



The Association of Gardens Trusts

President: Mrs Gilly Drummond D.L.

London Office: 70 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6EJ Tel and Fax: 020 7251 2610
E-mail: agt@gardenstrusts.org.uk Web site: www.gardenstrusts.org.uk

From the Chairman: Mrs Val Hepworth

Barker Review Team
Barker Review of Land Use Planning
4th Floor, HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London, SW1A 2HQ

15th September 2006

Dear Ms Barker

Response to Barker Review of Land Use Planning: interim report

On behalf of the thirty five County Gardens Trusts I am writing in support of the comments made by Heritage Link, of which we are a member, to this interim report.

The Association of Gardens Trusts is a relatively small voluntary organisation but its 7,500 members are passionate about the value of historic parks and gardens for all communities whether they are living in the countryside or perhaps, more importantly, they are living in our urban environments. Besides aesthetic enrichment, enlightenment and just sheer pleasure, parks and gardens encourage exercise, fresh-air, healthy living and the growing of food. We have a well-informed and specialist expertise in historic parks and gardens.

The Association of Gardens Trusts was established as a charitable trust in 1993 and comprises the thirty five County Trusts in England, together with another ten in Wales. Each County Gardens Trust is an independent charity and together we actively support the care and conservation of our historic designed landscapes, parks and gardens for the enjoyment and education of all ages. County Gardens Trusts in many parts of the country are active in developing school grounds, promoting the benefits of gardens and running grant schemes. These support the restoration and conservation of local parks and gardens, help finance the studies of young people who want to enter horticultural work or assist schemes working in gardens with people with disabilities or learning difficulties. An important part of the education work of the Trusts is to research the parks and gardens of their area and to use this information to assist with conservation and planning. This year the Association, sponsored by English Heritage held a conservation conference, 'Conflict and Resolution: Education Establishments in Historic Parks and Gardens' at Bath Spa University, a 'Capability' Brown landscape and as a result, guidance for conservation linked with development opportunities is being produced. We are also working with groups from other cultures to introduce families to the pleasures of visiting an historic park and garden.

We support the aims of the Barker review to improve efficiency and speed of the planning system, to increase flexibility, transparency and predictability and importantly to ensure that the national planning system assists in delivering sustainable communities. However we are extremely concerned that there is a pervading assumption that business interests will be pursued above environmental and social outcomes and sustainability. This flies in the face of the evidence that we find in our work with a broad spectrum of communities, across the country, and we are certainly not alone in this finding; from larger organisations such as

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English Heritage, wildlife trusts and the National Trust, to the raft of smaller organisations that are members of heritage and environmental groupings.

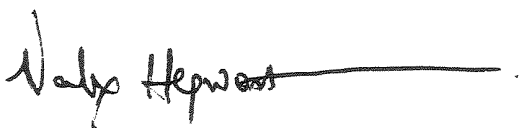
A study commissioned by the Community Service Volunteers and undertaken by ICM Research published on 16th August 2006, reveals that almost half of the entire British Population are worried about the loss of green spaces and the countryside – an issue that is of most concern to younger people, with over half of 25-34 year-olds and 35-44 year-olds expressing concern on this issue. And significantly the 18-24 year-old group are the most concerned with losing Britain's national heritage through the loss of historic buildings. The Association of Gardens Trusts believes that green spaces/parks/gardens and historic buildings are central to quality of life, and economic and social regeneration. The minister, Yvette Cooper has said 'Regeneration needs to draw on all available assets, including the historic ones; we want the best possible combination for the built environment, and that means integrating the historical into quality new design.' (*The Heritage Dynamo how the voluntary sector drives regeneration*, Heritage Link, 2004).

We appreciate that a difficult balance has to be struck between competing interests. The planning system is a democratically accountable means of determining the future shape of the built environment. Whilst supporting the Report's statement that *'it is clearly vital that the final recommendations do not advance business interests above social and economic ones'* we are concerned that there is an underlying sense that this may not be the case. It is vital that the quality of future development, the design and integration of green space/parks/gardens and the quality of planning decisions should not be lost in the rush for rapid determination at the behest of predominantly business interests.

We note Para 3.49 *'Planning policies and decisions involve making complex trade-offs in areas where there is often no clear right answer. Gauging individual and community preferences to factor non-market values into decisions inevitably takes time and resource. But one of the consequences of globalisation is that the window of opportunity for commercial success is rapidly shrinking. Firms therefore require the value-for-money service that is timely and transparent.'* Although in no way proposing that England becomes an historic museum we wish to remind the Review Team that it is our heritage which sustains much of our tourism, the reason why visitors from abroad come to England and spend large sums of money. It is the reason why people choose to live in historic areas. We should remember the largely unloved poor design and build which replaced historic buildings in our towns and cities in the 1960's and 1970's - and which is now being demolished. The challenge is to have a planning system that delivers places where we want to live and work in the future; places which are distinctive, high quality and sustainable. Business competitiveness can be underpinned by these qualities.

As an organisation, with a membership, which includes considerable specialist expertise in the historic environment, we strongly support the Heritage Link response to this interim report.

Yours sincerely



Val Hepworth
Chairman

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