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Carmel Howard,
Barker Review Team,
4/E1, 1 Horseguard's Road,
London SW1A 2HQ.

barkerreview@hm-treasury.gov.uk

Dear Sir or Madam,

Proposed Barker review of Land Use Planning

You have asked for comments upon the proposed review of the Land Use Planning System to be carried out by Ms Barker, and I therefore offer the following comments.

Having seen the breathtaking naivety of the Barker Review of Housing, I can see no value in paying her to carry out a similar review of Land Use Planning. Her analysis completely failed to acknowledge that the housing market is distorted by speculative investment, to the detriment of people on average incomes who merely want house to live in, and served only to demonstrate that Ms Barker and her neo-classical economic analysis understand nothing of how human behaviour actually creates our society, together with all of its problems. I note in The Guardian of Saturday 25th February, Financial Page 21 carries a report that Nationwide building society will now lend a landlord up to 10 buy-to-let mortgages up to £3million in value, and other lenders have similar policies. Banks now see loans for buy-to-let as safer than first-time buyers, and another housing price boom is forecast. But Barker's Review of Housing has completely missed this point, and widely missed the target, making recommendations that are completely irrelevant to the problem of individuals being unable to afford a home of their own.

I have no doubt that any work that she might carry out on the Land Use Planning System would be similarly valueless. As a town planner I could have no faith in any review which Ms Barker may undertake.

The whole point of having a Planning system is to address market failures inherent in the neo-classical economic approach, which by maximising personal and corporate gain allows external costs to be passed onto others in the form of pollution, environmental degradation, environmentally unsustainable practices of all kinds, and much human misery, from homelessness to poverty. Neo-classical economics is an integral part of the problem, and not a part of the solution.

The analysis that might be offered by a narrow minded neo-classical economics approach is not worth pursuing, and is akin to letting the poacher review the wildlife protection laws.

I would strongly recommend that if you want a valid economic input then you should commission the New Economics Foundation to undertake the study, as they do understand environmental sustainability, with a considerable track record arising from work for The Other Economic Summit. Economists working for the United Nations who have carried out valuable work on the Ecological Footprint of Nations would also have a significant contribution to make.

Sustainability is now at the heart of Government Policy, and all reviews need to focus upon what is environmentally sustainable. Unless you begin with an understanding that current patterns of economic activity in the UK rely upon the consumption of a level of resources that is three to four times higher than the level which the Earth can provide in perpetuity, then you really are fiddling while Rome burns.

I look forward to seeing proposals to return the Land Use Planning System to the heart of a Government Department of the Environment, instead of having that crucial function split between an ODPM and a DEFRA which clearly do not talk to each other.

Yours sincerely

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Postscript

Please note that I had tried to submit this to you using the email address published on your website, and the email was returned to me as an invalid address!

This clearly invalidates the consultation procedure and you should repeat the consultation on the proposal.