



# **Barker Review of Land Use Planning**

Submission by the Chartered Institute of Housing  
to the  
Barker Review of Land Use Planning

March 2006

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# Response to the Barker Review of Land Use Planning

## 1 Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the only professional body for individuals working in housing. Its primary aim is to maximise the contribution that housing professionals make to the well being of communities. Membership status is dependent on completion of a professional qualification and a track record of professional achievement.

CIH has over 19,000 individual members working for local authorities, housing associations, Government bodies, educational establishments and the private sector.

CIH recognises that this review of land use planning will not focus on housing, but feels that it is relevant to housing professionals because of the interconnections between the economy and sustainable communities. We therefore welcome the opportunity to make this short submission which raises some points that are pertinent to our members who are working to create sustainable communities.

## 2 Summary

The key points we raise for further consideration are:

- Policies beyond the planning system and activities of fragmented agencies directly affect the delivery of sustainable development objectives and also affect the ability of the planning system to contribute to delivery of these objectives. The planning system should not be considered in isolation from these factors.
- Policies guiding economic planning should not be shaped to be reactive to 'demands' of businesses rather than taking a strategic approach to the 'needs' of all stakeholders.

## 3 Detailed comments

**Question 2** – There is some imbalance between central direction and regional and local discretion, in that initiatives and priorities which attract significant funding tend to be often nationally determined and regionally administered. Whilst strategic oversight at supra-local level is important and valuable, it can have a negative impact on local engagement and use of discretion. This is discussed in Question 14.

Use of Geographical Information Systems in the plan-making process, harmonised across and between regional and local levels, can help to enable a positive and proactive approach to planning. GIS are a useful tool for those who seek to ensure strategic decisions on economic, social and environmental issues are complementary and integrated.

**Questions 3** – The balance between economic, social and environmental goals is not yet correct. For example, policies and strategies at all levels recognise the need to improve design quality and enhance the environment

alongside economic growth, but too often this does not happen in practice. Planning authorities often feel under immense pressure to enable development, and as a consequence some do not insist on implementation of the social and environmental aspects of their plans.

**Question 5** – Local Development Frameworks are an appropriate way to improve transparency and certainty at local level. However, where significant investment in social and transport infrastructure is needed to encourage or enable companies to invest in an area, sufficient certainty and transparency is still lacking. Investment in infrastructure which comes from central or semi-autonomous bodies is not always co-ordinated with local investment and planning intentions, and this lack of co-ordination hinders planning decisions and therefore development.

Proposals for a residential planning gain supplement have missed an opportunity to help bring land forward for businesses. A broader system where developable land is taxed could encourage land sales in high demand/high price areas, and thus enable expansion of businesses.

**Question 7** – The ability of the planning system to deliver efficiently can be hindered by central political priorities. Whilst quick decisions are undoubtedly beneficial for businesses and the local economy alike, there is too much emphasis on the need for speed at local level. Pressure from national bodies for speed and high development output can result in poor decisions being made or cause the social and environmental objectives in policies to be neglected. For example, pressure on planning authorities to consider building houses on land zoned for employment could result in imbalanced local economies in future years. Conversely, slow decisions at a regional or central level can impede the speed at which local bodies can process planning applications. Too often, ministers give general verbal commitments to the provision of funding, but funding for specific projects is subject to delay and political debate, which in turn prevents planning applications from being approved at local level.

**Question 12** – The fragmentation of agencies with responsibility or ability to promote sustainable economic development affect the skills and resources needed by planning authorities. Responsibility for co-ordination of the many agencies, departments, and businesses whose input is needed to aid sustainable development may come to planning authorities. Recommendations in our recent CIH/LGA publication, Visionary Leadership in Housing, are also relevant for planning authorities' involvement in economic development. The need for skills in co-ordination and development, and in communication of strategic long term visions is as important for planning professionals as for the housing profession. Despite the potential that improved skills would bring, the revision of Planning Policy Statements to put greater emphasis on the need for growth, is eroding planners' ability to promote sustainable development, as opposed to simply enabling business-initiated development.

**Question 14** – There is a real need to create support for development amongst decision makers and local communities. Opposition to development

and narrow focus on the needs of existing residents are barriers to successful expansion and development of the economy and of communities. However, incentives alone are insufficient to change hearts and minds. Despite policy statements on the need for local consultation, the ability to influence planning decisions is stacked against local communities. This serves to enhance resentment and opposition, and will impact on new residents and employees if it is not overcome.