

[via email]

Dear Sirs

Please find below the response of Bedfordshire Councils Planning Consortium.

Our Consortium consists mainly of Parish Councils and Town Councils from within Bedfordshire representing as such the voice of approximately 70,000 residents in Bedfordshire.

We object for the following reasons:

1. 1. The Barker review will destroy the planning system. This inquiry is as bad as we had feared and seek to make new recommendations to reform the planning system based on crude competitiveness agenda. Barker 2 is nothing to do with housing this time and is still clearly inspired and hosted by Treasury despite the fact that it's meant to be a joint project with ODPM.
2. For us the bottom line is:
  - it appears to be saying that economic considerations don't get enough weight in planning (our analysis would probably be completely the opposite...);
  - it misunderstands Sustainable Development as being about "balancing" rather than integrating economic, social and environmental objectives;
  - it seems to be proposing the analysis of planning solely against economic criteria;
  - it focuses only on improving the voice of business;
  - we think the review will be a platform for deregulation, because the results will say planning is not delivering effectively on economic goals.
3. It produces clear threats and opportunities for us
  - Threat:
    - • latest attack on regulation, very influential, Treasury-driven
    - • results would be terrible for the environment
  - Opportunities:
    - • we have a clear story to tell re environmental benefits of regulation
    - • we can get an alternative message about "quality" economic activity
4. It has been 17 months since the Government introduced a completely new planning system as a result of a massive consultation exercise, resulting in the Town & Country Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Unbelievably, the Government is undertaking another review of the English land use planning system, headed up by Kate Barker who is an economist and a close ally of the Treasury. There is a growing consensus across the voluntary and private sector that what is being proposed is unacceptable, and we are potentially looking at a piecemeal deregulation of the planning system.
5. The inquiry is heavily biased in favour of business interests and has no remit to investigate the environmental benefits of planning. It sees planning as an obstacle to competitiveness, focusing exclusively on examining how far the English land-use planning system impacts upon business performance in an increasingly globalised economic context. The review team has been asked to assess whether or not recent reforms have improved the efficiency, in a narrow and short term sense, and the speed of the system and whether this has encouraged the flexibility and transparency that enterprise requires.

Yours sincerely

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