

Carmel Howard
Barker Review Team
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1 Horseguard's Road
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SW1A 2HQ

24 March 2006

Dear Ms Howard,

BARKER REVIEW OF LAND USE PLANNING

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence for this review. Please find attached comments from the South East England Regional Assembly which we ask that you consider as this work is taken forward.

The Regional Assembly is keen to ensure that the review is as well informed as possible on the challenges that need to be addressed in order to deliver economic development. The Assembly is willing to be an active participant in the review process and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the points set out in this submission in greater detail with the review team.

If you have any queries please contact Martin Tugwell, Planning Implementation Director, at the Regional Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Field
Chairman Regional Planning
Committee

Ian Hepburn
Vice Chair Regional Planning
Committee

BARKER REVIEW OF LAND USE PLANNING – CALL FOR EVIDENCE

SUBMISSION FROM SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MARCH 2006

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The South East England Regional Assembly approved the draft South East Plan, the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East, on 1 March 2006 and will be submitting it to Government at the end of March. The development of the Plan has involved taking difficult decisions balancing the need to support growth whilst protecting and enhancing the environmental and social quality of life in the region.
- 1.2 The Regional Assembly supports the need to ensure that the links between spatial planning and economic development are understood as fully as possible. The planning system has a critical role in supporting sustainable development including, for example, managing the scale and distribution of infrastructure which enables economic activities to continue and to develop. But there are also other aspects of the development and implementation process which are equally crucial. We believe these should also be considered as part of this review if a full understanding is to be reached.
- 1.3 The Regional Assembly has informed Government on many occasions about the importance of ensuring appropriate infrastructure is in place to enable development to take place sustainably in the South East. It is essential that the review gives consideration to the role that improved working arrangements and delivery vehicles have to play in ensuring more effective delivery of economic development and infrastructure.

2. Role and Effectiveness of the Planning System

- 2.1 Ensuring that the planning system enables sustainable economic development is a key priority for the new spatial planning system as enacted by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. We support the need to ensure that any unnecessary blockages or delays in the system are dealt with as a matter of urgency. However we also urge the review team to be mindful that the current planning system is still relatively new and it should be given reasonable time to demonstrate its ability to deliver planned housing and economic growth.
- 2.2 The planning system has a key role ensuring that all aspects of individual development proposals are taken into account. This enables the economic impacts to be taken into consideration alongside the environmental and social dimensions. It is a fundamental premise of the planning system that the decision making process maintains an appropriate balance of these issues, and demonstrates democratic accountability and appropriate consultation.

- 2.3 We acknowledge that the planning system needs to operate in a way that is efficient and responsive to the need to facilitate planned levels of growth. However the proposition that the planning system should respond more explicitly to the demands of the market is one that challenges the fundamental principle of planning; namely that it should help influence and direct future growth in order to encourage a more sustainable pattern of development. The planning system should respond to the market but only up to a point. A planning system that gives undue weight to responding to the market will inevitably compromise broader policy objectives set out at a national, regional and local level.

3. Spatial Planning and Implementation

- 3.1 A key challenge is ensuring that the Implementation Plan that forms an integral element of the Regional Spatial Strategy sets out a clear framework within which the decisions of delivery agencies and regulatory bodies are co-ordinated to facilitate efficient and effective delivery. Delivery cannot be seen as simply the responsibility of the planning system itself. The Implementation Plan provides the basis for delivery agencies to work effectively with the wider business community to deliver the economic development set out in the Statutory Development Plan.
- 3.2 The experience gained in the development of the region's advice on regional funding allocations demonstrated that achieving a consensus on priorities is possible. Moreover it has demonstrated the influence that other areas of public sector policy, such as learning and skills, have on successful delivery of planned growth. Related to this, we also highlight the experience of bringing partners together as part of the delivery process associated with the Growth Areas, which demonstrates the significant progress that can be made through focused collective action.

4. Relationship Between RSS and RES

- 4.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy forms part of the Statutory Development Plan and is subject to an extensive and rigorous process of testing in the public arena. The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) also has an important role in setting the economic development context for a region. However if the emphasis of this review is to examine how the planning system can facilitate economic development the logical conclusion is that there is a need to focus on how the economic content of the RSS can be enhanced, and the relationship with the RES clarified.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Whilst the review is welcomed, we urge the scope to be broadened to consider the other parts of the economic development process that fall outside the statutory planning system. In addition we ask for clarification on the relationship between this review and the Government's 'Spatial Plans in Practice' project, which we understand is designed to assess how the new planning system is being put into practice and how the changes are helping to achieve the Government's objectives, but which runs to a longer timetable (December 2007).
- 5.2 The Regional Assembly is keen to ensure that the review is as well informed as possible on the challenges that need to be addressed in order to deliver economic development. The Assembly is willing to be an active participant in the review process and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the points set out in this submission in greater detail with the review team.

**South East England Regional Assembly
March 2006**