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Member of Parliament for Reigate

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

By Email and Post: planningforthefuture@communities.gov.uk

Planning for the Future Consultation
Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government
3rd Floor, Fry Building
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Dear Sir/Madam,

Further to my letter dated 17 September 2020, responding to the Planning for the Future consultation, please accept this letter as an addition or appendix to that response.

In the final paragraph of that letter, I expressed the view that the proposals in the White Paper constitute a failed opportunity to move to a plan led, rather than developer led planning system. In the brief speech I made on the Planning Debate in the House of Commons on 8 October I made the point that we have a responsibility to offer an alternative system rather than just critique the current broken system, which can't get close to delivering HMG's overall objectives. I would therefore like to expand upon this point.

The principal flaw in current planning is that commercial developers have the effective power to determine where and what type of housing is built. Local planning authorities are forced to accept unsuitable planning applications in order to meet their new homes targets and the application of both market forces and the government's own housing allocation criteria, both historic and the much criticised "algorithm" do not support any national policy objectives, which surely must include levelling up north and south, particularly addressing the need to rejuvenate provincial cities, which will require direction to address the required environmental restoration and infrastructure provision to make this work. The developers' main motivation and duty is to get a return for their shareholders. Unsurprisingly, the designs and house types are determined principally by profit considerations, not least where they have acquired options over land easy to build on. In the case of high value land being developed in the South East, developers obtain more profit from the land value and building larger homes is likely to gain a much improved return than affordable homes or social housing. There is certainly little appetite for them to engage in the kind of environmental restoration and flood risk management that might make 2 million homes a prospect in east and south east London. We can't expect the industry to come forward with marginal schemes when they can maximise profits by building luxury homes on green field land released because of the pressure to build new homes. This situation is only likely to worsen drastically should the new proposals be enacted.

According to a recent report by CPRE ("Recycling our land: The State of Brownfield 2020", October 2020) There is enough brownfield land for 1.3 million new homes and over half a million already have planning permission. The figures demonstrate that there is already enough available and suitable land in the planning system to meet the government's ambition to build 300,000 homes per year for the next



5 years (this Parliament), calling into question the need to immediately in effect deregulate the planning system set out in the White Paper.

The need is glaring to completely rethink the planning process in order that the future development of a local planning areas is led by local Masterplans, which determine where different types of development should take place and the type of building that are required, re-empowering local communities. However, these local masterplans must fit into a national plan that delivers our national social, environmental and economic objectives. The necessary compromises between these factors should be transparently done, debated at a national and regional level, not spat out of some unaccountable housing number algorithm, then enforced by a Planning inspectorate, overriding any real pretence at local control. Both levels of planning then need to link the built environment to strategic and local required infrastructure. The result should be the local plan being offered for tender out to developers to deliver specifically for the type and design of development that is enshrined in the plan.

Land could only be sold for development on the basis that development adheres to the conditions laid out in the local Masterplan. Super normal profits would be addressed as well as the need to subsidise those plans associated with significant environmental and other fixed costs to make viable in the wider long term national interest.

The best design is too often associated with social objectives carrying more relative weight than return on investment. The Duchy of Cornwall is an example. Poundbury in Dorset is an example of development based on a Masterplan. The development of this site was given over to the Duchy of Cornwall (the land owner) by West Dorset District Council, but the Masterplan could have been drawn up by the local planning authority.

The Prince of Wales appointed the architect and urban planner, Leon Krier, to prepare the overall development concept for 400 acres, within the line of the Dorchester Bypass - 250 acres of mixed-use buildings and 150 acres of landscaping. Krier is well known in Europe and America as a champion of traditional urban design. His challenge was to create an autonomous new extension to the town within the context of traditional Dorset architecture.

The Poundbury Masterplan was exhibited and the subsequent public comment was reflected in the scheme before planning consent was sought. A planned, phased, development continues to take place according to the plan designs. This has enabled Poundbury to be developed as a high-density urban quarter which achieves an attractive, modern and pleasing place in which people can live, work, shop and play. Emphasis is placed on the quality of design and materials, landscaping, and attention to detail - even down to street furniture and signage. The architecture at Poundbury is traditional, using a variety of Dorset materials such as stone, slate and render. The architecture draws on the rich heritage of Dorset and, in particular, on the attractive streets of Dorchester itself. Many of the architects are based in Dorset. All architects work to a Building Code which regulates features such as roof angles and chimneys. Quality of design and workmanship is controlled by the Duchy through legally-binding Building Agreements with each developer before the freehold is released. Larger commercial buildings are generally sited for better vehicular access, but are designed similarly to frame their sites and create a sense of enclosure - disguising unsightly parking and equipment. Currently 35% of the housing is being built for housing associations for rental or shared equity ownership by people on the local housing list. At Poundbury, the affordable housing is interspersed with, and indistinguishable from, the private housing, and some of the housing has also been designed for special needs or retirement. Parking is generally provided in landscaped courtyards at the rear which also incorporate housing and ancillary



spaces for playrooms and workshops. Provision for these extra spaces recognises the increasing demands for flexible living arrangements and allows people to work from home. Poundbury demonstrates that it is possible to build high-quality, traditional housing at affordable prices, and provide new factories and offices on competitive terms within the context of radically different urban design. Some similar examples around urban regeneration by Urban Splash and others present the vision of inner city villages that may be the key to unlocking provincial city regeneration.

In Europe, plan led systems have been especially successful especially in the Netherlands and Germany. Dutch planning policy shifted in the 1970s to encourage walking, cycling, and public transit as "a reaction to the increasingly harmful environmental, energy and safety impacts of rising car use." Their foresight has paid off, and the Netherlands today is the world's prime example of planning for people (and the environment) over cars.

Key to Dutch planning policy is the 'The Spatial Planning Act' (WRO) which sets down how the spatial plans of the state, provinces and municipalities are to be implemented. A municipal land-use plan is an example of a spatial plan. Spatial planning decisions are made at the national, regional and local levels. The spatial visions of the government, provinces and municipalities describe the spatial developments they expect as well as how these developments will be directed or implemented. Spatial planning policy and its implementation are, in so far as possible, shaped at the municipal level. The municipalities are able to set appropriate regulations based on their knowledge of the local situation. The state focuses on subjects that are of importance to the entire country, such as improving accessibility. These national interests are set down in the Spatial Vision on Infrastructure & Spatial Planning (SVIR).

The provinces focus on provincial interests, for example, landscape management, urbanisation and the preservation of green spaces. Provincial interests are set out in the provincial spatial visions. Land-use plans are the most important tool in spatial planning. Such plans set down where construction may take place, what may be built, the size of the structure and what it may be used for. The fixed components of a land-use plan are: i) the rules and regulations for the area concerned ii) an illustration (planning map) that indicates and explains the various zones.

Germany also has a decentralised and plan led planning system. At the federal level, the Ministry for Transport, Building and Housing, responsible for spatial planning. At present the predominant departmental assignment model is an independent ministry for planning and environment. Raumordnung is a term provides a classic model of the combined planning of land uses, preservation of heritage.

The planning law in the Federal Republic of Germany consists of the Law of Raumordnung and of the Public Building Law. The outstanding feature of the decentralised German planning system is the fact that the Federation itself has no comprehensive and legal binding spatial planning instrument. So, Germany has no national plan at its disposal, but in its place is established by the Federation principles of the Raumordnung which are the fundamental guidelines for the whole spatial planning and spatial policy in Germany.

As regards regional policies, the improvement of regional economic structures is positioned by the Constitution as a joint operation wherein the federal government is required to collaborate with the state government and bear half of the costs. Emphasis has been placed on providing assistance to the former East German regions after the unification of East and West Germany. Such a model could be used to 'level-up' areas of the UK that are in need of economic stimulus.



As a general rule of the German planning law, the undeveloped outlying areas should not be built on with the exception of "privileged" developments (e.g. developments serving agricultural activities, specific public infrastructure projects). Those projects must be permitted in rural areas (without a legally binding land-use plan) if public interests do not oppose and ample public infrastructure provision can be guaranteed. Other development projects may be permitted as exceptional cases, provided that their execution and use do not conflict with any public interests and public infrastructure provision can be guaranteed

It is surely now a blinding glimpse of the obvious that this is the time to radically review the UKs outdated planning system and adopt measures from other systems that can be adapted to benefit our own. The measures outlined in the White Paper, whilst they claim to be radical, are just likely to accelerate the worst outcomes of our current system. It is time to grasp this painful nettle, but it would restore honesty and transparency to planning and protect our environment with forethought, not do it appalling damage in a moment of absent mindedness about the long term consequences, as well as failing to level our nation up.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Crisp Blunt".

Crispin Blunt

Cc: Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Christopher Pincher MP, State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Bob Seeley, MP