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Witnesses: David Tittle and David Waterhouse

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Members present

Baroness O’Cathain (Chairman)
 Baroness Andrews
 Lord Inglewood
 Baroness Parminter
 Baroness Rawlings
 Baroness Whitaker
 Lord Woolmer of Leeds
 Baroness Young of Old Scone

Examination of Witnesses

David Tittle, Chair, Design Network, and Chief Executive, MADE West Midlands, and **David Waterhouse**, Head of Strategic Development, Design Council CABE

Q84 The Chairman: Good morning. I have already officially welcomed you outside, but here I hope it is warmer; it is jolly cold in those corridors. It is very good of you both to give up your time, and we are looking forward enormously to your evidence. You have in front of you a list of the interests that have been declared by members of the Committee. In addition, a transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the Committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary. Could I begin by asking each of you, for the record, briefly to introduce yourself to the Committee? I am going to do it alphabetically, so Mr Tittle before Mr Waterhouse; I was going to call you David and Goliath, but I decided not to.

David Tittle: My name is David Tittle. Most of my early career was in business or business advice, but about 15 years ago I went to work for the Civic Trust. That projected me into the built environment. Since then I have been a trainer, an advocate, organiser and adviser on design issues, and I have a qualification in urban design. For the past eight years I have worked for MADE, a charity based in the West Midlands dedicated to improving the built environment, and I became its chief executive. I am chair of the Design Network, which pulls together organisations like MADE across England. I am also a trustee of Civic Voice, the national organisation for civic societies.

David Waterhouse: I am David Waterhouse. I am a chartered town planner with over 10 years’ experience in urban planning and regeneration. My early career was spent in local government, followed by the Town and Country Planning Association, where I ran its policy

function. I then spent a period in DCLG, where I was responsible for the housing market renewal programme and advice on eco-towns and the Growth Points programme, under both Labour and coalition Governments. For the past three and a half years I have been head of strategic development at CABE, merged with the Design Council, working with cities and authorities up and down the country to support them in identifying solutions to improve the quality of all major developments. We work with many authorities, providing a variety of review, policy, peer-to-peer support and training. In addition, I am on the board of the Town and Country Planning Association and an academician at the Academy of Urbanism.

The Chairman: I am sure that around this table you see many old friends, not old in age but of long standing.

David Waterhouse: Yes.

The Chairman: Is the emphasis always on cities, not smaller towns or, say, market towns, because they need to be better than they are at the moment?

David Waterhouse: Yes.

The Chairman: Also, a lot of them will have to expand if we are to fulfil anything like the targets for housing.

David Waterhouse: Absolutely. Our work is very broad brush across towns and cities. We have delivered major programmes of work for neighbourhood planning programmes up and down the country, working in towns and villages, market towns and, critically, in historic towns where there is also a real need to integrate new and old sensitively.

Q85 The Chairman: Indeed. I am sure our specialist adviser would make that point, too. The first question is: who should be responsible for providing national leadership on design in the built environment? To what extent have the changes to CABE since 2011 resulted in the loss of leadership at national level, or has it?

David Tittle: On the first question, government needs to set general objectives, direction and priorities for the built environment. That needs to come from the centre of government rather than any particular department, because it crosses the responsibilities of all departments. The industry needs to respond to that, and professional bodies, charities and think tanks need to act as that collective memory and provide a challenge. There has been a loss of leadership since the old CABE disappeared. In our view, out in the field, away from the architectural press and the sort of discussions that go on at high level, what is missed most about CABE is that leadership: the bringing together of knowledge, the publications,

and the guidance and training that used to come out, rather than design review. To a certain extent, the Place Alliance and bodies like ours at Design Network are stepping into that role. We have run several national conferences, and the Place Alliance grew out of one of those. People are coming to fill the vacuum, but it is a little patchy and unco-ordinated.

The Chairman: Does that mean that in your situation you are reactive to people saying, “Well, it would have been so much better if we had x, y or z as we had before”, or do you actually go out and peddle for business, or for the opportunity to give advice to people?

David Tittle: We are certainly peddling for business and trying to be as proactive as we can, not only in reacting to what government are doing and to what is happening out there in the market in development, but also, as much as we can, in drawing knowledge together, learning lessons and talking about how things could be different.

The Chairman: Can I give you a case in point? Yesterday, we had a very good visit to Birmingham City Council, which was quite revelatory—from my point of view anyway. What would you do in circumstances where 10 years ago you saw what Birmingham City Council was about to do and the situation was as it is now for your organisation? Would you have rung the chairman of Birmingham City Council, or gone up there? What would you have done? Would you have asked for papers? Would you have asked, “What are you planning? Can we give you any help?”.

David Tittle: Yes, that is what we do all the time.

The Chairman: That is what you do now, so if, say, Sheffield wants to do it, that is what you do.

David Tittle: Yes. One aspect of the Farrell review that I like very much is the way it talked about the industry and the professions in a particular area needing to be more civic, needing to help out the public sector in these times of austerity. To take Birmingham as a point, traditionally it always argued that it had a very strong in-house team and did not necessarily need outside expertise.

The Chairman: Yes, I can understand that.

David Tittle: We always talked to them and said that a little bit of challenge was sometimes helpful, but they had a point; they had a very good team. Some of them were our friends and colleagues, so we knew how good they were, but that is no longer the case. A lot of those people have gone.

The Chairman: We know that.

David Tittle: They need help with capacity. What we have been doing in Birmingham is going round to talk to all the major firms of architects and principal developers, saying, “Let’s get together and put a proposal to the city. Let’s talk about how we can take that message from the Farrell review: we are here to help you”. We are doing that in Birmingham and also in Coventry.

The Chairman: Coventry needs it.

Lord Inglewood: You described Birmingham and its pomp in glowing terms. How representative is that of the wider picture?

David Tittle: I think it is very mixed around the country. A lot of it depends on happenstance: the politicians, the particular officers and the chemistry. A city that did very well 10 years ago at turning itself round is Sheffield. We took people to Sheffield to examine it and asked, “How have you managed to do this?”. I think it was the different principal agencies pulling in the same direction, all appreciating the importance of place. Yorkshire Forward was the one RDA that I think really got the importance of place and worked on transforming places, but that also needed a good local authority. In those days we also had urban regeneration companies. You need to have a good one of those working with the local authority. If all the agencies are pulling in the right direction and you get the right politicians and officers, magic can happen.

Lord Inglewood: But how often does it happen?

David Tittle: Not as often as it should.

Lord Inglewood: Is the general picture poor? I am not asking for names—no names, no pack drill, you will be glad to hear—but do you reckon the general picture is materially less good than it should be, or not?

David Tittle: It is less good in the sense that—I know others have said this to you in previous sessions—the attention to everyday places and to detail is not what it should be. Every city has prestige schemes—prestige developments and public realm schemes that they can take lovely photos of, put in their brochures and take to MIPIM and say, “Come and invest in us; we’re wonderful”. Of course, they should do that, but then you go round the corner and see a place that still has masses of surface car parks, is highway-dominated, has poor buildings, is difficult to find your way around and so on. A lot of our country is like that, but the good developments show what we are capable of and that we have the skills.

The Chairman: There is obviously a huge gap at the moment. That is the gap you could get yourselves into to fulfil your aspirations. Mr Waterhouse, you have been silent about this. What are your views on the question?

David Waterhouse: I agree entirely with David Tittle that national government and its delivery agencies—the Homes and Communities Agency and the Planning Inspectorate—have a clear role to play at national level. However, life has moved on since 2011. I have travelled to all core and key cities up and down the country, indeed to many small historic towns, and the picture is very mixed. But the advent of devolution, city deals, local growth deals, the pooling of funding from national government and focusing it in one location and the current wave of combined authorities that are coming forward provide a good opportunity for joined-up working at local level. Each place is incredibly different and varied. I was in Manchester earlier this week, where, under very strong civic leadership, the Manchester Place initiative, which is the housing regeneration company kick-started by the city council and now rolling out across Greater Manchester, provides the opportunity to bring together planning and housing and the funding associated with that, as well as health and well-being and all the aspects that make places.

There are a number of good initiatives happening up and down the country. Rather than seeing it as a loss of leadership at national level, we firmly believe it is about locally led bespoke solutions for each location. I take the example of Oxford, where we have been working for over two years. It has a very constrained set of circumstances, given the policy environment, its green belt constraints and the fact that it is an internationally renowned city in many respects. None the less, it is not all dreaming spires; there are major inequality issues. The challenge we are seeing in places like Oxford is a depletion of in-house resource and competencies, allied with major pressure from developers and applicants wanting to invest in the city. There is a huge opportunity for Design Council CABE and the Design Network to support local ambition. That is what we have to focus on.

Q86 Baroness Andrews: You have answered most of my questions, so this is a bit reflective. In the days when you and I worked together, we had a very clear government policy about regeneration. That regeneration was driven by the revival of inner cities, so the place-making, although we did not call it that at the time, was essentially evident in what transformed the city centres, not just in Birmingham and Manchester but in Sheffield, Newcastle, Nottingham, Bristol and many different places. I entirely take the point that we

are in a new situation and we have new vehicles, but we still do not have that overall clear instruction from government that regeneration is really important, that there are some better ways of doing it than others and that this is what is required to be done. First, do you think it is still something that government ought to be prioritising in the messages they send? Does it matter that government as a whole does not have that sort of clear strategic policy anymore? Secondly, the Manchester Place initiative writes itself, because of Manchester's power and its ability in terms of resources and back story to bring everybody together. How do you get a place initiative articulated in less competent authorities like Stoke-on-Trent, for example, or in smaller ones? Oxford is a good example, because by definition it will have that sense of itself, but there are places that do not have a very strong sense: for example, Burnley—the old industrial towns that have so much less confidence and, frankly, fewer resources. That is the big challenge for us.

The Chairman: They were not at the conference in Birmingham yesterday.

Baroness Andrews: I am sure they were not.

David Waterhouse: To take Baroness Andrews's first point on strategic regeneration capability and where that sits at national level, the national planning policy framework has a very strong role to play, but I think it is also down to local authorities having some direction from central government, if I can put it in those terms, to enact what the NPPF says. Paragraph 62 very clearly sets out the need for, and the value of having in place, comprehensive design arrangements. Yes, the policy is strong, but it is about the enactment and delivery of it, and there is a role for the Planning Inspectorate as well.

The Chairman: But do you think the national planning framework could look at the overall strategy of planning for the whole country and then say as a guideline, for example, that in relation to our heritage 35% of the emphasis on planning should be regeneration? I am covering Lady Andrews's point; if they are going to fall off the cliff in terms of not being appreciated, and they get all these sparkling new all-singing and all-dancing places in the middle of Birmingham, Oxford might find itself not being able to do so because people were not putting much emphasis on heritage and the regeneration of our existing stock.

David Waterhouse: The key point is to have in place a robust and up-to-date local plan based on robust evidence. That evidence base has to look at the pipeline of development; it has to comprehensively analyse housing market requirements, and it absolutely has to look at the investment community and understand what its ambitions are, because places

happen as a result of multitudinous built environment professionals, but also as a result of investment. That is the critical thing.

Perhaps I could address the point about other locations that have more challenging circumstances: Hull, Stoke-on-Trent, Middlesbrough—places we worked in together. That is where the real challenge lies, because land values are lower and you get applicants and developers cherry-picking the most profitable and valuable sites. There is danger of a two-tier planning system emerging, with the first tier being the Oxforas, the more progressive authorities and the larger authorities with strong civic leadership, and a second tier of locations which, for a variety of reasons, have major challenges. It is a risk and it needs to be considered strongly at local level and drawn to the attention of government.

The Chairman: Government has a role to monitor it, and to nod or not nod.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Can I ask about new settlements? They ought to be the opportunity to get it right, but we see some where you would rather boil your head and eat it than live in them.

David Waterhouse: Indeed. One interesting location, where we are working very closely at the moment, is the new settlement of Cranbrook in East Devon. That is the result of Exeter city and its adjoining authorities agreeing very clearly through the planning system not simply to extend, expand and potentially damage a very historic settlement—Exeter—but to take the brave decision to plan for a new settlement on a railway line to the east of Exeter. There the challenge lies first in the scale of the development. It is a greenfield site of eventually 7,000 units, and all the facilities that go with that. I would argue that phase 1—900 units built, on the ground now—is very much worth visiting and understanding to see how that has happened. It is fair to say that the quality is variable, because of the finance system and the developer system that apportions bits of land to different developers and different housebuilders. That is where you do not get a sense of cohesion in terms of place, but you get a standard type of housebuilding.

Opportunities exist in Old Oak and Park Royal, a major development corporation that has just been established in west London, to think about this from the outset. Indeed, we are working very closely with the development corporation to embed design and design thinking from the outset across policy and across every major development that comes through in that key location in west London. When it is completed, the station there will be a third busier than Waterloo is currently.

Lord Inglewood: I want to ask David Waterhouse about something he said which struck me as interesting, and I want to clarify it. If I understood you right, you said that it is much easier to develop sites that are expensive than those that are cheap. I am inferring from your remarks that that is because the expensive ones probably have characteristics that mean they are likely to be commercially viable. Is that right? Paradoxically, the more expensive the land, the more likely it is to be developed.

David Waterhouse: Perhaps I would not characterise it in such black and white terms, but places that are successful and have inherently high land values will attract further development and investment. It is riskier in places that do not have a legacy of good quality development at scale, or indeed high land values, for example the Stoke-on-Trents—I do not wish to pick on Stoke-on-Trent all the time, but places that are somewhat divorced from the economic mainstream, if I can call it that.

The Chairman: Stoke-on-Trent is beautifully placed and something wonderful could be done with it.

David Waterhouse: Quite.

The Chairman: I quite like the place—*Anna of the Five Towns*.

Q87 Baroness Whitaker: My question is mainly for Mr Waterhouse. It is good to see you again. To depart from the local, CABI did some national work that was fairly important. I remember very interesting research on sustainability and something very pioneering on the importance of beauty to well-being. It also carried out education and training functions, most particularly advocacy. Is there still a need for those? How should they be delivered, and who should do that?

David Waterhouse: The education and advocacy role is something that Design Council CABI as one organisation very strongly believes in. We, as government's adviser on design, have a very clear and strong role in producing research reports; indeed, next week on the terrace of this House, we are launching our economic value of design, and we would be delighted to see members of this Committee there.

Baroness Whitaker: What resource do you have for that research?

David Waterhouse: We have an in-house research and policy team who work collectively with government departments: BIS and DCLG.

Baroness Whitaker: Is that the Design Council as a whole, or is it specific to CABI?

David Waterhouse: It is one organisation; it is a shared function. Economic value of design in its broadest sense, but also economic value of design in the built environment, is very strong in making the arguments that we are perhaps all struggling with somewhat. CABE did a huge amount of good work on the economic cost of bad design in the built environment. That was quite a seminal report. That work and the ongoing research we undertake is very strong, but that is at national level. At local level, it is also critical to provide advocacy, CPD support and training for very challenged officers who have huge amounts of pressure and volumes of planning applications. I was astounded to hear recently that the city of St Albans is one of the busiest planning departments in the country, all temporary staff. In a historic city with such intrinsic value, that is quite shocking, given that it is in the economic mainstream. The support, training and CPD for officers, which we have been embedding in Oxford, with officers and critically with elected members and the leader of the council, is vital to upskilling and providing confidence to authorities.

Baroness Whitaker: But CABE and the Design Council do not have the resource to cover the national need in that area. How could that be better done? We have come across a dearth of capacity in some planning operations.

David Waterhouse: Absolutely. In our conversations with cities and local authorities, it is really about setting up a clear model to enable development schemes to come to CABE for review and policy assessment, and for that mechanism to provide funding for other discretionary services, such as policy support and training, because we all know the local government finance situation in which we find ourselves. That will obviously change post-spending review in November, but I cannot imagine it will become any rosier. It is about providing support to local planning authorities, and the mechanism we have for doing that is a very comprehensive city or borough panel where we charge applicants, and that funding is retained by the authority to pay for those discretionary services.

The Chairman: Mr Tittle, do you have views on this one?

David Tittle: Yes. We provide similar services; we argue that they are best managed at local level, which is where we differ from CABE. For example, in the West Midlands we have subscriptions with a number of authorities with which we work closely to give them support around major sites. For example, Tamworth has three areas of urban extension, and we undertook workshops on each of those to give guidance to the officers. On Tuesday I was

helping Great Malvern. We were talking to stakeholders about the public realm in Great Malvern town centre to improve the performance of Great Malvern.

On new settlements, if I had not been here today, we would have been reviewing a new settlement in Stratford-on-Avon district near the Jaguar Land Rover and Aston Martin plants in Gaydon. It has some very good designers working on it for the two landowners there. The challenge we face in a settlement like that is that a historic village or small town in Warwickshire has developed in a certain way that works, and we think of it as charming and so on, but you are not allowed to build that sort of place today, largely because of the way the highways authority operates, and the way you relate to main roads and so on. We are challenged all the time in that relationship to existing roads—connectivity and so on—which means that it is quite difficult to create a new settlement that we can enjoy in the way we enjoy older places.

Baroness Whitaker: To conclude this part of the argument, do neither of you think that anything more should be done in this area? For instance, would the appointment of a chief architect be useful?

David Tittle: It would have a marginal benefit. If government proposed it we would certainly support it. We had a discussion with the former chief construction adviser about the role he had played as a go-between—a conduit between government and industry. We could see that was a useful role. I do not think it is sufficient to make a huge difference; it would be useful. David pointed to the more important thing, which is to do with making sure that people are taking up design review services and so on, and strengthening the planning policy in that respect.

The Chairman: You raised a point about the Midlands where you are not allowed to build vernacular villages just because of the motorcar and the highways. What sort of influence do you have to bring to bear on the national planning framework about making the point very strongly that part of the place thing is that we could have more of these because it is so lovely to see in an area? We visited a mixed housing development yesterday in Birmingham. You could see social housing, rented housing and bought housing, but again there was the highway. That is inevitable, but it seemed to be a much happier space, even though there were very few trees, than having rows and rows of prefab-looking buildings. What influence should you or others have over the national planning policy framework to say, “Look, highways are not the No.1 objective”?

David Waterhouse: I was going to add that the capacity of local authorities is very constrained. One of the benefits that I hope we bring, alongside others, is that we have our in-house capacity, but we also have an unparalleled national network of 500 built environment experts, some CABE enablers, some CABE commissioners, design associates and experts in design across the field. They work with us in places, so it is about building capacity and strength in local authorities.

Returning to your point, Lord Chairman, about the weight of advice within the planning system, the NPPF sets that out very clearly; indeed, we are specifically written into the national planning policy framework, as we are in national policy statements on infrastructure. In cities where we have a long-term strategic relationship, our report is a material consideration in the planning system and is appended to all committee reports that go to elected members for decision. That approach retains local accountability and local democracy, but places importance on an independent expert panel who are embedded within the cities. That is a useful way of bridging the potential gaps.

Baroness Rawlings: I have two points I would like to bring up—one about traffic and one about aesthetics. What you say about economic value, good quality in the new settlements and all the trouble that is taken with buildings and green space, which one respects, is very interesting, but I should like to hear your views on certain areas that worry me regarding design and aesthetics and, on the second part of the question, practicality. One involves the built environment. You have all these lovely houses, but suddenly you get monstrous bollards down the street to which nobody has given any thought at all. Tremendous trouble is taken with buildings, but street furniture can absolutely destroy lovely places. There are terrible waste bins. They can be beautiful without spending a huge amount of money. I understand the need for security, but they are put in rotten places. The other day I saw a street completely filled with bottle banks. You could not see any of the houses at all. These were huge, hideous things. You have taken all this trouble worrying about the aesthetics and doing it properly. That is one side. The other side is traffic, which the Chairman just mentioned. You make a lovely environment in a place, and it is clogged with cars, buses, bicycles and lorries and everything comes to gridlock, let alone the pollution. Pollution from static traffic is everywhere now; it is not just London. The aesthetic side is wonderful—taking trouble and everything else—but very often some of these little, and not so little, areas are overlooked. I would like to hear your views.

David Tittle: That sort of decluttering issue is incredibly important. With my Civic Voice hat on, we have been very keen on that. We have some civic societies out doing street audits. In Coventry, we have people sticking things on each bit of clutter to highlight it and so on. I look upon these things as a design challenge. There are things that we need in the public realm, but design is about making those things work together for everybody's benefit. The public realm need not look so cluttered; things can be combined and some things are not necessary. A lot of signage is unnecessary. There are some very good examples around the country where people have decluttered the public realm. Sometimes the difficulty in the public realm is that nobody is in overall charge. People have said that in places maybe we need a tsar who is in charge of the streets. It has been said there are about 20 agencies that can interfere in the public realm. This is nothing to do with the planning system; they are all things that do not need planning permission. Things just pop up. We had an instance in Coventry. When the Olympics were coming, we got some money and were able to do a fairly simple scheme to declutter our main public square, Broadgate, to make it a really nice public space. Then some people from the communications department in Coventry came along and put up white flagpoles, with messages about adoption and so on. As soon as you declutter, somebody comes along and clutters. It is terribly difficult. If you are doing things to the highways often people say, "We don't need bollards or guard rails", and suddenly they appear. Suddenly they are part of the specification and they appear. It is quite a battle to keep the public realm decluttered. It is always easy to talk about joined-up thinking, but it is very hard to do. Somebody needs to be in overall charge with the authority to make things happen.

Baroness Rawlings: It needs to be sympathetic with the environment and encourage people.

David Tittle: Yes.

The Chairman: Once more, we are getting into a time pressure problem. Why do you just look at Coventry and places like that? Why do you not just get on Eurostar and walk from Arc de Triomphe to Défense and see what they have and have not done there? How do the French manage it? Is it just because Pompidou said, "Knock it down. I'm going to have yet another grand project", and they do not care? Do we have any sort of information about how they do it? It is probably very simple if you make a street furniture tsar.

Q88 Baroness Parminter: Can I invite you to say a bit more about the design review approach, specifically the effectiveness of the market, as it is now, in design review services? Is there a need for greater co-ordination, or indeed a case now for national guidance?

David Waterhouse: Design Council CABE has a very long and robust history in this field and with the built environment professional bodies: the Landscape Institute, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal Town Planning Institute. It continues to publish and update design review principles and practice, which is the standard by which the Design Network and Design Council CABE carry out all their work.

The concern with the change in the marketplace since 2011 must be around the quality and diversity of some of the panels, and the fact that that quality is not always necessarily delivering the public good, which both we and the Design Network very strongly believe in. We undertake in all our work to create and shape better places for all. It is a lofty ambition, but it is very much for the public good. That is perhaps some of the challenge that we see in other panels being set up for commercial gain or benefit in places around the country. There is variation in the quality. At the end of the day, it has to be about certainty and consistency for all in the planning process, providing high-quality schemes, with consistent, independent and objective advice. That must be the overriding ambition.

Setting the design review statement in the national planning policy framework was a strong move forward, and we are very supportive of that. The associated planning practice guidance is also perhaps not used as strongly as it should be. This emerged from Government following Lord Taylor's review 18 months or two years ago. Indeed, as adviser to government we were involved very much in the drafting of the design section of the planning practice guidance. It is an online portal that provides supplementary guidance to the national planning policy framework and is updated on an annual basis, so it is constantly kept up to date, which I think is an important point. It is perhaps not used as often as it ought to be by local authorities in preparing their local plans, or indeed in establishing design arrangements.

David Tittle: I would perhaps disagree that quality is the biggest issue with design review. We have concerns with some local panels around the country, particularly in the south. There are two big issues for me. The first is take-up, as we have said before. Even in London, we think about 20% of major schemes are subject to design review. Outside London, it is a

much lower figure, so there is not consistent treatment and application of design review in major developments.

The other issue is to do with whether people take notice of it. Does it really stick? One of the frustrations is that often schemes come into design review too late, and lot of work has been done on them. I can understand that people do not want to spend more on fees totally to change their schemes. We are always urging people to come earlier, but it does not necessarily happen.

Getting people to design review on a regular basis and getting it built into the culture of developing a larger scheme would be really helpful. I commend the approach taken by Newcastle-under-Lyme council, which has put design review in its planning validation checklist. If you put in a major application—a reasonable-size application—in Newcastle-under-Lyme, you have to have a design review letter and a report saying how you have responded to it. It does not solve all problems. Some schemes still come in just before they go to planning, but it has certainly helped. If national policy was to recommend that approach, it would really transform things.

Baroness Andrews: Precisely on that point, if we can dig down into the market failure, what are the levers we could consider that would have the greatest impact? We used to have a planning aid system that was a huge benefit to weaker local authorities. I know it is about money and skills, but is there a case for restoring something like that? Alternatively, David Waterhouse mentioned elected officials and the work you do with them. Given the loss of permanent skilled planners, should you be spending more time on elected officials' training? For example, you have lost your statutory consultee role and yet you are written into the NPPF. Would it be more effective if you still had a statutory consultee role so that you could push these things? Finally, what can you do about developers? What are the incentives? Are there financial incentives or planning incentives that can be built into the relationship with developers to pick up the inability to know about you, to find you and get you to help?

David Waterhouse: If I can use Oxford again as a case example, the long-term strategic relationship that we have built with the city council has proved beneficial to elected members, officials, developers and applicants wishing to invest in developing the city. There it has been about embedding in the system. We are written into PPAs—planning performance agreements—so that every major and medium-scale scheme at

pre-pre-application stage comes through a CABE review panel. We have developed a pool of expertise with the city council so that its expertise is tailored to the types of developments coming through the pipeline—university student accommodation, extra care housing and specific types of development. That has proved beneficial to applicants, because they want speed and certainty; that is all they care about. With that system in place, they know that is how business is done in Oxford. The leader and the cabinet member for planning will say to an applicant, “If you don’t go through this approach, you will get a very rough ride at planning committee”. That takes strong civic leadership, and buy-in politically and at senior officer level, but it has certainly proved highly beneficial in the case of Oxford. That all came about as a function of some poor decision-making in the city, so there is always a trigger that pushes people into thinking about this.

To take the statutory consultee point, that carries with it certain resource requirements and burdens. We would see it very much as working with cities to look at their individual needs and requirements, rather than something that is too top-down. I can quite clearly see pros and cons each way.

Lord Inglewood: Are the best schemes reviewed? Forget about the second-best schemes. Do the really good ones go through the review process, or are the people who are putting them together so expert and committed that they do not need it?

David Waterhouse: Are you talking nationally?

Lord Inglewood: As a generalisation.

David Waterhouse: As a generalisation, as I have cited for Oxford, all schemes come through. The important thing is not just the large schemes but the smaller-scale ones that, because of their location, are sensitive or will set a policy precedent. If you have perhaps lots of extra care housing coming down the pipeline, it is very important to get that right because there will be another 12 schemes of that type coming along. It is also important for the smaller and medium-size schemes to come through a review process.

Lord Inglewood: But are the best schemes that you see the product of the review process, or are they people who are sensible, because they are good guys?

David Tittle: Sometimes it is a bit of both.

David Waterhouse: I would agree.

David Tittle: The best people to come to design review—the people we really like—are those with good schemes but who listen and want to improve them. Those are the best

developers. It is not just the big names. In the West Midlands we have Accord Housing, a social housing developer, who produce some very good stuff in-house, strangely without architects. They come with these good schemes; they listen to us, and we end up with even better schemes. The difficulty is often the awkward schemes. Where local authorities do not have a consistent approach to design review, it is the difficult, awkward schemes that they eventually send to design review. They say, “Ah, this is difficult. We can’t get them to change. Let’s use design review”. That is how they end up coming to us too late. We see them when there has already been quite a difficult battle with the local authority. Sometimes we back up the local authority—more often than not—but it is still quite late.

The Chairman: It is a bit like the way we organise a Committee investigation or inquiry. We ask people to come and give us evidence. We do not think we know all the answers; we probably know none of the answers, but it is crazy that people do not try to look for the best advice, and encourage just by conversation.

Q89 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: I have three questions. You have commented already on a number of them, so only add anything new. Are the parts of the national planning policy framework that deal with design sufficient and appropriate? What impact in practice has the framework had upon design standards? How effectively have the policies set out in the policy framework translated into improved practice in local authorities? Only add rather than repeat.

David Waterhouse: We would advocate that now is not the time for a wholesale review of the national planning policy framework. The planning system has had so much change, tinkering and amendments, and applicants and local planning authorities want certainty. Let the system bed down, operate and work. That would be my key point: do not re-amend or re-alter the planning system yet again.

David Tittle: I have canvassed colleagues around the country. Our view is that practice has not improved as a result of the NPPF. The things that the NPPF has to say about design are good and, all other things being equal, they would have had a positive impact. The fact that they say them in fewer words is a good thing. The problem is that other aspects of the NPPF and of government policy have led to difficulty in producing local plans and undermined the confidence of planners, such that the feeling is that decisions about the built environment are being made by the inspectorate or in the courts. So much is going to appeal and so many local plans are being challenged legally, and so on.

Baroness Andrews: That is a very important point. Are you saying there is more planning by appeal these days than there is by design? The Committee has not yet talked to the Planning Inspectorate. My sense is that, because of the huge pressures on development, local authorities find themselves in the courts more often than not, or under appeal, because developers know that in the NPPF there is such emphasis on development. Therefore, what you say is coming about is being driven by those sorts of imperatives. Am I right in that?

David Tittle: That is broadly true. I do not think it necessarily needs to be so. The NPPF explicitly says that you should refuse poor design. If people have the confidence and can make the arguments, they can not only do that but win appeals. The problem is that confidence has been undermined and people are very nervous about it.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: Specifically in what ways has confidence been undermined?

David Tittle: There is the feeling that developers will go to appeal. If you look across the range of volume housebuilders, who are doing a lot of development, particularly outside cities, some will take a more collaborative approach and try to do the right things; others simply say, "If we can't get this through, we'll get it through at appeal".

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: But has it not ever been thus? Is this something that has resulted from the national planning policy framework approach?

David Waterhouse: The important point is for local authorities to have an up-to-date evidence-based local plan. That is the problem we are seeing at the moment. Roughly half of local authorities across the country have a robust local plan in place that is capable of being defended at inquiry or through the judicial process. Unless you have a clear framework in place by which to make decisions on individual applications, you are planning in a vacuum.

Baroness Andrews: Why are local plans so slow? What are the extra factors that have slowed them down even more?

The Chairman: If you are just Joe Bloggs out in the street and people ask you, "How do you think all this is going in this country?", you say, "The main thing is that we have to get 400,000 more houses. We need more houses". They do not care; they do not realise just how important it is, particularly long term, to have this sense of place. Our specialist adviser did a wonderful presentation on this at the beginning of our inquiry, which made me sit up and think, "Of course we need houses", but with this headlong approach the developers are ruling the roost, because they are delivering the houses.

David Waterhouse: Yes.

Baroness Whitaker: In answer to your question, Lord Chairman, could we also explore why local authorities are so slow? I am very conscious of how it works in my own nearest town, Newhaven. It is lack of capacity, not lack of intention. It is simply that there are not enough bodies working on it with the right background.

David Waterhouse: Absolutely. Talking to and working with local authorities of varying scales up and down the country, there is a huge lack of capacity and skills; for example, certain grants from government for planning capacity that were delivered have stopped. There are real challenges to the competency and confidence of senior planning officers in taking decisions. That is a real problem. I go back to the example of St Albans, where all staff are temporary, so you have no consistency of decision-making and no understanding of the history of planning in that location. That is also a critical point.

I welcome the recent announcement by government to work with local authorities to put in place a local plan. None the less, that is by 2017. Development does not stop; development continues and will continue at pace.

The Chairman: This is a very important issue. Mr Tittle, do you have anything to add?

David Tittle: Capacity is obviously a huge issue, but there is a whole range of issues. The changes made by the previous Labour Government started to slow down the process, such as the bringing in of local policy frameworks. A lot of people were working on that process when there was a change of government, the NPPF came in and things changed. People were used to working with the regional spatial strategies; those were abolished and they had to find new ways of working. In some cases, that gave the politicians a bit more confidence to interfere more and that set plans back. Some authorities and other agencies thought they had it all done and dusted and then they were subject to legal challenge. In some ways, the whole culture of plan-making has become an interminable process. That is the problem. Over the past decade, or maybe 15 years, it has become systemic; it has become cultural that we take ages to produce plans. I was very concerned about this. In particular, before the election, at Civic Voice we were trying to produce a manifesto. One of the very clear things we said was that every place should have a plan, so I started going round and asking planners I knew. I ended up sitting next to somebody from the inspectorate who was in charge of planning. I asked him how long realistically it should take to produce a local plan. He said two years. I think that is reasonable—two years maximum. You plan for 18 months and allow six months for eventualities. It also has a big impact on

people's ability to engage with the local plan. It is quite difficult to get citizens to engage with the local plan, but if they have been doing it for 12 or 15 years, it is really difficult to get them to engage. You think, "Oh, what's going on now? Didn't I talk about that 10 years ago?". I applaud the recent initiatives by the Government to try to speed up the process. It is unfortunate that they are doing that by saying, "We will intervene". If they need to intervene they should, but we also need to deal with the systemic problems.

The Chairman: They also need a time limit, because they cannot carry on for 13 years or so.

David Tittle: Absolutely.

Q90 Baroness Andrews: I am beginning to wonder whether this question is redundant. What should the decision to move ministerial responsibility for architecture and design from DCMS to DCLG mean in practice? My sense is that it does not matter. Essentially, you have been saying that unless we have clear planning policy, delivered at local level, it does not really matter what the Government themselves are saying or doing if they cannot actually help that process—or am I now being very cynical?

David Waterhouse: I would agree. However, the move of responsibilities from DCMS across to DCLG where planning, housing and regeneration policy, such as it is, sits has to be helpful in bringing all of that together. We work strongly with DCLG and its agencies, so I hope it is a beneficial thing. Indeed, Greg Clark, the former Cities Minister and now Secretary of State, has been very supportive of design in its widest sense. Having him as Secretary of State is a beneficial approach, and having architecture within his wider portfolio must be a good thing.

Baroness Andrews: How many people in DCLG have responsibility for design?

David Waterhouse: Overarchingly, two officials and a director would have oversight.

Baroness Andrews: Essentially, we have three people in DCLG who are responsible for ensuring that good design feeds into housing, infrastructure, housing renewal and supply.

The Chairman: The whole thing.

Baroness Andrews: Everything. That is very helpful. My next question was what role should DCLG be playing in promoting high standards of design? I think you have answered that.

The Chairman: Mr Tittle, do you want to add to that?

David Tittle: I had heard that nobody had specific responsibility for design, but maybe David takes a different view.

The Chairman: You are encouraged that there are three.

David Tittle: That is encouraging. As I said before, joined-up thinking is easy to say but hard to do. Moving people into the same department may help, but it may not. People do not necessarily talk to each other more if they are in the same department. Sometimes people from different departments can talk to each other better. It has to be a good thing; it has to be potentially helpful, but the devil is in the implementation.

Q91 Baroness Parminter: The Government have announced that they are going to form an infrastructure commission. Its remit and composition have not been agreed as yet. Do you think it is important that on that new body there should be somebody with responsibility for design of the built and natural environment?

David Tittle: Absolutely. I would say so. Yes.

Lord Inglewood: I preface my question by saying that when I was a Minister in the then DNH I was responsible for architecture. My comment about your comments is that you have been telling us what a good thing design review is. I think there is a case for having a Minister outside DCLG doing just that. I remember looking at some PFI schemes and, my goodness, they were dire.

David Waterhouse: Yes.

Q92 Lord Inglewood: I would particularly like to look at another aspect, which is that responsibility for heritage remains in the DCMS. In the context of where we are now, what is your view about that?

David Waterhouse: We have a very long-standing relationship with Historic England, as it now is, working on many programmes, such as tall building guidance and the urban panel, which is a joint panel of Design Council CABE and Historic England, looking at cities and providing diagnostic advice and support to them. In the last year, we have worked on their flagship annual *Heritage Counts* report. We have a very strong relationship with Historic England, and it has a clear role to play. Support for it must remain, certainly beyond the current settlement that has been agreed, because that potentially poses a risk to it going forward. In terms of its responsibilities lying within DCMS, from a civil servant perspective, cross-Whitehall working and regular joined-up thinking between DCLG and DCMS is absolutely critical and is something that I know happens. I do not know to what extent and over what period it happens, but there must be continual collaboration between the two.

Lord Inglewood: Is there not a risk that because it is a much bigger department the DCLG always rolls over the DCMS?

David Waterhouse: That is certainly not my experience. DCMS punches well above its weight in certain instances. In my experience, which may be a couple of years out of date, it is a very powerful and well respected department.

David Tittle: Not everything is solved by bringing people together. The very first question was about leadership. We talked about the need for leadership from national government and it needing to come from the centre. The danger with responsibility for place quality and design quality being seen to reside with DCLG is that it becomes too focused on the planning system. The planning system is very important, but it is not everything. The issues we talked about before about street clutter and so on are largely outside the planning system, so it is important that transport, the public procurement of buildings and so on are government policy, not just departmental policy.

Baroness Andrews: To pick up what Mr Waterhouse said about the fact that heritage remains in DCMS, it is slightly isolated, but it always has been. The key impact on what happens to our historic environment has been through the planning system. The fact that we now have Historic England as a separate statutory body with a very firm focus, particularly in relation to the issues raised by Mr Tittle about Civic Voice and historic towns, gives more power and focus. Although it has lost that immediate connection, Historic England itself is in a relatively strong position within DCMS to punch above its weight again. Do you agree with that?

David Waterhouse: I would agree. Going back to what all this is about—places and towns up and down the country growing and changing sensitively—our experience working with Historic England officials at regional and local level is that we have a very strong relationship in the towns and cities where we are working. That has to be a beneficial approach. I welcome it. Historic England is in a strong position, but in the spending review and beyond it, there will be a very challenging picture for all government agencies and local authorities. We must be mindful of the fiscal envelope and the challenges within which we are working at central and local government level. That is critical.

Lord Inglewood: There is also a fiscal envelope around the people who are actually managing, owning and running the buildings. Surely, that is at least as important as some of the things you are talking about in the context of the policy framework and the administrative and legal context in which all this is carried on.

David Waterhouse: I would agree absolutely.

Q93 Baroness Young of Old Scone: In design terms, is public consultation and participation in the decision-making process happening? Is it a force for good, or is this stuff so complex that the public get it wrong?

David Waterhouse: The advent of the neighbourhood planning system—there are over 600 neighbourhood plans at varying stages in the system—has been very beneficial in bringing communities and parishes together to understand what they value about their area and place, and what that means for growth and change in their location. Our experience of working with neighbourhood planning groups up and down the country in rural and semi-urban areas, and indeed in urban areas, in north London, has been that they feel they have more control and understanding of what happens in their area.

In a recent good example, we are working with DCLG on a very important programme led by the tenant management and empowerment team at DCLG, which is called community-led design and development. That is about tenant areas and tenant management organisations intensifying their areas through a very clear process, to ensure that design is used right from the beginning in changing, intensifying and reusing assets and new-build development. There are very interesting new models of co-housing of various types, bringing new entrants into the housing market, which bring with them communities of interest. We should not see communities as just one thing; there are many different communities—business communities, residential communities and communities of age—which we should also think about.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Remind us how many communities have gone for a neighbourhood plan out of the totality that could.

David Waterhouse: David may be closer to this than I am.

David Tittle: It may be in the 20s¹ that have gone through the whole process.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Twenty.

David Tittle: Yes, but obviously there are a lot along the way. It takes a long time. Part of the problem is the complexity and difficulty of neighbourhood planning. Neighbourhood planning has been a positive thing and it shows what can be done. One of the big issues I have with it is inequality. If you rank neighbourhood plans by the indices of deprivation and look at those in the bottom 25%, there is a handful. We have a notable one near us in Balsall

¹ Note by witness: There are 57 adopted neighbourhood plans as of August 2015.

Heath in Birmingham, which is just coming to referendum, but that is one of the few exceptions in a more deprived neighbourhood.

As regards community engagement, the position is rather like the one we talked about earlier as regards design generally. There are some exemplary cases of community engagement, people working with communities from scratch with a blank sheet of paper to design new places, new developments, urban extensions and so on. Aside from those good examples, the overall picture is very poor. It is often tokenistic and manipulative. We talked about the difficulty of engagement in local plans, but engagement around particular schemes is often very poor. People use PR consultants rather than people skilled in community engagement; they know what they want before they start, and so on. That definitely needs to change. There needs to be better encouragement. The key to it is independent expertise. Where we have been able to get involved with communities in engagement, we have been seen as someone who brings independent expertise. Because we are a charity, communities trust us. If there are issues, they do not feel they are being manipulated. If you bring together the expertise people have about their place—because they know their own place—but also expertise about places in general, it is a magic combination.

Q94 The Chairman: Very early in this inquiry, the Committee had evidence about the concept of the open room, where it was down to the level of streets and housing estates, and people were made to feel they had something to offer. In both of your experience, is that general or is it spectacularly a one-off?

David Waterhouse: In the recent Farrell review, a recommendation set out the concept of urban rooms. There are good examples in Pennine Lancashire. I am aware of Newcastle and a number of other places developing this, which provides a forum for people to come in, to understand and explore what makes their place unique and special. I concur entirely with David about independence and the honest brokering role that the Design Network and Design Council CABI can play in bringing together different parties in the planning process. That independence and objectivity is critical.

The Chairman: It also gives local people much more confidence that they have had a say, no matter how big or small.

David Waterhouse: Yes.

Baroness Whitaker: Mr Waterhouse described a very good policy in the DCLG of how to empower tenants, but on the whole it is very common that they are consulted too late. As Mr Tittle said, they are consulted by PR companies when the local planning authority just wants to vindicate its prior conception. What is the mechanism for bringing in local people right at the beginning to work out what their local identity ought to be? Urban rooms are fine, but how are we to enable them to happen?

David Waterhouse: One of the key points about the tenant-led development programme is that there is already a groundswell of support within the existing community that they want to do something. They are not happy with whatever it is in their area.

Baroness Whitaker: It has to be fertile soil.

David Waterhouse: There is a real bottom-up approach. In the locations we are working with—Hull, interestingly, York and some inner-London examples—there is an understanding that they as tenants in an area are not satisfied with the quality and type of housing stock they are in, and they want to grow and change. There has to be something innate to make it happen, but it is then about objective independent workshops, advice, consistency and working with the local planning authority, because it cannot happen in isolation. It is certainly an interesting area, but something where there is huge opportunity.

The Chairman: It sounds very exciting.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Could we impose upon you to scribble some notes and send us your views, if you have any, on how far the design review process has delivered on the green environment and green space issue and its wider benefits to health, climate change and resilience, as well as amenity and aesthetics?

The Chairman: We normally ask those questions, so thank you for asking that, Lady Young. Can I thank you both very much indeed? It has been fascinating. You can see how energised the Committee is. We could go on for ages, but we have a lot of other things to do. Thank you for coming and giving your time and expertise. We wish you all success in doing what you obviously share with us: the objective of improving things and making people happier where they live, work and play.

David Waterhouse: Thank you.

David Tittle: Thank you for inviting us.