating uncertainty for users of the planning system, should they contain general development control measures. This problem is seen by some boroughs as having been exacerbated by giving the Regional Spatial Strategy Development Plan Status in the 2004 Act;
- The planning reforms in 2004 encourage more local involvement in the plan making process. This needs to be protected and further encouraged. There is the concern that more prescription from the central or regional level can undermine levels of local involvement.

24. It is noted that some boroughs are concerned that supplementary planning documents attached to Regional Spatial Strategies add an additional layer of complexity to the planning hierarchy of plans. The role of Regional Spatial Strategies could be reviewed and options investigated to assess if it is possible to include implementation details within Local Development Frameworks.

Question 3. Sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning. Does the current system achieve the right balance between economic and other goals, such as the regeneration of areas and the promotion of social cohesion, improving the quality of design of buildings and urban environments, and the protection and enhancement of our natural and historic environment? Are some environmental, natural resource, or social considerations given too much or too little weight?

ALG Comments

25. There is consensus between London boroughs that the core principal of sustainable development is broadly defined and difficult to implement. Additionally, too little weight is placed on environmental objectives. The planning process can be used to introduce more sustainable environmental practices, providing the policy and controls are explicit enough. This could include the requirement to consider alternative energy and renewable energy as part of new developments and the requirement to install sustainable materials, use sustainable designs and employ sustainable methods of construction. There is concern that whilst the new planning system should place greater emphasis on improving environmentally efficient practices, there is little mandatory regulation. For example, boroughs can only encourage developers to consider alternative energy and renewable energy sources and carry out an optional sustainability checklist.
26. Additionally, some boroughs noted that environmental objectives are often included as a last thought or at the bottom of the list, compared with planning objectives and benefits (such as affordable housing, transport improvements, public realm improvements etc) or financial appraisals of proposed development. Therefore, aspirational achievements of sustainable developments are often skewed towards economic considerations, as opposed to wider social and environmental considerations. It may be difficult to assess the impact of social and environmental considerations, particularly as assessing them in relation to a monetary value may involve a level of objectivity. This has the potential to lead to conflict when deciding the outcome of planning applications and the importance of the delivery of affordable housing over wider environmental outcomes.
27. The profile of sustainable environmental objectives needs to be raised by practitioners to encourage greater demand for the delivery of better sustainable development in practice by the planning system. Many boroughs are concerned that for specific national sustainability objectives, such as reducing carbon emissions or improving energy efficiency ratings of new builds, greater guidance would be useful to help guide implementation at the regional and local level. There is also the ability to use large scale development opportunities, such as the Olympic Village, to test out new technology and demonstrate what can be achieved.

Question 4. What, if anything, could the English planning system learn from the planning and consent systems operated in other countries in order to respond to this new economic environment?

ALG Comments

28. The facility to amend quickly and easily statutory planning documents is a key benefit of other planning systems. It would be useful if a clear process was identified by Government to allow local authorities in the UK to take forward partial changes to a document within the Local Development Framework. In

order to keep up with changes, it should be possible and relatively easy, subject to a strong evidence base and consultation, for the local planning authority to change some parts of a strategy without opening up the whole strategy for review. An example might be a need to change a single site allocation in a document to reflect a changing use for a site or to give a strategic direction to a new initiative (e.g. the Olympics). Such a partial review should be capable of being completed within a much shorter timeframe started and completed within a year. To improve the planning process it would be useful if the Planning Inspectorate were provided with further resources to enable examinations in public to be held within much shorter timeframes.

Question 5. What is the impact of planning on encouraging or impeding business investment? In this context, how would you assess the potential of recent reforms to the English planning system, which are now being implemented? Are they increasing the transparency of the system and providing greater certainty for businesses? What further reforms, if any, are desirable in order to improve the transparency and effectiveness of the system still further?

ALG Comments

29. There is concern amongst London boroughs that there is an overriding imperative to deliver housing, somewhat at the expense of commercial and business sectors. Specific concern has been raised by outer London boroughs that if the conflict between land for housing versus that for commercial/industry activities is not managed, outer London boroughs could become commuter suburbs. In some boroughs businesses are finding it difficult to compete with the housing sector, particularly the land prices offered by the housing sector, despite strong employment protection policies. Boroughs have acknowledged that Planning Policy Guidance 3 (PPG3) has helped address the loss of business land to housing, where local authorities have carried out recent employment land reviews and identified employment zones to be protected. However, it is noted that reviewing PPG4 would assist further, particularly if it could provide updated and more sufficient guidance to enable Local Planning Authorities to provide for a supply of employment land during the LDF plan period.
30. Additionally, concern has been raised that the timescale to negotiate planning permission can potentially discourage business investment. However, the ALG is aware that several boroughs have started charging for pre-application meetings as a means of improving the quality of planning application submitted and the processing times. Boroughs operating such systems have had very positive feedback from developers, specifically that:
- developers recognise the benefit of discussing planning issues at the outset of a development with all relevant boroughs officers / managers and are aware that such meetings do not guarantee application success;
 - developers get more personal service, as have planning officer assigned to their application from the outset;

- developers tend to consult the general community earlier on major applications, building greater community engagement in the planning process;
 - boroughs are able to negotiate better S106 agreements with developers as such issues are discussed up front;
 - less duplicate applications are lodged by developers for unrealistic development proposals (in terms of what the local planning documents require as minimum temporary accommodate, parking, floorspace etc). In the long term this reduces developer processing costs and frees up borough planning resources; and
 - boroughs receive more thorough and realistic planning applications, that experience fewer delays when processed.
31. The Planning Officers Society is currently preparing a document to assist boroughs with pre-application charging. Such work will be useful to improve current practices and share the learning and knowledge from those boroughs effectively charging for pre meetings. The ALG is keen to identify how local authorities can work better with the business community to improve general liaison and overall performance in planning.

Question 6. Is the planning system sufficiently “joined-up” with other related aspects of government policy? In particular, are Regional Economic Strategies delivering a clear economic framework to help inform Regional Spatial Strategies? Is there sufficient interaction between RDAs and RSSs when preparing their respective regional strategies and if not how might greater interaction be encouraged?

32. The ALG has some concerns regarding the extent to which the planning system is sufficiently “joined up” across regions. In 2005 the ALG responded to consultations on the Regional Spatial Strategies for the East and South East of England. The ALG does not believe that these strategies have fully considered the impact that proposed developments in regions close to the London boundary will have on London. It must be acknowledged that there are a number of policy areas where it is necessary to find cross regional solutions, such as the labour market implications of comparative employment growth, town centre and retail policies, housing, flood defences and transport. At present this type of co-operative working across regions is not occurring to the level that is required to produce effective joined up planning.
33. The ALG also believes that current proposals for developments in major regeneration areas, outside of London such as the Kent / Essex Thames Gateway and the London Stansted / Peterborough corridor have not fully considered the impact on London. For example, the affect that this development will have on both the road network due to the potential increase in car-based commuting and the public transport system has not been fully addressed and the proposals will place additional demands on rail routes into London which the existing network cannot sustain. It is vital that cross regional issues such as these are

considered early in the planning process and measures taken to mitigate negative impacts at an early stage.

Question 7. Planning applications for major projects will typically take a considerable time to work through all the necessary stages. Do you consider the system puts too much emphasis on speed or do you feel that is too slow? If there is an undue emphasis on speed, what are the negative consequences of this and how could they best be avoided? If the process is too slow, what could be done to overcome delays? In particular, what improvements might be made to the planning appeal system to improve its speed and efficiency?

ALG Comments

34. The ALG is aware of general concerns that relate to processing planning applications and suggests the following areas could be reviewed to help improve efficiency:

35. Borough resourcing - Many London boroughs have limited resources (both in terms of planners, other specialist and technical staff and money). In April 2004, the ALG produced a study on addressing the need for planners in London. The study explored the issues and made some useful recommendations, such as recruiting non-planning graduates and other staff and providing them with professional training. The ALG recognises that many boroughs are working together through their sub-regional partnerships to consider planning issues. The results of the research are summarised as:

- Recruiting non-planning graduates and other staff and providing them with professional training;
- Working with training providers to expand provisions for day release and post-entry training;
- Provision of training for returned and retired staff, accompanied by flexible employment opportunities;
- Improving pay and conditions;
- Increasing the use and effectiveness of IT; and
- Enhancing the roles of staff who have no accredited planning qualifications.

36. The ALG has re-commissioned planning consultant Tim Edmundson (who prepared a 2004 survey of the issues in recruitment and retention of planners in London) to re-examine the situation and identify what the current barriers are to recruitment and retention of planners in the capital. The work will also identify a range of initiatives that could be taken forward over the longer term, particularly focusing on ensuring that links are developed between the academic and planning professional world.

37. There is some concern that the need for, and cost of, impact and sustainability assessments is further exacerbating the skills shortage. This is due to a shortage of specialists to carry out the necessary assessments as well as the

expertise required to evaluate relevant material and the timeliness of the process. Additionally there is also concern that these assessments are very costly and in some cases the added value is not necessarily obvious;

38. It is important that the impacts and effects of developments are properly assessed by competent planning staff to ensure decisions made do not have significant negative impacts. The ALG would be concerned if boroughs were required to process applications within shorter timeframe at the expense of quality planning assessments and thorough decision making processes. Therefore, additional ways to resource planning to enable boroughs to continue to improve efficiency and better customer service would be welcomed by government.
39. Pre application assessment_- There is currently significant emphasis put on processing major applications within the 13 week timeframe (as mentioned in **Question 1** above). Additionally boroughs are attempting to improve their processing times, by front loading the planning application process and encourage pre application meetings to identify any issues that may arise prior to applications being lodged (refer to **Question 5** above). Several boroughs note that while pre-application meetings help to speed up the processing of planning applications, it is unlikely that major applications could be processed any quicker. Nevertheless, it must continue to be recognised in the way targets are set, that there are many large and complex planning applications requiring a longer period for consideration, especially where there is considerable consultation or where referral to the Mayor of London must take place. The scope for Planning Delivery Agreements, as in the current national pilot, should be considered as a way of giving certainty over the time frame to developers and the community. There is particular concern that if the application processing timeframe is reduced, there could be insufficient time to adequately evaluate the impact of major proposed developments on the environment and the needs of London as a city.
40. Appeal processing timeframes - There is also concern that the time needed to resolve an appeal is often very long and protracted, creating unnecessary delays and uncertainty to the planning process. Additionally, due to the delay the process is extremely costly, not only for developers, but also for the boroughs and general public. There could be potential to improve the efficiency of Planning Inspectorate and the Examination in Public (EiP) process to resolve appeals and implement planning documents more quickly. There is some concern that current EiP processes maybe too onerous. Therefore, additional ways to better resource the Planning Inspectorate to improve efficiency and customer service would be welcomed by government.

Question 8. Is there evidence to suggest that the direct costs of making a planning application are deterring investment? Are there any unnecessary burdens/how might information requirements be streamlined to reduce the regulatory burden from the process of making an application?

41. The ALG response to the ODPM consultation on changes to the Development Control system in June 2005 supported, in principle, proposals to introduce

Local Development Orders (LDOs). The ALG believes that they will assist in both simplifying and speeding up the planning process as they offer potential benefits to local authorities, developers and the wider community. It is acknowledged that development constraints on many sites in London will limit the impact of LDOs in London; however the introduction of LDOs will still have significant benefits.

42. In addition, the response also supported the introduction of guidance to clarify the documentation required to support a valid application for planning permission. Incomplete applications waste time and resources due to the number of disputes that occur as a result of disagreements on whether sufficient evidence has been provided to support an application. The ALG supports the adoption of legislation enabling local authorities to independently set out the information they require for each particular type of application. This will allow local authorities the necessary flexibility to decide any additional supporting evidence that they require and will prevent the collection and processing of unnecessary or irrelevant information, which is likely to assist in speeding up the planning process.
43. The ALG supports measures to simplify and streamline the planning application process and therefore welcomed the ODPM consultation in June 2005 proposing the introduction of an electronic and paper based standard application form for planning applications.

Question 9. To what extent are high occupation costs in England likely to be due to planning constraints, or due to other factors such as imperfect competition or lack of transparency in the land market? What is the economic impact of these costs in terms of the main drivers of productivity?

44. There are general concerns that relate to planning playing a key role in the high cost of land for development, particularly that restrictions on commercial/industrial development land may be pushing up the price of floorspace. The ALG recognises that planning does play a role in the availability of land for differing uses and the possible restriction of land for specific uses (ie residential or commercial). However, it is noted that land within intensive urban areas, such as central London, is a finite resource. The development of such land will always be constrained by existing and surrounding uses, whether buildings are important historically and the proximity of potential sites to areas of key financial, recreational uses etc. Therefore, normal market conditions will also play a key role in determining the cost of land, as the more desirable an area, the more competition for space and the greater the cost. The planning system is not able to regulate the cost of land within areas, and to do so would artificially interfere with free market forces.
45. There is some concern that commercial and industrial land is currently being out-competed by the high prices paid for residential land. Therefore, planning has a key role to preserve national, regional and locally significant industrial land to ensure the economy of areas, such as London, is protected. It is noted that both the Mayor (in the London Plan) and London boroughs (within local

planning documents) have identified such land and are seeking to protect it to ensure London remains competitive with other world leading cities.

Question 10. How does the planning system impact on competition, through influencing barriers to entry and exit and economies or scale? If there are areas where there is a negative impact, how can these be addressed, while protecting other goals of the planning system?

Question 11. To what extent does the planning system effectively support innovation through fostering the formation of business clusters and wider agglomeration of economic activity?

ALG Comments (questions 10-11)

46. Within London the current planning system has identified areas of decline and is attempting to enhance local economies through regeneration activities. As previously mentioned (refer to **Question 6**) there are proposals for developments in major regeneration areas outside of London such as the Kent / Essex Thames Gateway and the London / Stansted / Peterborough corridor, as well as those opportunity areas identified in the Mayors London Plan. Through active planning for new and regenerated development in areas such as these, the planning system is helping to foster greater economic activity.

47. It is noted that within London significant work is being carried out to assist greater mixed use developments (such as Thames Gateway, White City etc) and business clusters. The ALG would be concerned if planning is always seen as a hindrance to development. Therefore, additional ways to support boroughs to better engage business sectors to become more engaged in the planning process to help deliver better business / mixed use areas would be welcomed by government. Additionally, greater integration and joined up working between national, regional and local planning authorities could help to deliver areas that better foster the formation of business and wider economic activity.

Question 12. Do planning authorities have the skills and resources required to help promote sustainable economic development? If not, what is the best way to ensure that resources match the challenges the system faces? Are there ways to increase further efficiency of process?

ALG Comments

48. It is noted that government is placing greater importance on sustainable development. As previously mentioned there is concern that the term 'sustainable development' can be widely interpreted in practice. Nevertheless, the ALG notes that many boroughs, through the LDF process, are producing area based plan policies (i.e regeneration strategies) that provide a good opportunity to link planning requirements with sustainable development and economic drivers, to ensure the right level of development occurs in appropriate locations. Therefore, the ALG recognises that London boroughs are trying to make the best use of their limited resources, to make closer links between

planning requirements and achieving sustainable development. However, there is a skills shortage overall in planning. Whilst the ALG is looking at this from a London perspective, a national co-ordinated approach would provide greater benefits (refer to **Question 7** above).

Question 13. Are the new arrangements for stakeholder engagement in the plan-making process succeeding in engaging those representing economic interests, including SMEs? If not, what are the barriers to that engagement and how might they be addressed?

ALG Comments

49. The ALG would like to stress that the current planning process has only been in place for a relatively short period of time and London boroughs are at a very early stage in the preparation of their LDF documents. However, boroughs appear to be actively engaging various community sectors, such as business sectors, home owners and occupiers, SMEs etc. Many boroughs are using the following consultation processes to improve community engagement with the planning system:

- Introducing greater transparency and accountability for stakeholder engagement by producing a Statement of Community Involvement, which highlights the need for local authorities to contact 'difficult-to-reach' and economic interests within the community and commit to their future engagement;
- Forming partnerships with community groups, such as local area partnerships with local business, community and environmental groups etc. Through these groups entering into local area agreements;
- Engaging community and business groups at the outset of developing planning documents and tailoring documents to respond to specific sectors and need of the community, e.g. youth issues.
- Improving consultation techniques to better reach groups that historically may be difficult to contact, such as BMEs by employing a dedicated staff member, workshop/fun days etc; and
- Publishing key planning statements and documents in a variety of languages relevant to the ethnic make up of their communities.

Question 14. Are there ways that the incentive structure for decision-makers and local communities can be improved so that a balance is achieved between local interests and the interests of the wider community regarding proposals for economic development?

Question 15. Economic development can help achieve the regeneration and renaissance of urban and rural areas. Are there ways which planning could strengthen economic performance in regions, sub-regions (including city regions) and at the local level?

ALG Comments (questions 14-15)

50. Planning plays an important role in providing for the future availability of land for both housing and employment opportunities, particularly in London where land is increasing facing conflicting land use needs. Therefore, planning has a significant role to play in the regeneration of urban areas within London. The ALG notes that, through the Mayor's London Plan, opportunity areas are identified across London where significant residential and commercial developments are likely to occur, in addition to the Thames Gateway / Olympic area. These key regeneration areas are going to play a significant role in enhancing the economic performance of London, as resources used will provide better integration of employment opportunities with services such as transport, health and education etc, all of which will improve the desirability of living and working in and around such areas.
51. Within London there is an attempt to improve joined up working, particularly for regeneration areas, between national, regional and local government, such as DfES, DfT, GLA, TfL, GOL, housing associations and boroughs. To ensure the success of regeneration areas, it is vital that such joined up working is effective and continuous, and engages the private sector. The ALG is supportive of the GLA's aims to increase inter-working within and between London's borough, particularly at the sub-regional level, particularly as pooled resources will enable better planning outcomes and service delivery, which again will benefit residents and businesses alike. The ALG encourages the Government to review the London model of joined up working, particularly where it relates to regeneration areas and the provision of better communities, to see where any planning changes could help to add value and enhance the planning system.