

## Written evidence submitted by the Highgate Society [FPS 155]

I wrote on behalf of the Highgate Society, the amenity society for the Highgate, London area, which for the past 55 years has been active in every aspect of local town planning, including negotiating with developers and local authorities, involvement in local plans and the forming of a neighbourhood plan, and monitoring and commenting on planning applications, often in great detail. We also participate in planning appeal inquiries, including on in which we established a national precedent. Like many other amenity societies, our planning committee includes senior practicing and retired professionals in many aspects of practice integral to good planning; until his death some 10 years ago, one of our members was one of the world's leading urban planners.

We regret that, since this does not seem to have been well publicised, we have only heard of your inquiry with less than an hour to submit representations, and therefore apologise for the inevitable briefness and superficiality of this submission.

May we therefore refer you to our submission to the Government's consultation on the planning white paper, and at this stage simply express our utter dismay at the government's proposals to abrogate the well-established citizen's right to comment on individual planning applications. The intention to also deprive Local Authority Planning committees is, for the same reason, a disastrous brake on local democracy, preventing the people's representatives from registering their concerns.

Their proposed alternative, of allowing communities to have closer involvement in local plans and design codes, will in no way compensate for the major loss of local expertise and knowledge which this will entail and the unacceptable restriction of community rights which will result. Our local planning authorities acknowledge the detailed contributions which we make to aspects of individual applications, raising issues of policy, design, heritage and environment which are of material help to them in making their decisions. The more enlightened developers seek our advice prior to making applications, and we possess a letter from a major developer thanking us for our input and acknowledging that their application was a better one as a result.

In addition, it is impossible that local plans and design codes can guarantee that all developments will conform and be completely acceptable. It is inevitable that, with the decisions left to local authorities and developers, bad outcomes will result, thus further destroying the already low public trust in planning and developers; a recent survey by Civic Voice and Grosvenor Estates found that 92% of the public had no confidence in their local planning authorities, and 98% had no trust in developers. The Government's proposals will destroy what remains.

As Lord Justice Cornwath has observed in his own comments, the planning system is basically sound, but has been seriously weakened by unthinking bolt-on legislation and change by government in the last decade, and by the disastrous widening of permitted development which means that "planning" for communities is almost impossible.

As we have no time to write further, we would finish by stating that we would be delighted - even anxious - to appear before you in any verbal hearings which you propose to give further evidence and views as to what is wrong with the planning system.

*November 2020*