



Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: Consultation on the reform of planning committees**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the government's consultation on proposed changes to the way in which decisions are made on planning applications. This letter represents the collective comments of the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP) on the proposals on behalf of Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB).

The Hertfordshire Infrastructure & Planning Partnership, or "HIPP," comprises the planning / transport portfolio holders and heads of planning from the eleven councils in Hertfordshire as well as representation from Hertfordshire Futures (Local Enterprise Partnership) and others. The partnership is supported by Hertfordshire Planning Group, comprising heads of planning and invited guests, as well as sub-groups which bring together planning policy managers and development management managers.

HIPP's overarching purpose is "to provide a forum to discuss and develop a shared view and to propose joint work programmes on planning and infrastructure issues of common concern, working co-operatively within Hertfordshire and across county borders."

HIPP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed reforms relating to planning committees and the way applications are determined. HIPP recognises that the Government is committed to encouraging better quality development that is aligned to local plans, facilitate the speedy delivery of quality homes and places and to giving applicants reassurance.

**Delegation of planning functions**

Tier A applications will remove the ability of Planning Committees to consider applications that fall within this definition. Whilst these applications may be minor they can create a significant amount of interest from the community and valid planning concerns are often raised.

Therefore, limitations placed upon the ability for elected Members to request often contentious applications to be determined within a public arena is not supported as it would unnecessarily limit the important role of public engagement and democracy in the planning application process. There should be some controls over this process, but it is considered that this should be for Council's to decide but within a national guidance framework.

Regarding Tier B applications, HIPP consider that strategic applications that are allocated in development plans are significant in scale and impact upon local communities and therefore such

applications should be considered and properly debated by planning committees. This allows communities to see decision making being undertaken in an open and transparent manner.

Overall, it is considered that limiting democracy and removing the democratic process through removing the right for members to call-in applications by restricting transparency in the decision-making process is worrying and we are not sure that this will do anything to increase the speed of housebuilding.

### **Size and Composition of committees**

HIPP have no observations to make on this proposal.

### **Mandatory training for planning committee members**

HIPP consider that there is a difference between galvanising and strengthening mandatory training and moving towards some form of certification of committee members potentially involving evening courses. There is no objection to the involvement of organisations such as the Planning Advisory Service in this process and many Councils already call upon their services in this regard.

However, any national testing and certification process for planning committee members will require considerable resourcing to avoid adversely affecting the membership and functioning of planning committees.

### **Threshold for Quality of Decision Making**

The consultation proposes that the threshold for quality of decision making is lowered from 10% to 5% for both major and non-major applications. HIPP disagrees with this proposal on the basis that if a Local Planning Authority doesn't deal with significant number of major applications, it only takes one or two applications for that threshold to be met and then the consequence is special measures. We don't think this proposed change to the threshold has been properly thought through especially in terms of resources for PINS to deal with applications as a consequence and the knock on impact for Local Planning Authority resources and budgets.

I hope that this response to the consultation is of use to shaping future proposals. Please do not hesitate to contact HIPP should you require any further information. The main officer contact for HIPP is Sara Saunders, Director for Place at East Herts. Please contact either Cllr. Allen via email at [daniel.allen@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.allen@north-herts.gov.uk) or Sara Saunders at [sara.saunders@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:sara.saunders@eastherts.gov.uk)

Yours sincerely

**Cllr Daniel Allen**

**Chair of HIPP**