

28th March 2006

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

I write with a brief response to the above call for evidence, to represent the views of the Energy Saving Trust. We are the organization established by Government after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to promote energy efficiency in the household sector. Our activities now cover domestic energy efficiency, small-scale renewables, and cleaner road transport.

We see planning as highly relevant to issues around sustainable energy, and in particular in:

- assisting with the delivery of high-energy performance / low-carbon homes.
- facilitating the establishment of community renewable energy generation schemes.
- ensuring integrated communities where the need for private road transport is minimised.

The economic implications of the above issues are clear, albeit often overlooked. Broadly, they can be summarised as follows:

- Low-carbon homes will have substantially lower running costs. The money not spent on distant energy generation will to a large extent circulate in the local economy. The homes are also likely to be of high quality and comfort, creating a more healthy social and economic environment.
- The establishment of small-scale renewable energy generation, both at building and community level, brings in skilled labour and new businesses (e.g: for feasibility, manufacture, and installation).
- A reduced need for private road transport means fewer traffic jams, less unproductive time, and less money spent on fuel. Again, this money will to a large extent instead be spent in the local economy.

In this context, we are keen that the planning system should be conducive to the development of low-carbon communities. We feel there are currently two major obstacles to this:

First, there seems to be lack of clarity as to the role planning can play in promoting energy efficient, low-carbon homes. Even though Building Regulations on energy efficiency are a legal minimum for the whole country, there is still a perception that a local authority cannot aspire to exceed these.

Second, not unrelated, positive policies have little credibility and authority, because they are not seen through. For instance, the sustainable energy provisions in a Regional Spatial Strategy may not be fully translated into associated Local Development Frameworks. And local authorities that try to specify low-carbon homes may be undermined by developers that submit plans with sustainable energy as an “additional cost” (to negotiate on) rather than an integral part of the proposal. This leads to lack of progress on sustainable energy, delays in the planning approval process, and economic inefficiency.

We believe these obstacles can be addressed through three relatively simple measures:

1. A Planning Policy Statement on Sustainable Energy, clarifying the power of planning authorities to require low-carbon homes if this is within their LDF and is a priority for the authority concerned.
2. The urgent finalisation of the Code for Sustainable Homes, the Government’s sustainability scheme for new homes that could be adopted in large volumes by developers and local authorities alike.
3. Regular review of LDFs and planning consent decisions, to ensure they are consistent with their associated RSSs, in particular on sustainable energy issues, and to show that the issue is an economic, social, and environmental priority, not a “nice-to-have.”

I trust the above is clear, and I hope it is consistent with the Barker agenda. We would be happy to provide further detail if this would be helpful at any point.

Yours faithfully,

Zoltan Zavody
Strategy Manager