

Carmel Howard
Barker Review Team
Barker Review of Land Use Planning
4th Floor, HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London SW1A 2HQ

27th March 2006

Dear Carmel Howard,

Heritage Link response to Barker Review of Land Use Planning

Heritage Link¹ brings together 82 voluntary organisations² concerned with the heritage in England. Between them they represent some 4 million members from specialist advisers, practitioners and managers, owners and volunteers, to national funding bodies and local building preservation trusts.

Our response is based on two key themes:

- to promote better and more widespread recognition across government of the benefits of heritage in contemporary society,
- to raise awareness of the voluntary sector's contribution.

We welcome the intention of the Review to enable more efficient, effective and integrated delivery of economic, environmental and social goals.

Sustainable Development is the core principle underpinning planning

1. Heritage Link members believe that the nation's heritage is central to economic and social regeneration, liveability, local quality of life and community cohesion. However the Government still fails to grasp its contribution and give heritage the priority it deserves. The Barker Review offers an opportunity to rebalance the longer term benefits against short term financial rewards as well to change public perception of the planning process. Strengthening the sustainable development principles could help re-brand the land-use planning system in a more positive light as the far sighted arbiter of competing interests rather than as restricting officialdom.

2. Planning Policy Statement 1 states that planning should facilitate and promote sustainable development by 'protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside and existing communities', but proposals for airport expansion, greenfield housing and the demolition of important parts of the existing urban fabric still pose unprecedented threats. Heritage Link believes that heritage interests should be better represented in planning decisions across Government and in local authorities. We are concerned that the Barker Review should reinforce the principle expressed in PPS1 not undermine it.

3. Heritage has a key role to play in the development of sustainable communities:

- Heritage and culture can contribute in many ways to the creation of sustainable communities:

- Provide 'roots' and a sense of place
 - Provide a focus for engagement and discussion
 - Offer an identity or a symbol
 - Establish a basis for activity – economic, cultural, social, environment
 - Provide a basis for the 'future history' of a community
- In a fast changing world heritage and history offer continuity and a 'backdrop' to the - immediate.
- Engagement in heritage and conservation offers a wide range of education, training and skills development opportunities.
- Professor Peter Roberts, Chair, Academy for Sustainable Communities at Heritage Link's Networking Event, Manchester, 20th January 2006.*

A similarly explicit recognition of the benefits of heritage to the Government's sustainable development programme would be welcome.

Public participation in planning

1. It is essential to engage local communities in the planning process. Yet the involvement of heritage groups in planning is more than as a consultee or champion. Often it is the voluntary sector which is leading the restoration projects. *Heritage Dynamo: how the voluntary sector drives regeneration*³ illustrates just some of their creative achievements. The Architectural Heritage Fund, the Association of Building Preservation Trusts, the Prince's Regeneration Trust and the National Trust are at the forefront of the heritage-led regeneration movement. Numerous local groups and trusts deliver projects with a measureable impact in terms of rental values, inward investment, tourism, employment and job creation.

These voluntary bodies can make such projects happen either directly or in partnership with local authorities or commercial developers because they have the experience, expertise and determination necessary to take on and restore historic buildings. They also have access to funding sources not available to other organisations.

The level of activity may well increase if the Government develops the idea of community 'right to buy' in addition to the existing but underutilised provisions which enable Local Authorities to pass on assets to community groups. The voluntary and community sector's operational role differing from the more traditional commercial developers should be recognised in the planning process.

2. Making Consultation Matter

We welcome the Government's move to make the planning process more open and transparent. Heritage Link's most recent research *Making Consultation Matter*⁴ set out to find if those who wished to have a say in the planning process were being heard in line with the government's aspirations of community involvement and civic engagement. As representatives of local communities, their extensive local knowledge and experience can make a positive difference to the quality of local and regional planning outcomes. Heritage groups are confident in their ability to play a positive role in the planning process. They know that their participation can make a real difference but they need to make their voices more effective.

Where the consultation process works, and the contribution of heritage groups are taken on board, it brings benefits in line with wider government policies: strengthened communities, civic involvement in local government, and an improved quality of the built and natural environment.

However, the potential benefits of consultation are less than they might be because the capacity and resources of heritage groups often lag behind their aspirations. Investment in these areas is critical to sustaining community involvement.

Evidence from nearly 200 local and national groups found that effective participation in the planning process is limited by:

- Voluntary groups' capacity to deal with increasing numbers and types of consultation
- Poor communication between local planning authority staff and heritage groups
- Poor quality consultation documents and off-putting language
- Unrealistic turn around times for responses

While experiences varied widely and good practice does indeed exist, we believe that there is an urgent need to improve engagement skills in the voluntary and community sector and in Local Authorities if confidence is to be established in the new consultation culture and if public capacity to participate is to keep up with the number and complexity of planning consultations. If central government wants to change the planning culture so as to deliver sustainable communities, it needs to develop the skills and capacity of local planning authorities to deal effectively with planning consultations.

We would be glad to expand on these points if you wish.

Yours sincerely,



Anthea Case CBE
Chairman, Heritage Link

Enclosures:

1. Heritage Link leaflet
2. Heritage Link membership
3. *Heritage Dynamo: how the voluntary sector drives regeneration* Heritage Link, 2004
4. *Making Consultation Matter: A survey of voluntary sector experience of Local Authority consultation on Land use Planning.* Heritage Link, 2005.