

JG/as
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Councillor Jonathan Glen

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Dear Ms Howard

I have been following the discussions following your call for evidence on how planning policy and procedures can better deliver economic growth and prosperity alongside other sustainable development goals. I share many of the concerns expressed in public so far that the new planning system is flawed and over-burdened with detailed rules and regulations. These do nothing to deliver the speeded up and transparent planning process which the Government intended; indeed they provide fertile procedural ground for those wishing to frustrate and delay development proposals. However, I believe that focussing on the planning system as the major influence on the key drivers of productivity - enterprise, competition, innovation, investment and skills is simplistic and wrong. Inevitably your study will discover examples where industrial and commercial development has been frustrated by the deliberations of local planning authorities. Some of those authorities may arguably have acted in apparently perverse ways, but in the great majority of cases the action would have been based on local political judgements about the relative social, economic and environmental implications of a proposal. Your review must explore and accommodate these legitimate local democratic aspects of the planning process if it to draw any meaningful conclusions.

In my experience, local planning authorities attempt to promote planning policy frameworks aimed at ensuring that the range of sites required to facilitate economic development are brought forward and protected. Often, especially here in the south east, that action is in the face of government policy to release land that is not immediately required for business development for housing. To avoid this tension between local and national economic planning objectives there must be clarity about the "Government's economic development objectives" and a shared understanding of the judgments that Government has made about the social, economic and environmental drivers for change that face all communities. This clarity and understanding could, at a stroke, be helped by a strengthening of the policy provision for economic development in a reviewed PPS4 to provide local planning authorities with the necessary support for their attempts to ensure better delivery of economic priorities.

More helpful still, would be a national economic planning framework to replace the patchwork regional response to the threats and opportunities of globalization, to provide a macro response to what is, after all, a macro-economic issue.

Setting aside the role that nationally significant infrastructure projects have on economic growth (which seems to me to be worthy of a study in its own right) the development of the UK economy relies more on the creation of stable economic and social conditions than the speed of the planning process.

From superficial analysis, and political rhetoric, planning is an easy target, but a serious study into the major influence on the key drivers of productivity should be based on more than the siren calls from business who, having failed to engage in the plan-making process, cry foul when their views are deemed contrary to community wishes through the planning system. Despite the best efforts of local planning authorities the engagement of the business community in the planning process is patchy. If the planning system is to be expected to respond to economic signals then those signals need to be clearly, coherently and consistently articulated. A solution to this particular problem would provide a very significant boost to the capacity of the planning system to achieve the Barker objectives.


There is clearly a need to keep under review the mechanisms required to deliver sustainable communities. However, there is no clear evidence that this review should include the sort of fundamental re-think of the planning system implied in the terms of reference - particularly as the system is still adapting to the changes introduced only a year or so ago.

As a County Council, we remain unconvinced that the removal of the County level of planning will necessarily improve the speed and quality of the planning framework within which individual planning decisions are made. The gap between a regional perspective on economic requirements and the district view of their local economy and the balance to be struck with social and environmental considerations will be difficult to bridge. The new sub-regional planning arrangements are necessarily complex and lacking in accountability. However, there needs to be at least one round under the new system before this can be properly assessed.

Your work must recognise that planning is a political process aimed at achieving the best outcomes for the whole community. In that respect the inevitable value judgements required when preparing plans or dealing with planning applications distort the market as different weights are attached to the various factors that are considered when decisions are made. Rather than constantly reviewing the rules and processes in the expectation that different rules will achieve different outcomes, Government should give a clearer indication of how it expects the economy to develop and the part it expects all the partners, including its own various departments, to play in delivering this. In particular resolving the requirement for infrastructure investment and its delivery must be a significant priority for Government to address. Planning gain supplement is unlikely to provide a sufficient remedy and could cause additional delays if funding does not reach appropriate delivery bodies. Experience suggests that clarity of objectives, joined-up working

and special delivery vehicles are more likely to succeed in nurturing economic growth than tinkering at the margins with the planning process.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan K Glen', with a horizontal line underneath.

Councillor Jonathan K Glen
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