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Miss K. Barker,
Baker Review of Housing Supply,
1 Horse Guards Road,
LONDON
SW1A 2HQ

And by E-mail : consultation@barkerreview.org.uk

Dear Miss Barker,

Review of Housing Supply

While I appreciate that I am outside the time limit for written submissions I have felt constrained to write to you as a result of a sense of utter frustration with this country's planning system.

I act for a company which owns a former industrial site at Langley, Nr. Macclesfield. The site is no longer occupied for industrial purposes. It is a 19th century industrial site which was developed because of the availability of a supply of fresh water. The site is not suitable for industrial use in the 21st century. It is in the Green Belt and within a few miles of the Peak District National Park. The buildings on the site are mainly old and constitute a real blot on the landscape (see picture on the enclosed copy of the Development Brief for the site produced by the Macclesfield Borough Council).

Almost everyone (with the exception of the Council) believes that the site is ideally suited to residential development. When the site became vacant we were contacted by almost every major house builder in the country. The Parish Council is not opposed and at least as many local residents support as oppose residential development on the site. When an exhibition was held many people tried to place deposits to secure a property there. The development would not be obtrusive and would break up the very large buildings which are currently on the site. There is a need for affordable housing in Langley and at least 24 of the proposed 98 new dwellings would be "affordable" which would fully meet that need.

Everything appeared to be in favour of residential development on the site. Not the Macclesfield Borough Council. The Council approved a Development Brief for the site a copy of which is enclosed. This would be better described as a "wish list". It is wholly impractical and is not going to happen. The Council say that they "consulted" with regard to the Development Brief. The company was consulted but the Council refused to incorporate any of its comments. There was a public consultation exercise but the Council refused the company the opportunity to put its own proposals forward at the same time.

The Council says that its proposals for the site were approved. Well they would be when no alternative was being put forward or allowed.

Two planning applications have been submitted, each subject to a fee of £10,000. The Council have refused to enter into any consultations or discussions and both applications have been refused. In the draft Local Plan Macclesfield Borough Council says that it is having to consider a moratorium on all new house buildings because it has met all its targets. In the meanwhile house prices in Macclesfield have increased by 50% in the last 12 months.

I understand that you will not be able to comment on all particular sites or applications for development. I have given a brief outline of the above simply to illustrate the absurdities of the current planning system. There is in my opinion one reason and one reason alone for the current situation and that is the restrictions imposed on development by the planning system. That does not mean that development should be uncontrolled but where a site is suitable for development (as it is) the presumption should be in favour and not against planning permission being granted. It should be for the Local Authority to show why development should not take place and not converse.

The idea that it is the Authority which determines "need" is absurd. It is the developer that will be risking its money and if it does not believe that a need exists will not proceed. The Local Authority is the worst possible organisation to determine "need". Planning controls should be limited to ensuring that the development is in a style that is appropriate to the area, the aspect of planning where Local Authorities have most spectacularly failed, many quite frankly appalling developments having been permitted. Planning should also deal with such matters as highways, drainage, tree preservation and landscaping but the principle should always be in favour and not against development taking place.

It is only then that the supply can meet demand and the present seemingly inexorable increase in prices be slowed.

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT F. ASHTON